

Billings City Administrator Weekly Report

September 9, 2022

1. **EPA PCE Update** - The EPA concluded soil vapor monitoring last week. The second phase of sewer gas monitoring of the city's sewer system is planned for October 2022. EPA and AECOM are drafting an informational pamphlet for use by the field techs when they speak with the public during the next phase of gas monitoring. We will forward a copy to the City Council when we get it.
2. **Low Barrier Shelter** – I've had three meetings since Tuesday's council work session working to come up with a good solution. A big thank you to our community stakeholders who serve in this area. All have been willing to meet with me to help us provide a good option for the council's approval. I'll provide a verbal update Monday night during my administrator's report.
3. **Lake Elmo Traffic Concerns** - City Council has received both public comment and emails about traffic concerns on Lake Elmo. In addition, a story was aired on the news stating the concerns and that the city was not responsive, so we want to update City Council on activity associated with the concern. Staff has been collecting information and evaluating the concerns but have not developed a plan as of this time. We reviewed specific areas of Lake Elmo relative to speed concerns in addition to the Lake Elmo corridor as a whole. Data collected earlier this year on Lake Elmo north of Wicks Lane showed average speeds of 34-36 mph which did not warrant a speed reduction or increase by typical standards. Arbitrarily reducing the signed speed limit to 25mph will likely not change driver behavior without extensive enforcement or a change in the physical street environment. Two steps citizens can do immediately to help the situation are first, park cars on the street. Much of Lake Elmo Road (not all) is built with on-street parking. Cars on the street present a narrower space and slow traffic. Second, ask the neighbors to drive like your child or best friends' kids are playing in the neighborhood. Traffic counts indicate most of the traffic in this area is local.

We will be collecting additional data following requests for stop signs on Lake Elmo, but it is important to note that stop signs are not used for speed control, but rather intersection operation. If stop signs on Lake Elmo are warranted, we will install them. We have discussed the school busing along Lake Elmo with School District 2 and buses now run both north-south and pick up children on each side of the road to avoid school children crossing the road.

While traffic issues may seem intuitive, we must be conscientious that we don't create unintended issues by adding traffic calming that is ineffective or even harmful. It has been shown that when drivers encounter unwarranted stop signs, they actually increase speed to make up for their perceived loss of time. Or, when speed limit signs are changed without physical changes to the street, they are similarly ineffective. We need to consider Lake Elmo's physical characteristics, what an appropriate speed is for the corridor, and how we can physically create an environment to support that speed. Another of the unintended consequences that we need to be cautious about is the idea of making collectors and arterials more congested, in theory slowing people down. In a grid network like we have, cut through traffic on local, residential streets can become an issue which is absolutely not what we want to create (this isn't really an issue for Lake Elmo). We

highlight these particular consequences just to illustrate that a well thought out, data supported approach is necessary when reviewing streets.

Moving forward, we are actively reviewing the recent Safe Routes to school study, collecting additional speed data both north and south of Wicks Lane, reviewing additional crash data (if any), and reviewing various traffic calming methods that could be implemented, if warranted and proven effective.

4. **Transportation Design** - We want to acknowledge the emails that have been sent with regards to the subject of transportation design. The industry is changing, and our approach and designs are evolving with it. However, two things to note, first, as Councilmember Gulick stated, it will take a generation, at least. We have 865 miles of road, and we can construct about 1 mile per year (less now with inflation). Second, we still need to move cars. Traffic engineering is not just a design modification like reducing lane widths. We have to ensure cars have a place to be also. So, arterials need to exist and yes, in some cases they will be "stroads" because we don't get to start from scratch. But we are focusing on creating better environments in neighborhoods, downtown and on re-construction projects where possible/appropriate. If you read Jeff Speck's book, Walkable City, he says start with the downtown. When cities attempt to do the entire city at once, they become mediocre. We need to focus on neighborhoods, our downtown, and smart design for arterials that need to move cars but also address multimodal users. Collectors like Lake Elmo are difficult because of how they have developed over time. Parkhill, Colton, Lewis are all similar examples. But property owners can help. Park on street – that has helped those streets I mentioned. We've striped bike lanes and parking on Lake Elmo – it is clear that this striping has had some impact in that speeds are not substantially above the speed limit. If it wasn't striped, we would anticipate the speeds would be significantly higher. If parking was used all along the street, the speeds would decrease.

So, the industry is changing but it is not going to happen overnight. City staff is keeping up on all of the various discussions, changing standards, design approaches, and looking at the city's transportation network (vehicles, bikes, pedestrians, neighborhoods) as a whole. We must consider our unique characteristics and construct appropriately. Staff has heard your thoughts on this issue and want to assure you that we are incorporating new concepts.

5. **From the PIO Desk:**

WATCH – Join the Miracle League of Billings for opening day on Saturday, September 10th at 10 a.m.! <https://youtu.be/SmH8BLMzMtM>

Billings in the news

Billings City Council discuss how the Public Safety Mill Levy and the Marijuana Options Tax money could be spent

https://www.kulr8.com/news/billings-city-council-discuss-how-the-public-safety-mill-levy-and-the-marijuana-options-tax/article_bdc0706c-2e5f-11ed-970b-67dfc8671966.html

Billings City Council talks spending public safety levy, marijuana tax money

<https://www.ktvq.com/news/local-news/billings-city-council-talks-spending-public-safety-levy-marijuana-tax-money>

Billings debates what to do with \$865K in pot and mill levy money

https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/billings-debates-what-to-do-with-865k-in-pot-and-mill-levy-money/article_60fa2f10-2e34-11ed-80a6-7ff7fd6587ad.html#tncms-source=login

Cold season looms as Billings grapples with whether to open low barrier shelter

https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/cold-season-looms-as-billings-grapples-with-whether-to-open-low-barrier-shelter/article_bda65e44-2af8-11ed-8dc9-2372c247ed70.html#tncms-source=login

Retiring firefighter captain teaching fire science education at MSUB

https://www.kulr8.com/news/retiring-firefighter-captain-teaching-fire-science-education-at-msub/article_19a57ee8-2d77-11ed-b955-576db9cebf5b.html

Progress update on the Billings Bypass Project

<https://www.ktvq.com/news/local-news/progress-update-on-the-billings-bypass-project>

Roundabout construction centered around safety for Billings drivers

<https://www.ktvq.com/news/local-news/roundabout-construction-centered-around-safety-for-billings-drivers>

Billings businesses encouraged to sign up for enforcement program to deter trespassing

<https://ci.billings.mt.us/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2377>