

Rimrock Neighborhood Task Force (RNTF) Quarterly Meeting 17 July 2019

Chairman Lyle Gabrian called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm and introduced the RNTF officers - Alice Lahren, Jane Van Dyk, Cheryl Lenhardt, and Dennis McKnire - and special guests: Ward 4 Council Representatives Penny Ronning and Reg Gibbs, Ward 2 Representative Roy Neiss, Ward 1 Representative Mike Yakawich, Howard Holz, Vice Chair of the West End Task Force, and Sgt. Pat Curry, BPD. Mayor Bill Cole and City Administrator Chris Kukulski attended later in the meeting. Also introduced were Pam Purinton and Carmelita Dominguez, as candidates for City Council; Wyeth Friday, City/County Planning & Community Services Director; and Scott Walker, Transportation Planning Coordinator.

Announcements.

- Kristy Drake, E.D. of Billings TrailNet, recognized the RNTF at the Skyline Trail Celebration last Saturday July 13th for all of its work on the Skyline Trail. The RNTF was instrumental in getting the bike/pedestrian tunnel, under Zimmerman Trail by the new roundabout, completed.
- Becky Bey with KLJ, PIO for the Montana Dept. of Transportation project on North 27th Street, said in an email that the project involves 3 miles of No. 27th St. from I-90 to the Airport Rd. through downtown Billings and will take 2 or 3 construction seasons to complete.
- Lyle thanked Alice Lahren and Carolyn Kennedy for going door to door in delivering RNTF flyer/brochures about our meeting.
- We have a quorum. The next meeting will be October 16, 2019.

2. **Minutes** from the 17 April 2019 meeting were approved as submitted.

3. Sgt. Curry handed out the **Crime Report** for RNTF and commented that it was a busy time for the police with so many teenagers getting into trouble late at night. The Crime Prevention Center needs volunteers; it was suggested to call Kallie Parsons at (406) 247-8590 or go to the City website for an application to mail in: <https://www.ci.billings.mt.us/1033/Crime-Prevention-Center>

4. **Amend the Bylaws with area change for RNTF** – postponed until Oct. 16th meeting.

5. & 6. **Open Forum discussion on the City Growth Policy including development in the Inner Belt Loop Corridor and the Impacts of the IBL on west end streets including Zimmerman Trail & Rimrock Rd.**

Wyeth Friday began the discussion by providing background on the City's 2016 Growth Policy and explained that state law requires a review every five years

with a policy statement that provides growth guidelines and scenarios: where do you want growth to go if you expect 50,000 more people and where do you fit them into Billings e.g. North or West Billings or Infill? The Policy covers essential investment topics, such as additional needed fire stations, roads, schools, parks, transportation, busing, services, and costs. The Inner Belt Loop, (IBL) is partially completed and certainly development will follow. Lyle asked about the return on investment (ROI) for making water and sewer available in the three scenarios in the 2016 Growth Policy and Wyeth answered:

1. Infill – is the most cost effective
2. North, the Heights, is second cost effective
3. West End– highest cost, \$100 million+

Several years ago, Sanderson Stewart was hired by the City to prepare a study for possible connections of the IBL to Hwy 3 and concluded that Zimmerman Trail was the most cost effective. It should be noted that connections west of ZT were not studied. ZT currently has about 11,000 vehicles including trucks per day and according to the Hwy 3 Corridor Study it is expected to go to 16,500 by 2035. It was not clear if trucks will be allowed on the IBL; although, the money is coming from a mix of local and federal funds so trucks may be allowed. Wyeth Friday said the alignment of the IBL with ZT is what they are currently working on in two phases, for about \$7 million each.

Sanderson Stewart has been hired to do an IBL Corridor Planning Study. Scott Walker explained that the City was getting out ahead of anticipated expansion with the IBL, designed as two lanes separated with a median. He compared it to the orderly development of Shiloh Road Corridor. The IBL will have fewer roundabouts and is expected to be finished within several years depending on funding. The IBL Corridor Study's Oversight Committee meets once a month and Lyle is a member representing the RNTF. They will hold public meetings in Sept. 2019 possibly one in the Heights and another on the West End.

Lyle Gabrian said it is the RNTF position that the IBL should connect to Hwy 3 and off the rimrocks somewhere west of ZT for safety reasons.

Reg Gibbs commented that he would like to see a study on who uses ZT and why? How many people are driving to work or home, to and from the airport, to I 90 or Hwy 3, etc. He suggested we develop ways to mitigate the impact of more traffic on ZT.

Questions and comments from the audience were as follows: one person sleeps in his basement because of the noise from the trucks jake breaking. Another person commented he had just invested \$70,000 in his home on Rimrock Road and now he was seriously thinking about selling. Another person asked whether using ZT as the IBL connection and making it a main arterial was a done deal? Another commented why go forward with a bad idea? Why put a ton of money into a bad deal? Penny Ronning responded that it wasn't a bad deal for

everyone: people in the Heights and the West End might think it was a good deal. Another person commented that some people lose while some win.

Chris Kukulski joined the Open Forum.

A question was raised about what developers were required to pay? Kukulski responded that while the city does collect an impact fee from developers for some utilities like water and sewage, the city does not have fees that cover all the costs.

Ronning stated that she is opposed to using ZT as a connector; however, she said that the current Council did not make the decisions on the construction of the IBL or its connections. She said by annexing the West End the City is not getting a fair ROI because of the costs of getting out there. Much more tax revenue is realized from the downtown district. She cited a return of \$11.70 per sq. ft. from the Northern Hotel as compared to \$0.45 from Shiloh Theater. Agriculture land on the Rims is poor; ag land on the West End is some of the best in the country. If the city doesn't develop it, then the county will and maybe it will be something we will have to fix in 30 years. Kukulski commented that it is best to annex early.

Alice Lahren noted that an Ironwood Estates developer blocked a City Planning recommendation for a west end connector off the rimrocks, the Molt Rd./Hwy 3 connector, a number of years ago and that the least cost is often not the best decision. Friday commented that it's not just the cost they consider but also a matter of timing and priorities.

Jane Van Dyk noted that ZT was unsafe and unsuitable as a main arterial because of the shifting nature of the sandstone cliffs. She cited statistics on the number of days ZT was closed because of rockslides, grass fires, vehicle accidents, snow and ice, maintenance, and reconstruction: 2013 – 16 days closed; 2014 – 74 days; 2015 – 5 days; 2016 – 0 days; 2017 – 2 days; 2018 – 148 days. Average # of days closed per year = 41 days.

Lyle Gabrian asked that the City commit to giving ZT extra attention as it is a street unlike all others because of safety concerns. Bill Cole said that ZT is safer than some streets because of slow driving speeds; however, others said that people speed on ZT. Friday and Walker said that generally streets with curves are safer than straight streets because people tend to drive faster on straight streets.

Chris Kukulski referred to the Capital Improvement Plan (green sheet handed out) with \$84 million projects just waiting. A question was raised about making Rimrock Rd. and ZT/32nd St. West four lanes in the future. Walker said that widening is not anticipated on Rimrock Road and not south of ZT in the next 5 years. 32nd Street is the #1 priority and would eventually have a 3rd turning lane.

Chris Kukulski said that redevelopment of the city core may have the biggest economic benefits and that everything is not about moving cars fast. More people want to live in a nice neighborhood where they can walk or bike to nearby stores and businesses. The cost of the IBL - \$14 - \$15 million does not include water and sewer. He would like to see significant planning before the inevitable development around the IBL.

Cheryl Lenhardt noted that there are two alternate routes off the Rims already in place that connect the Heights to the west end. The recently developed Alkali Creek Exit takes Heights traffic to 6th Ave. & Division. This option connects traffic to many areas in the west end: Grand Ave., Central, King Ave. West and Shiloh. The Alkali Creek Exit is as quick and efficient as ZT.

A second alternate route would involve improving Alkali Creek Road to connect it to an outer belt loop and Hwy 3, which would provide an exit off the rims farther west than ZT. This option would relieve much ZT traffic and provide good access to the airport and the Heights. Improving and using existing roadways, like these two options, would be more economical and a better way to bring traffic to and from the Heights than ZT.

Mayor Bill Cole joined the Open Forum.

Lyle Gabrian asked Wyeth Friday to explain the development illustrated on maps from the Long Range Transportation Plan showing anticipated employment and population growth north of Highway 3. Wyeth commented that the growth is predicted and that ZT is going to get busier and busier. Chris Kukulski mentioned Project Recode and the need for revitalization of commercial strips. The possibility of using TIF funds was also brought up.

Mayor Cole had several points including 1) the RNTF should talk to the City Council members from the Heights and Ironwood Homeowners so they are aware of the plans. 2) we need data on traffic numbers and standards: how much traffic until a road fails etc.?

The meeting was concluded at 9:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Jane Van Dyk, Secretary