

Minutes of the Region 26 Council Board Meeting

September 29th, 2026

Present:

Blaine County: Matt Eggert
City of Ord: Brandon Stoural
Garfield County: Diana Hurlburt
Greeley County: Jordan Foltz
Loup County: Dave Larson
Thomas County: Joseph Smith
Law Enforcement: Joel Bergman
Valley County: Theresa Petska
Wheeler County: Doug Pokorny
Tri-County Municipalities: Jay Meyer, Chairman
Catie Larsen, Executive Director

Absent:

Sherman County: Tom Bandur
Range Municipalities: Paige Ryschon

Staff Present: Virginia Michalski, Office Manager; Caden Johnson, Dispatcher Supervisor

Chairman Jay Meyer called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm as a legal meeting of the Region 26 Council. Notice of the meeting and agenda were sent to all clerks of each member county/municipality for posting and given in advance to all members of the Board. A quorum was present. The Open Meetings Act was available for public inspection.

Action Items Requiring Vote

Approval of Agenda

The Chair noted the agenda had been amended. Motion and second were made to approve the amended agenda. Motion by Joseph Smith, seconded by Joel Bergman, to approve the September 29, 2026 agenda as presented. Motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes (10), Nays (0), Abstain (0).

Approval of August 25, 2026 Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes of the August 25, 2026 meeting and noted that a correction was needed to identify the individuals who made and seconded the motion approving the August 26 claims, as that information had been omitted from the record. Following discussion, a motion was made and seconded to approve the

minutes with the requested correction. Motion by Diana Hurlbur, seconded by Dave Larson, to approve the August 25, 2026 meeting minutes with corrections. Motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes (10), Nays (0), Abstain (0).

August 2026 Financial Statement

The Board conducted an extensive review of the August 2026 Financial Statement, with discussion centered on a \$10,000 transaction resulting from the sale of equipment at the Ansley Tower. Members questioned whether the funds had been accounted for twice after being transferred into the Cares account on August 5. While the Cares account increased from approximately \$49,000 in July to \$59,000 in August, the increase did not reflect the full \$10,000 transfer. It was explained that accrued interest on the principal is deposited into a separate interest account, which accounted for the discrepancy. Additional concerns were raised regarding approximately \$13,000 that appeared to be missing from the Equipment Fund since the close of the previous fiscal year, as well as the absence of the Vehicle Fund from the current budget. Board members noted that the Equipment Fund balance was reported at \$57,160 at the end of June but began the new fiscal year at \$44,413, and that the current budget total of \$1,219,702 did not match the amount previously approved by the Board. After considerable discussion, members agreed that the identified discrepancies should be resolved before the financial statement could be approved. Options including approval with corrections, disapproval, and tabling were discussed, with concern expressed that formally disapproving a financial statement could create issues during future audits. By consensus, the August 2026 Financial Statement was tabled pending further review, reconciliation, and correction.

The Board further discussed budget management, fund accounting, and the need for revisions to ensure the budget accurately reflects prior Board actions. Staff was directed to investigate the missing Equipment Fund balance, restore the Vehicle Fund as a separate budget line item, and review bank statements to trace fund activity and reconcile discrepancies. Discussion clarified that the Vehicle Fund is intended as a reserve account for future vehicle replacement rather than routine maintenance expenses and should receive annual budget allocations to build sufficient reserves over time. Members acknowledged that the previously approved budget totaled \$1,313,834 and agreed that the current budget should be revised to align with that figure. Additional discussion focused on a questioned \$10,000 line item associated with 911 telephone and communication expenses, including NCTC, Frontier, and CenturyLink services. Members noted that previous budgets may have included these costs within broader communication categories and that further reconciliation was necessary to determine the correct allocation. The Board also discussed whether moving funds between budget line items required a formal budget amendment and generally agreed that internal adjustments may be made

without amendment provided the overall budget amount is not increased. Members emphasized the importance of maintaining sufficient documentation for audit purposes and recognized that modern audit requirements may require more detailed itemization than in previous years. The Board also reviewed budget flexibility, noting that individual line items may show deficits during the year as long as overall expenditures remain within the approved budget and restricted funds are properly accounted for. Several previously omitted budget items, including capital improvements, staff appreciation, host training expenses, and vehicle mileage, will be restored in a revised itemized budget while maintaining the approved overall budget amount.

The August 2026 Financial Statement was therefore tabled pending further review, reconciliation of fund balances, and correction of identified discrepancies prior to consideration at a future meeting.

September Claims

The Board reviewed the September 2026 claims for payment. Staff explained that the highlighted items on the claims sheets represented expenditures that were not available when the original claims information was distributed and were subsequently added as inclusion checks. Discussion noted that the claims presented involved only two accounts, the General Account and the Grant Account. After review and discussion of the submitted claims, Motion by Joseph Smith, seconded by Dave Larson, to approve and pay the September 2026 claims. Motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes (10), Nays (0), Abstain (0).

East Central 911 Board

The Board discussed Region 26's participation in the East Central 911 Group, a regional partnership that hosts communications equipment in Columbus and Grand Island and is currently in the process of establishing a formal governing board to make collective decisions on behalf of its member entities. Discussion included the importance of representation on the new board, particularly as the group prepares to address significant system decisions in the coming years, including the potential replacement of the current Call Works system with Motorola Vesta or another next-generation platform. Members were advised that billing for the annual contract through Columbus has not yet occurred because Motorola has not completed its billing process. Following discussion, a motion was made and passed designating Catie Larsen as Region 26's voting representative to the East Central 911 Board and Caden Johnson as the alternate representative. Motion by Joseph Smith, seconded by Doug Pokorny, to approve and pay the September 2026 claims. Motion carried by roll call vote. Ayes (10), Nays (0), Abstain (0).

Wage Proposal Increase/Dispatch Starting Wage

Catie presented information to the Board regarding dispatcher wages and current market comparisons among neighboring 911 centers. She reported that a survey of surrounding agencies showed Region 26's starting wage is currently near the bottom of the market. Examples included Howard County, where dispatchers can reach \$19.10 per hour within six months in addition to differential pay, while many comparable agencies are starting employees between \$20.00 and \$21.00 per hour. Catie reviewed various wage scenarios, including the financial impact of implementing \$1.00 and \$1.50 per hour increases and the potential cost of hiring an additional dispatcher at approximately \$20.00 per hour. She advised the Board that competitive wages are becoming increasingly important for recruitment and retention and noted that many neighboring agencies are offering higher starting pay than Region 26.

Catie also discussed compensation related to Certified Training Officer (CTO) duties and supervisory responsibilities. She explained that Caden had previously received a pay adjustment related to his supervisory role but that no compensation had been added for CTO responsibilities, despite such differentials being common within the industry. Due to certification requirements, Donna can no longer serve as a full-time CTO trainer without obtaining additional training, and Taylor is expected to assume CTO responsibilities to help provide training coverage across shifts. Catie presented the possibility of implementing a general wage increase along with a CTO differential and discussed the potential benefits of establishing a night shift differential to assist with employee recruitment and retention.

During the discussion, Catie advised that the approved budget contains funding for additional dispatch positions and provides flexibility for compensation adjustments within the overall authorized budget. She noted that savings from vacant positions, reduced overtime, and staffing efficiencies could help offset future wage increases. The Board also discussed the challenges rural agencies face in generating additional revenue and the importance of maintaining competitive pay to reduce turnover, improve employee retention, and enhance the quality of service provided to the public. No formal action was taken; however, The Board expressed support for allowing Catie discretion to make compensation adjustments within the limits of the approved budget. Members agreed that if adequate funds are available, she may implement wage and differential changes as deemed necessary to support recruitment, retention, and operational needs as she feels fits.

Towers and Equipment

It was reported that the new warning siren in Ericson has been successfully installed and integrated with the radio console system. Weekly testing has been conducted, and no operational issues have been reported since the installation was completed. An update was also provided on the North Loup/Scotia pagers, with work expected to begin once ground conditions improve and the area has sufficiently dried out. There has been no significant updates reported regarding other tower sites or generators.

Stealth Greeley Tower Agreement

The Board discussed a request from Stealth Telecommunications regarding equipment located on the Greeley Tower. Stealth has proposed replacing the existing microwave radio and installing an additional three-foot dish antenna as part of an upgrade to its communications equipment. Corey from Platte Valley advised Catie that the proposed equipment should not interfere with Region 26's existing communications infrastructure or hardware located on the tower. During discussion, members noted that the current agreement with Stealth provides Region 26 with access to the tower cameras; however, Region 26 does not presently have that access, and restoring it was identified as a priority. Board members also observed that Stealth had previously indicated that its service at the site provided limited business value, making the proposed equipment upgrades appear inconsistent with those earlier statements. Following discussion, the Board agreed that additional information and clarification were needed before taking action on the request. Stealth representatives will be invited to attend the next Board meeting to discuss the proposed equipment changes, address camera access concerns, and explore potential revisions to the existing agreement.

Garage Update

It was reported that the demolition scheduled for September 29, 2026, was postponed due to unfavorable weather conditions and has been tentatively rescheduled for Friday, October 2, 2026. Members were advised that the original quote received for the new building was obtained during a promotional pricing period and may no longer be valid, potentially resulting in revised costs. Discussion also noted that the new garage activities remain contingent upon obtaining measurements of the concrete foundation beneath the structure to ensure the scope of work is properly determined.

Flock Cameras

The Board discussed ongoing participation in the Flock camera program and reviewed the funding, ownership, and operational structure of the system. It was noted that Flock retains ownership of the physical cameras, while county grant funds are used to pay for the associated service subscription. Members were advised that two cameras previously located within Valley County had been removed by Flock and are currently in the company's possession, with any relocation costs likely becoming the responsibility of the county. Catie also included future grant opportunities, with local counties and law enforcement agencies will be expected to take a more active role in obtaining permits and coordinating with the Department of Roads for camera installations. Theresa Petska informed the board that a committee is being established to develop a county policy governing camera use and to establish appropriate safeguards and operational guidelines.

Communications Center Report

The Board received an update from Caden Johanson on training, staffing, and recruitment efforts within the Communications Center. It was reported that Taylor's Certified Training Officer (CTO) course has been delayed again after it was determined the class was scheduled as an in-person course in Connecticut rather than the anticipated virtual format. Staff are pursuing either a refund or a transfer to the next virtual course scheduled for January. Plans are underway to conduct cross-training during October and early November through overlapping shifts, and work continues on developing a new training structure and employee progress tracking form to better document skills and training accomplishments. Staffing challenges and overtime demands were also discussed. While employees have been cooperative in covering open shifts, concerns were expressed regarding fatigue and burnout resulting from extended overtime hours. The Board was informed that Catie and Ian will be attending the APCO/NENA conference in October, as part of ongoing professional development efforts.

The Board discussed an email received from Jake Klein expressing interest in returning to the agency and requested input from Catie and Caden regarding the possibility of reemployment. Catie stated that while she appreciated Jake reaching out and the professionalism of his email, she did not believe rehiring him would be the best option at this time. She noted concerns related to his previous separation from employment after falling asleep while on duty and the fact that the position would primarily involve working independently on night shifts. Catie recommended waiting to evaluate other available candidates and staffing options before considering rehiring. Caden agreed with this assessment and supported continuing the current hiring process and exploring other employment options. The Board concurred that pursuing other staffing alternatives at this time would be the most appropriate course of action. Catie did report that they are still hoping to hire Maria. She will be in contact with us in November as she is going through some medical issues. Catie reported she performed very well during the interview process.

When Catie reaches out to her in November and if she is still interested she would like to set up a time for her to meet Caden and Donna as they did not sit in on the interview. The Board emphasized the importance of continuing recruitment efforts to address staffing needs and reduce reliance on overtime.

Director Report

Catie provided an update on activities involving the North Central PET Region. The 2025 PET Region Grant was reviewed during the North Central PET Region meeting, and discussions have begun regarding Flock Camera projects and the development of future planning meetings. Training efforts continue to be a priority, with Catie completed the requirements to be eligible to attend the NEMA Capstone course on October 20-21, 2026. An EMPG reimbursement request was submitted, and the reimbursement has since been received. Updates were also provided regarding the State's new grant management system, which is expected to improve grant administration and reporting processes.

Catie reported that NEMA advised PET Region dues could not be charged through grant funding; however, discussions with other PET Regions confirmed that many regions do collect dues. As a result, efforts are underway to restructure the PET Region by involving additional emergency managers in documentation and administrative duties and improving project planning to ensure grant funds are spent in a timelier manner throughout the grant cycle rather than near the end of funding periods.

Catie also updated the Board on disaster declaration activity within the region. Five disaster declarations are currently being processed, including storm damage in Greeley County, where REA damages are estimated between \$150,000 and \$175,000, and two declarations in Valley County totaling approximately \$600,000. Additional storm damage in Wheeler and Thomas Counties is still being documented, and information will continue to be submitted to NEMA as documentation becomes available.

Personnel updates included the resignation of Jaimie Stefka and the termination of Miki Gerten, who has filed for unemployment benefits. Recruitment efforts remain ongoing, with job advertisements placed in the Burwell, Ord, and Custer County newspapers. To support employee development, dispatch supervisors have implemented training progress reports based on training needs identified during recent staff meetings.

Additional reports were provided on professional meetings and regional partnerships. Catie attended the Lou-Platte Mutual Aid Meeting, East Central 911 Meeting, North Central PET Region Meeting, and Supervisors Meeting. Region 26 will be sending municipality election letters in October for voting purposes. Virginia and Catie attended the Greeley EMS/VFD meeting to update identification badges and inventory equipment. Virginia successfully completed and submitted the annual 911 Wireless Audit. The Frontier phone line in Ord has

been disconnected, resulting in cost savings and operational adjustments. Donna and Caden have expressed interest in attending future mutual aid meetings, and each plans to attend a meeting while Catie is attending the Capstone course to ensure Region 26 remains represented when schedules permit.

In October Catie will travel to Lincoln for the NEMA Capstone course before meeting Virginia in Kearney for the NIRMA Conference. Lastly, the Board was informed that the Deb Fischer DOJ Radio Console Grant has been officially announced, and the project budget has been approved, allowing work on the radio console project to move forward.

Executive Session

A motion regarding intel matters was made by Brandon Stoural and seconded by Doug Pokorny at 8:44PM. Vote carried by roll call vote. Ayes (10), Nays (0), Abstain (0).

Motion by Dave Larson, seconded by Doug Pokorny, to exit executive session and return to open session at 8:47PM with no action made. Vote: Ayes (8), Nays (0), Abstain (0).

Board returned out of executive session. No action made.

Other Business

- Municipality Assessments on Revenue - Revenue from municipality assessments is categorized under "teletype work/backup and is include on the revenue spreadsheet.
- Dunning Fire Grant – Catie took on helping with this grant prior to becoming the director because at the time she had time to help. In the future she will not be assisting with these but it did help give her some practice and getting accounts set up as the radio console grant will be handled through the same systems.
- Board members recognized and commended Caden Johnson for his outstanding work during a motor vehicle accident response. The incident involved a vehicle that left the roadway, traveled down an embankment, and came to rest on its side near the railroad tracks by the chalk mines. During the response, Caden effectively managed radio communications while simultaneously coordinating with personnel on scene. Due to the remote location and difficulty locating the vehicle, it took approximately 40 minutes for responders to find the accident scene. Board members expressed appreciation for Caden's professionalism and communication skills throughout the incident.

Next Meeting

October 27, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:52PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Catie Larsen, Executive Director