

A REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING OF THE LEWISTOWN CITY COMMISSION ON MAY 4, 2026 WHICH WAS HELD AT THE CENTRAL MONTANA COMMUNITY CENTER AND STARTED AT 7:00 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Day called the meeting to order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Day asked everyone to stand and say the Pledge to the Flag.

ROLL CALL

Present were Commissioners: Bowser, Buehler, Day, Hewitt, Robertson, Shaver and Warren.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Day stated that without objection and based on the corrections the minutes for April 20, 2026 are approved.

COURTESIES

Commissioner Day explained that with the passing of the City Planner Doug Osterman, we would like to honor him by planting a tree. City Manager Phelps commented she will talk with the Park and Recreation Director to find a location for a tree and will notify the Commission when a location is confirmed.

PROCLAMATIONS

Chairman Day read the following proclamation:

Proclamation for National Historic Preservation Month 2026 City of Lewistown, Montana

Whereas, historic preservation is a vital tool for managing growth, revitalizing neighborhoods, fostering pride in local history, and maintaining the unique character of Lewistown while enhancing its livability; and

Whereas, Lewistown's rich heritage—from its early settlement and railroad history to its distinctive architecture—reflects the diverse stories and enduring spirit of Central Montana; and

Whereas, historic preservation is relevant for communities both urban and rural, and for residents of all ages, backgrounds, and walks of life; and

Whereas, it is important to celebrate the role of history in our lives and honor the dedicated individuals who work to preserve the historic places that shape our identity as a community; and

Whereas, the theme of National Historic Preservation Month 2026, **“Preserving History, Building Community,”** reminds us that protecting our past helps build a stronger, more resilient future for Lewistown; and

Whereas, May 2026 has been designated as **National Historic Preservation Month** by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, offering an opportunity to recognize and promote the preservation of Lewistown's historic resources, landmarks, and cultural heritage;

Now, Therefore, be it Resolved, that the City of Lewistown, does recognized **May 2026 as Historic Preservation Month** in Lewistown, and call upon all residents to join in celebrating and supporting efforts to preserve our shared history for generations to come.

City Manager Phelps reported that a couple weeks ago, we honored this year's Historic Preservation Award recipients. Ms. Paige Helmer and her parents received the Adaptive Reuse Award for the renovation of a residence located at 1114 W Main into the Juno Wellness site. City Manager Phelps reported that McKenna Agency building on Main Street also received an adaptive reuse project. The McKenna Agency building now houses an insurance company, real estate office and apartments above. City Manager Phelps reported Mr. Brandon Overland was also recognized for preservation efforts, including the First and Main Apartments and several restored residential properties.

BOARD AND COMMISSION REPORTS

Commissioner Bowser reported the Ordinance Committee and the Library Board meet the third Wednesday of the month.

Commissioner Robertson reported he attended the Public Works hiring ad hoc committee meeting. Commissioner Robertson reported the thing the Commission should know is there are seven positions similar to our public works position in municipalities and another six hundred similar positions statewide. Most offer significantly higher compensation than we do. Commissioner Robertson commented we offer a better quality of life in Central Montana, but not the same wage levels. There was a lot of ideas discussed on how to get the word out and hope a marketing campaign will be launched soon with help from local professionals.

Commissioner Buehler reported the Central Montana Foundation met last Tuesday. The major focus of the meeting was the review of the larger grants that will be awarded at the annual meeting on May 26. Commissioner Buehler further reported several smaller grant requests were approved.

Commissioner Hewitt reported the airport board meets Wednesday at 3:00 p.m.

Commissioner Day reported the Park and Recreation Board will also meet Wednesday. Commissioner Day commented the board will hopefully be touring the new multi-purpose building.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

City Manager Holly Phelps reported on the following issues:

City Manager stated that last week the Board of Adjustments (BOA) held their meeting. The Board of Adjustment voted to amend the approval of the parking variance and require additional lighting to improve safety in the area. The BOA voted to affirm the setback variance. The board members had spent several hours researching minutes, previous variances and reviewing recent state law changes prior to meeting and making their final decision. City Manager Phelps stated she would like to take a moment to directly address the misinformation circulating about the City's involvement in this apartment development. City Manager Phelps stated that at no point did she or anyone representing the City encourage the construction of a forty-unit apartment complex on this property. On the contrary, we advocated for lower density options such as townhomes, triplexes or fourplexes that would better align with the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

However, the reality is that the existing zoning, unchanged for over 30 years, allowed the developer to proceed with this type of development by right. This situation has made one thing very clear. Our current zoning framework does not adequately protect traditional residential neighborhoods, like we have in many areas of our community, from higher density developments like this that simply don't fit. As we move forward, we must take this lesson seriously. This means being more intentional, more proactive and more inclusive in our zoning decisions; ensuring meaningful community input happens early in the process, not after the fact. We owe it to our residents to get this right moving forward.

On May 19th the Department of Transportation will be having a local public meeting to comment on the Central Montana Transportation Study and specifically the Lewistown subarea. Preliminary recommendations have been developed but they are looking for comments from the public prior to finalizing the draft report. The meeting will be held at the Civic Center starting at 4 pm to 6 pm.

The swimming pool's opening day is June 6th. Lesson sign ups and pool passes will be sold on May 27th and 28th from 5 pm to 7 pm at the Civic Center. The City is still looking for lifeguards and the starting wage is \$15.00.

Department of Environmental Quality conducted their biannual compliance inspections. The full reports have been provided to the Commission. City Manager Phelps reviewed the findings and some findings were directly related to the construction efforts, which were the septic dumping station and that it did not have adequate spill prevention and response procedures for stored oil. Those were the three items noted on that portion of the inspection and the City does have some time to respond. The wastewater plant was also inspected and three violations were noted. All of those violations were laboratory related to testing or calculations.

We continue to work the zoning updates. It should be noted that we will be looking at amending or adding another zoning district to allow for a kind of mid-level middle density housing option. There is a lot of areas that need to be further developed in the City Codes. This is an opportunity to go through the process and get public comment on what the community would like to see in our zoning codes. The Planning Commission will play an active role. The City Manager is working to get a meeting scheduled to establishing their bylaws.

Commissioner Robertson commented that he appreciated the City Manager's opening comments of the City's involvement in the process regarding the Board of Adjustments.

PUBLIC COMMENT – non agenda items

Ms. Michelle Raney commented that she has been reviewing the growth plan and she feels the City is so focused on the growth plan that the City is not thinking about the consequences of the plan. Ms. Raney stated that if a proposed development is that big, the notices should have included a wider range of people because the residents a block away that were not notified will be affected by the parking and trash. Ms. Raney concluded by reiterating opposition to the proposed development and encourages further consideration of community feedback and zoning communication.

Mr. John Carlson addressed the Commission explaining the sound system is not very good and during the meetings he attended he had a lot of feedback with his hearing aids. Mr. Carlson stated communication is a key issue and if you're not hearing half of the stuff being said, then that's how rumors start.

CONSENT AGENDA

Commissioner Buehler made the motion to approve the consent agenda and Commissioner Bowser seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. The consent agenda was the acknowledgment of the claims that have been paid from April 17, 2026 to April 30, 2026 for a total of \$53,326.68.

REGULAR AGENDA – Resolutions, Ordinances & Other Action Items:

1. Discussion and action on appointing Katie Wirtzberger to serve a three-year term on the City of Lewistown Police Commission

City Manager Phelps explained Montana State Code recommends municipalities to have Police Commissions. Lewistown City Code requires a Police Commission of three members that each hold a three-year term. These are members our community and are tasked with helping with the interviews of police officers. The Police Commission sometimes assists with the disciplinary process. City Manager Phelps stated Ms. Faith See was one of the Police Commissioners and has decided to no longer serve in that capacity. As a result, the Police Chief has brought forth Ms. Katie Wirtzberger to be appointed to a three-year term. Ms. Wirtzberger is a Junior High teacher. City Manager Phelps commented that Dana Goodan and Ty Thomas are the other two citizens that serve on the Police Commission. Commissioner Buehler explained she would like interested applicants to complete the board application, which would provide their qualifications and interest in serving. Commissioner Buehler would like to know where the board vacancy was posted, how long it was posted for and how many candidates were interested. Commissioner Buehler made the motion to table making the appointment to the Police Commission until the next meeting and Commissioner Warren seconded the motion. Commissioner Shaver commented that he would like to review all of the boards listed in City Codes and make sure that all are reporting back to the City Commission. Commissioner Day asked for comments from the audience and Commission. There being none, the question was called for and the City Clerk took a roll call vote with all being in favor of the motion.

2. Discussion on City staffing. City Manager Holly Phelps

City Manager Phelps stated that in the packets was a staffing flow chart for the City of Lewistown and a list of generic responsibilities. Fire Chief Jimmy Jensen reviewed the advertising process for the open fire fighter position. Chief Jensen stated he does try to hire part paid fire fighters for the full-time positions. Chief Jensen explained there is a written test, physical agility test and an interview.

City Manager Phelps explained the Library staff are employees of the City of Lewistown; however, the Library Director answers to the Library Board in accordance with Montana code. City Manager Phelps explained the Library Director position is still open and the Library is currently staffed at about four and a half employees.

City Manager Phelps stated positions open in the Public Works department are the Public Works Director and a Street Worker position.

The Planning Director position is open.

City Manager Phelps explained the Recreation Specialist is still open. The Park and Recreation Director has been having high school kids to cover evening and weekends.

The City Office has an opening for a billing clerk.

Commissioner Shaver asked since the City Attorney is still out on leave do we contract work? City Manager Phelps answered the City did contract for the Board of Adjustments and the variances, however, there has not been a need.

Commissioner Robertson commented that with his many years in business in Lewistown, hiring professional staff is the hardest thing to do and there is nothing more difficult. There is not a big pool of people who have specialties in the areas. When professional staff move to town the two biggest challenges are spousal employment and housing. Commissioner Roberston reported that at the committee meeting they discussed aggressive marketing campaigns, type of flexibility could be offered, help with housing and spouse employment and lastly wages.

City Manager Phelps stated she thinks it is important to continue to explore recruitment options and promote the City of Lewistown as a desirable workplace and positive culture.

Ms. Jody Warren, 416 W Morase, commented that some places offer to pay off the student loan debt if you give five- or ten-year commitment. Commissioner Shaver asked who has been doing the Public Works Director's job. City Manager Phelps answered Superintendent Ernie Pallet and that she is licensed in water and wastewater and currently the only licensed water operator for the City of Lewistown. Further discussion followed. Commissioner Robertson commented we need to review the City's wage structure and compare compensation levels with similar communities in order to remain competitive and retaining employees. City Manager Phelps stated these types of adjustments can be looked at in the budget for the year moving forward.

CITIZENS REQUESTS

Ms. Raney informed the Commission that she heard from a local realtor there is not a lot of people moving into town. There is more housing available

COMMISSIONER'S MINUTE

Commissioner Warren commented that he gets asked about parking quite often. Commissioner Warren further commented we keep hearing how there are a lot of TIF funds and is there any way we could access the funds to purchase a property for paid parking area. Commissioner Warren stated this may help with people living in apartments on Main Street and some of the congestion.

Commissioner Warren reported there is a broken bench at Symmes Park. City Manager Phelps answered that if you let her know she will relay to the appropriate department.

Commissioner Warren stated he would like to disband the Board of Adjustments so it is done. Commissioner Warren further stated he would like it on the agenda so it can be voted on and the elected people should have the final say. City Manager Phelps stated she will look into, but think there is a 60-day window.

Commissioner Buehler thanked the Park and Recreation Director for the great tour of the Civic Center this evening. Commissioner Buehler stated she appreciates the care that each department takes when offering their departments services.

Commissioner Bowser commented she was thankful for the minutes being provided earlier.

Commissioner Bowser reported she received a call regarding the Berg Lumber building that blew onto private property and is wondering when it will be cleaned up. City Manager Phelps answered she will find out where we are at with cleaning it up.

Commissioner Shaver commented that someone rebuilt a ball park at Symmes Park and it's beautiful.

Commissioner Shaver agreed with Commissioner Warren that all of these boards need to be reviewed and make sure they are necessary and determine which are mandated by the State. Commissioner Shaver stated he would like to look at the job positions that are open. Commissioner Shaver further stated he is having a hard time with the City Attorney situation and know that other cities contract it out, and would like to see if that is something we should do.

Commissioner Day commented that at a previous Commission meeting there was public comment on options to promote the development of the Berg Lumber property and where are we with that. City Manager Phelps answered that she has reached out to Snowy Mountain Development to work with them on promoting that project and they were pretty receptive.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Day adjourned the meeting.

Dated this 4th day of May, 2026.

Loraine Day, Commission Chairman

ATTEST:

Nikki Brummond, City Clerk