

Questionnaire for Billings 2025 City Council Election.

The members of the Billings Firefighters Union, IAFF Local 521, are committed to protecting the lives, property, and well-being of our community. As we consider endorsements for the upcoming city council election, we are seeking your positions on issues that directly affect public safety, emergency response, firefighter health and wellness, and the future of Billings.  
  
Please respond to the following questions as thoroughly as possible. Your answers will help our membership make informed decisions about who will best support the citizens of Billings and the men and women who serve them.

1. Please provide a brief bio.

I am a Billings native and mother of 5 adult children, and grandmother to one precious baby girl. I am also director at Angela’s Piazza: Women’s Drop-In Center and have worked there for 15 years. For 8 years I have served as director of the Spanish Choir at Mary Queen of Peace Church and have been a member of the choir for 35+ years. I have a passion for social service work and have spent my entire career in the nonprofit sector working with marginalized families in some form or another. Community is my heart.

1. What made you want to run for city council?

As you can see in my work history, I am committed and loyal, which are necessary qualities in a council representative. I’ve known Billings and so many members of this community for so long, that I feel my background and personal experiences allow me to bring to the table fresh perspectives and real solutions. I have seen where the “haves” and the “have nots” can come together to create change for good. I represent an underrepresented faction of this community that is rarely seen on council, which will bring more color (literally and figuratively), insight, and solutions-focused energy.

1. What is your leadership style and how do you intend to bring a consensus to the council?

I believe collaboration is key. We aren’t all-knowing about every single issue. So, working together by listening to the experts as well as the people who are being affected by policy is critical for securing a quality outcome. I am not interested in being a seat warmer, nor am I interested in stealing the show. My focus is on the issue and who is affected by it. Bringing consensus is critical to achieving goals. As they say, you win some and you lose some. But having this diverse council with different ideas and solutions is critical to ensuring all voices are heard. I am willing to listen and learn, and I am committed to working together.

1. What do you see as the role and/or function of city government?

City government is to set policy and procedure for the function and benefit of the city. In Billings’ case, council has one employee and that is the city administrator, and his job is to oversee the various departments. Those departments conduct the day-to-day work, reporting to their department head. I believe this is ideal. The city administrator makes weekly reports to council on what current work the departments are conducting, and council advises from there. In my mind, this is a good model, and council needs to continue in this manner. It is not the council’s job to get into the weeds of each department’s budget, as the department heads are the qualified ones to do this. When they present their budgets, then council can ask specific questions as needed.

1. What is the number one issue facing Billings for the next city council, and how do you intend to address it?

I believe addressing crime and crime prevention are urgently needed. And yes, it can be done in tandem with one another. We need more mental health support at earlier times in the lives of our community members. Green spaces attract families and outdoor enthusiasts, which is all crime-preventative. Programs like Camp Blue, where students get to learn about police work and consider a career in it, are also effective as students learn about what the job entails and would hopefully lead them to raising their families here, as well, as they take a leadership role in peace-keeping. Meanwhile, our jail is filled to bursting, creating even more opportunity for crime within its own walls due to inhumane conditions and insufficient support. Yes, we need to expand the jail and yes, we need to work so much harder on prevention.

1. How would you determine and consider the agendas of other council members to be the most productive and prioritize the conflicting demands of Billings?

From what I have witnessed at council meetings all year thus far, I see contention and back biting among our own leadership. It’s juvenile at best and clearly obstructive to meeting goals and deadlines. In my work in the nonprofit sector, I also see a lot of this behavior among the families I work with, and work with the families to resolve the deeper issues. I am not a counselor but my degree in psychology has given me a deep appreciation in learning why people do what they do. I have had a great deal of success in helping people put aside their differences and address the issue at hand, because once you can understand what their motivation is, you are more likely to find some common ground.

1. How would you work with other entities to balance asks of the public for funding through levies and bonds?

I believe some of the issues in our community can be effectively addressed, if not resolved, by working with our community service providers, such as nonprofits, faith communities, civic groups, and neighborhood task forces. I will use TrailNet as a great example of how collaboration is so effective. TrailNet is comprised of a group of people who are passionate about safe routes to schools, connecting trails for bikers or other wheeled individuals to get from point A to B, and for folks who simply enjoy a brisk or even leisurely walk around their community. They conduct fundraisers and community events to help pay for the installation and maintenance of these trails. All the work they do is focused on the good of the community. They are an essential asset to what Billings can provide. We need more effort like this! I personally am delighted to be part of a women’s cohort where women in leadership of various service programs come together to identify gaps in service, when and how to collaborate and team up so as not to duplicate efforts, and in general lift up women in our community. It is groups like this, comprised of passionate people around an issue, that effect real, forward-focused change for the greater good. Bonds and levies have their place, but the current climate suggests our community is tax-weary. We need to listen to them.

1. What do you see as the role of the Union in representing the 144 members of Local 521?

The Union is a critical piece to ensure our first responders are taken care of, both in the workplace but also as productive, thriving members of this community. The work provided by the union members is essential to the safety of our city, and the members should thus be treated that way. I am a strong believer in the right to organize, and 100% support their efforts.

1. Currently Fire Station 5 is undergoing a renovation that is long overdue. There are four other stations that need considerable renovations and a growing need for a new station to support growth. What is your stance on maintaining what is currently in use versus building new stations?

I would be happy to sit with representatives from the union to learn the specifics but overall would support renovations as necessary. This then lends to also listening and learning about the vision of a new station and working with both city and union representatives to see how that could come to fruition. Billings is definitely a growing community, and safety is key to ensuring prosperity.

1. The men and women of Local 521 currently respond to about 18,000 to 20,000 calls for service each year. Departments throughout the nation that respond to a similar number of calls have between 200 and 250 members taking those calls. Currently L521 has 144 members. What do you see as solutions to add staffing?

Please educate me as to staffing needs! Thus far I have only heard about BPD needing more officers in the field, but few seem to be mentioning this critical need that you are experiencing. Again, we can’t all be experts on everything, but you are the experts on this issue, and I would be heartened to hear your concerns and advocate for you at city council level.

1. Firefighters face significant risks from cancer, PTSD, and other occupational hazards. How would you support initiatives to improve firefighter health and wellness programs?

I understand 100% how one’s mental health needs to be protected as a provider of this level of intense work. Yes, absolutely there are serious risks at play in this line of work. Our Family Justice Center offers Warrior Yoga as one way to support our first responders. Yoga is an excellent way to center oneself and learn to let go of stress. I support incentives that encourage access to mental health support in whatever way is most effective for those that will use it.

1. How will you approach contract negotiations with Local 521 if elected to city council?

I will come to the table with a listening ear, because again, you know what you need better than anyone. I will endeavor to meet you where you are at, and advocate for policy and agreements that will best meet your needs.

1. How would you support community risk reduction initiatives such as fire prevention education, wildfire preparedness, and public health partnerships?

I grew up with Smokey the Bear, and he played a significant role in shaping my awareness and understanding of my own role in nature. My family has always been active outdoors, so we have a healthy respect for how we as humans impact the environment. Programs and messaging like Smokey’s are very effective! When we have strong leadership with sensible messaging, we can have a significant, positive impact on our community. This approach is critical because it provides essential information and education around various issues, including fire prevention and public health in general. Education campaigns have always been my focus – I am not working to change anyone’s minds; more so I am working to inform them on the facts. The Facts should always be what we use to educate our public on the issues that are important to them and to us.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful responses. Your answers will be shared with our membership as we consider our endorsement. Please return your completed questionnaire to Local 521 by September 1st, 2025 at 5p.m.