

**** Page 1** A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL WORK
SESSION MEETING CITY OF THREE FORKS, MONTANA, NOVEMBER 4TH, 2025**

NOVEMBER 4TH, 2025, The Three Forks City Council met for a Work Session at the Three Forks City Hall at 206 S. Main Street and via Zoom. (Zoom is a virtual meeting tool which the City began using due to COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines and continues to use to encourage participation from the safety of one's home.) The meeting was chaired by Mayor Randy Johnston, who called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL: City Council members Ed Tharp, Gene Townsend, George Chancellor, Roxi McDermott, Reagan Hooton, and (Warren) Garret Buchanan were present. City Attorney Susan Swimley, City Treasurer Kelly Smith, and City Clerk Crystal Turner were present at City Hall.

The record reflected a quorum with the attendance of six (6) Council members and the meeting was held.

The **Pledge of Allegiance** to the American Flag was led by Mayor Johnston. Mayor Johnston reminded the audience that this meeting was audio and video recorded and may be streamed via Zoom and on our Facebook page.

GUESTS: Alex Blackburn, Mickie Imberi (via Zoom), Joanna Lightner, Matt & Kelly Bugland.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/CONCERNS (For items not on the agenda)

There were no public comments or concerns for items not on the agenda.

NEW BUSINESS

Work Session on Water/Sewer Accounts Being Placed in a Tenant's Name or Owner Name

Kelly Smith read her staff report into the record (see packet). She then also read a rebuttal she prepared about public comments provided at the 10/14/2025 meeting. Kelly asked the Council and Mayor directly, "Do any of you think we are not doing our jobs?" She said, "The reason I am asking, is because one of Mickie Imberi's solutions was not to rewrite the law but to have staff 'do their jobs'."

The Mayor read new public comment letters into the record from Robert Buchholz in support of changing water and sewer accounts to be in the landowner's name, Dennis Nelson in support, Kristin Dantagnan in support, Jeff Bellino in support, Dave Hanson in support, Matt Jones in support, Patricia Blazick in support, Rick & Val Lamb in support, Ray Noble in support, and Melissa Steingruber in support.

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Public Comment in person: Joanna Lightner in support of change; Matt Bugland in opposition, and he apologized for requesting this meeting because he feels it is an extension of a long [regular] meeting that already occurred; Kelly Bugland spoke that she thought this would be a roundtable discussion tonight with the City saying what its goals are and then hear what the public said. "At the last meeting, a few of you were appalled by the 300% rent increase mentioned at the last meeting. Think of that number - my water bill has increased 300% at the old hospital and so I would love to have these discussions in a normal way and solve issues of water and sewer." Alex Blackburn spoke that he is property owner, but would like to acquire more properties. He originally felt opposed to this change, but now that he knows the whole story he agrees with the City to not have the bill in the tenant's name, "As at the end of the day, it is still the property owner's responsibility to manage their property." Mickie Imberi spoke and thanked Kelly Smith for presenting the numbers tonight, and she stated she believes her original intent was misunderstood when she asked for "a count" not "account" tallies. She asked for clarification on whether the City requires a homeowner to pay a deposit on the water/sewer account.

The Mayor closed public comment.

Board Discussion: Garret Buchanan answered Mickie Imberi's question if the City requires a deposit on water/sewer accounts for property owners, answering no. He then asked Matt & Kelly Bugland directly about their process when they receive a copy of the late letter from the City. Kelly Bugland answered her first step is she takes a picture of the notice and texts the tenant asking what is going on. Garret then asked, "In a non-ideal situation, what is the process?" Kelly Bugland answered the worst example she has is for a mobile home, where the tenant rents the lot she owns, but the tenant owns the trailer. "It's a very extreme situation because it [the mobile home] cannot be replaced if we kick her off."

Garret Buchanan then said, "I usually pay my bills on time; maybe in college there were a few I missed. But let's say I'm your tenant. If I don't pay the water bill the first month, I get a letter. You've texted me, and I don't text back. How many times do you reach out?" Kelly Bugland said she follows up with a written notification. "It's like the 3 strikes and you're out. Text, fine, send notification." Garret said in the previous ordinance we talked about nonpayment multiple times. He asked about two late notices. Crystal Turner corrected that late letters may be received indefinitely/multiple times. "Disconnect notices are two in the tenancy before it gets turned back over to the property owner's name," she said.

Mayor Johnston asked Kelly Smith about the \$11,000 on the City's books in deposits from rental accounts. "How does City manage that?" he asked. Kelly Smith responded that those funds are kept in a separate account, and

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monthly we balance our books between the Utility Billing system and how much more we collected or applied in the Accounting system. "If a tenant had a \$100 deposit, and their final bill was \$93, we owe them \$7. We cut a claim to pay them back; you guys approve the claim and often times we have to contact them to find out where to mail it. This is something the auditors look for and verify we balance to," she said.

George Chancellor said the City is run like a business, which he wishes more governments did. "Our budget is in the black, audits are near perfect. We run a tight ship compared to most cities in Montana. Our staff does a phenomenal job, and it was not pleasing to me to hear the comments you two (pointing to Mickie Imberi on screen, and Kelly Bugland in the audience) have made," George stated.

Mayor Johnston directed the Council to read Kelly Smith's staff report, answering yes or no to each of the proposed questions/changes and then come back at the next meeting with discussion and direction on the 13th to draft a resolution or not.

Gene Townsend asked why do we need a resolution without anything on the books? Susan Swimley stated that it because you have been doing this for so long, without any policy/resolution/documentation and staff is asking you to change it so the best way to do that is to document it. Crystal Turner added that technically, everything the Council does is a resolution even when we do not have a document, resolution number, all the *whereas'* written down. "When we document a resolution, it is much easier for the future to find out what happened, when and why," she said.

Kelly Bugland asked the Mayor if she could ask a question. The Mayor allowed it. Kelly asked for a copy of what Kelly Smith sent to people for all the letters of support. Kelly Smith replied, "It's what I gave to you, and read as my staff report. It was public. The newspapers had two articles about what was going on, so some people asked when they came into City Hall or called and asked, so that's why I gave them my handout."

Council to return at the 11/13/2025 meeting with its direction to staff on how to proceed.

City Treasurer Kelly Smith asked the Budget Committee when it could meet to discuss easement starting amounts for the Jefferson River Floodplain Mitigation project. It was agreed by Roxi McDermott and Gene Townsend to attend on 11/17/2025 at 5:30PM. George Chancellor could not attend on this date.

Garret Buchanan questioned Susan Swimley regarding this topic being called a legislative matter. "So, we are allowed to talk amongst ourselves, if there was another discussion, I just have to report who I talked to, what

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was discussed - mention that to all at the next meeting?" he asked. Susan Swimley said yes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Councilman Tharp, seconded by Councilman Chancellor. The meeting was adjourned without a vote taken by the Mayor's gavel at 7:12P.M.

Randy Johnston, Mayor

Crystal Turner, City Clerk