

**City of Menahga  
Regular City Council Minutes  
January 13, 2025**

**1. Call to Order**

The Menahga City Council held their Regular Monthly Meeting on Monday January 13, 2025.

Mayor Jody Bjornson called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

- a. Swear in new Council Member Keith Waaraniemi
- b. Resolution 2025-02 Declare Vacancy of Council Member Seat

**Main Motion: To adopt Resolution 2025-02 Declare Vacancy of Council Member Seat.**

Moved by:	Netland
Seconded	Tomperi
Action:	Motion carried by a 4-0 voice vote
In favor:	Tomperi, Netland, Bjornson, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

- c. Appoint vacant councilmember seat – Willard Hodge
  - a. Swear in Council Member Willard 'Bill' Hodge

Discussion started with Tomperi indicating that would prefer to advertise the vacancy and stated that Bjornson owed it to the community to advertise the position. Bjornson countered stating that the League of Minnesota Cities suggests filling the vacancy as soon as possible. Bjornson approached James Krasky first, the runner up in the 2024 election and offered him the opportunity to serve. Krasky declined the invitation. Willard 'Bill' Hodge expressed interest in the position and has attended several of the previous council meetings. Waaraniemi stated that everyone knew the position was vacant since the election, as Bjornson won the mayor's role. Netland expressed doubt that the public was aware, and that not everyone connected the dots. Netland agreed with Tomperi in that it should be opened and advertised to the public before filling. Following the discussion, a motion was made by Waaraniemi and seconded by Bjornson to appoint Bill Hodge as the 5<sup>th</sup> member of the council, serving the remainder of Bjornson's term, until 06 January 2027. The vote was 2:2, forcing Bjornson to use his mayoral authority to break the tie to keep business from being deadlocked.

**Main Motion: To appoint Willard 'Bill' Hodge as Councilmember to the city council of the City of Menahga, Minnesota.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Bjornson
Action:	Motion carried by a 2+1-2 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	Tomperi, Netland

**2. Roll Call**

Comprising a quorum of the Council, the following members were present:

Mayor Jody Bjornson                      Mike Netland                      Keith Waaraniemi

Bill Hodge                                      Durwin Tomperi

City Office Staff present: City Clerk/Treasurer Brett Gagnonpalick

**3. Pledge of Allegiance**

**4. Mayoral Expectations for Council and Staff**

Bjornson outlined his thoughts for moving the city forward, handing out the roles to the councilmembers directly from the League of Minnesota Cities to guide.

**5. Approval of Agenda**

- Tomperi wishes to add a conversation about committees vs. work sessions. It will be added between E and F on the consent agenda.
- Bjornson adds setting a Public Works Committee meeting date to H. under new business.
- Gagnonpalick adds council approval for the newly elected Fire Chief, Terry Berttunen under new business I.

**6. Communication Appearance Request – None**

**7. Public Forum and Correspondence (Must Sign in) –**

- Jeff Schindledecker

Jeff stated that he sold Pleasant Pines Acers, effective 01 February. Jeff introduced Kyle Davis, the incoming property owner. Bjornson asked if services would remain the same to which Davis answered yes, no change. Davis stated he is excited to invest in our community.

## **8. Consent Agenda**

- a. 23 December 2024 Work Session Minutes
- b. Designate Official Depositories for 2025 – Community First Bank of Menahga, 4M/PMA Financial, True Star Credit Union.
- c. Designate Official Newspaper of Record for 2025 – The Review Messenger
- d. Designate Civil Legal Counsel – Flaherty & Hood, P.A.
- e. Designate Criminal Legal Counsel – Kyra Ladd, Wadena County Attorney
- f. Approve Mayor’s appointment to the Planning and Zoning Committee – Jody Bjornson
- g. Appoint Mayor’s Representative Appointments to Personnel/Hiring/Negotiations – Jody Bjornson and Bill Hodge, and acting Mayor to Bill Hodge
- h. Appoint Mayor’s committee Members
  - i. Greenwood Connections – Durwin Tomperi and Bill Hodge
  - ii. Police Committee – Keith Waaraniemi and Bill Hodge
  - iii. Fire Department, Fire Relief, and Fire contracts – Mike Netland and Durwin Tomperi
  - iv. Public Works Committee – Mike Netland and Jody Bjornson
  - v. Liquor Store Committee – Jody Bjornson and Durwin Tomperi

Going out of order, discussion started about the different committee postings. In regard to the personnel representatives, Bjornson has stated that he expects a summary provided to the rest of the council to ensure essay is maintained. Bjornson further explained that going to committee meetings will reduce the administrative workload from the administrative staff. Furthermore, the department heads have been requesting committees come back to the regular function of the city. Tomperi asks who will be responsible for taking the minutes. Gagnonpalick states either himself or the department head will generate the minutes. The minutes will be added to the website, per normal council meetings. The MN Open Meeting Law will be in effect. Waaraniemi states he would like less meetings and more productivity. Tomperi wants an overview of how they will work and is not against committee meetings. Tomperi questions that if these people want committee meetings, wouldn’t they want the entire council present? Tomperi asks how the meetings will be scheduled. Bjornson responds with stating he’s not going to ask that they be mandatory but instead discussed between that department head and their council representatives to set the time, date and agenda. Netland comments on the timeliness of council action on issues that require council

action if only meeting once a month. Netland also brings up payments and how the city will ensure bills are paid in a timely manner. Bjornson asks if there is issue with operating how we are now. Gagnonpalick states that he spoke with interim deputy clerk about this topic and said that we would aim to finish batches on Thursday, email them to the council for review and submit payment on Monday if there are no issues or questions. Hodge opines that moving into different processes may have its challenges, but there would always be 'what ifs' that come with it. Hodge states that you can't move forward without positive progress if we are always in fear of potential outcomes. Netland brings up Greenwood Connections and hear their reports. Bjornson states that Laura Ahlf will be present to deliver her report during the regular council meetings. Ahlf requests to speak from the gallery: The board representatives have the option to present their committee reports to the council vs. having the department head there.

Gagnonpalick calls attention to consent agenda items A through E, and that we moved a little head of schedule.

**Main Motion: To approve letters A through E on the consent agenda.**

Moved by:	Netland
Seconded	Warmbold
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Hodge, Tomperi, Netland, Bjornson, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**Main Motion: To approve letters F through H on the consent agenda.**

Moved by:	Tomperi
Seconded	Bjornson
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Olson, Tomperi, Netland, Bjornson, Warmbold
Opposed:	None

**9. Public Hearing – None**

**10. Acknowledgment of Receipt of Commission Minutes – None**

**11. New Business**

**a. Fee Schedule**

Netland states the campground rates should be adjusted incrementally. He asks Gagnonpalick what the break-even rate was for the campground, and Gagnonpalick doesn't remember. Netland requests the analysis be reintroduced to the council. He also requests the full revenue and expense statement for 2024. This would also include adjusting the fee schedule as required.

**Main Motion: To approve the 2025 Fee Schedule as presented.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Tomperi
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Hodge, Tomperi, Netland, Bjornson, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**b. Informational – Council being compensated on a monthly basis.**

Under MN Statute 415.10, city council members in statutory cities must be paid on a monthly basis. Unless there is a charter or ordinance that states otherwise. Menahga does not possess such an ordinance.

**c. Motion to allow City Clerk/Treasurer to manage consultants**

City Clerk/Treasurer Brett Gagnonpalick requests the authority and responsibility to manage consultants and administrative staff. Gagnonpalick's aim is to ensure city services remain operational and productive. With the upcoming hiring of a new Deputy Clerk, Gagnonpalick doesn't request additional management to set the time in which a person is deemed properly trained in. There will be no hiring, raises, or terminations without the council's approval.

**Main Motion: To authorize the City Clerk/Treasurer to oversee and manage the administration section of City Hall during this period of turnover, granting them the authority to make necessary operational and staffing decisions to ensure continuity and efficiency.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	none

**d. Clarification – Council Member Mike Netland**

Netland wants to comment on a newspaper article published January 1<sup>st</sup>. In which the paper stated, 'it was because of two people we lost a city employee.' Netland states that it wasn't because of two people and a consultant. He goes on to reference minutes which state the council was complicit in the decision to move the audit along.

Bjornson comments that including a single word without any context shouldn't be allowed to be placed on the Agenda. It doesn't give the public or councilmembers anything to form an opinion or decision on.

**e. League of Minnesota Cities 2025 Elected Leaders Institute**

The Foundational Program is designed for recently elected city officials with less than two years in office. Become familiar with the nuts and bolts of city leadership through a combination of online, on-demand courses and a two-day, in person program.

The Advanced Program gives elected officials a chance to learn higher-level leadership skills and network with other elected leaders from across the state. Designed for more experienced officials who have served in local government for over two years or have completed the foundational program.

**Main Motion: To approve any councilmember to attend Elected Leaders – Foundational Program and/or Advanced Program and to coordinate with city staff for registration and fee payment.**

Moved by:	Tomperi
Seconded	Netland
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**f. MCOFA Annual Conference**

**Main Motion: To approve city staff to attend this training and compensate for lodging and per diem in accordance with Menahga Rates.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Netland
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**g. 2025 Meeting Schedule**

The presented meeting schedule is for the City Council Regular meetings, Quarterly Work Sessions, Planning Commission, and Committee meetings.

\*Note: Committee meetings are 'To Be Determined' (TBD) as the times and dates are subjective to the needs of the department. Meetings will be posted in accordance with the MN Open Meeting Law.

\*Note: Additions to the City Council Chambers being named on the schedule.

\*Note: Administrator Laura Ahlf will post her schedule in the same manner.

**Main Motion: To adopt the 2025 meeting schedule for council meetings, work sessions, planning commission, and the tentative schedule for the committee meeting.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**h. Public Works Committee Meeting Date**

The date that MN DoT will be here is 22 January 2025, at 1pm. The City Engineer, Chris Thorson has been invited to attend.

**i. New Fire Chief nomination**

Terry Berttunen has been nominated as the new Menahga City Fire Chief, vice Dave Kicker. Kicker will remain on the force.

Waaraniemi abstained, citing being a member of the Fire Department.

**Main Motion: To appoint Terry Berttunen as the Menahga City Fire Chief.**

Moved by:	Tomperi
Seconded	Netland
Action:	Motion carried by a 4-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge (Waaraniemi – Abstained)
Opposed:	None

**12. Unfinished Business**

**a. Set Interview Date for Deputy Clerk interviews**

Interviews will take place January 23<sup>rd</sup>, from 5pm until 8pm. [After the fact, the meeting was moved to the 22<sup>nd</sup>]

Netland asked that an excel assessment be taken.

Netland asked about evaluations at 6 months. It was council consensus to do a full panel evaluation for the deputy clerk.

**b. Pay Scale 2025**

A range of discussion centered around the proposed pay scale. Councilmember Netland brought in his own pay scale for comparison and highlighted the fact that some of scales didn't make sense. He went on to highlight the Police Chiefs scale, Clerk/Treasurer, and Deputy Clerk scales. Netland asked the Chief of Police, Amy Lane if the Police Chief scale tied into pay equity because she is a female. Lane responded that the scale was approved by the council. Lane also pointed out that a 2023 pay equity study was done for the city that ended the 2023 year going into 2024. It was included in two previous council packets.

Tabled pending comparing our scale to other cities of like size. Hodge

stated that this action should not be delayed any further and that a vote should be conducted at the next council meeting.

**Main Motion: To table the 2025 Pay Scale until February 10 City Council meeting, pending more information from surrounding municipalities.**

Moved by:	Hodge
Seconded	Waaraniemi
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**c. Personnel Policy in relation to ESST**

**Main Motion: To approve updating the Personnel Policy to be in accordance with the rules and regulations that govern ESST (MN Statutes, Chapter 181, Section 181.9445).**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**d. Pay Raise for Administrative Clerk (March 2024) Approval**

In March 2024, the Administrative Clerk received a raise that, while appropriate, was not formally approved by the City Council, nor was it documented in the council minutes or any other official record. While there is no disagreement regarding the validity or merit of the raise, it is important to codify and formally recognize this adjustment to maintain transparency and compliance with standard procedures.

**Main Motion: To approve and formally codify the raise given to the Administrative Clerk in March 2024 from step 13 to step 15, ensuring it is accurately reflected in the official records and payroll documentation.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried by a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

**13. Consideration of Bills**

The Council Members were provided with the actual invoices for the following batches:

- a. Batch #123124EFT - \$77,324.83
- b. Batch #123124PAY - \$34,600.88
- c. Batch #011325PAY - \$526,633.15

**Main Motion: To approve Batch #123124PEFT- \$77,324.83, Batch #123124PAY - \$34,600.88, Batch #011325PAY – \$526,633.15 for a total of \$638,558.86.**

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried on a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None.

### 13. Adjournment

**Main Motion: To adjourn at 8:07 p.m.**

Moved by:	Netland
Seconded by:	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried on a 5-0 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

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City Clerk/Treasurer, Brett Gagnonpalick

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Mayor, Jody Bjornson