

Frequently Asked Questions – Public Safety Mill Levy 2021 (Last updated 10-25-2021)

Q What will passage of this mill levy mean for the City of Billings?

A If the new mill levy is approved, it will add staff and resources to the City’s Police, Fire, Legal, Court, and Code Enforcement within the following areas:

Police Department	\$ 2,450,000
Fire Department	1,500,000
Legal, Court, & Code Enforcement	1,450,000
On Going Public Safety Needs	1,300,000
Mental Health and Substance Abuse	415,000
Total Additional Resources	\$ 7,115,000

Our goals are simple – lower crime rates in our city and reduce the time it takes the fire department to respond to emergency calls. Our target is to lower crime rates to, at or below national averages for violent and property crimes per 100,000 residents.

Q What will failure of this mill levy mean for the City of Billings?

A If the 2021 mill levy does not pass, the City will not add these new resources. Violent crime (aggravated assaults, armed robberies, rapes and homicides) has increased by over 250% over the past decade while our population has grown by less than 20%. Without additional resources, domestic violence victims are not given adequate legal representation, criminals are not held accountable, and responses to emergency’s are not as effective as they could be.

Q When are ballots going to be received, and when are they due?

A Ballots were mailed out on October 13. Ballots must be returned to the Yellowstone County Elections Office by November 2nd.

Q How much have calls for services within the Fire Department increase in the past 10 years?

A The Fire department receives over 18,000 calls for service annually. This is an increase of 68.9% since 2010.

Q What types of calls does the Fire Department respond to?

A In 2020, the Billings Fire Department responded to 18,284 calls for service. 47% Emergency Medical & Rescue Calls. 53% Fires, Fire Alarms (malicious & non-malicious), Utilities Calls, Hazardous Materials, Gas Line Ruptures, Service Assists, etc.

Q How much has violent crime increased in Billings over the past 10 years?

A Incidents of violent crime in Billings have increased by 268% over the past decade. In 2010, there were 307 incidents of violent crime vs 1,132 in 2020. Over the first ¼ of 2021, Billings has experienced over 1,050 incidents of violent crime.

Q How does this PSML address accountability when there is limited jail space?

A Incarceration is not the only means of administering justice. Most crimes don't include jail sentences. Most involve fines and restitution. For crimes that do require incarceration, we are continually working with Yellowstone County to ensure adequate jail space is available. The State of Montana, Yellowstone County, and City of Billings are currently working on a program to address multiple facets of the criminal justice system in Billings, which includes jail diversion (for those who don't belong in jail), moving the State's prisoners out of our jail (it is common for State prisoners to occupy 20% of local beds) and we are encouraging the county to expand the jail.

Q How does this PSML address mental health? Where/what will the money (\$400K) go toward?

A The PSML includes \$415,000 annually to be granted to community partners who provide mental health and addiction services. The City is a critical partner in the Substance Abuse Connect coalition. We will use our public dollars to leverage county tax dollars in partnership with private service providers to reduce the impacts of addiction and mental health issues on the city's first responders. These investments are meant to help those who need services but are not best served by incarceration or in the emergency room.

Q The voters approved a Public Safety Levy last year. Why is there another this year?

A Last year's mill levy did not include increasing the capacity of any part of our criminal justice system or fire response capabilities. The approved levy prevented the city from needing to downsize PD, FD and 911 personnel. The city increased the size of these three divisions by 22 personnel between 2016 and 2019, relying on cash reserves (savings account) to cover these costs. Please listen to the "Unfiltered" Billings Police Dept. podcast Part 3 on Billingsmt.gov/psml or through your favorite podcast application.

Q How will the Fire Department Mobile Response Teams (MRT) be staffed?

A We intend to use firefighters. All city of Billings firefighters are EMTs and approx. 25% are paramedics. Two teams of two, with at least one paramedic on each unit. One roving the east/downtown and one roving the west/midtown during the peak hours of the day. Conceptually, we intend to use a hybrid system with internal personnel and augment with new recruits.

Q What is the purpose of the MRTs?

A To quickly respond EMS resources during our busiest hours of the day and to keep engine crews available for more labor intensive and severe calls. These teams, if available may also help with said labor intensive type calls, such as fires, rescues, and hazardous materials.

Q How will this plan be implemented?

A If voters approve the mill levy, the City will not begin collecting the tax revenue until Dec. of 2022. However, if the mill levy is successful in Nov. 2021, the City will begin immediately implementing the programs identified in this levy using cash from our savings account. The City anticipates it will take 2 years to fully implement the new public safety programs and resources.

Q Where can I find more information?

A Billingsmt.gov/psml – this website includes video presentations, podcasts, peer review studies and a mathematical formula to show you exactly how much your taxes will increase if voters approve the PSML.