

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS
PENNINGTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
JUSTICE CENTER BOARD ROOM
JANUARY 27, 2026 – 10:00 A.M.**

Pursuant to adjournment, the Pennington County Board of Commissioners met in the Pennington County Justice Center Board Room in Thief River Falls, MN, on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. Members Present: Seth Nelson, Bruce Lawrence, Roy Sourdif, Dave Sorenson, and Neil Peterson. Members absent: None.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Sorenson and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

The Chairman asked if there were any amendments to the agenda. Hearing none, there was a motion by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the agenda as written. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Lawrence, to approve the County Board minutes of January 6, 2026, as written. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to approve the Auditor-Manual warrants for December 2025 totaling \$1,955,406.75, the Human Services warrants totaling \$386,959.12, and the following Commissioner warrants. Motion carried.

County Revenue	\$249,081.25
Road & Bridge	\$141,585.85
Solid Waste	\$ 5,720.00
Ditch Funds	\$ 2,024.921

Meal reimbursements and per diems in the amount of \$1,125.00 were also approved.

Julie Sjostrand – Human Services Director

Ms. Sjostrand presented the consent agenda from the January 20, 2026, Human Service Committee meeting. On a motion by Commissioner Nelson and seconded by Commissioner Peterson, the following recommendations of the Pennington County Human Service Committee for January 20, 2026 (detailed minutes on record) are hereby adopted:

SECTION A

- I. To approve December 16, 2025, Human Service Committee Meeting minutes.
- II. To approve the agency's personnel action as presented.
- III. A. To approve the Northwest Minnesota Multi-County Housing Redevelopment Authority acceptance of the fifth payment of 2025 Pennington County aid for \$14,000 for Housing Redevelopment Authority's Pennington County down payment assistance program as presented.

- B. To approve the Emergency Rental Assistance for \$5849.50 from the Statewide Affordable Housing Aid, as presented.
- C. To adopt and approve DHS's Merit System Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Guidelines as the agency's EEO and AA action plan as presented.
- D. To approve the Revised CY 2026 Tri-Valley Public Transportation Services Agreement as presented.

SECTION B

- I. To approve payment of the Agency's bills.

Mike Flaagan – County Engineer

Engineer Flaagan discussed the department's tractors, noting they currently own two and are securing quotes for the trade in and purchase of a new tractor. The tractor to be traded is a Puma model, which is about twelve years old. He is estimating a cost of \$142,000-\$150,000 after trade-in. He will present multiple quotes and his recommendation at a future Board meeting.

Engineer Flaagan noted the department received their new truck a couple weeks ago. The truck came fully equipped and is similar to the MnDOT design but includes a stainless-steel box. Total cost of the unit was approximately \$365,000. Mr. Flaagan noted a 2010 model truck cost \$184,174 fully equipped, demonstrating how costs have risen dramatically. The old trucks will be sold at auction.

Mr. Flaagan discussed the shortage of qualified highway technicians and noted there are no related college programs in the area. In the past he discussed a civil technician program with Northland Community and Technical College, but no action was taken. He hopes to have additional communication with NCTC regarding the possibility of such a program.

Mr. Flaagan discussed the possibility of a county tuition assistance program, noting that Polk County has such an agreement with an employee attending college. He noted that one of our 2025 seasonal employees is currently pursuing a degree in land surveying.

Engineer Flaagan provided an update on his department's new handheld radios. They have been in use for approximately one month and are working well following some early battery issues.

Cindi Kilen, Grant Nelson, Abbey Rodelius – County Extension / 4-H

Abbey Rodelius reported on 4-H, noting that the Cloverbuds program took place November through January with 47 kids participating. The Leader's Council meets the first Monday of each month and the Ambassador program is active. She will soon be

helping plan for the 2026 Pennington County Fair. Also discussed was the BLUE project, Project Bowl, and the Dog project.

Grant Nelson reported on ag services and solid waste. There were 17 participants in a recent ag land rent workshop. A private pesticide workshop will be held on February 13, 2026. A class on invasive species, particularly noxious weeds, will be held on March 5, 2026, at the Heritage Center. He is working on the county's SCORE report for recycling, noting that 35% of waste should be recycled per the MNPCA. He noted that a large local company will soon ship old food to Wisconsin to be used for the creation of electricity. The costs of a new loading dock at the solid waste transfer station is being researched. Waste oil and oil filter recycling services has been transferred to Lee's Oil Service of Litchfield, MN as of January 1, 2026.

Cindi Kilen distributed a flyer from the Master Gardeners titled 'Gardening and Beyond', a program being held on February 28, 2026, at The Legacy Center. The program will feature vendors, a lunch, a speaker from Bergerson Nursery, and Mark Langevin will discuss his deep winter greenhouse. Also discussed was Home Council / Learning Circles, which consists of six groups and 60+ members. They are currently planning their April Spring Fling event.

At 10:30 the Chairman recessed the County Board meeting and opened the Public Hearing on the Economic Development Tax Abatements.

Present for the Hearing: Seth Nelson, Bruce Lawrence, Neil Peterson, Roy Sourdif, David Sorenson, Jennifer Herzberg, Nathan Hasse, Lucas Fornshell, April Scheinoha, Kevin Erickson, and Carl Bruzek.

Auditor-Treasurer Jennifer Herzberg reviewed the Economic Development Tax Abatement Policy and submitted those parcels that the City of Thief River Falls has determined as qualifying. There are two new parcels and four parcels from previous years.

The tax abatement program encourages new single-family home construction within the City of Thief River Falls by providing a property tax rebate for up to three years. The program applies to new stick-built, modular, and manufactured homes constructed after January 1, 2022, and placed on approved foundations. Eligible homes must be owner-occupied, built on approved city lots, and occupied within two years of lot acquisition.

Property owners pay their taxes as usual and receive the County's portion of the abatement as a rebate after the home is occupied and assessed. The abatement applies only to the original owner and does not transfer if the property is sold. The program operates under Minnesota Statutes and is scheduled to end December 31, 2026, at which time it will be reviewed.

Hearing no comments on the abatements, Chairman Sorenson closed the Public Hearing at 10:33 a.m. and called the Board meeting back to order.

Motioned by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the abatement of the County's portion of real estate tax for the following properties, as per the abatement policy and recommended by the City of Thief River Falls and authorize the County Auditor-Treasurer to issue payment by Auditor's warrant. Motion carried.

First Year

- 415 Robson Court: Robson First Addition Lot-014 Block-001. Parcel Number 25.097.014.10 – Kia B. Vichaikul. The total estimated abatement is \$2,637.92.
- 109 Eastwood Drive: South Eastwood Addition Lot-003 & Lot-001 . Parcel Number 25.111.003.10 – Abbey Halvorson. The total estimated abatement is \$1,038.38.

Second Year

- 2016 Nelson Dr: MMCDC's Greenwood Neighborhood Addition Lot-003 Block-001. Parcel Number 25.121.019.10 – Davis J. Mills. The total estimated abatement is \$1,163.16.
- 619 Evergreen Street: Noreen's First Addition West 68' of Lot-014 & Lot-015 less the West 54' Block-006. Parcel Number 25.062.087.00 – Richard Merrill. The total estimated abatement is \$878.56.

Third Year

- 2006 Nelson Dr: MMCDC's Greenwood Neighborhood Addition Lot-024 Block-001. Parcel Number 25.121.024.10 – Haven Keuhn. The total estimated abatement is \$836.76.

Fifth Year

- 2004 Nelson Drive: Lot 4 Block 1, MMCDC's Greenwood Neighborhood Addition Lot- 025 Block-001. Parcel Number 25.121.025.10 – Lori Alvarado. The total estimated abatement is \$640.82.

County Auditor's Items: None.

County Coordinator Items:

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to approve the reappointment of Commissioner Bruce Lawrence to the TRF Regional Airport Authority for a three-year term effective January 1, 2026. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Nelson, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to authorize the County Personnel Committee to interview and hire for the position of Lead Maintenance Worker. Motion carried. Mr. Erickson noted a total of eight applicants with interviews to be held on January 28, 2026. He will provide an update to the Board at the February 10, 2026, meeting.

Motioned by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the following quotes regarding purchase & installation of suspended ceiling and lighting in the north and center office areas of the County Recorder's office, to include installation of a 3-way switch and related wiring in the north office area. Motion carried with Commissioner Lawrence abstaining.

Lawrence Builders	\$4,420.00
Hudson Electric	\$1,450.00

County Assessor Carl Bruzek met with the Board and announced that he will retire from his position effective July 3, 2026. He is giving ample notice in order to allow the County to advertise and plan for the future of the office. Mr. Bruzek wished to thank the County Board for their support throughout his 33 years of work for Pennington County. Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to accept the resignation of County Assessor Carl Bruzek effective July 3, 2026, and to thank him for his 33+ years of dedicated service to Pennington County. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to authorize the Personnel Committee to advertise for the position of County Assessor as appropriate based on the July 3, 2026, position vacancy date. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to approve issuance of a duplicate warrant to Jarrett McKay in the amount of \$1,349.19 to replace lost warrant #117127 issued on December 10, 2025, without issuance of an indemnifying bond. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Peterson, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to approve the resignation of Full-Time Custodian II Randy Knutson effective January 26, 2026. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to authorize the County Coordinator to advertise for the position of Full-Time Custodian I. Motion carried.

Mr. Erickson opened discussion on a new Joint Powers Agreement for the County's participation in the Northern Counties Coalition, formerly known as the Northern Counties Land Use Coordinating Board. Commissioner Peterson noted that the agreement reflects the organizations new name and recognizes new member counties, including Carlton, Cass, Kittson, Ottertail, and Pine. Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Sourdif, to approve the updated Joint Powers Agreement for Pennington County's participation in the Northern Counties Coalition as presented and authorize signature by the Board Chair. Motion carried.

Motioned by Commissioner Lawrence, seconded by Commissioner Nelson, to approve a quote by Harris Company, formerly Climate Control, in the amount of \$5,635.00 for the purchase and testing of nine VAV (Variable Air Volume) controllers for the Justice

Center jail pods and remote software support as needed during installation. Motion carried.

County Attorney Item: None.

Committee Reports/Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Sorenson informed the Board that the Auditorium's electric heat boiler has been under ripple control. The electric boiler is currently the only source of heat in the building. The City of TRF was notified of no backup heat source and the ripple control was subsequently disconnected. Without ripple control, the building will be charged a different electric rate and costs to heat the building are expected to substantially increase. The City of TRF is reviewing past electric usage and will provide an estimate of electricity going forward.

Motioned by Commissioner Sourdif, seconded by Commissioner Peterson, to adjourn the Board meeting to February 10, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. Motion carried.

ATTEST:

Kevin Erickson, County Coordinator
Pennington County

David Sorenson, Chairman
Board of Commissioners