



## **The Billings Heights Community Development Task Force**

### **THE MEETING WAS CALLED TO ORDER 7:00 PM**

### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:** Jim Brown, Matthew Callahan, Sean Callahan, Kerri Seekins Crowe, Michael Crowe, Grace Dittrich, Laura Drager, Pam Ellis, Paul Evanson, Steve Gaertner, Kodi Kaiser, Doug Kary, Teresa Larsen, Michael Marino, Tom McGillvray, Roy Neese, TJ Smith, Nancy Steel, Mike Yakawich, Tracy Arnold

**POLICE REPORT:** Kodi Kaiser was promoted (and in plain clothes!). Steve Gaertner was introduced as our Task Force liaison. TJ Smith directed the officers to respond to questions from members rather than report on the statistics available on the city website: Monthly Task Force Reports

**<https://billingsmt.gov/2736/Monthly-Task-Force-Reports>**

Police are looking for a black pick-up (maybe Dodge), with 3-4 kids that engaged in multiple acts of vandalism. The officers estimated that Yellowstone County Jail needs a total of 1200 beds; Billings police require 40-50 beds for temporary holds pending arraignment.

**PRIOR MEETING MINUTES:** The minutes for November and January are included in the agenda packet. The January minutes are the Community Seven video which require no approval as they can not be changed. There was a motion made and seconded to accept the November minutes as attached. Motion was approved. Permission given to post minutes to City website.

**NEW BUSINESS:** Assistant Public Works Director Jennifer Duray presented: "Storm Fee, Proposed Change to Move Fee"

**Operational Change for Storm Billing:** Public Works is planning to migrate from charging the storm fee as an assessment t on property taxes to instead charge the fee on the utility bill beginning 7/1/24, to coincide with the implementation of the new storm rates and rate structure. While there are many communities who still assess storm fees on the property tax statement, it is a type of utility similar to water and wastewater. Public Works recommends a \$178 million upgrade...

<https://www.billingsmt.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/1772>

**Advantages from the city's point of view:** 1) transparency—residents see their bill monthly; 2) increased billing efficiency and less overhead cost; 3) decrease the amount of reserves required because funding is paid 12x per year rather than twice via property taxes Disadvantages 1) people don't like change; 2) reduce property tax refunds for the Elderly Homeowners and Renters Credit. Jennifer anticipated renters would not be affected because a lot of renters already pay storm water fees via their rent. Vacant parcels will not be charged. Some people in the County Water District of Billings Heights refused to pay their storm water fees (some unpaid balances were in excess of \$3000). Unpaid storm water fees in the District will be added to the property taxes.

### **Nominations for First Vice Chair:**

Jacqueline Garcia was nominated for First Vice Chair. Nancy Steel was nominated as Second Vice Chair. As per the Bylaws, nominations will be reopened at the next regularly scheduled meeting followed by the vote being taken for the positions.

### **REPORTS State Legislature, City, County, School District:**

**Yellowstone County, Mark Morse:** The state has begun transferring inmates to Arizona. About 70=80 state will be transferred from Yellowstone County detention. The county commissioners are willing to build as big a jail as taxpayers will support. Currently the dentention has 500-600 detainees. No one

can go in unless someone comes out. Most detainees have felonies. There are probably 300 that are DOC but are being held in Yellowstone County.

**Doug Kary Heights Water District:** Bitterroot Storm Water Construction will be finished in another month. The contractor is going very slow to avoid breaking the asbestos concrete pipe that is about 10 feet away. AC pipe becomes very brittle as it ages and it is very difficult to construct nearby.

**Mike Yakawich:** Mike complimented the excellent work of the Task Forces on the safety issue. Mike is a MT representative for HD#51 and is working on the Behavioral Health for Future Generations Commission. The legislature allocated \$300 million to address the increase of mental health challenges in Montana which are affecting the entire state. We have a high level of domestic violence which impacts the entire family. We have cartel members marrying into the reservation. 1) \$10 million for beds for acute needs—need staff to treat children; 2) \$7 million to hire people to conduct mental health evaluations; 3) increase support for centers like the Crisis Center in Billings; 4) \$500,000 for education; Billings does a pretty good job triaging needs; 5) increase support for developmental and intellectual disabilities. Mike provided a handout titled Recommendations for Consideration from the Behavioral Health System for Future Generations Commission.

**Kerri Seekins Crowe** is continuing to identify employers who can provide job opportunities for people reentering the workforce from prison. Kerri is working for the Labor Department on a grant that is focused on people coming out of federal prison and going back into the community. She is seeking to identify mentorships. Right now the program serves 8000 people per year; 10-20 per day in DOC alternatives

**Teresa Larsen:** The school board voted unanimously to ask the community to approve safety levies for both the elementary and high school districts. If approved, the District will have a community committee to oversee expenditures and verify that they comply with the levy. The district has identified materials to assist with students struggling to learn to read with dyslexia. The board approved a KinderReady program for children in K-3 who will receive about 150 hours of additional instruction in reading and hired instructional coaches to help teachers implement the curriculum.

**Senator Tom McGillvray** shared a document "The US Fiscal House of Cards is Collapsing". Additionally, Senator McGillvray said he had been assigned to the Governor's committee to review property taxes and said the committee welcomed ideas from all about reducing property taxes.

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.**

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Monday, March 11, 2024 6—8 pm Convention of the States Action, National Debt-Deficit Forum Emmanuel Baptist Church 328 S Shiloh Rd Billings, MT Senator Rick Santorum, and others

Next Meeting Tuesday, March 26, 7:00PM will feature David Goodridge with a presentation on the upcoming "City and County Government Study." We will also have the Planning Department give us an update on continuing discussions concerning the Heights Neighborhood Plan.