

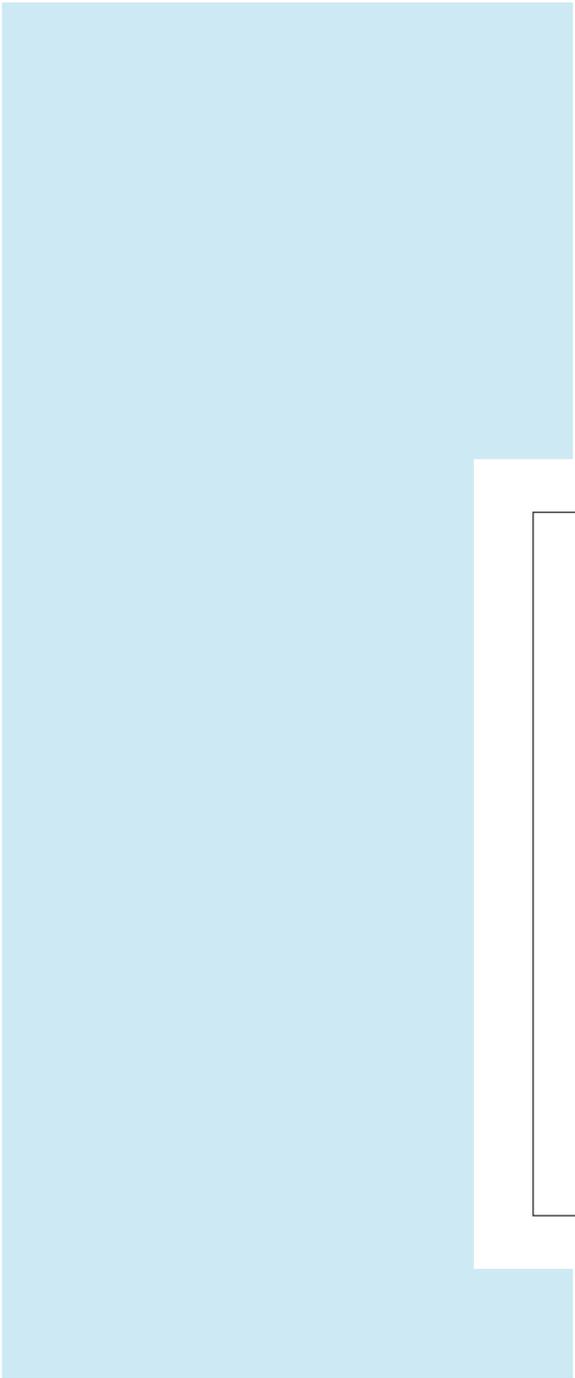
The background features a large, stylized logo for PCSD. The letters 'P', 'C', 'S', and 'D' are arranged in a circular pattern. The top half of the logo is light blue, and the bottom half is light grey. The text 'ANNUAL REPORT' is centered within the top blue section.

ANNUAL REPORT

PCSD

2020

The City of Billings Planning & Community Services Department reflects on 2020, a year with challenges, opportunities, growth and change.



# One Mission

## **The Magic City**

**A diverse, welcoming place where people prosper and business succeeds.**

# About Us



Most citizens seek the services of the Planning and Community Services Department when they need information on property, buildings, or land uses. Landowners, realtors, builders, and developers rely on our fast and customer-friendly service. Qualified homebuyers and not-for-profit community organizations enjoy the programs we offer. All residents benefit from the Code Enforcement Division's efforts to preserve property values.

The Planning and Community Services Department is committed to building a safe community that uses its resources wisely. Our services and programs help maintain a high quality of life while providing a variety of housing and businesses choices for all residents. Consisting of three Divisions, we are happy to be at your service.

# PCSD DIVISIONS

## CODE ENFORCEMENT

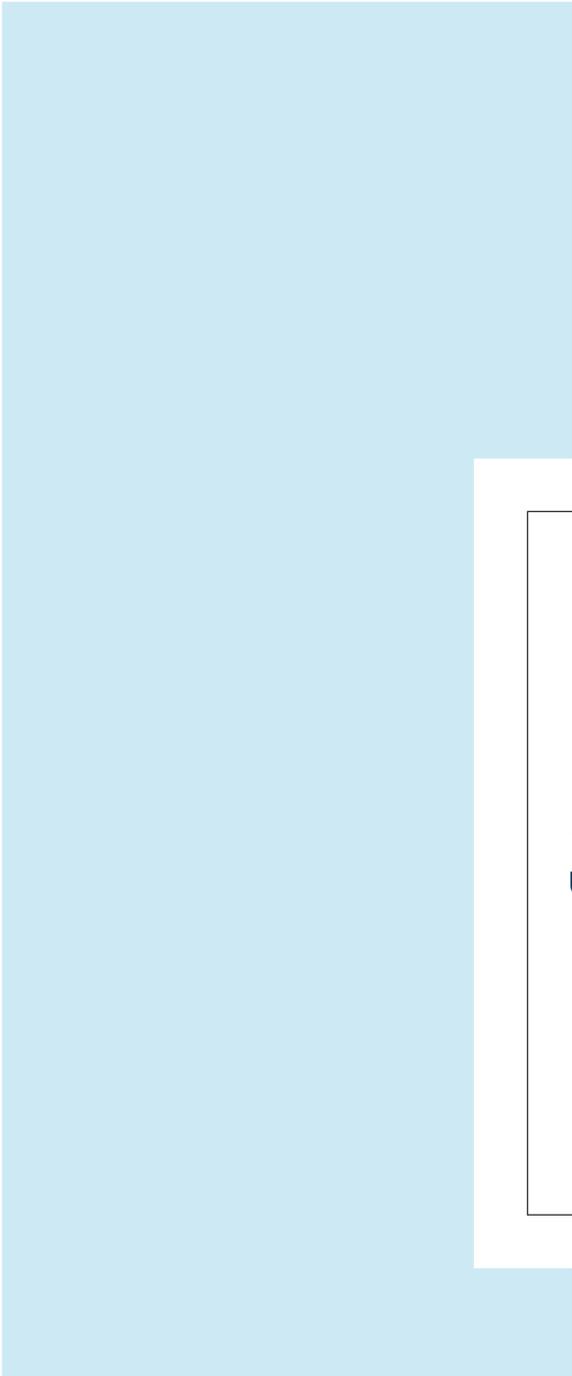
**C**ode Enforcement is a complaint-based response program for violations of zoning, building codes, business regulations, nuisance codes, sign codes and specific parking regulations.

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**T**he 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, including Community Development Block Grant, HOME Investment Partnerships Program and AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America.

## PLANNING

**T**he Planning Division provides community planning and development services to Yellowstone County, the City of Billings, and the Town of Broadview. It provides the community with a broad service base that consists of current planning, neighborhood and community planning and transportation planning. The Division provides services to residents and developers by reviewing proposed projects and processing subdivision applications, applications for requests for zoning changes and variances, and special use permits.



# The Director

PCSD staff was here alongside you facing significant challenges during 2020 in how we live and how we serve our customers. Twenty-Twenty taught us to look for opportunity in the face of adversity:

Wyeth Friday  
Director PCSD

Everyone here at the Planning and Community Services Department (PCSD) is relieved to put last year behind us, but we also recognize COVID-19 has inflicted significant loss of life, and a serious physical, mental and economic toll on our community. PCSD staff was here alongside you facing significant challenges during 2020 in how we live and how we serve our customers. Twenty-Two taught us to look for opportunity in the face of adversity:

We shifted in the space of one month from conducting in-person meetings of all nine of the Boards and Commissions we support to all online digital platforms.

We set up online, phone and email communication processes to keep serving our customers through the health crisis when our offices were physically closed for several months.

We modified our office space and daily operations when reopening to the public became possible to provide a safe environment for customers and staff.

We implemented remote work options for staff to reduce contact between staff and customers.

All of this adaptation lead to two results: First, as you turn the pages of this report you will see PCSD was very productive in 2020, providing services and completing community projects. Second, we uncovered new ideas and innovation that will forever change how we do business and provide new ways to serve you:

Planning migrated its application and permit submittal processes to the City's Citizen Access Portal as well as utilized email and tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams to conduct pre-application meetings. Software acquired late in 2020 will drive more change later this year.

The Building Division left PCSD to combine with City Facilities under City Administration. This seamless transition lead to no noticeable changes for our customers in Building or Planning.

The public responded well to our online meeting platforms as we live-streamed meetings on our PCSD Facebook page and enabled the public to call in during the meetings to provide comment on applications. We expect to implement hybrid public meetings later in 2021.

We put electronic field and remote work tools to the test and found some staff can be productive from the office, work vehicles and home. We will experiment further with these tools in 2021.

Please stay safe and join us in making our community stronger, healthier and more agile as we all face new challenges and opportunities in 2021!

# Planning Division

## Staff

Monica Plecker, AICP  
Planning Division  
Manager

Nicole Cromwell, AICP  
Zoning Coordinator

Scott Walker  
Transportation  
Planning Coordinator

Lora Mattox, AICP  
Transportation Planner

Dave Green  
Planner II

Karen Husman  
Planner I

Elyse Monat,  
Active Transportation  
Planner

Jeannette Vieg  
Planning Assistant

Tammy Deines  
Planning Clerk

## Current Planning

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The Planning Division handles numerous application types for projects like Subdivision, Exempt Subdivision, Special Review, Variance, and Zone Change. We also review permits like Zoning Compliance, fence, and sign permits.

### Permits

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### Projects

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## Long-Range Planning

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The Planning Division is responsible for development and implementation of long-range plans like neighborhood plans, growth policies and sub area plans.

### Policies

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### Plans

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## Transportation Planning

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The City of Billings and Yellowstone County are designated a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). This designation allows for federal funding of transportation specific plans.

### MPO Administration

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### Plans

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# 2020 Highlights

01

## **Build Grant Awarded**

In September 2020 the City of Billings was awarded \$11.6 Million towards the completion of the Inner Belt Loop and Skyline Trail.

## **Project Re:Code Adoption**

After more than three years and countless volunteer efforts project Re:Code was adopted by Yellowstone County and City of Billings.

02

03

## **Complete Streets Progress Report**

Billings City Council adopted the Complete Streets policy (the Policy) in 2011 and updated it in 2016. The Policy ensures that all people using all modes of transportation are considered when planning a street.

## **Subdivision Review**

Subdivision activity in the City of Billings and Yellowstone County remained steady in 2020 in comparison to past years. Nearly 600 new building lots were proposed in 2020.

04

05

## **Historic Preservation National Nomination**

The Yellowstone County Historic Preservation Board is working with the City of Laurel in moving forward with the development of a nomination for Riverside Park.

# Planning Division

## Subdivision

The year 2020 brought many challenges to Subdivision activity. Planning started doing all of our meeting through an electronic format rather than face to face. Subdivision paperwork was no longer handed in but submitted on line. With those changes it accomplished something Planning has been proposing to do for a while now, allowing for electronic submittal of applications. 2020 pushed us to achieving that goal.

Subdivision activity numbers in the City of Billings for the year 2020 shows overall less lots being proposed and created than in 2019. In 2020 we had pre-application meetings that proposed 294 new building lots, 2019 had 281 proposed. 2020 had 243 new lots preliminarily approved, 2019 had 395. One item to note in those numbers in 2020, of those 243 new lots preliminarily approved, one lot was for 155 spaces for Residential Manufactured Homes. 2020 had 166 building lots created through the final plat process, 2019 had 263.

Subdivision activity in Yellowstone County also saw a lower number of lots created but an increase in lots proposed. In 2020 we had pre-application meetings that proposed 393 lots, 2019 proposed 354 lots. 2020 had 44 new lots preliminarily approved, 2019 had 135. 2020 had 33 building lots created through the final plat process, 2019 had 235.

44

**NEW LOTS RECEIVED PRE-LIMINARY APPROVAL FROM YELLOWSTONE COUNTY**

243

**NEW LOTS RECEIVED PRE-LIMINARY APPROVAL FROM THE CITY OF BILLINGS**

## Historic Preservation

The Yellowstone Historic Preservation Board (YHPB) was created in February 1993 under an inter-local agreement with the City of Billings, City of Laurel, Yellowstone County and the Crow Tribal Council. This inter-local agreement provides for a joint board of the four parties to promote public interest and preservation of historic and prehistoric sites, structures, objects, buildings and districts by addressing preservation issues at the local level and integrating them into local, state and federal planning and decision-making processes.

This year has been challenging with Covid-19 and restrictions on in-person meetings and events. In

March, the annual YHPB Roundtable, which brings together community members and historic preservation organizations, had to be cancelled. The board met several times via Zoom just as so many others have done to continue with the business at hand.

Even though meetings were few, there was a lot of behind the scenes work completed by the board, the board's consultant, the Western Heritage Center and the State Historic Preservation Office on several National Register projects. The following nominations have been submitted to the National Park Service for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places: Billings Communal Mausoleum, Fratt-Link House, Pioneer Park, McKinley Elementary School, and the Kate Fratt School.

In addition to the submitted properties for inclusion to the National Register, the board working with the City of Laurel is moving forward with the development of a nomination for Riverside Park. Riverside Park is significant to local, state and national history for at least four time periods: Dance Hall (1923-1933), Federal Relief (1934-1939), PoW camp (1944-1946), Park (1946-now). In circa 1923, Riverside Park was created as a private dance pavilion and travel camp. The history of Riverside Park directly parallels the history of our country. Actions taken now to preserve the structural integrity of the site will insure they will endure well into the future.



# Planning Division

## Transportation

In 2020, \$1 billion in BUILD funds from the US Department of Transportation were available for a competitive grant process and the City of Billings applied for approximately \$16.8 million to complete the Inner Belt Loop, the Skyline Trail and the Stagecoach Trail. While the City was not successful in receiving the full request, USDOT has awarded \$11.6 million to fully construct the Inner Belt Loop and Skyline Trail. This would not have been possible without the assistance of our partners, Billings TrailNet, the Billings Chamber of Commerce, Big Sky Economic Development Agency, Yellowstone County, Montana Department of Transportation and especially Senator Tester, Senator Daines and Representative Gianforte.

With local funds of \$7 million from the City of Billings, and \$85,000 from Billings TrailNet, these projects will open alternative transportation routes that will enhance safety and travel time while also providing for economic development opportunities and outdoor recreation.

## Complete Streets

Billings is working towards making its streets friendlier for all people, whether they are driving, walking, biking, rolling, or taking transit. As part of that effort, Billings City Council adopted the Complete Streets policy (the Policy) in 2011 and updated it in 2016. The Policy ensures that all people using all modes of transportation are considered when planning a street.

Every three years, the Planning Division leads a collaborative effort to update the Complete Streets Progress Report. First published by Healthy By Design, a local health coalition, as the Complete Streets Benchmark Report, the report measures progress on performance measures that show improvement towards meeting transportation needs for all Billings residents. In addition to members of the Planning Division, this year's report team included representatives from Healthy By Design, RiverStone Health, Living Independently for Today and Tomorrow, the City of Billings Public Works Department, and MET Transit.

Performance measures in the report include counts of people walking and bicycling at several intersections around the city, crash data, inventory of walking and biking facilities, and more.

Of note, 71% of streets in Billings have sidewalks on at least one side, up 4% from the last Complete Streets Progress Report in 2017. While crashes involving people walking remained fairly steady between 2009–2018 (most recent years for which data was available) more people died while walking in Billings in 2018 than any time over the previous 9 years. This follows a national trend in which more people across the United States died while walking in 2018 than in the previous 28 years. Crashes involving people bicycling have been trending downward, demonstrating that even as bicycling has become more popular over the past few years, crashes are decreasing.

# 71%

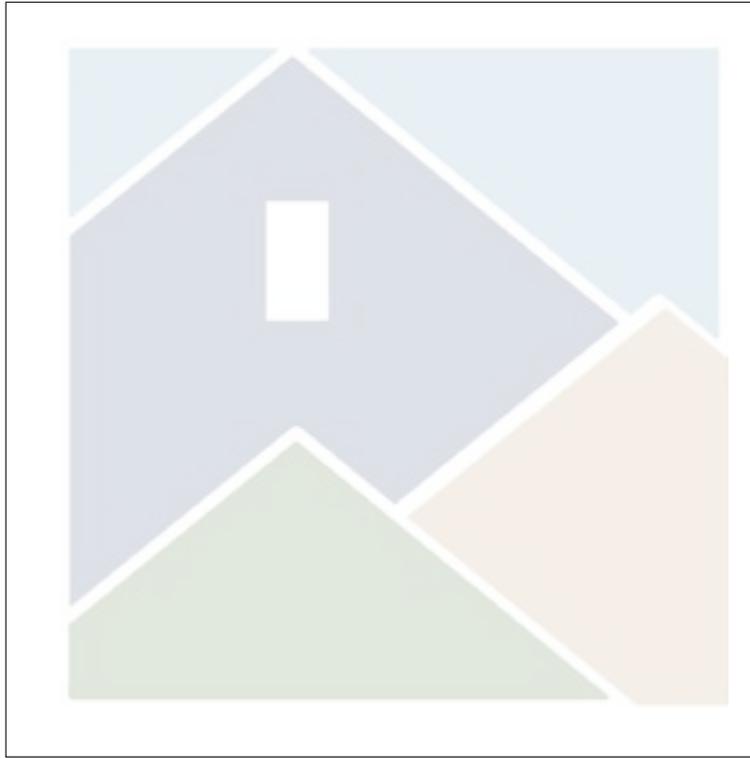
**of streets in Billings  
have sidewalk on at-  
least one side.**

Data from MET Transit shows that transit remains an important mode of transportation for students, people with disabilities, seniors, and those who rely on paratransit. Even as overall use of MET has decreased slightly, the number of uses of the wheelchair lift is trending upward.

While Billings is making progress towards creating a transportation system for everyone, there is still more to be done. Learn more about the benefits of Complete Streets and dig into the data at <https://ci.billings.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/43311/Final-Complete-Streets-Progress-Report-2020>.

Skyline Trail Rendering





# Planning Division

## Project Re:Code

After more than 3 years, the City of Billings and Yellowstone County have both adopted new Zoning Codes which help implement the County's and City's Growth Policies and ultimately provide a positive impact on the quality of life. This page highlights some of the accomplishments and major milestones throughout the process.

# 32



### Committee Members

In August of 2017, a steering committee was appointed to help shepherd the development of the code. The steering committee created 4 working groups to focus on urban issues, county issues, signs and landscaping



### 6300+ Volunteer Hours

By the time Project Re:Code was ready for adoption it is estimated there was more than 6,300 volunteer hours contributed to the effort.

# 2

### Adopted Codes

In December 2020, the Yellowstone County Board of County Commissioners adopted its new Zoning Code. In January, 2020, the City of Billings City Council adopted its new zoning code.



# 90+

### Working Group Public Meetings

The Steering Committee and Working Groups met diligently from 2017-2019. 2020 was spent working on final code drafts and the adoption process.



# Community Development

## Foreclosure Acquisition/ Rehabilitation Program

Federal HUD funding is used to acquire and re-develop vacant, foreclosed properties that may otherwise become sources of abandonment and blight within the Billings community. Following rehabilitation or reconstruction, the homes are sold to income-qualified households through the First Time Home Buyer program. Mortgage payments are based on 30% of the household's income. A silent second lien is placed on the home for the difference between the purchase price and an affordable mortgage payment.

Acquisition price	\$122,052
City rehabilitation investment	\$74,938
Total City investment	\$190,745
Purchase appraisal	\$126,475
Acquisition discount (at least 1% required)	4%
After-rehab appraisal	\$172,450
Increase in home value after rehab	34%
Homeowner first mortgage	\$98,403
City's second mortgage lien	\$77,139
Revenue per home following initial resale	\$84,504
Total City Liens/Future Revenues	\$771,391



Before



After



Before



After

# 5 Year Housing Poverty Impact Outcomes

## First Time Homebuyer

289 families

## Home Repair

21 Homes

## Foreclosure

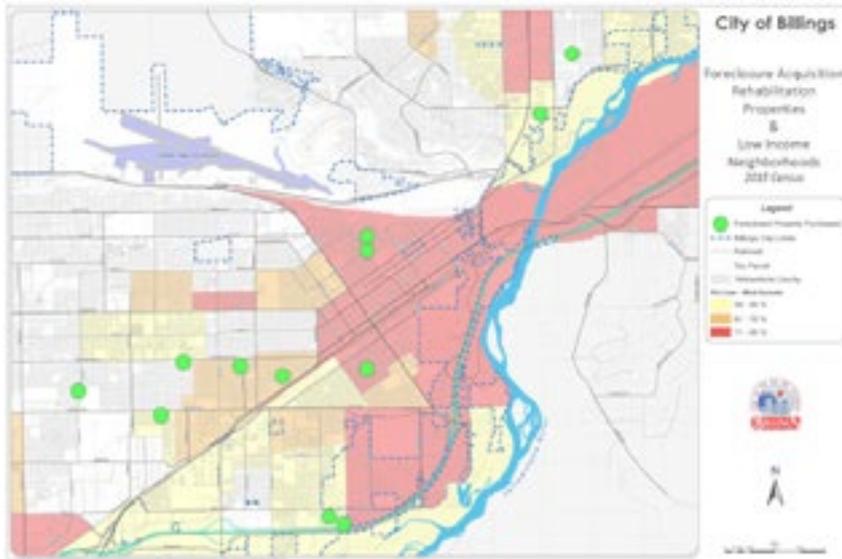
5 Homes

## Affordable Housing Development

Four homeownership units

## Americops VISTA

2,770 people assisted



## Staff

Brenda Beckett  
Division Manager

Dina Harmon  
Program Coordinator

Tam Rodier  
Program Coordinator

Carly Collins  
Grants Technician

# AMERICORP VISTA

## Billings Metro VISTA Project Members featured in National Spotlight

In response to the global coronavirus pandemic, several Peace Corps volunteers were evacuated from their service sites around the world. Despite the challenges, these same volunteers felt a calling to serve, and joined the Billings Metro VISTA Project this summer as AmeriCorps VISTA members! Their stories were featured across national AmeriCorps VISTA social media pages and they were praised for their resilience and commitment to service!

## AmeriCorps VISTA Members Respond to COVID-19

This year, AmeriCorps VISTA Members were involved with various efforts to provide resources for community members in need.

Through their many projects, members assembled masks and hygiene kits, organized volunteer events to address food insecurity, and evaluated a City-wide survey that will guide funding priorities for community responses to the coronavirus.

In total, over 150 masks and hygiene kits were assembled and distributed, 94 pounds of fruit was gleaned and donated, approximately 400 pounds of produce was provided for veterans and their families, and over 3,500 community surveys were reviewed and analyzed!



VISTA Member, Emma Shenton, and community volunteers proudly display the fresh fruit gleaned and donated to a local food pantry.



AmeriCorps VISTA Members, Blake Matthews and Amber Nichols, were inundated with coronavirus survey responses from the community in September 2020.



Billings Metro VISTA Project members gather at the Miller Building to get their service assignments for the September 11th National Day of Service and Remembrance.

# CDBG - CV

## The City Receives CARES funding

The City of Billings was awarded \$909,126 in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding (CDBG-CV) to support coronavirus response for low-income individuals and families in Billings.

Activities must:

- Exclusively prevent, prepare for, and respond to coronavirus (i.e., SARS-CoV-2 or another coronavirus with pandemic potential).
- Primarily benefit low-income individuals and families in Billings. Extensive documentation relative to the impact of pandemic response activities for low-income beneficiaries, including complete demographics, is required.
- Avoid duplication of other local, state, or federal service or support to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse.

The City recently solicited input and public comment via survey instruments and other communication forums to garner data and information to conduct a needs assessment relative to coronavirus / infectious disease response.



# 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.

## CASE OVERVIEW:

**4,300 CASES**

**8,200 PROPERTY INSPECTIONS**

**85% of CASES ACHIEVED COMPLIANCE WITHIN 30 DAYS**

**3035**

## PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CASES

This category includes storing junk and debris outdoors, junk vehicles, not mowing, improper storage of RVs, boats and campers

**835**

## RIGHT OF WAY CASES

This category includes signs obstructing sidewalks, parking violations, trees too low over the sidewalk or street, snow removal and leaving an unattached trailer on the street

**165**

## COMMERCIAL CASES

This category includes operating without a business license, failing to maintain landscaping or sign code violations

**153**

## ZONING CASES

This category includes building setbacks, uses, and fencing issues

**107**

## NUISANCE CASES

This category includes improper or extended boarding of vacant buildings, dangerous, burned out or abandoned buildings

**16**

## BUILDING CASES

This category includes building without a permit or in violation of an approved permit

## Landscaping Enforcement

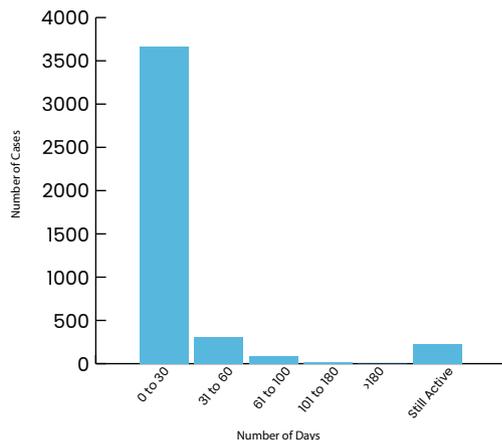
In 2020, the Code Enforcement Division emphasized commercial property maintenance issues including landscaping, signs, and buffering for adjacent neighborhoods. This is just one of those cases. The Code Enforcement Division worked with the local manager as well as the corporate headquarter's staff to restore the landscaping at this crucial Westend intersection.

## Helping Resolve Property Ownership

In 2020, the CE Division joined forces with the State Attorney General's office to resolve ownership of property with no living heirs or heirs unable to claim the property. All property owner issues were resolved successfully.

## Working Towards Compliance

The below chart shows on average how long it takes to resolve cases.



Before 2402 Grand Avenue



After



## Staff

Nicole Cromwell  
Division Manager

Todd Morgan  
CE Officer

Tanya Punt  
CE Officer

Craig Salzman  
CE Officer

Marshall Glunt  
CE Officer

Trina Adams  
CE Clerk

# Case Closed

To the right are highlights of property brought back from the brink in 2020 and restored neighborhood integrity.



Before - 114/118 S 29th St



After



Before - 911 Terry Ave



After



Before - 46 Washington



After



# 2021 – What’s Next

The PCSD starts 2021 with a full slate of projects, programs and codes to manage. We look forward to many of you participating at all levels of the process as we complete more long range land use and transportation planning, learn new zoning codes and find ways to help those at a disadvantage in our community continue to navigate the current pandemic and its aftermath. Here is some of the work ahead:

[Billings Bypass Corridor Study](#) will evaluate the land use and transportation needs along the proposed alignment of the Billings Bypass focused on the corridor north of where it crosses the Yellowstone River.

[Update of the Yellowstone County Growth Policy](#) will be completed in 2021 after public outreach efforts, Planning Board review, and staff work was done in 2020 to update goals and other content.

[Implementation of Project ReCode](#) will begin with Yellowstone County’s adoption of its new zoning code in December 2020 and the City of Billings adoption of its new code in January 2021.

[Planning, Management and Scheduling of the Inner Belt Loop and Skyline Trail](#) construction projects kicks off in 2021 after the community was awarded an \$11.6 million BUILD (Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development) Grant in September 2020.

[Disbursement of \\$909,126 in CDBG CARES Funding](#) for low-income residents allocated to the City of Billings in 2020 to be used to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus. Staff has reviewed and interpreted guidance from HUD, completed a citizen and service-provider survey in the community, and is preparing an application process to allocate the funds in 2021.

We will use Social Media and Web-Based Tools more than ever to communicate with you – our PCSD Facebook page has more than 1,000 followers as we start 2021 and we want to keep you engaged.