

COUNCIL INITIATIVE PROPOSAL FORM

City Code Sec. 2-214(14). *Council Initiatives. This section of the agenda is reserved for individual councilmember requests for future legislative or staff action. These shall be limited to giving direction to staff to assist in formulating policies, work plans, etc. for future consideration of the city council. An initiative moves forward by majority vote of the city council.*

City Charter Sec. 3.08. *Interference with Administration. Except for the purposes of inquiries and investigations, the Council, its members and the Mayor shall deal with the City officers and employees who are subject to the direction and supervision of the City Administrator solely through the City Administrator.*

COUNCIL MEMBER PROPOSING INITIATIVE: [COUNCIL MEMBER]

SHORT NAME OF INITIATIVE: SCHOOL ZONE POLICY REVIEW

TERMS OF MOTION PROPOSING LEGISLATIVE OR STAFF ACTION: (Please be as specific as possible. Indicate if action is to be divided into steps or phases. Use separate sheet if needed.)

I move that Council direct staff to conduct a rapid review of the City of Billings School Zone Traffic Control Policy, including the 1989 decision to exclude middle schools and high schools from reduced-speed school zones, and return to Council with recommendations in two phases. Phase 1, within 30 days: an engineering and traffic investigation and a recommended school zone boundary and speed limit for Will James Middle School that includes the Grand Avenue and Rehberg Lane crossing. Phase 2, within 60 days: a proposed amendment to the policy allowing reduced-speed school zones at all middle schools and high schools, with a prioritized list of sites, cost estimates, and a recommended timeline for implementation.

CITY STAFF OR DEPARTMENT POTENTIALLY IMPACTED BY INITIATIVE: Public Works (Engineering and Traffic), Police, City Attorney, City Administrator. External: Billings Public Schools, Montana Department of Transportation if any zone includes a state or commission-designated route.

HAS COUNCIL MEMBER COMMUNICATED WITH CITY ADMINISTRATOR ABOUT THE INITIATIVE?
YES NO

ESTIMATE OF APPROXIMATE STAFF AND COUNCIL TIME REQUIRED: Phase 1: one engineering and traffic investigation at Will James, consultation with the school district, and a short staff memo. Phase 2: policy amendment drafting and a site inventory for the remaining middle and high schools. Council time: one work session item of 30 to 45 minutes and one business meeting action for the policy amendment.

APPROXIMATE TIMELINE FOR STAFF/DEPARTMENT ACTION:

Phase 1 report to Council within 30 days of approval. Phase 2 policy amendment and site list within 60 days. Signage and any flashers installed as soon as the Will James zone is adopted.

COSTS OTHER THAN STAFF TIME, IF ANY: Signage, pavement marking, and speed zone flashers or changeable message signs for each new zone. Staff to provide a per-site estimate in Phase 2. Some sites may be eligible under the Safe Routes to School program already underway.

PRIORITY RELATIVE TO EXISTING INITIATIVES (SEE LIST AVAILABLE FROM CITY ADMINISTRATOR): High. This is a public safety item following a student fatality and should be scheduled ahead of pending initiatives that are not time sensitive.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR COMMENTS:

On September 24, 2026, a Will James Middle School seventh grader was struck by a vehicle while walking to school in the crosswalk at Grand Avenue and Rehberg Lane. There is no reduced-speed school zone at Will James or at any other middle or high school in Billings.

That is a City policy choice, not a state requirement. The City of Billings School Zone Traffic Control Policy states that the City Council eliminated all reduced speed zones at junior high and high schools in 1989, on the reasoning that middle and high school students are expected to assume greater responsibility for their own safety as pedestrians. The policy limits reduced school speed zones to streets directly adjacent to elementary schools.

State law does not draw that line. MCA 61-8-310(1)(d) allows a local authority, on the basis of an engineering and traffic investigation, to decrease the speed limit in a school zone or at a designated crosswalk close to a school to not less than 15 miles per hour, with variable limits by time of day. MCA 61-1-101(69) defines a school zone as the campus, the streets directly adjacent, and as many blocks surrounding the school as determined by the local authority. Council sets the boundary.

Staff has already begun moving past the 1989 policy on a case-by-case basis. Phase Two of the Safe Routes to School program covers middle, county, and private schools, and the proposed projects at Riverside Middle School include a school zone with reduced speed signage. This initiative asks for the policy itself to be reviewed rather than continuing to make exceptions site by site.

Scope of the Review

- **Phase 1: Will James Middle School**
 - Engineering and traffic investigation of the streets adjacent to Will James and the Grand Avenue corridor between the school and Rehberg Lane.
 - Recommended school zone boundary that includes the Grand Avenue and Rehberg Lane crosswalk, recommended speed limit, and hours of operation.
 - Consultation with Billings Public Schools as required by MCA 61-8-310(7).
 - Confirmation of jurisdiction over Grand Avenue and whether MDT consultation is required under MCA 61-8-310(6).
 - Companion crossing improvements staff would recommend at Grand and Rehberg, such as signal timing, leading pedestrian intervals, and turn restrictions during school hours.
- **Phase 2: Policy Amendment**
 - Proposed amendment to the School Zone Traffic Control Policy removing the exclusion of middle schools and high schools and applying the same engineering warrants used for elementary schools.
 - Site inventory for the remaining middle schools and the high schools, with street classification, adjacent posted speeds, and any state or federal-aid route involvement.
 - Prioritized implementation list with per-site cost for signage and flashers.

- Confirmation from the City Attorney that proposed limits and signage comply with MCA 61-8-310 and 61-8-726 as amended in 2025.

Intended Outcome

A reduced-speed school zone at Will James that covers the Grand Avenue and Rehberg Lane crossing, adopted and signed this school year, and a City policy that treats middle and high school students the same as elementary students with regard to the importance of their safety. A lower posted speed alone will not fix a wide arterial, so the review should return crossing improvements alongside the speed zone rather than in place of it.