

CITY OF BILLINGS

CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

March 12, 2026 – 12:00 Noon

Council Chambers – City Hall, 316 N. 26th St., Billings, Montana

Council Present:

Councilmember Shaw
Councilmember Nicholson
Councilmember Neese
Councilmember Pitman
Councilmember Aguirre
Councilmember Kennedy
Councilmember Aspenlieder
Councilmember Lindley
Councilmember Boyett
Councilmember O'Donnell
Mayor Nelson

Staff Present:

Gina Dahl, City Attorney; Jessica McKee, Deputy City Attorney; Denise Bohlman, City Clerk; Wyeth Friday, Planning Director; Anna Vickers, Planning Manager

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)

- **Pam Ellis**, asked that City Council issue a letter of support for the County Water District of Billings Heights to apply for Federal funding for its infrastructure.

Councilmember Pitman moved to add as Agenda Item #1, Letter of Support for County Water District of Billings Heights Application for Federal Funds

ADDED: AGENDA ITEM #1 – Letter of Support for County Water District of Billings Heights Application for Federal Funds

Councilmember Pitman asked Council to approve sending a letter of support to Senator Sheehy for the County Water District. Council discussed that items like this should go to the Council's Legislative and Local Affairs Subcommittee for consideration in the future. Councilmembers Shaw, Aspenlieder and Neese would not support the motion as it competes for monies the City of Billings needed for its projects. Discussions continued about the use of City Council letterhead should a single or less than majority of Council wished to provide a letter of support. Consensus was each Councilmember that wished to use their own personal letterhead could, but Council letterhead should not unless a majority of Council supported sending a letter.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Estimated project cost of approximately \$1 million with grant funding anticipated for a portion of the project. Concerns that using City letterhead could imply the City of Billings officially endorses the project, which may compete with City infrastructure funding priorities.

Clarification from legal staff that use of City letterhead could create the perception of Council endorsement. Councilmembers generally agreed that individual Councilmembers could write letters of support, but not on City letterhead to avoid implying an official City position.

No formal motion was made.

AGENDA ITEM #2 – Montana Land Use Planning Act / Billings 2045 Update

Presenters: Wyeth Friday, Planning Director and Anna Vickers, Planning Manager

- Staff provided an overview of the Montana Land Use Planning Act, adopted by the Legislature in 2023, which requires cities to adopt updated planning documents by May 17, 2026.

Key elements required under the Act:

- Adoption of a Future Land Use Map
- Re-adoption of zoning regulations
- Re-adoption of subdivision regulations
- Implementation of administrative review processes for certain land use applications
- Selection of at least five zoning incentives intended to encourage housing development
- Staff explained that the Billings 2045 Plan is being developed to meet these statutory requirements and guide community growth over the next 20 years.
- Projected growth estimates include:
 - 30,000 additional residents
 - Approximately 16,000 new housing units needed

Planning Timeline Highlights

- Staff summarized steps completed in the planning process, including:
 - West Billings Plan contract – November 2023
 - Heights Plan contract – April 2024
 - Community survey – October to December 2025
 - Community planning week – November 2025
 - Draft plan development – January 2026
 - Upcoming planning week – April 6–8, 2026
- Staff emphasized the need for Council direction during work sessions to allow the plan to be finalized before the state deadline.

Discussion – Zoning Incentives

- State law requires adoption of at least five housing incentives from a list of fourteen options.
- Staff reviewed each option and provided recommendations from the Interim Planning Commission (IPC).

Incentives Already Implemented or Recommended

- Council generally agreed to continue several existing practices, including:
 - Accessory dwelling units
 - Single-room occupancy housing
 - Mixed-use residential in commercial areas
 - Encouragement of tiny homes
 - Reduced parking requirements required by state law
 - Existing lot frontage standards

Motion: Adopt initial recommended incentive set (c), (e), (f), (h), (j) and (m)

Moved by CM Aspenlieder

Seconded by CM Shaw.

APPROVED 10-1, CM Neese opposed

Incentive A – Allow as a permitted use for at least a duplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted

Motion: remove this incentive and revert to previous reCode policy.

Moved by CM Neese

Seconded by CM Boyett

FAILED 3-7, Shaw, Nicholson, Pitman, Aguirre, Lindley, O'Donnell and Mayor Nelson opposed

CM's Aspenlieder and Kennedy left the meeting at approximately 1:30 PM

Incentive B – Zone for higher density housing near transit stations, places of employment, higher education facilities, and other appropriate population centers, as determined by the local government.

Motion: accept the incentive allowing Council-designated higher density areas near transit or employment centers.

Moved by CM Boyett

Seconded by CM Nicholson

APPROVED 9-0, Kennedy and Aspenlieder absent

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

Motion: defer the incentive and evaluate it as part of the future Infill Development Policy review, as recommended by Interim Planning Commission (IPC).

Moved by CM Lindley

Seconded by CM Shaw

APPROVED 9-0, Kennedy and Aspenlieder absent

Incentive G – Allow, as a permitted use, a triplex or fourplex where a single-unit dwelling is permitted.

Motion: defer the incentive and evaluate it as part of the future Infill Development Policy review, as recommended by IPC.

Moved by CM Shaw

Seconded by CM Nicholson

Substitute motion: remove incentive G from further consideration.

Moved by CM Neese

Seconded by CM Kennedy

APPROVED 5-4, Shaw, Nicholson, Aguirre and Lindley opposed

PUBLIC COMMENT – “NON-AGENDA ITEMS”

None

ADJOURN: 2:00 P.M.