

BECON
8/28/20

Another hot breakfast welcomed us this morning at Metra. About the same number and same folks are showing up for our meetings.

Guests

Our only guess today were are speakers – Kody Christensen Linton and BPD Officer Brad Munser.

Announcements

- The Beef Raffle tickets and money have to be turned in by this Thursday (9/4/20). The raffle is on Friday 9/5.
- The Big Air Bash is tonight. It's a 6 pm show-up time (enter thru the glass doors below the upper parking lot per normal) and the doors open at 6:30 pm. Double-check your shift assignment and find a sub if necessary.
- School supply donations (or \$\$) are still being accepted at breakfast and at B&B Tire.
- Please see Dina's email from yesterday regarding the Laurel Exchange Club's Field of Flags events and the COVID modifications to the visitor format (drive-thru this year); and opportunities to volunteer.

Speakers

Kody Christensen-Linton, the Resource Outreach Coordinator for the Billings Downtown Business Alliance and Brad Munser, a Billings cop assigned to the downtown beat (on a bicycle), were on hand to talk about the efforts to help with the "at risk individuals" – ie transients, panhandlers, homeless, addicts – that are found in the downtown area, and their efforts to help these people, keep the public safe and generally, help promote a better downtown business environment and community.

There are a lot of programs in place to address this issue working with and alongside Kody and Brad and being funded by the Downtown Business Alliance, Downtown Business Development District and funding from the City and State. So many programs and missions that I kind of got a little lost during the presentation but more information is available on the downtownbillings.com website.

We all know we have a problems with chronic inebriation, street disorder and transiency that negatively affects the City so Community Innovations programs like the Continuum of Care, Motivated Addiction Alternative Program (MAAP), the Purple People and Spare Change for Real Change are in place with specific charges to improve the overall problem we have. Again, details on these programs is available under the "Resources" menu tab in the downtownbillings.com website.

Several things that were particularly eye-opening to me during this discussion include the following:

- Our neighboring and regional community business "friends" regularly ship transients, homeless, etc. to the City of Billings because we have the services in place to deal with them. Our speakers confirmed that the City of Billings does have more services available for the help that these people need than other towns in MT or the region. However, they are far from being large

enough to accommodate additional people from outside of our community – we don't have enough resources to handle our own problems.

- I've always wondered why the police can't clean up the street and simply arrest people that are obviously intoxicated in public – other than the fact that we really don't have any jail space. Well it's because there is no State law on the books to do this – there is no law against public intoxication. There is, however, a law against having an "open container" so this is the law that it often times used when an arrest is needed.
- Even though the programs mentioned and the efforts of Kody and Brad have made a significant impact in turns of lessening crime and general disorder, a large number of jail inmates were released in an effort to reduce the spread COVID virus that has caused a spike in the crimes associated with transients, homeless, etc, and tracked by law enforcement in 2020.
- An incident that necessitates a hospital visit for the at-risk population can easily result in thousands of dollars of expense, which becomes the responsibility of tax payers. It's likely that it would probably ultimately be less expensive if more tax-payer money was spent on the programs in place and mentioned above than paying for these hospital bills.
- The Spare Change for Real Change is a program where you can get "card" to give out to panhandlers in lieu of money that provides them with information on where to get help. Most times, any money given to panhandlers is used to feed an addiction.

A question was asked of our speakers about what they think would help the situation most and they indicated that having a "low barrier" shelter, AKA an old-school drunk tank, or a place with limited or minimal requirements for entry, to put people in for very short-term stays to get them off the streets until they can get it together. And then also a high-barrier shelter, which is similar except it has more rules for entry and is designed more for providing both a shelter and a means towards long-term help.

Have a great weekend!