



ANNUAL REPORT

**PCSD**

2021

The City of Billings Planning & Community Services Department reflects on 2021, a year with exciting opportunities and fast paced growth.

# 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. The Code Enforcement Division protects and enhances the quality of life in 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

## 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 (VISTA).

## 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

My Planning and Community Services Department (PCSD) staff and all of you, our customers, did a truly amazing amount of work in this community in 2021 – and we all did it still managing a pandemic that just kept adding challenges for our community.

Wyeth Friday  
Director PCSD

My Planning and Community Services Department (PCSD) staff and all of you, our customers, did a truly amazing amount of work in this community in 2021 – and we all did it still managing a pandemic that just kept adding challenges for our community. As you turn the pages of this report, you will see PCSD was very productive in service and project delivery. We also:

Are taking new budget resources the City Council afforded us in our 2022 budget and are making additions and improvements to serve you even better with new staff members added in the Code Enforcement (CE) and Planning divisions.

Are boosting our CE capabilities and resources due to your support passing the 2021 Public Safety Mill Levy (PSML).

Are providing more support and services to our low income neighborhoods and residents through programs and projects made possible through Federal Community Development Block Grant COVID funding and American Rescue Plan Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding (See page 16).

You will be introduced to our two new planning staff members on page 9, so I want to introduce you here to our new CE Manager Tina Hoeger. Council support for our 2022 Budget in CE enabled us to transition from CE supervision being handled half-time by a hybrid Zoning Coordinator/CE Manager position to a full time CE Manager for the first time in the City's CE Division history. Now full time Zoning Coordinator Nicole Cromwell juggled two jobs for almost two decades and finally handed off the CE Manager duties to Tina in January 2022.

Tina comes to us after 28 years in the Billings Police Department, starting as a Police Clerk and rising to Field Training Officer and then to Sergeant in the Patrol Division, leading a daily shift of Police Officers for our community. Tina has hit the ground running in CE, evaluating our resource deployment, updating and drafting new standard operating procedures, improving officer safety, and working with me to begin implementation of the new resources the PSML has afforded us. We look forward to rolling out new enforcement approaches, programs and resources to the community in 2022 and beyond with Tina on our PCSD Management Team.

Our services, partnerships and work with the community last year and in the new year doesn't stop with added staff and new programs, so keep reading and seeing the great work we are all doing together in Billings and Yellowstone County.

Please stay safe and join us in making our community stronger, healthier and more agile as we face new challenges and opportunities in 2022!

# 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

Erin Keith  
Planner I

Hunter Kelly  
Planner I

Tammy Deines  
Planning Clerk

## Current Planning

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

Projects

## Long-Range Planning

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

Policies

Plans

## Transportation Planning

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

Plans

# 2021 Highlights

01

## Build Grant Progress

The City is anticipating a signed agreement with Federal Highways this spring. Soon after, staff expects to initiate the bidding process.

02

## Project Re:Code Implementation

The City and County have completed one year of Re:Code implementation. Reports have been provided to the City Council on the successes of the new code and also areas that are being monitored.

03

## Planning Division Hires New Staff

The Planning Division brought on two new Planner I's in the fall of 2021. More information on Erin Keith and Hunter Kelly is provided in this report.

04

## Development Pressure Soars and Building Booms

Subdivision activity in the City of Billings and Yellowstone County boomed in 2021 in comparison to past years. 1,281 new building lots were proposed in the City of Billings and Yellowstone County in 2021.

# Planning Division

## Two Planners Join the Division

This past fall Erin Keith and Hunter Kelly joined the Planning Division as Planner I's. Erin and Hunter hit the ground running and assist customers on a daily basis. While both planners will have an all-around skill set, Hunter will assist with Subdivisions and Erin will focus on Zoning. To learn more about our new team members read their biographies below.

Erin brings a wide range of experience to the Planning Division. She spent 5 years in the environmental regulatory compliance world, working daily with planners and permit writers across the State of Washington. She then gained a breadth of knowledge in community outreach developing and managing public education and outreach programs for local governments and utilities across the country. She loves to share knowledge with others and the Planning Division offers a wealth of opportunity to help the citizens of Billings and Yellowstone County on a daily basis. She has lived here in the Yellowstone County area for over 7 years with her family, and couldn't imagine ever living anywhere else.

Hunter is a new Planner I for the Planning Division for the City of Billings and Yellowstone County. He is currently responsible for general planning duties, but specializes in Subdivisions. Hunter is a graduate of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, earning a B.S. in City and Regional Planning. He has prior experience as a public planner in the State of Arizona, where he also acted as a subdivision specialist. Hunter is interested in the fields of urban revitalization, transportation planning, and walkability.

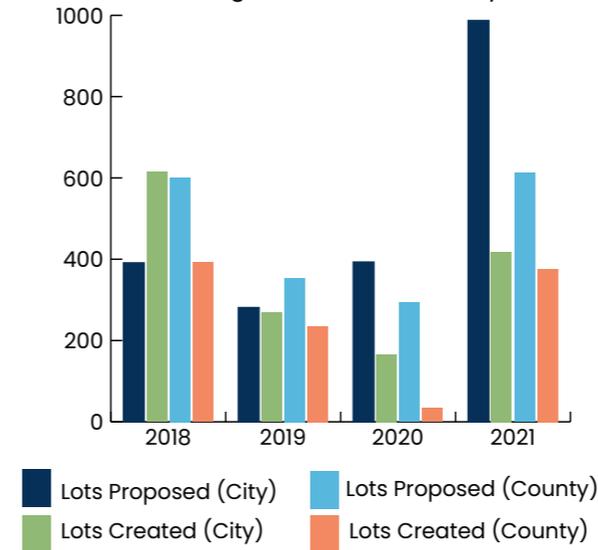
## Subdivision

2021 has been a very successful year for subdivisions in the Billings City-County Area. The digitization of our procedures has continued with little issue. 2021 brought with it a major milestone for the Planning Department: the adoption of Project ReCode. While Project ReCode did not directly alter the subdivision regulations, the changes to the zoning code have been largely successful and pave the way for making future changes to the subdivision regulations.

Statistically, 2021 was a substantial improvement over the performance of previous years. Going from 2020 to 2021, there was a tremendous increase of both lots proposed and created. In 2020 there were 393 lots proposed and 166 lots created in the city, whereas in 2021 there were 987 lots proposed and 418 lots created. The County saw similar growth as well, with 294 lots proposed and 33 created in 2020 versus 613 lots proposed and 376 lots created in 2021.

2021 marks the first time since 2018 that the City of Billings has had an increase in the number of both proposed and created lots from the previous year. The Planning Department expects this trend to continue and mark the beginning of an upward trend of growth.

Lots Proposed and Created in Billings/Yellowstone County



**987** NEW LOTS PROPOSED IN BILLINGS FOR 2021

**613** NEW LOTS PROPOSED IN YELLOWSTONE COUNTY IN 2021

## 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 is a provision for a joint board of the four parties to promote public interest and preservation of historic and pre-historic 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.

In an effort to outreach to the community, the YHPB designed three informational banners to display across Yellowstone County. The first highlights the board and its activities, the second discusses the National Register of Historic Places, and the third discusses the economic and social benefits of historic preservation and restoration. The board placed these banners in the Billings Public Library during Preservation Month in May.

The annual YHPB Roundtable was held in September this year. Although a smaller crowd, we were mighty! Some great organizations and projects were highlighted. The YHPB also presented their annual awards, the first was the Eugene Carroll award to an individual or firm for their contribution to historic preservation. The winner was Dr. Tom Rust, professor at MSU-B. Dr. Rust is well known for his historic preservation projects throughout Montana. Dr. Rust and his students developed a list of barns in Yellowstone County a few years ago. This 4-inch binder of information will help the YHPB in potentially nominating several barns in Yellowstone County to the National Register of Historic Places. The second award, the Best Practices, was presented to the Moss Mansion Museum. The Moss is a local must see and Director Jenna Peete has done an excellent job maintaining and expanding the tourism activities. The board this year also gave special acknowledgement to Cushing Terrell for the renovation of the Alberta Bair Theater. Originally a Fox movie theater, the continued use of this building over the last 90 years proves that you don't need to demolish an old building; it can be reimaged!

# Planning Division

## Billings First Neighborhood Bikeway

Billings has a new type of bike facility: a neighborhood bikeway! Neighborhood bikeways are routes with low speeds and low traffic volumes where people biking have the priority. Billings' first neighborhood bikeway covers an impressive distance of about 4 miles between North Park and just north of Rose Park. Wayfinding signage and shared lane markings clearly identify the route and help people biking to easily find their destinations. Stop signs that stop cross traffic allow people biking to maintain momentum. Residents who hop on the neighborhood bikeway can reach everyday needs such as health care, education, jobs, and healthy foods. The route also helps people walking; pedestrian activated flashing beacons and new crosswalks were added at the neighborhood bikeway's crossings of Virginia Lane, 13th Street West, and 17th Street West.

## BUILD Grant Update

In September of 2020, the City of Billings was awarded \$11.6 million in federal BUILD grant funds. Along with \$7,085,000 of local funds (\$7 million from Arterial Fees and Gas Tax, \$85,000 from Billings TrailNet) the grant funds will construct the Inner Belt Loop and the Skyline Trail.

Working within the Federal grant realm can be a long and specific process. In the 16 months since learning of the City's success, we are just now completing the Project Grant Agreement. Before even drafting the agreement, several steps had to be completed first. This included completing an Environmental Review process, completing a Pre-award Budget Narrative to account for all the local funding spent to complete the Environmental Review, design and engineering, right-of-way appraisals and procurement, and development of construction documents. Any one of these elements can take over a year to complete, but the City, led by the Engineering and Planning Divisions were able to accomplish the elements within a year.

Once the Project Grant Agreement is accepted and signed by the City and the FHWA, the City will be able to bid the project. Once bids are received, they will be sent to FHWA for review and concurrence on the successful bid. The timeline the City is aiming for, and again, working within the federal realm can be slow and subject to unexpected delays, is to hopefully have an Agreement in place by April or May. Staff will continue to evaluate the best timing for the bid process based on the FHWA schedule.

## Safe Routes to School Plan Update

The Billings-Yellowstone County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is currently working on a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Plan Update. With the original plan completed in 2011, staff decided it was time for an update of this important plan. The Plan Update looks at safe routes for walking, biking, and rolling to all 22 elementary schools in Billings Public Schools. Toole Design, the consultant on the project, visited Billings in September and conducted walking audits of all 22 elementary schools. The

# 22

## Elementary School Walking Audits Completed as part of SRTS effort

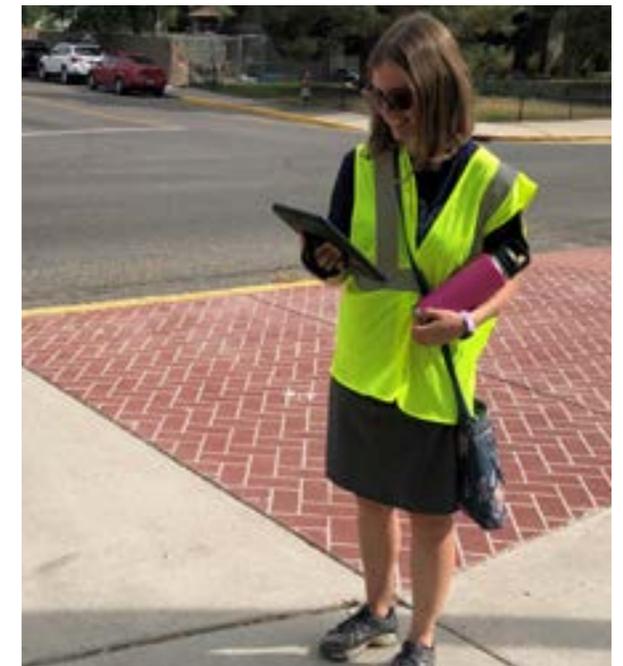
consultants observed either arrival or dismissal, walked the main routes within half a mile of the school, and spoke with principals and crossing guards. The community had an opportunity to give input on challenges along school routes via an online survey and interactive webmap.

As of January 2022, Toole is combining on-the-ground observations, public input, and geographic data to create existing conditions maps. They will also develop a prioritized list of projects to improve walking, biking, and rolling conditions using community selected criteria and local data sources. The finalized plan will make it easy for City staff to equitably select Safe Routes to School projects for construction. The Plan Update will also include updated walking route maps for each school that are fun and easy for students to use. Later in 2022, the MPO will work on a Safe Routes to School Plan covering Billings Public Schools middle schools and private and County schools within the Billings Urbanized Area.

Neighborhood Bikeway Wayfinding



Staff member Elyse Monat completing an audit



# Community Development

## First Time Homebuyer Program

The First Time Home Buyer (FTHB) Program provides a down payment and closing cost assistance loan to low-income first-time homebuyers in our community. In 2021, 35 households were assisted with a FHTB loan to purchase their first home in all different neighborhoods throughout the city.

2021 was especially challenging to low-income buyers due to rising housing costs and lack of properties. Most properties received multiple offers above asking price within a day or two of being listed.

Those who were able to use the FTHB program to purchase their first home in 2021 had to be very perseverant and patient in searching for a property within their limits.

The photos to the right show Properties purchased by households using the First Time Home Buyer program, both in different neighborhoods.

<https://ci.billings.mt.us/476/First-Time-Home-Buyer>



Northside Neighborhood



Southside Neighborhood

## Foreclosure Program

Federal funding has been used to acquire and re-develop vacant, foreclosed homes that may otherwise become sources of abandonment or blight within the Billings community. Following rehabilitation or reconstruction, the homes are sold to income-qualified households through the City's First Time Home Buyer program. No HUD-foreclosed properties were available for purchase during 2021, as a result of the foreclosure moratorium. City staff is hopeful properties will become available in early 2022.

## CV Fast Track Grant Awards

In December 2021, the City Council approved an allocation of up to \$150,000 for a CDBG-CV fast-track application process for public service activities including: emergency rent, mortgage, and/or utility assistance; mental health; healthcare; food assistance; adult education, job coaching, employment assistance; childcare and/or tutoring; non-congregant shelter; Wi-Fi to access social services; vaccination activities; etc. Funding will be available on a first-come, first-served basis for grant awards between \$10,000 and, \$15,000 per award.

<https://ci.billings.mt.us/2858/CDBG-CV-Coronavirus-Response>

### Staff

Brenda Beckett  
Division Manager

Dina Harmon  
Program Coordinator

Tam Rodier  
Program Coordinator

Carly Collins  
Grants Coordinator

# AMERICORPS VISTA

## Billings Metro VISTA Project

The Billings Metro VISTA Project successfully hosted 23 AmeriCorps VISTA members at 15 local nonprofit and governmental organizations this year! In total, VISTAs recruited an additional 699 volunteers to assist with projects related to veteran health, COVID-19 response, food security, youth education, housing, and access to health care. Because of their efforts, VISTA members raised over \$114,000 in cash resources and leveraged over \$35,000 of in-kind donations to support anti-poverty programming and initiatives in our community. Thank you, VISTAs!



VISTAs show off one of the many parkland gleaning signs they installed during their service project on MLK Day of Service in January.



Departing VISTA Members pose for a final photo-op on their last day of Service in August.



VISTA Members gather at Rose Park on the 9/11 Day of Service to participate in a shelter upkeep and parks beautification project.

## The City Receives CARES funding

# CDBG - CV

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided a special allocation of Community Development Block Grant – Coronavirus (CDBG-CV) funds to the City of Billings to be used to prevent, prepare for, and respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19). All funded activities must primarily benefit low-income individuals and families in Billings and must not duplicate other local, state, or federal service or support.

In June 2021, the City Council approved awarding \$117,715 to the Downtown Business Improvement District for a downtown public restroom and handwashing facility and \$55,000 to The Salvation Army for a mobile meals program. Grant Agreements with both awardees have been executed and both projects are moving forward.

In December 2021, the City Council approved awarding approximately \$1 million to the Billings Parks, Recreation & Public Lands Department to install improvements to eight parks located in low-income areas of Billings. The improvements are designed to prevent, prepare for, and/or respond to coronavirus and address needs identified within the 2020 Coronavirus Surveys, as parkland usage has greatly increased during the pandemic. Proposed parks improvements include:

**North Park (6th Avenue N & N 19th Street):** An adult exercise area and equipment, North Park Center accessibility and HVAC improvements, new 4-room accessible restroom with touchless features, 12-month touchless water fountain, new shelter near playground and adult exercise area, and concrete path bulb-out to eliminate tripping hazards.

**Pioneer Park (3rd Street West & Parkhill Drive):** Zimmerman Center accessibility enhancements, restroom repair / upgrades, and Heritage Park Trail improvements.

**Comanche Park (South Plainview Street):** A new playground, ADA accessible parking spots and a walkway to the playground.

Installation of Wi-Fi hotspots at each of the following parks are also planned, if feasible:

- South Park, 6th Avenue S and South 30th Street
- Optimist Park, Morgan Avenue & Hallowell Lane
- Highland Park, 2nd Avenue S & South 37th Street
- Central Park, 8th Street West & Central Avenue
- Arrowhead Park, Crow Lane and Sioux Lane

# 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.

## 2021 CASE OVERVIEW:

**3,900+ CASES**

**9,000+ PROPERTY INSPECTIONS**

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

# 2900

## PROPERTY MAINTENANCE CASES

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

# 610

## 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

# 241

## COMMERCIAL CASES

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

# 138

## ZONING CASES

This category includes building setbacks, uses, and fencing issues

# 62

## NUISANCE CASES

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

# 6

## BUILDING CASES

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

## Spa Ordinance Enforcement

In 2021 officers participated in training with a national human trafficking organization to learn how to distinguish when a massage or spa facility might be trafficking women or men. Officers coordinated with Finance staff, Billings Police Officers, the City Attorney and state enforcement staff to begin the licensing and inspection work for Billings Massage and Spa facilities. By the end of 2021, 8 businesses were fully licensed, 4 have been denied, and 1 is in the review process. Additionally, 68 solo practitioner applications have been reviewed and granted. Staff suspects 3 businesses still have not applied for a license and need to.

## Successful Property Abatement Before and After Photos



Before - 2225 Yellowstone Ave



After



Before - 301 S. 32nd



## Staff

Tina Hoeger  
CE 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 2021 and restored neighborhood integrity.



Before - 120 S 29th St



After



Before - 270 Oasis



After



Before - 2202 Canyon



After

# Boards and Commissions

The Planning and Community Services Department Supports many Boards and Commissions.

## **City County Planning Board**

Dennis Cook, Teresa Larsen, Roger Gravgaard, Dennie Stephenson, Darell Tunncliff, Jon Thompson, Scott Reiter, Troy Boucher, Woody Woods, and Jarrett Hillius

## **City of Billings Zoning Commission**

Michael Larson, Greg McCall, Daniel Brooks, David Goss, and Trina White

## **City of Billings Board of Adjustment**

Jeff Bollman, Oscar Heinrich, David Mitchell, and Dave Hagstrom

## **Yellowstone County Zoning Commission**

Melissa Gentry, Tyler Bush, Todd Hewitt, and Blain Poppler

## **Yellowstone County Board of Adjustment**

Carlotta Hecker, Troy Boucher, Tyler Bush, and Blain Poppler

## **Policy Coordinating Commission**

Mayor Bill Cole, County Commissioner Denis Pitman, Planning Board President Dennis Cook, and MDT District Administrator Rod Nelson

## **Bicycle Pedestrian Advisory Committee**

Margy Bonner, Kristi Drake, Anna O'Donnell, Joan Schey, Dorothy Dupree, and Nikki Zimmer

## **Yellowstone County Historic Preservation Board**

Keith Edgerton, Evan Bruce, Brenna Moloney, Linda Lien, Rebecca Jeter, and Zachary Garhart

## **Community Development Board**

James Corson, Katrina Kruger, Rebecca Noell, Bret Rutherford, Joe Stockburger, Jessica Schmidt, Shane Noble, and Hannah Olson