

**EXPANSION OF THE BILLINGS, MONTANA
NORTH 27TH STREET URBAN RENEWAL AREA,
WITH TAX INCREMENT, AND AMENDMENT TO
THE URBAN RENEWAL PLAN**

**FOR CITY OF BILLINGS AND PLANNING REVIEW
Revised and Completed November 14, 2008**

Prepared by



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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

On July 11, 2005, the City Council adopted an ordinance that (a) created the North 27th Street District Urban Renewal Area (“North 27th Street District”) and (b) adopted an urban renewal plan for the district. On November 13, 2006 the City Council adopted an ordinance that (a) expanded the North 27th Street District and (b) modified the urban renewal plan for the district. For reasons discussed in this Amendment to the Urban Renewal Plan of the North 27th Street District (“Plan”), it has been determined that the North 27th Street District should be expanded again to include other contiguous blighted properties in need of redevelopment. Further, it has been determined that this area, known as the Central Business District of Billings, has been and is in need of expanded public parking, enhanced pedestrian connections and experiences, improved public safety, and infrastructure improvements to public and private properties that will lead to increased taxable values. The existing urban renewal plan may be modified by ordinance in accordance with the procedure described in M.C.A. § 7-15-4221. The Urban Renewal Plan of the North 27th Street District approved by the City Council on July 11, 2005 and modified on November 13, 2006 is hereby included by reference as part of this amended Plan and shall remain applicable hereto except to the extent the original plan is explicitly or impliedly amended by this Plan. It is recognized as part of this Plan that the basic vision of the document known as Downtown Billings Framework Plan, adopted by the Billings City Council on December 22, 1997 and by the Yellowstone County Commissioners on December 23, 1997, is still valid and should be considered a part hereof. The terms defined in “Part I – DEFINITIONS” of the North 27th Street District Plan shall have the same meanings in this Plan unless a contrary meaning is expressed herein. The expanded district proposed in this Plan is hereafter referred to as the Expanded North 27th Street District - 2008 or the “District.”

SECTION 2 – BACKGROUND

The original Downtown Redevelopment District, a downtown tax increment finance district, was created on December 20, 1975 by a resolution which cited hazardous conditions existing in the district due to overhead utility wires, inefficient land use,

problems of access and circulation, physical constraints to development, random location of mixed uses and deteriorated building conditions, and found that rehabilitation and redevelopment of the District would be in the public interest. That original district (hereafter “1975 District”) comprised one hundred and twenty four (124) blocks in the city center after the 1985 south expansion and the 2004 east expansion. The 1975 District expired March 1, 2008 but the Urban Renewal Plan and the Framework Plan used for that district, in many parts and in relation to this District remain valid.

Because the 1975 District has terminated, but many of the undesirable conditions continue to exist, it was determined that it would be in the best interest of the City to expand the North 27th Tax Increment District to assist the construction of public improvements, stabilize and grow the tax base, increase the parking inventory, increase the inventory of downtown residential property, stimulate multi-use development (“Multi-Use Facility Projects”), fill street level vacancies, provide expanded security, develop safe event locations with appropriate traffic control devices, expand the Business Improvement District, make modifications to street and intersection lighting, increase traffic calming and reduce the noise in the district through Quiet Zone management and further implement the vision of the Downtown Framework Plan.

Currently, there is a need to expand the North 27th Street District to encompass development needs on the North 27th Street corridor, the North Broadway corridor, the Old Town Neighborhood and the Montana Avenue Historic District (including expansion of the Historic District to include areas south of the railroad tracks), the Civic District, areas adjacent to the Medical Corridor, adjacent to the East Billings Urban Renewal Area and other underutilized properties within the Central Business District of Billings. Although there has been significant improvement in the valuation of property in much of the 1975 District, the area defined by this proposed expanded tax increment district has major properties that have been neglected for many years and continue to show signs of serious blight and tax base decline. Many parcels have been removed from the tax rolls and/or are delinquent on payments of taxes and fees. The Expanded North 27th Street

District creates an opportunity to continue redevelopment of the center of downtown with a mixture of public and private investment in a roughly seventy-one-square-block district (just over half of the size of the 1975 expanded district) encompassing the existing North 27th Street District.

The area has several pockets of low taxable value, with several lots of the land being owned by government and other non-profit entities and several buildings that are over 50% vacant.

The creation of the Expanded North 27th Street District is essential to any planned development at 4th Avenue North and North Broadway, redevelopment of the vacant Northern Hotel, improving security and expanding the clean safe and vibrant programs of the Business Improvement District, continuing redevelopment of the Civic Plaza area, developing the boundary areas of the Medical Corridor and the East Billings Urban Renewal Area, and expanding the Historic District. It could also assist with the essential remodeling of the Northern Hotel, the Babcock Theatre, the Westwood Building, the Lincoln Hotel Building. Public infrastructure construction within this expanded District could assist with the renovation and/or relocation of various City facilities, such as the public library. It is currently expected that the expanded North 27th Street District may help fund the following projects:

I. Business Programs and Projects

- a. Business Retention
 - i. Targeted assistance and review of existing street level businesses
 - ii. Retail market survey
- b. Business Recruitment
 - i. Development of a “chainlet” network
 - ii. Business plan development assistance
 - iii. Association networking
 - iv. Business Improvement District support
 - v. Business cluster analysis
 - vi. Pedestrian study
 - 1. demographics
 - 2. directions
 - 3. linkages
 - 4. destinations

5. wayfinding

II. Parking and Transportation

- a. Increase use of public transit
- b. Parking structures to support current and future needs
- c. Explore parking linkages to adjacent destinations
- d. Explore parking management practices and programs
 - i. Off street parking
 - ii. On street parking

III. Crime Prevention and Public Safety

- a. Cooperative Security Program
- b. Business Watch Program
- c. Crime and Fraud prevention programs
 - i. Geared towards street level businesses

IV. Management, Implementation and Maintenance

- a. Downtown Billings Partnership, Inc. or its successor, management agreement
 - i. Project development
 - ii. Public awareness
 - iii. Advocacy and liaison between public and private sectors
- b. Business Improvement District expansion and development
 - i. Cooperative work agreements with PMDs
 - ii. Development and promotion of Conference Corridor
 - iii. BID expansion
 - iv. “Green” Management
 - 1. Recycling programs
 - 2. Tree management

V. Infrastructure Improvements

- a. Public
 - i. Expansion of Historic District
 - ii. New Library
 - iii. New Planning Department Offices
 - iv. Public Parking and Greenspace
 - v. Intersection Lighting by Public Works
 - vi. New SILMDs for mid-block lighting
 - vii. Streetscapes and traffic calming plans
 - viii. Sidewalks, curbs and gutter improvements
 - 1. stabilization of vaults
 - ix. Relocation of public and private utility lines

- b. Public infrastructure improvements that would support the following development projects/programs
 - i. Workforce housing development
 - ii. Loft and Condo development
 - iii. Lodging development
 - iv. Conference Facilities
 - v. Entertainment venues

SECTION 3 – SUMMARY OF BLIGHT FINDINGS

The area in the proposed expansion of the North 27th Street District contains a great deal of blight. Within the district there is substantial structural deterioration, long-term land vacancy, a railroad spur line that has been abandoned and a major rail line that continues to divide the Central Business District. Several of the commercial buildings in the district are deteriorated and/or vacant and need demolition or renovation. Many of the storefronts and upper floors are vacant or under-occupied. Sidewalks are cracked; alleys are deteriorated, and, in general, much of the area is below accepted standards. In contrast to the above, there are certain properties within the district in good repair but included in the district to allow for a contiguous block of land within the district and because pockets of revitalization cannot be sustained if areas of neglect and blight surround them. Over time, without continued managed urban renewal, even these success stories will once again decline in taxable value. Most of the district falls into the blighted, neglected and under-utilized categories.

SECTION 4 – DESCRIPTION OF BLIGHTED AREA

The expanded urban renewal area described in this amended Plan incorporates most of the Central Business District. Within the district there are several older, single-story structures that have been retrofitted for offices and warehousing, numerous surface parking lots, and several vacant structures. Many of these structures are unsuited to their current uses because of age obsolescence and physical deterioration.

Montana’s Urban Renewal Law (Montana Code Annotated Title 7, Chapter 15, Parts 42 and 43) provides the authority to declare the existence of blighted areas and to target

them for improvements. “Blighted area” is defined in Section 7-15-4206(2), M.C.A., as follows:

[A]n area that is conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency, and crime; substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the city or its environs; retards the provision of housing accommodations; or constitutes an economic or social liability or is detrimental or constitutes a menace to the public health, safety, welfare, and morals in its present condition and use, by reason of:

- (a) the substantial physical dilapidation; deterioration; defective construction, material, and arrangement; or age obsolescence of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential;*
- (b) inadequate provision for ventilation, light, proper sanitary facilities, or open spaces as determined by competent appraisers on the basis of an examination of the building standards of the municipality;*
- (c) inappropriate or mixed uses of land or buildings;*
- (d) high density of population and overcrowding;*
- (e) defective or inadequate street layout;*
- (f) faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility, or usefulness;*
- (g) excessive land coverage;*
- (h) unsanitary or unsafe conditions;*
- (i) deterioration of site;*
- (j) diversity of ownership;*
- (k) tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land;*
- (l) defective or unusual conditions of title;*
- (m) improper subdivision or obsolete platting;*
- (n) the existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes; or*
- (o) any combination of the factors listed in this subsection (2).*

The land being added to the Plan area includes 405 (Exhibit A) property tax codes plus a segment of centrally assessed BN Railroad property. The complete, expanded Urban Renewal Area will have 481 property tax codes plus the segment of BN Railroad property. Within that total area, and as noted in the 2006 approved Urban Renewal Plan, there are many “target areas” that should be immediately considered for redevelopment. The properties on N. Broadway between 4th Avenue North and 6th Avenue North will need additional parking to facilitate the construction of a Stockman Bank facility. The area adjacent to the Northern Hotel on North Broadway is in need of parking due to the closure of the privately owned parking structure in that area due to unsafe and blighted conditions of the structure. The area east of the Yellowstone County Courthouse Lawn is

targeted for a new federal courthouse and will need additional parking and green spaces. The area between the new MET transit facility on N. 25th Street and to the east boundary of the East Billings Urban Renewal Area (N. 22nd Street) is in need of redevelopment that could include workforce housing and parking. The status of the Battin Federal Courthouse is still unclear. The facility is contaminated with asbestos and is destined to become vacant with the completion of a new federal courthouse and office building. This vacancy will present a redevelopment opportunity in the near future. The area surrounding City of Billings Park IV contains many surface parking lots that could be developed if Park IV is sold to a private developer. This area lacks high-rise housing with mixed use occupancy on the first floor. The future use of the Lincoln Center is unclear and it could be a redevelopment opportunity if the school district ceases its administrative and continuing education functions in the building. The properties on 1st Ave. S. and Minnesota Avenue are not currently in a Historic District and values remain stagnant as compared to the Montana Avenue area. The redevelopment of the south side of the railroad tracks has not kept up with the redevelopment north of the tracks and should be a target area. Several properties located between Montana Avenue and 1st Avenue North are severely underutilized and in need of redevelopment. Without attention to some of this blight, over time, the value of the Montana Avenue redevelopment will most likely be negatively impacted.

SECTION 5 – DETERMINATION OF BLIGHT

The proposed expansion area of the North 27th Street District contains a number of underdeveloped properties. The Council previously determined that the property included in the North 27th Street District was “blighted” within the meaning of the Act in Resolution 05-18276 adopted June 13, 2005 and Resolution 06-18488, adopted September 25, 2006. The Redevelopment Area, including the portion that is to be expanded to form the Expanded North 27th Street District - 2008, was previously determined to be blighted and an appropriate area for an urban renewal project in Resolution No. 12107 dated January 5, 1976. Deficiencies in public and private

properties located in the district lead to a determination that the area continues to be blighted, as defined by state statute. Specific areas of blight on the site are listed below:

Deficient Structures in Expanded Area

There are several buildings that are over 50 years in age and do not qualify as being historically significant. Many are in poor repair and may contain potentially hazardous asbestos and lead paint.

Deficient Public Facilities in Extended Area

The streets, curbs, gutters and sidewalks in much of the area are in satisfactory repair. However, sewer and water utilities in the area are aging and have required frequent repairs in recent years. Several parking lots generally do not meet code requirements for paving, striping and landscaping. Many of them are cracked and crumbling. The city owned parking ramps within the area, except for Park IV have extensive “waiting lists” and public parking for adjacent office and commercial structures continues to be inadequate. Demand for parking will continue and additional and expanded parking structures will be required to accommodate commercial growth.

Deficient Land Use in Extended Area

In general, the area is under-utilized due to the significant amount of surface parking areas and a large number of single-story structures. The taxable value of this district must be stabilized and encouraged to grow.

SECTION 6 – THE SITE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CITY

As noted, the expanded North 27th Street Urban Renewal Area comprises most of the Central Business District (CBD) of the City of Billings.

SECTION 7 – LEGAL DESCRIPTION

The legal description of the proposed Expanded North 27th Street District – 2008 is as follows:

Beginning at a point at the intersection of the centerlines of 6th Avenue North and North 31st St. proceeding east along the centerline of 6th Ave. North to a point at the intersection of the centerlines of 6th Avenue North and N. 22nd Street proceeding south along the centerline of North 22nd Street, crossing the centrally assessed Burlington Northern Railroad property, to a point at the intersection of South 22nd Street and Minnesota Avenue proceeding west along the centerline of Minnesota Avenue to a point at the intersection of Minnesota Avenue and South 23rd Street proceeding south along the centerline of South 23rd Street to a point at the intersection of South 23rd Street and 1st Avenue South proceeding west along the centerline of 1st Avenue South to a point at the intersection of the centerlines of 1st Avenue South and South 31st Street proceeding north along the centerline of South 31st Street, crossing the centrally assessed Burlington Northern Railroad property, to the starting point at the intersection North 31st Street and 6th Avenue North encompassing all parcels and tax codes therein, all inclusive.

SECTION 8 – PROPERTY DEVELOPERS

New development in the proposed tax increment district will also be accomplished through the implementation of the Downtown Framework Plan. These Projects are described in Section 2 of this plan.

SECTION 9 – PROJECT RELATIONSHIP TO THE FRAMEWORK PLAN

The proposed urban renewal area and expanded tax increment district is located generally in the center of the City and encompasses most of the “districts” as defined by the Billings Framework Plan (“Framework Plan”). One goal of the Framework Plan was to remove barriers to downtown circulation and development created by 4th Avenue North and 6th Avenue North and establish the area between the avenues as both a discreet district and a recognized extension of the CBD, thereby allowing potential ties to the medical corridor and MSU-Billings from the CBD. Generally, the Framework Plan stressed the downtown’s ability to make a positive impact on the entire city. The Framework Plan also recommended a private non-profit organization to assist the City of Billings with the management of the Tax Increment District through an annual work plan and contract. This Expanded N 27th Street District may be managed in a similar manner and could make use of the redevelopment and facilitation established through that management entity.

Framework Plan Recommendation: Housing

The Framework Plan states that housing should be a top priority and that the City should continue to work with builders and developers to encourage downtown housing through various methods. Specifically, the plan states that high-rise housing is to be located in the east transition zone and portions of the north transition zone.

The formation of an expanded tax increment district will help to raise funds that can be used for construction or rehabilitation of public infrastructure necessary to attract and retain housing in the area.

Framework Plan Recommendation: Priorities

The top priorities identified in the Framework Plan include the following:

- Development incentives, including business retention and recruitment
- Housing – demonstration projects
- Streetscape Kit of Parts – expand kit to include Minnesota Avenue
- Events Kit of Parts – Modern and safer traffic control devices may be needed
- Paring configuration adjustments – several one-way streets could be converted to 2-way
- 5th Avenue North Corridor preservation and enhancement

This amendment to the Plan and the urban renewal projects that it contemplates specifically address all six of these priorities.

SECTION 10 – CONFORMANCE TO THE GROWTH POLICY

One of the requirements of Montana’s Urban Renewal Law (Title 7, Chapter 15, Parts 42 and 43) is that the urban renewal plan must conform to the community’s growth policy. The Yellowstone County and City of Billings Growth Policy (“Growth Policy”) refers to and promotes downtown redevelopment in a variety of ways. This amendment to the Plan is consistent with the current Growth Policy.

SECTION 11 – CERTAIN PLAN FEATURES AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

Section 7-15-4217, M.C.A., of the Act requires cities to make certain findings when they adopt an urban renewal plan and approve Urban Renewal Projects. These are addressed below:

1. Most of the District contains no existing dwelling units or housing, and planned projects would not displace any persons from housing. Accordingly, there is no need to have a workable and feasible plan for substitute housing until and unless such a project is developed in the future.
2. This amended Plan conforms to the Growth Policy for the City as a whole and to the Framework Plan.
3. This Modified Plan affords maximum opportunity, consistent with the needs of the City as a whole, for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the Expanded North 27th Street District by private enterprise. It is unreasonable to expect that the district will be remain stabilized and/or redeveloped without substantial public support. Numerous properties within the area are dilapidated. As presently constituted, property in the district is not conducive to any sort of uniform or integrated development and, as presently existing, cannot compete with other areas of the City for substantial developments, particularly areas at the outskirts of the City. Experience has validated the foregoing facts and observations. This amended Plan is intended to facilitate the identification and construction of significant Urban Renewal Projects, which would not be possible without this Plan.
4. A sound and adequate financial program exists for financing projects, which include the sale and issuance by the City of the Bonds in an amount not to exceed the costs of the project, including administration costs and costs of issuance of the Bonds. Any approved Development Project will require commitments of substantial private financing that will provide the primary means for funding construction of the improvements.
5. This Expanded N. 27th Street District - 2008 may be modified at any time by the City Council as necessary to eliminate and prevent the development or spread of blighted areas, and encourage urban rehabilitation. The process for plan

modification shall follow the procedures set forth in 7-15-4212 through 7-15-4219 MCA, with respect to initial adoption of this plan. For purposes of urban renewal district boundary changes only, the notice of public hearing, as described in 7-15-4215 MCA, may be mailed only to those owners whose properties are situated within the area of expansion or contraction of the Urban Renewal District boundaries. In cases where the boundaries are not modified, but the contents of the urban renewal plan are substantially modified, notification shall be mailed to all owners of property within the Urban Renewal District area.

SECTION 12 – TAX INCREMENT

Tax increment financing is necessary to encourage private reinvestment within the District, which will further encourage economic growth in the District and Downtown Billings, create substantial employment opportunities, and increase the tax base of the City and other taxing jurisdictions. The expanded North 27th Street District is hereby established as a tax increment financing urban renewal area within the meaning of the Act, and, in particular, Section 7-15-4282 through 7-15-4293 of the Act. This Section constitutes a tax increment provision within the meaning of the Act. In connection therewith:

1. For the purpose of calculating the incremental taxable value each year for the life of the district, the base taxable value shall be calculated as current base taxable value of the district plus the base taxable value of all real and personal property added to the district by this amended plan and as show in Exhibit B as of **January 1, 2008.**
2. The City is hereby authorized to segregate the tax increment derived in the district and use and deposit such increment into the tax increment fund of the district for use as authorized by the Act and as authorized herein from time to time, including, without limitation, pledging the tax increment to repayment of Bonds.

3. The tax increment received from the district may be used to pay directly costs of an approved Development Project as may from time to time be approved by the Council. The Council also hereby authorizes the use of tax increment in the district to pay debt service on Bonds issued to finance a portion of the costs of these Development Projects, and costs associated with the sale and security of such Bonds in compliance with the Act, subject to any limitations imposed by the Montana Constitution and federal law.
4. The tax increment provision of the district will terminate upon the latter of:
 - a. The fifteenth (15th) year following the original creation of the district; or
 - b. The payment or provision for payment in full or discharge of all Bonds, and the payment of interest thereon, for which the tax increment has been pledged.

After termination of the tax increment provision, all taxes shall continue to be levied upon the actual taxable value of the taxable property in the district, but shall be paid into funds of the taxing bodies levying taxes within the district.

SECTION 13 – CONCLUSIONS

The creation of this expanded North 27th Street Urban Renewal District will have a positive impact on Downtown Billings and no impact on the total taxable value flowing to the taxing entities from the now expired 1975 Urban Renewal District.

Expansion of the North 27th Street District is an essential first-step in completing what may be a number of urban renewal projects. If completed, mixed use projects approved within the first two years could stimulate over \$30 million in new construction, and possibly as much as \$15 million in re-sales and redevelopment. Approximately 500 new employees and new downtown residents could be located on the commercial and upper floors of possible mixed use projects. Thus, expansion of the district, in addition to

further stabilizing the tax base, eliminating blight and providing renaissance to the CBD, will also bring new employees and residents to the CBD.

Mixed use development within the Expanded District ties in favorably with and actually stimulates the remodeling plans that are currently underway for several downtown properties.

Additionally, like any major new development, the anticipated Stockman Bank construction at 4th Avenue North and North Broadway will have a stimulating effect on the surrounding area. Specific examples of this are:

1. It will tie the CBD to the medical corridor located immediately to the north of the development.
2. The Billings Clinic has purchased the Underriner property to the north and west of the Library. The Clinic's plans at this point have not been determined; however, the development proposed in this amended Plan will enhance and encourage future development by this group.
3. The Framework Plan encourages the development of the 5th Avenue North corridor. An enhanced Library, as accomplished by projects described in this Plan, will provide an excellent entrance to this corridor.
4. Future redevelopment and revitalization of structures like the Northern Hotel and the Babcock Theatre Building are enabled by this district.
5. This expanded district may assist with the completion of and continued modernization of City owned downtown parking structures.

In conclusion, expansion of the North 27th Street Urban Renewal District to include the property described in this amended Plan will have a positive effect on the CBD and the City.