



# Candidate Questionnaire City Council & Mayor Races

With more than 1,250 member businesses employing over 47,000 Montanans, the Billings Chamber is committed to remaining the voice of the business community and ensuring a favorable economic, legal, and regulatory climate that encourages prosperity and growth. Our mission is to publicly support policies that will facilitate economic growth in our community and produce positive impacts well into the future. Your answers to this questionnaire will help to educate our membership on your positions and hopefully increase civic engagement between our business community and elected officials. Please refer to the Chamber's Strategic Priorities fact sheet and Public Policy Guide for more information on our positions.

Candidate answers to the following questions will be evaluated and candidates given a letter grade by the Chamber's Local Government Advisory Board, which will be vetted by the Executive Committee, and ultimately approved by the Chamber Board of Directors. The board-approved candidate grades will be published online and mailed to the Chamber's 1,250+ member businesses.

"( Y , N )" questions may be answered as a simple "Y" or "N", and you are welcome to provide additional context which will be taken into account for question grading. Unanswered questions will be given a score of 0/5. Unreturned questionnaires will result in a grade of 'F' for the candidate.

The deadline for returning answers is 5:00 pm, July 14, 2017. Please feel free to contact the Billings Chamber's Business Advocacy Manager, Daniel Brooks ([daniel@billingschamber.com](mailto:daniel@billingschamber.com)), with any questions or clarifications regarding the following questions.

1. Please provide a brief biography detailing your background and including your occupation, job title, employer, and education.
2. The Chamber's top Strategic Priorities (see Strategic Priorities fact sheet at end of questionnaire) are: air service; river to the rims; and local option authority. What do you see is the most important issue related to growing business in Billings and how would you address the issue?
3. The Chamber supports the local option authority, which would simply allow local residents to vote on a local tax on specific goods, for a specified period of time, to be used on specified projects in that community. As a City Council member, or Mayor, would you vote for the City of Billings to support this concept? ( Y , N )
4. The City Council could play an important role in recruiting conferences and meetings to

Billings by providing expanded meeting space. Will you support construction of a convention/conference center, utilizing public money, to bring additional conferences to Billings? ( Y , N )

5. City Council has partnered with Big Sky Economic Development on the thoughtful use of the tax abatement program to support business expansion and recruitment to our community. As a member of Council would you continue this approach to using this important economic development tool? ( Y , N )
6. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) districts are one of local government's effective tools to attract private investment and growth to a declining tax base, raising property values for owners and eventually tax revenue for local government. Will you join the Billings Chamber, Downtown Billings Partnership, and Big Sky Economic Development in defending the responsible use of tax increment financing (TIF)? ( Y , N )
7. Billings International Airport is a municipal enterprise-fund facility that significantly supports our economy. A coalition of community organizations recently attracted American Airlines to Billings, pledging \$600,000 of private funding to augment a \$750,000 federal grant and provide a profit guarantee to the airline. Would you vote to continue this public/private partnership practice of providing airline guarantees to other carriers to expand service? ( Y , N )
8. A recent report by TRIP, a national transportation research group, estimates that congestion costs Billings motorists \$268 per driver, annually. There are a number of ways to decrease congestion such as multi-modal road use (i.e. increasing walkability and bikeability) and increasing roadway connectivity such as with the Inner Belt Loop. If elected, how would you help our businesses by dealing with traffic congestion?
9. Additional regional parks and trails would increase quality of life for current residents, as well as create more community amenities that are attractive to the skilled workforce Billings needs to retain and recruit. Do you support expanding and improving our parks and trails as necessary components of retaining and attracting our workforce? ( Y , N )
10. Billings' success has led to questions and discussion on how to manage increased growth. How would you ensure the city appropriately balances the need for additional government (public safety, services, etc.) without unfairly burdening citizens and businesses (zoning regulations, increasing taxes, etc.) as we address the symptoms of growth?



### Short Term (2017-2018)

#### Air Service

Increase and maintain existing service while improving the airport facility experience.

- a. Work with the airlines and BIL to determine potential growth areas which may include: direct new service to San Francisco and Boise; or expanded year-round service to Chicago.
- b. Support the airport's \$45 million remodel to create a stronger aesthetic welcome and touch points throughout the airport while improving back of house operations. First impressions matter.
- c. Continue local and regional marketing campaigns to include print, out-of-home, digital and web to encourage regional travelers to drive/fly BIL rather than other regional airports and encourage more frequent trips; and inform residents on the importance of our airport. Support American Airlines' new DFW service and encourage increased Chicago service with United through marketing efforts.

#### River to the Rims

Build and connect the assets that support our community's most notable resource: ***"River to the Rims."*** Develop and connect the numerous existing and potential attractions along the River to the Rims corridor (Zimmerman Park, Skyline Trail, Swords Rimrock Park, Yellowstone Kelly Interpretive Site, Boothill Cemetery, Metra, trail along the river, Coulson Park, Mystic Park, Western Sugar site, Clarks Crossing, Riverfront Park). Improves our community's "front door."

- a. Yellowstone Kelly Interpretive Site: Complete the site and further promote the "Yellowstone Kelly Brand." Develop a "Friends of Swords Rimrock Park" nonprofit to vision the entire park while maintain existing amenities.
- b. Trails: Make connections to the Marathon Loop to complete the vision and increase number of off road paved trail miles. Develop a Western Sugar easement development committee; support TrailNet in their fundraising efforts for Skyline Trail.
- c. Support the Coulson Park Master Plan process and the Skyline Trail fundraising efforts.

#### Elections Have Consequences

Local, state and federal elections impact each of our community priorities and significantly impacts each of our business members. To accomplish great things, Billings needs leaders in influential positions willing to respectfully and unapologetically support Billings. We launched our new Business Advocacy structure which includes a more active role by the Chamber in creating awareness of candidates with a pro-business and pro-Billings agenda.

#### Local Option Authority

Local voters should have the authority to enact a local option tax that will reduce property tax while furthering our community's quality of life initiatives. The state legislature must authorize that local authority. This year will build upon successful education and coalition efforts from the last session in preparation for bill drafts in the 2019 legislative session. Incremental, regularly measured successes include: updating the local option strategy and including a timeline working backwards from the next session; small educational programs featuring pros and cons; local coalition development; educational materials produced; support from the business community in small and large, east and west cities.

## Long Term (2017-2020)

### **Workforce**

With approximately 3% unemployment in Billings, businesses struggle to find qualified workers. BillingsWorks is a community leadership group charged with growing and improving the talent pool. With talent attraction campaigns launched, we will continue to partner to create awareness and usage of this platform.

### **Convention Center**

Improve meeting and convention space to grow current events and attendees. Without new space 25% of current meetings and events will be lost impacting our \$400 million tourism economy. Examine all funding opportunities with an emphasis on public/private partnerships.