A SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING CITY OF THREE FORKS, MONTANA, APRIL 14TH, 2026

APRIL 14TH, 2026, The Three Forks City Council met 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 Alex Blackburn, Reagan Hooton, Gene Townsend, Ed Tharp, (Warren) Garret Buchanan, and Robert Buchholz were present. City Clerk Crystal Turner, City Engineer Jessical Salo, Public Works Director Steve Johnston were present at City Hall; City Attorney Susan Swimley attended via Zoom. City Treasurer Kelly Smith was excused.

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: George Chancellor attended at City Hall; Billi Jean Portscheller (Gallatin Wireless) attended via Zoom.

PUBLIC COMMENTS/CONCERNS (For items not on the agenda)
There were no public comments or concerns about items not on the agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

a. City Claims Paid due to Timeliness on 3/31/2026 in the Amount of $66,604.84
b. City Claims to be Paid
c. Three Forks Rodeo Arena Claims to be Paid
d. Council Minutes of 2/24/2026, 3/10/2026, & 3/31/2026
e. Zoning & Planning Board Minutes of 1/15/2026 and 2/19/2026
f. Service Agreement for Performance at July Rodeo (Gracie Stolfus $1,000)
g. Franchise Agreement with Gallatin Wireless, dba WispWest, for Fiber Optic Work in the City's Right-of-Ways (Signed by the Mayor 3/30/2026)
h. Draw #1 for the Wastewater PER Project totaling $27,500 (MCEP for $20,000 and RRGL for $7,500) Representing 50% Request.
i. Draw #11 for the Jefferson River Flood Mitigation Project totaling $60,403.35
j. Draw Packet #41 for the Water Project (#10 MCEP for $31,512.11) (#25 MAG for $38,454.76), (#32 LFR $20,773.06) totaling $90,739.93
k. Glacier Bank Pledged Securities through 3/31/2026

1. Change Order #1 with The Third Element for Public Water Supply Project for the Electrical for Well House ($16,805.91, within budget)

Ed Tharp clarified that the Mayor had read the consent agenda based on a copy of the agenda he had in his packet, which listed an incorrect amount for Item #i) Draw #11 for the Flood project, which should be for a total of $60,403.35.

Councilman Townsend moved to approve the Consent Agenda, as amended.
Councilman Tharp seconded the motion.
Motion Passed Unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARINGS
Public Hearing and Decision on a Resolution of Intent to Declare Certain Property as Surplus, No Longer Necessary to Conduct City Business and Authorizing its Sale or Disposal
Mayor Johnston read the resolution into the record in its entirety and noted it would be Resolution #467-2026. At the end, he encouraged the Council to find a time on the 28th of April to have at least a quorum to meet and open bids at a public hearing. Crystal Turner added that it could occur on the 29th, 30th, or anytime that week as long we can advertise it timely, and before early May. "We do not have a date the contractor will be on site, but it's *early May,* so we need to have an end date as well," she said. She recommended changing the end date in the draft resolution to May 4th, 2026. It was agreed that the Council would meet at 3PM on 4/28/2026.

Councilman Buchholz moved to approve Resolution #467-2026, a resolution of intent to declare certain property as surplus, and no longer necessary to conduct city business, authorizing its sale or disposal, as amended.
Councilman Tharp seconded the motion. There was no public comment.
Motion Passed Unanimously.

REPORT OF OFFICERS
City Treasurer Kelly Smith was excused so she could attend her daughter's scholarship award ceremony at Montana State University.

City Clerk Crystal Turner reported on the Floodplain Mitigation project that FEMA is back open starting today, and that the City's designs have been submitted to the Montana Department of Transportation for the culverts, and hopefully FEMA will begin reviewing our application very soon. Next, she reported that MMIA confirmed the employee health benefit rate only increased 0.8% (rather than the 5-6% projected increase). "We offer a cafeteria plan to our employees, so they can choose another plan, but most of our employees are on this plan that is only increasing 0.8%," she said. "I sent you all an email on Municipal Summits. The closest appears to be in Helena, but these are great learning opportunities for

you to hear the legislative goals – get together with other small communities to see how we can pool ideas legislatively, hear the goals of the Montana League of Cities and Towns, and MMIA updates. They provide a free lunch, the training is all day, and these trainings are free. I encourage you to attend if you can make one of the upcoming summits," she said. Crystal also reminded everyone that the spring cleanup dumpster will be delivered on Friday to the Rodeo Grounds. "I know it may be a little early, but next weekend is high school rodeo and I didn't think there would be enough room for folks with all the horse trailers parked around there," she explained. She also reminded the Council that they proclaimed April 24th at Arbor Day, but that will also be our Earth Cleanup day, starting at 10AM and meeting at City Hall. "We distribute gloves and bags and then divvy up and spread around town so we usually cover the parks and trails within a couple of hours," she said. "Then remember, Arbor Day tree planting will occur on Saturday, April 25th, again starting at 10AM at the Library where Reagan [Hooton] is leading a tree planting demonstration. Lastly, I applied for a $5,000 grant from the Montana 250 Commission (that was the max) but I just learned I was awarded $1,000 and hope to purchase American Flags with that, and then we can hand them out at a community potluck. I posted a question on our Facebook page asking how the community would want to celebrate and the most common response was a big block party. Leann Bryant at Hollowtop Galvanized has offered her space, and I've worked with the manager of Town Pump here in Three Forks who said they will sponsor 500 hot dogs. I plan to work with Wheat Montana to donate the buns, and then let the rest of those interested in helping out (Leann, the Chamber, the Historical Society, and others) take it over and have the community bring their pot lucked items to the BBQ," she said.

REPORTS FROM COUNCIL COMMITTEES (if any)

There were no Council Committee updates.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Wastewater PER Presentation by Jessica Salo of Great West Engineering

Jessica provided an overview of the PowerPoint she prepared (see packet). She explained, based on the Growth Policy's data, the projected population growth is 2.6% per year, which would put the City's population at 3,782 by the year 2045. Great West reviewed the existing systems to see if they could handle that population growth.

"First, we reviewed the City's [wastewater] collection system. You can see these are color coded by different main line material (clay, PVC). Then you'll see you have your Oak Street lift station, and then it all comes back to the wastewater treatment plant southeast of town. Then you have the Ridge View Subdivision which is a gravity-fed lift station to the treatment plant. The existing wastewater treatment plant was constructed in 2014, which has the headworks building and aeration lagoons, as well as

partial mix cells. Once the waste goes through all those cells, it goes through a polishing reactor which treats for ammonia, then to a UV disinfection system before being discharged to the river.

"Basically, the biggest problem we see in your system is infiltration coming into the system, which is either from leaks or from sump pumps. Clean water is what you don't want in your treatment system because it dilutes the process. We did some flow monitoring last summer, and this table shows a priority list based on the figure (slide 6) where we found the most infiltration. We think you may have somewhere around 80 homes using sump pumps to get water out of the crawl space or basements being pumped into the City's system. We recommend a CCTV project where a camera goes through the pipes and finds where that freshwater is coming in.

"The Oak Street lift station, there are no major issues currently but the pumps and controls may be reaching the end of their usable life. I think those are some minor concerns," Jessica said. Mayor Johnston said they were originally put in in 1982, "So they have some hours on them," he said.

Jessica continued, "I would like to focus on the treatment system of the lagoons. We are showing the lagoon is at capacity for the BOD loading (biological treatment). In the graph, yellow is the average load, red is the design load, and the blue line are the actual test results. As you can see you are not always exceeding it, but at times you are. The wastewater isn't in the ponds long enough to have the proper amount of retention time to remove BODs. We estimate that the system can handle 190-300 more people before needing an expansion.

"The next slide goes through the polishing reactor, which is designed to treat for ammonia. The City is not in any violation here, but with the increase in population you will probably need to include additional ammonia treatment on the next discharge permit update as well as any improvements to the wastewater treatment plant," she explained. The current discharge permit expires on 4/30/2027, so another improvement project Great West is recommending could be to just focus on the renewal process of the discharge permit. The next slide said that based on those findings, the potential project list would be:

1. CCTV inspection
2. Collection System Repair (This project is also already identified in the CIP)
3. Upsize Trunkline (Railway Avenue and Main Street) (This project is also already identified in the CIP)
4. Oak Street Lift Station Rehab (This project is also already identified in the CIP)
5. WWTP Expansion (This project is also already identified in the CIP)

Jessica said, "Once you know where the infiltration is coming in, then you can prioritize your projects." She continued her presentation by

explaining several funding options for various projects, noting that not all projects are eligible for the same grants or loans. She recommended 2026-2027 to CCTV all the existing clay lines, especially where the most I&I was monitored, and work on permit renewal. Apply for loan applications in 2027 and 2028. Then if the City is successful in grant funding in 2028, Great West could start design and construction of treatment expansion in 2029-2030.

Alex Blackburn said regarding growth projections of 2.6% annual growth rate, "300 people isn't very many. It's coming pretty quick."

The Mayor asked if there was any grant money to do the CCTV, or would it be out of City's maintenance coffers? Jessica believed it would be paid for by the City, but she has worked with communities that used grant funding, but she feels it slowed the project/process down.

Gene Townsend asked who does the [discharge permit] renewal? "If we are ready to renew in 2027, I remember them saying phosphates was something we would have to be monitoring, or even treating, in the future. Is that required yet?" Gene asked. Jessica said she is not a treatment expert, so she does not know the answer. Gene said, "When DEQ does the renewal, will they put on additional requirements that have not put on communities previously?" Jessica said they could switch it up based on EPA and State laws/rules. Gene continued, "If the target rate is going from $124 to $154, when do you have to meet that?" Jessica explained that target rate was for MCEP funds specifically, but if the City determines a project that would require its rates to be raised to that minimum target rate, you could apply for the grant funding at the same time you are raising rates to fund the project.

The remainder of projects will be determined by the results of the CCTV. Mayor Johnston thought that would be the best option. Gene Townsend said the permit should be priority #1 since it expires 4/30/2027 (not a long renewal with only 5 years), and meet with Water & Sewer Committee, the Mayor, and the Public Works Director. "I think we need to know about which streets they will be working on before we start any digging, so we can plan accordingly. I think we should do at least [recommended projects] A-D of the collection repair. I think the TV inspection should only be done on the areas we anticipate to fix. I don't see a reason to get it all done when we may not catch all the leaks that are infiltrating into our system," Gene said.

There was discussion about sump pumps (refer to Ordinance #9-5-13). With this kind of discharge into the sewer system, and it being illegal already per the ordinance, how could the City charge those who have them? Reagan Hooton asked, "Isn't that defeating the purpose of the ordinance?" Staff explained that some [sump pumps] were installed before they were prohibited. Garret Buchanan said, "People do all sorts of crazy stuff and do it on their own, outside of City approval. CCTV could identify those

sump pumping." There was discussion regarding prioritizing the first four options presented.

Councilman Townsend moved to accept the PER on the sewer system, get it started anyway, and then stopped the motion because it became a discussion/clarification about whether this is a PER and if the Council can edit what is documented. Jessica stated, "You can update it and reflect just A-D, and update it again later to amend the projects, (and there are planning grants for that too)," she said. Reagan Hooton thought slide 15 would be a good plan.

Councilman Hooton moved to finalize the PER based on slide 15. Councilman Tharp seconded the motion. Jessica Salo suggested the Water & Sewer Committee could meet and reprioritize the projects. Steve Johnston wanted to make sure the CCTV was a goal this time. Garret Buchanan clarified A-D are prioritized for CCTV. Ed Tharp asked when the rate increase would be done? Jessica said it should be reevaluated in 2027-2028 (in the blue on slide 15) to see if the City's rates are sufficient for whatever project(s) the City chooses to do, and where you are applying for grant funding. Steve said the I&I determination would help identify.
Motion Passed Unanimously.

Reagan asked, "What happened in September 2024?" No one could think of anything crazy, but Steve said his theory is that the lab is incorrect. "We sample every week, and it just jumped off the page. I'm sorry , but I don't buy that." Steve said.

Garret Buchanan recommended 5/6/2026 at 6PM for a Water/Sewer Committee meeting.

Jefferson River Flood Mitigation Project Update
See above in City Clerk's report.

Water Project Update
No update.

NEW BUSINESS
Adopt the Updated Public Records Request Policy (Version 5) to Align with 2025 Legislative Changes, Which Become Effective June 2026
Crystal Turner explained that the Legislature changed the MCA location, so our form is being updated to reflect the correct MCA, as well as we have been charging for staff time over the first 15 minutes and the law now states you cannot charge for the first hour at all. This version is also increasing the per page cost of copies.

Councilman Buchholz moved to adopt the updated Public Records Request Policy (Version 5) to align with the 2025 Legislative changes, which will become effective June 2026. Councilman Buchanan seconded the motion.

There was no public comment.
Motion Passed Unanimously.

Discussion on New Workman's Compensation Provider, Going Directly to Montana State Fund or Through an Agent
Crystal Turner asked the Budget Committee members, since none had replied to her email, if they would like to review the proposals received individually and send her their recommendations or have a meeting. Reagan Hooton and Alex Blackburn commented on not having great experiences with agents, and thought the City could just go straight to Montana State Fund. They tasked Crystal to find out if agents mark up the State Funds' price, and any other pros and cons on going directly through Montana State Fund versus using an agent. It was agreed to meet with Budget Committee (Gene, Robert and Reagan) on Friday, May 1st, and present a recommendation to the Council before deciding.

Gene added that when the Budget committee meets, they should also discuss where the current fiscal year budget sets. He added, "We could at least get started on review, as well as ideas for next fiscal year."

PUBLIC COMMENTS/CONCERNS (For items not on the agenda)
There were no public comments or concerns that were not on the agenda.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL ANNOUNCEMENTS
Mayor Johnston announced he met with the new Superintendent with the Bozeman division of MDT. "I met with Ace [Meskimen] a couple months ago regarding the "No Parking" signs, which are from for the 2-5AM window so the State could street sweep. John Antonick, MDT Bozeman Maintenance Superintendent met with me, MDT will replace all the signs on the east side of Main. Regarding the new crosswalk signs, they put signs up on W. Birch and E Birch. Also, on their list for this summer, from the Masonic Hall all the way to Magris, they will mill down the street, possibly dig it up and put fabric down and start all over again, and then also from Masonic to past the TF Market. John noted the area by depot park with divots in the asphalt, and he will put in for that to be fixed also, and he hope it gets approved," the Mayor reported. Gene Townsend asked if that would be contract work or done in house by State employees? Mayor Johnston said he did not know.

The Mayor also reported that he attended the 4/2/2026 meeting of the Gallatin DES meeting, which included the Lincoln County DES Director, Sheriff, the Mayor of Libby, "Remember last December they had a big flood up there? They had plans all ready to go and everything, but a matter of hours they lost 9 bridges and 7 culverts." Crystal Turner asked what he meant by "had plans all ready to go and everything…but what happened?" He said, "They had evacuation plans, but the flood occurred so quickly it didn't help. No lives were lost, but they suffered a lot of damage to

houses and also infrastructure." Crystal said, "Oh, I thought you meant they had plans for a mitigation project and were like us: waiting on FEMA to finalize the permit so we can begin the project to protect our residents."

The Mayor also said he learned that Gallatin County has been doing burns to prevent wildfires already. "You may have seen it in the Bridgers already. I also attended the DDMAP meeting," he said.

Ed Tharp asked if any enforcement would occur on the 1-hour parking around the school, "People park there all day long and never move." Crystal Turner to send an email to Sgt. Doonan and the Mayor will reach out him and talk to him as well.

The next meeting will be on April 28, 2026, at 3PM and will have the following items:

- Surplus property resolution and opening of bids for the bleacher set available

ADJOURNMENT

Councilman Townsend motioned to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Councilman Tharp. The Mayor adjourned the meeting at 7:30P.M.

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Randy Johnston, Mayor Crystal Turner, City Clerk