

**MEETING MINUTES**

**CITY OF EAST HELENA**

**CITY HALL – 306 EAST MAIN - ROOM 110**

**COUNCIL MEETING: 6:30 PM**

**DATE: TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026**

**JOIN ZOOM MEETING: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/3787705872>**

**CONFERENCE CALL-IN: 1-253-205-0468 MEETING ID: 378 770 5872**

**MEETING CALLED TO ORDER:** Mayor Harris called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Councilmember Ferguson led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CITY OFFICIALS & STAFF PRESENT:** Mayor Kelly Harris, Council President Don Dahl, Councilmember Judy Leland, Councilmember Wesley Feist, Councilmember Suzanne Ferguson, Clerk/Treasurer Amy Thorngren, Public Works Director Kevin Ore, Volunteer Fire Chief Roger Campbell, Volunteer Firefighter Nick Kallem, Acting Police Chief Ed Royce, Patrol Officer Zach Butler, and Patrol Officer Chris Kirkegaard

**PUBLIC PRESENT:** John Willoughby, Jerry Verbanac, Lisa Leland, Leo Vroegindewey, Scott Walter, Jonathan Heslep, Leo Dutton, Kit Johnson, Prescott Wagner, Ruth Wagner, Unidentified, Unidentified, Unidentified, Mike Sanders (via Zoom), Jacob Kuntz, Courtney Ellis, Brad Koenig, Greg Wirth, Blair Miller (via Zoom), Guest (via Zoom), Guest (via Zoom), Russ Hill (via Zoom), Denise Feller, Dan Rispens, and Vince Bray

**ABSENT/EXCUSED:** City Judge Dennis Loveless and City Attorney Pete Elverum

**(0:00:40) PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Nick Kallem expressed his gratitude for the East Helena Police Department.

**(0:01:55) APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** A copy of the draft minutes of the January 6th meeting was included in the council packet. There was no public comment. Councilmember Feist made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Councilmember Leland seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**CITY COURT REPORT:** A written report was included in the council packet. City Judge Dennis Loveless was excused.

**(0:02:15) DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS:**

**Administration** – Clerk/Treasurer Amy Thorngren reported that the department was processing 2025 tax forms, building permit applications were experiencing a winter lull, and that summer park rentals had increased.

**Police Department** – Acting Police Chief Ed Royce reported that the department had responded to at least 325 calls-for-service so far in January, thanked neighboring agencies that aided, and noted that Officer Kyle Butler would be receiving a second lifesaving award.

**Public Works** – A written report was included in the council packet. Public Works Director Kevin Ore reported that the DEQ inspection at the wastewater treatment plant had gone as expected, wastewater rate hearings are upcoming, he attended meetings with the water rights attorney, and he started working on the FY27 budget.

**Volunteer Fire Department** - Fire Chief Roger Campbell thanked the other departments for their assistance, discussed his department's upcoming ISO inspection, reported that he was updating the department's liability insurance, and said that he would be sending a letter of approval to the DEQ for the Ironhorse Landing Subdivision.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** There was no unfinished business.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

1. **(0:15:40) Appointment of Ed Royce as Chief of Police** – Mayor Harris stated that the hiring process was completed and the position had been offered to Ed Royce. Officers Butler and Kirkegaard expressed their support. Councilmember Ferguson made a motion to approve the appointment. Councilmember Leland seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
2. **(0:17:30) Request to Use Main Street Park for the Montana POW-MIA Ride to Remember August 14<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup>** – John Willoughby and Lisa Leland gave a brief history of the event and requested Council's approval to use Main Street Park for this year's ride. Mr. Willoughby answered questions from Council. There was no public comment. Councilmember Feist made a motion to approve the use of Main Street Park for the event including a rental fee waiver. Councilmember Dahl seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
3. **(0:24:35) Approval to Move Forward with Application to the Montana Board of Investments for Rose Hills Subdivision SID Bond** – A copy of House Bill 505 was included in the council packet. Mayor Harris stressed that impact fees are not development fees and stated that the city still expects to collect system development fees from the developers. Courtney Ellis of Dorsey & Whitney discussed the distinction between impact fees and system development fees. Jacob Kuntz of Helena Area Habitat for Humanity noted that the request was only to make the application to the Montana Board of Investments and that final approval of the bond would be requested later. There was no public comment. Councilmember Dahl made a motion to approve moving forward with the application on the condition that the city would still collect system development fees. Councilmember Leland seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
4. **(0:33:40) Agreement Regarding Engineering Costs of Water Infrastructure in the Rose Hills Subdivision** – The draft agreement was included in the council packet. Jacob Kuntz of Helena Area Habitat for Humanity discussed the proposed agreement to reimburse the city for engineering expenses related to the design of a water tank and pump station. There was no public comment. Councilmember Feist made a motion to approve the agreement. Councilmember Ferguson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

5. **(0:36:05) FY25 Budget Amendment** – Draft Resolution 637 was included in the council packet. Clerk/Treasurer Thorngren discussed the budget lines that required amendments. There was no public comment. Councilmember Dahl made a motion to approve Resolution 637. Councilmember Leland seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
6. **(0:39:200) Proposed Changes to the Missouri River Drug Task Force Memorandum of Understanding for Task Force Officer Operations** – Copies of the proposed changes were included in the council packet. Mayor Harris explained that the proposed changes added border patrol activities to the existing MOU. Police Chief Royce stated that he wholeheartedly agreed with the mission of the MRDTF, but that he had some liability concerns regarding the addition of border patrol. Lewis & Clark County Sheriff/Coroner and MRDTF Chairman Leo Dutton discussed the changes to the MOU, commented in support of it, and answered questions from Council. Denise Feller, Leo Vroegindewey, EHPS Board Chairman Scott Walter, Vince Bray, EHPS Superintendent Dan Rispens, John Willoughby, Prescott Wagner, Jonathan Heslip, and Kit Johnson commented in support of the proposed changes. Councilmember Feist made a motion to approve the update to the Missouri River Drug Task Force Memorandum of Understanding. Councilmember Leland seconded the motion. Councilmembers Feist, Leland, and Dahl voted aye. Councilmember Ferguson voted no. The motion passed.

**(1:42:40) MAYOR’S REPORT:** Mayor Harris reported that he attended Coffee with the Chamber and a tour with an aerospace company considering a new facility in the area.

**(1:48:00) COUNCILMEMBERS’ REPORTS:**

**Don Dahl** had nothing to report.

**Judy Leland** reported that she attended the police chief interviews.

**Wesley Feist** reported that he attended Coffee with the Chamber, the Montana Economic Developers Association has funded a community review of East Helena, he was reelected chair of the Lewis & Clark Metro Region of the Montana Opioid Abatement Trust, he attended the tour with an aerospace company considering a new facility in the area, and that he attended the Montana Business Assistance Connection board meeting.

**Suzanne Ferguson** had nothing to report.

**LEGAL REPORT:** City Attorney Elverum was excused.

**(1:51:40) PAYMENT OF BILLS:** Claims 299558 through 299602 were presented for Council’s review. Councilmember Leland made a motion to pay the bills. Councilmember Feist seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**MEETING & EVENT SCHEDULE:**

1. East Helena City Council Meeting, Tuesday, February 3, 2026, 6:30 p.m., East Helena City Hall Room 110

2. East Helena City Council Meeting, Tuesday, February 17, 2026, 6:30 p.m., East Helena City Hall Room 110

**ADJOURNMENT:** Mayor Harris adjourned the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

ATTEST:

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Clerk/Treasurer

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Mayor