

CITY OF BILLINGS
PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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ANNUAL REPORT



T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S



HELLO AND WELCOME	4
BUILDING DIVISION	6
CODE ENFORCEMENT DIVISION	8
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION	10
PLANNING DIVISION	12
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING	14

H E L L O & W E L C O M E

On behalf of all of us here at the Planning and Community Services Department (PCSD), I am excited to bring you front page news from our past year as well as some previews of where we are going in 2020. Before you turn the page, I want to share a few examples of what we are working on here at the PCSD:

The community will be concluding Project Re: Code in 2020 – a total rewrite of the City and County zoning regulations. This 2.5 year effort has engaged more than 50 dedicated volunteers giving more than 6,000 hours of their time, as well as hundreds more community members participating via email, meeting, website, and in person. Together, we have drafted a zoning code for our community to carry us into the years ahead well equipped to support and enhance our community for businesses, residents and visitors. The formal adoption process will be starting this spring.

Our Building Division staff are gearing up for adoption of the 2018 International Building Code in March after participating in a multi-year process lead by the Montana Building Codes Bureau to complete the adoption process at the state level. Billings must adopt the building codes Montana adopts, and this is significant as the state and Billings had been operating under the 2012 International Building Code for the last 7 years.

We are using social media and web-based tools more than ever to communicate with you – our PCSD Facebook page has about 800 followers, a 100% increase from last year! Utilizing boosting of posts and more strategic notification of Department activities has resulted in driving more people to our events, and websites. Examples – In 2019 we reached more than 6,000 people for our Inner Belt Loop Corridor Study Meeting and almost 2,000 people for our new Bike Rack Ribbon Cutting.

We are going to make it even easier in 2020 to utilize the community's trail system by rolling out an updated Heritage Trail Tour Map and an App to go with it for your smartphone, so your phone you can help you and your dog take a walk or hit the trails on your bike! (see page 17)

Now, flip through our annual report and see what else we've been working on. Learn what major construction projects were completed in 2019 (page 7), see before and after photos of some major Code Enforcement cleanup success stories (page 9), and check out the new bike racks installed in Downtown Billings through a MT Department of Tourism Grant (page 15).

Enjoy and join us in making our community an even greater place in this new year, and new decade!



Wyeth Friday, AICP
Director

BUILDING

DIVISION STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

The Building Division has 7 inspectors, 2 plan reviewers, 1 office administrator, 2 permit technicians and is managed by the Building Official, Brian Anderson. Deputy Building Official Jessica Iverson left the Division in January 2020 to take a position as the City Facilities Manager. Jessica had been with the Division for 4 years before accepting the new position. We will miss her in the PCSD but are glad she's part of the greater city team.

The Building Division staff collectively earned more than 60 certifications and 200 hours of training in 2019. Continuing Education and staying up to date with changing building codes and standards is always an important goal for the Division.



Cody Gunn, Plans Examiner accepting an award at the ICC Annual Business meeting for outstanding performance in Region II.

This year, two Division members had the opportunity to attend the International Code Council (ICC) Annual Business meeting in Las Vegas, NV. Cody Gunn, former Combination Inspector accepted a new position as Plans Examiner, and in 2019 was able to attend through a 'Code of Honor' scholarship from ICC. We enter 2020 with a vacancy in our Deputy Building Official position we are working to fill. Also, Pete Castellano was promoted to Senior Combination Inspector in 2019. Pete will help inspectors adapt to new policies and procedures.

STATE BUILDING CODE ADOPTION

The State of Montana adopted the 2018 building codes in December of 2019. Since the state adopted the code, all local building code enforcement agencies must follow suit. The City of Billings will adopt the 2018 codes on March 5, 2020. There will be significant work for the division to update standards and provide public information and education for the upcoming code changes.

NATIONAL TRENDS

Housing statistics remain consistent locally, with fewer permits, but increased valuation for new construction. The national trends show signs of a stronger demand for housing with continued affordable mortgage rates into 2020.

DIVISION



NOTABLE PROJECTS COMPLETED IN 2019

- Winco Foods (2424 Central)
- A Rehabilitation Hospital (3572 Hesper)
- A new 105,000+ Sq Ft facility for Northwest Pipe (1725 Majestic Lane)
- Two new Dialysis Clinics (720 Saint Mary's Way & 616 N 25th)
- A new Pizza Ranch, the company's largest store in the country (1327 Main)
- New 'Stillwater Parking Garage' across the street from the 'Stillwater Building'. The new parking garage has 6 tiers of parking and sky bridge to the Stillwater Building (2549 3rd Ave N).



NOTABLE PROJECTS INITIATED IN 2019

- Alberta Bair Theatre (2801 3rd Avenue North)
- Airport Expansion (1901 Terminal Circle)
- REI (711 Henry Chapple)
- Starner Gardens Retirement Center - Billings Heights (230 Starner Ln.)
- "At Home" located in the old Shopko (905 S 24th Street W)
- Panera Bread (110 S. 24th Street)
- 4-story residential addition at St. Johns (3940 Rimrock Road)

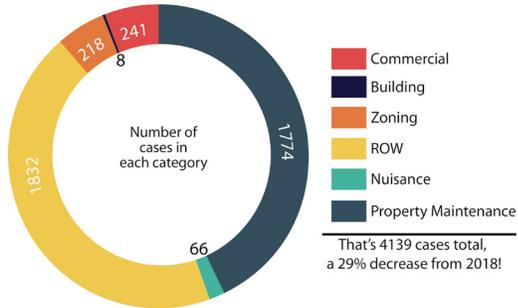


CODE ENFORCEMENT



The Code Enforcement Division protects and enhances quality of life throughout Billings' neighborhoods by responding to citizen complaints about violations of city codes. These range from property maintenance issues such as tall grass, to public nuisances such as vacant, abandoned or burned out buildings.

Code Enforcement Division Cases 2019



Code Enforcement Officers respond to complaints in six different categories, including:

Property Maintenance: Storing junk and debris outside, junk vehicles, unmowed grass, and improper storage of RVs, boats, and campers.

Nuisance: Improper or extended boarding of vacant buildings, dangerous, burned out or abandoned buildings.

Right-of-Way: Signs obstructing sidewalks, parking violations, trees too low over the sidewalk or street, snow removal, and leaving an unattached trailer on the street.

Zoning: Building setbacks, uses, and fencing issues.

Building: Building without a permit or in violation of an approved permit.

Commercial: Operating without a business license, failing to maintain landscaping, or sign code violations.



DIVISION

Code Enforcement Officers handled more than 4,100 cases and over 8,000 property inspections in 2019. Below are highlights of property brought back from the brink in 2019, helping to restore neighborhood integrity.

BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

DIVISION STAFF

BRENDA BECKETT
DIVISION MANAGER

TAM RODIER
CD PROGRAM COORDINATOR

DINA HARMON
CD PROGRAM COORDINATOR

CARLY COLLINS
GRANTS TECHNICIAN

The Community Development Division joins local partners with resources to increase access to housing, support capacity building for local non-profit organizations, to create a sustainable community, and to promote neighborhood revitalization. The Division is primarily responsible for managing federal grant programs.

HOUSING REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The purpose of the program is to preserve and improve existing housing and to eliminate health and safety issues. Secured, deferred payment loans up to \$25,000 are available to income-qualified homeowners for eligible home improvements. There are no payments during the deferment period and no interest is assessed on the loan at any time. The loan is due in full if the property is sold or there is a title transfer, under certain refinance conditions, or if the property is rented or is no longer owner-occupied.

FORECLOSURE ACQUISITION/REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The purpose of the program is to purchase foreclosed properties that might otherwise become sources of abandonment and blight within our community, rehabilitate and/or redevelop them, and then offer them for sale to City-approved First Time Home Buyer applicants.

FIRST TIME HOME BUYER PROGRAM

The FTHB Program provides down payment and closing cost assistance loans to low income households purchasing their first home in the City of Billings city limits. The loans are deferred and zero percent interest that are repaid to the City at the time the homeowner sells the property, refinances, or uses the property as a rental. Interested applicants must meet the income requirements, have less than \$15,000 in assets, and be a first time homebuyer. The property must be considered in city limits, be vacant or owner occupied, meet the minimum health and safety standards requirement and the purchase price cannot exceed \$221,000.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Affordable Housing Development Program provides low interest loans to Developers and grants to Community Housing Development Organizations (CHDO's) to build and/or rehabilitate multi-family and single-family housing in the City Limits for low income households.

DIVISION



VISTA MEMBERS SUPPORT COMMUNITIES

A total of 18 new AmeriCorps VISTA members began service terms throughout 2019. The VISTA members served at 13 non-profit organizations that work to empower the community and reduce the effects of poverty.



VISTAs worked to create sustainable projects that focused on increasing access to healthcare, food security, housing, education, economic opportunities, veteran services, and more! Members generated over \$160,000 of cash and in-kind donations to support their projects and individual organizations!

BILLINGS METRO VISTA PROJECT CELEBRATES 10 YEARS OF SERVICE

The Billings Metro VISTA project in 2019 recognized its tenth year of serving nonprofit organizations in our area! In August VISTA Alumni and current members gathered together in Billings to celebrate the event. Attendees shared their accomplishments throughout service and the impact that VISTA service had on their lives.



VISTA Alumni members, Lisa, Aundi, Jessie & Wendi, met in Billings to celebrate the anniversary of B-MVP.

PLANNING

DIVISION STAFF

MONICA PLECKER, AICP
DIVISION MANAGER

NICOLE CROMWELL, AICP
ZONING COORDINATOR

SCOTT WALKER
TRANSPORTATION PLANNING
COORDINATOR

LORA MATTOX, AICP
TRANSPORTATION PLANNER

DAVE GREEN
PLANNER II/SUBDIVISION

KAREN HUSMAN
PLANNER I

ELYSE MONAT
ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION
PLANNER

JEANNETTE VIEG
PLANNING ASSISTANT

TAMMY DEINES
PLANNING CLERK

2019 PLANNING STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

PLANNING STAFF MEMBER RECEIVES STAR ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

The City of Billings encourages employees to improve the customer service, efficiency and effectiveness of all services provided to the public. The City also recognizes the power of teamwork and the higher level of service teamwork provides to the citizens of Billings. The STAR Award commends those employees for providing outstanding service.

CONGRATULATIONS! Elyse Monat, Active Transportation Planner

Elyse was nominated and recognized with the STAR award for her successful grant application efforts in which funding was obtained for decorative downtown bike racks. We look forward to her growth and development as a grant writer.

DAVE DRENNAN COMPLETES VISTA YEAR OF SERVICE

PROJECT FOCUS: PROJECT RE:CODE



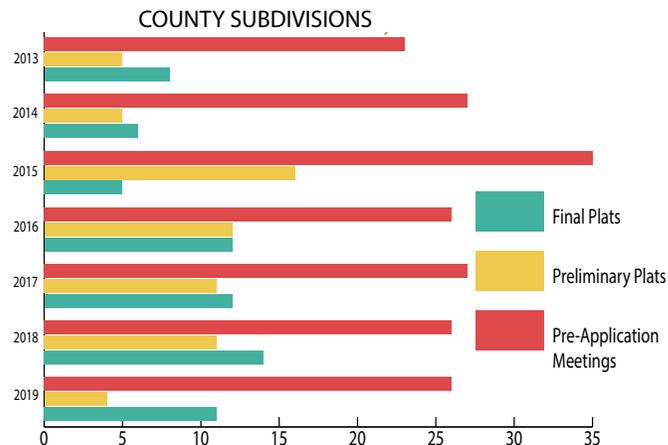
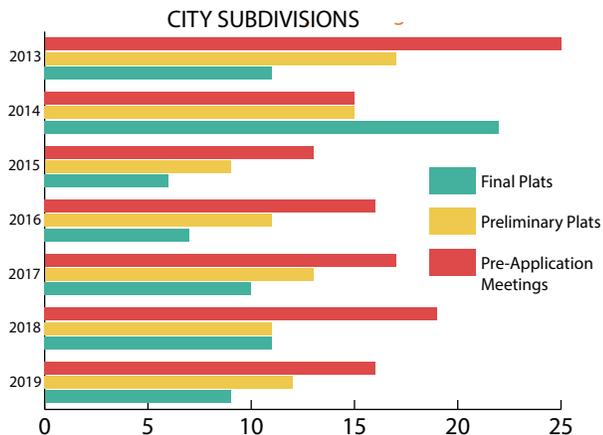
Dave Drennan joined the Planning Division specifically to focus on Project Re:Code in January 2018. This last year he dedicated his time and attention to affordable housing tools and strategies that could be implemented as part of the Planning Division's comprehensive update of the Zoning Code. An effort better known as Project Re:Code.

Dave is pursuing a career in environmental planning in the mid-atlantic region. We wish him the best of luck with his future endeavors.

DIVISION

SUBDIVISION ACTIVITY FLUCTUATES

Subdivision activity in the City of Billings and Yellowstone County ebbs and flows with the market and what is in demand in the housing market. Some years, there is a higher number of lots platted within the City limits and other years the County has more lots platted by developers. The biggest observation of subdivision development in 2019 is that overall subdivision activity is down in the county but not the city. Many subdivisions that were developed as multiple filings or master plans in Billings are building out or receiving final approvals.



TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING EFFORTS

**CITY OF BILLINGS, MONTANA
2019 BUILD GRANT APPLICATION
INFORMATION**

Project Locations

Project Goals

- 1 ENHANCE**
Movement of Goods, Services and People
- 2 CREATE**
Emergency Route for Billings-Highline
- 3 STRENGTHEN**
Multimodal Transportation Infrastructure
- 4 INCREASE**
Tourism and Recreation Economic Activity
- 5 REDUCE**
Congestion and Transportation Carbon Footprint
- 6 PROVIDE**
Safe Biking and Walking Options
- 7 ENRICH**
Quality of Life and Livability by Increasing Direct Access to Nature and Outdoor Active Recreation Leading to Better public Health

Partners

The City of Billings submitted one of the community's biggest grants to the Department of Transportation in July 2019. The BUILD (Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development) Transportation Discretionary Grant program provides a unique opportunity for the DOT to invest in local road, rail, transit and port projects that promise to achieve national objectives.

The application requested the following elements:

- **Northwest Billings Connector:** 2-lane roadway with termini at Highway 3/Zimmerman Trail and Alkali Creek/West Wicks Lane.
- **Marathon Trail Final Elements:** Completion of a 26-mile loop around Billings. Approximately 16.5 miles of trail are already completed.

Unfortunately, the BUILD grant was not funded. The City will consider resubmission when future funding opportunities are available.



Billings TrailNet Executive Director Kristi Drake, Billings Chamber Business Advocacy Manager Dan Brooks, Planning and Community Services Department Director Wyeth Friday, Big Sky Economic Development Executive Director Steve Arveschoug and Mayor Bill Cole traveled to Washington, DC in October to meet with Montana's Congressional Delegation and US Department of Transportation staff about the City's 2019 BUILD Grant application.

P L A N N I N G

39 NEW BIKE RACKS INSTALLED DOWNTOWN



Photo Credit: Mel Barbour

Thanks to a Montana Department of Commerce Tourism Grant, Billings installed 39 new branded racks in downtown. Downtown businesses can request the racks for only \$50. With the Billings, Montana's Trailhead community logo, it serves the dual purpose of giving tourists and residents a safe place to park their bikes and branding Billings as a tourist destination. Businesses received the racks warmly, with some requesting up to five racks. Facebook comments from the public were enthusiastic with users calling the racks "awesome" and "beautiful." One commenter even said that when he got a lock, he would start riding his bike to his destination!

Thank you to all those who contributed to these racks!



TRANSPORTATION

2019 TRANSPORTATION PLANNING EFFORTS



In 2019 transportation planners initiated the **Inner Belt Loop Corridor Study**. This study provides a vision for the future corridor, including recommendations on land development, access management, multi-modal safety and operations, corridor aesthetics, stormwater management, and feasibility of public utilities service. In order to develop that vision, the project team and Sanderson Stewart, performed extensive research, met with a variety of key project stakeholders (including adjacent property owners), held a public meeting to solicit input, and applied technical and planning-level analysis techniques prior to developing recommended steps for moving forward. The plan is in its draft form and available for view here: <http://sandersonstewart.com/projects/innerbel-loop>



The **Wayfinding Signage Plan** is wrapping up and should be approved at the Policy Coordinating Committee meeting in February 2020. Wayfinding benefits bicyclists and pedestrians and is defined as an information system that helps people orient themselves in a physical space and navigate from place to place. In the built environment, it typically takes the form of signage, maps, or environmental graphics such as pavement markings, and is all around us, whether we consciously recognize it or not. Wayfinding is so much more than the strategic placement of messages in the built environment to guide an individual from A to B.

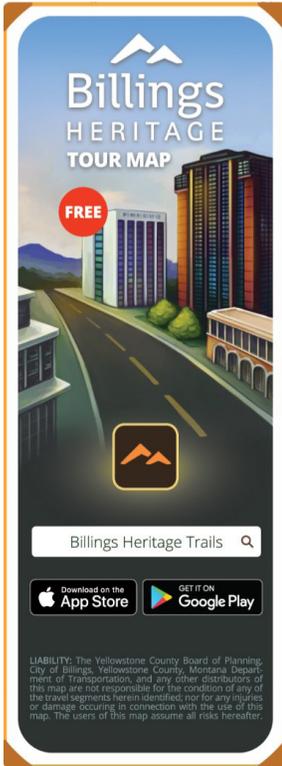
P L A N N I N G

NEW WAYS TO NAVIGATE BILLINGS - WALKING AND ROLLING

The MPO worked with a consultant to develop a new map app for bikeways and trails. The app will help people walking and biking navigate to their destinations on their smart phone. Users will be able to select the fastest route, the most scenic route, or the best workout. The app provides voice announcement for directions. Users will also be able to save their trips to see how far they have biked or walked and how many calories they have burned.

Compatible with both iPhone and Android, we are expecting to release the app in early 2020. The updated printed Heritage Bikeway and Trails Map is available now.

Contact monate@billingsmt.gov to request one or more copies.



TRANSPORTATION

LOOKING FORWARD: 2020 TRANSPORTATION PLANS

The 2020 Unified Planning Work Program includes a variety projects for the upcoming year. After its adoption in October, staff has been in the early stages of initiating the following projects:

Complete the **Downtown Billings Traffic Study**: Alternative Prioritization and Public Preference Plan. The goal of this project is to take the identified transportation network alternatives completed in the Downtown Traffic Study, completed by the City of Billings Engineering Division, and create a robust and thoughtful public outreach process to develop an implementation and project prioritization strategy. DOWL was the successful consultant to complete this plan and we anticipate it will begin in February.

Every three years, the Planning Division working with the City of Billings Engineering Division, MET Transit, Healthy By Design and other partners update the **Complete Street Progress Report**. This report will analyze up to date data to gauge the ongoing effectiveness of the Complete Streets Policy.

North Billings Bypass Corridor Study: This study will evaluate transportation needs along the proposed alignment of the North Bypass. This study could include future access options as development occurs along the roadway, potential intersections, storm water management, bicycle and pedestrian access and transportation safety along the corridor.

Later this spring, the **5th Avenue North Feasibility Study** will be initiated. This study will review potential connections, non-traditional motorized and non-motorized systems along the 5th Avenue North corridor between North 32nd Street and Main Street through downtown Billings.

Bicycle/Scooter Share Feasibility Study: This study will assess if Billings can support a shared micromobility device program to include, but not limited to, bike share, e-bike share, and e-scooter share. The study will include research into elements that can make any shared device program successful, such as marketing, education, enforcement, and policies that will produce a beneficial relationship for users, pedestrians, residents and visitors, the City, and service providers.

THANK YOU