

**City of Menahga
Regular City Council Minutes
February 10, 2025**

1. Call to Order

The Menahga City Council held their Regular Monthly Meeting on Monday February 10, 2025.

2. Roll Call

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

Mayor Jody Bjornson - Remote via Teams Mike Netland Keith Waaraniemi

Bill Hodge – Acting Vice Mayor Durwin Tomperi

City Office Staff present: City Clerk/Treasurer Brett Gagnonpalick

3. Pledge of Allegiance

4. Approval of Agenda

Councilmember Durwin Tomperi requested to add an item under New Business regarding TIF payment and transfer on sale of property. This was added as item 'E' under new business. Councilmember Mike Netland requested to add an item under New Business regarding the public beach and lifeguards. This was added as item F.

Durwin Tomperi made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. Mike Netland seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Main Motion: To approve the agenda as amended.

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

5. Communication Appearance Request – None

6. Public Forum and Correspondence (Must Sign in) – None

7. Consent Agenda

Councilmember Durwin Tomperi noted some corrections needed in the minutes:

- In the January 13 minutes, the motion to appoint the new call person was incorrectly recorded as being moved and seconded by the same person.
- In the January 22 minutes, Tomperi was incorrectly listed as making a second when he was absent from that meeting.
- In the January 13 minutes, item 11a on the fee schedule was not accurately recorded. The campground fees were excepted from approval for further study. [The motion was passed 'as presented' confirmed by audio review].
- In the January 13 minutes, item 12a on deputy clerk interviews did not include discussion about having a third party review of ordinances and job duties completed by the deputy clerk.

There was discussion about the evaluation process for the deputy clerk position. It was clarified that during the probationary period there would be a third party review, and after the probationary period it would revert to a direct review by the immediate supervisor.

Main Motion: To approve the consent agenda as amended.

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

8. Public Hearing – None

9. Acknowledgment of Receipt of Commission Minutes

10. New Business

Resolution 2025-05 Donation from Five Wings Arts Council to SOSL

Brett Gagnonpalick read Resolution 2025-05 accepting a \$4,000 donation from the Five Wings Arts Council to the Sounds of Spirit Lake program.

Main Motion: To adopt Resolution 2025-05.

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

Kelly Kumpula, City of Menahga Deputy Clerk

Brett Gagnonpalick presented the formal motion to hire Kelly Kumpula as the new deputy clerk treasurer at \$28.65 per hour starting February 24, 2025. There was discussion about including language about the hire being conditional on satisfactory reference checks and background checks. Gagnonpalick confirmed this was included in the offer letter. He also provided details on the salary negotiation process.

Main Motion: To hire Kelly Kumpula as the City of Menahga Deputy Clerk/Treasurer at 28.65 per hour starting February 24th, 2025 in accordance with the offer letter.

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

Camera and audio system to record and stream council meetings

Brett Gagnonpalick presented a proposal to purchase video recording and live streaming equipment for city council meetings, with a budget not to exceed \$1,000. There was discussion about the equipment capabilities, streaming platforms, and analytics that would be available. Council members expressed interest in being able to track viewership data.

Main Motion: To authorize the purchase of video recording and live streaming equipment for city council meetings with a budget not to exceed \$1,000.

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

Motion for signatories for Community First Bank

Brett Gagnonpalick presented the new signatories for city checks and financial business: Jody Bjornsson (mayor), Willard Bill Hodge (vice mayor), Brett Gagnonpalick (city clerk treasurer), and Kelly Kumpula (incoming deputy clerk). There was discussion about including other financial institutions beyond just Community First Bank.

Main Motion: To authorize the listed names to sign checks and conduct financial business with Community First Bank, the 4M fund, and TruStar Credit Union on behalf of the City of Menahga.

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

TIF payment and transfer on sale of property

Councilmember Durwin Tomperi raised questions about the TIF payment process for a recently sold property. There was discussion about whether the TIF payment automatically transfers with the sale and if the city needs to take any action. Brett Gagnonpalick agreed to research the issue further and provide an update in the Friday email to the council.

Public beach and lifeguards

Councilmember Mike Netland brought up the need to begin the process of hiring lifeguards for the public beach for the upcoming summer. There was extensive discussion about lifeguard qualifications, wages, hours of operation, and the importance of the beach as a community asset. Brett Gagnonpalick agreed to draft a job posting for lifeguards to be reviewed by the council.

Department/Committee Reports

Police:

The council discussed a proposal from Police Chief Amy Lane to reduce the frequency of the city siren to only the first Wednesday of every month at 1:00 PM. During the discussion, there was a range of opinions shared regarding the pros and cons of this change. Among the reasons for reducing the frequency was the idea of "siren fatigue," suggesting that frequent sirens may lead residents to become desensitized, potentially impacting their responsiveness to actual

emergencies. Council member Mike Netland expressed personal attachment to the sirens for marking time and signaling curfews, but also acknowledged that societal changes might warrant a different perspective.

In support of Chief Lane's proposal, it was highlighted that other towns in the area have already moved to a once-a-month schedule, emphasizing the need to evaluate and possibly update practices to align with broader trends.

Main Motion: To authorize the Police Department in collaboration with the Public Works to reduce alarm frequency to only the first Wednesday of every month at 1:00 pm for a three month trial period.

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried by a 4-1 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	Netland

The council also discussed a request from Chief Lane to have access to all city cameras for investigative purposes. There was significant dialogue regarding privacy concerns and the potential for the misuse of camera footage. However, it was emphasized that this access would be restricted strictly to investigative needs, ensuring that surveillance does not extend beyond necessary boundaries.

Main Motion: To authorize Chief Lane to have access to all city cameras for investigative purposes only.

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

Additionally, the council debated a proposal to remove Verizon GPS systems from police squad cars. Chief Lane argued that since the police squads are already tracked by Wadena County using their system, the local GPS presented a redundancy and cost concern. Despite initial resistance due to accountability and city liability protection concerns, it was pointed out that the county's system could serve the same purpose. This was supported by clarification that the current costs of \$700 per year for the service could be allocated elsewhere in the department more beneficially..

Main Motion: To continue using the existing GPS system.

Moved by:	Tomperi
Seconded	Netland
Action:	Motion carried by a 2-3 voice vote
In favor:	Tomperi, Netland
Opposed:	Bjornson, Hodge, Waaraniemi

Motion did not garner enough support to pass.

Main Motion: To authorize the Chief of Police, Amy Lane, to have the Verizon GPS systems removed from all police squads.

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried by a 3-2 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Waaraniemi, Hodge
Opposed:	Netland, Tomperi

Liquor Store

The council reviewed the monthly liquor store report presented by Brett Gagnonpalick. It was noted that January had a good net income of nearly \$16,000. This positive financial outcome was likely bolstered by the cold weather, which typically leads to increased activity during ice fishing season, as mentioned by Brett Gagnonpalick. The council acknowledged that favorable weather conditions for ice fishing could contribute to higher sales at the liquor store.

Additionally, Councilmember Jody Bjornson inquired about the status of roof repairs at the liquor store, specifically if Heather had heard any updates from Herzog regarding the scheduling for this maintenance. Brett Gagnonpalick confirmed there had been no updates received on scheduling, and he agreed to look into it further to provide a timeline.

The report and discussion highlighted the liquor store's financial health and ongoing structural needs, indicating a focus on both immediate financial performance and long-term maintenance planning.

Overall, the review of the liquor store's report reflected the council's awareness of the factors contributing to its financial success and the need for continuous oversight on operational infrastructure.

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Bjornson
Action:	Motion carried by a 3-2 voice vote

In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	Hodge, Netland

Shepersky also presented quotes for roof repairs at the liquor store. The council discussed the options and long-term plans for the building.

Public Works

Brett Gagnonpalick noted that the 2007 Chevy vehicle needs its alternator replaced and suggested starting discussions about replacing the vehicle while it still has some resale value. Council members discussed the need for a vehicle replacement schedule for the department.

Greenwood Connection

Laura, the Greenwood Connection administrator, presented the monthly report. She highlighted the census numbers, which reported a current occupancy rate of 58 residents with eight in the Transitional Care Unit (TCU). Staffing updates revealed some turnover, with the facility adapting admissions based on staffing levels, particularly within the TCU.

Financial matters included the renewal of two CDs with Community First, amounting to \$1,600,000 and \$200,000, respectively. She reported that the interest rates offered by Community First were competitive, even slightly better than those from 4M. Concerns about reduced rates in future years were mentioned, with potential decreases expected by 2026 due to state budget proposals.

Laura also presented a market study indicating potential demand for about 100 beds by 2029, pointing to significant growth in senior living needs, including independent living, memory care, and assisted living. Council members expressed interest in how such expansions would be sustained until the projected demand materialized. Questions from the council included inquiries into staffing challenges, government funding changes, and the timeline of past expansions, which Laura detailed as a multi-year process from initial discussions to facility opening.

Additionally, concerns around future budgeting and strategic planning for growth and resource allocation were discussed, comparing the current and future demands on Greenwood Connection's services and facilities.

Main Motion: To approve the monthly report and financials as

presented by Greenwood Connections administrator Laura Ahlf.

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

Fire Department

Brett Gagnonpalick presented the fire call report for January, which included two structure fires in Sebeka. He also presented the fire department personnel appointments recommended by Fire Chief Terry Berttunen.

Main Motion: To approve and codify the appointments made by the Menahga City Fire Chief Terry Berttunen.

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

Councilmember Keith Waaraniemi abstained.

Unfinished Business

Pay Scale 2025

The council engaged in an extensive discussion regarding the proposed pay scale increase for 2025. Councilmember Mike Netland provided an analysis contrasting a 6% increase, initially proposed by staff, against a 3.3% increase based on the consumer price index. This led to a robust debate about finding a balance between offering competitive wages for city employees and managing the financial impact on taxpayers, particularly focusing on the city's senior residents who largely live on fixed incomes.

Mike Netland highlighted that Greenwood Connections had previously implemented a 6% wage increase, drawing comparisons with the city's potential raise. However, he pointed out the distinct difference that Greenwood Connections is not supported by taxpayer dollars, unlike city wages which are largely funded by city taxes. His analysis included how both the 6% and 3.3% proposals would position Menahga within the regional pay scale landscape, noting that both would place the city in the middle.

Councilmember Bill Hodge expressed the importance of competitive pay to maintain a

stable workforce, emphasizing that potential employees would be most attracted by the direct wages offered, rather than just the benefits package. Durwin Tomperi underlined the need to provide a living wage that acknowledges both the benefits and the direct wage, promoting employee retention and satisfaction.

In a spirit of compromise and with the aim to reach a balanced decision, council members discussed alternative options, ranging between the proposed percentages. They considered findings from the Greenwood Connection's pay practices and assessments from other regional cities, acknowledging that any decision would set a precedent for forthcoming union negotiations as well.

Ultimately, weighing all viewpoints and considerations, the council agreed upon a 5% wage increase for 2025. The agreed increase sought to align with other local governmental bodies and sustain competitive compensation for city employees. Brett Gagnonpalick was tasked with preparing an updated pay scale that reflects the 5% increase for formal approval at the March meeting, ensuring that the new scale would be retroactive to January 1, 2025.

Main Motion: To approve a 5% wage increase for 2025.

Moved by:	Hodge
Seconded	Waaraniemi
Action:	Motion carried by a 3-2 voice vote
In favor:	Bjornson, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	Netland, Tomperi

Brett Gagnonpalick was directed to prepare an updated pay scale reflecting the 5% increase for approval at the March meeting, to be retroactive to January 1, 2025.

Consideration of Bills, Budget YTD, Investment Report, Bank Securities Pledge

Brett Gagnonpalick presented the invoices for approval:

- Batch #012225PAY - \$27,267.98
- Batch #012325PAY - \$683.29
- Batch #013125EFT – \$94,935.03
- Batch #021025PAY - \$104,282.05 Total: \$227,168.35

Main Motion: To approve payment invoices as presented.

Moved by:	Waaraniemi
Seconded	Hodge
Action:	Motion carried on a 5-0 voice vote

In favor:	Bjornson, Tomperi, Netland, Hodge, Waaraniemi
Opposed:	None

Closed Session

The meeting was closed under the authority of Minnesota Statutes, Section 13D.03, Subdivision 1, to discuss preliminary consideration of strategy and proposals in relation to union negotiations.

Main Motion: To close the meeting under authority of MN statues, Section 13d.03, sub. 1.

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

Statement Summary from Closes Session:

Upon reopening the meeting, it was reported that the council agreed to give Brett Gagnonpalick authority to communicate with the union on behalf of the council regarding negotiations.

13. Adjournment

The council decided to adjourn the meeting after ensuring all agenda items were addressed, ongoing concerns were noted for follow-up, and the next work session was set for March 31st.

Main Motion: To adjourn at 9:11 p.m.

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

City Clerk/Treasurer, Brett Gagnonpalick

Mayor, Jody Bjornson