

Meeting Minutes

June 12, 2025, at 7:00 pm

Mercer City Hall

Mayor Lori Stute opened the meeting at 7:00 pm and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Council Members Barb Stute, Gary Volochenko, and Erika Lorenz were present. Randy Zinke was absent.

Council additions to agenda: City web site

Gary Volochenko made a motion to approve the minutes, with corrections, from the May 15, 2025, meeting, Barb Stute seconded. Stute, Volochenko, and Lorenz all voted aye. The motion carried.

Financial Report: Mayor Stute stated that financials are still unavailable.

Bills to be Paid:

Erika Lorenz stated that, as Gary Volochenko pointed out at the May meeting, the \$1739 bill from Moore Engineering should be repaid to the City from the community center funds as it is part of the community center project. Erika Lorenz made a motion to transfer \$1,739 paid to Moore Engineering to replat the lot donated to the city for a new community center from Community Center fund to the general fund, Gary Volochenko seconded. Volochenko and Lorenz voted aye. Stute voted no. The motion carried.

Gary Volochenko made a motion to approve the bills, Erika Lorenz seconded. Stute, Volochenko and Lorenz voted aye. The motion carried.

Water Bills:

Erika Lorenz questioned why the deposit from the month before showed as zero. Mayor Stute will check and report back to the council. She also questioned a high dollar amount for an account that should have been paid on the account's property taxes. Mayor Stute will check on this and report back. Mayor Stute stated that the water bills have been estimated without any notice to the city. Letters will be sent to residents who are 60+ days past due.

Park Report:

No report was given.

Community Center Project Report:

Mayor Stute presented a list of grants that have been applied for, the dollar amounts and statuses:

T-Mobile Hometown Grant	\$50,000	Pending
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Minot Air Community Foundation	\$46,755.33	Pending
Basin Electric Power Co-Op	\$20,000	Denied
Rainbow Energy Center	\$36,400	Pending
MDU Resources Foundation	\$42,458.33	Pending
Falkirk Mine/North American Coal	\$4,000/year for 4 years	Received
Garrison Diversion	\$50,000 matching	Received
Co-Op Elevator of McClusky	1.67 acres of land	Received
Ottertail Foundation	\$59,202.25	Pending
Inspiritus	\$59,202.25	Pending

Erika Lorenz asked why the grant applications are not being presented to the council before they are submitted. Karen Zinke is writing the grants for the community center. Mayor Stute asked if committee members are being informed of the grants being applied for. No, they are not. Erika Lorenz stated that her expectation is that grant applications are to be brought to the council before they are submitted. Not any differently than when the park committee applied for grants for the playground equipment. The grant applications bind the city, and she is concerned by the lack of transparency, especially now that this is a subcommittee of the city council.

Old Business:

Provide Sewer to all occupied properties in city limits:

Mayor Stute presented estimates for two different options. Michael Erickson with the Drain Man explained the two options. One was to install a pump chamber and a pump (\$19,144); the other option was to add another manhole structure (\$28,029). The second option is more expensive. Gary Volochenko questioned how to pay for the project. Mayor Stute stated the city can use Prairie Dog Funds/Municipal Infrastructure Funds to pay for this. Mayor Stute does not know why the sewer was not run to all residents when the sewer was installed but her septic system is aging, and she cannot install a new one as it is not allowed. Mr. Erickson said he will try to install the sewer line under the water main. Mr. Erickson recommends the lesser expensive option, and he will also raise the manhole cover and install a new lid. Other homes can also be connected into the line if needed. There is concern that if the city does not provide it now and the septic system fails, the cost will increase because there will be a time issue. Gary Volochenko made a motion to install a sewer line and accept the estimate for \$19,144, Erika Lorenz seconded. Stute, Volochenko, and Lorenz all voted aye. The motion carried.

Community Center Project – Names on bank account:

Mayor Stute stated that to open a bank account for the community center project specific individuals must be named on the account. The mayor and one other person must be on the account. Barb Stute asked if Randy Zinke, as the committee president, should be on the account. Erika Lorenz moved to table naming a second person for a community center project account, Gary Volochenko seconded. Lorenz and Volochenko voted aye. Stute voted no. The motion carried.

Sign County Assessor's return oath:

Mayor Stute presented the County Assessor's oath for the council to sign. It was approved at the May meeting, but the city did not have the form to sign.

Our Savior's Lutheran Church:

Mayor Stute went to the courthouse to find out information on the community center lot. If the lot were split it would leave nothing but a 15-foot setback on the side of the building. The Recorder's Office recommended the city not split the lot. The city attorney also recommended not splitting the lot. The setback would not be enough to do anything with the property for any kind of work. If the city is willing to sell the lot and building it would have to be put up for bids. All information on the testing that was done and the remediation required would have to be disclosed to potential buyers. Gary Volochenko stated the city should put the lot and building up for bids. Erika Lorenz agreed but would like a full council to make that decision. The city attorney will have to write up the ad and any additional required paperwork. The church wants to build this year, if the church is not the high bidder perhaps they can work with the new owner. The city does not have the funds to fix the building. The soonest a sale would happen would be July if everything gets done quickly. Gary Volochenko made a motion to put the community center property up for bids with full disclosure, Erika Lorenz seconded. Stute, Volochenko, and Lorenz voted aye. The motion carried.

Accounting System:

Mayor Stute stated that the accounting system is unusable. She presented a letter from Mary Jamerson with Midwest Assistance Planning with recommendations and requirements for the city account systems. The city must address the malfunctions in the accounting system and have a CPA audit of the financials for the past two years. The city is also required to have a single audit for 2018 before the State Auditor's Office can approve the financials for 2020, 2021, and 2022. The audit is required because the city received more than \$750,000 in federal funds. Erika Lorenz made a motion for Mayor Stute to hire Eide Bailey to perform the audit for 2018 and to audit the past two years of the city's financials, Gary Volochenko seconded. Stute, Volochenko and Lorenz voted aye. The motion carried.

New Business

Flexible Transportation Fund Distribution Direct Deposit Authorization

Mayor Stute presented a form to direct deposit any flexible transportation funds the city may receive. She will fill out the form for any funds to be deposited into the city general fund.

City Web Site

Erika Lorenz stated that the city does not have access to the city web site. Katherin Volochenko mentioned that Reservation Telephone has a site building plan for \$10 per month that would not require any special software and the city would have access to the site for updating. Will the council allow an outside person to be the webmaster? Yes.

Erika Lorenz made a motion to build a new website through Reservation Telephone and to allow Katherin Volochenko to serve as the web master with the city having access to the site, Barb Stute seconded. Stute, Volochenko, and Lorenz all voted aye. The motion carried. The city agreed to allow Katherin Volochenko to charge a nominal fee for her time.

Katherin Volochenko

She recommended that the council develop a policy that council member cannot contact any entity that charges its time without prior approval by the council, Mayor Stute stated that, per the city attorney, this would not be allowed. Erika Lorenz stated that if the council does not approve an expense, the council member that incurred the expense would then be personally responsible for the bill. The bills to be paid should be corrected in the paper.

She has not received any of her information on her open records requests regarding bills for the city attorney. Erika Lorenz stated the copies are ready and Katherin will receive them after the meeting.

There is no notice of advertising for a new auditor. The auditor position, by statute, is a salaried position. She also requested copies of all the Rural Development paperwork. She hasn't received anything to date. She would also like a copy of the 18 page document that Amanda Presser presented at the last meeting. Mayor Stute stated that a 30 day deadline is difficult for the current council to meet and it is not just the responsibility of the mayor to fulfill these requests. Senate Bill 2180 creates an opportunity for the public to provide public comment at each meeting and the council will need to create a policy for this.

Erika Lorenz moved to adjourn the meeting, Barb Stute seconded. Stute, Volochenko and Lorenz all vote aye. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 8:51 pm.