

CLAY COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
5:00 PM, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2025
Meeting Room A / B – 3rd Floor – Courthouse
MINUTES

The Clay County Board of Commissioners met in regular session with the following Commissioners present: Paul Krabbenhoft, Ezra Baer, Kevin Campbell, and David Ebinger. Others present: County Administrator Stephen Larson, County Attorney Brian Melton, Assistant County Administrator Darren Brooke, and Senior Administrative Assistant Sarah Hellem.

Call to Order

Commissioner Campbell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Approval of Agenda

On motion by Commissioner Baer, seconded by Commissioner Krabbenhoft, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the agenda.

Approve \$100 Seed Money for Bank Account for Online Payment Acceptance - Recorder's Office

By consent, the Board approved the \$100 seed money for the bank account for online payment acceptance for the Recorder's Office.

Approve Renewal of Lease Contracts between Clay County and Rural Minnesota CEP, INC-Family Service Center

By consent, the Board approved the renewal of Lease Contract 1 and Lease Contract 2 between Clay County and Rural Minnesota CEP, Inc. for space located at the Family Service Center, under the terms and conditions outlined in the renewal agreements.

Approve Renewal of Lease Agreement with University of Minnesota Extension for Suite 107C, Family Service Center

By consent, the Board approved the renewal of the lease agreement between Clay County and the University of Minnesota Extension for Suite 107C in the Family Service Center.

Approval of Withdrawal Management/Detox Policies

By consent, the Board approved the Withdrawal Management/Detox policies.

Approval of Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP) Added Eligibility Language

By consent, the Board approved the added eligibility language to the Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP).

Citizens to be Heard

David Kragnes of Felton, MN, approached the Board and discussed his proposed 2026 ag land property taxes and provided comparable numbers between the taxes for different investments. Mr. Kragnes encouraged the Board to take these concerns to the state to advocate for rural Clay County farmers.

Approval of Payment of Bills and Vouchers

On motion by Commissioner Baer, seconded by Commissioner Ebinger, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the bills and vouchers totaling \$3,192,032 from 258 vendors. There were 185 warrants issued under \$2,000 (\$71,633) and the following 73 were over \$2,000.

Buffalo-Red River Watershed	\$ 1,407,396	Verizon-386550144	\$ 7,306
Treas Wild Rice Watershed	\$ 187,738	Amazon Capital Services	\$ 7,265
Otter Tail Public Health	\$ 115,318	Forum Communications Printing	\$ 6,638
Clay Co Public Health	\$ 114,266	General Equipment & Supplies Inc.	\$ 6,284
Sellin Bros Inc	\$ 89,091	Powerplan	\$ 5,991
Regents Of The Univ Of MN	\$ 88,750	Summit Fire Protection	\$ 5,750
West Central Regional Juvenile Center	\$ 68,214	Petro Serve Usa-Hwy	\$ 5,574
Clay County Social Services	\$ 66,215	Nitzkowski, Inc.	\$ 5,530
CB & Sons Electric, Inc.	\$ 61,675	Johnson's Auto Repair LLC	\$ 5,463
Trinity Services Group, Inc.	\$ 59,823	Anne M. Carlson Law Office, PLLC	\$ 5,180
Dennis Drewes Inc	\$ 59,503	Amherst H. Wilder Foundation	\$ 5,000
Becker County Public Health	\$ 48,374	Kinslow/Carrie	\$ 5,000
Enterprise FM Trust	\$ 48,129	Solutions Behavioral Health PC	\$ 4,695
Hough, Inc	\$ 46,649	Pomp's Tire Service, Inc.	\$ 4,575
Xcel Energy	\$ 44,871	Fevig Oil Co	\$ 4,512
Red River Regional Dispatch Center	\$ 43,293	Psychlogics	\$ 4,065
Moorhead Public Service	\$ 42,585	Clay County Public Health Dept (Jail)	\$ 3,784
ESRI, Inc.	\$ 42,200	Pro West & Associates Inc	\$ 3,668
Lakeland Mental Health Center, Inc.	\$ 40,568	Farmers Coop Oil Co	\$ 3,504
Becker County Highway Department	\$ 39,996	Verizon 386550144-00004	\$ 3,420
Wilkin Co Public Health	\$ 26,921	Medical Pharmacy (PH)	\$ 3,312
Paramount Planning Group LLC	\$ 24,000	Fuchs Sanitation Inc	\$ 3,298
Mn State Auditor	\$ 23,011	Ulteig Operations, LLC	\$ 3,154
Lutheran Social Service Of Mn	\$ 21,161	CivicPlus, LLC	\$ 3,150
Lyle Wilkens Inc.	\$ 19,924	Dakota Plains Mechanical, Inc.	\$ 2,994
Department Of Corrections	\$ 18,000	ANJAAM HOLDINGS, LLC	\$ 2,915
Code 4 Services, Inc	\$ 17,340	Otis Elevator, Inc.	\$ 2,875
JT Lawn Service	\$ 17,198	Thomson Reuters - West 590031	\$ 2,790
WEX Bank - Sheriff	\$ 14,259	Wold Johnson, P.C.	\$ 2,610
NEMO-Q, Inc.	\$ 12,247	MN Counties Intergovernmental Trust	\$ 2,500
Pemberton Law, P.L.L.P.	\$ 11,433	Galls, LLC - 5287110	\$ 2,320
Bert's Truck Equip of Moorhead, Inc.	\$ 11,389	Fidelity Security Life	\$ 2,292
Barnesville Record-Review	\$ 9,516	Titan Machinery Inc.	\$ 2,250
Town & Country Oil Inc.	\$ 9,409	Stantec Consulting Services, Inc.	\$ 2,247
Sanford Health	\$ 8,349	Office of MNIT Services	\$ 2,162
Oasis Mental Health & Wellness	\$ 7,800	Swanston Equip Corp	\$ 2,154
City of Pelican Rapids	\$ 7,534		

Approval of Minutes from November 25, 2025, and December 2, 2025

On motion by Commissioner Baer, seconded by Commissioner Ebinger, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the minutes from November 25, 2025, and December 2, 2025.

Request Approval of Out-of-State Travel for the Opioid Program Manager

Health Promotion Director Rory Beil requested approval of the out-of-state travel for the Opioid Program Manager, and stated this is a continuing education opportunity to expand the knowledge on opioid crisis management. The cost impact is \$2,000 which is fully funded by and approved under the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Overdose Prevention grant

On motion by Commissioner Baer, seconded by Commissioner Ebinger, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the out-of-state travel for the Opioid Program Manager to attend the National Opioid Conference in Austin, TX from February 26th - 27th, 2026.

Request Approval of Agreement with Otter Tail Valley Railroad

Highway Engineer Justin Sorum requested approval of the agreement with Otter Tail Valley Railroad and stated this is due to the roundabout construction, and needing to enter Railroad right-of-way.

On motion by Commissioner Krabbenhoft, seconded by Commissioner Baer, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the agreement with Otter Tail Valley Railroad.

Request Approval of Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2026

Assistant County Administrator Darren Brooke requested approval of the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) 2026. Mr. Brooke provided a brief overview on the number of employees, union data, and COLAs of comparable counties.

Commissioner Baer thanked Mr. Brooke for figuring out the average percentage between the comparable counties.

On motion by Commissioner Ebinger, seconded by Commissioner Krabbenhoft, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the Cost-of-Living Adjustment of 4% for 2026.

Clay County Sheriff - Salary Adjustment Request - Minnesota Statutes § 387.20

Sheriff Mark Empting requested a salary adjustment for 2026 pursuant to Minnesota Statute § 387.20. Sheriff Empting discussed going into his 8th year as Sheriff and throughout those years, never asking for a salary adjustment until now. The current compensation level no longer aligns with the increasing complexity of departmental operations, expanded service demands, and compensation trends in comparable jurisdictions. Sheriff Empting stated that this adjustment was built into his 2026 budget. Discussion ensued regarding comparable counties.

Commissioner Campbell asked if the motion needed to include the dollar amount. County Administrator Stephne Larson stated if this were approved today, a resolution will be brought forward next week that would designate the exact number per statute requirement.

Commissioner Campbell stated this was discussed in length at the Personnel Issues Committee (PIC).

On motion by Commissioner Ebinger, seconded by Commissioner Baer, and unanimously carried, the Board approved a 10% increase and a 4% COLA to the Clay County Sheriff's salary for 2026 resulting in an hourly wage of \$88.48.

Chief Assistant County Attorney - Salary Adjustment Request - Minnesota Statute 388.18

County Attorney Brian Melton requested a salary adjustment for the Chief Assistant County Attorneys in accordance with Minnesota Statute section 388.18. The Assistant County Attorneys recently negotiated a 9% raise, along with a 4% COLA, based on the market analysis and market adjustment needed for appropriate compensation for attorneys across the state and specifically within the County. The market considerations included the professional

responsibilities of the office, the volume and complexity of criminal and civil legal matters, and market comparisons with counties of similar size.

Mr. Melton further discussed the rationale as to why the adjustment is warranted. Therefore, it's suggested to consider compensation for the Chief Assistant County Attorneys in the amount of a 7% raise along with a 4% COLA.

Commissioner Campbell stated this also went to PIC and was recommended to the full Board.

Discussion ensued regarding grades and steps.

On motion by Commissioner Baer seconded by Commissioner Ebinger, and unanimously carried, the Board approved to adjust the Chief Assistant County Attorneys salaries as presented.

Clay County Attorney – Salary Adjustment Request - Minnesota Statute § 388.18

Mr. Melton requested a salary adjustment for 2026 in accordance with Minnesota Statute § 388.18. Considerations include the professional responsibilities of the office, the volume and complexity of criminal and civil legal matters, and market comparisons with counties of similar size. The current compensation no longer reflects the increasing legal workload and statutory obligations of the office. Therefore, it's suggested to consider a salary adjustment of a 7% increase and 4% COLA for the County Attorney.

On motion by Commissioner Krabbenhoft, seconded by Commissioner Ebinger, and unanimously carried, the Board approved to adjust the Clay County Attorney Salary as presented in the 2026 budget.

BREAK

The Board took a break from 5:56 p.m. to 6:03 p.m.

TRUTH IN TAXATION

Discuss 2026 Budget and Proposed Property Tax, Public Comment and Questions

Mr. Larson presented the Clay County Budget & Tax Levy for 2026 and discussed the budget timeline, the Summary of 2026 Tax Levy by Funds, Clay County Tax Levy, Clay County Budgeted Expenditures, Clay County Levy History, Clay County Budget History for Revenues and Expenditures, Summary of Expenditures by Departments – General Revenue, 2025 Assessment and 2026 Property Tax, 2025 Proposed Taxes, Summary of Estimated Market Values, Clay County – 2022 Revenue & Expenditures from the State Auditor's Office.

Commissioner Campbell stated this presentation was based on what the Board did to authorize a preliminary levy which needs to be done in September per statute.. Since that preliminary levy was set, Clay County personnel have done a number of things to bring the net levy down to 4.40%, resulting in a drop of 2.06% from the preliminary levy.

Loren Ingebretsen of Felton, MN, approached the Board to discuss the funding that was cut from the Lakes & Prairies Community Action Partnership (CAPLP) Rural Routes Senior Transportation Program. Mr. Ingebretsen sits on the Board of Directors for CAPLP and discussed the need for the rural bus, as it provides a way for seniors to stay in their homes, and asked the Board to consider providing these funds due to the importance of the program.

Brittany Nesvold of Felton, MN also discussed the need for the CAPLP Rural Routes Senior Transportation Program as it directly affects her family. Ms. Nesvold stated without that bus, her mom wouldn't be able to get to her medical appointments. Seeing the bus service end would be detrimental to her mom.

Mark Haugen of Hawley, MN stated he's been a volunteer for Rural Enrichment and Counseling Headquarters (REACH) in Hawley, and they have a volunteer senior driving program. The need for these services is increasing and encourages the Board to look at funding the CAPLP Rural Routes Senior Transposition Program.

Commissioner Campbell stated maybe the Board can revisit the CAPLP request at next week's meeting.

Mr. Ingebretsen thanked the Board for getting the levy down significantly and thanked the Board for listening and considering the Rural Routes Senior Transposition Program.

2026 Clay County Budget

Mr. Larson further discussed the changes that have happened since setting the preliminary levy and discussed the Summary of 2026 Tax Levy by Funds, which includes the 4% COLA, utilizing \$1.5 million in Fund Balance, and the decrease of \$403,475 in insurance, which drops the net levy to 4.40%.

Request Approval of Vacation Leave Carryover for County Administrator

Mr. Larson requested approval to carry over 44 hours of unused vacation. Approval of this request would allow the utilization of excess hours during the first pay period of the following calendar year, rather than forfeiting the accumulated leave as required under current policy. County personnel also have a mechanism available whereby, with mutual agreement between the department head and the County Administrator, employees may be permitted to carry over vacation hours beyond the standard 240-hour cap.

On motion by Commissioner Ebinger, seconded by Commissioner Krabbenhoft, and unanimously carried, the Board approved the authorization for the County Administrator to carry over 44 hours of unused vacation leave into the subsequent pay period.

Committee Reports/County Administrator Update/Discussions

- Commissioner Baer reported on meetings for Clay County Collaborative; Clay-Becker Partnership4Health CHB; AMC Transportation; MN Rural Counties Caucus; and AMC Annual Conference.
- Commissioner Ebinger reported on meetings for Kiwanis Club; NW Emergency Communication Board; AMC Public Safety; Clay-Becker Partnership4Health CHB; AMC Annual Conference; AMC Subcommittee - Treatment Court Initiative Advisory Committee; and PIC.
- Commissioner Krabbenhoft reported on meetings for Law Library; Legislative Planning; Clay County Collaborative; MIAC; AMC Annual Conference; CAPLP; and Extension Committee.
- Commissioner Campbell reported on meetings for PIC; AMC Annual Conference; MCIT Annual meeting; Lakes Country Service Co-Op; and PIC.
- County Administrator Stephen Larson reported on meetings for met with Darren Brooke;

budget discussion with Lori Johnson; Legislative Planning; met with Sheriff Empting; met with Robert Wilson; MIAC; MACA meeting; worked on the presentation for Public Safety meeting; AMC Annual Conference; Legislative Planning meeting; NSJD/PRTF; City/County Connect with Dan Mahli and Derrick LaPoint; worked on the TNT presentation; Step 3 union grievance; met with Matt Jacobson, Brian Melton and Darren Brooke regarding Scott Dahms and bringing an appeal to the District Court for the actions of the Planning Commission; PIC; and discussed Police Fundraiser – Coffee for Kids.

- Assistant County Administrator Darren Brooke reported on meetings for met with Stephen Larson on a variety of issues; Legislative Planning; 2026-2028 grids for the Unions Negotiations; met with Matt Jacobson regarding Planning & Zoning forms; Early Retirement forms/grids; AMC Annual Conference; met with Anna Moore; CDL discussion with Anna Moore and Corey Bang; MnCCC; Step 3 grievance; met with Stephen Larson, Brian Melton and Matt Jacobson regarding the Scott Dahms case; PIC; and Safety Committee.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Kevin Campbell, Chair
County Board of Commissioners

Darren Brooke, Assistant County Administrator