

HEIGHTS NEIGHBORHOOD TASK FORCE MINUTES 3/26/24



The Billings Heights Community Development Task Force

CALL MEETING TO ORDER: Chair TJ Smith at 7:00 pm

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS Sean Callahan, Laura Drager, Pam Ellis, Frank Ewalt, Jacqueline Garcia, David Goodridge, Lora Mattox, Lindsay McGimpsey, Chris McMorris, Roy Neese, Michel Poodry, Carolyn Sevier, TJ Smith, Nancy Steel, Tracy Arnold Wageman

POLICE REPORT: Steve Gaertner was not in attendance.

PRIOR MEETING MINUTES Laura Drager made the motion to approve the February 27, 2024; seconded by Sean Callahan. The minutes were approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

- **David Goodridge:** City and County Government Study
- *Montana voters to decide in June whether to change local government* Amy Nile, Feb 2, 2024
https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/government-politics/montana-local-government-review/article_95b36ac0-bfb8-11ee-808d-f3c9a39c74f6.html
- David provided a handout entitled *Local Government Review Questions and Answer Sheet*, Get to Yes, <https://www.gettoyes.net/> Statutory requirements for local government review require that the city/county state an amount that

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they are going to levy against the property owners to fund the review process from start to finish. See the website for additional information

- The city has its proposed levy amount of \$200,000
- The county has its levy amount of \$495,000.
- The levy amount is NOT a permanent tax!
- It can only be levied for two years. Levied Tax $\$ \div 2$
- If there are excess dollars that were not used in the 2-year timeframe. The excess goes into the governing entity's general fund.
- The dollars are meant to be spent on the costs associated with the study commission's work, i.e. consultant fees, staff time, etc.

- **Planning Department: Begin discussion of Heights Neighborhood Plan Lora Mattox, City of Billings Planning Department**

- Lora Mattox lead the Heights Neighborhood Plan Committee in 2006 which was funded by a Community Development Block Grant \$50,000 to write the plan and an additional \$75,000 to develop a Transportation Plan. The city currently has an opening for a Transportation Planner.
- The city hired DOWL, LLC DOWL supports planning, surveying, engineering (transportation, civil, structural, water resources, and geotechnical), environmental, and other services.
- Dowl is very familiar with the Heights and did the work to plan the Billings Bypass
- The plans will include the Inner Belt Loop. What kind of development do we want to see along Hwy 3? MDT is updating the Hwy 3 corridor study. The Task Force will get notices of surveys and public meetings. The plan is to also engage the Business Association, schools, and citizens. Roy recommended to include the County Water District of Billings Heights.
- The focus of the plan is housing for the future, land use, economic vitality. Includes wheelchair accessibility, sidewalks, trails.
- Dick Anderson is also on the team
- The plan will segue into the Billings Growth plan that the state mandated

- **Election of Vice Chair Nominations & election;** two members were nominated in February. Nominations are open from the floor. Roy Neese nominated Jacqueline Garcia and Nancy Steel. Laura seconded the nominations. There were no additional nominations from the floor. Unanimous consent.

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- Nominations First Vice Chair: Jacqueline Garcia
- Nominations Second Vice Chair: Nancy Steel

- **Proposed bylaws revision:**

Pam Ellis proposed a rewrite of the Bylaws. A motion was made and it was decided by unanimous vote that a rewrite should be done by a committee. As per the current Bylaws the chair will appoint a committee.

REPORTS State, City, Cty, School District

Frank Ewalt, County Water District of Billings Heights The Heights has an opening for a director to fill the term of Laura Drager through May 2025. The board received emails that were full of confusion and accusations. The opening will be formally noticed at the April 17 CWDBH Board meeting, 6 pm @ the Board room, 1540 Popelka Dr, Billings, MT 59105, United States. All prior applications were rejected due to the confusion. The April 17th agenda will include the closing date and the date applicants will be interviewed.

The District will be interview the four finalists for General Manager on Thursday, March 28 @ 11:00 am.

The board has started looking into checking the infrastructure. Most of the pipes are 60 years old. Lake Hills has water pressure problems in the summer, particularly early morning when people are watering and taking showers.

The section of ipe from Wicks Lane had three breaks in the asbestos cement pipe. The contractor changed crew, equipment, and the procedure for digging 19 feet below ground for the new storm water pipes.

The board voted in March to begin discovery with the city regarding consolidation.

Roy Neese, City Council The city approved a storage facility on Wicks Lane. This will be the first unit built using Project ReCode standards which mandates that the street facing be a commercial front and storage unit doors are not visible from the street.

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Public Comment Michel Poodry lives on the corner of Nutter and Claimjumper. She recently received a notice from the city that they were installing sidewalk on one side of Claimjumper and she would be required to remove her landscaping and watering system from the city right-of-way. The water flows to that side of the street and she is concerned that the curb cuts for wheelchairs will focus the water to her basement. Roy Neese noted that the legislature gave cities the ability to build sidewalks and assess local property owners. City of Billings ordinance requires installation of boulevard sidewalks and the property owner is required to maintain the boulevard. The recommendation was to contact council representatives for Ward 2: Roy Neese and Jennifer Owen and perhaps Public Works Director Debi Meling.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/ADJOURNMENT 8:22 pm

- Do you have some extra time to devote to our elections?! If you can help, you should apply soon at
<https://www.yellowstonecountymt.gov/elections/GetInvolved.asp>
- Additionally, there is a new webpage created by election administrators in Montana:
<https://votinginmontana.org/>
- Billings City Administrator Weekly Report March 9, 2024

Heights Water District – A group made up of three HWD board members (Frank Ewalt, Jeff Essman and Laura Drager) met with Debi, Jennifer, and I to discuss a selection process to jointly hire a firm to provide a thorough analysis of the HWDs assets, liabilities, financial condition, and other critical information. It is essential that this work is done by a competent, independent group of experts to gather and assess information for the HWD Board, its customers, city administration, Council and the public to make a well-informed decision on the impacts of merging HWD into the City’s water system. A thorough vetting process and decision is expected to take a few months. Once a decision is made and contracts are approved by both boards, we expect they will need 6-9 months to complete their analysis.

- Billings City Administrator Weekly Report March 22, 2024

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Heights Water District – The City and HWD meet every other month to discuss issues. The most significant topic for 2024 is the independent analysis of the HWD assets and liabilities. The purpose of the analysis is to provide the HWD board, city staff, city council and our citizens with the critical information necessary to make an informed decision on the potential consolidation of the district into the city's water system.

Park and Recreation News - The Billings Parks and Recreation Team is hosting Eclipse Day at Castle Rock Park on April 8th from 11 am to 1 pm! This will be an excellent opportunity to preview our summer Rec2U program and (safely) view the 50% coverage of the sun during the eclipse window. We are excited to offer sports, lawn games, arts & crafts, Billings Public Library, Girl Scouts STEM Van, and eclipse glasses will all be there! (See attached flyer.)

• Public Safety panel discussions. The hosted by the Chamber, Buchanan Capital, Oakland Family and

Riverstone included County Attorney Twito, CM Owen, CC Morse and Superintendent Garcia. (See

Crime surge spurs city and county to work on strategy to improve public safety
<https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/crime-courts/yellowstone-county-and-billings-push-for-publicsafety/>

[article_16127688-e0d0-11ee-b1c3-7b272d720b5d.html](https://billingsgazette.com/news/local/crime-courts/yellowstone-county-and-billings-push-for-publicsafety/article_16127688-e0d0-11ee-b1c3-7b272d720b5d.html)

See Detention Facility Working Group – Interim Report (linked on Mail Chimp)

• Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 23, Dr. Garcia, Superintendent Billings Public Schools All City Task Force Meeting Community Room, Billings Public Library

Dr Garcia will present the mil levy request which comes to us, the voters, this spring. Your Task Force

believes it is important for every voter to consider the facts used to develop the request, so you can make

an informed decision on your vote.

Dr Garcia will present the background, details and costs of the mil levy, followed by an open Q&A

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session. Jennifer Owen will introduce the Trustee candidates and moderate the presentation.

The program will be broadcast by Community and available on Facebook and YouTube so those unable

to attend will have access to the information.

This program is brought to you by your Billings city neighborhood task forces.