



INTERIM PLANNING COMMISSION

Thursday, February 5, 2026 at 4:30pm

Commission Members	Position	01/15/2026	02/05/2026	03/05/2026	04/02/2026	05/07/2026	06/04/2026	07/02/2026	08/06/2026	09/03/2026	10/01/2026	11/05/2026	12/03/2026		
Dennie Stephenson	Chair	1	1												
Kimberly Welzenbach	Vice Chair	1	V												
Daniel Brooks	Commission Member	1	1												
Roger Gravgaard	Commission Member	1	V												
David Nordel	Commission Member	V	V												
Amber Parish	Commission Member	1	1												
Josh Sayer	Commission Member	1	1												
John Staley	Commission Member	1	1												
Jim Ronquillo	Commission Member	A	A												
Wyeth Friday	PCSD Director	1	1												
Anna Vickers	Planning Div Manager	1	1												

Please note: "A" stands for excused absence, "1" stands for present, "V" stands for Zoom participation, "C" stands for cancelled

Call the Meeting to Order:

Chairman Stephenson called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

Introduction of Planning Board Members and Planning Department Staff

Chairman Stephenson called for introductions of the members of the Interim Planning Commission and Planning staff.

Attending Staff: Wyeth Friday, PCSD Director; Anna Vickers, Planning Division Manager; Brenda Berns, Planning Clerk

1. Others in Attendance – Nicole Cromwell, Billings MT

2. Approval of Agenda

Motion

Motion by Commissioner Staley to approve the agenda as submitted. Second by Commissioner Brooks. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of Minutes of January 15, 2026

Motion

Motion by Commissioner Brooks to approve the meeting minutes of January 15, 2026 as submitted. Second by Commissioner Sayer. Motion carried unanimously.

4. Public Comment – There were no speakers for non-agenda items.

5. Disclosure of Outside (Ex-Parte) Communication. There were no communications received from external parties.

6. Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest. There were no Conflicts of Interest.

7. Old Business

a. Review Housing Development Encouragement Matrix

Wyeth Friday provided an overview of the City of Billings’ growth projections for the next twenty years, including population, employment, housing, and commercial development. Mr. Friday also reviewed the items included in the housing matrix as outlined in **MCA 76-25-302**.

PLAN ACTION

a) Allow, as a permitted use for at least a duplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted.

Plan action: Already allowed, no action necessary

b) Zone for higher density housing near transit stations, places of employment, higher education facilities, and other appropriate populations centers, as determined by local government.

Plan action: Want to create an overlay

c) Eliminate or reduce off-street parking requirements to require no more than one parking space per dwelling unit.

Plan action: To be implemented

d) Eliminate impact fees for accessory dwelling units or developments that include multi-unit dwellings or reduce the fees by at least 25%.

Plan action: Navigate with Infill Policy

Discussion focused on development and impact fees. Staff noted that the City is considering adjustments to transportation-related fees, which may be addressed later, rather than at the time of adoption.

e) Allow, as a permitted use, at least one internal or detached accessory dwelling unit on a lot with a single-unit dwelling occupied as a primary residence.

Plan action: Already implemented

f) Allow for single-room occupancy developments.

Plan action: Already implemented

g) Allow, as a permitted use, a triplex or fourplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted.

Plan Action: Investigate with Infill Policy

Discussion addressed challenges associated with elevation changes in development areas, particularly where transitions may affect construction, grading, and site design.

h) Eliminate minimum lot sizes or reduce the existing minimum lot size required by at least 25%.

Plan action: Do not implement

i) Eliminate aesthetic, material, shape, bulk, size, floor area, and other massing requirements for multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use developments or remove at least half of those requirements.

Plan action: Do not implement

Discussion noted that while the current code includes certain aesthetic requirements, these provisions were considered overly restrictive with respect to overall development costs.

j) Provide for zoning that specifically allows or encourages the development of tiny houses, as defined in Appendix Q of the International Residential Code as it was printed on January 1, 2023.
Plan action: Already implemented

k) Eliminate setback requirements or reduce existing setback requirements by at least 25%.
Plan action: Do not implement

Discussion addressed how reduced setback requirements could affect compliance with firewall guidelines and related building safety standards.

l) Increase building height limits for dwelling units by at least 25%.
Plan action: Do not implement – currently have high allowances.

Discussion focused on transitional housing and potential approaches for addressing related planning and regulatory considerations.

m) Allow multi-unit dwellings or mixed-use development as a permitted use on all lots where office, retail, or commercial are primary permitted uses.
Plan action: Already implemented

n) Allow multi-unit dwellings as a permitted use on all lots where triplexes or fourplexes are permitted uses.
Plan action: Needs clarification from the board.

Discussion from the board reviewed zoning allowances for transitional housing. It was noted that NX1 permits up to a four-plex, and the possibility of placing limits on the number of structures was considered. Development is expected to be multi-level, and one- and two-family housing are already permitted in NX1, NX2, and NX3 districts.

Board Discussion

The Commission reviewed approaches used by other communities regarding density, transitional housing, and lot coverage. Examples from Bozeman, Missoula, Great Falls, and other cities were noted as references for potential adjustments in NX1 zoning. It was discussed that single-family zoning requires allowances for duplexes, and similarly, three-unit structures may permit six units, with attention to multi-level development.

Consideration was given to alternative ways to increase density without changing building size, including adjustments to lot coverage or footprint availability, while maintaining compliance with fire codes and building regulations. The impact of square footage, height, and separation between structures on safety, traffic, and overall community design was also discussed. It was emphasized that while zoning can provide descriptive guidance, it should not be overly prescriptive regarding materials or unit size.

The Commission also considered the potential effects of increased density on traffic patterns, community predictability, and public safety over time, including radiant heat impact and building separation standards. The importance of balancing density goals with growth planning dictated by state law, as well as maintaining flexibility in lot design, was highlighted.

The discussion acknowledged that implementing missing-middle housing in the community requires careful consideration of density, lot coverage, building size, and associated impacts on infrastructure and neighborhood character. Observations from previous developments were noted, and it was recognized that not all outcomes will satisfy all residents, but careful planning can provide reasonable predictability and community benefit.

Public Comment

Nicole Cromwel, Billings MT – Ms. Cromwell noted that the Commission appears to be moving in the right direction regarding NX1 zoning. In earlier post-war neighborhoods, four-unit developments were often placed on neighborhood corners, resulting in a mix of housing types. In later developments, particularly in areas zoned NX1 and NX2 post-1970, larger areas were treated uniformly, which was recognized as less safe. Observations indicated that integrating smaller multi-unit developments into predominantly single-family neighborhoods can increase overall neighborhood safety by providing more “eyes on the street.”

b. Review of Land Use Plan and Future Land Use Map Project Status

Anna Vickers stated that a review of the plan will be provided to the Commission in the coming weeks. It was noted that additional meetings with the Commission are planned as the adoption process progresses, including a second meeting specifically scheduled for March to provide further updates and discussion opportunities.

8. New Business

a. Discuss Dave Nordel’s Housing Affordability Framework

Commissioner Nordel raised concerns regarding the potential impact on housing affordability. He emphasized that the focus of the plan has been on optimizing land use to make the most effective use of available land, rather than directly zoning for affordability. The Commissioner noted that while data and community input were considered, care should be taken in discussions to avoid framing zoning decisions solely in terms of affordable housing. Attention was also given to strategies for managing development in ways that help keep taxes and costs reasonable.

Board Discussion

The Commission discussed the role of the growth plan in relation to housing affordability. It was noted that the Commission's primary responsibility is to evaluate land use and growth strategies for the city, rather than to directly influence housing affordability. While incentives such as upsizing, mixed-use development, multi-family structures, and increased density may indirectly support more affordable options, outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

It was emphasized that affordability is influenced by broader economic factors, builder decisions, and market forces, and that zoning alone cannot predict specific outcomes. The Commission acknowledged that surveys and community input have been considered, and that strategies must balance growth, density, and development incentives with practical considerations such as tax impact and market realities. It was further clarified that state law does not require the Commission to ensure housing affordability, and the focus should remain on optimizing land use and supporting orderly growth.

Public Comment

Nicole Cromwell, Billings MT – Ms. Cromwell stated she appreciated Commissioner Nordel's approach to naturally occurring affordable housing in the city. She noted that in calendar year 2025, nearly half of the homes built had a building valuation of \$216,000 or less, not including land, infrastructure, or market adjustments, with sale prices varying significantly. Most homes at or below \$216,000 were attached units, such as multi-family town homes. Homes valued above \$280,000 were predominantly single-family, including some high-end properties.

The discussion highlighted that builders are managing valuations, estimates, and margins to bring price points down, though market demand continues to influence final prices. It was suggested that overlay districts and infill areas are likely locations for affordable housing opportunities. For households with incomes around \$70,000, homes priced between \$127,000 and \$187,000 may be attainable. The Commission was reminded that Community Development utilizes grant funds to assist homebuyers, and that zoning codes should support strategies such as accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and use of basements to increase housing options.

Discussion

The Commission requested clarification on the schedule for upcoming materials from consultants, including the economic analysis, and the subsequent map and plan. It was noted that the economic analysis is expected to be provided in March, with draft sections shared as they become available rather than waiting for the entire plan.

Questions were raised regarding parking, and it was confirmed that parking validation would be available from the county lot.

The Commission also discussed the Boards & Commissions training session, noting its usefulness, and it was reported that efforts are ongoing to locate and provide a recording of the session for members.

9. Other Business: Next IPC meeting will be March 5, 2026 @ 4:30pm

Adjournment: 5:42pm

Brenda J Berns, Planning Clerk