

City Council Work Session

5:30 PM
Council Chambers
September 3, 2019

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) ✓ Cole, ✓ Cromley, ✓ Yakawich, ✓ Neese,
✓ Ewalt, ✓ Joy, ✓ Friedel, ✓ Gibbs, ✓ Ronning, ✓ Clark, ✓ Brown

CM excused: ALL COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

ADJOURN TIME: 7:45 pm

Agenda

TOPIC #1	Downtown Traffic Study
PRESENTER	Katy Easton, CEO of Downtown Billings Association (DBA) Erin Claunch, Engineer for City of Billings Scott Walker, Transportation Planning Coordinator
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Easton:** Provides handout with 9 studies as well as emailing the council the much larger list of studies online. These studies are the economic impact of the conversion of one-way to two-way streets. Quotes an article on the pros and cons of one-way versus two-way streets. Notes that cities of similar size as Billings experience property values increases at a faster rate on two-way streets. The DBA fully supports the conversion to two-way streets.
- **Friedel:** Are there any studies that view one-way and two-way in conjunction? i.e. a main throughway being one-way while the side streets being two-way?
- **Easton:** Absolutely. Most of the streets are viewed in couplets two at a time.
- **Claunch:** Provides a PowerPoint presentation and gives project history and steps that have been taken on this project dating back to 2012. Next phase is to hand it off to the Planning Department to be sent to the public for review. The study is looking at the alternatives in conjunction with one another. The goal is what *can* we build? Not what *will* we build? The Project Management Team (PMT) was: Public Works - Engineering (PWE), Kittelson & Associates (KA), and DOWL and members of the Project Advisory Committee (PAC). Timeline of project beginning in May 2018-Current was given. Shown map of downtown boundaries with which intersections were analyzed. Over 170 intersections were analyzed. Showed which Eliminated Alternatives based on the current traffic flow and north/south 2-ways study showing 4 recommended new traffic lights as well as 2 new turn lanes. The estimated price -- \$6 million. The plan would increase mobility, driver expectancy, pedestrian safety. There is a potential loss of 60-70 parking stalls if angle parking was eliminated. Next alternative given showed 2nd/3rd Ave. N. becoming 2-ways. The estimated price -- \$3-4 million. Three turn lanes recommended, and 3 new traffic lights recommended. This plan has a loss of 35-60 parking stalls, does include a plan for bike lanes. The next alternative is

called a road diet (going from a three-lane to a two-lane road) on Montana Avenue. This is a way to confine drivers and increase safety. The benefit is there is little delay to time to drive the corridor, with a potential to add 47 parking stalls. The estimated price is \$1.5 million. This is also a state-owned road, so they would have to approve. Next alternative is 6th Ave N. road diet. This alternative has no impact to the parking, would also provide a bike lane connect. The estimated cost is about \$1.5 million. Next is N. 13th St. road diet. This project increases space for potential parking and bike lane connectivity. N. 13th is partially owned by the state so we would have to get approval from them. The last alternative is Broadway closure. We found very minimal delay issues. The cost is dependent on the extent of the plan (just putting up barricades or ripping out the street and making it a pedestrian plaza). An overlay of all alternatives was shown.

- **Brown:** What is the total estimated cost if all alternatives were done.
- **Claunch:** \$10-\$19 million.
- **Friedel:** Where would we be gaining or losing parking spots?
- **Claunch:** That would be dependent on the planning and opinion of the public.
- **Mayor:** You already said the goal of the first phase was not to prioritize these projects, but how would the projects be prioritized?
- **Claunch:** The public seems to most cite the need for 2nd and 3rd Avenues North to be converted to 2-way.
- **Neese:** Would the alleys be converted too?
- **Claunch:** That wasn't looked at, but hopefully the conversion of a street to 2-way would minimize the use of the alleys.
- **Gibbs:** What is the safety impact for people adjusting to what they are used to being a one-way and is now a two-way?
- **Claunch:** The expectations are the drivers are now looking both ways which opens their eyes to bikers and pedestrians. All in all, 2-way is preferred for safety.
- **Walker:** Showed timeline of Phase 2, as beginning to engage the public. Especially the property and business owners. Looking at about a 6-month time frame to get the final plan out.
- **Ronning:** During the last meeting, approved a budget for the Public Works to get information to the public regarding the media contract they have. Is that contract something you could utilize?
- **Walker:** Yes, also a big part of this is engagement through public setting meetings.
- **Kukulski:** To refer to your earlier question Mayor Cole I also believe the Montana Avenue project to be a high priority due to traffic calming, economic impact, and adds parking where it's needed.
- **Public Comment:**
- **Ed Gullick, 3015 10th Avenue North, Billings, Montana:** I am pleased we're going through this process. There is a need for increased bicycle safety downtown. It looks like we're going in a good direction as far as connections from the heights to downtown.
- **Public Comment is Closed.**

TOPIC #2	South Billings Aquatic and Recreation Center
PRESENTER	Steve Zeier, Director of SBBURD Dusty Eaton, CEO of A&E Architects
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Zeier:** Introduces Dusty Eaton.
- **Eaton:** Provided a PowerPoint presentation and stated this was a culmination of 8 months of work. She thanked all who contributed to the planning of the project and provided input. Recapped the timeline starting with the Fall of 2017 a study showing the need for an aquatic center down to today going through a review process of the final plan with hopes of implementation of a funding committee. Prioritization -- 1. Communication program needs 2. Operational Sustainability 3. Community Partnerships 4. Image identity. Community input and forums were very key to this plan. Reviewed six attributes that reflects the community's market research analysis showing the service area of 45 miles. Reviewed national trends in activities. Received back 405 surveys within City of Billings and 100 surveys from outside of Billings. Feedback of the survey showed a very consistent high need for an aquatic center. Showed the community's top five needs for activities by Billings' residents and that most residents are willing to pay a higher fee for a new recreation facility.
- **Yakawich:** What events would we need to attract?
- **Eaton:** Swim meets, hockey, volleyball, and basketball tournaments.
- **Ewalt:** Did the survey question about fees have details about how much the fees may increase?
- **Eaton:** Yes, although there wasn't a specific amount because we have to keep it in check with the market. So, our operational consultant suggested we stagger the fees over time.
- **Cole:** The current study does not go into the economic impact, when will we be able to go to the public to get better data on this?
- **Eaton:** The scope of this study did not review the economic impact, but the Victus Study did. Laying these two studies together would be worthwhile.
- **Brown:** It sounds like this is becoming more of a recreation center not an aquatic center?
- **Eaton:** Yes. And this next section answers that. Showed the potential facilities including gymnasium space, leisure pool, competition pool, pool party room, ice rink, open fitness, group fitness, walk/jog track, concession stand, and community meeting paces. Reviewed development options. After an extensive process, the site adjacent to Amend Park was chosen. Developed 2 scenarios and gave the details for both options. Option A is a scaled down version of Option B. Option A estimated cost ranges from \$34.4M-\$71.5M with a minimum cost recovery of 75% to a maximum of 85% depending on which variations are chosen. Option B has estimated cost of \$43.6M-\$102.0M with a cost recovery ranging from 69%-85%.

- **Cromley:** In determining the cost recovery, what fees did they use?
- **Eaton:** They used a complex model of both user fees as well as assumed equipment rentals. Those fees are assumed based on what current fees pay and what would be sustainable to ask them to pay.
- **Cromley:** Did they look at membership fees for using the weight room and pool?
- **Eaton:** Yes.
- **Cole:** Is there a specific differential if the user is a City resident versus not?
- **Eaton:** Yes, a 25% fee increase if the user is not a City resident.
- **Ewalt:** Are there any of these facilities that are privately owned?
- **Eaton:** Yes, but they are generally high revenue with low cost to build and maintain which works out to be a warehouse-type building with turf that can be rolled out and only takes one person to operate.
- **Ewalt:** So there really is not anything that is like what you showed us that is privately owned?
- **Eaton:** Not to my current knowledge, no. That's the challenge when you're running a business versus investing in a community.
- **Friedel:** Have we investigated making the ice rink more versatile so that turf or something down during the offseason?
- **Eaton:** There are some options that we have looked at with varying versions of cost effectiveness.
- **Neese:** Regarding the cost effectiveness, does that consider 20-30 years down the road?
- **Eaton:** Yes.
- **Neese:** So, is it reasonable to expect that in 20 or 30 years there will be a fund there built up for when the pool or ice sheet needs to be replaced so we don't have to go to the taxpayers for that?
- **Eaton:** That is correct. Shows the potential for what it might look like. Reviews the timeline mentioned at the beginning of presentation. Next step is to set up a Funding Committee.
- **Friedel:** Has there been any conversations like maybe a hotel or private organization that is looking to move here, that basically we could combine the private sector to mitigate the price?
- **Eaton:** That was the subject of many of our meetings, but we did not have the correct resources to really dig into that which is why I think it should be the next step.
- **Mayor:** Speaking of the private sector, there is almost no service that the government doesn't provide. Some people might ask why are you creating something to compete with the private sector?
- **Eaton:** That topic became a central point in many of our conversations. The trend is that a few years into the recreational facility being built, that fear of competing subsidies. The demographics are different.

- **Clark:** How much do you think South Urban TIF District could put into the funds for this project?
- **Zeier:** There is a line item in the current budget for \$25 million for bond proceeds. As Dusty mentioned, the next step is to make a committee to investigate this.
- **Public Comment:** None.
- **Jim Tevlin, 2404 Quinn Haven Drive, Billings, Montana:** Discussed the willingness to support something like this from a public standpoint. It is a sense of pride to the community to have something like this. Asks for Council support.
- **Public Comment is Closed.**

TOPIC #3	Council Discussion
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Ronning:** Cites an article that rated the high schools in the state. Billings rated 41 for Billings West High, 44 for Skyview, and 64 for Senior. Some of the elements provided in the assessment have to do with what we provide in the community for kids. So, we should ask what we are doing to invest in our community and the future of our children.
- **Yakawich:** Attended a DBA meeting at the library. They are taking on a challenge in Downtown of over-alcohol consumption. I went to the library and walked around and picked up 7 pounds of cans, most of them were cans with an alcohol content of 8.5%. I was encouraged that some of the stores and bars agreed to not sell the high alcohol content Tall Boys.
- **Ronning:** I was just this morning called to Lewis and Clark Middle School to look at a vandalized banner and while I was there, I was shocked to see how many empty liquor bottles there were at the bus stop right on the property of the school.
- **Mayor:** It is a problem, and thankfully some of the businesses are now agreeing to not sell those.
- **Kukulski:** Regarding the aquatic center, our community needs things for kids and people to do. Grateful that we are being very transparent and upfront with the public about the whole cost of the project. The TIF putting in \$25 million, public fundraising, and some sort of mill levy or vote to cover the funds of a non-cost-recovery share is feasible.
- **Clark:** Would it be reasonable to amend the state tax to help fund these amenities rather than going back to the property tax always?
- **Kukulski:** Yes. Each community I have served has a tax structure for homeowners to cover the cost of community recreation. These types of projects would be more attainable to voters if we had some kind of consumptive tax to say this event last year brought “x” people and “x” dollars to offset the cost. Whitefish is a good example. The property tax burden has a much more limited tax burden but more going into amenities.
- **Public Comment:** None.

TOPIC #4	Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Kukulski:** Along with Neese and Ronning discuss state tax options for Billings based on his experience in other Montana communities.
- **Public Comment:** None.