

February 24, 2026  
Harlowton City Hall

A regular meeting of the Harlowton City Council was held on February 10, 2026. The meeting opened at 7:00pm with the Pledge of Allegiance.

There was no public comment on any item, not on the agenda.

The minutes of the January 27, 2026, Council meeting were approved as amended.

#### **COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**Library:** No report.

**Tree Board:** The tree board met last Wednesday. DNRC came out with a brochure that says we have 1080 trees in the city boulevards and parks. The MUCFA report when they inventoried trees says we have 1247 city trees.

**Ordinance:** Back on the Agenda for the next meeting

#### **OLD BUSINESS:**

**West End Lots:** Mayor Runner reported there is no new information. We are still waiting on MMIA's decision whether they will indemnify the title company if the title company okay's selling the lots.

**Storage Building/Unisex Bathroom at the Pool:** Mayor Runner reported we received an estimate for the building, to include storage, a snack shack area and unisex bathroom. The estimate is for \$120,000. Mayor Runner said we need more information before a decision can be made.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

**Street Closure Form Approval:** Mayor Runner presented an updated street closure form which includes a separate alcohol policy, any barriers, fencing, cones etc. must be removed immediately following the end of the event, and the event must be coordinated with the sheriff's office. Also, if the event has their own security, they must coordinate that with the sheriff's office also.

**Repairs to Public Works Ford pickup:** Mayor Runner reported that the public works Ford pickup needs about \$1500 worth of repairs. The money is in the budget for this repair.

**Resolution 2026-08 Establishing Bank Signatures:** A resolution was presented to have Mayor Jack Runner, Clerk-Treasurer Anita Leach, Public Works Director Bob Schuchard, and Council President Frank Brouillette as signees for the City at Citizens Bank. Councilmember Susan Beley questioned why Bob Schuchard is a signer, since employees are not answerable to the taxpayers. It was mentioned that the Public Works Director has been a signer on the checking account back to at least 2005. Councilmember Brouillette moved to have the auditor look at this resolution and find out who should be signers. Councilmember John Billadeau seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Resolution 2026-09 Forming a Recreation Committee:** Mayor Runner presented a resolution forming a recreation committee which would include overseeing the pool, pickleball court, baseball fields, basketball courts, tennis court, and skate park. Mayor Runner mentioned that he asked Darian Murray to be on the committee as a pool representative. He also thinks we will need two council members on this committee because of the number of areas to be covered. Councilmember Susan Beley moved to approve this resolution. Councilmember Vicki Paddock seconded the motion. TJ Tupker mentioned Kylee Meeker should be on the committee as the baseball representative. Councilmembers Paddock, Brouillette, Billadeau, Beley, and Bennett voted in favor of this motion. Councilmember Lawson abstained.

**Resolution 2026-10 Forming a Rail Trail Committee:** Mayor Runner presented a resolution forming a committee for Rail Trail. He would also like this committee to help with the Railyard project. He needs a committee to help with the goals for that area. Councilmember Susan Beley moved to approve this resolution. Councilmember Lawson seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Mayor Runner also mentioned that the DEQ let him know there are two grants for cleanup at the roundhouse and the brownsfield cleanup.

**Water, Sewer, Solid Waste expenses/revenues:** Mayor Runner mentioned that he has been working on the water and sewer EDUs. He is meeting with the water board on Wednesday to request that they give us relief on 16 EDUs after he refigured what we actually have. He is also going to ask them to give us relief on 14 EDUs from the old hospital on the first of April since it will be empty for the foreseeable future.

**Counter from Library:** Mayor Runner passed around a diagram of a counter/shelf unit that was built for the library but does not match the rest of the furnishings in the library. The prison is willing to give us a discount on the unit. We do have money in the budget for this item. Councilmember Beley moved to purchase the shelving unit. Councilmember Billadeau seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Audit Findings, working with the State:** Mayor Runner gave a more in-depth summary of the audit findings we have had for the last 5 audits and what the consequences of those findings are with the state. We have some reports we need to get to the state to prove that we have changed the way we are doing cash reconciliations, accounts receivable, proper period recognition expenditures, revenue recognition, and expenditures-internal controls.

**Request Funding for Clerk Institute:** Mayor Runner requested funding for Clerk Anita Leach to attend Clerk Institute. When asked, Mayor Runner stated there is no money in the budget for training. This item died for lack of a motion.

**Letter to Mark Robinson on home issue:** Mayor Runner explained that he has asked City Attorney Brent Brooks to write a letter to Mark Robinson addressing the issues about his house and the metal sheeting and tin that is flying off and landing on other people's property.

**PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR REPORT:** Public Works Director Bob Schuchard reported he has been working with RPA's Chris Hayes on future sewer projects and what order of importance things need to be done in. The new grader is built; it is just waiting on an inspection.

**REPORT OF THE CLERK-TREASURER:** Clerk Anita Leach reported the audit is scheduled for March, so they have been compiling information for that. They are also clearing out old files and moving them to the basement.

**MAYORS REPORT:** Mayor Runner reported he is attending the Executive Forum in Livingston March 4-6. There is also budget training in Helena March 12<sup>th</sup>. Only one person from each city can go, but we are hopeful that both Anita and Jack will be able to attend if there are extra openings. Wheatland County Attorney sent a letter to Mayor Runner that he would like read into the record. See attachment

**REPORT OF ATTORNEY:** City Attorney Brent Brooks stated the Executive Forum and Clerk Institute are both very informative conferences. He is working on ordinances with the committee. He has 6 criminal cases, 3 new and one omnibus hearing that he attended today.

**REPORT FROM DES COORDINATOR CODY NELSON:** Cody explained the reason behind the emergency resolution from the wind event in December. Cody also introduced the new deputies in attendance, Kylie Mahood and Lucas Verreth.

**REPORT OF WCSO:** Deputies Lucas Verreth and Kylie Mahood reported the Sheriff's office had several DUI's and some animal cases.

**PUBLIC COMMENT OF ITEMS NOT ON AGENDA:**

**ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING:** Tree Board Committee, Bank Signatures, Ordinance Committee Reports

**CLAIMS:**

Councilmember Frank Brouillette made a motion to approve claims, 22583-22604. Councilmember Vicki Paddock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Councilmember Susan Beley reminded the councilmembers that they can stop in and read through the invoices before meetings since the claims are hard to read. She has stopped before the last two meetings and gone through them and encourages everyone to do the same.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm

Council Members Present: Susan Beley, Kyle Lawson, Charley Bennett by zoom, Vicki Paddock, Frank Brouillette, John Billadeau

Council Members Absent: None

City Office: Mayor Jack Runner, City Clerk-Treasurer Anita Leach, Public Works Director Bob Schuchard, City Attorney Brent Brooks

Public Present: Charlotte Runner, Cody Nelson, Lindsey Sramek, Dane Elwood, Alex Thompson, Lucas Verreth, Kylie Mahood, TJ Tupker

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Jack Runner, Mayor

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Anita Leach, Clerk-Treasurer

P.O. Box 770  
201 A Ave. N.W.

Lynn M. Grant  
Wheatland County Attorney  
Harlowton, MT 59036

Phone:(406) 632-5651  
[WCATTY@wheatlandcomt.gov](mailto:WCATTY@wheatlandcomt.gov)

February 6, 2026

Harlowton City Hall  
17 S. Central Ave  
Harlowton MT 59036

RE: Letter to the Editor February 5 Times Clarion

Dear Mayor and Council persons of Harlowton, Montana:

I am writing today to try to bring clarity to, and correct misassumptions, published in a letter to the editor of the Harlowton Times Clarion. The writer of that letter calls for the removal of the current City Attorney. I take no position on that request, or the writer's ability to make that call as an expression of free speech. I do take issue with how the matter about which he complains is presented, and his understanding, or lack thereof, of Montana law. I do not agree with the writer's interchangeable use of terms for purposes that are derogatory to the former Mayor and current City Attorney. For purposes of this letter I will assume his allegations are correct that the prior Mayor purchased a vehicle for the City of Harlowton, for \$22,000, without getting prior approval of the City Council through an adopted budget that did not include a "vehicle purchase."

The writer first cites MCA §7-6-4005, MCA, entitled "**Expenditures limited to appropriations.**" This sections tells local officials they may not "make a disbursement or an expenditure or incur an obligation in excess of the total appropriation for a fund." This statute is simply telling county and city officials not to spend more than is budgeted. It is not item specific in any way. I can tell you it is fairly common in the operation of county governments that expenses in the county departments can exceed the amount budgeted for certain items, just as many budget categories are often under budget at the end of the year. Budgets are estimates, not figures cast in stone. When a budget category is over, a budget amendment is proposed and considered by the Commissioners. The overall Wheatland County budget carries an allocated surplus or reserve, exactly for these occurrences. I expect the City budget is similarly structured.

The most important aspect of this statute is it does not incorporate criminal liability for violations. For that to apply the official would have to satisfy the elements of a separate criminal offense. Mere violation of this statute will not suffice. There has been no such allegation the former mayor pocketed any of these funds, or that the City did not get the item purchased. The writer of the published letter wants the public to believe a violation of this statute is "illegal" or "criminal", in that sense it clearly is not.

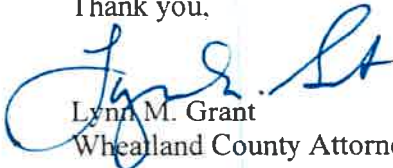
Next, as noted above, if a purchase is made by a local official in excess of funds, the City Council is the body responsible for dealing with the situation. They can reject the purchase, return the item and seek return of the money. If they cannot receive in return all of the money spent, then yes, the local official making the purchase is personally liable for the difference. Or they can ratify the action through an amendment to the budget, which the City Council did in this situation. Should there be insufficient funds to cover the full amount of the expenditure through budget amendment, then the local official could potentially be personally liable for the shortfall. However, where the item purchased is needed, cities and counties routinely the process is either §7-6-4011, MCA, to borrow money, or §7-6-4012, MCA to make adjustments to the budget using collected fees. I don't understand how the letter writer can profess if the City Council keeps the item purchased, or returns the item and gets all the money back, that the official is still responsible for the appropriation. The City, in either circumstance, has suffered no harm, and the government is not entitled to a windfall.

The only thing the letter brings up which causes pause for concern is whether the action taken by the City Council through budget amendment, was given proper notice as §7-6-4021, MCA requires. If not given, that would invalidate the action but not prevent it from being revisited after proper notice was given. I don't have independent knowledge one way or the other, and trust proper notice was here given, and the Council and City Attorney did things correctly.

In my opinion the tone of this letter to the editor, and the actions described therein at the City Council meeting, show misplaced anger at the City Attorney. Because the procedures used are so common throughout Montana, I can understand why the City Attorney would opine that nothing criminal was done, accepting that the accusers were using "illegal" and "criminal" interchangeably. Attorneys like to be both correct and precise, something that often requires them to equivocate at first, and research when they have time to make sure their answer is correct. That appears what happened here.

This incident highlights how crowds can be whipped into excitement when people use incorrect words or meanings. There was nothing nefarious about what happened, and the city council handled it properly. Attempting to taint good people in this fashion is something that is really low. As one scholar put it, and I'm paraphrasing it here, the real danger isn't someone not knowing what they are talking about, the danger is someone who doesn't know he doesn't know what he's talking about. Hopefully that's no longer the case.

Thank you,



Lynn M. Grant  
Wheatland County Attorney