

City Council Work Session

October 19, 2009
5:30 PM
Community Center

ATTENDANCE:

Mayor/Council (please check) x Tussing, x Ronquillo, x Gaghen, Brewster, x Pitman,
x Veis, x Ruegamer, x Ulledalen, x McCall, x Astle, x Clark.

ADJOURN TIME: 8:46 p.m.

Agenda

TOPIC #1	<i>Public Comment</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

- **Al Staley, 3520 Masterson** distributed a picture of the intersection of Rimrock Road and N. 27th and pointed out that the left hand turn striping was not reinstalled when N. 27th was improved. He stated he made two calls to the City over a year ago, but nothing was done.
Ms. Volek advised that it was a State road and asked Stefan Streeter from MDT, who was in the audience, to work with Ms. Staley. Mr. Streeter said he would do that.
- **Frances Harris, the Terrace**, urged the Council to pass a cell phone use ban. She said it was dangerous for pedestrians and other drivers.

TOPIC #2	<i>Aviation & Transit Commission</i>
PRESENTER	Jack Bayne, Chair
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Mr. Bayne introduced commission members in the audience: Dick Larsen, Mark Kennedy, Stan Hill, Sterling Starr, Norm Kolpin, and Steven Tostenrud.

Mr. Bayne reported that the he was part of an essential service task force of eight other cities with airports that met to discuss essential air issues. He reviewed other tasks of the Aviation and Transit Commission as:

- ✓ Interact with outlying airports and exchange ideas
- ✓ Monitor and precipitate Aviation & Transit work projects and activities
- ✓ Link to Big Sky Development Committee on aviation and transportation issues
- ✓ Connection to general aviation & transit issues

- ✓ Requests For Qualifications
- ✓ Attend public meetings
- ✓ Review documents
- ✓ Meet with departments to determine how they work
- ✓ Liaison between City and citizens on issues – clarify issues
- ✓ Information to clubs on Airport & Transit issues
- ✓ Assist in evaluating aviation & transit
- ✓ Make suggestions to improve services, locally and around the state
- ✓ Interact with Airport tenants, such as Museum
- ✓ Meet monthly

Mr. Bayne stated that he felt commissions were important to represent the public in government and the government in public. He commended Aviation and Transit staff for the great job they did.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked about the status of the master plan. Aviation and Transit Director Tom Binford reported that it was in the final stages and staff was reviewing financials and completing final steps for FAA. He noted it should be completed by the first part of 2010. He explained that high fuel prices and the recession slowed the plan development and staff had to re-evaluate the forecasts.

Mr. Bayne commented that Mayor Tussing did his homework when selecting commission members that were really interested and involved in aviation and transit.

Councilmember Ronquillo commented that Transit Manager Ron Wenger made an excellent presentation at a roundtable discussion providing information of transit services and the two park and ride facilities.

TOPIC #3	<i>Holiday Schedule</i>
PRESENTER	
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Ms. Volek explained that the Council usually met Monday prior to Thanksgiving and wanted to make sure that schedule was still acceptable. Council consensus was to meet. She reviewed the December work session and regular meeting schedule and explained that Council traditionally chose not to meet between Christmas and the New Year. It was Council consensus to hold a work session December 7, and regular business meetings December 14 and 21, and no meeting at all on December 28. Councilmember Veis pointed out that a special session would be needed at the January 4, 2010, work session to swear in the new Mayor and councilmembers.

TOPIC #4	<i>Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board Update</i>
PRESENTER	Lora Maddox
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Neighborhood Planner Lora Maddox provided a brief update on the activities of the Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board. She pointed out that it was the largest historic preservation board in Montana and included Yellowstone County, City of Billings, City of

Laurel and the Crow Indian Reservation. She reported that the City of Laurel received Preserve America funds for a downtown survey of buildings to create a historic district and the City of Billings received Preserve America funds to survey the buildings in the Old Town Neighborhood to create a historic district. She added that other activities/accomplishments included:

- ✓ Working with the Western Heritage Center to create an architectural style for the South Side homes
- ✓ Historic Preservation Month observed in May, 2009
- ✓ Review building permits for Montana Avenue
- ✓ Update the outdated preservation ordinance
- ✓ Document potential historic buildings prior to any demolition
- ✓ Review of MSU-Billings student study of barns and silos in Yellowstone County to identify potential properties for the national register
- ✓ Annual roundtable and preservation awards. Award was presented to Vernon Drake who restored and replaced the old stagecoach markers south of Billings; and another award was presented to CTA Architects for its office building which was an old warehouse
- ✓ Work with the Billings Preservation Society

TOPIC #5	<i>North Billings Bypass</i>
PRESENTER	Scott Walker
NOTES/OUTCOME	

Councilmember Veis reported that the North Billings Bypass project was discussed at the last PCC meeting. He said County Commissioners had decided how they wanted to move forward but he wanted information from Mr. Walker and council discussion to determine where to go next.

Transportation Planner Scott Walker explained that the Department of Transportation wrote a letter to PCC Chair Commissioner Kennedy regarding the high costs associated with the environmental impact statement. He explained that the proposed bypass from the I-94 Interchange, intersecting with Highway 312, intersecting with Highway 87, and then around to Highway 3 was estimated to cost \$160-248 million. He said the transportation plan needed to be financially constrained, which meant that the document had to include projects that could be realistically built in a 20-year time frame. He noted that the City had been able to obtain grants in the past and expected that to continue, but probably not for \$248 million over 20 years.

Mr. Walker reported that the project was in the environmental and location phase to identify routes and related environmental issues. He said a past feasibility study indicated the project was feasible and was scoped as a four-lane road from I-94 to Highway 87 and then a two-lane road from Highway 87 to Highway 3.

Mr. Walker advised that there had been some public outcry from property owners between Highway 87 and Highway 3 that were opposed to that part of the project. He said the EIS could continue to reach a conclusion, or if the project was re-scoped, the process would have to start over. Councilmember Veis asked if it was accurate that the project was stalled because property owners in the western section did not want the project and were not allowing anyone on their property to finish the project. MDT representative Stefan Streeter said that was somewhat

correct, but those issues could be overcome. He said the scope of the project and whether it was realistic was what had stalled the project. Mr. Streeter advised that he asked the Planning Board not to say which way to go or how to go, but he preferred to leave the methodology to the experts. He said if the decision was to fiscally constrain it, the whole document could still be finished.

Councilmember Astle asked about the distance of the project and how long it would take to build a project of that size. Mr. Streeter responded that the bypass was about 12 miles long and two bridges would be needed. He said the original concept was examined to see if it could be fiscally constrained. He advised it would take 24 months or more to finish the environmental document, and then time would be needed for design and funding, so it was a multi-year project.

Councilmember McCall asked how much had already been spent on the current EIS, if it could be transferred if the project was started over, and how much it would cost to do it all again. Mr. Street said about \$3 million had been spent on the current EIS, and if the project was stopped now and started over with a new scope, most of it would transfer, but more money would be required.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked what the City's share would be of the \$248 million because he was concerned about binding a future Council to that financial commitment. Mr. Streeter stated he did not have that answer, but knew it depended on the funding source. He said the best case would be \$0 from the City and the worst case scenario would be 14% match, plus indirect costs. Councilmember Veis asked if it was correct that none of it was in the City limits. Mr. Streeter explained some of it was within the urban limits. Councilmember Veis commented that by the time it went to construction, some of the area could be in the City limits.

Mr. Walker reviewed breaking points. He stated that the Planning Board was concerned about traffic on Main Street and the Heights, but a bypass like that would help that issue. He said the Planning Board would support completion of the current EIS and liked the idea of completing Highway 312 and the intersection with Highway 87, and wanted it to be done quickly rather than starting over. He said it was to the point of getting the Council to react to what was out there.

Councilmember Ulledalen asked about the origin and destination of the truck traffic. Mr. Streeter said he did not have that information with him. Mr. Walker explained that postcard surveys were conducted and most of the traffic came from Canada, through Great Falls, to the I-94 interchange. Councilmember Ulledalen asked what it would cost to bring it closer in, such as near Metra. Mr. Streeter explained that different options were considered, but one of the big catches was that there were limited locations to cross the Yellowstone River. Councilmember Pitman added that some of the study indicated that it would go over 700 or more homes, which was not the intent and would be very costly. He said the I-90 to I-94 to Highway 312 was better because that was where most of the development was occurring. He said he was glad it could be done in phases. Councilmember Clark commented that the Commissioners had told him they wanted the bypass to get the truck traffic away from the Metra. Councilmember Veis advised that the Commissioners expected the bypass would reduce the truck traffic on Main Street.

Councilmember Veis asked what the Council preferred with the project. Councilmembers Pitman and Astle suggested supporting a phased approach. Mr. Streeter advised the Council to select a section it felt should be built without talking about phases that might not be developed later due to environmental issues. Council consensus was a preference to secure a route between I-90/94 and Highway 312.

