

Mayor:
David Cates

City Council:
Amber Schoenrock
Carrie Doty
Karla Breeding
Darryl Burditt



City of Conrad
413 S. Main St.
Conrad, MT 59425
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MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL
OF THE CITY OF CONRAD, COUNTY OF PONDERA, STATE OF MONTANA
HELD AT CONRAD CITY HALL ON APRIL 21st, 2026

The City Council of the City of Conrad, County of Pondera, State of Montana, met in regular session at Conrad City Hall on Tuesday, April 21st, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Mayor David Cates, Alderman Amber Schoenrock, Alderman Darryl Burditt, Alderman Carrie Doty, Alderman Karla Breeding, Police Chief Andy Lund, Public Works Director David Zimbelman, Administrative Clerk Julie Orcutt, City Clerk Jerad Walston, City Attorney Daniel Jones.

Absent: Financial Officer Jodi Rogers

Guests: Ruth Erickson, Ed Erickson, Ed Engham, Heidi Fowler, Janice Lund, Robert Bender, Robert Skorupa, Ernest Padilla, David Baggs, Ron Moon, Tom Kuka, Cody Dugan, Jennifer Kronebusch, Phyllis Hammermeister, Zane Drishinski, Brad Koon, Adam Jorgenson, Jeff Ashley, Jerry Riewer, Sandy Syvertson, Terry Syvertson, Teresa Vanderbush, Amy Zimbelman, McKenzie Graye, Angelique Dodge, Brian Heath, Shaunna Graham, Michael Herdina, Lynn Masimore, Jean Egan.

Teleconference Guests: AH, Steph **Doe**, Dave Thomas, Angela Thomas, Wendy Judisch; as well as three anonymous guests.

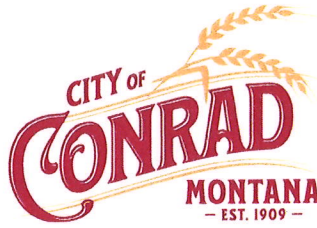
The meeting was called to order by Mayor David Cates at 6:00 p.m.

1. Action: Read and approve minutes of April 7th, 2026, regular council meeting.
 - Motion by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, Second by Alderman Karla Breeding, to approve the minutes of the April 7th, 2026, regular meeting, as presented.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously
2. Action on any Claims and Payroll:

Claims: 29697-29719
Total: \$56,385.63
Motion by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, Second by Alderman Carrie Doty, to approve the claims as presented.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously
3. Action on Water Contracts: None
4. Correspondence: None

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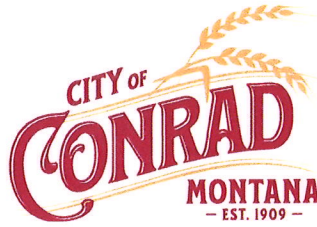


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5. Public Comment (no action taken): None
6. Department Reports:
 - Finance Officer:
 - Mayor David Cates briefly summarized the Financial Report, noting that expenditure and revenue looked good.
7. Discussion/Action: Appointment of Chief of Police
 - Mayor David Cates commended Police Chief Andy Lund for his dedication and determination that allowed him to perform far beyond expectations in managing the CPD over the past several months as Interim Police Chief.
 - Motion by Alderman Karla Breeding, Second by Alderman Carrie Doty, to Approve the appointment of Andy Lund as City of Conrad Police Chief, at \$35/hour, with an additional \$150 for Animal Control.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously
 - The Honorable David Cates, Mayor, administered the Oath of Office to newly appointed City Police Chief, Andy Lund.
8. Discussion/Action: Triple Tree on MCET/PER Grant Application.
 - Brad Koon, from Triple Tree Engineering, presented a preliminary engineering report to address infrastructure issues within the city's freshwater system and Lake Francis pumping station. This report prioritizes repairs and support for upcoming grant applications to MSEP and RGL for funding.
 - Triple Tree went on to propose a 20-year plan to address critical freshwater system needs, including aging transmission lines and leaking treatment filters, while pursuing up to \$625,000 in grant funding. The project prioritizes essential upgrades to water treatment, supply sources like Lake Francis, and distribution infrastructure to ensure long-term reliability with minimal impact on resident water rates.
 - The no-action alternative entails maintaining the current system and upgrading infrastructure with an estimated \$17.5 million for projects like a \$10.3 million water transmission main replacement. This approach focuses on internal upgrades rather than regional connection, with high-level cost estimates meant for long-term planning rather than immediate, full-scale investment.
 - Finally, Triple Tree Engineers discussed water supply options between maintaining the city's current system, which requires significant long-term infrastructure investment, or connecting to the North Central regional system.
 - Motion by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, Second by Alderman Karla Breeding, to approve Triple Tree Engineering's request to go forward with grant applications, MCEP and the RRGL.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously

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9. Discussion/Action: Ed's Tavern request to close Front Street during Whoop-up.
 - Motion by Alderman Karla Breeding, Second by Alderman Carrie Doty, to approve Ed Tavern's request to close Front Street during Whoop-Up, June 3rd and 4th, from 5:00 pm to 2:00 am.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously
10. Discussion/Action: Dispatch Contract to move forward with a 4% COLA each year for 3 years.
 - City Attorney Daniel Jones explained that Conrad is renegotiating its expiring four-year dispatch agreement, proposing a 4% annual inflationary increase alongside new protocols for emergency response and radio usage.
 - Key updates include a requirement for dispatch to send the nearest available officer regardless of jurisdiction during emergencies and a formal partnership with Capital Communications to resolve ongoing radio equipment issues.
 - Motion by Alderman Karla Breeding, Second by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, to move forward with Dispatch Contract with a 4% COLA each year for 5 years.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously
11. Discussion: Pickleball in Conrad.
 - **Presenter Absent**
12. Discussion: The Pintler in the health insurance does not qualify for an HSA.
 - Administrative Clerk Julie Orcutt presented details for the City's employee benefit offerings for the 2026-2027 fiscal year, featuring a 7.8% premium increase for the standard Madison health plan and a 3% increase for alternative options.
 - While health premiums have risen, the city-funded \$10,000 life insurance benefit and employee-paid dental, vision, and supplemental life insurance rates remain unchanged.
13. Discussion/Action: Approval for health insurance coverage for F/Y 2026/2027.
 - Motion by Alderman Karla Breeding, Second by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, to approve all offerings from MMIA, with the City covering the cost of the Madison Plan. Employees opting to take the high-deductible plan would have the difference in premium placed in their HAS account.
 - Motion Carried Unanimously
14. Update: Worker's Comp Insurance. Cost for the plan under the Montana State Fund is estimated at \$36,383.16, which is about what it was last year with MMIA. We are still waiting for confirmation of coverage for volunteers.
 - Administrative Clerk Julie Orcutt reported that the City is evaluating transitioning its workers' compensation coverage to a state fund, with an estimated annual cost of approximately \$36,384, which appears to be several thousand dollars cheaper than previous rates.

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- Volunteer fire department premiums will see a small \$300 annual increase due to higher minimum wage requirements; these costs are partially offset by savings on library volunteer coverage and overall lower base rates.

15. Discussion: Consolidation of PCSO and CPD.

- Pondera County Under Sheriff, Robert Bender, read a prepared statement clarifying the intent of the County's proposed merger (see transcript).
- City Attorney Daniel Jones provided his assessment of the law enforcement consolidation proposal, suggesting that it may cost taxpayers more for less service while stripping the city of all operational control. Furthermore, the plan lacks critical protection for current city employees, a financial justification, and a clear "exit plan" should the merger fail.
- Daniel further suggested exploring "shared services" through inter-local agreements as a less drastic alternative to a full merger, allowing the county to backfill staffing gaps without dismantling the city's police department. He emphasizes that the current proposal lacks any defined performance measures, meaning the city would surrender its entire force and control without a guaranteed level of service in return.
- Citizens expressed varying concerns, including law enforcement coverage and availability, law enforcement turnover rate, costs, and the lack of logistics in the County's merger proposal. The consensus called for more information to be provided before a final decision is made, with some suggesting the use of a consultant.
- Alderman Carrie Doty expressed a desire to "slow the roll" on consolidation, shifting from a sense of urgency caused by past staffing shortages to a focus on due diligence and factual analysis. She highlights that dismantling the police department is likely irreversible and cost-prohibitive, necessitating a deep dive into tax implications and long-term service impacts before any final decision or town hall meeting could be considered.

16. Discussion/Action: Approval of moving forward with proposed PCSO/CPD merger.

- Motion by Alderman Karla Breeding, Second by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, to move forward with proposed PCSO/CPD merger.
 - The motion tied, 2-2, with Alderman Darryl Burditt and Alderman Amber Schoenrock voting for the motion, and Alderman Carrie Doty and Alderman Karla Breeding voting against the motion. Mayor David Cates cast the tiebreaking vote, voting against the motion, causing it to fail.
 - Council President Amber Schoenrock specifically asked that an agenda item be placed on the next meeting schedule to discuss a possible Town Hall meeting.

17. Executive Session: None

18. Other Business: None

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19. Items to Appear on the Next Agenda: n/a

There being no further business to come before the Council,

20. Motion by Alderman Amber Schoenrock, Second by Alderman Carrie Doty, to adjourn the meeting at 8:15 PM.

- Motion Carried Unanimously

Mayor, David Cates

Attest: 

Council President, Amber Schoenrock

