

Town of Ennis Commission Meeting
January 8, 2026
6:15 PM
Ennis Town Hall
328 W. Main Street, Ennis, MT

1. Mayor Roberts opened the meeting at 6:15 pm.
2. Roll call of the council found Commissioner Way, Commissioner Hankins, Commissioner Abernethy, and Commissioner Hardy present.
3. Mayor Roberts led the Pledge of Allegiance.
4. Approval of the December 11, 2025, Meeting minutes. Commissioner Way moved to approve the December 11, 2025, meeting minutes. Commissioner Abernethy seconded the motion. There were no additions or corrections. Upon a call for the vote, Commissioner Hankins abstained, as she was not a member of the Council at the December 11, 2025, meeting. All remaining Commissioners voted in favor. M/S/C, unanimously approved.
5. Department Reports
 - a. Library: Karen Ketchu submitted an annual summary report for the previous fiscal year, which was included in the Commissioners' packets. The library serves approximately 50,000 visitors annually. Karen noted a decrease in program attendance. She reported that the library demonstrates a strong return on investment compared to other libraries statewide. Karen stated that she can provide library statistics in multiple formats for ease of review upon request. She also informed the Council that she will be meeting with a State Library consultant next week to discuss opportunities to improve workflows and that she is applying for smaller grant opportunities. Mayor Roberts reminded those present that Commissioners are unable to comment on public comments made on non-agenda items. She clarified that the comments are acknowledged but cannot be addressed during that portion of the meeting.
 - b. Public Works: Eric Olson attended the meeting remotely and submitted a written report included in the Commissioners' packets. Eric reported that he located a cost-effective generator for the Comley wellhouse for use in the event of a power outage. He also stated that Public Works continues efforts to expose the lagoon valve currently encased in concrete. In response to a question from Commissioner Hardy regarding the DEQ report, Eric advised that the annual inspection report was received with no discrepancies noted.
 - c. Zoning: Susie Sprout submitted a written report included in the Commissioners' packets. Susie reviewed her report and noted that the Town received a total of 36 permits during the year. Mayor Roberts inquired whether a compliance report had been prepared. Susie responded that a compliance report is not currently in place, but that she can begin developing one to track compliance violations.
 - d. Clerks: Brennah Bench submitted a written report included in the Commissioners' packets and invited any questions from the Council. Mayor Roberts announced that former Clerk/Treasurer Ginger Guinn has retired and extended best wishes to her. Commissioner Way referenced the online post regarding varying office hours and inquired how long the schedule would remain in effect. Brennah stated that the adjusted hours would continue through the month of January. She also noted that the Town's Facebook page will be updated weekly and that notices will

be posted on the Town Hall door indicating expected return times when the office is temporarily closed. Commissioner Hardy asked Brennah about her educational goals moving forward. Brennah responded that she intends to pursue training related to clerk duties and grant processing.

- e. Madison County Sheriff's Office: Sheriff Duncan Hedges was present and reviewed the Sheriff's Office report. Sheriff Hedges stated that the office is working toward providing an annual report to the Town. For the month of December, the Sheriff's Office responded to a total of 170 calls for service. He noted that deputies accompany ambulance calls approximately seven out of ten times. Sheriff Hedges reported that with the start of the basketball season, deputy presence at school-related events will increase. He also noted that the Sheriff's Office has had multiple positive interactions with Ennis residents. Sheriff Hedges stated that two individuals are currently in the hiring process, with the goal of reaching a total of 19 deputies. Mayor Roberts reported that she has spoken with the Sheriff's Office and will continue working with them to ensure the Town remains safe and well served. Sheriff Hedges encouraged residents with concerns to contact the Sheriff's Office directly. Commissioner Hardy inquired about the status of interlocal agreements with other towns in the county. Sheriff Hedges provided an update on the progress of those agreements.

6. Claims: Commissioner Abernethy inquired about charges for a wallet phone case, a shower liner, and bagged ice. Eric Olson explained that the wallet phone case is used to carry his work phone, Town credit card, and fuel card together. He stated that the shower liner is used to line the sander, which is heavily rusted and causes sand to adhere to the interior. Eric further explained that the bagged ice was purchased for transporting water samples sent to Helena, as the ice machine in the Public Works bay is currently inoperable. Regarding a Facebook charge, Eric was unable to provide an explanation. Myron Wallmow asked about charges for distilled water and the quantity purchased. Eric explained that multiple gallons of distilled water were purchased from the Dollar Store for use with the new generator. Mr. Wallmow also asked questions regarding fuel purchases. Brennah Bench confirmed that the WEX bill reflects the Town's standard fuel charges, and Eric noted that he did not have access to his fuel card at the time, resulting in the use of the Town credit card. Commissioner Hardy moved to approve the claims. Commissioner Way seconded the motion. Commissioner Abernethy moved to amend the motion to remove the Facebook charge while approving the remaining claims. The amended motion was seconded. All Commissioners voted in favor of the amendment. Mayor Roberts stated that if the League processes the claims, staff would prefer to process claims twice per month. Commissioner Abernethy agreed that this would be beneficial to the Town.

7. Public comment on Non-Agenda Items: Myron Wallmow expressed that he looks forward to improvements in the Town's business operations and accountability. Bill Todd welcomed the new Mayor, Lisa Roberts.

8. Scheduled Matters:

Prior to addressing the scheduled agenda items, Mayor Roberts stated that agenda item 8(d) was no longer necessary. She reported that she had spoken with Justin from the Montana Board of Adjustment, who advised that the Town is not required to adopt a new resolution and instead only needs to update the paperwork to reflect Lisa Roberts and Brennah Bench as the new points of contact.

- a. Commission Chairperson selection: With the formation of the new Town Commission, the Council needed to select a chairperson to preside over meetings in the absence of Mayor Roberts. Commissioner Hardy nominated Commissioner Way for the position.

Commissioner Hankins seconded the nomination. All commissioners voted aye. *M/S/C*, unanimous vote.

- b. **Craig Abernethy Water/sewer bill adjustment request:** Mayor Roberts asked Brennah, who manages water billing, to explain the billing process. Brennah stated that sewer charges are averaged during June through September because not all water used for lawn watering returns to the sewer system. The averages are calculated using water usage from November through February. For October through May, sewer charges are based on actual water usage. Brennah noted that this October was warmer than usual, resulting in higher sewer charges, and explained the average versus actual procedure to customers who inquired. She also clarified that the Black Mountain software automatically applies payments and cannot selectively apply them to portions of the bill. Mayor Roberts emphasized that the Town does not have sewer meters, and average calculations are used to account for summer water usage; future water rate discussions may include reevaluation of this method. Craig Abernethy addressed the council, stating he was disputing only the sewer portion of his bill. He provided documentation, including a water usage chart, his past and current bills, and a spreadsheet he prepared showing water and sewer charges. Craig explained that the property manager did not turn off the sprinkler system until mid-October. He calculated what he believed the sewer charge should be, submitted a check for that amount, and it was processed without adjustments to the official bill. Craig also expressed concern that he was not added to the agenda at a prior meeting. Upon receiving the next bill, he noted a past due balance of \$53.11; late penalties had been removed by Mayor Roberts. Craig reiterated he was willing to pay water charges but contested the sewer charges. Mayor Roberts stated that the Town's current billing method is the only mechanism available and suggested exploring alternative methods during future rate discussions. Commissioner Hardy recommended that the engineering team evaluate the rates to ensure efficiency in billing. Craig requested that all past due amounts be zeroed and proposed a sewer charge of \$43.00. Commissioner Abernethy noted that adjusting one bill would require adjusting all similar bills for that month. After discussion, the Council agreed to adjust Craig's sewer charge to \$40.34 and requested that he work with the property manager regarding sprinkler system access. Commissioner Hardy motioned to adjust the bill by \$12.77, resulting in a total amount due of \$40.34. Commissioner Hankins seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. *M/S/C*.
- c. **Cody Maxter - Madison County Planning Board:** Cody Maxter attended the meeting and provided the commissioners with an informational sheet regarding land use. She explained that an interlocal agreement between the Town and the County Planning Board was established in 2009, and a contract amendment in 2014 designated the County Planning Secretary to also serve as the Town's Planning Board Secretary. The purpose of the discussion was to have the commissioners consider updating the Town's planning needs. Cody noted that the County Planning Board can assist if the Town's board is short-staffed. Mayor Roberts commented that this represents a valuable opportunity for the Town. This information will be shared at the next Planning Board meeting.
- d. **Resolution 617-2026 to Adopt the Town of Ennis Growth Policy:** Lindon Seed, Planning Board member, attended the meeting virtually. Lindon reported that, after consulting with Kevin Angland of Great West Engineering, the Town is on track and progressing successfully. Karen Ketchu noted that the policy on page 13 does not list the Library as a department and recommended its inclusion. Mayor Roberts read the resolution aloud to the Council. Commissioner Way motioned to approve the resolution with the addition of

the Library to the department section on page 13. Commissioner Hankins seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. M/S/C.

- e. Resolution 620-2026 Contract to participate in the MT League of Cities and Towns Financial Program: Mayor Roberts explained that under this program, the League could manage payroll, claims, cash reconciliation, and accounting for the Town at a rate of \$65 per hour. She noted that this could allow restructuring of the front office, potentially reducing staffing to one clerk with additional substitute or seasonal help as needed. Jodie Rogers estimated initial costs of \$2,000 to \$3,000 per month while the League familiarizes itself with the Town's books and needs. The rough total for the six-month trial period is approximately \$18,000, compared to \$32 per hour plus benefits for the previous Clerk/Treasurer. Mayor Roberts emphasized that the Town may select which services to utilize and that the arrangement would free the front office clerk to focus on record retention and other priority tasks. Commissioner Hardy moved to approve Resolution 620-2026. Commissioner Abernethy seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. M/S/C.
- f. Wellhouse Project Update: Mayor Roberts provided an update regarding the 4050 Development bid. A bid was originally issued in September and awarded to 4050 Development in October. 4050 Development subsequently informed Colette Anderson of Great West Engineering that they were unable to secure their bond and would need to withdraw from the contract. A notice to rebid has been issued, and the bidding process has reopened. A pre-bid meeting is scheduled for January 13th, and the bid award is planned for the January 23rd meeting at 5:00 p.m. Commissioner Way inquired whether 4050 Development would be required to have a bond for emergency work. Colette Anderson stated that she does not believe a bond is required for emergency work. Commissioner Way also asked if the Town could recoup expenses incurred for the initial bid process. Colette confirmed that a letter was sent to 4050 Development and their bonding agency stating that the Town would retain the bid bond.
- g. Worker's Compensation Discussion: Mayor Roberts informed the Council that MMIA will no longer provide workers' compensation coverage for the Town. The Council discussed alternative options. Commissioner Hardy suggested contacting Thurston to explore their workers' compensation offerings. Mayor Roberts stated she will research available programs and provide updates to the Council as information becomes available.
- h. Resolution 622-2026 to hire Brennah Bench as Interim Clerk/Deputy Clerk and adjust the wage to \$20.54. Mayor Roberts noted Brennah's exemplary performance during the transition process and recommended a \$2.00 increase. The Mayor discussed Brennah attending a Clerk's School in May, after which the official position and responsibilities will be reviewed. Commissioner Abernethy suggested that the Administration Department be reviewed and restructured, particularly in light of the League assisting with some administrative duties. Commissioner Hankins moved to approve Resolution 622-2026. Commissioner Way seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. M/S/C..

9. Commission Comments:

- Commissioner Way expressed enthusiasm for working with the current Council and emphasized that the Town should have confidence in its own capabilities.
- Commissioner Hankins expressed appreciation for Mayor Roberts' efforts to improve communication.

- Commissioner Abernethy echoed Commissioner Hankins' comments regarding improved communication and noted her attendance at a Workers' Compensation hearing with MMIA. She stated that MMIA will continue coverage for the Town through June 1st and will handle any claims in place during the transition.
- Commissioner Hardy expressed excitement about the Town's future under the current Council. He requested the creation of a drive to review documents for future agendas; Mayor Roberts clarified that, due to open meeting laws, the Council will have viewing access only, and documents can be added or removed as needed. Commissioner Hardy also inquired about assistance from Great West regarding the resort tax, requested that capital improvements be added to future agendas until updated, and suggested discussion on combining the Zoning and Planning Boards be added to the next agenda.

10. Mayor Comments: Mayor Roberts addressed the Council and residents, noting the challenges of serving as Mayor during the current transition. She extended best wishes to Ginger Guinn in her future endeavors and thanked Town staff for their patience as she acclimates to her role. Mayor Roberts reported that a new routing system and other operational improvements will be implemented soon. She also reviewed upcoming Town projects, including updating the Town website and posting the budget online.

11. Unscheduled Matters: Any item(s) not listed for the current meeting with the of such discussion shall be to decide if to schedule the item(s) for discussion/vote on a subsequent agenda. No matter where discussed during this agenda item.

12. Adjourn: Commissioner Hardy motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Hankins seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously. M/S/C.

Brennah Bench, Deputy Clerk



Brennah Bench, Clerk



Lisa Roberts, Mayor

