

# Mercer City reviews finances, discusses water system updates

## Council considers testing changes, hears park and project reports

BY KELLI AMELING  
Associate Publisher

The Mercer City Council reviewed financial reports, discussed water system testing and heard updates on park improvements during its Feb. 12 meeting.

According to meeting minutes published in the Central McLean News-Journal on May 28, Mayor Kenneth Thomsen called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. at City Hall, with all council members present and a quorum established.

The council approved minutes from the Jan. 8 meeting. Auditor Kathrin Volochenko presented financial reports, including the 2026 balance sheet, year-to-date and month-to-date profit and loss statements, and January bank reconciliations. The council approved the reports and also approved payment of bills.

During the meeting, Mary Jameson of the Midwest Assistance Program provided an overview of services offered through the organization and discussed financial details related to a USDA water and sewer loan.

Council members reviewed water usage and account reports, including discussion of unread meters. Volochenko

recommended adding additional Stage 1 water testing sites on a rotational basis to improve data collection, pending property owner permission.

Council Member Erika Lorenz reported on recent park board discussions, including the need to share lawn mowing duties and schedule maintenance such as pumping the park outhouse. She also noted the park's security camera subscription, which renews annually at a cost of about \$225.

Lorenz said the park board is considering fundraising efforts this summer to support planned improvements. The committee is also preparing to apply for an AARP grant to fund a sidewalk to a second shelter, flooring replacement in one shelter and additional upgrades.

Council Member Randy Zinke and Karen Zinke provided an update on planning for a proposed community center. An initial informational meeting was held Jan. 30, and a follow-up meeting was scheduled for Feb. 13 to help draft a letter to residents about the project.

In old business, Jameson presented information on emergency response program materials and procedures.

Thomsen also reviewed allowable uses for the municipal infrastructure fund, noting it is restricted to infrastructure-related expenses.

Thomsen and Volochenko reviewed the city's recent regulatory filings and reports, including quarterly federal and state submissions and water system reporting to state agencies.

In new business, Thomsen reminded council members of statutory deadlines requiring the city auditor to submit and publish the annual financial statement by early March. The 2025 financial statement is scheduled to be published in the Central McLean News-Journal in late February.

Thomsen also noted requirements to publish notice of the candidate filing deadline ahead of the 2026 election.

Volochenko reported on new insurance coverage options available through the North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund for sewer backups and water main breaks and said a quote will be requested.

Council members also heard reports from recent safety meetings related to wastewater management and pipeline safety, as well as an update on cybersecurity training.

### CALLS

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home safely."

Deputies responded at about 5:30 p.m. to the Cenex in Wilton on report of a gas drive-off. The reporting party stated the driver appeared to try the tap for their card but it didn't go through. The amount was for \$86.38. The deputies were unable to locate the vehicle, however, the subject did contact the Cenex and took care of the balance.

Deputies performed a traffic stop at about 10:30 p.m. on N.D. Highway 27 eastbound near mile marker 50 for speeding. A 45-year-old male of Mandan was cited for speeding and failing to display plates. He received a verbal warning for having a white light to rear.

#### May 5

Deputies performed a traffic stop at about 8:50 p.m. to U.S. Highway 83 northbound near mile marker 148. Savannah Thomas, 26, of White Shield, was arrested for driving under suspension.

#### May 4

Deputies responded at about 12:30 a.m. to the 2000 block of 30th Avenue Northwest in Max on a report of a fire call. The reporting party stated there was a fire in their trees next to hay bales. First responders arrived at the scene.

Deputies responded at about 10 a.m. to the 1000 block in Garrison for a civil standby. The reporting party requested the standby while they moved things out while the other person is at work. When the person returned home from

work, they called dispatch stating the person who moved out exchanged their cat for one of theirs. The reporting party stated they will not take care of the cat and wanted theirs back.

Deputies responded at about noon to Deeter Dental in Garrison on report of dumping garbage. The reporting party stated someone was dumping garbage in their dumpster, adding the dumpster was full and they hadn't started their work week yet. Personal information was taken from the items in the dumpster and were contact by the deputies.

Deputies responded at about 1 p.m. to the Scotwood Motel in Washburn for a citizen assist. A person called to get a ride to their vehicle north of Underwood.

Deputies responded at about 3 p.m. to the Cenex in Wilton on a report of a gas drive-off. Deputies looked for the vehicle.

Deputies performed a traffic stop at about 4:30 p.m. to U.S. Highway 83 near mile marker 140 in Underwood. Plates from the vehicle were seized.

Deputies responded at about 6 p.m. to the Shell Station in Garrison for a suspicious situation. The reporting party stated a person was sitting in a minivan and it made them feel uncomfortable. The caller called back stating the vehicle left without coming in.

Deputies performed a traffic stop at about 7:30 p.m. on U.S. Highway 83 eastbound near mile marker 46 for speeding. A 51-year-old female of Bismarck was cited for speeding.

#### May 5

Deputies performed a traffic stop at about 9:45 a.m. on U.S. Highway 83 near mile marker 171. Chris Haman, 47, of Douglas, was arrested for driving with a suspended license.

Deputies responded at about 2:15 p.m. to the 1000 block of 39th Avenue Northwest in Garrison on a report of stolen property. The reporting party stated they wanted to file a report regarding the incident were the individual took their cat and left a blind cat. The caller alleged the person's son stole a keyboard and mouse, as well.

### DIGGIN'

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veins, leaves that look like they escaped from a coral reef—didn't happen by accident. Breeders sometimes irradiate seeds to scramble their DNA. Most of the seedlings look like duds, but every once in a while, something spectacular appears—one of those true 'it's alive' moments in horticulture. That plant is then propagated vegetatively and ends up on a greenhouse bench.

Speaking of experiments: about 15 to 20 years ago, the market briefly had some incredible orange petunias. They were vegetatively propagated, came from a single mother plant in Europe and were a hit. Then the USDA discovered they were technically a GMO—and hadn't been labeled as such when they entered the country. Even though they weren't a food crop, regulations are regulations. The varieties were pulled from the market almost overnight. It wasn't about a mutant plant taking over your garden. It was about paperwork and money. A few orange varieties are creeping

back now, but the original stunners are gone.

So why do annuals cost what they cost? Because behind every plant is an origin story—part biology, part economics and part mad science. A \$2.50 seed geranium and an \$8 zonal geranium aren't the same organism. One is the basic model; the other is the successful experiment. Once you understand the strange little laboratory behind modern annuals—the cloning, the tinkering, the mutations that stuck—the price tags stop feeling mysterious. You're not just buying a plant. You're buying the experiment that worked.

Have plant questions? I've got answers. Email your questions or photos to digginit@nordaknorth.com, or stop by The Leader-News office with a photo or sample.

Phaidra Yunker is a Master Gardener and a certified horticulturist with over a decade of experience in the horticultural industry. She serves as Vice President of the City of Washburn Forestry Board.

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**Bobbi Jo Krueger**  
275 2nd St SW  
Garrison, ND  
701.463.2270  
bkrueger@nodakins.net



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