

October 15, 2025

Town Board: Mayor Kerry Barney, Kurt Sawyer, Jon Spendlove, Gary Goble, Janell Barney

Staff: Carly Burrows, Karen Baker, Tyler Mendenhall

Public: Julie Bishop, Ryker Ogden, Brett Burrows

1. Meeting Called to Order

Mayor Barney offered the opening prayer to begin the meeting at 7pm and Councilor Sawyer led those present in the pledge.

2. Approval of September 24, 2025 minutes

Councilor Spendlove noted an error on the last months minutes. The minutes did not include the purchasing of a computer for the clerk just the printer. With that being fixed on the minutes Councilor Spendlove approved the minutes, Councilor Barney 2nd the motion. The vote was unanimous.

3. Review September Invoices, checks & financial report/budget

Councilor Spendlove motion to approve the financials, Councilor Sawyer 2nd the motion. The vote was unanimous.

3.3 Extra monthly invoices for pickleball court

Council members discussed the wrapping up of the pickleball project. Mayor Barney discussed the installment of the chain link fence and the last payments and reports needed to be done.

Councilor Sawyer motioned to Accept the extra invoices for the pickleball court and councilor Barney 2nd the motion. The vote was unanimous.

4. Public Hearings

5. Petitions, Remonstrations and Communications

5.1 Training with Roger Carter

The Council discussed scheduling a training/work meeting with Roger Carter. Proposed date and time: **Wednesday, November 12, 2025, at 6:00 PM.** Proposed topics include: council-staff relations; separation of duties; council rules and procedures; electronic meetings; and a strategic planning review. The purpose is to strengthen governance fundamentals, reduce procedural errors, and clarify processes, including handling urgent approvals and noticing special meetings. Councilor Sawyer approved the meeting time, Councilor Barney 2nd. The vote was unanimous.

5.2 Water billing update

Water Billing Discussion

- Late fee policy announced in this month's bills: a new late fee of \$5/month; accounts are being reviewed for accuracy and corrections.

- Timing of payments vs. posting dates clarified (drop box at month-end). Staff will tighten end-of-month processing to prevent inadvertent late charges caused by posting on the 1st instead of the 30th/31st.
- System issue identified that caused some duplicate or excessive late charges; a full audit and cleanup will be conducted with vendor support next week.
- Deposit policy reaffirmed: \$250 deposit held for one year; if account closes earlier, deposit is refundable less any outstanding billed amounts (e.g., September usage) and policy wording will be clarified accordingly.
- Rate clarity:
 - Active service: \$55 water base + \$5 fire fee = \$60/month
 - Standby service: \$27.50 water + \$5 fire fee = \$32.50/month
 - Public materials will state water and fire fees separately and remove the outdated line implying a \$280 shut-off equals a year of water.
- Service types and fees:
 - Temporary turn-off (seasonal/maintenance, town-side valve): \$25 service.
 - Full shut-off (account closure): \$280 fee

5.3 Water Deposits

- Staff are reviewing legacy deposit records; some go back years. Plan is to audit and update by year-end alongside late notice cleanups.
- Restated policy intent: new accounts post a \$250 deposit held for one year; if on-time for that year, the deposit may be applied to the account.
- Council guidance (consensus): When an account closes in under a year, the \$250 deposit should be refunded minus any outstanding billed amounts (e.g., the \$60 September billing), and this approach should be formalized in written policy for clarity
- New water policy will be created and voted on in the next meeting.

Council Action on Water Deposit and shut-off of Account #1147,1148

- Apply the \$280 shut-off fee as a credit toward standby charges until the credit is fully used, then charge the regular standby rate thereafter. This avoids effectively double-charging for shutting off service when standby would have been the appropriate option.
- Treat September billing as valid active-service charges. If refunding the deposit, deduct the September bill (e.g., \$60 per meter) from the deposit before issuing any refund.
- Handle the deposit per policy: if the account closed before one year, refund the \$250 deposit minus any outstanding billed amounts (such as the September bill).
- Update and clarify public-facing policy/communications to:
 - Clearly distinguish active vs. standby monthly charges (Active: \$55 water + \$5 fire = \$60; Standby: \$27.50 water + \$5 fire = \$32.50).
 - Remove outdated language implying the \$280 shut-off equals a year of water.

- Explain that customers seeking to pause usage should choose standby rather than full shut-off to avoid unnecessary fees.

These steps reflect the council's consensus approach for Acc#1147, 1148 and similar cases going forward

5.3 Snow Plow Policy

Equipment Damage, Storage, and Control

- Damage occurred when the plow assembly had been removed in summer (to use the truck as a general vehicle) and then reattached incorrectly, likely causing electrical/hydraulic connection issues. Kelly's summer removal/reattachment was cited as the cause; repairs are needed soon.
- Plan to fix: Kerry will coordinate with Russ and Chuck to determine repair approach (self-repair vs. hire out) and get it done promptly.
- To prevent recurrence, council wants the job description updated so that any actions involving the plow/truck require Russ's oversight/approval. The Clerk also raised the idea of storing the dedicated snow plow vehicle appropriately over summer to avoid casual re-purposing and related damage

Policy and Triggers

- Existing practice referenced: plow when snowfall reaches about "three inches." There was uncertainty about whether this is a formally written policy; council indicated they likely have an established practice but want it written down.
- The Clerk requested a clear, written policy covering: when to plow, where to plow, who plows, and who calls it. Council agreed to draft and formalize these details.

Snow Plow Operations and Roles

- Russ is in charge of plowing going forward. Kelly (who had been informally helping) is no longer an assistant plow driver after damaging the equipment; only Russ will plow for now. Others may be trained in the future, but not currently.
- Add snow plow details (routes, call-out procedure, responsibilities) to Russ's job description and/or a standalone written policy for council review.
- Proceed with repairs and ensure equipment control and storage practices are clarified and followed.

6. Ordinances

6.1 Gravel Pit Annexation

Council members discussed the expansion of the town and the annexation of the gravel pits in order to bring more revenue to the town.

- Motivation: Expanding town boundaries could significantly increase the town's tax base and revenue. Other towns do this to grow funds for services and amenities.

- Timing hindsight: If the gravel pit area had been annexed earlier, the town would be “a lot richer” today, prompting interest in exploring annexation now

The council members had some key questions in regards to the annexation.

- Owner consent: Asked whether the property owner must agree to annexation. Acknowledged owners “have a say,” but not necessarily a binding veto; prior annexations occurred even over an owner’s objection.
- Town service obligations after annexation:
 - One view (Councilor Sawyer): If the town annexes property without the owner petitioning, the town becomes responsible to provide services (e.g., water) to that property. If an owner petitions to be annexed, then the owner must provide required infrastructure to town standards.
 - Counterpoint (Mayor Barney): Belief that annexation does not automatically obligate the town to provide water, citing examples of annexed properties in other towns using private wells and paying different utilities (e.g., Garkane) without municipal water service.
 - Practical note: Gravel pit and a nearby house reportedly already have wells, which could affect service expectations/needs if annexed.

Council members decided to take the next steps to see what it would take to annex the gravel pits and what information could be gathered in support or denial of said annexation.

- Research path: Council supports having Kerry consult with Roger Carter on annexation feasibility, process, legal obligations (especially water service), and revenue impact—starting with the gravel pit but potentially considering a broader annexation strategy.
- Water system capacity context: The town is near current storage capacity; engineers presented a proposal for a new 500k-gallon tank and system upgrades. Annexation planning should be coordinated with water system improvements, funding, and grants (CIB, rural water, Division of Drinking Water).
- No immediate vote: This was a preliminary discussion to gather feedback and authorize information-gathering rather than take formal action. Further discussion will follow after Roger Carter’s input and clearer understanding of service obligations and financials.

7. Report of Officers - boards - committees

7.1 Water Department - Water Usage

System Capacity and Planning Context

- Storage nearing capacity for current population; engineers proposed a new 500,000-gallon tank, distribution upgrades, and prep for 2030 full metering. Grants (CIB, Rural Water, Division of Drinking Water) to be explored, with coordination alongside annexation growth planning

Equipment Issues and Recommendations

- Tank level sensor failure after a power outage:

- Existing ultrasonic sensor failed internally; estimated replacement cost \$2,000-\$2,400.
- Recommended switch to a submersible level sensor (~\$649), which peers report has comparable lifespan and is increasingly preferred.
- Backup power for controls:
 - Consider UPS/battery backup to buffer outages; note environmental concerns at Well 4 (temperature extremes) may shorten battery life. Low-space enclosure constraints also noted.
- Installation approach:
 - Proposed installer: Tyler's controls technician (lower cost than prior vendor). A "not-to-exceed" approval around ~\$2,000-\$2,500 discussed to cover sensor + potential battery components and labor.

Governance/Approval Path

- Recognized need for a fast-track approval mechanism for urgent water repairs. Interim plan: post a short special council meeting (24-hour notice) to approve the specific repair "not to exceed" amount, since it wasn't on the standing agenda.
- Councilor Barney voted to have a meeting on Oct 17, 2025 to vote on water fixes not to exceed \$2,000. Councilor Goble 2nd, the vote was unanimous.

7.1a Water Grant Presentation by Ensign

- Ensign outlined a comprehensive water system upgrade to support town growth and reliability:
 - New 500,000-gallon storage tank (current 200,000-gallon tank near capacity)
 - Run Well 4 to existing tank and Well 5 to new tank; operate in tandem for balanced pressure across town
 - New/up-sized distribution mains along West Road (8-12 inch), broader system piping upgrades
 - Include Impact Fee Facilities Plan, Impact Fee Analysis, and a Water Master Plan
 - Ensign to handle funding applications and project management end-to-end.
 - Primary targets: CIB, USDA Rural Development, Division of Drinking Water
 - Ensign stated the chance of striking out with all three is "very small"
 - Proposed fee for preparing funding package: about \$30,000 (for grant/funding effort itself)
 - Potential tank sites discussed (near existing site, or property by Kurt; BLM land via long-term lease possible but slower due to federal process)

- Eminent domain mentioned as an absolute last resort; not preferred due to community impact
- Grants aren't guaranteed; if no funding awarded, town may still owe Ensign's funding-prep fee (~\$30k)
- Council favored consulting Roger Carter before committing; action deferred as this was a presentation, not an approval item

Reasoning on why we need to upgrade our water systems:

- Storage is nearing capacity for current residents; upgrades needed for reliability and growth
- Dual-tank/dual-well approach improves pressure balance and service across town
- Ensign emphasized time savings and reduced administrative burden by handling funding and project delivery

7.2 Fire Department

Councilor Spendlove reported that there will be a meeting October 17th at 6:30pm

7.3 Road Department-

7.4 Parks & Recreation-

7.4a Halloween Party

- Event begins at 6:00 PM with trunk-or-treat, followed by outdoor social time around fire barrels.
- Simple, community-style menu (beef stew, bread, hot chocolate).
- Option to move indoors if weather is too cold.

7.4b Snowflake Lights

Snowflake Lights Discussion:

- Invoices on file: Council referenced "a paper there on snowflakes" and noted "two invoices," indicating pending purchases/expenses for snowflake lighting.
- Rope vs. LED options:
 - Two product types discussed: "rope lights" and "LED lights" (likely higher-quality rope-style LED) with similar accessories/connectors (T and L connectors, end caps).
 - Cost comparison mentioned:
 - Rope lights (non-LED label): \$396.44
 - LED-labeled option: \$912
 - Noted ~\$600 price difference and that the LED option uses C7 sockets while the cheaper rope light does not.
- Technical/installation details:
 - Need to confirm whether strands can be cut to length and terminated with end caps or T-connectors; plan to verify how to wire plugs after cutting.

- Measurement needed: Team to measure existing installations/building runs before ordering; plan to meet to measure lengths; Jacie may already have some measurements but not confirmed.
- Next steps and agenda:
 - Place the item on the agenda and contact Jacie to clarify product differences and specs (rope vs LED quality, connectors, existing light reference) before deciding.
 - Concern flagged about who will perform the installation; acknowledged it's at least a two-person job.

7.5 Grants

7.6 Planning & Zoning Commission

- Oversight responsibility: The council questioned whether the Town should actively enforce plan compliance or defer entirely to the County, noting the Town pays the County monthly for inspections (Jared) but issues arise when plans change after initial approvals.
- Specific case review: They plan to pull the permit for Fallis's project to verify what was actually approved (e.g., whether living quarters were permitted). Concerns were raised that construction includes full living space (plumbing, water, sewer) though it may have been presented as a "garage" originally.
- Action items proposed:
 - Retrieve and review the original Town permit and conditions for the Fallis project.
 - If the current build doesn't match the approved plans, contact the County to halt or correct the work.
 - Clarify roles: define when the Town intervenes versus when the County is solely responsible, to avoid gaps as plans evolve after approval.
- Process concerns: The council noted the risk of applicants getting an easy initial "OK" and later adding elements (e.g., kitchenette, extra facilities) beyond what was approved. They emphasized tightening follow-up and documentation to ensure adherence to approved footprints/plans.

7.7 Cemetery

Prairie dog issue:

- Report that Fish & Wildlife had been contacted to address prairie dogs affecting the cemetery's appearance; traps were expected to be placed.
- If trapping doesn't resolve the issue, the Town can obtain a permit from Fish & Wildlife to remove a limited number by shooting; a council member volunteered if needed.

8. Public Input

- Public comments focused on clarifying utility billing: separate fire fee, accurate base water rate, and updated/remove outdated annual cost references.

- Clearer wording and review processes were encouraged to avoid resident confusion on fees and services

9. Unfinished or New Business

10. Adjournment

Councilor Sawyer motioned to adjourn at 8:20pm Councilor Barney 2nd. The vote was unanimous.