

# WADENA COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING

December 16, 2025

The Wadena County Board of Commissioners' Meeting was held on Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025 in the Wadena County Courthouse Small Courtroom at 415 Jefferson St. S., Wadena, Minnesota. The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Chairperson Stearns and all present recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present were: Commissioners Murlyn Kreklau, Bryan Winkels, Ron Noon, Bill Stearns, and Jon Kangas; County Attorney Kyra Ladd, County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson, County Engineer Anthony Maule, Assistant County Engineer Ben Skoog, Human Services and Human Resources Director/Deputy County Administrator Jennifer Westrum, Human Resources Specialist Brenna McKnight-Tessier, SGR Vice President Michael Czymbor via Zoom, Transit Director Randy Jahnke, Sergeant Bryan Savaloja, Sheriff Mike Carr, Public Health Director Sarah Ness via Zoom and Tax Specialist Missy Lund.

## **Amend/Approve the Day's Agenda:**

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to approve today's Agenda as presented, seconded by Commissioner Kangas. Motion carried unanimously.

**Citizen Comments:** There were no citizen comments at this meeting.

## **Consent Agenda:**

- 11-24-25 JD3 Minutes for Approval
- 11-25-2025 Minutes for Approval
- 12-01-2025 Minutes for Approval
- 12-01-2025 TNT Minutes for Approval
- Auditor Warrants for Approval in the amount of \$399,965.93
- Human Services Warrants for Approval in the amount of \$31,663.88
- Designating Wadena County Polling Places for Absentee and Mail Ballot Precincts for 2026 Election Year
- Fire Abatement Application
- Draft Condensed 11-20-2025 Minutes of Planning Commission
- Amendment to Summit Food Service PDF
- HBI RMS Grant Application
- Employment Update

Motion by Commissioner Kangas to approve the Consent Agenda after pulling the HBI RMS Grant, the Condensed Planning Commissioner Minutes and the Employment Update, seconded by Commissioner Kreklau. Motion carried unanimously.

**Draft Condensed Minutes of the 11-20-2025 Planning Commission Meeting:** Commissioner Kangas raised concerns about the use of “quarter-quarter section” reference in the zoning ordinances and suggested it be replaced with “parcel” for clarity. Commissioner Winkels noted that he would bring that suggestion to the next Planning Commission meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Kangas to accept the Condensed 11-20-2025 Minutes of the Planning Commission, seconded by Commissioner Noon. Motion carried unanimously.

**Healthy Brain Initiative Road Map Strategist (HBI RMS) Grant:** Commissioner Kreklau asked for the specifics on this \$50,000 grant opportunity. Public Health Director Sarah Ness explained that this is a one-time grant from the Alzheimer’s Association for a Public Health program focused on caregiver training and coalition building.

Motion by Commissioner Noon to approve the HBI RMS \$50,000 Grant Application as presented, seconded by Commissioner Winkels. Motion carried unanimously.

**Employment Update:** Commissioners Kreklau and Kangas asked if it was the employee or the department who requested the transition from full-time to part-time with benefits. Public Health Director Sarah Ness reported that the current full-time employee is transitioning into an existing part-time position which is available due to a retirement. The full-time position being vacated is not being filled at this time because of the uncertainty of the future of UCare.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to approve the Employment Update as presented, seconded by Commissioner Noon. Motion carried unanimously.

## **REGULAR AGENDA ITEMS:**

**SGR Introduction:** Michael Czymbor, Sr. Vice President of the recruiting firm SGR, joined the meeting via Zoom and presented an update on the County Administrator search. He outlined the recruitment process and timeline with the goal to present finalists by February 17, 2026.

**Law Enforcement Contract with City of Verndale:** Sheriff Mike Carr presented this contract for Board approval, which will bring in \$101,400 in revenue and reduce the sheriff’s overall budget request to 2.6% with no new additional employees. Sheriff Carr explained that the contract is for one year and noted that similar arrangements are becoming more common as smaller municipalities struggle to hire police officers. County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson noted that if this contract is approved, the budget that was planned to be presented would need to be quickly updated and brought back for Board approval later in this meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to approve the Law Enforcement Contract with the City of Verndale, seconded by Commissioner Stearns. Motion approved unanimously.

**Friendly Rider Selling Buses 9 and 10:** Transit Director Randy Jahnke began this discussion with the Board going over the appraisal details and minimum bid amounts.

Motion by Commissioner Kreklau to post both bus 9 and bus 10 on MNBid with a minimum bid of \$1,500 each, seconded by Commissioner Kangas. Motion carried unanimously.

**Solid Waste Committed Funds:** Solid Waste Supervisor Wade Miller addressed the Board recommending the annual capital improvement budget receive \$80,000 in 2026 as committed fund dollars, an increase of \$30,000 over previous years. Solid Waste maintains a capital improvement plan and a committed fund to normalize its annual budget. The current committed fund balance is \$515,000 and estimated landfill closure costs are approximately \$1 million. This will not affect the proposed Levy, but instead will come out of Solid Waste Funds which are separate from the rest of the county funds.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to authorize the Auditor to characterize \$80,000 annually within the Solid Waste Account as committed fund dollars starting with the year 2025, seconded by Commissioner Noon. A roll call vote was taken: Kreklau - nay, Noon - aye, Stearns - aye, Winkels - aye, Kangas - nay. Motion carried 3 to 2.

**Licensed Solid Waste Haulers:** Solid Waste Supervisor Wade Miller presented the Board with 4 applications for 2026 Solid Waste and Recycling Hauler Licenses.

Motion by Commissioner Kangas to approve the 2026 Solid Waste and Recycling License for G&T Sanitation, seconded by Commissioner Noon. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Commissioner Kangas to approve the 2026 Solid Waste and Recycling License for 5 Star Disposal, seconded by Commissioner Kreklau. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Commissioner Kangas to approve the 2026 Solid Waste and Recycling License for Long Prairie Sanitation, seconded by Commissioner Winkels. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to approve the 2026 Solid Waste and Recycling License for Waste Management, seconded by Commissioner Noon. Motion carried unanimously.

**Paycom 3 Year Agreement:** Human Resources Specialist Brenna McKnight-Tessier addressed the Board with the request for approval. This agreement would cap increases at 3% each year with an estimated cost savings of \$2,704 over the three years.

Motion by Commissioner Noon to approve the 3 Year Agreement with Paycom, capping rate increases at 3% per year, seconded by Commissioner Kangas. Motion carried unanimously.

**Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML) Policy:** Human Services and Human Resources Director/ Deputy County Administrator Jennifer Westrum presented the policy for Board review, noting that Labor Attorney Dyan Ebert has vetted it prior to today's meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to approve the Paid Family Medical Leave Policy as presented which is consistent with current state law requiring compliance, seconded by Commissioner Kreklau. Motion carried unanimously.

**Family Medical Leave (FML) Policy:** Human Services and Human Resources Director/ Deputy County Administrator Jennifer Westrum stated that this policy is being presented for approval as it must align with Met Life's standards and match the timelines of the PFML time periods.

Motion by Commissioner Noon to approve the updates to the Family Medical Leave Policy as presented, seconded by Commissioner Stearns. Motion carried unanimously.

A break was taken from 10:00 a.m. to 10:10 a.m.

**2028 CSAH 17 to TH 71 Roundabout - 5 Year Project Plan Update:** County Engineer Anthony Maule and Assistant County Engineer Ben Skoog introduced the plan update to the Board. The board discussed potential concerns about truck traffic, winter maintenance, and local business access and decided to move forward with the project due to safety benefits and community support.

Motion by Commissioner Kangas to approve the Highway Department's updated 5 Year Plan to include the proposed mini-roundabout project on CSAH 17 at TH 71/TH 87 in Menahga for 2028 as well as authorizing the County Engineer and County Board Chair to send the letter of support to MNDOT's project manager indicating support of the improvement and commitment towards the County's cost for its leg of the intersection. Motion seconded by Commissioner Winkels and carried unanimously.

**2026 Board Meeting Schedule:** County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson presented the Board Meeting schedule for discussion noting that there may be adjustments, potentially in February for County Administrator Interviews. Timing of Board of Appeals and Truth in Taxation are appropriate to the Statutes. All agreed to go forward with the 2026 schedule as presented.

**Tax Forfeited Property:** County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson and Tax Specialist Missy Lund introduced three tax forfeited parcels which are eligible to have the minimum bid prices lowered and re-listed at auction or be left at the same price and available for sale over the counter at the Wadena County Auditor/Treasurer's Office.

Motion by Commissioner Noon to lower the minimum bid price of parcel 13.001.2020 to \$5,000, seconded by Commissioner Kreklau. A roll call vote was taken: Kreklau - aye, Noon - aye, Stearns - aye, Winkels - aye, Kangas - nay. Motion carried 4 to 1.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to lower the minimum bid price of parcel 13.001.2025 to \$1,000, seconded by Commissioner Kangas. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to lower the minimum bid price of parcel 19.370.0640 to \$10,000, seconded by Commissioner Kreklau. Motion carried unanimously.

**Wadena County Owned Property:** County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson and Tax Specialist Missy Lund presented the list of county owned parcels which are eligible to have the minimum bid prices lowered and re-listed at auction or be left at the same price for sale over the counter at the Auditor/Treasurer's Office. Parcel 22.006.1050 is to remain at the price of \$25,000 and available for sale over the counter at the Wadena County Auditor/Treasurer's Office.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to lower the minimum price on parcels 05.008.4010 & 05.009.3040, being sold together, to \$100,000 on the upcoming auction, seconded by Commissioner Kangas. A roll call vote was taken: Kreklau - nay, Noon - aye, Stearns - aye, Winkels - aye, Kangas - aye. Motion carried 4 to 1.

**Final Levy and Budget:** County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson presented the Levy and Budget with revenue updates necessary from the passing of the Law Enforcement Contract with the City of Verndale earlier in the meeting. The final Levy increase is 8.90% and includes \$275,000 in Cash Reserves moved from the General Fund. County Auditor/Treasurer/Interim County Administrator Heather Olson reported that Cash Reserves still has a 12-month balance.

The Board discussed the county's budget and levy, expressing concerns about unsustainable tax increases and the impact on residents and businesses and the need for strategic planning and potential service changes to address financial challenges. It was noted that Wadena County is one of the few Minnesota Counties who is being proactive and considering the unfunded legislative mandates in its budget. Future decisions of the legislature and restructuring the implementation of these laws could have an impact.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to approve the 2025/Payable 2026 Final Levy Resolution 2025-42 in the amount of \$12,012,150.00, seconded by Commissioner Noon. A roll call vote was taken: Kreklau - nay, Noon - aye, Stearns - aye, Winkels - aye, Kangas - nay. Motion carried 3 to 2.

Motion by Commissioner Winkels to set the Wadena County 2026 Budget at \$33,013,960.00, seconded by Commissioner Noon. A roll call vote was taken: Kreklau - nay, Noon - aye, Stearns - aye, Winkels - aye, Kangas - nay. Motion carried 3 to 2.

**Recognition of Award:** The Wadena County Board of Commissioners recognized and congratulated County Attorney Kyra Ladd as the recipient of the Minnesota County Attorneys Association Johnson Distinguished Service Award for demonstrating significant leadership and sacrifice in her work on the Sentencing Guidelines Commission.

**Commissioner Reports:**

Commissioner Winkels - 12/04 Ag Society, 12/7-9 AMC, 12/15 Ag Society

Commissioner Kangas - 12/03 AMC, 12/05 Mahube OTTWA, 12/15 Solid Waste

Commissioner Stearns - 12/15 TWCC

Commissioner Noon - 12/04 Public Safety, 12/7-9 AMC, 12/15 TWCC

Commissioner Kreklau - 12/04 Reg 5 Dev. Auth, 12/07 MN Rural Co., 12/07 AMC, 12/10 EDA,  
12/15 Soil & Water

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Winkels at 11:10 a.m., seconded by Commissioner Noon. Motion carried unanimously.

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Heather Olson, County Auditor/ Treasurer  
Interim County Administrator/Clerk of the Board  
Wadena County, MN

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William Stearns, County Board Chairman  
Wadena County, MN