

West End Task Force (WETF) Minutes

Meeting date: 7 p.m. 1/15/19 Meeting location: Faith E Church, 3125 Sweetwater Dr.

Meeting called by: Tiffany Wardell, Chairperson

Note taker: Tina Volek

Council Member Richard Clark, County Commissioner Donald Jones and State Sen. Cary Smith were in attendance.

The prayer and Pledge of Allegiance were led by Mrs. Wardell.

AGENDA TOPICS

Police Report: Det. Shane Selden presented the attached report on activities in the West End and the City at large.

A question was raised about how Billings' calls compare with those in communities of a similar size? Det. Shelden said Fargo had about the same number of calls for service per year; Durango, Co, had a smaller number; Spokane had about 150,000 calls a year, twice those of Billings.

It was suggested that graphs would be helpful in presenting crime statistics.

In response to a question about staffing levels, Det. Shelden said there were 5 officers at the training academy in Helena and 8 in field training in town. The afternoon shift is running with a minimum number of officers.

A question was raised about whether neighborhood watch signs are effective? Det. Shelden said he had not researched the issue, but he suspected signage would be better than nothing. There are no WETF neighborhood block captains. It was noted that the Falcon Ridge neighborhood has put up signs with a camera. Det. Sheldon said networking through a Facebook application that notifies others of burglaries and similar incidents also might be helpful report crime issues. In addition, doorbells with built-in cameras and motion detectors can be helpful.

Long-Range Transportation Plan: Presenter Carry Kirkham.

Ms. Kirkham reviewed the final version of the Billings Urban Area Updated Long-Range Transportation Plan, which a Metropolitan Planning Organization such as Billings must update every 4 years. A complete list of recommended projects and their costs are included in pages 58-63 of the report, which can be seen here: www.Billingslrtp.com.

Mrs. Wardell asked members to let her know if there are other projects that should be included. Other items mentioned at the meeting were (1) The Montana Department of Transportation is studying railroad underpasses at 27th and at Montana Avenue and; (2) A roundabout is being considered at 56th and Central, with acquisition of sufficient land being an issue.

Annexation Petition

Council Member Clark reported that the City Council approved the zone change from Neighborhood Commercial to Planned Development with an underlying Neighborhood Commercial for a microbrewery proposed by MYK Enterprises near Grand Avenue and 54th Street West. People from the area spoke in favor of the plan at the City Council meeting. The zone change allowed the placement of more restrictions on the site, which would not include gaming. Mrs. Wardell said the Day Break Homes Association chair had said 50% of the homeowners had voted to support the zoning change, but no vote had occurred.

There has been support for reducing the number of zoning districts during the Project Re:Code process. For more information see:
<https://ci.billings.mt.us/2138/Project-Re-Code>.

Committee Updates/Revamping: Presenter, Tiffany Wardell.

Mrs. Wardell said there were no reports from the existing standing committees; Transportation/Traffic Safety; Code Enforcement, Crime Prevention, and Community Parks. She asked if the committees as they stand are effective? Is this a time to revamp the committees?

There were comments that the subcommittees helped get information to the WETF and that having WETF members peak at City Council meetings can be effective.

Ms. Kirkham said a group might be able to find out about neighborhood watch signs or what to do about speed signs. A report on the Crime Prevention Center would be helpful. Council Member Clark said he was sure they would send a speaker if requested.

Rex Dietz said a presentation on the City Code would be helpful, and the WETF members should ask questions on code issues and have someone report back.

Gordon Olson said some issues should be addressed at the Legislature, but the consensus was it might be too late to undertake issues at the current session.

Mr. Clark reported that there had been a casino application at the Reef at the Big Horn Resort, but the number of casinos in town now is over the allowable limit for a city of Billings' size.

Leo Barsanti said that the Public Service Commission had ruled 3-2 against a class action group of which he was a part that had alleged NorthWestern Energy had over-charged for street-lighting services.

Next Meeting: 7 p.m. Feb. 19, Faith E Church, 3145 Sweet Water Drive.