LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY
WATER QUALITY PROTECTION DISTRICT
BOARD MEETING
Hybrid – Zoom
April 28, 2026

Members Present:
Ed Kerins, Adel Johnson, Sherri Ohs-Mosley, Patrick Johnson, Diana Hammer, Ryan Leland, and Don Dahl.

Staff & Guests Present:
Fred Sargeson, Kegan McClanahan, Drenda Niemann, Sandy Whittington, Fred Sargeson,

CALL TO ORDER
Mr. Kerins, Chair, called the 291st meeting of the Lewis and Clark County Water Quality Protection District (WQPD) Board of Directors (Board) to order at 4:00 p.m. A quorum was established. Introductions of Board members and WQPD staff were made.

REVIEW OF AGENDA
The agenda was reviewed and approved with no changes.

MINUTES
The Chair, Mr. Kerins requested a review of the minutes, and they were unanimously approved with the updated language regarding the board updates stating "The City of East Helena Prickly Pear Estates submitted their preliminary plat for their first 5 phases for 367 homes".

FY26 QUARTERLY FINANCE REPORT & FY27 PROPOSED BUDGET
Ms. McBroom presented the FY26 quarterly financial report, noting that the WQPD was approximately 75% through the fiscal year. Overall, budget categories are performing well, with personnel expenditures at 70.8% and operations and maintenance at 46.5%. Maintenance assessment at 62%. Total cash on hand was reported at $260,154.56, with 90-day reserves at $121,223.00.

Ms. McBroom then reviewed highlights of the proposed FY27 budget. Projected revenues total $425,767.00, with projected expenses of $525,032.00, resulting in an anticipated deficit of approximately $100,000. She noted that the deficit is expected to be covered by remaining cash from the FY26 budget.

Chair Kerins called for a motion to recommend approval of the proposed FY27 budget to the County Commissioners. Mr. Leland moved to recommend approval of the FY27 budget to the County Commissioners. Ms. Hammer seconded the motion. The Chair opened the floor for discussion.

The Chair provided clarification regarding County appropriations, explaining that any unspent funds remain within the fund and may be reappropriated for future use. He also noted that

WQPD funds are maintained separately from County funds; while the County Commissioners have authority over fund allocation, they cannot appropriate WQPD funds for other purposes.

The Board concluded the discussion and proceeded with voting. The motion passed unanimously.

PAST BUSINESS

Chair Kerins recapped discussions from recent meetings regarding development of the FY FY2027–2029 Strategic Plan and emphasized the important role of board members in the process. He then turned the meeting over to Ms. McBroom, who explained that the original timeline for development of the Strategic Plan had changed due to scheduling conflicts with the facilitator, yet they have all that is needed to move forward with the process.

Ms. McBroom initiated discussions on finalizing the WQPD mission, vision, and values statements and opened the floor for board input. Ms. Ohs-Mosely raised questions regarding the collaboration language in the values statement, as well as considerations related to regulations and potential legal implications. Following discussion, the Board agreed to retain the mission and values statements as presented, with only minor adjustments to the values statement.

Ms. McBroom then revisited prior discussions regarding the vision statement, noting previous concerns that it focused primarily on residents and did not fully reflect the natural environment. She reviewed earlier proposed revisions. Mr. Johnson commented on existing standards related to drinking water, fishing, and swimming, noting that enforcement responsibilities fall under other agencies. Ms. Hammer expressed concerns about the use of the word “beneficial” in the vision statement and how it could be interpreted.

Following discussion, the Board reached consensus on the finalized statements for the Strategic Plan. The approved vision statement reads: “Clean, sustainable water is available, and water consumers conserve and protect water resources.” The mission statement remains unchanged, and the values statement was approved with minor revisions.

The discussion then shifted to next steps in the strategic planning process. Ms. McBroom reviewed activities from the previous Strategic Plan to provide context for upcoming work. The Board engaged in discussion regarding potential activities and funding considerations and was asked to prepare up to 20 proposed activities for consideration at the next meeting. Goals will then be developed from the activities for the FY 2027–2029 Strategic Plan.

WATERSHED UPDATE

Ms. McBroom updated the Board on the departure of Keirstin LaRoche, who decided to pursue other opportunities with her master's degree. Ms. McBroom noted recruitment is currently underway, and that interviews are being conducted. The Board discussed workload impacts and how responsibilities will be managed until a new Water Quality Specialist is hired.

Ms. McBroom then provided an update on the award of the WRP grant. She explained that the project work will occur within the watershed boundaries. A consultant will be hired to develop a watershed restoration plan, which will include testing for sediment, metals, nutrients, and temperature.

Mr. McClanahan provided an overview of the annual outdoor event hosted by the Conservation District, noting strong attendance and successful engagement with community members.

Mr. McClanahan continued his updates with notes from the Helena Valley Flood Committee meeting, which primarily addressed the Tenmile Creek flood zone. He presented the hydrological dashboard available on the WQPD website and noted that the meeting provided valuable opportunities for discussion and networking.

Mr. McClanahan revisited the March Emerald Ridge HOA annual meeting, highlighting groundwater level trends from the start of monitoring in 2012 to current conditions. He reported that the Helena Valley Irrigation District (HVID) has completed a lateral lining project in the area to address approximately 80% water loss. This information was shared with residents, along with observations of continued declines in water levels. Mr. McClanahan stated that WQPD will continue to monitor conditions closely and provide updates to residents as needed.

The Board discussed potential impacts to homeowners experiencing dry wells due to decreased aquifer recharge. Additional discussion included exempt wells and associated water rights concerns. It was noted that several legal cases are currently pending related to the exempt well process, along with potential legislative changes that could eliminate exempt well permits.

COEH LETTER OF SUPPORT

Ms. McBroom presented a request from the City of East Helena regarding the East Helena Wastewater System Improvement Project. The City is applying for a grant and requested that the Board provide a letter of support. Ms. McBroom provided a template for the Board's review and noted that the letter is due by May 15.

Chair Kerins called for a motion. Ms. Hammer moved to authorize a letter of support for the East Helena Wastewater System Improvement Project. Mr. Leland seconded the motion. The Chair called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

BOARD MEMBER ROUND-ROBIN

- **LCC Commissioner Payne –** No report
- **City of Helena –** Mr. Leland reported on several ongoing projects. He noted continued progress on the Hale-Eureka project. The ARPA-funded project at Reeder's Village has recently been paved and is nearing completion, though progress has been gradual. The Red Mountain Plume project in Rimini is scheduled to begin in July. He also reported that a well project to protect the City's water rights is underway, with three wells being drilled across separate well fields, including connections near the Missouri River. Mr. Leland added that the City is in the process of updating engineering standards related to water, sewer, stormwater, and transportation. The City Commission is scheduled to review the first water and sewer chapters at its April 29 meeting.
- **City of East Helena –** No report
- **Board of Health –** No report
- **Helena Citizens Council (HCC) –** Ms. Hammer reported that the group is

focusing on future planning efforts. Top priorities identified include non-motorized transportation (walking, biking, and sidewalks), followed by affordable housing and issues related to the unhoused population, city governance, public participation, and land use and sustainability.

Ms. Hammer also noted that the Council will host a wildfire awareness meeting on May 11 at 5:30 p.m. at the library, featuring Commissioner Logan and local fire department staff. She further reported that the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is considering a new blanket approval process for septic systems regardless of geology.

- **Conservation District (CD) –** Position remains vacant - Mr. Sargeson provided an update from a recent meeting, noting concerns regarding 310 permits due to erosion and sloughing issues. He also reported on a presentation that was given during the meeting from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) regarding snowpack conditions, indicating that regional conditions may be more severe than previously understood.
- **Public at large –** N/A

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

There being no public comment; the meeting was adjourned at 5:31.