

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL WORK SESSION SUMMARY

May 5, 2026 – 5:30 PM

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

Council Present:

Councilmember Shaw
Councilmember Nicholson
Councilmember Pitman
Councilmember Aguirre (Via Zoom)
Councilmember Kennedy
Councilmember Aspenlieder (Via Zoom)
Councilmember Lindley
Councilmember Boyett
Councilmember O'Donnell
Mayor Nelson

Absent/Excused:

Councilmember Neese

Staff Present:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator
Gina Dahl, City Attorney
Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director
Anna Vickers, Planning Manager
Gavin Woltjer, Parks, Recreation & Public Lands Director
Matt Hoppel, Fire Chief

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda and Non-Agenda Items)

None

AGENDA ITEM #1 – Billings 2045 Update

Presenter: Wyeth Friday, Planning and Community Services Director; Anna Vickers, Planning Manager

Overview:

Staff provided an update regarding the Billings 2045 process, including the status of the Interim Planning Commission (IPC) review, proposed zoning amendments, subdivision regulation amendments, and implementation requirements associated with the Montana Land Use Planning Act.

Key Points:

- IPC reviewed the future land use map, zoning amendments, and subdivision amendments on April 29, 2026.
- IPC scheduled a follow-up meeting for May 7, 2026 to finalize recommendations to City Council.
- Staff reviewed projected housing needs of approximately 26,200 units by 2045 and presented land capacity calculations.
- Discussion included proposed zoning code amendments related to parking standards, temporary food truck uses, and neighborhood mixed-use standards.
- Subdivision regulation changes and state-mandated public noticing requirements were reviewed.

Council Discussion:

- Councilmembers expressed frustration regarding the timing of IPC recommendations being delivered only days prior to Council consideration of the final package.
- Councilmember Aspenlieder stated concerns regarding Council's ability to adequately review last-minute IPC recommendations and communicate with constituents prior to adoption.

- Acknowledged the scheduling concerns while emphasizing efforts to maintain transparency and communication throughout the process.
- Council discussed the impact of state legislation on local zoning authority and public noticing requirements, with several members expressing concern about the loss of local control.
- Questions were raised regarding future public participation opportunities after the state-required noticing changes take effect in 2027.
- Expressed opposition to state mandates impacting local zoning authority and public notice procedures.
- Council discussed parking requirements under state law, including minimum parking standards for smaller residential units and whether the City could impose stricter requirements.
- Staff explained that several proposed code changes were intended to maintain as much local flexibility as possible while remaining compliant with state law.
- Discussion occurred regarding neighborhood mixed-use standards and the placement of higher intensity commercial uses near residential neighborhoods.
- Councilmembers asked questions regarding subdivision review timelines, traffic study thresholds, and the level of administrative discretion under the proposed system.
- Staff clarified that future land use designations and adopted plans would continue to guide development decisions and infrastructure review.

Public Comment:

None

Council Direction:

- Continue with the scheduled process and provide IPC recommendations to Council following the May 7, 2026 meeting.

AGENDA ITEM #2 – FY2027 Departmental Budget Presentations

CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE PRESENTATION

Presenter: Gina Dahl, City Attorney

Overview:

Presentation of the FY2027 City Attorney's Office budget, staffing levels, operational demands, and legal service trends.

Key Points:

- City Attorney's Office reviewed increases in public records requests and legal workload.
- Presentation included prosecution statistics, civil litigation activity, and contract review responsibilities.
- Department discussed staffing allocations and operational efficiencies.
- Discussion included technology and case management improvements supporting legal operations.
- Department emphasized ongoing legal support for Council, City departments, and risk management efforts.

Council Discussion:

- Council discussed increasing complexity and volume of public records requests.
- Questions were raised regarding efficiency improvements through technology and records management systems.
- Discussion occurred regarding the use of outside legal counsel for Council-specific matters and contract negotiations.
- Councilmembers discussed balancing legal staffing needs with budget constraints.

Public Comment:

None

Council Direction:

- Continue evaluating legal service demands, staffing needs, and operational efficiencies.

PARKS, RECREATION & PUBLIC LANDS PRESENTATION

Presenter: Gavin Woltjer, Parks, Recreation & Public Lands Director

Overview:

Presentation of the FY2027 Parks, Recreation & Public Lands budget, operational priorities, recreation programming, park maintenance, and capital projects.

Key Points:

- Department highlighted operational accomplishments and increased park utilization metrics.
- Discussion included recreation center progress and programming expansion.
- Presentation reviewed ongoing capital improvement projects and deferred maintenance needs.
- Discussion regarding South Park Pool funding strategies and future capital planning.
- Department reviewed park asset management efforts, trail maintenance, and urban forestry priorities.
- Staff emphasized use of operational data and analytics to support planning and grant applications.

Council Discussion:

- Council praised operational efficiencies and data-driven planning efforts.
- Discussion occurred regarding long-term funding strategies for South Park Pool.
- Questions were raised regarding deferred maintenance and sustainability of park capital investments.
- Council discussed future management responsibilities for additional recreation facilities and assets.
- Discussion included urban forestry staffing needs and coordination opportunities with Yellowstone County.
- Councilmembers emphasized the importance of maintaining recreational amenities as the community grows.

Public Comment:

None

Council Direction:

- Continue development of long-term park funding strategies, capital planning efforts, and operational improvements.

FIRE DEPARTMENT PRESENTATION

Presenter: Matt Hoppel, Fire Chief

Overview:

Presentation of the FY2027 Fire Department budget, emergency response operations, staffing needs, strategic planning efforts, and alternative funding opportunities.

Key Points:

- Fire Department reviewed staffing levels, response demands, and future operational growth needs.
- Discussion included staffing and operational planning for Fire Stations 8 and 9.
- Department reviewed strategic planning initiatives and future service demand projections.
- Presentation included discussion regarding crisis response operations and behavioral health-related calls.
- Department discussed grant opportunities, alternative funding mechanisms, and cost recovery strategies.
- Review of 911 Center operations and emergency response coordination efforts.

Council Discussion:

- Council discussed long-term operational demands associated with City growth and emergency response coverage.
- Questions were raised regarding firefighter recruitment, retention, and mental health resources.
- Discussion occurred regarding alternative funding sources including grants, impact fees, and partnerships.
- Council discussed future staffing needs for Fire Stations 8 and 9.
- Discussion included the future role of crisis response teams and lower-acuity emergency response models.
- Councilmembers expressed appreciation for the Department's transparency regarding operational challenges.

Public Comment:

None

Council Direction:

- Continue development of the FY2027 budget and return with additional discussions regarding staffing priorities, capital planning, and long-term funding strategies.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None

ADJOURN: 8:55 P.M.