

**Mercer County Commission Minutes  
March 18, 2026**

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. by Vice Chairman Jamee Folk. Present were Commissioners, Steve Guenthner, Gene Wolf, Casey Voigt, Auditor Carmen Reed, and Dan Arens of the Hazen Star. Chairman Rick Bauman was absent. Others present during the meeting were Sheriff Terry Ternes, States Attorney Todd Schwarz, Clerk of Court Wanda Knutson, HR/EM Director Alice Grinsteiner, Building Maintenance Supervisor Jim Albers, Treasurer Dawn Grannis, Tax Director/Land Use Administrator Jennifer Neumiller, Assistant Highway Superintendent Dennis Olheiser, Highway Department Administrative Assistant Rachel Grimm, Coteau Properties Darren Hellman, Lignite Coal R&D Vice President Mike Holmes, NextEra Energy Resources Representatives included Executive Project Director of Development Heath Barefoot, Senior Attorney Melissa Hochmuth, Senior Communications Strategist Tiffany Emery; Crowley Fleck Representative Erik Edison, Coyote Creek Mining Representative Donn Steffen, Basin Electric Power Cooperative Representatives included CEO Todd Brickhouse, VP of Commercial Operations Daniel Gallagher, Senior Legislative Representative John (Jack) Schuh, Director of Property & Right-of-Way Mike Murray, VP of Strategic Planning & Communications Andy Buntrock; Innovative Energy Alliance Anne Hansen, LIUNA Marketing Representative & Organizer Steve Cortina, Roughrider Electric Representatives included Co-GM/CEO Managers Jason Bentz & Travis Kupper, Member Services Manager Larissa Eslinger; Coal County Conversion Representative Ken Miller, ND State Representative Bill Tveit, Western Dakota Energy Association Executive Director Alison Ritter, Chris Renner, Joe Grannis, Stacie Kruckenberg, Kevin Irwin, Linette Irwin, Lori Hammer, Cody Didier, Robert Berger, Wayne Bertsch, Tony Reiss, Wayne Windhorst, Brandon Windhorst, Sheila Roth, Wes Klein, Mike Berg, Weston Berg, Dwight Berger via phone, Gerry Burr, Erin Laverdure, Kevin Hafner, Bud Woeste, Elizabeth Dagley, Dave Nehring, Retha Matten, Duane Miller, and Darwin Knutson.

Pledge of allegiance was said.

Wolf moved to approve the amended agenda. Guenthner seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried.

Voigt moved to approve the March 3, 2026 regular meeting minutes as presented.

Guenthner seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried.

Clerk of Court Wanda Knutson presented the State options to provide Clerk of Court services in Mercer County. Voigt moved to approve option #2, to elect to enter into a funding agreement for the 2027-2029 biennium to receive reimbursement for providing clerk services from the State of North Dakota. Guenthner seconded. Voigt, Guenthner, and Folk voted aye. Wolf voted nay. Motion carried.

Voigt moved to approve duplicate check request for Check# 55188 for \$106.70, that was initially issued on 1/6/2025. Wolf seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried.

Wolf moved to approve the Sheriff's February Revenues of \$43,672.47. Voigt seconded. All vote aye. Motion carried.

Voigt moved to appoint Tammy Schmidt to the Mercer County Housing Board. Wolf seconded. All vote aye. Motion carried.

Coteau Properties Environmental Specialist Darren Hellman gave a brief overview of Coteau's progress and plans for 2026 and presented a Petition for Setback Waiver. Guenther moved to set the Setback Waiver Petition Public Hearing for 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, April 15, 2026. Voigt seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried.

Lignite Coal Research & Development Vice President Mike Holmes discussed the economic contributions of the coal industry and presented an overview of the Energy & Environmental Research Center (EERC) Study that evaluated how increased electricity demand from large load users could impact economic contributions, coal production and local tax revenue. The EERC Study components included lignite power generation facility (500 MW), new lignite mine (3.5M tons), data processing center (400 MW), and critical mineral processing facility (100 MW). Presentation paused due to Public Hearing. At 9:45 a.m. Voigt moved to close regular meeting and open the Public Hearing for the Third Reading to Amend Mercer County Zoning Ordinance. Guenther seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried. Tax Director/Land Use Administrator Jennifer Neumiller conducted the Third Reading to Amend Mercer County Zoning Ordinance: Chapter 1, Section VII-Definitions: Definitions added for Data Center & Digital Asset Mining, Chapter 3, Section IV-Industrial District: Data Center listed as a conditional use, and Chapter 7, Section 1-Statutory Authorization -Requires NDCC Chapters update. Voigt moved to approve Chapter 1, Section VII as presented. Guenther seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried. Guenther moved to approve Chapter 3, Section IV as presented. Wolf seconded. Guenther and Wolf voted aye. Voigt and Folk voted nay. Motion tied and moved to April 1, 2026 agenda. Voigt moved to approve Chapter 7, Section 1 as presented. Wolf seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried. Wolf moved to close the Public Hearing and open the regular meeting. Voigt seconded. All voted aye. Lignite Coal Research & Development Vice President Mike Holmes answered questions regarding his presentation.

Recessed at 9:54 a.m.

Reconvened at 10:00 a.m.

The following Basin Electric representatives Senior Legislative Representative John (Jack) Schuh, VP of Strategic Planning and Communications Andy Buntrock, VP of Commercial Operations Daniel Gallagher, and Director of Property and Right-of-Way Mike Murray, NextEra Energy Executive Director of Development Heath Barefoot, and Roughrider Electric Representative Co-GM/CEO Manager Travis Kupper all spoke regarding a proposal for a large combined cycle natural gas fueled generation facility to be built primarily to serve a large hyperscale data center. Basin Electric in June, 2025 developed a formal process called the large load commercial program, to responsively accommodate new large energy demand in emerging industries while protecting our existing cooperative members. Under this program the large load customers are responsible for the costs associated with infrastructure needed to serve their needs, while insulating existing customers from higher electric bills. NextEra Energy entered into an MOU with Basin Electric, Roughrider Electric Power Cooperative, and Upper Missouri Power Cooperative to evaluate the feasibility of serving a potential multi-gigawatt hyperscale data center campus, which will require 1,000 – 1,500 acres of land. Due to the large amount of power needed a new power plant will need to be constructed. Economic benefits were stated. Public engagement is a priority and the first project open house will be on the afternoon and evening of March 30, 2026, at the Stanton

Civic Center. One of the many concerns raised by commission members and the public were possible usage of reclaimed properties for this proposed project.

Assistant Highway Superintendent Dennis Olheiser requested approval of the Golden Valley roof repairs bid from Roof Maxx for \$17,799.86 with polyurethane coating. Voigt moved to approve the Golden Valley roof repairs bid from Roof Mats for \$17,799.86 with polyurethane coating. Guenther seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried. Highway Department Administrative Assistant Rachel Grimm presented the U.S. Geological Survey Utility Permit #1775(26) for updating equipment on the bridge south of Hazen on County Road 27. Guenther moved to approve the U.S. Geological Survey Utility Permit #1775(26) as presented. Wolf seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried.

Mercer County resident Darwin Knutson requested additional polling locations. Public comments were given from Dwight Berger via phone, Wes Klein, Michael Berg, Wayne Windhorst, and Lori Hammer regarding the data center project.

Recessed at 11:06 a.m.

Reconvened at 11:11 a.m.

Payroll concern regarding lack of federal tax withholdings in 2025 was explained by HR/EM Director Alice Grinsteiner, who will be sending out a letter to all employees explaining how to check to ensure each person is getting enough federal tax withheld from their check.

New building discussion was placed on the April 1, 2026 meeting agenda.

Portfolio assignments were placed on the April 1, 2026 meeting agenda.

Portfolio updates were given.

Wolf moved to approve the bills as presented. Guenther seconded. All voted aye. Motion carried. The following bills were approved for payment: ARMOR INTERACTIVE \$2,606.00; ASKIM, CRAIG \$282.03; BEULAH LUMBER CO \$21.08; BEULAH ND HARDWARE \$79.90; BRONSON'S MARKETPLACE \$7,458.13; BUTLER MACHINERY CO \$123.30; CHARM-TEX, INC. \$107.70; CITY OF GOLDEN VALLEY \$29.75; D&E SUPPLY CO INC \$537.01; DAKOTA AWARDS, INC. \$24.99; DAKOTA BUSINESS SOLUTIONS INC \$1,195.00; ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS INC \$1,287.06; ESRI \$2,440.00; FIRESIDE OFFICE SOLUTIONS \$44.09; GALLS \$215.54; GOOD SOURCE SOLUTIONS \$400.00; HAZEN HARDWARE HANK \$177.44; HAZEN HEALTH PHARMACY \$700.20; HAZEN STAR \$419.28; HAZEN WELDING \$898.84; HR COLLABORATIVE \$150.00; HUSS, REBECCA \$39.72; INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT \$5,526.25; INTOXIMETERS INC \$375.00; KRAUSE SUPER VALU \$212.64; LANGUAGE LINE SERVICES \$211.02; MERCER COUNTY HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT \$1,474.60; MIDCONTINENT COMMUNICATIONS \$192.80; NAPA \$1,097.56; NATIONAL SHERIFF'S ASSOCIATION \$125.00; ND DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION \$8,955.42; ND SECRETARY OF STATE \$36.00; NEUBERGER OIL COMPANY \$80.00; NEXUS PLANNING & CONSULTING LLC \$8,402.50; NORDAK CENTRAL PUBLISHING \$325.00; North Central International, LLC \$718.68; NORTH DAKOTA CLERKS ASSOC. \$100.00; NORTHWEST TIRE AUTO SERVICE INC. \$1,005.72; OFFICE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL \$3,196.00; OFFICE OF THE STATE AUDITOR \$14,547.25; PENGUIN MANAGEMENT, INC. \$6,324.00; PFLIGER, METTA \$50.03; PHARMCHEM, INC. \$415.35; PRO FORMS \$181.48; PRO VISION \$326.03; QUADIENT FINANCE USA, INC. \$2,066.62; RDO EQUIPMENT CO. \$255.46; ROUGHRIDER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC \$1,396.28; ROUGHRIDER RV'S, INC. \$800.00; RUD PROPANE LLP \$6,816.36; SAKAKAWEA MEDICAL CENTER \$880.52; SEIFERT, BRADLEY Q \$287.99; SENGER,

SHANNAN \$105.90; SNIRTSTOPPER, LLC \$1,730.72; SOUTHWEST WATER AUTHORITY \$57.97; SRF CONSULTING GROUP, INC \$415.21; Stein's Inc \$271.35; STERICYCLE, INC. \$22.90; STREICHER'S INC. \$3,911.61; T-MOBILE USA, INC \$86.33; THE HUB CONVENIENCE STORES, INC. \$87.72; TYLER TECHNOLOGIES \$300.00; UNIFORM CENTER \$1,053.84; VERIZON WIRELESS \$534.44; WEST RIVER TELECOMMUNICATIONS \$2,464.83; WESTERN PLAINS PUBLIC HEALTH \$3,728.23; YANTZER, SARA \$24.71; YOUTHWORKS \$8,487.00; BIEBER, GERALD \$7.25; ESLINGER, MIKE \$7.25; HAFNER, KEVIN \$24.65; THOMAS, ANDY \$24.65 (TOTAL: \$108,965.18).

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 11:48 a.m. The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 1, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in the boardroom of the Mercer County Government Center in Stanton, North Dakota. Meetings can be viewed live at <https://www.youtube.com/@MercerCo>

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Jamee Folk, Vice Chairman

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_  
Carmen Reed, Auditor