

Billings City Administrator Weekly Report

August 6, 2020

1. Monday's COVID-19 Update

- City Hall and Library Closure Press Release

2. Public Safety Mill Levy Presentations – The PSML presentation was given to the following groups this week:

- a. Downtown Rotary
- b. Republican Central Committee
- c. AM 730
- d. Community Development Board
- e. City Zoning Commission
- f. Human Relation Commission

PSML presentations schedule for next week:

- a. Public Works Board
- b. Parks, Recreation and Cemetery Board
- c. Library Board
- d. Ward 2 Presentation at Castlerock Park

Please contact wynnette Maddox at 406-657-8433 if you have additional presentation ideas.

The PS2020 web page is where the videos are available on the city website. A webpage has been created for all educational materials for the public safety levy. The web link is: www.billingsmt.gov/ps2020.

Gazette Opinion printed July 29, 2020: It's critically important for Billings to pass public-safety levy

Is violent crime too high in Billings?

Are property crimes too numerous?

Are fire response times too slow?

Have police and fire calls for service climbed steadily over the past decade?

Answering an unequivocal “yes” to those questions, the City of Billings and its police and fire departments are urging voters to pass a repeal-and-replace public safety levy.

We heartily concur with that position.

The cost to the owner of a median-valued home (\$211,000) is \$4.75 a month.

The truth is that the 60-mill levy, which is designed to raise \$12.2 million, is not enough. It enables the city to keep its head above water, preserving the status quo and preventing the city from sliding backward.

More money will have to be raised for public safety in the future.

It's important to note that the biggest driver of both property crime and violent crime is methamphetamine.

After a big push against local "cookers" years ago was relatively successful, now the drug is being moved into Montana by the cartels, authorities say. Chief Rich St. John said this week that street prices have risen recently, making addicts all the more desperate to finance their habit and spurring more property and violent crime.

Compared to similarly sized communities around the West, Billings' crime rates are close to the top.

It is clear that community health and growth are not possible without public safety. This additional funding is urgently needed to address a public safety crisis in this community.

Two additional points should be considered:

First, Billings needs to continue its current effort to address drug- and intoxicant-related crime upstream of law enforcement by doing everything possible to enhance and increase social programs that can have a positive impact.

Second, the state of Montana continues to be derelict in leaving social services and education spending unfunded, pushing more and more responsibility to the cities, particularly Montana's largest city. Adding insult to injury, the state is straining Billings' public safety budget by underpaying for county jail beds for prisoners under state supervision. The Legislature can and must do more to fund statewide needs responsibly.

Neither of these points is intended to lessen the immediate, urgent need for this public safety levy's passage.

Ballots will be due September 15. Please vote to help Billings fund its urgent safety needs.

3. Temporary Changes to Municipal Pool Schedules - Due to impacts from COVID-19, the Montana University System has moved the start of college across the state forward two weeks. As a result, the Parks and Recreation Department will be making some changes to the pool schedules due to the loss of lifeguards and pool managers returning to college.

- The Wading Pools at Pioneer and Hawthorne will close for the season at 6 pm on Sunday, August 9th
- South Park Pool will remain open through August 22nd but will close daily at 4 pm beginning on Monday, August 10th
- Rose Park Pool will remain open through August 23rd for Dog Day at the Pool, but will close daily at 7 pm effective immediately

4. Temporary Changes to Restroom Closing Schedule – Due to impacts from COVID-19, the Parks Division will have only 34 out of 50 seasonal positions filled to start the week of August 10th. As a result, the Parks and Recreation Department will be making some changes to the restroom closing schedules. Unless there is an event at one of these parks, the restroom will close at 4:00 pm and reopen the following day by 7:00 am.

- Optimist
- Highland
- Gorham
- Sacajawea
- Edgerton
- Arrowhead
- South
- North

5. Certified Taxable Value – The Department of Revenue provided us with Certified Taxable Value this week. I have provided a brief summary of the changes and the impact for the coming fiscal year.

Taxing District	% Change in value	Estimated Tax Revenue Impact	Comments
City of Billings	1.8% increase	\$250,000 more in the General Fund	
Downtown TIF	9.33% Decrease	\$210,000 decrease in Tax Revenue	Largely driven by a reduction at the Double Tree & Centrally Assessed AT&T/CenturyLink properties
East TIF	0.92% Increase	\$6,500 increase	
South TIF	6.51 % Decrease	\$200,000 decrease in Tax Revenue	Largely driven by a reduction at the Red Lion Hotel

This is good news for the City General Fund and other tax supported funds, as it should reduce the amount of reserves used to balance the FY21 budget. The budget anticipated using \$4.7 million of General Fund reserves, and with this increase that should be closer to \$4.5. Unfortunately, both the Downtown and South Billings TIF districts are each losing approx. \$200k in revenue.

Have a great weekend.



CITY OF BILLINGS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Update regarding positive confirmation of COVID19 tests with City employees

On July 29, 2020, the City of Billings confirmed three (3) City employees, two (2) custodial and one (1) information technology, tested positive for COVID-19. A contact investigation was conducted by RiverStone Health to determine the extent of possible transmission to other City employees. The location and exact time of contraction of the virus is unknown. These employees are currently in quarantine at their residences under the advice of healthcare providers. In an abundance of caution, City Hall will be closed to the public effective 5:00 pm August 3 in preparation for deep cleaning of the facility. City Hall will reopen to the public on Thursday, August 6, at 7:00 am until noon, and will then operate on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 7:00 am until noon through August 14. Normal business hours will resume August 17.

The Billings Public Library will also close effective 6:00 pm August 3 for deep cleaning. Curbside services will continue Monday through Friday. The Library will reopen on August 17 at 10:00 am. No further quarantine measures are needed for library employees, at this time.

The City of Billings has proactively prepared for the eventuality of a staff member contracting COVID-19 since the onset of this virus in our community. The City will continue to monitor staff, adhere to all enhanced safety implementations, and follow all CDC guidelines to maintain a healthy workforce.

For further information, please contact: Gavin Woltjer at 657-8292 or woltjerg@billingsmt.gov.

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