

MINUTES OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF LAUREL

February 10, 2026

A regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, was held in the Council Chambers and called to order by Council President Tom Canape at 6:30 p.m. on February 10, 2026.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Thomas Canape	Sara Naylor
Brent Edgmond	Jessica Banks
Casey Wheeler	Irv Wilke
Richard Klose	Jodi Mackay

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHER STAFF PRESENT:

Michele, Braukmann, Civil City Attorney
Britney Harakal, Administrative Assistant
Kelly Strecker, Clerk/Treasurer
Kurt Markegard, CAO

Council President Canape led the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag.

MINUTES:

Council noted an error in the minutes that indicated that past Council Members were present.

Motion by Council Member Banks to table the minutes of the regular meeting of January 27, 2026, to be revised and presented at the next Council Meeting, seconded by Council Member Mackay. There was no public comment or Council discussion. A roll call vote was taken on the motion. All eight Council Members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

CORRESPONDENCE:

- Hurd Letter of Resignation from Cemetery Commission.
- County Correspondence Appointing Mike Waters to the Laurel City County Planning.
- Police Monthly Report - January 2026
- Fire Monthly Report - December 2025.
- FY27 CDS Application Correspondence

COUNCIL DISCLOSURE OF EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS:

City Attorney Braukmann read the attached public comments into the record.

Council Member Mackay disclosed the attached communications.

Council Member Banks stated she received a phone call from a constituent expressing their concern and asking when the Council would be voting on the annexation. She stated that she responded that she did not know, as annexation had not yet been requested. She did let them know that the zoning was still residential.

PUBLIC HEARING: None.

CONSENT ITEMS:

- **Claims entered through February 6, 2026.**
A complete listing of the claims and their amounts is on file in the Clerk/Treasurer's Office.
- **Approval of Payroll Register for PPE 2/1/2026 totaling \$274,962.29.**

The Council President asked if there was any separation of consent items. There was none.

Motion by Council Member Klose to approve the consent items as presented, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or Council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight Council Members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

CEREMONIAL CALENDAR: None.

REPORTS OF BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS:

- Budget/Finance Committee Minutes of January 13, 2026.
- Library Board Minutes of September 9, 2025.
- Library Board Minutes of October 14, 2025.
- Library Board Minutes of November 11, 2025.
- Laurel Airport Authority Minutes of January 20, 2026.
- Emergency Services Committee Minutes of January 26, 2026.
- Laurel Urban Renewal Agency Minutes of December 22, 2025.
- Laurel Urban Renewal Agency Minutes of January 12, 2026.
- Laurel Urban Renewal Agency Minutes of January 26, 2026.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION (THREE-MINUTE LIMIT):

Juanita Bear, 1113 West 4th Street, Laurel, Montana. I invite each of you here to understand that we appreciate the hard work you are doing. I invite each one of you here to build trust with the community members that you serve. I invite you to oppose the mental health forensic prison, and I do oppose that moving forward. Every culture through history has had a code of treating others how you want to be treated. You have the amazing responsibility as public servants, and we thank you for your service. You have the amazing responsibility as public servants to either fulfill your responsibility of serving those who elected you or breaking trust with those who elected you. I have worked in the mental and behavioral health field with children at Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch, and I would be willing to obtain special training to be part of the prison ministry if the prison were located in a different position. Can you really move this forward? When those you serve are opposed to it. So I thank you, Sara Naylor. I thank you, Jessica Banks. I thank you, Irving Wilkie. I thank you, Jodi MackKay. And I'm sorry my eyesight is not good; I thank you, Tom Canapy, and the attorney, and Kelly, and Kurt Markegard, and Britney, and Richard, and Casey and Brent, I thank you for your service as public servants. I invite you to build trust with the community members who elected you. I oppose the forensic mental health prison. And again, I'm just repeating myself for emphasis, every culture has had the code of treat others how you want to be treated. When you have the entire community or the majority community against this? How can you move it forward? Again, working in the mental health field as I have, I want to do what is right, and I would be willing to get special training to be part of a prison ministry, not where it's located. The community is against it. As public servants, will you really be serving our community by moving this forward? So I know it's a hard, hard situation that you are in. However, I believe that you guys have the character to do the right thing for the community, which is opposing this facility. Thank you.

Julie Jones, 1201 West 4th Street. Mayor Waggoner, who's not here, and the members of the Laurel City Council, thank you for your service. I understand completely what you're going through. I've actually served on the town council and school board in Fromberg years ago, and I was on county planning in Carbon County. So I am, and I actually years ago, work for the Laurel City as a consultant for housing in this one Chuck Rogers was Mayor that was decades ago anyway I'm I'm here because the residents of Laurel are watching the development of the proposed forensic mental health facility with deep concern I'm not here to talk about safety or location I'm here to talk to you you took to sit on this board. When you took your seat, you solemnly swore to faithfully execute the duties of your office. In the context of this facility, a project coordinated by the Mayor, the planning director, and the Board of Investments, the word faithfully is under a microscope. We are asking you today to remember that your authority doesn't come from the State Board; it comes from the people of this City and the surrounding community. We ask you to look at this project, the lens of that oath, and ask yourselves, is this truly a faithful representation of the people of Laurel? Finally, I want to address the procedural crossroads currently before you. You are being asked to amend the City's growth policy and potentially approve the annexation of the land. These are not mere administrative box-checking exercises. They are the most powerful tools you have to shape the future of Laurel. I urge you to take a clear public stance on the suitability of this facility now before you move forward with these changes. Once you rewrite the City's roadmap and expand the borders to accommodate this project, the momentum of the machine often becomes unstoppable. Your oath to preserve and protect applies to the City's boundaries in the long-term vision. Do not change the laws to fit a project that has not yet earned the trust of the community. Use your authority today to ensure that the growth policy reflects



the people's will, not the board of the investments agenda. Don't wait until the ink is dry to decide if this is right for Laurel. Thank you again for your service, and please say no to this project.

Britney Hunter 2604 Willowwood. I'm coming to you as one of your school board trustees, so I also took that oath, and it was a good from Julie, and I will remind you, but I want to put this in the record. On January 27th of 2026, the Laurel Public School Board of Trustees and Superintendent Matt Toricks formally announced their unified opposition to the state of Montana's proposed development of a forensic detention facility within the Laurel Public School District. The board's opposition is basically primarily on the safety and well-being of the students in public schools. The planned state facilities proposed property would be within 500 yards of the Laurel Elementary School. I don't care who tells you where the property boundary goes; it's still within the vicinity of 500 yards. Where our youngest and most vulnerable students are educated, when they are outside playing, and somebody tells you that there is somebody who's escaped, and nobody can tell you it can't because and our children are out, and they are the most vulnerable. How are we gonna get them in? Think of that. The safety of our students is our highest priority from our Superintendent Mr. Torix. The building of the forensic detention facility is in such closely proximity to our elementary school, and it's not supported by the board on the grounds of safety for the students we serve. The board of trustees discussion regarding this proposed state facility during the regular Meeting on January 26th of 2026. Following this discussion, the board confirmed that no state officials have contacted the district regarding how this facility would impact the student body of Laurel Schools. Laurel Public Schools serves the Laurel School community and is dedicated to providing a safe and high-quality educational environment for all students. The Laurel Board of Trustees does not feel the development of the forensic detention facility within such close proximity to our schools meets this obligation. This is also signed by Chris LaRache, our board chair, and Matt Torix, our superintendent. I also want to give some history. When we were trying to attempt to build our intermediate school, we had one individual trying to consistently stop us, because we were in the as well, and we wanted to annex into the City to be part of the community with that new facility. And we were constantly being roadblocked by one individual in this room, and he now has a new title. And he also took an oath. So we want to push away a school, but then we're going to vote for a forensic facility. Thank you.

Shawna Hopper, 504 Roundhouse. Each council member has been given a couple of letters as well as verified time. This is work that we have done for the City on behalf of all residents. February 10th, Laurel City Councilor, Mayor Dave Wagner, CAO Kurt Markeygard, City Attorney Brockman, Clerk-Treasurer Kelly Strecker, and Administrative Assistant Britney Harakal. I was going to send this by email. However, after last week's workshop, I wanted to be able to look each and every one of you in the eye as I read this. The pure disappointment, disgust, embarrassment, and astonishment I felt witnessing the conduct of Mayor Wagner and CAO Markeygard through the last six months and last week's workshop is unacceptable and should not be allowed. Our current leadership is in, our current leadership is in complete disarray and reflects poorly on our entire community. It is quite apparent these two have purposefully left City Council and the City Attorney out of many discussions and opportunities to learn about the Montana State Forensic Facility or prison, as well as many other decisions, discussions, and pertinent to the well-being of our town. Last week, CAO Markeygard stated that he didn't know what type of facility it was. He was late to the tour, didn't have the QR code, and he did not allow our City Council to be there and represent us. He also fails to respond to emails from both city employees and community members about many different issues. Communication is essential in any job, especially in city government. Last week, he also stated he had to take two days off the previous week and then informed everybody that he was taking another two days off. I also know of a specific incident last year where a resident was needing responses from him about the building, and he was gone for approximately three weeks. On November 28th, via text message to Cheryl Hill and myself, and we questioned the Mayor about the forensic hospital when we saw it on City, on Q2. His response was, I just got out of the hospital. I have prostate cancer. They removed part of my prostate. The news just called me, and I had no idea. I just heard about it an hour ago. It is all on the state. Last I heard, it was from in Mile City. They mentioned looking into the woods property, going through the annexation process. However, through the provided timeline, you will see that on August 22nd, 2025, the CAO sent on behalf of the Mayor. The Mayor and CAO are out of office, don't respond, and have no idea what anything.

Maggie Hanson, 1000 Longview Road, gave her three minutes to Ms. Hopper.

Ms. Hopper continued, No idea what anything, and they are leaving the city council, city attorney, and citizens of Laurel out of everything. So who exactly is running our City? With the recent actions of the Mayor towards city attorney Brockman, we are adding a public records request for all public records with any past or pertinent complaints from all city staff, city council members, all contract personnel, former and existing city court judges against the Mayor for his treatment. As of today, the



only public records released have been emails between Kurt and a BOI, Dan Villa, and the Department of Montana Department of Health Human Services, Charlie Barretton, with only one CC to the city attorney and one response from the Mayor. There are still many missing requests. So again, I present public records requests for all emails, phone logs, text messages, social media posts regarding any and all discussions regarding the Montana Forensic Prison, water lines, zoning between any of the following. Kurt Markeygard, Dave Wagner, BOI, Department of Health, and Dick Anderson Construction, Project Manager, Norm Miller, Loves Gas Station, Project Manager from 5-1 to present. Be advised that As of this request and many before this, deletion or editing of comments and messages would be spoliation of the communications protected by MCA-2-2-1003. I do understand that this is a process, and it may take time. However, the continued lack of transparency and communication is unacceptable. It is my, Thank you very much.

Elizabeth Gilg, 1200 Cedar Crest Dr, Great to be back this week. The Laurel-Cared Committee has composed a letter of request pertaining to an investigation of the conduct of Kurt and the Mayor. Shawna Hopper is going to read a letter on our behalf.

Shawna Hopper, read the attached letter into the record.

Steve Krum, 249 24th Avenue W, I guess first I'd like to say I hope and believe you deserve a public apology right here as well. And I think most of us do that, so I think you get it. Second, I disagree with Councilperson Mackay on the Senator from Big Timber because he led off his article with something that said something like our anxiety and fears were not real because he knows better that this thing is safe. He's done all this stuff about traveling the state, going through all these facilities, but in my experience, and all the years that I've been working different jobs. Anytime the guy that comes around with the paycheck or the guy that comes around and can hire or fire you, you polish up your facility. You see the best of it, not the worst of it. I would trust more on the newspapers around there. The people that actually work there, not just not solely the management, as to how safe and that the fact is, these facilities do fail sometimes, and things happen. That you don't want. So I disagree that he would be the guy to listen to for your real strong decision on whether or not that belongs here. And then secondly, when you look at your growth policy, that is supposed to be your growth direction. It is probably your most reasonable financial direction to grow as far as residential. Everything that way is either trailer court, and you hit the rims, everything. That way, the county's already expanded. You can't hardly go over the top right now because Kurt says it's too expensive to go up to the water. That's the way to go. And if you put that facility over there, that's gone. Then the City's got nothing. You got the railroad, the refinery, you got a truck stop. Rumor is there's another residential area going to go over there, but that's down the road. But you've really blocked yourself on growth. So you really should think about it and then look hard at your growth policy. Because that's where it should be going, not this facility. And then the other thing this gentleman said was that these facilities were so great, they wouldn't impact your growth or anything like that. But look at the county jail. Look at all the jails elsewhere, with some of the other ones. But nobody's building around those facilities. Nobody's building new residential areas there. And they're not going to do it here either. Nobody's going to want to build or lived there, so you really hurt yourself when you allow that to happen. And then the last thing, as far as jobs, two years ago, three years ago, when I was in here before, the City had trouble getting a police officer. And you take a look now, the hospitals, all those places, they are having trouble keeping nurses, stuff like that. As your help turns over and over, over and over. Do you keep getting the best people each time? Probably not. So thank you.

Jennifer Lorenz. I live at 916 Avenue in Laurel, Montana, obviously. I am mainly because I just want you to know I'm a small business owner. I also own a nonprofit, and more importantly, I'm a veteran, and I'm a stickler for rules and regulations. And through this whole disaster that's happening right now, I really feel that a lot of this could have been completely and totally avoided if certain individuals would have paid attention to what the Charter says—the City of Laurel charter. And starting like, because all of this, I mean, people are getting threatened, people are feeling safe because the choices you and the men the Mayor made on how to handle this situation and I hope you feel the full responsibility of the safety of these guys in front of you because they're in trouble and they're dealing with crap outside of this thing because of your actions and that hurts my heart that we have people in the community that would threaten you and and talk down to you and everything else like that when what I see is not a Your fault. Anyways, I just wanted to remind everybody that the mayor and everything like if you look at section and 3.04 duties, the Mayor shall administrator or administer affairs of the local government shall carry out policies established by the council item seven or eight or nine anyways shall execute contracts, et cetera, approval of the Council there everything in there a point or points to the fact that you guys have the power over the Mayor and over the CAO and over their actions and what they do and what they represent and I just want to encourage you to take that power back it has been unfairly taken from you and you guys are getting the brunt of it I think it is



completely and totally unfair and you are owed a huge but also I wanted to point out that maybe some of you don't know but the City Council can also recall the Mayor on their own without us even having to submit a petition with at section you look at the Charter it says the Mayor may be removed by a City Council vote of six to eight has he respected you has he treated you with dignity has he treated our city employees with dignity calling out ice on the poor guy that does nothing but serve our community and is here as a legal Canadian immigrant is that the guy that you guys want representing us like to me it's an embarrassment you deserve better malam but anyways and also I want you to know that the CAO position There may be a CAO. There doesn't have to be. Thank you.

Brian Lubinski, 320 7th Avenue. You know, there's a couple of things last time I said I'm going to talk to you like I talk to my kids because they're still learning. You obviously are not. Had any of us done what you did in our normal day-to-day jobs, we would have been fired, put on leave, reprimanded, demoted, or something to that extent. So I don't see why it's any different, why you shouldn't be demoted, reprimanded, or removed from the position. I kindly ask that you just step and save everybody the time. Your constant lies have obviously put a lot of people in danger. There's no getting around it. You're not a child anymore. There's consequences for actions, and your actions have shown that there is no trust whatsoever in both the Mayor and yourself. So I would kindly ask that you save everybody here the time and just resign.

Jeremy Loyal, 1035 9th Avenue. I've lived here for years, grew up in Park City. So, you know, this is home area for me. I have never come to a city council Meeting before. I watched the complete boring one last week. It was just mind-numbing. But it forces me to come here because I don't want this in my community. I don't know if you as council members can put out a statement to the state saying we as the Council and the City don't want it I don't know if you can do that or not but if you can you should because from what I've heard there's been one positive from somebody in Big Timber and one other from somebody in the community possibly but everything else I've heard personally talked to there's no positive viewings of this facility from anybody I don't know you from Adam but I've talked to people in the community that have been here for years and there's question about your capabilities. Sorry, but that's just what it is out there. Um, I don't like saying that, but that's just, I asked cause I don't know you, never dealt with you. And so I talked to people around here, and there's concern. Um, my wife works at the school. My child goes to the school over on Laurel Elementary. I don't want it around them. They say it's 500 plus to where they'd build the facility, but then you're going to build back. What else is going to go there? Because 114 acres, they're not just going to stop at 32 beds. It'll get bigger and bigger and bigger. And once they get annexation, if you let them have that, it's just going to grow uncontrolled. I guess I'd like to know where you guys stand as council members on this. I don't know if you can say that right now or not, but I would like to. I mean, that's kind of where are you standing? What's your position? What's your thoughts? It's great that you can hear from us, but we'd like to know what you guys are thinking. I would like to know what you're thinking. So that was kind of my thoughts off the top of my head. Thank you very much.

Wayne Fjare, I live at 1008 Duval. I work for the school district, and although I accept and follow what they believe in this, I'm serious speaking for myself. I've been here for six and a half years. When I moved here, I went to, and I've become somewhat a locomotive. I'm proud, very proud to be part of this City. And I look at all these people here, and I'm proud of them. And it makes me feel good that I have their support because I do not support the location of this facility. This facility I have a home here. I don't want the cost of it to go down. I'm worried about the safety of our kids. I get to play with those kids every day, walk down the hallway when our kids are there. And I want the safety for them. And that should be the responsibility of you. It's taken on the responsibility of all these people, and I'm very, very proud to be a member of this community.

Gary Waddell, I live at 1241 Elkhorn Drive, a country subdivision just east of Laurel. And I'm a proud father of a daughter. That has taken a lot of time out of her career, being a grandmother and a mother, to bring this to light. I just want to add a couple of comments. Last week, Mr. Markeygard, you said you've never been to the facilities in Warm Springs and Galen. Is that correct? I think that's correct. If I'm wrong, I'm wrong. But I haven't been there either. Because when you go by it, you can see it on the interstate. There's nothing there but those hospitals. Has anybody in here talked to any of the medical people, professionals that have worked in that hospital, either one of them? I bet you none of them. I have. There are traveling nurses and doctors. We have them in Billings at both hospitals. They have told me it's the worst-run facility they've ever worked in. And now we're trying to bring one here. Let them fix what we have up there. And from Big Timber, I did a lot, a lot of spot inspections when I was working. You notify people. The only time you see what it really is is when you stop in unexpected. So with that, I hope everybody in this room will do their due diligence. Look on the Montana website. Those two facilities lost federal government funding. Now we want to bring it here. No, thank you.



Amber Zahn. I live at 1224 4th Street. I, for a second week in a row, am deviating from what I had planned to say. I want to bring to you the emotional side of it. And I'm actually very proud and thankful for everything that's been said tonight. I come from Billings. I'm a firm believer in mental health. I myself seek mental health, and it is incredibly beneficial. Everybody should do it. It's a thing. Do it. My opposition to this location, though, is because of what it actually is. There's so many soft words around it. It's a hardened facility. It's XYZ. Busy, call it what it is. I came from Billings, though. I fostered for two years. I took all the Keep Kids Safe courses and everything. We, as parents as caregivers, we keep our kids safe. We keep them healthy. We want them to be comfortable. We want them to live big, beautiful lives. This is quite literally my backyard, so yes, I have a lot of skin in the game, and I apologize for always bringing that up; I have two children, who they are what I'm doing. They are my life. Their life is my biggest thing. And they do not need to grow up next to this. Their school doesn't need to grow up next to this. These other kids do not need to grow up next to this. This is so recklessly thought out. And I pray every day that we do have better thought processes going forward in it. You guys hear a lot, and I'm thankful for you. Please, I hope we make the right decision for our community.

SCHEDULED MATTERS:

- **Resolution No. R26-05: A Resolution Of The City Council Of The City Of Laurel, Montana Amending Resolution No. 25-75 And Affirming Continuation Of Services Under The Managed Service Agreement For Renamed Systems Technology Consultants.**

Motion by Council Member Mackay to approve Resolution No. R26-05, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or Council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight Council Members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

- **Resolution No. R26-06: A Resolution Of The City Council Approving A Transportation Coordination Plan For The City Of Laurel Transit.**

Motion by Council Member Wheeler to approve Resolution No. R26-06, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or Council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight Council Members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA: None.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS (ONE-MINUTE LIMIT): None.

COUNCIL DISCUSSION: None.

MAYOR UPDATES:

Council was asked if they would like to attend training from the Local Government Center at the Billings offering or schedule their own. Council noted that they would like their own scheduled. Council Members who had attended previous trainings found these sessions very valuable.

UNSCHEDULED MATTERS:

Council Member Mackay asked if there had been any more communications on the Mayor's request for Attorney Braukmann to resign and if she intends to do so.

Attorney Braukmann clarified that she had not had any further communications from the Mayor on his request for her resignation, and it is not her intention to do so.

Council questioned if they would be going into a Closed Executive Session now to discuss the litigation issues. Council President Canape stated he felt it was appropriate to wait until the Mayor returned.

Council Member Naylor asked what direction, if any, did the Mayor personally give staff regarding pursuing Laurel as a site and when? Including specific dates and actions. How many public records requests has the City received relating to the mental health facility to date, and how many have been completed? Is there an administrative plan to proactively post frequently released documents so the public can access information without submitting individual records requests?



It was clarified that the released documents are located on the City's website.

It was further questioned if all the documents were located on the website. It was further clarified that any documents that had been given to the Council Administrative Assistant had been placed on the website.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Council Member Edgmond to adjourn the Council meeting, seconded by Council Member Wilke. There was no public comment or Council discussion. A vote was taken on the motion. All eight Council Members present voted aye. Motion carried 8-0.

There being no further business to come before the Council at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:36 p.m.


Britney Harakat, Administrative Assistant

^{Mayor - K5}
Approved by the ~~Council President~~ and passed by the City Council of the City of Laurel, Montana, this 14th day of April, 2026.


Dave Waggoner, ~~Council President~~
Mayor - K5

Attest:


Kelly Streckey, Clerk/Treasurer



Print Name	Address
Sheri Phillips	1043 Montana Ave. Lr1
Laura Kirschenmann	939 W. 4th St. Lr1
Christy Ford	1009 2nd Ave
Breanna Nordella	815 7th Ave
Kathleen Linger	415 Fairway 2nd Dr.
Drene Wambeck	311 2nd Ave
Elizabeth Gilg	1200 Cedar Crest
Shirley Johnson	1224 W 4th St
Bryan Letcher	1224 W 4th St

Print Name	Address
Norma Rae Adickes	102 8 th Ave #B
Bonnie Stos	1334 E. Newbyrd Laurel
Sally Stinson	1129 12 th Ave
Mindy & Debbie Patton	419 8 th Ave
Sean Mark	311 2nd Ave
Jacob Schreiner	201 1 st Ave
Maggie Thompson	1000 Longview Rd Laurel Mt 59044
Brian Lesinski	320 7 th Ave

Print Name	Address
Danielle Kopp	318 W. 13th St. Laurel
Neta Bare	1113 W. 9th St. Laurel
MARUE FJARE	1008 BUVALS LAUREL
Kalli Wescott	1035 Coyote Ridge Rd. S Laurel
Rinhami Hunter	2604 LOMWOOD TRAIL
Mitch Wadell	1301 W. Maryland
Cheng Hill	8 709 W. 1st Street.

Print Name	Address
Julia Jones	1201 West 4th St, Laurel
Gary Rym Shael Bookbinder	1241 Eithers Dr Laurel 1
Justin KAP	318 W 13th St Laurel 1
Shelley White	512 Wagoning Ave Laurel Mt
Randall Byre	1113 W 4th Street Laurel
Dabyferontale	21633 Meadows Dr Laurel
Jennifer Lorenz	916 5th Ave Laurel
Shawna Hopper	564 Roundhouse

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4A
Sent: Monday, February 9, 2026 6:36 AM
To: Brittney Harakal
Cc: Michele Braukmann
Subject: FW: Memo concerning questions about the forensic health facility
Attachments: Good evening Council members.docx

From: John Esp <johnespforsenate@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 8, 2026 10:08 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Kurt Markegard <kmarkegard@laurel.mt.gov>; Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; john esp <johnesp2001@yahoo.com>
Subject: Memo concerning questions about the forensic health facility

Hello all, Attached is a Memo that may shed some light to some of the questions you are being asked. I hope you will find it constructive. If you can't open the Word Document, I would be happy to paste it in the body of an email. Thank you for your consideration. John Esp

Memo:

2/7/2026

From: John Esp, Box 1024, Big Timber, Montana
To: The Mayor and City Council of Laurel Montana.

Mr. Mayor and City Council members, Quick background information on me; I have worked to address the shortcomings in the Mental health treatment systems before I first came to the legislature in 2001. I tell you this to frame my perspective on an issue I have dealt with, sometimes personally, for the last 40 years. What I have written in bold print throughout this memo is my informed opinion, albeit my opinion only. It's my attempt to answer to some of the questions your constituents and some nearby county residents are asking you. I do this based on my experience of trying to build new beds, and upgrade the State's inadequate and undersized infrastructure during my legislative tenure. We have never had enough money to meet all the needs. That shouldn't keep us from trying.

The BOI and the state itself are not being transparent.

To be clear, the Legislature and Executive branch has given the task of building this facility to the BOI. The Department still has some responsibility to provide advice to the BOI on the actual building design, and the requirements for the safety of people, both inside and outside of the facility. The land will be owned and managed by the BOI for the benefit of State taxpayers.

Some of you, as community leaders, have been part of preliminary plat reviews, and other actions reviewing subdivisions, and/or variance requests from your citizens. Maybe some of you haven't yet. Those that have dealt with applications or requests already know that until you see an actual request or recommendation from a planning board or variance board, it is not prudent to speculate on the contents thereof. As the BOI develops a plan, they may have underlying priorities that dictate the direction in which they would like to proceed, but until they complete an application and submit it to the appropriate local government entity, speculation and premature information on their part is also not wise. Your citizens will have an opportunity at the time an application is formally made to comment on that proposal at a noticed recorded public meeting of a local government entity.

How much did the land sell for?

In my experience, it is not permissible to disclose terms of a buy-sell agreement. Especially if contains contingencies. Even the final sales terms as reported to the Department of Revenue are kept confidential by the Department of Revenue, and used only for property tax appraisal purposes. The final sales price of a transaction brokered by a realtor becomes proprietary information to the multiple listing service (MLS) they belong to.

Why do you need 114 acres for 32 beds?

My guess is that though we may not have needed it, it will benefit Laurel in that it provides a buffer to the community and the school, and... it could have been the preference of the landowner to sell all it or none of it.

Will it be used for future expansion of prisons for the "criminally insane", or for "the worst of the worst", or for "murderers and rapists"?

Those choices of words are certainly unfortunate and in my view, inaccurate hyperbole. Mental illness can affect any one of us, or any one family at any given time. There but for the Grace of God go you or I. Most of the clients of the facility are there to be evaluated to see if they have the capacity to stand trial in answer to the charges against them. If they do not have capacity, the staff works with them to recover from their illness to the point they can participate in their own defense. The vast majority of those held in this proposed facility have not been convicted of anything yet. And nearly all will be discharged back to the jail that they were brought to the facility from. Nearly every state in the US is building capacity into their forensic health system, so yes if current trends continue, at some point in the future, Montana will need more forensic beds. It's hard to predict where that demand will be, or where those beds may be located.

Will the state will pay for expanded water infrastructure.

If the lot and/or lots are annexed into the city, as per city regulations and planning requirements, the Board of Investments will pay the appropriate fees appurtenant to their lots and the infrastructure thereon. They will pay all the ongoing fees and assessments that the city normally charges to their customers.

Will Warm Springs close and move to Laurel?

Given the fact that you, the State taxpayers just spent tens of millions of dollars upgrading the main hospital, and by the way, it is a beautiful, and now a much safer facility, no. We are currently in the process of spending another 20 million to repurpose another building for patient care on that campus. As hard as it was to get the money to rehab those buildings at the Springs, it would be impossible to conceive of a scenario in which the legislature appropriates another half a billion dollars-plus to move the operation here to Laurel. It simply isn't going to happen. Western Montana legislators, local leaders, and County law enforcement in western Montana, appreciate the proximity of nearby mental health services. They also appreciate the economic impacts that the high paying union jobs have on their communities.

Does proximity to homes and schools pose safety risk? A Laurel school board member said perception is reality.

Not true. Perception is not reality. Reality, in my mind, is reflected in the community of Billings and it would suggest that the proposed facility near Laurel does not pose an unreasonable safety risk. The Yellowstone County detention Center and the site of the proposed new Yellowstone County Detention Center are across the street from several homes. There are schools and perhaps hundreds of homes within a several block radius of the facility. Those schools are a similar distance from the Yellowstone County facility as is likely to occur from the West Elementary School to the new facility in Laurel. Yellowstone County and the Montana Women's Prison know how to keep the people safely incarcerated that we put in their care. The state has a good record for holding people securely also.

This facility is 450 yards away from a public elementary school.

Mr. Mayor and Council members, this is a fallacy. The State is not going to build a forensic hospital in the North East corner of the 114 acres. To my knowledge, there isn't even a road/street to that part of the lot, nor is there water, sewer, and electrical infrastructure evident on that end of the property. The State is going to build where they have the closest direct access to the Interstate highway. The State is going to build directly adjacent to Highway 10, where public access, and all those utilities are already available. The site near Highway 10 is roughly 1100 yards from the school. By contrast, the two schools in Billings

with the closest proximity to the Yellowstone County Detention Center are 1100 and 1140 yards respectively from that facility's property line. Incidentally, there are 600 to 700 inmates incarcerated there at the current time. This number is in a facility that was originally designed for a capacity of 434 inmates. A significant number of those inmates are waiting for a bed to open up in a forensic facility so they can get their mental health treatment, and a pathway to their day in Court.

Will inmates be driven in the path of elementary school students?

No. The inmates in custody of law enforcement and being transported to this facility will taken directly off the interstate ramp to Highway 10 and then about another block to the Forensic Facility. Once on facility grounds they will be driven into a secure attached garage (sally port), and the garage doors will be closed. They will then be escorted by law enforcement from the sally port through a walkthrough door into the secure part of the facility. They will be allowed nowhere near school children on a path.

This has been specifically asked of me so I will answer it publically: You talk a lot about other prisons being in residential neighborhoods, but would you be ok with this facility in your backyard?

I have the advantage over most of you in that I have toured all the States major institutions multiple times. A month or so ago I was in both the Montana State Prison and the Montana State Hospital. I have spent several hours in the Galen Forensic Facility, and in most major and some smaller County Detention facilities. At no time did I feel unsafe. A little over a month ago, we walked through the High Security Side at MSP in Deer Lodge. I would not have concerns having a forensic mental health facility near me. Keep in mind, most of the folks being treated at Warm Springs will eventually be released to community providers, and the vast majority of those serving time at Deer Lodge will eventually be released to pre-release facilities, probation and parole, and community providers in our cities and towns.

I travelled the state in 2023-2025 time-frame looking in depth at the needs that local governments face when it comes to behavior health issues. We heard from hundreds of citizens, providers, emergency responders, law enforcement

officers, jail commanders, county attorneys, and families whose loved ones struggle with incarceration and behavior health issues.

We can solve the need to serve one problem population with the construction of this facility, but there is much more to do in supporting and caring for your neighbors and friends that deal with behavior health issues, sometimes on a daily basis.

Mr. Mayor, and Council members, I am happy to dialogue further on this issue when appropriate. You, and of course, your neighbors will get an opportunity to weigh in, likely at a public Planning Board meeting, when the final proposal is rolled out there in its entirety for all to see. At that time, none of us will need to speculate about distances, layouts, building design, landscaping, parking lot design, or any other unknowns. The questions you are hearing now will be answered, perhaps not as quickly as you and your constituents would like, but over time they will be answered.

Until then I remain willing to help your constituents find accurate responses to address their questions.

Senator John Esp

Brittney Harakal



Attachments:

City Mayor
Monday, February 2, 2026 1:18 PM
Brittney Harakal
FW: Letter of Gratitude from NAMI Montana
Matt Kuntz Letter to Laurel City Council 30JAN26.pdf

Dave Waggoner
Mayor
City of Laurel, Montana
(406) 628-8456 extension 5501

From: Matt Kuntz <matt@namimt.org>
Sent: Friday, January 30, 2026 12:37 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Letter of Gratitude from NAMI Montana

Dear Laurel City Council,
Please accept the attached letter of appreciation from NAMI Montana for your support for the new forensic mental health facility. Hopefully, it provides some helpful information about the genesis of this effort at the Legislature and how some of the challenges of Yellowstone County were tied to it from the beginning.

NAMI Montana has also been involved with the creation of the Galen facility in 2015. Hopefully some of the things that we've learned over the last ten years with that facility will be helpful as well.

Thank you,
Matt

--

Matt Kuntz JD, MHA
Executive Director
NAMI Montana

NAMI Montana has a resource guide on our website for every county in Montana. Please let us know if anything needs to be updated for your county. <https://namimt.org/montana-county-mental-health-resource-guides/>

NAMI Montana

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Laurel City Council
115 West 1st Street
Laurel, MT 59044

January 30, 2026

Subject: New Forensic Mental Health Facility

Dear Laurel City Council,

NAMI Montana works to improve the lives of Montanans with mental health conditions and their families through support, education, and advocacy. On behalf of NAMI Montana, I want to thank you for your support in building a forensic facility in your community.

As part of our work for Montana families, NAMI Montana tries to improve the interface between mental health conditions and the criminal justice system. It is hard, slow work with progress measured over the course of years.

In 2015, we supported building the forensic facility in Galen. This was in response to the state locking offenders with severe mental health conditions in solitary confinement in Montana State Prison because they couldn't manage their medication needs and the behaviors related to their untreated mental health conditions. It was horrible for everyone involved. There was also a massive lawsuit with the ACLU and Disability Rights Montana. The forensic facility at Galen that came out of that nightmare has been a success for the State of Montana, people served by Galen, and the community that supports it.

NAMI Montana and our allies in the Legislature worked to improve the laws around mental health and the criminal justice system in the last decade. I think we have made some slow progress in that, but Montana's population of people needing forensic mental health services continues to grow. Ten years ago, the issue of a dangerous lack of forensic capacity showed up in the Montana State Prison. This time the issue is starkest in county jails across Montana.

The reality of the dangerous lack of forensic capacity in Montana came to a head for us and members of the Montana Legislature during the hearing on Representative James Reavis's bill to make it possible for mental health evaluations to be offered in jails and prisons. This bill was well thought out, but desperate move to try to do something to address the massive backlog of people in jail in need of psychological evaluations. The testimony from

NAMI Montana
P.O. Box 1021
Helena, MT 59624

jail staff, law enforcement, and county attorneys was incredibly powerful. The message was that Montana's county jails were overwhelmed with people with complex mental health needs who are waiting for some kind of forensic services.

The testimony was excruciating. Jail staff desperately trying to serve prisoners that were well outside their facility's ability to safely serve. County Attorney searching for answers to move cases forward that were bogged down with either evaluations or treatment requirements to ensure they met their burden for "Fitness to Proceed." Everyone knowing that it is just a matter of time before the state and the counties are hit with a massive lawsuit.

No testimony was more powerful than those given by people in the legal system in Yellowstone County. Based upon the magnitude of the issue in Yellowstone County alone, it was clear that the State of Montana needed a new forensic facility. It was also clear that it needed to be able to easily serve Yellowstone County and the counties in Eastern Montana.

While there were a few turns or two in the hallways of the Capital, that was the genesis of the bill that passed the Legislature. NAMI Montana is grateful to the City of Laurel for hosting this facility that is critical to Montana and specifically Yellowstone County.

While I understand that there are always concerns about the placement of public health and justice facilities, NAMI Montana expects that this facility will operate similarly to the successful forensic unit at Galen. The 32-bed patient population will be a relatively small facility, in a well-designed building, with good staffing ratios. Most of the patient stays will be a relatively short duration - for either psychological evaluations or restoration of competency. Patients in need of long-term stays will eventually be transitioned to the group homes on the Montana State Hospital campus in Warm Springs.

As described by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services, most of the jobs in this facility will be for nursing staff and psychiatric assistants. These positions will offer great opportunities for the citizens of Laurel and also help bring in additional healthcare practitioners to Laurel who begin by working at the facility and then later transition to healthcare roles in the community.

NAMI Montana
P.O. Box 1021
Helena, MT 59624

Thank you for supporting this facility that is so essential for Montana families that have been impacted by mental health conditions and the criminal justice system. We really appreciate any help you can provide in moving it forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Kuntz". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Matthew Kuntz JD, MHA
Executive Director

NAMI Montana
matt@namimt.org
(406) 443-7871

NAMI Montana
P.O. Box 1021
Helena, MT 59624

Brittney Harakal



City Mayor
Monday, February 9, 2026 10:03 AM
Brittney Harakal
FW: Propose site for Montana Mental Health Prison

Dave Waggoner
Mayor
City of Laurel, Montana
(406) 628-8456 extension 5501

From: Russ Bray <montanarustynail@yahoo.com>
Sent: Saturday, February 7, 2026 12:56 PM
To: Kurt Markegard <kmarkegard@laurel.mt.gov>
Cc: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; vince.ricci@mtleg.gov
Subject: Propose site for Montana Mental Health Prison

Dear Mr. Markegard,

As a rural resident and former member of the Laurel City/County planning board I am officially announcing my vote against the proposed site for the Montana State Mental Prison. I firmly feel it is a poor location for the safety and comfort of the local residents of Laurel and surrounding community. I understand the convenience for city hookups for the State, but that is an irresponsible consideration for the community under the circumstances.

The State of Montana has land North of town. The City of Laurel and community should NOT have to bare the burden of city hookups for the State.

Therefore, I recommend the proposed sight for the State Mental Prison be scrapped.

Sincerely,

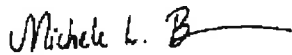
Russell Bray

Laurel, MT. 59044

Brittney Harakal

From: Civil Attorney
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 12:12 AM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kurt Markegard; City Mayor; Kurt Markegard
Subject: FW: Mental heath facility

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann
Civil City Attorney
City of Laurel
Cell Phone: 406.671.4333
civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

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From: Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 6:13 PM
To: Brittney Harakal <bharakal@laurel.mt.gov>
Cc: Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: FW: Mental heath facility



Sara B. Naylor

Council Member - City of Laurel - Ward 1

✦ 406 598 9499
✦ ward1a@laurel.mt.gov

From: Christine Jones <chrisvjones17@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 3, 2026 5:31 PM
To: Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Mental heath facility

Dear Sara Naylor,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed construction of a mental health facility in the city of Laurel.

I am concerned that this facility will block the future growth of our community and place an undue strain on local services. Additionally, there is no tax benefit from the state to offset the many hidden costs that will fall upon local taxpayers. Beyond the financial impact, I believe this facility poses a public safety risk and will negatively affect property values in the area.

I respectfully ask that you do not allow this project to move forward in Laurel. Thank you for your time and for considering the concerns of our community.

Sincerely,

Christine Willis
760 Discus Cir
Billings Mt 59102

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4B
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 9:49 AM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kurt Markegard
Subject: FW: Noise Ordinance
Attachments: Common Features of Small City Noise Ordinances.docx

From: Monna Rae Adickes <monnarae@cbthebrokers.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 8:08 AM
To: Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Noise Ordinance

Hello All,

After the 2.3.2026 Council Meeting, I came home to a neighborhood disturbance.

I call the non-emergency number and an officer went to check on the source of the noise.

I live to the north of the Town & Country building on 8th Ave.

The noise was Town & County hired someone to wash down their concrete in the areas of their gas pumps.

The noise went on past midnight. Today I will be calling the manager Wes Burlingson and let him know that I was not impressed with his neighborly shenanigans.

I have lived in Laurel for over 20 years, and it is time for a noise ordinance.

I have attached a copy of an example, it does not need to be detailed just something that allows the residence of this area to be able to sleep.

I will watch for this to be added to the workshop and council agenda. Please forward a copy of this letter to our city attorney.

Thank you

Monna Rae Adickes – 102 8th Ave Unit B



MONNA RAE ADICKES

Real Estate Broker

☎ 406-860-4284
✉ monnarae@cbthebrokers.com
📍 3135 Meadow View Drive
Billings, MT 59102
🌐 www.mra406.com

 **COLDWELL BANKER** THE BROKERS

Common Features of Small City Noise Ordinances

- **Quiet Hours:** Typically, ordinances prohibit loud noises between 10 p.m. or 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. or 8 a.m.
- **Prohibited Noises:** Common nuisances include loud music, barking dogs, loud partying, and operating heavy equipment or power tools (mowers, blowers) during night hours.
- **Enforcement:** These are often enforced by local police, with violations sometimes treated as civil infractions, misdemeanors, or public nuisances.
- **Exemptions:** Typical exemptions include emergency vehicles, public service construction, and sometimes permitted special events or festivals.
- **Measurement:** While smaller towns may rely on officer discretion ("plainly audible" standard), others may use decibel meters (e.g., 55 dB(A) for residential at night).

Specific Examples of Smaller Local Ordinances

- **Residential Noise:** Loud noises that disturb the peace of a reasonable person, such as amplified music or lawnmowers in residential areas, are prohibited during nighttime hours.
- **Vehicle Idling:** Engines on vehicles weighing over 10,000 pounds are restricted from idling for more than 15 minutes near residential areas.
- **Construction/Repairs:** Construction projects are often subject to specific, louder decibel limits but may be allowed to operate within reasonable, permitted hours.

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Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4B
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 9:59 AM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kurt Markegard
Subject: FW: proposed State Mental Hospital

From: Robert Al7FF <robert.dupuis.affinity@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 27, 2026 2:22 PM
To: Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: RE: proposed State Mental Hospital

In my opinion, this is a very bad idea to locate this facility in our little town of Laurel. My wife and I have been homeowners here since 2017. Laurel isn't perfect, but bringing all the problem people from all over the state here is not the kind of population growth that is beneficial to our community. Surely, there are other options available.....like expanding the existing facility at Warm Springs. Let's not ruin Laurel for the sake of whoever is benefitting from this decision.

Sincerely,
Robert Dupuis

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4B
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 9:59 AM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kurt Markegard
Subject: FW: proposed State Mental Health Facility

-----Original Message-----

From: Robert AI7FF <robert.dupuis.affinity@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, January 27, 2026 2:06 PM
To: Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>
Cc: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Re: proposed State Mental Health Facility

Regarding the initiative to make Laurel MT the home for this Facility is

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 1B
Sent: Friday, February 6, 2026 3:39 PM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kelly Strecker; Kurt Markegard
Subject: Fw: Mental Prison

From: Monna Rae Adickes <monnarae@cbthebrokers.com>
Sent: Friday, February 6, 2026 12:05 PM
To: Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Mental Prison

Dear City Council,

I agree a mental prison is needed on the east side of Montana. BUT not in Laurel at the 114-acre site that has been selected. This site is surrounded by homes, a school and a pristine golf course. This site is less than 500 yards from West / Laurel Elementary, and even closer to the softball fields used by the youth of Laurel.

This mental prison should be located near our two hospitals in Billings or in an industrial park, far away from any homes and especially children. The State-owned land off Buffalo Trail is more suitable than the current selected site.

I sell real estate; our property values will drop!! Look at Warm Springs, no one wants to live there...why?? The staff of this facility will commute from Billings and surrounding communities.

What value does this bring to Laurel, **NONE!**
Our roads, water and sewer are already failing.

Kurt Markegard and Mayor Dave Wagonner want you to vote yes for this annexation but have told my client that because he is currently leasing to a pot shop, his 5 acres will not be considered for annexation.

You as a councilman/woman are our only hope to stop this prison from being built in Laurel.
Please **VOTE NO** to the annexation of this 114-acre parcel owned by Miller Trois LLC

Monna Rae Adickes – 102 8th Ave Unit B Laurel MT



MONNA RAE ADICKES
Real Estate Broker

☎ 406-860-4284
✉ monnarae@cbthebrokers.com
📍 3135 Meadow View Drive
Billings, MT 59102
🌐 www.mra406.com

 **COLDWELL BANKER** THE BROKERS

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4B
Sent: Friday, February 6, 2026 5:43 PM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kurt Markegard
Subject: FW: Laurel's Future

From: Alley M <ameyerhoff96@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 5, 2026 2:56 AM
To: Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Laurel's Future

Richard Klose,

To the Laurel Leadership Team & Laurel Representatives:

I have been a dedicated resident of Laurel since 2019 and owned multiple properties within the community. I also put intentional effort to give back to the community, local business, local community events. I am formally expressing my opposition to the proposed State Mental Forensic Facility Project. I am deeply concerned for its future. The current division caused by the proposed facility project is clear, Laurel Residents say NO. It is evident that the overwhelming majority of residents—I estimate nearly 90%—are opposed to both the location of this facility and the manner in which leadership has handled the process.

My opposition is informed by my professional background in both Healthcare and Public Safety/Security. Viewed through the lens of risk management and community welfare, this project introduces significant liabilities with no tangible benefit to our city or occupants. Placing it near our schools and children poses its own safety risks. 459 Yards from the elementary school. Our utilities/resources will continue to strain with this project and Laurel currently lacks an Emergency Room, and the addition of this facility would place an unsustainable strain on our existing Law Enforcement, Fire Rescue, and Medical Response teams. We are being asked to absorb substantial risk while gaining nothing in return.

Unfortunately, regarding this project's progression I remain unmoved. In fact I'm disheartened. Previously, I placed implicit trust in our leadership; I trusted the process and I trusted the chain of command. However, this experience has made me realize that such trust was misplaced for some time now. It's more concerning that we have a credibility gap in our leadership that should have never been there. The

inconsistencies between written statements and live meetings have been glaring. To be frank, the contradictory narratives presented to the community feel fundamentally disrespectful to the residents who elected you. The faith we placed in the Leadership Team has been lost. We should have been offered a choice, a vote, or at the very least, a transparent conversation. Instead, we have been shut out of the process.

We do not want this facility at the currently set location, nor do we want it connected to our utilities. I urge you to recognize that this location is fundamentally wrong for Laurel and our utilities, resources, and our residents. Please respect the will of the community you represent and reconsider your support for this project. We want accountability. We want transparency. I ask that you advocate for us. Advocate **Laurel's voice in halting the project. Laurel Residents SAY NO**

Respectfully,

Alley M.
Resident of Laurel

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4B
Sent: Friday, February 6, 2026 5:44 PM
To: Brittney Harakal; Kurt Markegard
Subject: FW: Opposition to Proposed State Mental Health Prison in Laurel Area

From: Maggie Lowell <mtlowell81@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, February 5, 2026 10:18 AM
To: Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; ward2@laurel.mt.gov;
ward3@laurel.mt.gov; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Opposition to Proposed State Mental Health Prison in Laurel Area

Dear Members of the Laurel City Council,

I am writing as a county resident to formally express my opposition to the State of Montana's proposal to construct a mental health prison in or near Laurel.

I want to be clear that my concerns are not rooted in opposition to mental health treatment or services. Montana absolutely needs improved, humane, and effective mental health care. My concerns relate specifically to the siting and scale of a secure, correctional-style facility and the long-term impacts such a placement would have on our local community.

Facilities of this nature carry significant implications for land use compatibility, infrastructure demand, emergency response capacity, and community planning. These impacts fall disproportionately on local residents and local government, while decision-making authority and operational control remain at the state level.

Of particular concern is the proposed site's proximity to established residential areas and an elementary school my child attends. Regardless of the population served or the operational safeguards proposed, locating a secure state institution adjacent to a school raises legitimate planning and zoning questions. Schools are community anchors, and their surrounding areas are generally expected to support low-impact, family-oriented uses. This concern is about appropriate land use and community design, not fear.

Similarly, the location's proximity to my brother and sister-in-law's property, where they are raising very young children, highlights the broader issue of placing a large institutional facility within close range of family neighborhoods. Families deserve clarity, predictability, and stability in their living environments, especially when decisions are made that will shape the area for decades.

Laurel and the surrounding county already face challenges related to growth, limited healthcare capacity, and strained public services. Introducing a large, state-run mental health prison without firm commitments for long-term funding, staffing, and infrastructure support places additional responsibility on local systems that are already under pressure.

I am also concerned about the precedent this sets. Our community should not be selected primarily for convenience or availability. Projects of this magnitude require robust local engagement, transparent impact analysis, and serious consideration of alternative locations or treatment models that better align with community planning principles.

I respectfully urge the City Council to oppose this proposal and to advocate for comprehensive impact studies, meaningful public input, and alternatives that do not place a disproportionate burden on Laurel and county residents.

Thank you for your time and for your service to our community. I appreciate your consideration and your commitment to thoughtful, long-term decision-making on behalf of local families.

Sincerely,

Maggie Lowell

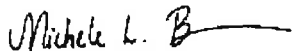
2025 Driftwood River Dr.
Laurel MT 59044

County Resident
Laurel, Montana

Brittney Harakal

From: Civil Attorney
Sent: Sunday, February 8, 2026 9:38 PM
To: Brittney Harakal
Subject: Fw:

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann
Civil City Attorney
City of Laurel
Cell Phone: [406.671.4333](tel:406.671.4333)
civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

From: Reenie Lane <reeniegoodwin15@gmail.com>
Sent: Sunday, February 8, 2026 6:41:13 AM
To: Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject:

I am writing as a nearby property owner to formally express my concerns regarding the proposed placement of a state mental health institution on property that directly borders my land.

I support the need for adequate and humane mental health services. My concern is not with the purpose of the facility, but with the appropriateness of this specific location.

The land the State has purchased directly touches and borders my property. In addition, my eight-year-old granddaughter lives with her father in a home located less than a football field (approximately 300 feet) from the proposed site. Placing a large state institutional facility in such immediate proximity to residential property—and to a young child's home—raises serious and legitimate concerns regarding safety, security, supervision, land-use compatibility, and long-term quality of life.

This site is outside city limits yet appears to rely on the city for access, infrastructure, and services. As a result, nearby residents bear the impacts of the facility without the protections typically provided through city zoning, buffering requirements, and comprehensive planning standards.

Once constructed, the impacts of this facility will be permanent. Effects on surrounding properties—including loss of use and enjoyment, safety considerations, neighborhood character, and property values—cannot be reversed. Montana has a long tradition of respecting private property rights and ensuring that major land-use decisions are made thoughtfully and fairly, especially when families and children are directly affected.

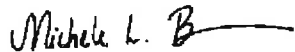
I respectfully urge the City Council to oppose this specific location and to advocate for alternative sites that are properly zoned, adequately buffered from residential homes, and better suited for an institutional facility of this nature.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our community. I appreciate your attention to the concerns of residents who will be most directly affected by this decision. Respectfully John & Coreen Tomek

Brittney Harakal

From: Civil Attorney
Sent: Sunday, February 8, 2026 9:38 PM
To: Brittney Harakal
Subject: Fw: Annexation concerns

Best Regards,



Michele L. Braukmann
Civil City Attorney
City of Laurel
Cell Phone: [406.671.4333](tel:406.671.4333)
civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov

From: Dennis And Sandy Conway <scdcconway@aol.com>
Sent: Saturday, February 7, 2026 7:20:21 AM
To: Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Annexation concerns

Good Morning, We live outside the city of Laurel but in the area of the proposed location for the forensic mental health prison. I would like it of record that we are opposed to this location or our community for this type of a facility. Our concerns are safety and how a facility such as this would effect land/home values. If the 114 acres was annexed into the city of Laurel, what control would you have for their future plans for the remains 104 acres? What else would be brought into our community? It has been stated they would only require a 10 acre parcel. Thank you for placing our wish for your council member to vote no on the annexation.

Dennis and Sandy Conway
Sent from my iPad

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 1A
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 10:41 AM
To: Brittney Harakal
Cc: Civil Attorney
Subject: FW: Proposed Forensic Prison in Laurel



Sara B. Naylor

Council Member, City of Laurel, Ward 1

+ 406 598 9499
+ Ward1@laurel.mt.gov

From: Janis Taylor <janistaylor11@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 9:20 AM
To: Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>
Cc: Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Proposed Forensic Prison in Laurel

Dear City Council,

I am writing as a concerned Laurel resident to formally express my strong opposition to the proposed construction of a facility for the criminally insane within our community, particularly at its current planned location.

The proposed site is located approximately 500 feet from an elementary school and within an established residential neighborhood. This proximity raises serious concerns regarding public safety, child welfare, and responsible land-use planning. Schools and residential areas should remain protected spaces, and the placement of a high-security mental health correctional facility so close to children is both alarming and inappropriate.

In addition to safety concerns, this project directly conflicts with the intent of existing zoning laws. Residential zoning is designed to preserve quality of life, promote stability, and encourage thoughtful community growth. Introducing a facility of this nature into a residential area undermines those principles and sets a troubling precedent for future land-use decisions.

The long-term economic consequences are also significant. The presence of a prison for the criminally insane in close proximity to homes and schools will inevitably lead to decreased property values, making it more difficult for current residents to sell their homes and discouraging new families from moving to our town. This will deter residential development, private investment, and business growth. In turn this could cause stagnation to the city's future and reduce its tax base.

Furthermore, the strain this facility would place on already limited local resources cannot be ignored. Emergency medical services, fire departments, and law enforcement agencies are not currently equipped to absorb the increased demands such a facility would generate. Diverting these critical services to support the prison would reduce response for local residents and place unnecessary risk on the Laurel community.

Additional concerns include infrastructure stress, staffing logistics, and long-term operational impacts—many of which would disproportionately affect the local community while offering little benefit in return.

While I recognize the importance of secure and appropriate facilities for individuals requiring mental health treatment, such facilities must be placed in locations that prioritize public safety, adhere to zoning standards, and respect the wellbeing of surrounding communities. This proposed location fails to meet any of those expectations.

I respectfully urge you to oppose this project as currently planned and to advocate for alternative locations that do not place children, families, property values, and residential neighborhoods at unnecessary risk. Our community deserves thoughtful planning, transparency, and a meaningful voice in decisions that will permanently shape our future.

Thank you for your time, service, and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,
Janis Taylor
Laurel, Montana resident

February 6, 2026

Letter of Opposition to the Laurel City Council

To the Members of the Laurel City Council,

I am writing to you today as a concerned Laurel Citizen in regards to the Forensic Mental Jail Facility that is proposed to be built just outside of our town of Laurel. I have lived in Laurel for 14 years now, I came to help raise my grandchildren who attended West Elementary. I have friends and relatives here that will be affected by this. I have friends that live right across the road and have lived there for many years, raised families and run local businesses. What will they be looking out their front window at? It could be anything even 10 to 12 foot high fences with barb wire or razor ribbon along the top to discourage anyone from climbing over?? No one knows really what it will look like to passers by and people living right there next to it. So many families live right by there that purchased their homes there because it was a safe place to raise their families. Can their children still play in their backyards without fear?? BIGGEST concern, It is dangerous for the children and most importantly they need to be protected. West Elementary less than 450 yards away. With the way society has changed how our children already live, in a sort of lock down at the Schools for their safety. NOW THIS RIGHT BY THERE NO!!! that is so wrong. Yes they will have some kind of security there but it only takes one mistake, JUST ONE, to change a child and family's life FOREVER!! ONE!! Whose will it be? Someone you know or someone that you love? I have friends that own small businesses here that depend on that income to support their families. Will this affect their businesses to the point they have to close the doors? Putting this in our little town will change it forever and not in a good way. These people that will be coming there aren't there for traffic tickets. These people have committed serious crimes like murder and rape and that is why they have to be there. Whether they are insane or not doesn't make a difference because they are dangerous to the public and should not be put within close proximity of innocent children and citizens. Transportation of these people from one place to another poses another threat to the general public and to our citizens.

We all are so proud of our schools that have been newly built and updated. We are so proud of the football, baseball, track and new soccer fields being built and our children that play all those healthy school sport activities, good for body and mind. I love the way this town comes alive with pride to support our children when the games are on. THAT IS LAUREL!! IT IS ALIVE!! not dying because of this jail to be possibly put here. So many towns come here to participate in those sports. ARE they still going to want to come to our town for games now? Will we lose families that live here that will take their children elsewhere, somewhere they consider safe to raise a family? If we lose families what will happen here? WE are all proud of Laurel and for good reason it is a safe, friendly place to live.

What about the firemen, emergency responders and police? What kind of unnecessary danger and stress are you putting on them. Our firefighters are volunteers and not paid. We already can't respond

to our ambulance needs and this can only add to that problem. There is a fundraiser being done by a caring 8th grader, Claire Anderson, raising funds for our much needed ambulance! Because we can't fund it thru our city funds..... What about our police that protect our community, what extra danger are being put on them with just the Love Truck Stop let alone a Forensic Mental Facility. Truck stops are known to be hot spots for crime. They are high-risk areas for crimes including drugs, vandalism, robbery and prostitution. This has been annexed into the town of Laurel so I assume our police will be responsible for responding to anything that happens there.

IT is so wrong that they have been in touch with the state about property here in Laurel, namely the site on Old Hiway 10 for this Forensic Mental Jail with no thought for the citizens of Laurel. The state was actually steered away from the site north of town by Kurt Markegard because he said it would be too costly for the state to run the sewer and water lines to the city. Who does this Mayor Waggoner and Kurt Markegard work for? THEY work for the City of Laurel and that is where their loyalty should be not with anyone else! It appears the site north of town would have been within a little over a mile of a residential area where I believe Kurt Markegard's own a home so very close to where he lives. Is it just coincidence that he suggested the site on Old Hiway 10 to them instead because he was worried about the cost to them? Neither piece of land is really what the City of Laurel residents want anyway. The one outside of town still too close to innocent families and a straight shot to our High School where families children are at.

To many things are pointing to the Mayor Waggoner and Kurt Markegard being involved in selling out our city of Laurel without even a second thought about what the people that live here would want or how they would be affected. How many times did Kurt Markegard say he had no IDEA what this was too be. However in different News articles back in September 30, 2025 Q2 Montana News Leader article written by David Jay said Mayor Waggoner had met with the State Board Of Investments about a piece of property for the State Forensic Mental Hospital on Old Hiway 10 on west Main Street. How is it that the reporter knew what kind of facility this was but the Mayor Waggoner and Kurt Markegard had no clue. No truth in that at all. Mayor Waggoner stated he liked the idea of bringing the Mental Facility here and you can bet he knew just as well as anyone what kind, it was A FORENSIC MENTAL JAIL FACILITY FOR CRIMINALS. Laurel Planning Director Kurt Markegard declined a on camera interview to give more details. IS THAT SURPRISING!!!!!!!! NO it isn't, it was being done behind all of our backs.

US NEWS by Associated Press December 5, 2025 Markegard hinted at a location just outside of city limits with adjacent waer and sewer lines under installation and other criteria "that would make building the facility remarkable successful". WOW thank you Kurt Markegard! . Laurel City Planning Department did not respond to a Monday request from MTFP for a list of the parcels the state was considering. Still under cover things happening with our city officials!

THEN there is still the email from Kurt Markegard way back on August 22, 2025 Kurt Markegard ON BEHALF OF LAURELS MAYOR WAGGONER, basically outlining the the state how this could be accomplished right down to changing the zoning to Public so they could be annexed in. WHO is in charge of the planning Committee??? I heard it is Kurt Markegard. WELL isn't that convenient for this

whole thing going on? It is just hard to believe that the people that are voted in to protect our city and our citizens are really not doing that at all. The land in question should be left for new residential homes that will help build our City of Laurel. That was the intention wasn't it? To make our City grow and prosper. They would be paying taxes into the City to help with needed improvements, unlike the State that will not.

ONE more thing there is a article in the Daily Montanan dated Novmber 10, 2025 that is speaking of the need for a new Womens Prison. Not alot of details except overcrowded facilities and they need 400 more beds. They have 250 million to construct it. But if the state has 114 acres here just outside of town what else can be built there without any say from the citizens once they have been annexed into the City Of Laurel. I think they might be able to do anything they want at that point.

There was mention of jobs it would bring to our city. Well the jobs will be limited mostly to qualified mental health workers such as Forensic psychologists, Forensic Psychiatrists, Psyciatric Nurse Practitioners, Licensed Clinical workers and licensed professional counselors and Mental Health intake Specialists. They will likely commute from other areas. The licensed employees probably have no desire to live this close to it either. The jobs for the general public will likely be housekeeping, kitchen and maybe grounds care. These jobs will probably not pay enough in regards to the danger the people will be in working there.

THE Mayor and CAO have not been representing the citizens of Laurel in a transparent way and protecting their best interests. The Mayor has not conducted himself in a professional manner on several occasions. They both refuse to answer questions asked of them at all or truthfully. The Attorney was asked for her resignation by Mayor Waggoner at the last meeting on February 3 because she did not choose to lie the council members and attending citizens. That kind of conduct is not acceptable and they should consider stepping down for not telling us all the truth and informing us all of what was happening in regards to our City Of Laurel.

SO, finally I just am asking you the City Council to NOT approve this Forensic Mental Jail Hospital to come to our City of Laurel. This is your town too and you cannot believe it is good or beneficial to Laurel more than any of the rest of us do. IF the our citizens already here don't want to live by this Forensic Mental Jail then WHAT new famiies will? PLEASE PROTECT the city you love and live in raising your families also. PLEASE JUST SAY NO! NO FORENSIC MENTAL JAIL FACILITY FOR LAUREL! It is not for us it can be put somewhere else where it won't be such a danger to the pubic, to our famiies. BIG SKY MONTANA has plenty of land elsewhere in Eastern Montana.

Thank you,

Sandi Whitman

806 Wyoming Avenue

Laurel, Montana

From: Kellie Martin
To: Civil Attorney
Subject: Proposed Mental Health Prison objection.
Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026 5:39:22 PM

Dear Members of the Laurel City Council,

I am writing as a concerned homeowner and resident of Laurel to formally oppose the proposed placement of a mental health prison facility approximately 400 to 500 yards from my home and in close proximity to an established residential neighborhood and West Elementary School.

While I fully recognize the importance of accessible mental health services and appropriate facilities for those in need, I strongly believe that this specific location is unsuitable and poses serious concerns for nearby residents, families, and children.

First, the placement of a correctional-style mental health facility in such close proximity to homes will inevitably and negatively impact surrounding property values. Many residents, including myself, have made significant financial investments in our homes with the reasonable expectation that zoning and land-use decisions would protect the stability and integrity of our neighborhood. A facility of this nature undermines that expectation and places an unfair financial burden on homeowners who had no voice in the original planning.

Second, there are legitimate safety concerns associated with situating a secure mental health detention facility near family neighborhoods and an elementary school. West Elementary School serves young children who deserve a safe, secure environment free from unnecessary risk. Regardless of security measures, the perception and potential for incidents — including escapes, disturbances, or increased law enforcement activity — creates anxiety for parents, residents, and school staff alike.

Finally, residential neighborhoods are not the appropriate setting for facilities that require heightened security, monitoring, and emergency response. There are more suitable locations within the city or surrounding areas that are better zoned, less densely populated, and more appropriate for this type of facility without placing undue impact on families and homeowners.

I respectfully urge the City Council to reconsider this location and to engage directly with affected residents before moving forward. Responsible planning requires balancing the needs of the broader community with the rights, safety, and financial well-being of those who live nearby.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to the City of Laurel.

Sincerely,

Kellie Martin
205 Foundation Ave, Laurel, MT 59044

From: [Ward 1A](#)
To: [Brittney Haraka](#)
Cc: [Civil Attorney](#)
Subject: FW: Vote NO on Annexation - Forensic Mental Health Facility
Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026 8:10:12 AM

-----Original Message-----

From: Lisa Stutterheim <stutterheim4@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 10:56 PM
To: Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Vote NO on Annexation - Forensic Mental Health Facility

Dear Sara Naylor,

I am a resident of Laurel at 5 Beartooth Court Laurel MT 59044, and I am writing to urge you to vote NO on the proposed annexation for the forensic mental health facility.

This 32-bed facility would house justice-system involved individuals just 459 yards from West Elementary School. Our community deserves transparency about how this location was selected and what security measures will protect our children and neighborhoods.

Key concerns:

- No tax revenue to Laurel despite increased burden on emergency services
- Proximity to schools and residential areas
- Lack of public input in the decision-making process
- Inadequate information about security and safety protocols

The state cannot proceed without City Council approval of annexation. I urge you to vote NO and demand full transparency from city leadership about this process.

Sincerely,
Lisa Stutterheim
5 Beartooth Court Laurel MT 59044

From: Kathleen Ward
To: Civil Attorney
Subject: Concerns Regarding Proposed Mental Health Facility Location
Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026 1:28:39 PM

Dear Members of the City Council,

My name is Kathleen Ward, and I am a resident of this community. I am writing to formally express my opposition to the proposed mental health facility at its currently planned location and our small community.

While I support access to mental health care and recognize its importance, I have serious concerns about placing this facility so close to schools and established residential neighborhoods. The proximity raises valid questions regarding student safety, neighborhood impact, traffic, and overall quality of life for nearby families.

Additionally, our city is already experiencing strain on essential services such as police, fire, emergency medical response. At this time, there does not appear to be sufficient infrastructure or staffing capacity to adequately support the increased demands that this type of facility would require. Without a clear and well-funded plan to expand these services, the burden will fall on a system that is already stretched thin.

I respectfully urge the City Council to reconsider the proposed location and to vote **NO**. The state can look for other areas that allow for appropriate space, security, accessibility, and service support without negatively impacting schools and residential communities.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and service to our city. I ask that you prioritize thoughtful planning, public safety, and transparency as you move forward with this decision.

Sincerely,
Kathleen Ward
Concerned Resident

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 4A
Sent: Monday, February 9, 2026 5:40 PM
To: Brittney Harakal
Subject: FW: Proposed Metal Hospital in Laurel MT

From: Reneeiverson821 <reneeiverson821@aol.com>
Sent: Monday, February 9, 2026 4:55 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Proposed Metal Hospital in Laurel MT

To whom this may concern,

I am writing as a property owner whose land borders the proposed site for the new mental health facility. While it may be unusual, I wish to express my full support for this project. I recently purchased my property in August 2026 with the intention of living outside city limits, allowing us to keep animals and operate our business on-site. Additionally, we homeschool our two children and plan to establish a large garden this summer. Our children are active members of 4H.

My primary reason for supporting this facility is that it will prevent the area below my property from being developed into a subdivision. I have no concerns regarding potential decreases in property values, and I am aware that incidents of escapes from such facilities are statistically minimal.

Thank you for your time and service. I am willing to give my name and address, but I would like my information to remain anonymous due to how this community seems to be treating people who support this facility, and I do not want my business damaged. We also have a neighbor who complains to the county about everything, and she has made it clear that she will sue over anything.

Thank you

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 1A
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 7:59 AM
To: Brittney Harakal
Cc: Civil Attorney
Subject: FW: Mental Health Prison



Sara B. Naylor

Council Member - City of Laurel - Ward 1

✦ 406 598 8499
✦ Ward1a@laurel.mt.gov

From: Tyler Hansen <thansen573@icloud.com>
Sent: Monday, February 9, 2026 8:13 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Mental Health Prison

Mayor Waggoner and Mr. Markegard,

I am writing to formally express my deep disappointment and concern regarding the actions and conduct of the Mayor of Laurel, Dave Waggoner, and the Chief Administrative Officer, Kurt Markegard.

You have been dishonest with our community. Despite repeated requests, you have failed to provide receipts or documentation to substantiate the claims you have made regarding the proposed mental health facility. Transparency is not optional in public service. When facts are withheld or misrepresented, trust is broken — and once broken, it is rarely restored.

In addition to the lack of honesty, your behavior has been profoundly disrespectful. The manner in which our City Attorney was treated during the meeting on February 3, 2026,

was disgraceful and unprofessional. She was fulfilling her duty to the City of Laurel and its residents, and the treatment she received warrants a sincere and public apology. Not only to her, but also to the City Council and to the community who witnessed it.

The emails on record and Mr. Markegard's extended filibuster during that same meeting further demonstrate a troubling pattern: an attempt to push through a facility without full disclosure, while dismissing legitimate concerns raised by council members and residents alike. This facility is being proposed to house criminal populations, in close proximity to an elementary school. That is not only concerning — it is irresponsible. You cannot reasonably expect this community to accept such risk without clear, complete, and honest information.

Let me be clear: I fully support mental health services and believe they are critically important. However, that is not truly what is being presented here. If this facility is intended to house criminal offenders, then say so plainly. What is Phase 2? What is Phase 3? What additional populations are planned? The refusal to answer these questions directly only fuels public distrust.

You are facing a community that is angry, frustrated, and demanding accountability — and understandably so. I recognize that you are under pressure. I recognize that you are tired and have personal lives beyond City Hall. But so does every resident of Laurel. Public service is not an excuse-driven role. It is a responsibility-driven one.

No more deflection. No more excuses. It is time for clear, direct, and truthful answers.

Thank you,

Tyler Hansen

Sent from my iPhone

From: Mike Nardella
To: Civil Attorney
Subject: Proposed mental hospital
Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026 2:38:50 PM

To whom it may concern:

Though I am not a city resident of Laurel, I do own a business that is located on 7th Avenue on the west end of town. My office building would be roughly 840 yards from the proposed mental hospital. **I am 100% opposed to this being shoved down our throats.** Those in the Laurel government have not been forthcoming with us about the dealings with the state on this matter.

The hospital in Warm Springs has had documented large staff turn overs and is notoriously understaffed. Warm Springs lost their CMS certification a few years back! There is not proper governance with that facility. How can we expect any different with this proposed hospital? Anything could happen with a person that is not of right mind (and criminally insane), of which this facility will house. We do not need that potential risk this close to residential areas or close to our kids' and grandkids' West Elementary School! Has the City of Laurel evaluated the demand on our law enforcement and ambulatory services? There have been numerous documented cases of Laurel citizens that did not have access to an ambulance. If our city's ambulances are having to be dispatched to the hospital, they won't be able to assist citizens. It is also my understanding that local jails are required to house inmates coming and going from the hospital. All of our local jails are beyond their holding capacities.

With this hospital, further growth in neighborhood subdivisions to the west of Laurel will cease, and property values will plummet. And, as it has been repeated over and over, the city of Laurel nor Yellowstone County will no longer receive real estate taxes that are currently being paid by the current private owner, or any future private owner (such as a residential housing developer). That lost revenue will then have to be absorbed by the taxpayers of Laurel. I hope the City Council has also reviewed the light pollution this facility will create. The security lights required of a facility like this will undoubtedly flood the neighborhood. Light pollution has always reduced surrounding property values.

Any new job recipients of the hospital will need housing. Those coming in for these jobs will most likely look for a rental house or apartment (some may purchase). But, there is already a shortage of affordable rentals in Laurel. I see young families looking for affordable housing all the time. This will only make that ability to find housing that much worse.

Lastly, just look back a short few years ago. Laurel has been plagued by water supply issues by the fluctuations of the Yellowstone River. There is no doubt in my mind that this proposed facility's water demands will stress our fragile water treatment center's ability to address the city's water needs.

I urge you to consult with the Laurel City Council to come to their senses and stop this. This is NOT what Laurel needs or wants.

Sincerely,

Mike Nardella

Mike Nardella
Nardella & Associates CPA's
15 7th Avenue
Laurel MT 59044

From: [Ward 1B](#)
To: [Civil Attorney](#)
Cc: [Kelly Strecker](#)
Subject: Fw: Laurel Response about the Mental Health Jail/Prison facility
Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026 9:58:01 AM
Attachments: [Screenshot 2026-02-04 131807.png](#)
[Community Responses Document Mental Prison.pdf](#)
[Screenshot 2026-02-04 131807.png](#)

From: The Front Porch <thefrontporchmt@gmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, February 4, 2026 2:40 PM
To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Laurel City Planner <cityplanner@laurel.mt.gov>; Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>; Vince.Ricci@legmt.gov <Vince.Ricci@legmt.gov>; Deming, Lee <Lee.Deming@legmt.gov>; governor@mt.gov <governor@mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; magnum234@msn.com <magnum234@msn.com>; mtbare@bresnan.net <mtbare@bresnan.net>; dantrost@mt.gov <dantrost@mt.gov>; johnmilanovich@gmail.com <johnmilanovich@gmail.com>; tkober@mtech.edu <tkober@mtech.edu>; ceyounkin@yahoo.com <ceyounkin@yahoo.com>; BOI.ED@mt.gov <BOI.ED@mt.gov>; BOI.Loans@mt.gov <BOI.Loans@mt.gov>
Subject: Laurel Response about the Mental Health Jail/Prison facility

Hello and thank you for your time,

We as a community put together a questionnaire that would allow Laurel residents to provide their feedback about the proposed State Mental Health facility and Prison in Laurel Montana.

As you will see reading through these responses, it is obvious that our Laurel community has reservations and concerns about this facility being here, but mostly the LOCATION the state has chosen to put a buy/sell on.

It was state by our Governor *"you would not put this into a community that didn't want it"* Reference Link: https://youtu.be/f2VTantBwFk?si=9wml_-98B5wUIOdW

On site selection: "We're not going to go someplace where it's not wanted," Gianforte said in an interview regarding the search for a location in the Laurel/Billings area.

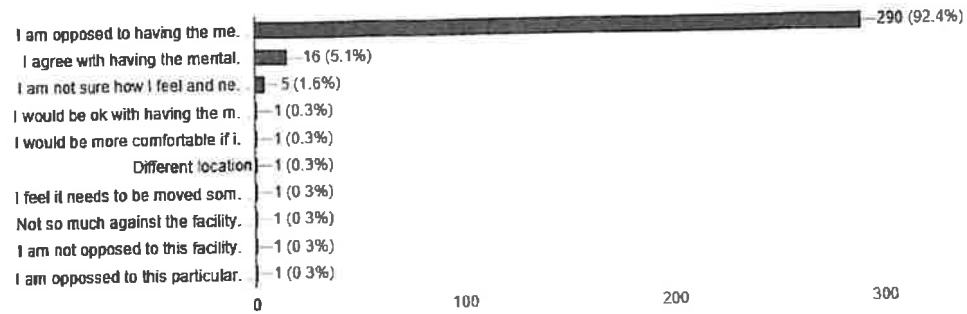
This is an accumulation of responses that were received from a community questionnaire... You will find 314 individual responses.

I have also included a screen shot diagram graph of the responses

Please Choose one

 Copy chart

314 responses



Cheryl Hill
Concerned Laurel Community Resident and Business Owner

Brittney Harakal

From: Ward 1B
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 2:57 PM
To: Civil Attorney
Cc: Brittney Harakal; Kelly Strecker; Kurt Markegard
Subject: Fw: Mental Health Facility

From: Trish Little <me_is_t1@yahoo.com>
Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 2:49 PM
To: Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>
Subject: Mental Health Facility

Hello Mr. Canape: My name is Trish Little. I am a citizen of Laurel.

I wish to express my concern with regard to the possibility of having a mental health detention facility (I may be using the incorrect term for it, so please forgive me) located in our town. I am not in favor of it. I am deeply concerned with the location, which is in close proximity to one of our elementary schools. I am also very concerned about the potential for increased taxes, and the strain this facility will place on our town's infrastructure. Our per capita tax burden is already substantial for such a small town. We do not need or wish to shoulder additional costs that will only continue to increase over time.

I also find it deeply concerning that the entire process has been so "back room", for lack of a better term. Why was it initiated without any input from the citizens of this town? It casts a very ugly shadow on our city government, deserved or not. The whole thing reeks of dishonesty and fraud. Given the current climate in which we find ourselves as a nation, with rampant fraud being uncovered at every turn, I find it not only disheartening, but shocking, that our city employees (both elected and hired) would engage in something like this. Americans are tired of being treated like this. We are tired of being financially brutalized by our government officials. We are very very tired of being taken advantage of.

I encourage you to stand up for the citizens of this town, and fight to deny the placement of this facility in Laurel. I appreciate your taking time to read my message. Trish Little

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

[Yahoo Mail: Search, Organize, Conquer](#)

Ex Parte Communications

CM Mackay

From: Katlyn Gotschall <katlyngotschall@gmail.com>

Sent: Tuesday, January 27, 2026 9:50 PM

To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Kurt Markegard <kmarkegard@laurel.mt.gov>; Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>

Cc: Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>

Subject: Community Impact and Professional Concern Regarding Proposed Forensic Mental Health Facility

Dear Mayor and Members of the Laurel City Council,

My name is Katlyn Gotschall, and I am a resident of Laurel, Montana.

I am writing this letter following the City Council meeting held this evening (1-27-2026) to formally share my concerns, perspective, and professional opinion regarding the proposed annexation of a forensic mental health facility into the City of Laurel.

When I met my husband, I knew Laurel would become our forever home. We have built our life here with intention and commitment, purchasing our home, raising our child, establishing our careers, and investing deeply in this community and its people.

I am a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor. While this facility is sometimes framed as an opportunity for mental health employment, the reality is that forensic state facilities primarily employ psychiatrists, psychologists, correctional staff, and nursing professionals. Roles for counselors are limited and highly custodial in nature, and they are rarely filled by local outpatient clinicians. This facility would not meaningfully strengthen Laurel's mental health workforce, increase access to care, or support community based therapy services.

My clinical work centers around trauma, safety, and trust. What I have observed through this process is that the City has unintentionally activated a collective trauma response within the community. Fight, flight, freeze, and fawn are predictable reactions when people feel unsafe or excluded from decision making. Laurel is responding with fight.

When questions are asked with urgency and emotion, it is not hostility. It is fear. Fear emerges when trust has been disrupted. Many residents feel blindsided and unheard. Rather than prioritizing sustainable growth such as affordable housing for healthcare professionals, investment in local services, and workforce retention, the City is considering annexing a state run forensic facility that offers little direct benefit to Laurel while introducing long term risk.

Once annexed, the City of Laurel would assume ongoing responsibility for municipal services tied to this facility. This includes emergency response, fire protection, medical coordination, infrastructure support, and mutual aid response. These responsibilities carry staffing, training, liability, and financial implications that

remain even if state priorities or funding structures change.

Community members are not passive observers or social media acquaintances. We are residents who have entrusted our elected officials with transparency, accountability, and honest communication. When information is shared unevenly or appears selectively endorsed through informal platforms, it further erodes trust and deepens community concern.

As the spouse of a volunteer firefighter, my concerns deepen further. My home is structured around other people's worst days. I fear that our already stretched first responders may be expected to manage incidents involving a forensic population without specialized, ongoing, and fully funded training. Forensic psychiatric response differs significantly from standard crisis intervention. Without guaranteed preparation and resources, local responders are placed at risk alongside the community they serve.

I also feel anxiety knowing my husband may be asked to give more time, energy, and emotional labor to support a decision that does not clearly support him or his fellow responders in return. I feel shock that those entrusted with safeguarding this community would consider introducing a high acuity facility without a clearly defined and publicly presented plan for emergency readiness, responder protection, and long term sustainability.

Montana already faces critical shortages in healthcare and emergency personnel. Adding a high demand facility without parallel investment in workforce retention increases burnout risk, turnover, and strain on systems that are already operating at capacity.

As a mother, I am left asking how we teach our children to trust leadership when transparency feels absent. The individuals housed in a forensic mental health prison are not there voluntarily, nor are they stabilized for community integration. As a parent, I cannot support a decision that compromises my child's sense of safety.

For clarity:

A forensic mental health hospital is a secure psychiatric facility that evaluates and treats individuals involved in the criminal justice system, often those deemed incompetent to stand trial or not guilty by reason of mental disease or defect. These facilities operate with correctional level security and house individuals who have committed serious offenses.

Trust is built through consistency, transparency, and mutual respect.

Safety is the reasonable assurance that individuals and communities are protected from harm and that adequate systems are in place to respond effectively when risk arises.

Communication is the clear, timely, and honest exchange of information that allows informed decision making.

To date, there has been no publicly presented community benefit agreement outlining guaranteed funding, staffing ratios, emergency response support, infrastructure investment, or long term oversight mechanisms that would directly benefit Laurel residents.

You have already heard concerns regarding the lack of economic benefit, tax revenue, or expanded services this facility would bring. Other communities have expressed willingness to accept this facility where infrastructure and resources may better support it. This proposal is not comparable to the Billings Clinic Psychiatric Center, which stabilizes individuals in crisis. It is not Warm Springs. It is not Passages. This is a prison for mentally ill offenders.

Opposition to this annexation is not opposition to mental health treatment. It is opposition to placing a secure forensic facility in a community without demonstrated benefit, adequate preparation, or transparent collaboration.

Tonight, you have heard from many voices. This letter adds the perspective of a mental health professional, a first responder's spouse, a mother, and a committed community member.

I respectfully urge you not to annex this facility into Laurel.

Sincerely,
Katlyn Gotschall, MS, LCPC
Resident of Laurel, Montana

406-697-9487

RESPONSE 1/28/2026

Ms. Gotschall,

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on this matter. I appreciate your unique perspective as a MH professional.

Sincerely,

CM Jodi Mackay

Ward 4a

Thursday, 1/29/26

While at the gym, a Laurel citizen and fellow gym-goer asked what I thought about the State MH Hospital. I told him I couldn't say a lot but that it's been an interesting process. I asked what he thought as a citizen of Laurel. He wanted to know when we'd know more about the process. I told him much would likely come out should the State file for annexation of the property regarding use of infrastructure, traffic and emergency services' needs. He asked how many people the hospital would serve. I told him from the plans and docs I'd seen and heard, it was slated to be 32 beds initially with a plan of 64 in a separate phase. He expressed concerns with it being so close to the school.

Dear Jodi Mackay,

I am a resident of Laurel at 1200 Cedar Crest Circle, and I am writing to urge you to vote NO on the proposed annexation for the forensic mental health facility.

This 32-bed facility would house justice-system involved individuals just 459 yards from West Elementary School. Our community deserves transparency about how this location was selected and what security measures will protect our children and neighborhoods.

Key concerns:

- No tax revenue to Laurel despite increased burden on emergency services
- Proximity to schools and residential areas
- Lack of public input in the decision-making process
- Inadequate information about security and safety protocols

The state cannot proceed without City Council approval of annexation. I urge you to vote NO and demand full transparency from city leadership about this process.

Sincerely,
Matt Gilg
1200 Cedar Crest Circle

--

Matt Gilg

mattgilg.dev

Cell: 860.771.3511

RESPONSE

Tuesday 2/3/26

Mr. Gilg,

Thank you for taking the time to reach out and share your concerns with me. I appreciate it.

Sincerely,

CM Jodi Mackay

Ward 4

From: John Esp <johnespforSenate@gmail.com>

Sent: Sunday, February 8, 2026 10:08 PM

To: City Mayor <citymayor@laurel.mt.gov>; Kurt Markegard <kmarkegard@laurel.mt.gov>; Civil Attorney <civilattorney@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1A <ward1a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 1B <ward1b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward

2A <ward2a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 2B <ward2b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3A <ward3a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 3B <ward3b@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>; Ward 4B <ward4b@laurel.mt.gov>; john esp <johnesp2001@yahoo.com>

Subject: Memo concerning questions about the forensic health facility

Hello all, Attached is a Memo that may shed some light to some of the questions you are being asked. I hope you will find it constructive. If you can't open the Word Document, I would be happy to paste it in the body of an email. Thank you for your consideration. John Esp

Memo:

2/7/2026

From: John Esp, Box 1024, Big Timber, Montana

To: The Mayor and City Council of Laurel Montana.

Mr. Mayor and City Council members, Quick background information on me; I have worked to address the shortcomings in the Mental health treatment systems before I first came to the legislature in 2001. I tell you this to frame my perspective on an issue I have dealt with, sometimes personally, for the last 40 years. What I have written in bold print throughout this memo is my informed opinion, albeit my opinion only. It's my attempt to answer to some of the questions your constituents and some nearby county residents are asking you. I do this based on my experience of trying to build new beds, and upgrade the State's inadequate and undersized infrastructure during my legislative tenure. We have never had enough money to meet all the needs. That shouldn't keep us from trying.

The BOI and the state itself are not being transparent.

To be clear, the Legislature and Executive branch has given the task of building this facility to the BOI. The Department still has some responsibility to provide advice to the BOI on the actual building design, and the requirements for the safety of people, both inside and outside of the facility. The land will be owned and managed by the BOI for the benefit of State taxpayers.

Some of you, as community leaders, have been part of preliminary plat reviews, and other actions reviewing subdivisions, and/or variance requests from your citizens. Maybe some of you haven't yet. Those that have dealt with applications or requests already know that until you see an actual request or recommendation from a planning board or variance board, it is not prudent to speculate on the contents thereof. As the BOI develops a plan, they may have underlying priorities that dictate the direction in which they would like to proceed, but until they complete an application and submit it to the appropriate local government entity, speculation and premature information on their part is also not wise. Your citizens will have an opportunity at the time an application is formally made to comment on that proposal at a noticed recorded public meeting of a local government entity.

How much did the land sell for?

In my experience, it is not permissible to disclose terms of a buy-sell agreement. Especially if contains contingencies. Even the final sales terms as reported to the Department of Revenue are kept confidential by the Department of Revenue, and used only for property tax appraisal purposes. The final sales price of a transaction brokered by a realtor becomes proprietary information to the multiple listing service (MLS) they belong to.

Why do you need 114 acres for 32 beds?

My guess is that though we may not have needed it, it will benefit Laurel in that it provides a buffer to the community and the school, and... it could have been the preference of the landowner to sell all it or none of it.

Will it be used for future expansion of prisons for the “criminally insane”, or for “the worst of the worst”, or for “murderers and rapists”?

Those choices of words are certainly unfortunate and in my view, inaccurate hyperbole. Mental illness can affect any one of us, or any one family at any given time. There but for the Grace of God go you or I. Most of the clients of the facility are there to be evaluated to see if they have the capacity to stand trial in answer to the charges against them. If they do not have capacity, the staff works with them to recover from their illness to the point they can participate in their own defense. The vast majority of those held in this proposed facility have not been convicted of anything yet. And nearly all will be discharged back to the jail that they were brought to the facility from. Nearly every state in the US is building capacity into their forensic health system, so yes if current trends continue, at some point in the future, Montana will need more forensic beds. It's hard to predict where that demand will be, or where those beds may be located.

Will the state will pay for expanded water infrastructure.

If the lot and/or lots are annexed into the city, as per city regulations and planning requirements, the Board of Investments will pay the appropriate fees appurtenant to their lots and the infrastructure thereon. They will pay all the ongoing fees and assessments that the city normally charges to their customers.

Will Warm Springs close and move to Laurel?

Given the fact that you, the State taxpayers just spent tens of millions of dollars upgrading the main hospital, and by the way, it is a beautiful, and now a much safer facility, no. We are currently in the process of spending another 20 million to repurpose another building for patient care on that campus. As hard as it was to get the money to rehab those buildings at the Springs, it would be impossible to conceive of a scenario in which the legislature appropriates another half a billion dollars-plus to move the operation here to Laurel. It simply isn't going to happen. Western Montana legislators, local leaders, and County law enforcement in western Montana, appreciate the proximity of nearby mental health services. They also appreciate the economic impacts that the high paying union jobs have on their communities.

Does proximity to homes and schools pose safety risk? A Laurel school board member said perception is reality.

Not true. Perception is not reality. Reality, in my mind, is reflected in the community of Billings and it would suggest that the proposed facility near Laurel does not pose an unreasonable safety risk. The Yellowstone County detention Center and the site of the proposed new Yellowstone County Detention Center are across the street from several homes. There are schools and perhaps hundreds of homes within a several block radius of the facility. Those schools are a similar distance from the Yellowstone County facility as is likely to occur from the West Elementary School to the new facility in Laurel. Yellowstone County and the Montana Women's Prison know how to keep the people safely incarcerated that we put in their care. The state has a good record for holding people securely also.

This facility is 450 yards away from a public elementary school.

Mr. Mayor and Council members, this is a fallacy. The State is not going to build a forensic hospital in the North East corner of the 114 acres. To my knowledge, there isn't even a road/street to that part of the lot, nor is there water, sewer, and electrical infrastructure evident on that end of the property. The State is going to build where they have the closest direct access to the Interstate highway. The State is going to build directly adjacent to Highway 10, where public access, and all those utilities are already available. The site near Highway 10 is roughly 1100 yards from the school. By contrast, the two schools in Billings with the closest proximity to the Yellowstone County Detention Center are 1100 and 1140 yards respectively from that facility's property line. Incidentally, there are 600 to 700 inmates incarcerated there at the current time. This number is in a facility that was originally designed for a capacity of 434 inmates. A significant number of those inmates are waiting for a bed to open up in a forensic facility so they can get their mental health treatment, and a pathway to their day in Court.

Will inmates be driven in the path of elementary school students?

No. The inmates in custody of law enforcement and being transported to this facility will taken directly off the interstate ramp to Highway 10 and then about another block to the Forensic Facility. Once on facility grounds they will be driven into a secure attached garage (sally port), and the garage doors will be closed. They will then be escorted by law enforcement from the sally port through a walkthrough door into the secure part of the facility. They will be allowed nowhere near school children on a path.

This has been specifically asked of me so I will answer it publically: You talk a lot about other prisons being in residential neighborhoods, but would you be ok with this facility in your backyard?

I have the advantage over most of you in that I have toured all the States major institutions multiple times. A month or so ago I was in both the Montana State Prison and the Montana State Hospital. I have spent several hours in the Galen Forensic Facility, and in most major and some smaller County Detention facilities. At no time did I feel unsafe. A little over a month ago, we walked through the High Security Side at MSP in Deer Lodge. I would not have concerns having a forensic mental health facility near me. Keep in mind, most of the folks being treated at Warm Springs will eventually be released to community providers, and the vast majority of those serving time at Deer Lodge will eventually be released to pre-release facilities, probation and parole, and community providers in our cities and towns.

I travelled the state in 2023-2025 time-frame looking in depth at the needs that local governments face when it comes to behavior health issues. We heard from hundreds of citizens, providers, emergency responders, law enforcement officers, jail commanders, county attorneys, and families whose loved ones struggle with incarceration and behavior health issues.

We can solve the need to serve one problem population with the construction of this facility, but there is much more to do in supporting and caring for your neighbors and friends that deal with behavior health issues, sometimes on a daily basis.

Mr. Mayor, and Council members, I am happy to dialogue further on this issue when appropriate. You, and of course, your neighbors will get an opportunity to weigh in, likely at a public Planning Board meeting, when the final proposal is rolled out there in its entirety for all to see. At that time, none of us will need to speculate about distances, layouts, building design, landscaping, parking lot design, or any other unknowns. The questions you are hearing now will be answered, perhaps not as quickly as you and your constituents would like, but over time they will be answered.

Until then I remain willing to help your constituents find accurate responses to address their questions.

Senator John Esp

RESPONSE

2/9/26

Senator Esp,

Thank you for this information. I hope it will be disseminated to the community.

Sincerely,

CM Jodi Mackay

Ward 4

From: Trish Little <me_is_t1@yahoo.com>

Sent: Tuesday, February 10, 2026 2:55 PM

To: Ward 4A <ward4a@laurel.mt.gov>

Subject: Mental Health Facility

Hello Ms. Mackay: My name is Trish Little. I am a citizen of Laurel.

I wish to express my concern with regard to the possibility of having a mental health detention facility (I may be using the incorrect term for it, so please forgive me) located in our town. I am not in favor of it. I am deeply concerned with the location, which is in close proximity to one of our elementary schools. I am also very concerned about the potential for increased taxes, and the strain this facility will place on our town's infrastructure. Our per capita tax burden is already substantial for such a small town. We do not need or wish to shoulder additional costs that will only continue to increase over time.

I also find it deeply concerning that the entire process has been so "back room", for lack of a better term. Why was it initiated without any input from the citizens of this town? It casts a very ugly shadow on our city government, deserved or not. The whole thing reeks of dishonesty and fraud. Given the current climate in which we find ourselves as a nation, with rampant fraud being uncovered at every turn, I find it not only disheartening, but shocking, that our city employees (both elected and hired) would engage in something like this. Americans are tired of being treated like this. We are tired of being financially brutalized by our government officials. We are very very tired of being taken advantage of.

I encourage you to stand up for the citizens of this town, and fight to deny the placement of this facility in Laurel. I appreciate your taking time to read my message. Trish Little

RESPONSE

2/9/26

Ms. Little,

Thank you for reaching out. I appreciate you sharing your thoughts with me.

Sincerely,

CM Jodi Mackay

Ward 4a

February 10, 2026

Laurel City Council, Mayor Dave Waggoner, CAO Kurt Markegard, Laurel City Attorney Michelle Braukman, Clerk/Treasure Kelly Streck and Administrative Assistant Brittany Harkel,

I was going to send this via email, however after last week's City Workshop I want to be able to look each and every one of you in the eyes while I make my statement

The pure disappointment, disgust, embarrassment and astonishment I felt witnessing the conduct of Mayor Waggoner and CAO Markegard throughout the last 6 months and last week's workshop is unacceptable and should NOT be allowed. Our current leadership is in complete disarray and reflects poorly on our entire community. It is quite apparent that these two have purposely left CC and the City Attorney out of many discussions and opportunities to learn about the MSF "Prison" as well as many other decisions and discussions pertinent to the well-being of our town.

Last week CAO Markegard stated that "he didn't know what the facility was", "he was late to the tour", "didn't have the QR code", and he did NOT allow our city council to be there. He also fails to respond to emails from both city employees and community members about many different issues, communication is essential in any job, especially city government. Last week he also stated he had to take two days off the previous week and then informed everyone last week he was taking another two days off. I also know of a specific incident last year where a resident was needing responses from him about building and he was gone for approximately 3 weeks.

On, November 28, 2025 via text message to Cheryl Hill and myself, "I just got out of the hospital. I have prostate cancer and they removed part of my prostate. The news just called me I had NO idea", "I just heard about it an hour ago. It is all on the state. Last I heard it was Miles City. They mentioned looking at the Woods property and going through the annexation process". However, thru the provided timeline you will see that August 22, 2025 the email CAO Markegard sent "on behalf of of Mayor".

The mayor and CAO are out of the office, don't respond and have "no idea" what anything is and they are leaving the CC, City Attorney, citizens of Laurel out of everything so WHO IS RUNNING THE CITY OF LAUREL?

With the recent actions of the mayor towards the City Attorney Braukman we are adding public records request for all public records with any past or present complaints from ALL City Staff, City Council Members, All Contract personnel, Former and existing City Court Judges against the mayor for his treatment of them.

As of today, the only public records released have been emails between Kurt and the BOI (Dan Villa) and MT DPHHS (Charlie Bereton), with only one cc to the city attorney and one response from the mayor there are still many missing requests. So again, I present the Public Records requests for all emails, phone logs, text messages and social media post regarding any and all discussions regarding the MT Forensic Prison/Water Lines/Zoning/ between any of the following.

Kurt Markegard, Dave Waggoner, BOI (Dan Villa), MT DPHHS (Charlie Bereton), Dick Anderson Construction Project Manager AJ, Norman Miller of Miller Trois, LLC, Love's Gas Station Project Manager from 5/1/2025 to present

Be advised that as of this request and many before this, deletion or editing of comments and messages would be spoilation of communication protected by MCA 2-2-1003.

I do understand that this process may take time, however the continued lack of transparency and communication is unacceptable.

It is my request to have both Mayor Waggoner and CAO Markegard put on administrative leave immediately pending full investigation of public records requests and misconduct.

Sincerely,

Formal Request for Independent Investigation**

****TO:**** Laurel City Council

****FROM:**** Laurel CARED

****DATE:**** 2.10.2026

****RE:**** Request for Independent Investigation into City Leadership Conduct

Dear Honorable Members of the Laurel City Council,

We, the undersigned citizens of Laurel, respectfully request that the City Council immediately authorize an independent investigation into the conduct of Mayor Dave Waggoner and Chief Administrative Officer Kurt Markegard regarding the proposed state forensic mental health facility, and take any and all administrative actions the Council deems appropriate to ensure the integrity of this investigation.

****BASIS FOR THIS REQUEST:****

Recent document releases reveal a troubling pattern:

1. ****Unauthorized Communications:**** On August 22, 2025—two months before Council's "informational only" briefing—CAO Markegard sent detailed proposals to state officials stating he was acting "on behalf of the City of Laurel's Mayor." Mayor Waggoner was CC'd, indicating his approval. This occurred without City Council authorization or knowledge.
2. ****Exclusion of Elected Representatives:**** BOI Director Dan Villa's July 10, 2025 invitation explicitly requested Kurt invite "your respective councils" to facility site tours. Billings brought multiple council members and their Mayor. No evidence suggests Laurel City Council members were invited or informed.
3. ****Contradictory Statements:**** September 30: Mayor Waggoner told media any decision "requires resident and city council approval." October 21: CAO Markegard told Council the state "probably doesn't have to comply with local zoning laws," discouraging involvement.
4. ****Unexplained Property Selection:**** City officials stated Laurel submitted no formal proposal, yet CAO Markegard promoted a specific private property (Miller Trois LLC) to state officials. The selection process has not been explained.
5. ****Oath of Office Questions:**** Montana law requires mayors to represent constituents and

promote citizen participation (MCA 7-3-203, 7-4-4303, 7-5-4102). The exclusion of Council and citizens raises serious questions about compliance.

****REQUESTED ACTIONS:****

1. Authorize immediate retention of an independent investigator with expertise in municipal governance
2. Direct preservation of all communications and records related to the facility
3. Take any and all administrative actions deemed appropriate to ensure investigation integrity, including but not limited to administrative leave
4. Establish a 60-90 day timeline for completion
5. Commit to public disclosure of findings

****CONCLUSION:****

This request is made in the spirit of protecting the integrity of Laurel's governance and restoring public trust. Administrative leave is a standard practice when serious questions arise about official conduct—it is not a finding of wrongdoing, but rather a prudent measure to allow for fair, thorough investigation without the appearance of interference.

The citizens of Laurel deserve transparency, accountability, and leadership that places community interests above all else. We respectfully urge the City Council to act swiftly on this request.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl Tuttle
Shopper
Amber R Zahn
Maggie Hanson

KALI WESCOTT
Art Gubog

[← Back to Home](#)

Timeline & Verified Facts

What we know about the proposed forensic mental health facility

Timeline of Events

May 2,
2025

Legislature Approves \$124M Behavioral Health Overhaul

Montana Legislature concludes session, approving approximately \$124 million in state spending plus up to \$40 million in federal funds for behavioral health improvements. This includes \$26.5 million for a new mental health facility in eastern Montana with forensic beds.

The funding addresses longstanding waitlists, facility shortages, and backlogs of criminal defendants awaiting psychiatric evaluations—some experiencing jail holds exceeding one year.

[Read full article →](#)

Jun 27,
2025

DPHHS Director Identifies Billings Region as Likely Site

NAMI Montana releases statement celebrating DPHHS Director Charlie Brereton's announcement that Billings (Yellowstone County region) has been identified as the likely location for the new facility.

Charlie Brereton (DPHHS Director):

"Right now we are focused on identifying a site for the facility and it looks more and more like the Billings region will be the location."

Purpose:

The facility will serve criminal defendants who require intensive psychiatric treatment in a secure setting.

NAMI Montana leadership expressed enthusiasm for the development, stating it would improve access to critical mental health services for those involved in the criminal justice system.

Read full article →

Jul 10, 2025

COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Villa Emails Kurt & Billings CAO - Invites to July Site Tours

BOI Executive Director Dan Villa emails both Kurt Markegard (Laurel CAO) and Chris Kukulski (Billings CAO) inviting them, their staff, and their respective councils to site tours in Yellowstone County.

Villa's Email (July 10, 2025):

"In an effort to gain more understanding from your communities, I'd like to invite you, your pertinent staff and your respective councils to site tours in Yellowstone County for areas that are being considered for the new Behavioral Health Facility authorized in HB5 (2025)."

"We will meet at 1PM at the Rimrock Road MSU B Parking Lot and carpool/caravan from there."

"Input from local officials is not only necessary to a success siting process, but also sincerely appreciated."

🚩 Villa's Invitation Instructions:

Villa explicitly asks recipients to "invite you, **your pertinent staff and your respective councils** to site tours in Yellowstone County."

Question: Did Kurt extend this invitation to Laurel City Council members or city staff? No evidence suggests he did.

Significance: Villa invites both Laurel and Billings leadership to tours of Yellowstone County sites. This establishes that Kurt was engaged by the state early in the process - but whether he involved Laurel's elected officials remains unclear.

Jul 14, 2025

• COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Villa Schedules "Boi/Laurel Intro Call" - Kurt Misses Meeting, Villa Reveals "Potential Laurel Options"

BOI Executive Director Dan Villa schedules a Microsoft Teams meeting titled "Boi/Laurel Intro Call" with Kurt Markegard to discuss a site north of Laurel (near airport/Veterans Cemetery area). Kurt doesn't receive the invite notification and misses the meeting.

• Email Exchange (July 15):

Kurt: "I missed the meeting. I hadn't received the invite, so I thought it was canceled."

Villa: "Give me a ring whenever you have a sec and we can chat through **potential Laurel options.**"

Jul 24-28, 2025

State Tours Yellowstone County Sites - Kurt Attends & Mentions "For Sale Sign"

DPHHS advances plans for new state behavioral health facility. Legislators and state officials tour potential sites in Yellowstone County on July 24. CAO Kurt Markegard attends tour and points state representatives toward property west of Laurel.

🚧 Kurt's "For Sale Sign" Story (As Told at October 21 Council Meeting):

Kurt claims that while walking down a hill during the tour at the Skyway Drive site, he casually mentioned to state representatives:

*"Well, how many acres are you looking for? They said, 'Well, we need at least 10.' I said, 'Oh, I think there's a site west of Laurel that probably would fit that. **I happen to drive by and there's a for sale sign.**"*

Kurt says state representatives looked it up on their phone app, confirmed it was 10 acres, then "had to catch an airplane and they left and that's the last they heard of."

Updated Facility Details:

- **32-bed forensic facility** for criminally committed individuals

- Approximately **90-100 staff expected** for 24/7/365 operations
- To address waitlist at Montana State Hospital

Sites Toured During July 24 Visit:

- Farmland in Lockwood's Targeted Economic Development District (near Sugar Factory)
- Wilson Park on Billings' South Side
- Land near Laurel Municipal Airport (north of Veterans Cemetery)
- Property along Skyway Road (Billings Heights)

Tour attendees included Senator Vince Ricci, Commissioner Morris, Billings council members, Billings Mayor, and BOI representatives.

⚠️ Laurel Council Excluded:

Billings brought: Multiple council members and their Mayor

Laurel brought: No council members documented as attending

Villa's July 10 invitation explicitly asked Kurt to "invite you, your pertinent staff and your respective councils." Despite this instruction, there is no evidence Kurt invited any Laurel City Council members or staff to participate in this tour - even though one of the sites visited was near Laurel.

Local Officials' Response to Tour:

County Commissioner Mark Morse:

"There's a lot of, what are we trying to do here? There's just a lot of unanswered questions."

Billings City Council Member Jennifer Owen:

"I can't stress enough how frustrated people are in Billings with the state dumping its problems on us."

Owen also noted officials "received little information about what the facility would look like or even the potential number of beds."

📰 Read Billings Gazette Article →

Aug 20,
2025

Gianforte Pauses BOI Leadership - Site Selection on Hold

Governor Greg Gianforte pauses State Board of Investment's leadership role in planning the facility. BOI asked to step down as lead agency. Previously

reviewed sites, including Skyway Drive location, no longer viable given local concerns and infrastructure considerations.

Yellowstone County Commissioner Mark Morse:

"Extremely grateful...that the governor listened to the community and that they were unhappy and he hit the pause button."

BOI Executive Director Dan Villa:

Board received direction requiring a "pause" due to differing interpretations between executive and legislative branches regarding BOI's construction authority.

Villa's Statement Includes Two Key Commitments:

1. On Previously Reviewed Sites:

*"If due diligence resumes upon receipt of written guidance, no previously reviewed sites—including those on Skyway Drive—are viable, **given local feedback**, infrastructure costs, local zoning regulations, impacts on targeted economic development districts, and state land leasing processes."*

2. On Moving Forward:

*"If BOI is to engage further, our future work must begin with **clarity on services and siting from our partners...**"*




*Villa also specifically thanks "Laurel City Administrator **Kurt Markegard**" for "candid input."*

Billings City Council Member Jennifer Owen:

"Slowing the assessment down, getting a lot more community and stakeholder input is a really smart way to go."

Key Issue: Local officials raised concerns about insufficient information. Questions remained unanswered about facility specifications, operational scope, staffing models, and implementation details.

No timeline provided for resuming the project.

-  **Read BOI Statement (Dan Villa)** →
-  **Read Q2 Article (Billings Leaders)** →
-  **Read Q2 Article (Gianforte Pause)** →

Aug 22,
2025

Markegard Emails State Officials Pitching Specific Site - "On Behalf of the Mayor"

CAO Kurt Markegard sends email to DPHHS Director Charlie Brereton, BOI Executive Director Dan Villa, and Ryan Osmundson, explicitly stating he is acting "on behalf of the City of Laurel's Mayor." Email includes detailed site maps, zoning information, and infrastructure details. CC'd to City Mayor.

Key Revelations from Email:

- **"On behalf of the City of Laurel's Mayor, I am emailing you to let you know about a potential site for the new State of Montana mental health facility."**
- Property "just west of the Laurel city limits" with Love's Truck Plaza infrastructure
- Love's investing \$2.4 million in new water and sewer lines
- Markegard touts his building inspector credentials: "I know what the state will need"
- Details about old interstate interchange deeded to city, potential for access road or facility expansion
- Discusses zoning changes needed: "Public" designation would allow facility
- **"The property is currently on the market to be sold"**
- **"The Mayor of Laurel would like to invite you all to a teams meeting to further discuss"**

Dan Villa's Reply (3:11 PM same day):

"Thank you, Kurt. Appreciate it. We will be in touch once we have more guidance. Have a good weekend. Best to the Mayor."

Timeline Significance: This email was sent on August 22, 2025 - two months BEFORE the October 21 "informational only" council workshop, and nearly three months before the November 14 proposal deadline. Markegard and Mayor Waggoner were actively pitching a specific site to state officials without informing City Council or the public.

☰ [Read Full Email with Maps \(PDF\) →](#)

☰ [Read Billings Gazette Article \(Jan 27, 2026\) →](#)

Sep 10,
2025

Gianforte Orders Restart - Emphasis on Public Participation

After three-week pause, Governor Gianforte directs state agencies to resume planning for the facility. BOI remains lead agency, working with DPHHS to determine facility type and location.

Governor Gianforte's Letter (Sept 10, 2025):

*"I share the goals of the Legislature to complete this project quickly while also **ensuring transparency, fairness, and public involvement.**"*

"In proceeding with this project, public participation should play a critical role as it moves forward. Engaging the public and stakeholders will ensure that these decisions are made in the open, allowing Montanans to have a voice in how their hard-earned tax dollars are spent."

What Changed:

After local officials expressed feeling "blindsided" by the state's process, restart now emphasizes public participation and transparency.

BOI Director Dan Villa:

Received instructions to "move forward with the proposed mental health facility, just to be more public about it."

Communities Already Requesting Consideration:

- Billings (city officials express interest)
- Laurel
- Stillwater County
- Big Horn County

Notable: Article states Laurel, Stillwater County, and Big Horn County "have already requested consideration" - though Laurel officials previously stated they did not submit formal proposal.

☰ [Read Governor's Letter to BOI \(PDF\) →](#)

☰ [Read Q2 Article →](#)

Sep 30,
2025

Mayor Waggoner Publicly Promotes Laurel Site - Claims Council Approval Required

Mayor Dave Waggoner confirms to Q2 News that a 10-acre vacant property on Old Highway 10 (outside city limits) is being considered for the facility. He promotes the economic benefits while claiming any decision requires resident and city council approval.

Mayor Waggoner's Public Statements:

"It would be great for Laurel, bringing jobs and adding to the economy."

Emphasized "any decision requires resident and city council approval"

Property Details:

- 10-acre vacant property on Old Highway 10
- Outside city limits
- Has water and sewer infrastructure
- Could accommodate 32-bed facility with expansion potential to 64 beds

Critical Contradiction:

September 30: Mayor publicly says decision "requires resident and city council approval"

October 21: Just 3 weeks later, Kurt tells Council state "probably doesn't have to comply with local zoning laws" and land decisions "are not covered by our insurance carrier" at "informational only" workshop

 [Read Q2 Article](#) →

Oct 1, 2025

Legislative Legal Memo: Facility "Most Likely" a Profit-Making Investment Security

Montana Legislative Services Division Staff Attorney Julie Johnson issues memo to Speaker Ler concluding the behavioral health facility directed to BOI under HB 5 would "most likely constitute a security" under state and federal law.

The Howey Test Analysis:

- **Investment of money?** Yes - \$26.5 million appropriated for construction
- **Common enterprise?** Most likely yes - Legislature directed BOI (which manages "unified investment program for public funds") to construct it, implying inclusion in common investment pool
- **Expectation of profits?** Most likely yes - BOI charges rent on its real estate portfolio to yield returns and produce profits for investors

Key Conclusion:

"It is reasonable to infer that the Legislature intended the board to charge whoever occupies the behavioral health facility a rent that yields a rate of return."

Supporting Evidence:

- BOI's workforce housing project (HB 819, 2023) is included in BOI's real estate investment portfolio
- Had Legislature not intended facility to be a security, they would have directed Department of Administration (not BOI) to construct it
- BOI has duty under §17-6-201, MCA to "maximize its rate of return and produce profits for its investors"

Implications: If the facility is a security, BOI will charge rent to DPHHS (the operator), which could complicate federal Medicaid reimbursement and means the facility is intended to generate investment returns for the state's unified investment program, not just provide healthcare services.

Context: This memo was prepared at the request of the Legislative Finance Committee to clarify the legal nature of the project and BOI's authority under HB 5.

 [Read Legislative Legal Services Memo \(PDF\) →](#)

Oct 6, 2025

DPHHS Opens Site Selection Process to All Eastern Montana Communities

DPHHS Director Charlie Brereton sends formal letter to BOI Executive Director Dan Villa specifying a 32-bed forensic facility and authorizing a formal Due Diligence Questionnaire process for Eastern Montana communities.

Key Quote - Open Process:

*"While DPHHS remains interested in site opportunities in Yellowstone County, it is important that **all Eastern Montana communities** equipped with adequate infrastructure and a potential workforce are afforded the opportunity to submit proposals for hosting our new facility."*

*"Working together, I am confident that both of our agencies will **facilitate robust engagement with local stakeholders when appropriate and prior to final site selection.**"*

Timeline Context - Process Still Open:

- **October 6:** DPHHS opens process to "all Eastern Montana communities"
- **October 21:** Only 15 days later, Kurt tells Council about zoning exemptions and insurance issues at "informational only" workshop - treating Laurel as already selected

Critical Detail: Letter authorizes BOI to proceed with Due Diligence Questionnaire process "on our behalf" - establishing formal process for community proposals.

☰ [Read Full DPHHS Letter & 14-Page Analysis \(PDF\)](#) →

Oct 8, 2025

• COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Kurt Emails Commissioner Morse & Lee Deming - Spins "For Sale Sign" Narrative

Kurt sends email to Commissioner Mark Morse (copied to Lee Deming and others) responding to October 6 DPHHS announcement, spinning his involvement as casual observation of a "for sale sign."

Kurt's Email (October 8, 2025):

"The only thing I passed along to the state was that there was land listed for sale at the tour that you and I was on in and around Billings. **Vince Ricci was standing right beside me when I told the state representative about a 'for sale sign' that I had seen on my way to the family farm.**"

"The state followed up a few weeks later with the mayor and all the Mayor and I wanted was more information to make informed decisions."

"This is the first response we have received from the state."

⚠ Timeline Contradicts Kurt's Narrative:

- **July 10:** Villa emails Kurt inviting him to tours
- **July 14:** Villa schedules "Boi/Laurel Intro Call" with Kurt
- **July 24-28:** Tour happens - Kurt claims casual "for sale sign" mention
- **August 22:** Kurt emails Villa pitching specific Laurel site "on behalf of the Mayor"
- **October 8:** Kurt now claims this was all casual and "the first response we have received"

Significance: Kurt's email creates a narrative of casual, innocent involvement - but the July 14 "Boi/Laurel Intro Call" and August 22 email show active, intentional engagement with the state about Laurel as a site.

Oct 21,
2025

Laurel City Council Workshop - Kurt & Mayor Push Council to View Facility as Positive

CAO Kurt Markegard hosts Senator Vince Ricci and Representative Lee Deming at council workshop for "purely informational" discussion, presenting facility as beneficial for Laurel. Kurt and Mayor Waggoner frame proposal positively while City Attorney Michelle Braukmann expresses concern about the informal presentation process.

Kurt's Problematic Statements to Council:

- **On State Zoning Exemption:** "The state probably doesn't have to comply with local zoning laws if they own land on it. They can exempt it out like the school did with the public hearing."
- **On Annexation Requirement:** Kurt confirms state MUST request annexation to access city water and sewer - City Council approval required.
- **On Insurance Coverage:** "Land decisions are not covered by our insurance carrier. If we make the wrong one and we are challenged on it, we would then have some liability out there."

Kurt frames these as reasons Council should be cautious, but simultaneously advocates for considering the facility as job creation opportunity.

City Attorney Michelle Braukmann's Response:

"There is not a formal agenda item in front of you. This is a workshop to discuss issues and you should absolutely discuss these issues. But I invite council to consider very carefully the things that are said on the record..."

*"I didn't know this would be a big topic area tonight. I had not educated myself for that. Kurt and I have had several discussions about this issue. **I wasn't aware that it was quite right for city council discussion...**"*

"We all know that it's not good to approach these things informally."

Michelle repeatedly warns Council about creating a legal record and suggests formal agenda item and public hearing process would be more appropriate.

Mayor Waggoner's Statement:

*"I will say when we were approached both Kurt and I immediately said it's not our decision... But I will tell you as mayor, **I feel it was my job to entertain the thought** because I was voted in to help build Laurel... And if it were to happen, we don't have the land, but you know, that would help that land owner if he sold that property. It would help our restaurants. It would help our motel..."*

Key Documents Provided to Council:

- Senator Esp's memo to Yellowstone County Commissioners, Billings City Council, and Laurel City Council
- Dan Villa's August 20, 2025 statement
- Governor Gianforte's September 10, 2025 letter
- DPHHS Director Brereton's October 6, 2025 letter and 14-page analysis
- HB 5 bill text and legal analysis
- Timeline calendar showing November 14, 2025 deadline

Critical Context: Workshop held less than one month before November 14 proposal deadline. Kurt characterizes meeting as "informational only" but admits he was contacted by state "about two months ago" and encouraged them to consider Laurel location. City Attorney clearly uncomfortable with informal process and lack of proper legal framework for discussion.

 [Read Full Meeting Minutes with All Documents \(PDF\) →](#)

 [Watch Council Workshop Video →](#)

Oct 31,
2025

State Releases Official FAQ Document

DPHHS and BOI release "Montana's New Behavioral Health Facility: Frequently Asked Questions" document providing official details about the facility, staffing, security measures, and discharge protocols.

Key Details Released:

- 32-bed forensic facility confirmed
- 90-100 staff required for 24/7/365 operations
- Average stay: 3-6 months for evaluation and restoration
- Security features: Sally port doors, double-layer fences, 24/7 video monitoring
- All patients court-ordered or sentenced to DPHHS - cannot voluntarily leave
- Discharge planning coordinated with courts, law enforcement, and Probation & Parole

Official Purpose:

"Provide secure, therapeutic care for individuals with serious mental illness who are in the criminal justice system" including those awaiting trial evaluation, found Unfit to Proceed (UTP), or Guilty but Mentally Ill (GBMI).

Timeline Question - When Did This Information Exist?

During the **July 24-28 tour**, state officials shared facility details (50 beds, ~1,000 employees). Kurt attended that tour.

October 21: Kurt holds "informational only" workshop with Laurel Council - 10 days before this FAQ is publicly released.

October 31: State finally releases detailed operational information publicly via this FAQ - 3 months after Kurt heard it during the July tour.

 [Read Full FAQ Document \(PDF\) →](#)

Nov 14,
2025

Two Counties Submit Comprehensive Proposals - Laurel Does Not

State deadline for facility site proposals. Big Horn County (Hardin) and Custer County (Miles City) submit comprehensive proposals meeting all 7 due diligence requirements. Billings declines. Laurel does not submit proposal.

Required Proposal Components (7 Categories):

- Infrastructure Access & Connection Cost
- Acreage Available (minimum 10 acres, site plans)
- Local Government Ownership/Control
- Zoning & Permitting
- Site Suitability & Environmental Conditions
- **Community Support (Pass/Fail: 30% of evaluation)**
- Workforce Assessment

Big Horn County (Hardin) Proposal:

- **Community Support:** 5 letters of support (County Commissioners, Crow Tribe, Northern Cheyenne Tribe, City of Hardin, Town of Lodge Grass)
- 1,000+ acres identified in Industrial Park
- Educational partnerships with Little Big Horn College & Chief Dull Knife College
- Complete due diligence questionnaire submitted

Custer County (Miles City) Proposal:

- **Community Support:** Public survey (433 responses, 68.82% in favor) + Resolution 2026-13 + 8 letters of support from surrounding counties

- 17.52 acres on state land
- Complete infrastructure and workforce assessments
- Complete due diligence questionnaire submitted

 **Laurel's Non-Submission:**

Kurt Markegard: "From my understanding, they wanted an invitation from the community. And as a municipality, from the city of Laurel, we had no land that would have been able to meet it."

Contradiction: Kurt's November 17 letter (3 days later) reveals he and Mayor Waggoner gave state officials a summer tour of a specific site just outside city limits and had been coordinating with the state since July.

 [Read Big Horn County \(Hardin\) Proposal \(PDF\) →](#)

 [Read Custer County \(Miles City\) Proposal \(PDF\) →](#)

 [Read Montana Free Press Article →](#)

Nov 17,
2025

 **COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY**

Kurt Emails Mayor Draft Letter - "Looks great Kurt"

Kurt emails Mayor Waggoner asking him to review draft letter to Dan Villa about Laurel's interest in the facility. Mayor responds "Looks great Kurt" at 8:57 AM. This becomes Laurel's official submission.

Email Exchange (November 17, 2025 - Morning):

Kurt (8:54 AM): "Mayor, Can you read this and see if you want any changes? Kurt"

Mayor Waggoner (8:57 AM): "Looks great Kurt"

Kurt's Follow-Up Email to Villa (9:16 AM):

After getting Mayor's approval, Kurt sends letter to Villa with additional message:

"My schedule is open this Friday if anyone from the State would like to meet in person."

"I also have some thoughts on zoning laws I would like to discuss. I believe state law has some exemptions for certain types of government facilities."

Working for the State on City Salary:

Kurt is proactively offering to help the state identify zoning exemptions that would allow them to bypass local regulations. Instead of protecting Laurel's regulatory authority, he's strategizing with the state about how to circumvent it.

This directly contradicts his role as City Administrator, which is to serve Laurel's interests - not help outside entities avoid local oversight.

Letter signed by:

- Mayor Dave Waggoner
- Kurt Markegard, City Administrator

Significance: This official letter, approved by the Mayor in 3 minutes, explains why Laurel didn't submit a formal proposal by November 14 deadline but reveals behind-the-scenes dealings. Kurt's offer to discuss zoning exemptions shows he was working to advance the state's interests rather than protecting the city's authority.

Nov 17,
2025

Markegard's Letter to BOI - NOT a Proposal

Three days after the November 14 deadline, CAO Kurt Markegard writes to Dan Villa explaining why Laurel didn't submit a formal proposal - but crucially reveals private dealings with the state that occurred without public knowledge or input.

Not a Proposal - Yet Listed as One:

Kurt's letter contains NONE of the 7 required proposal components that Hardin and Miles City submitted:

- No infrastructure cost analysis
- No site plans or acreage documentation
- No ownership/control details
- No zoning or permitting timeline
- No environmental assessments
- **No community support documentation (required 30% of evaluation)**
- No workforce assessment

Yet the state website (hb5.mt.gov) lists:

- "Big Horn County Site Proposal"
- "Custer County Site Proposal"
- "Letter from Laurel" ← Submitted after deadline, missing all requirements

This presentation misleadingly suggests equivalence between comprehensive proposals with documented community support and Kurt's post-deadline explanation letter.

Key Revelations from Letter:

- **"Laurel's Mayor David Waggoner and I have described to you a location just outside Laurel's city limits"**
- References a **"summer tour"** where Markegard showed state officials a specific site
- Describes site infrastructure in detail: water/sewer lines "currently being installed," natural gas, electrical, cable, fire hydrants, fiber optic
- States this location would "lower the initial cost to construct" versus other sites
- Explains Laurel couldn't formally apply because site is outside city limits and requires annexation
- References MCA 7-2-44 process for annexation of "contiguous government land"

Critical Quote:

"I applaud the efforts to get community involvement in choosing the location for the facility, but I believe the process did not allow the location I pointed out to you during the summer tour to be nominated."

Timeline Contradiction: This letter confirms Markegard and Mayor Waggoner were privately showing the state a specific site during summer 2025 - months before the September 2 "informational" council workshop and the November 14 proposal deadline. The public and City Council were not informed of these dealings.

Legal Justification: Markegard cites City Resolution R08-22 and MCA requirements for annexation, claiming Laurel must follow public participation and hearing requirements. However, this doesn't explain why he was privately touring the site with state officials without public knowledge.

📄 [Read Full Letter from CAO Markegard \(PDF\)](#) →

Nov 21,
2025

State Officials Tour Miles City & Hardin

DPHHS and BOI representatives spend full day touring sites in Miles City and Hardin - the two communities that submitted formal proposals.

State Sen. Gregg Hunter (Glasgow):

"If you're going to put it in some place where the community doesn't want it, you're going to be fighting those battles forever. So, I think this is a step ahead of a lot of other places and sites that they've looked at."

BOI Director Dan Villa:

"This is generational, so how does that scale over the next 50 years?"

Lawrence Killsback (Big Horn County Economic Development):

Said Hardin meeting went well, believes state officials giving them good chance

State officials planned to decide by Wednesday (Nov 26)

Article notes: "Even though DPHHS and BOI did not travel to Laurel Friday, the city is still in the running for the state forensic mental health facility as well."

 [Read Q2 Article](#) →

Nov 26,
2025

DPHHS & BOI Submit Official Proposal to State Budget Director - Laurel Selected

DPHHS Director Charles Brereton and BOI Executive Director Dan Villa submit formal proposal to State Budget Director Ryan Osmundson for a 32-bed forensic mental health facility in Laurel, Montana.

Critical Statement on Local Approvals:

"BOI and its contractors will obtain all required permits, annexations, zoning, and other local approvals in full compliance with applicable ordinances and resolutions."

Key Details:

- **Facility:** 32-bed forensic mental health facility with scalability
- **Funding:** \$26.5M from HB 5, plus additional BHSFG funds if needed (\$41.97M available)
- **Lease Term:** DPHHS will lease from BOI for minimum 20 years
- **Rationale for Laurel:** "Access to critical health care workforce," geographic location for central/eastern Montana

FAQ on Community Involvement (Attached to Proposal):

Question 14: "How will the selected community be involved in the planning process for the facility?"

Answer: "Once a site and location for the facility are formally selected, a series of local meetings will explain the process for designing, building, and operating the facility and gather feedback from community members and leaders."

Community involvement planned AFTER selection, not before - contradicting Governor's September 10 promise about public participation "as it moves forward" and decisions being "made in the open."

 [Read Full Proposal \(PDF\) →](#)

Nov 28,
2025

State Officially Announces Laurel Selection

Day after Thanksgiving - Montana DPHHS announces Laurel chosen for 32-bed facility. Location not specified.

Charlie Brereton (DPHHS Director):

"Laurel provides access to a critical health care workforce and infrastructure necessary to ensure the facility's success. Laurel's geographic location is ideally situated for improving access and transportation logistics."

State Sen. Vince Ricci's account:

"I got a call from the state warning me that, 'Laurel's been selected, we just want to let you know before it hits the press.'"

Local lawmakers and Laurel City Council learn from press, not through official consultation

Fact: Laurel did NOT submit formal proposal (unlike Hardin and Miles City who did). Decision followed approval from Office of Budget and Program Planning based on collaborative plan from DPHHS and BOI.

 [Read Official DPHHS Announcement →](#)

 [Read Q2 Article →](#)

Dec 1, 2025

Other Counties Surprised by Selection

Counties that submitted formal proposals express disappointment and confusion.

Custer County Commissioner Jason Strouf:

"To have a decision made that site was selected that was not one of the two proposals submitted seems a little disingenuous in regards to the process that the state chose to put forward."

Big Horn County Economic Developer Lawrence Killsback:

"I think the state overlooked us and saw what it could have did for us generationally. The impact would have been great."

Yellowstone County Commissioner Mike Waters:

"I was surprised. And I think my colleagues were surprised."

Counties had hoped facility would provide economic boost to rural eastern Montana

 **Read Q2 Article** →

Dec 2, 2025

Laurel City Council Workshop - Council Questions State Announcement

Council members question the recent state announcement. This is the first documented City Council discussion of the facility after the November 28 announcement.

CAO Markegard's Statement:

"It is the State's decision to choose the facility's location. As I had previously briefed Council, the City cannot be considered under their process because we do not have property within our jurisdiction to propose. At this time, the City has not received a request for annexation."

City Attorney Michele Braukmann's Instructions:

- City must preserve all feedback received on this matter
- "There is nothing before the Council at the moment"
- Council members' verbal comments from public must be stated during public meeting
- Text messages and voicemails are "discoverable and need to be preserved"

Public Reminded:

"The State is a separate governmental entity. The City does not control what the State does. Just because the Council may not respond does not mean it lacks care. All information on the project can be found at <https://hb5.mt.gov/>."

Legal Positioning: Attorney Braukmann's guidance suggests the city is preparing for potential legal proceedings by instructing preservation of all communications and limiting

Council responses.

 [Read Full Meeting Minutes \(PDF\) →](#)

 [Watch Council Meeting Video →](#)

Dec 4, 2025

Gianforte Claims Facility Won't Go Where "Not Wanted" - Markegard Says City Learned from Press

Laurel officials react to selection. Governor Gianforte makes contradictory claims about community support. CAO Markegard confirms city learned of decision from press, not from state.

Governor Greg Gianforte's Full Statement:

"We're not going to go someplace where it's not wanted. It's certainly needed in all of Eastern Montana, and there was a site visit with the city council, and they were very encouraging."

Context: This statement was made on December 4, 2025, after selecting Laurel - a city that did not submit a formal proposal and whose Mayor formally opted out of the application process in November. The "site visit with the city council" refers to a September 2 informational workshop with state legislators (not state officials), which was described as "purely informational and in response to recent rumors via news articles."

CAO Kurt Markegard's Response:

"The state did not send me information on it. I had to go seek it once it went to the press."

City Attorney Michele Braukmann:

"That project has not been presented to the city nor has gone through any of the uniform channels that are required to go through here."

Contradictions:

- Gianforte claims "we're not going to go someplace where it's not wanted" while selecting a city that didn't apply
- Claims "there was a site visit with the city council, and they were very encouraging" - but the September 2 workshop was "informational only" with state legislators, not a site visit with state officials
- Laurel formally opted out of application process in November, yet was selected anyway
- City learned from press, not through official consultation

 [Read Q2 Article →](#)

Dec 4, 2025

State Admits \$27M Won't Cover Construction Costs

Officials acknowledge the \$27 million (\$26.5M + \$700K increase) approved by Legislature will not cover actual construction costs. No timeline for final cost estimate.

Funding Situation:

- Original appropriation: \$26.5M from \$300M behavioral health fund
- Increased to \$27.2M - still insufficient
- \$42M balance remains in behavioral health capital fund
- Must pull additional funds pending budget office approval

Dan Villa (BOI Executive Director):

"We will know more once we've worked through design, site identification..." - cost estimate timeline remains uncertain.

Sen. John Esp (R-Big Timber):

Acknowledged the \$27M figure was estimated based on similar past projects, noting forensic facilities cost more than originally envisioned.

Matt Kuntz (NAMI Montana):

"Our state desperately needs a forensic facility...and it's going to cost what a forensic facility is going to cost."

Context: Existing Galen facility houses 54 people with waitlists exceeding 100 patients. State faces potential federal intervention if crisis continues.

Note: Article mentions facility will require additional operational costs beyond construction, though health department states they "would not have proceeded independently without consulting the Legislature."

 [Read MSU Exponent / Missoulian Article](#) →

Dec 8, 2025

COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Villa Requests Zoom Link for Council Meeting

Villa emails Kurt requesting Zoom link for "tomorrow's Council meeting" (December 9). Villa and Director Brereton want to provide public comment to Council and staff.

Villa's Email (December 8, 2025 - 7:42 AM):

"Good morning, Kurt. Is there a Zoom link for tomorrow's Council meeting? Director Brereton and I would like to provide public comment to Council and staff."

Significance: Villa coordinating directly with Kurt about council access rather than going through official channels. This sets up the December 9 public meeting where Villa makes transparency commitments.

Dec 9, 2025

Villa Makes Public Transparency Commitments to City Council

BOI Executive Director Dan Villa and DPHHS Director Charlie Brereton address Laurel City Council during public comment period. Villa makes explicit promises about transparency and following local processes.

Villa's Key Commitments:

1. Council Will Hear First:

"When and if BOI enters into a contingent buy-sell agreement with the property owner, **the city council will hear about it first**. You will hear about it during the public comment period of a city commission meeting. **You will not read about it in a press release. You will not see it covered by news media before you have been informed directly by me.**"

2. Will Follow Local Processes:

"BOI will follow every existing city resolution, ordinance, and process that governs land use in Laurel. **If annexation is required, and it likely will be, we will file an annexation request through the proper channels.** BOI does not intend to circumvent city governance. We intend to work within it."

3. Current Status:

"**No land has been purchased. No offers to purchase land have been made to any property owner.** We are conducting preliminary discussions regarding potential sites, nothing more."

Promises Immediately Broken:

December 30: Villa privately emails Kurt requesting meeting to discuss "annexation process, zoning regs, basically all of the city requirements" - no public notice

January 6-7: Villa schedules and holds secret meeting with entire city leadership at private construction company offices in Billings

January 19: Press reports state advancing plans - Mayor Waggoner says "haven't heard from state since Dec 9 meeting" and they're learning from media (breaking Villa's "hear about it first" promise)

Significance: Villa's public transparency commitments on December 9 establish a clear standard that his subsequent private coordination with Kurt and city leadership directly violates. These promises were made to Council and public, then immediately broken.

 **Watch Council Meeting Video** →

Dec 19,
2025

Attorney General Issues Letter of Advice on Securities Classification

Montana Attorney General Austin Knudsen responds to Speaker Ler's formal opinion request about whether the behavioral health facility constitutes a "security" under state and federal law.

Critical Limitation - Not a Formal Opinion:

AG provides a "letter of advice" rather than formal Attorney General Opinion because **"the specific financial instrument(s) evidencing BOI's investment has not been provided for consideration."**

"This response shall be construed as a letter of advice and shall not be cited and/or presented as controlling authority nor carrying the force of law."

AG's Partial Analysis:

- **Investment of money?** Yes - BOI's use of transferred funds to develop real estate is considered an investment under GAAP
- **Common enterprise?** Likely yes - Past practice (HB 219 in 2023) indicates building will likely be included in common investment pool
- **Expectation of profits & managerial efforts?** Cannot determine - "BOI currently charges rent to tenants of buildings in its real estate portfolio. These agreements can comply with the Howey test, but **in absence of a specific agreement, I cannot offer an opinion** or advice as to whether the project in HB 5 will comply."

Key Context from October 1 Legal Memo:

"If the building rent is reimbursed with federal funds, it is not clear how the Board of Investments can maximize profits while adhering to strict policies for federal reimbursement."

Significance: The AG's inability to provide a definitive opinion leaves uncertainty about the facility's securities classification and its implications for federal reimbursement and BOI's profit requirements.

Dec 30,
2025

COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Villa Requests Private Meeting to Discuss City Requirements

BOI Executive Director Dan Villa emails Kurt requesting a meeting to discuss Laurel's annexation process, zoning regulations, and city requirements. Villa asks about meeting at a private construction company's offices in Billings.

Villa's Email (December 30, 2025):

*"Would you and any members of your team you'd like to add be available to meet team on January 7 at 6PM at Dick Anderson Construction's offices in Billings? **We want to get a good understanding of the annexation process, zoning regs, basically all of the city requirements.**"*

Jan 6, 2026

COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Villa Confirms Meeting with City Leadership at Private Construction Office

Villa sends meeting confirmation for January 7 at 6PM at Dick Anderson Construction's offices in Billings. Attendees include Kurt and Mayor Waggoner.

 **Private Meeting Location:**

Meeting scheduled at **Dick Anderson Construction's offices** - a private construction company in Billings, not at Laurel City Hall or any public building.

Attendees: Kurt Markegard, Mayor Dave Waggoner, and state officials

Jan 7, 2026

Secret Meeting: City Leadership Helps State Navigate Local Requirements

Kurt and Mayor Waggoner meet with state officials at Dick Anderson Construction's offices in Billings to discuss annexation process, zoning regulations, and "basically all of the city requirements."

Timeline:

- **October 21:** Kurt tells Council state "probably doesn't have to comply with local zoning laws"
- **November 17:** Kurt offers to help state identify zoning exemptions
- **January 7:** Entire city leadership travels to Billings to help state understand how to navigate Laurel's requirements

Jan 8, 2026

COMMUNICATIONS DISCOVERY

Villa Thanks Kurt for "Very Helpful" Meeting - Requests Annexation and Zoning Forms

Morning after the private meeting, Villa emails Kurt thanking him for the "very helpful and informative" session and requests the official forms needed to submit annexation and zoning change requests to the city.

Villa's Email (January 8, 2026 - 8:55 AM):

"Good morning Kurt,"

"Thanks for the time yesterday. Very helpful and informative."

*"Can you please direct me to the forms we will need to submit to the city to **request annexation and a zoning change?**"*

State Formally Pursuing Local Approvals:

Villa is now requesting the official forms to formally apply for:

- **Annexation** - bringing property into city limits
- **Zoning change** - modifying land use designation

Jan 19,
2026

State Advances Plans Without Local Feedback

Charlie Brereton presents draft plans to legislators in Helena on Dec 17. Laurel and Yellowstone County officials learn about plans from Q2 News.

Mark Morse (Yellowstone County Commissioner):

"The first I was aware of them was when Q2 made me aware of them this morning. So that's not open, honest or transparent."

Mayor Dave Waggoner (Laurel):

Haven't heard from state since Dec 9 meeting - "very interesting that they want to be here, without saying anything."

Cost Update:

Brereton estimates \$30M-\$50M needed (original appropriation: \$26.5M)

Broken Promise: Dan Villa previously told City Council they'd hear about buy-sell agreement first, not from press. BOI now nearing agreement - city officials learned from media.

 [Read Q2 Article](#) →

Jan 20,
2026

BOI Announces Buy-Sell Agreement to Council

During a city council workshop, Dan Villa of the Montana Board of Investments (BOI) formally notifies the council that a buy-sell agreement has been executed for a 114-acre property west of Laurel. He states that with the agreement in place, the BOI will now begin the formal process of requesting annexation and zoning from the city.

Dan Villa (BOI) to Council:

"The Montana Board of Investments has executed a buy-sell agreement to purchase approximately 114 acres located west of Laurel along Highway 10. With this

agreement in place, BOI will now begin the formal process of requesting annexation and assignment of zoning from the city of Laurel."

 **Watch Council Workshop Video** →

Jan 21,
2026

State Identifies Specific 114-Acre Site

Following the announcement to city council the previous night, news breaks publicly that the state has a buy-sell agreement for a 114-acre plot along Old Highway 10. For the first time, the specific location and property owner are publicly confirmed.

Location Details:

- Between Foundation Avenue and Golf Course Road
- Across from Wood's Softball Complex
- Near main road to Laurel Golf Course
- **Visible from West Elementary School**
- Outside city limits (requires annexation)

Property Owner Confirmed:

Miller Trois LLC (per Montana Cadastral property database)

Mark Morse (Yellowstone County Commissioner):

"People should not mince words. People who go there, their freedoms, their liberties have been taken away. They're not free to leave. And that means you're in a correctional facility."

Updated Cost: \$27.2 million (increased from \$26.5M appropriation)

State will request annexation into city and zoning assignment. 32-bed facility confirmed.

 **Read Q2 Article** →

Jan 23

BOI Public Meeting Announced

Laurel Chamber of Commerce announces meeting with Montana Board of Investments for Friday, January 30th.

Public invited to bring questions about proposed facility to BOI representatives.

Jan 26,
2026

School Board Holds Meeting - Discusses Opposition to Facility

Board of Trustees holds discussion regarding the proposed state facility during their regular meeting. Board confirms no state officials have contacted the district regarding how the facility would impact students.

Key Points from Discussion:

- Facility would be within 500 yards of West Elementary School
- Proximity raises significant concerns about student safety and well-being
- Board concerned about security and potential impact on educational environment
- **No state officials have contacted the district** about facility impact

Superintendent Matthew Torix:

"The safety of our students is our highest priority. The building of this Forensic Detention Facility in such close proximity to our elementary school is not supported by the Board on the grounds of safety for the students we serve."

Context: This meeting occurred one day before the Board's formal written opposition announcement on January 27, 2026.

Jan 26,
2026

Laurel C.A.R.E.D. Forms - Community Organizing Intensifies

Laurel C.A.R.E.D. (Community Advocates for Responsible Economic Development) Facebook page published, marking the formal organization of community resistance to demand transparency and accountability.

- Document requests filed with city
- Recall petition preparations begin
- Media coverage increases (KULR 8, Montana Free Press)
- Workshop meetings scheduled for public questions

 [Join Laurel C.A.R.E.D. Facebook Group](#) →

Jan 26,
2026

BOI Cancels Meeting - Venue "Not Agreed Upon"

Montana Board of Investments cancels scheduled January 30th public meeting.

Chamber announcement:

"The Montana Board of Investments is unable to participate in the previously scheduled meeting under the proposed format."

Context: Meeting venue had been moved to local high school due to overwhelming community response. BOI originally agreed to smaller town hall format.

Jan 27,
2026

School Board Formally Opposes Facility in Writing

Laurel School Board and Superintendent Matthew Torix issue written statement officially opposing "the proposed state forensic detention facility."

Key Concerns:

- Legality of building so close to school
- **Distance: 459 yards** from eastern edge of West Elementary property to western edge of facility property
- Board member asked about filing injunction to stop the state

Chris Lorash (School Board member):

"What I find interesting is that there are two other communities that did put in a proposal to host it, but Laurel was not one of those... it's not like they don't have other places to put the facility."

Article confirms: Hardin and Miles City submitted proposals, but state chose Laurel even though city never put in formal proposal

Laurel C.A.R.E.D. meeting scheduled at Front Porch before City Council meeting at 6:30 PM

 [Read Q2 Article](#) →

Jan 29

BOI Refuses All Public Meetings

Chamber final statement:

"At this time, the Laurel Chamber of Commerce will not be hosting any public or private meetings with the Montana Board of Investments. This was the decision of the Montana Board of Investments."

BOI's position: Will only attend required City Council meeting after submitting zoning documentation

No date known for required meeting at this time

Jan 27,
2026

Packed City Council Meeting - Residents Speak Out

Two dozen residents pack public meeting room for nearly two hours of public comment. Council members sit in silence per city attorney's instructions.

Key Concerns Raised:

- Facility 500 yards from elementary school
- Tax burden on limited Laurel tax base
- "Backdoor deals" without community consultation
- Markegard's Nov 17 letter as evidence of obscure dealmaking

Chris Lorash (School Board Chair):

"Safety is more than just access to the building. It's the students and the teachers state of mind."

Samantha Mayes (resident):

"Backdoor deals have been made without consulting the Laurel community. We deserve answers."

Markegard's response:

"I want open and transparent government. That's what I want. That's what I want from the council members. That's what I want from the mayor and I want that from the public."

Markegard states Gianforte administration approached him and mayor in July along with Billings and Yellowstone County officials

 **Watch Council Meeting Video** →

 **Read Montana Free Press Article** →

Read Billings Gazette Interview (Markegard) →

Read Q2 Article →

Feb 3, 2026

Tense Council Workshop: Planner Explains Process, CAO Defends Actions

In a tense city council workshop, new contract planner Forest Sanderson explains the lengthy three-step public process required for the facility project (Growth Policy Amendment, Annexation, and Zoning), confirming no application is yet pending. The meeting is dominated by fallout from the proposed facility, with the City Attorney reading nearly an hour of public correspondence overwhelmingly opposing the project.

Key Moments from the Meeting:

- Under questioning from Council Member McKay, **Mayor Waggoner admits he instructed CAO Kurt Markegard** to send the controversial letters to the state in August and November.
- A tense exchange occurs over the city's failure to fulfill public records requests. When the City Attorney clarifies the requests have not been answered, the Mayor calls for her resignation on the record. A resident later states during public comment they overheard the Mayor say to the attorney, "You're not helping us."
- When asked by Council Member Naylor what specific steps he will take to be more transparent and correct issues, the **Mayor refuses to answer**, stating, "I won't do anything until we get an annexation request."
- CAO Kurt Markegard gives a nearly hour-long, emotional speech defending his actions and communications with the state, claiming his November 17th letter was a "letter of rejection" of the state's process, not a letter of interest.

Analysis: Contradictions in CAO & Mayor's Accounts

During the workshop, both CAO Kurt Markegard and Mayor Dave Waggoner stated they were surprised by the state's selection of Laurel. The Mayor claimed, "We were surprised as you were when they announced it," while the CAO portrayed his early involvement as minimal, stating he was "really naive" and "had no idea" what the state was doing. These claims are contradicted by previously documented events.

Key claims from the CAO's speech vs. the timeline record:

- **Claim:** His involvement began with casually mentioning a "for sale" sign during the July 24th tour.

Contradiction: Records show state officials scheduled a "Boi/Laurel Intro Call" specifically with Kurt on **July 14** to discuss "potential Laurel options," ten days before the tour.

- **Claim:** The August 22nd letter was merely an attempt to get information from the state at the Mayor's request.

Contradiction: The **August 22** email shows the CAO, "on behalf of the Mayor," actively pitching a specific site with maps and infrastructure details, and inviting state officials to a meeting to "further discuss" it.

- **Claim:** The November 17th letter was a "letter of rejection" intended to correct the state's flawed public process.

Contradiction: The letter itself highlights the financial benefits of the proposed site. Furthermore, in an accompanying email on **November 17**, the CAO offered to meet with state officials to share his "thoughts on zoning laws," suggesting collaboration rather than rejection.

Analysis: A Contradictory Stance on Zoning Regulations

During the workshop, both the CAO and the new planner heavily emphasized the required public processes for a Growth Policy amendment and zoning change, presenting them as a crucial safeguard for the community. The CAO highlighted his efforts to provide maps to the public as an act of transparency, noting he even tried to have larger maps printed.

Contradiction: This narrative, presenting local zoning law as a protective shield for Laurel, directly contradicts the CAO's own advice to the City Council on **October 21, 2025**. In that meeting, while framing the facility as a positive opportunity, he specifically told the council that the state "probably doesn't have to comply with local zoning laws" and could "exempt it out."

 [Watch Council Meeting Video →](#)

These Facts Demand Action

The lack of transparency is intentional. The silence is strategic. Your voice is needed.