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Bill No. HB 747

Gazette opinion: Bus center site options must be explored

A group of Billings people will be taking another look at potential sites for a Billings MET transfer center. This rethinking of site possibilities is important now because the city's tentative top choice has generated objections on several fronts.

By appointing a committee this week, Mayor Chuck Tooley allowed the process of exploring alternatives to move forward while the possibility of a major private business project at Broadway and Fourth Avenue North is developed further.

The committee appointments include Big Sky EDA Director Joe McClure, architect Kim Olsen, attorney Jock West, Downtown Billings Partnership Director Greg Krueger and Gazette Publisher Mike Gullledge.

Virtually everyone who has spoken up on the transit center location supports having a safe, comfortable transit center to serve MET customers. It's the location choice that has generated concerns about the best use of valuable downtown property, neighboring property owners' needs, additional traffic, noise and bus emission pollution.

This latest bus center site committee doesn't have much time to come up with detailed proposals, but we expect the members will work to raise good questions and good ideas that will help this city ultimately make a transit center decision that will benefit downtown and the MET bus riders. The City Council must take the time needed to make a good decision that will serve Billings well for many years to come.

Construction class bill gets bipartisan boost

There was good news from Helena this week for the future of Billings Public Schools' vocational construction programs. House Bill 747, sponsored by Rep. Robyn Driscoll of Billings, would limit liability for student construction projects. The House gave final approval to the bill Tuesday and sent it to the Senate for consideration next week.

The bill would allow SD2 continue its long-running home construction programs, which teach Career Center students skills in high demand by the construction industry. Every year, Career Center students build a house, which is then sold. In recent years, these homes have sold for \$200,000 to \$250,000, according to Dan Martin, SD2 operations director.

But this year, the district couldn't buy insurance on portions of the construction training program. This situation left the district with no liability protection. HB747 proposes that public schools and institutions of post-secondary education would be immune from liability for student construction in most cases, provided the student construction is disclosed when the property is sold. Schools around the state favored this bill.

Driscoll's common sense bill drew overwhelming bipartisan support, including the support of all Yellowstone County lawmakers. Now, if only we can see that kind of collaboration on the larger education issues of school funding and quality education.