

CITY OF BILLINGS
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL WORK SESSION SUMMARY
May 12, 2026 – 12:00 PM
Council Chambers – City Hall, 316 N. 26th St., Billings, Montana

Council Present:

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

Absent/

Excused:

Councilmember Pitman

Staff Present:

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator
Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator
Gina Dahl, City Attorney
Morgan Lix, Deputy City Attorney
Sam Atwood, Deputy City Attorney
Ben Halverson, Domestic Violence Prosecutor
Rich St. John, Police Chief
Katie Nash, Domestic Violence Investigator

PUBLIC COMMENT (Agenda Item)

The following members of the public provided comment regarding domestic violence prevention, victim services, trauma-informed training, protection order enforcement, judicial education, risk assessment tools, housing protections, legislative reforms, jail capacity, community collaboration, and prevention-focused strategies. Commenters emphasized the need for victim-centered services, improved interagency coordination, education, and early intervention:

Katie Harrison.

Kyla Hailstone, MT Family Court Awareness Project.

Madison Bach, MT Family Court Awareness Project.

Dr. Matthew Leavenworth, Pay Love Forward.

Elizabeth Peterson, Safe Parents organization.

Denise Johnson, Children's Justic Coalition.

David Irion, Safe and Secure Yellowstone County Political Action Committee.

Lily Aimone.

Senator Dennis Lenz.

AGENDA ITEM #1 – Domestic Violence Response System Overview and Discussion

Chris Kukulski, City Administrator; Kevin Iffland, Assistant City Administrator; Rich St. John, Police Chief; Gina Dahl, City Attorney

Overview:

Staff provided a high-level overview of the City's domestic violence response system, including law enforcement response, training protocols, protection order enforcement, release decisions, victim notification practices, interagency coordination, and opportunities for future review. The work session was intended to establish a baseline understanding of current practices and identify areas for additional analysis.

Key Points:

- Police Department personnel receive domestic violence training beyond state minimum requirements, including lethality assessment, strangulation recognition, trauma-informed interviewing, and protection order enforcement.
- The Police Department utilizes a patrol response model supported by specialized domestic violence investigators and works closely with the Family Justice Center and community partners.
- Recent internal reviews resulted in additional training, policy review, and efforts to strengthen domestic violence and missing persons response procedures.
- Domestic violence homicide data and trends were reviewed, including the relationship between intimate partner violence, family conflict, mental health concerns, and repeat offenders.
- Staff explained the distinction between no-contact orders and orders of protection, enforcement mechanisms, and prosecution procedures.
- Municipal Court arraignment and bond processes were reviewed, including victim notification efforts, GPS monitoring, release conditions, and prosecutor recommendations.

- Discussion included monitoring of protection order violations, jail communications, GPS tracking technology, victim notification processes, and coordination among law enforcement, prosecutors, courts, and service providers.
- Staff highlighted the importance of victim advocacy, prevention, education, and community resources in reducing domestic violence and supporting survivors.

Council Discussion:

- Questions regarding domestic violence training standards, officer preparedness, and consistency among responding agencies.
- Discussion regarding Police Department policies, investigative procedures, staffing levels, and resource needs.
- Questions regarding jail release procedures, bond decisions, GPS monitoring providers, victim notification practices, and enforcement timelines.
- Discussion regarding coordination between the City Attorney's Office, Police Department, Municipal Court, Yellowstone County agencies, and community partners.
- Questions regarding judicial discretion, prosecution practices, repeat offenders, and escalation from misdemeanor to felony offenses.
- Discussion regarding legislative opportunities, including protection order enforcement, victim safety measures, and judicial training initiatives.
- Comments regarding prevention strategies, public education, early intervention, and addressing long-term cycles of violence.

Public Comment:

Additional public comment emphasized the importance of prevention, community education, data collection, victim services, and continued review of domestic violence response systems.

Council Direction:

- Continue the domestic violence response system review process through additional work sessions.
- Request additional information regarding training practices, policies, interagency coordination, GPS monitoring, victim notification procedures, and legislative considerations.
- Explore opportunities to engage additional partner agencies and stakeholders in future discussions.
- Continue evaluating prevention, education, victim advocacy, and system-improvement strategies.

PUBLIC COMMENT – NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Melanie Schwarz, Upstream Strategy Partners, spoke of prevention, education, community awareness, and the importance of addressing domestic violence through early intervention and collaboration.

ADJOURN: 1:58 P.M.