

**LEWIS AND CLARK COUNTY
WATER QUALITY PROTECTION DISTRICT
BOARD MEETING**

Hybrid – Zoom
February 24, 2026

Members Present:

Ed Kerins, Adel Johnson, Patrick Johnson, Ryan Leland, Commissioner Payne, Don Dahl

Staff & Guests Present:

Jennifer McBroom, Fred Sargeson, Drenda Niemann, Kegan McClanahan Kierstin LaRoche, Sandy Whittington

Mr. Kerins, Chair, called the 289th 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 no changes were requested.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Ms. McBroom discussed and reviewed LCPH's current Strategic Plan and presented the timeline to create LCPH's new 3-year Strategic Plan, which will be reviewed over the next few months. The Board will discuss the current strategic plan, mission, value, and vision statements. The Strategic Plan will pause in March but will resume starting in April along with discussion regarding the FY27 budget. LCPH's sampling and outreach will most likely not change, but the expenditures will most likely be different.

The April meeting will be longer than normal as two things need to be accomplished. Strategic Planning processes need to resume, and the FY27 budget will need to be presented and approved prior to being presented at the commission meeting in May. The Board Subcommittee would like to be involved with any budgetary processes prior to any presentations to the Board as a whole. Niva Loney from the MT Department of Health and Human Services will facilitate the April meeting. At our meeting in June, we will finalize our goals and objectives, and staff will develop activities to meet those goals and objectives and present them to the Board. The July meeting will be the start of fiscal year FY27.

Mission Statement – Ms. Johnson feels our Mission Statement is spot-on and easy to understand. Commissioner Payne was concerned about changes in water rights and if the mission statement currently reflects these changes, or if those changes need to be addressed at all. Mr. Kerins noted that “quantity” relates to availability and wants to be sure the WQPD is staying alert. Ms. Niemann noted how Commissioner Payne's question relates to the Mission.

Values – Mr. Kerins noted that “ethics”, while not listed, are represented. Commissioner Payne noted that we just need to do the best we can, and if we get sued, it's okay. Ms.

Johnson noted the word “knowledgeable” would be “scientifically based” stewardship. Commissioner Payne noted that the word “knowledgeable” is more than science because we also must deal with the values of our community. Mr. Johnson noted “knowledgeable” covers a lot and that he liked the “integrity” part and felt like the willow project showed our integrity. Mr. Kerins asked if there would be time to reflect on what is discussed today before making final decisions for the new Strategic Plan. Ms. McBroom stated that although the hope was that everyone reviewed the packet prior to today’s meeting, that yes, of course, if there are any changes to today’s discussion that needed to be made, Ms. McBroom will create a draft to review and discuss at the next two meetings in April and May.

Vision – Commissioner Payne noted that changing the statement to “Every resident will use the water responsibly and has access to sustainable and clean water” and does not think “uses the water responsibly” fits and is concerned that if there were ever a lawsuit, things could get beat up by the current wording and would like a clearer sentence. Commissioner Payne would like the statement sent out electronically via Word, so other Board members could note their comments on the statement to be discussed at the next two meetings. Commissioner Payne questioned if the Mission coordinated with the Vision because how do you fit improved water quality into it? Ms. Niemann reminded the Board of Mission/Vision statements again. Mr. Leland noted it only references residents, not the environment or animals. Ms. McBroom used the term “beneficial uses” and Mr. Leland agreed with this term. The Board continued conversation about the best way to unite the vision to include people, animals, agricultural life, and organic life. Commissioner Payne noted future Data Centers could have negative impacts on water quality and quantity. Ms. McBroom noted she will offer some revised suggestions for the Board to consider. Mr. Johnson noted Helena’s sustainable water will attract more businesses, good or bad. Commissioner Payne commented that Helena’s water rights are first and how a forest fire could damage our drinking water and the possibility of forest thinning and fire mitigation above Chesman Reservoir. Mr. Kerins noted Mr. Leland gets updates and keeps the Board abreast of happenings. Mr. Leland noted that Helena and the Forest Service have done work to thin and prevent forest fires.

Ms. McBroom gave a quick re-cap of the current strategic plan and how well it has worked. Ms. McBroom asked a few questions about the current plan - Did the plan improve? Did we complete the objections? Ms. McBroom reiterated that the Board comes up with the goals and objectives; staff comes up with activities to meet those goals and objectives, then it is presented quarterly. If there are any questions or concerns about meeting those goals and objectives, that is the time to bring them up. Ms. McBroom is looking to see what can carry over to the new plan and anything new that can be added. Mr. Kerins noted the review was helpful to see where we hit the mark or missed. He appreciated the review but would like more time to reflect. Ms. Johnson noted the MS4 permit and asked if there is anything that can be done to help. Mr. Leland said he will need time to figure that out. Ms. Niemann noted WQPD could support the county for sure and prompted the Board to think about MS4 participation.

RE-WATERING PROJECT

This is a past business follow-up. The rewatering project is a \$125,000 contract that we entered with the National Resource Damage Program. The Prickly Pear Project costs \$13,500 to run. We have sent the NRD an invoice and report in the amount of 4,929.00 and an invoice and report in the amount of \$8,571.00 sent to Bonneville Environmental Foundation, our other financial source. Commissioner Payne questioned who carries the liability insurance for the rewatering program. Ms. Niemann stated that the insurance is

through Lewis & Clark County and that the WQPD is not defined as a special district in law, it has its' own designation in law. Commissioner Payne would like Ms. McBroom or Ms. Niemann to call Nicho Hash at the County Attorney's office to investigate insurance coverage further.

BOARD MEMBER ROUND-ROBIN

- LCC Commissioner Payne – noted her concern about the insurance. Ms. Niemann noted she is positive that the WQPD is absolutely covered by the county's liability insurance through MACO and will confirm this with Marnie and Nicho.
- City of Helena – Spring run-off has begun – opened bids for wells to develop water reservations – bids came in at 2.6 million which was less than the 4 million predicted – high levels of water main breaks – Mr. McClanhan asked if we receive calls about water main breaks, who can we refer them to, Mr. Leland stated to send them to water quality or utility maintenance building
- City of East Helena – upgrading sewer plant lagoon liner, it has reached the end of its life and its capacity – it is over 25 years old. The Prickly Pear Subdivision is proposing 365 houses on the planning board on the 19th, usually 50-60 a year per phase, so probably about a 5-year plan
- Board of Health – Ms. Niemann noted BOH has been working on creating their own strategic plan which should be coming out in April. It will be shared with the district.
- HCC-Upcoming year priorities at next meeting
- CD-Mr. Sargeson noted there is a site visit tomorrow, 2/25 on the RV Ranch permit to approve or make modifications/changes to their plan. A new policy has been developed to remove participants at meetings who are disruptive and unruly. Mr. Sargeson was given a report regarding the nitrates that are being investigated around Head Lane.
- Public at large – Mr. Johnson, Mr. Kerins, & Ms. Johnson – Mr. Kerins noted the wells at the Grandview Drive subdivision went dry. None of the residents had applied for water rights, so are in the process of doing so now. The residents are not happy with the cost at the DNRC to file for water rights.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

Next meeting will be March 24, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.

There being no public comment; the meeting was adjourned at 5:03.