

March 5, 2026

Montana State Library Commission
Jennie Stapp, State Librarian
Robyn Scribner, State Library Commissioner: Chair

Via Email

RE: Formal Complaint Regarding Unethical Behavior and Lack of Transparency by Flathead County Library Trustee Jane Wheeler and Director Teri Dugan

To the Members of the Montana State Library Commission:

I am writing to formally report a series of actions by Flathead County Library Trustee Jane Wheeler and Library Director Teri Dugan that appear to circumvent ethical standards, violate open meeting laws, and undermine the integrity of public library governance regarding the proposed acquisition of land from a private developer for a new library. I request a formal investigation, a pause on land negotiations, and a review of board conduct.

Based on internal documents and meeting records, the following issues merit immediate scrutiny:

1. Violation of Open Meeting Laws and Transparency

On February 26, 2026, during an official Library Trustees Board Meeting, Trustee Jane Wheeler admitted to attending a private, non-notified meeting with Director Teri Dugan, Mayor of Kalispell Ryan Hunter, and Erica Wirtala of the Flathead Library Foundation.

- **Private Negotiations:** Wheeler explicitly stated that this was "not an official Facilities Committee meeting." This appears to violate Montana Code Annotated (MCA) 2-3-203 regarding open meeting laws.
- **Discussion of Public Funds:** During this closed-door session, the participants discussed the expenditure of public TIF (Tax Increment Financing) funds, parking allocations, and city plans involving a private developer, SHOP Development (aka Parkline Partners).
- **Director Participation:** Director Teri Dugan, who explicitly said she would provide notice of this meeting on the library's website at the February 12, 2026, Facilities Committee Meeting, participated in this non-public dialogue, characterizing it as "opening the dialogue".

2. Bypassing Board Directives and Improper Collaboration

The Board of Trustees had previously issued a directive that the Flathead Library Foundation's role should be strictly limited to fundraising, specifically excluding them from negotiations regarding the purchase and development of a new library.

- **Policy Violation:** Trustee Wheeler and Director Dugan ignored this directive by including Foundation President Erica Wirtala in the private meeting with the Mayor to discuss development negotiations.

Public Comment

Brad Wright
233 Arbour Drive E
Kalispell, MT 59901
bradwright@bullittmail.com

March 11, 2026

The Hon. Ryan Hunter
Mayor of Kalispell

Via email

Subject: NOTICE OF CONCERN: Circumvention of Public Process and Violation of Transparency Standards

Mayor Hunter,

I am writing to formally address the alarming reports of clandestine deliberations involving your office, as detailed by Flathead County Library Trustee Jane Wheeler during the February 26 Board Meeting. The audio record of this meeting confirms that a private meeting was initiated by your office to discuss public TIF funds and development projects behind closed doors. The relevant discussion of the Facilities Committee Report begins at approx. 1:09:55 of the meeting:

<https://tinyurl.com/Feb-2026-Trustees-Meeting>

This meeting, which included Library Director Teri Dugan and Erica Wirtala of the Northwest Montana Association of Realtors, regarding the Library and SHOP Development (Parkline Partners), appears to be a direct attempt to negotiate public assets and funds outside the required public forum. Given that SHOP has not submitted a formal application to the URA Board, these off-the-record discussions create a significant appearance of impropriety and pre-determination. It is my understanding that no signed buy/sell agreement currently exists between the Library and SHOP. Furthermore, the current co-signed Letter of Intent is reportedly being modified from a 2-acre developable area purchase to 1.71 acres, including approximately 0.5 acres that are undevelopable.

Furthermore, as someone who holds a Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning, your apparent disregard for the public process is particularly concerning. Your professional background and the AICP certification requirements for staff like City Manager Jarod Nygren and Community Development Manager Nelson Loring demand a standard of transparency that is clearly not being met here.

I previously requested at a Library Facilities Committee meeting to be notified of any discussions between the City and the Library to ensure I could attend as a member of the public. I was not notified nor was the public.

You are hereby formally invited—and encouraged—to attend the **URA Board Meeting on March 19, 2026**. This will be your opportunity to account for these private deliberations in a public forum and explain why your office is "working with" developers on matters that have yet to be presented to the URA Board. The public deserves to understand why these negotiations are occurring in the shadows rather than in the light of a public meeting.

Because standard city and county communication channels have proven unreliable or have been intentionally obstructed, I am sending this directly to your campaign email to ensure it cannot be ignored. I am copying several state-level oversight agencies because my attempts to communicate through standard city and county legal channels have been met with active obstruction and the blocking of my public comments.

Sincerely,

Brad Wright

CC:

- Honorable Kristen Juras, Lt. Governor of Montana
- Montana Legislative Audit Division
- Montana Commissioner of Political Practices
- Montana State Library Commission
- Montana Transparency Project
- Ross Pickert, NMAR Board of Director Ethics Committee
- Doug Adams, Flathead County Library Board of Trustees

Appendix A: March 19 2026 URA Board Meeting Agenda



City of Kalispell

Post Office Box 1997 - Kalispell, Montana 59903
Telephone: (406) 758-7701 Fax: (406) 758-7758

AGENDA

URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY BOARD

THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026 – 3 P.M.

AT CITY HALL, FIRST FLOOR CONFERENCE ROOM

1. Welcome
2. Public Comment
3. Approval of Meeting Summary
 - a. January 2026 Meeting
4. TIF & TEDD
 - a. West Side TIF
 - a. 40 Apple Way TIF Assistance Application
 -  b. Kalispell Center Mall Work Session
5. Public Projects
 - a. Updates
 - i. BUILD Grant Update
 - ii. SS4A Implementation Grant Update
6. Next Regularly Scheduled Meeting – Thursday, April 16, 2026
7. Adjourn

- **Conflict of Interest:** Ms. Wirtala also serves as the Public Affairs Director for the Northwest Montana Association of Realtors (NMAR), creating a potential conflict of interest as she advocates for private developers before they have submitted formal applications to the city.

3. Failure to Disclose Public Documents and Deceptive Land Proposal

Evidence suggests that both Wheeler and Dugan have been involved in a proposal from SHOP Development that is fundamentally deceptive regarding the value and size of the proposed library site.

- **Withholding Information:** Director Dugan received architect sketches in 2025 that revealed significant discrepancies in the acreage and parking being offered by SHOP, yet these documents were not made public at that time.
- **Acreage Deception:** The original April 2025 cosigned Letter of Intent (LOI) specified 2 acres for \$2.9 million, but subsequent unsigned draft agreements reduced this to 1.71 acres, much of which is an unbuildable easement of roughly .5 acre. This could represent a potential loss of approximately \$2 million in value to the library and county taxpayers.

4. Potential Conflicts of Interest and Third-Party Influence

There is significant concern that Trustee Wheeler and Director Dugan are being manipulated by Realtor Wendy Brown, who appears to be acting as a dual agent for both the library and the developer. Brown reportedly arranged these private meetings to solicit trustee support for TIF funding for SHOP Development before any formal application was submitted to the city.

The actions of Trustee Wheeler, a former librarian with a Masters Degree in Library and Information Science, and who should be well-versed in professional ethics, and Director Dugan represent a systemic failure in transparency and a disregard for the legal requirements governing public expenditures.

I request that the Montana State Library Commission investigate these matters to ensure that the Flathead County Library is protected from deceptive development practices and that its leadership adheres to the highest standards of public trust.

Respectfully,

Brad Wright

bradwright@bullittmail.com

cc: Honorable Kristen Juras, Lt. Governor of Montana

cc: Montana Transparency Project

cc: Ross Pickert, NMAR Board of Director Ethics Committee

cc: Doug Adams, Flathead County Library Board of Trustees

cc: Teri Dugan, Flathead County Library Director

I am submitting this as a formal public comment for the record and request that it be included in the minutes of the next City Council meeting.

Brad Wright
233 Arbour Drive E
Kalispell, MT 59901
bradwright@bullittmail.com

March 12, 2026

Kalispell City Council

City of Kalispell
Via email

Subject: Ethics Disclosure regarding SHOP Mall Proposal & Unauthorized Staff Negotiations

Dear City Council Members,

I am writing to formally alert the Council to a series of non-transparent negotiations involving the Mayor and specific city staff members that appear to bypass public oversight and directly contradict established legal agreements regarding the Flathead County Library acquiring property at the Kalispell Center Mall. It is my concern that the Council may not be fully aware of the extent to which staff-led "secret negotiations" have deviated from publicly approved plans.

1. Contradiction of Public Statements and Staff Involvement

In yesterday's communication (See Appendix A), Mayor Hunter asserted that he "would not discuss specific details about a proposed project and would only talk about general ideas." However, an audio transcript of Library Trustee Jane Wheeler regarding the February 26, 2026 meeting (See Appendix B) directly refutes this.

Ms. Wheeler's account confirms that the **Mayor, City Manager Jarod Nygren** and **city staff members** have been engaged in specific, high-level deliberations affecting the Library:

- **Financial Commitments:** Ms. Wheeler stated, "TIF [Tax Increment Financing] money was the one thing that we discussed" (Transcript 1:01).
- **Project Specifics:** The group discussed "parking lots" and specific coordination with **SHOP Development** (Transcript 1:07–1:19).

2. Material Deviations from the April 2025 Library Letter of Intent (LOI) There is evidence that city staff and the Mayor are advocating for a "SHOP Mall Proposal" (submitted to the URA Board in September 2025) that secretly strips away protections guaranteed to the public in the **April 2025 LOI**. These deviations represent a significant detriment to City and County taxpayers:

- **Acreage Reduction:** The public agreement for **2 acres** has been reduced to **1.71 acres** in the staff-reviewed SHOP proposal.
- **Easement Reintroduction:** A **.5-acre unbuildable ROW easement**, which the Trustees explicitly excluded in April, has been reintroduced.
- **Parking Mandates:** The independent parking requirement was replaced with a **shared parking garage** adjoining the library, a move the Trustees previously refused.

3. Pattern of Obstruction and Unauthorized Representation The Council should be aware of procedural irregularities that suggest a deliberate effort to keep these changes from public view:

- **Public Record Tampering:** In December 2025, city staff member **Nelson Loring** modified my public records request and sent me information that was irrelevant, successfully withholding the SHOP Mall Proposal until the City Clerk intervened.
- **Conflicts of Interest:** Per the April 2025 LOI, Realtor **Wendy Brown** (the Trustees' Buyer's Agent) maintains a "separate agreement" with SHOP, creating a clear conflict of interest because there is no explicit written consent between the Library and SHOP.
- **Circumvention of Authority:** **Erica Wirtala** (NMAR and Library Foundation) attended this private meeting despite the Trustees' explicit, recorded refusal to include the Foundation in property negotiations. There is no current agreement between the Foundation and the Trustees regarding the new library so there was no reason for Wirtala to be at that meeting.

Conclusion and Request for Oversight

As the governing body responsible for the city's ethical standards and the fiduciary oversight of TIF funds, the Council must determine why city staff and the Mayor have facilitated a developer-led proposal that materially violates a signed LOI. The lack of transparency and the documented obstruction of public record requests suggest a pattern of conduct that prioritizes developer interests over the public's right to know. I am referring these findings to **State Authorities** to ensure a formal, independent review of these ethical discrepancies.

Requested Action from Council:

- 1. Independent Audit of Staff Communications:** I request a comprehensive audit of all communications (emails, texts, and meeting minutes) between the city manager, city staff, the Mayor's office, and SHOP Development regarding the library site from April 2025 to the present.
- 2. Public Disclosure of "Side Agreements":** I request that the Council mandate the immediate public disclosure of any "separate agreements" or verbal commitments made between city staff/representatives and SHOP Development or Wendy Brown that have not been presented in a public Council session.
- 3. Suspension of Financial Deliberations:** I urge the Council to halt all TIF allocations or property transfer negotiations related to this project until the state-level reviews and the internal audit of staff conduct are completed.
- 4. Assessment of Liability:** I request the City Attorney review whether these staff-led deviations from the April 2025 LOI expose the City of Kalispell to litigation from the Library Trustees or other stakeholders.

Sincerely,

Brad Wright

CC:

- Honorable Kristen Juras, Lt. Governor of Montana
- Montana Legislative Audit Division
- Montana Commissioner of Political Practices
- Montana State Library Commission
- Montana Transparency Project
- NMAR Board of Director Ethics Committee
- Flathead County Library Board of Trustees

Appendix A: Response from Ryan Hunter Email

Re: EXTERNAL Public Comment to Ryan Hunter



From Ryan Hunter <rhunter@kalispell.com>
To Brad Wright <bradwright@bullittmail.com>, Kalispell City Council <citycouncil@kalispell.com>
Date 2026-03-11 14:51

Mr. Wright,

Thank you for your public comment regarding my recent meeting about a possible future library. I met with some library staff, board members and foundation staff to share some personal thoughts I have about any possible future library in Kalispell and to learn generally about the current status of their efforts to pursue a new library. I made very clear at the meeting that I was representing only myself and was not representing the City or the City Council. I also made clear that I would not discuss specific details about a proposed project and would only talk about general ideas. I informed them that if a project that might come before the Council began to formalize into something that would be scheduled on our agenda, I would not be able to speak with them about it. I assure you that there were no "negotiations" as you describe it. I'm confident that all that occurred conforms with the law and ethical standards.

I do believe it is important for elected officials to have conversations in the community about important issues facing the community so that we may be responsive to our constituents and well informed. I will continue to have such conversations within the boundaries of the law.

Sincerely,

Ryan Hunter
Mayor of Kalispell
rhunter@kalispell.com



From: Brad Wright <bradwright@bullittmail.com>
Sent: Wednesday, March 11, 2026 2:15 PM
To: Ryan Hunter <rhunter@kalispell.com>
Cc: Kalispell City Council <citycouncil@kalispell.com>
Subject: EXTERNAL Public Comment to Ryan Hunter

[NOTICE: This message includes an attachment -- **DO NOT CLICK** on links or open **attachments** unless you know the content is safe.]

Please see attached document 20260311 Public Comment to Ryan Hunter.

Thank you,
Brad Wright

Messages and attachments sent to or from this e-mail account pertaining to City of Kalispell business may be considered public or private records depending on the message content. The City is required by law to protect private, confidential information. Emails that contain confidential information such as information related to individual privacy may therefore be protected from disclosure under law. However, these communications are also subject to the Right to Know provisions of Montana's Constitution (Art. II, Sect. 9) and may be considered a "public record" pursuant to Title 2, Chpt. 6, Montana Code Annotated. As such, this email, its sender and receiver, and the contents may be available for public disclosure and will be retained pursuant to the City's record retention policies. Any unauthorized review, use, disclosure or distribution of this e-mail or its attachment(s) is prohibited. If you are not the intended recipient, immediately contact the sender by reply e-mail and destroy all copies of the original message.

Appendix B: Transcript of portion of February 26, 2026 Trustees Board Meeting Audio

Audio Transcript -

(0:00) [Jane Wheeler speaking] Erica, I was just going to address the meeting yesterday, because you asked about it. (0:06) We had a meeting yesterday, Teri, myself, so this wasn't an official Facilities Committee meeting at all, (0:13) but the new mayor of the City of Kalispell asked for a meeting. (0:18) It was Teri and myself and two members of the Foundation.

(0:21) And he just wanted to talk to us about what the city could do to help us build this new library. (0:27) And that was kind of his first step. (0:30) What can the city do to help us build a new library? (0:34) And all of us just went, oh, thank you for asking that question.

(0:39) It was so wonderful. (0:40) And it was really just a give and take, but basically it said, (0:47) I will be happy as the mayor to support this as best I can. (0:51) And that was kind of what the meeting was about.

(0:52) But it was wonderfully refreshing and just another step in seeing blue sky ahead.

(0:59) [Doug Adams speaking] Did you all talk about financial interest?

(1:01) [Jane Wheeler speaking] We talked about TIF money. (1:04) We talked about whether or not that would be available. (1:07) We talked about parking lots. (1:09) We talked about, yeah, kind of, you know, a little bit about what the city is doing with SHOP. (1:19) But the TIF money was the one thing that we discussed.

(1:23) [Doug Adams speaking] And then the other thing, although it wouldn't be near as big one, is to forgive any permit fees.

(1:31) [Jane Wheeler speaking] Yeah, that's a good thought. (1:34) And we should look at that.

(1:35) It will be interesting. (1:36) We did, in that same vein, we talked about really working with them and working with Jarod Nygren on an awful lot of things that will come up. (1:48) So that was a discussion about that. (1:50) I should have brought my notes. (1:51) But it was a fairly short meeting, but very, I thought, very productive. (1:56) And we were, at least I was, incredibly pleased that we're on his radar.

(2:05) And because we haven't felt that way with the city at all in any planning we've done previously. (2:12) So it just was a step in the right direction.

(2:15) [Teri Dugan speaking] It opened the dialogue, which we all thought was really great.

(2:18) [David Ingram speaking] I might also ask if we can not have to pay for our two parking spots for our staff. (2:24) I know it's not big, but. (2:27) All the pushers.

(2:31) Got to start with the crumbs. (2:34) Okay. (2:35) Well, thank you, Jane.

(2:36) Is there anything else? (2:37) No, that's it. (2:37) Thank you. (2:39) Okay.

End Transcript

Appendix C: September 2025 URA SHOP Mall Proposal with my notes

