



# July 2020 Newsletter

## South Side Neighborhood Task Force

The July meeting of the Task Force will once again be held at the South Park Gazebo on Thursday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 PM. We will continue to honor the precautions for COVID-19: everyone will wear masks and we will be social distancing. Thanks to the Billings Community Foundation and the Masked Crusaders we will have plenty of masks for those who do not have one.



A major focus of this meeting will be the **Rise and Shine Mural** project, since painting will begin on, or around, Saturday, August 1. We have

much to do to get ready and a little over two weeks to do it! We need volunteers galore: painters, artist helpers, paint distributors, safety coordinators and snack and water servers.

Elyssa Leinger, the artist, will present her final design of the mural, if her busy schedule that night permits. She will also talk about the meaning of it and her role as not only professional artist, but as teacher and encourager, during the painting of the mural.

The other focus of the meeting will be the Downtown Billings Traffic Study, through which we members of the public can make our preferences known about the traffic flow we would like to see in the downtown area. For instance, current one-way streets could be converted to two-way; bike lanes could be added on certain streets and some streets could be closed to traffic for a season. Lisa Olmsted and Ryan Guelff from DOWL will tell us about the project and how we can participate. Here is some information about the project:

The flyer is titled "HELP DESIGN THE FUTURE DOWNTOWN" and includes logos for "CITY OF BILLINGS DOWNTOWN" and "MPO". It features three icons: a car, a clipboard, and a smartphone. Below the icons are three columns of text: "The recent Downtown Billings Traffic Study identified six alternatives.", "We want to know what you think about these alternatives!", and "Your feedback will be used in planning future design and improvements to Downtown Billings!". A QR code is present with the text "LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD! TAKE THE SURVEY: Simply hold your smart phone's camera over the QR code." The bottom half of the flyer shows a person's hands holding a smartphone.

Help design the future Downtown Billings! A recent traffic study of Downtown Billings identified several feasible alternatives to current traffic flow in downtown including the conversion of one-way streets to two-way, the addition of bike facilities, and seasonal closures. Before proceeding with any of the options, the City County Planning Department wants to know what you think. Public preference will help to steer future planning in our community, so your input is incredibly valuable!

Please take a moment to learn about the project and provide your thoughts:

<https://dowl.mysocialpinpoint.com/downtown-billings-traffic-study>

This site offers the opportunity to provide specific feedback on the proposed alternatives through an online survey, a budgeting tool to help us prioritize how funds are allocated, and a digital bulletin board for other thoughts and perspectives. You'll also find general project information and a link to the full Downtown Billings Traffic Study document. Thanks for your help!

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of  
**THE SOUTH SIDE NEIGHBORHOOD TASK  
FORCE (SSNTF)**

South Side Park Gazebo - Billings, Montana  
**June 18, 2020**

Present: Craig Barthel, Cindy Buckman, Catherine Card, Genna Carlisle, Shelley Carpenter, Alex Cunha, Felicia Bradley, Neil DeLao, Shaun Hinz, Angela Metz, Melissa Henderson, Marguerite Jodry, Lynnadele Nielsen, Kaleb Perdew, Bev Zaugg, Elyssa Leininger, Jim Tevlin, Penny Ronning, Mike Yakawich

Task Force Chair Catherine Card called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m. All attendees introduced themselves and were welcomed.

Card announced that, due to orders by the Billings Police Chief, Officer Nathan Schara will not be able to attend Task Force meetings. He will provide reports to Card to share with the Task Force.

City Council members Mike Yakawich and Penny Ronning gave a presentation regarding the Public Safety Mill Levy. They passed out several informational documents including the Charter of the City of Billings, a sample of the Public Safety Mill Levy ballot language and documents showing the property tax levy by jurisdiction and the composition of the general and public safety fund monies. Ronning and Yakawich reiterated the importance of the fact that Billings is a municipality that has a city charter. The charter was adopted in 1976; every 10 years, the city votes to renew the charter or discontinue it. The charter has restrictions, such as in Sec. 1.05.1 Mill Levy to Fund Fire, Police and Related Public Safety Expenses, where the mill levy on real and personal property to fund those expenses was capped at \$8.2 million; back in 2004, when this levy was passed, that represented 60 mills. Today 60 mills represent approximately \$12,240,000. Setting a permanent levy of 60 mills, rather than a levy based on a set monetary value means that the amount raised for Fire and Police Departments and related public safety expenses would follow the assessed value of property over time.

Ronning stated that with the increase in crime in Billings, and thus, the increase in demand for law

enforcement officers, plus the increased cost of officer benefits and equipment, the city has run short of funding and has had to use monetary reserves to meet these expenses. But that cannot continue. So, if, by Spring 2021, the proposed public safety mill levy does not pass, the city will begin layoffs, possibly impacting 70+ employees.

Ronning reminded the attendees that the City Council meets every Monday at 5:30pm via Zoom and that people need to be there. The community needs to get involved and make their voices heard on issues such as the public safety mill levy and the city budget, she said.

Card presented the February minutes for member approval. Marguerite Jodry moved to approve minutes, with one noted change that the Day of Service was for Just Serve, and not United Way. Craig Barthel seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Jodry presented the Treasurer's Report (attached). Carlisle moved to accept the Treasurer's report and Kaleb Perdew seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Updates from Neighborhood Agencies:

Jim Tevlin with the South Billings Urban Association reported that road projects will extend to King Avenue East and Hallowell.

Lynnadele Nielsen with Just Serve reported that volunteers are needed for painting at the Spruce Up Billings Food Bank event.

Shaun Hinz with RiverStone reported that there was a need to provide a space for homeless and housing-insecure people to quarantine due to COVID-19. While the MetraPark pavilion was effective for the short term, over the longer term, it would be too expensive to continue using that space. Consequently, Hinz stated, RiverStone has purchased a property that can function as a longer-term facility for those people who need isolation treatment but have no place where they can do that.

Craig Barthel with St. Vincent DePaul reported that they are striving to keep people from becoming homeless. Barthel reported that they are seeing many new faces at the meals they serve each day. About 80-100 people are receiving breakfast and lunch each day at St. Vincent de Paul.

In addition, Barthel stated that it has been a challenge to keep the parking lot free from people camping out; they have had to call upon law enforcement to help with that. Barthel pointed out that low barrier housing is needed and that it is a community problem. He reported that the Saturday Shower Program has been closed because the Garfield School building was sold.

Perdew with CLDI reported that fun events were happening for kids this summer, and that the Rail Line Coffee Shop on the corner of S. 29<sup>th</sup> and First Avenue S. would host its grand opening on Saturday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>.

Elyssa Leininger, artist selected for the mural project, reported that she presented her draft drawings to the Subcommittee. Some of the ideas represented in the draft were a sunrise, symbolizing hope and new beginnings, various and diverse animals representing the diverse wildlife living together in the Yellowstone Valley, as well as the diversity of the South Side. Elyssa requested that members save containers to keep paint in, such as coffee containers or yogurt containers. She stated her plan for the mural is to be a panoramic view. She regards the mural as a piece of fine art, not a cartoon, or caricatures. Card asked members to volunteer for a focus group to help Elyssa finalize her design. Lastly, Elyssa stated that the mural will not only be relevant to the South Side, but to the entire community.

Card reported on the Brighten Up community flower planting event. The flowers were free to South Side residents today outside the South Park Gazebo; she will also give them away tomorrow outside the Fraser Tower apartments.

Melissa Henderson reported on the Bright Side of the Tracks, including the creation of the Brighten Up Business Pledge (attached), through which South Side businesses will commit to keeping their property clean and tidy, encourage employee participation in South Side events, advocate for ideas that support the diversity of the South side, among other efforts to support the people of the South Side. She also talked about the Sidewalk Poetry project and the need to find a broken sidewalk square which could serve as a test of the

process of replacing a broken square with a new one that has a poem stamped into it.

Yakawich invited everyone to the Juneteenth Celebration on Saturday, from 1-5pm at South Park. He stated this was a state holiday to celebrate the day when the last enslaved Black Americans learned of their freedom. All attendees need to bring their own food.

Card dispensed with the rest of the agenda, due to the time. The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 pm.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, July 16, 2020.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Genna Carlisle

### **The Agenda for the July 16<sup>th</sup> Task Force Meeting**

Call Meeting to Order  
Welcome and Introductions  
Reports from the City  
    Billings Police Department and Q/A  
    Billings City Council and Q/A  
Minutes of the June Meeting and Approval  
Treasurer's Report  
Neighborhood Organizations, Agencies, Businesses  
Other Reports, Happenings in the Neighborhood  
Presentations  
    Rise and Shine Mural Design  
        Elyssa Leininger  
    City of Billings Downtown Traffic Study  
        Lisa Olmsted, Ryan Guelff  
Old Business  
    Rise and Shine Mural Project Status  
    Fund-raising Report  
    Focus Group Feedback  
    Organizational Needs  
    Calendar  
New Business  
    Brighten Up Business Pledge Partnership  
    Other  
Wrap-up  
Adjournment