

**NORTHWEST COLLEGE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING**

January 12, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Ms. DENISE LAURSEN; Vice President/Secretary MR. R.J. KOST; Treasurer MR. BOB NEWSOME; and Trustees MR. JOHN HOUSEL, MR. SHANE OGDEN, and DR. MARK WURZEL.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Trustee Ms. TARA KUIPERS

OTHERS PRESENT: Ms. LISA WATSON, President; MR. DAVE ERICKSON, Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. TOM HAVRON, Vice President for Student Services; MR. BURT REYNOLDS, Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance; MS. JILL ANDERSON; MS. KAREN BERCHTOLD, MS. JACQUE COBOURN, MR. CASEY DEARCORN, MR. DUSTIN DICKS, MR. TY FLOCK, MS. TRACY GASAWAY, MS. ABIGAIL JEFFERY, MS. CAREY MILLER, MR. DENNIS QUILLEN, DR. GREG SMITH, MS. LISA SMITH, MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO, MS. SHELBY WETZEL, MR. ZAC TAYLOR, *Powell Tribune*; and MS. KELI BORDERS, Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Trustees.

CALL TO ORDER: President Denise Laursen called the regular meeting of the Northwest College Board of Trustees to order on Monday, January 12, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

A APPROVE THE AGENDA: **A motion was made by Trustee Ogden and seconded by Trustee Kost to approve the agenda. Motion carried.**

MISSION MOMENT

Vice President Havron stated that each year, one student is selected from each of Wyoming's eight community colleges for the Shaping Wyoming's Future award. These students are recognized for transforming their lives through their experience with the Wyoming Community College System.

Vice President Havron introduced Abigail Jeffery, who was chosen as Northwest College's award recipient. Abigail is a native of Park City, MT, and will graduate this spring with an Associate of Science degree in Pre-Occupational Therapy. She plans to continue her education through the Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program operated by the University of North Dakota in Casper. While keeping a busy schedule, Abigail has served in a variety of leadership roles and is involved in many campus activities and admissions events. Abigail will be presented with her award and a \$500 scholarship at the Capitol building in Cheyenne on February 12, 2026, at a private luncheon during the state Legislative session.

Abigail expressed her appreciation for the people and the services provided at Northwest College. She stated that her experience has been phenomenal, and the College is an excellent place for students to grow.

President Watson stated that there are students who tend to shine and make Northwest College a special place, and Abigail is one of them. She extended her congratulations and expressed her appreciation to Abigail for her contributions to Residence Life and Activities and for her welcoming nature to other students.

A CONSENT AGENDA: **A motion was made by Trustee Wurzel and seconded by Trustee Ogden to approve the consent agenda.**

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that in past budget cycles, Governor Gordon has recommended that cuts not be made as a result of House Bill 80 due to the pandemic and other budget cuts; however, he feels that with increased enrollments, it is time that the community colleges true up to HB 80. President Watson stated that, given the conservative

nature of the current Legislature, she doesn't expect WACCT or the WCCC to bring forward suggestions for changes to HB80.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that Interim Dean of Extended Campus and Workforce, Ty Flock, is currently surveying the local K-12 districts following their visits to determine whether the meetings were useful and whether there was additional feedback to continue the dialogue and strengthen relationships.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the CMVOST (Commercial Motor Vehicle Operator Safety Training) grant awarded to the College is for veteran scholarships in the CDL program. The College was also awarded the Workforce Pre-hire grant, which amounts to \$150,000 in scholarship dollars from both grants that will be available to eligible students interested in the CDL program.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the Enrollment Management team has developed an Operational Plan that provides focus for the year based on goals outlined in the Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that FY2026 tuition and fee revenue is down approximately 2-3% from the expected budget due to reduced enrollment. However, Vice President Havron noted that the College welcomed 100 new students for the Spring semester, possibly due to new initiatives to drive enrollment, such as the free class program and additional scholarship opportunities.

Motion carried, and the consent agenda, including the minutes of the December 8, 2025, regular meeting, was approved.

DISCUSSION/ INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Capstone Report – Hanover

President Watson stated that the College is in its final year of a three-year contract with Hanover Research, a research firm hired to support the College in its Strategic plan. Northwest College prioritizes fostering communication and engagement with external stakeholders, optimizing existing academic programs, and advancing local workforce development. A Community Needs Survey and a Regional Needs Assessment were completed, intended to measure the success of the College's efforts in these areas.

Feedback from Hanover indicates that the College is unique among the other colleges they work with. President Watson stated that the College has exceptional employees and the benefit of a community and culture that is caring, interested, and recognizes the value of higher education. The challenge with reports such as these is determining what can be implemented or changed based on the feedback received, resources, and sustainable need.

Several projects have been completed with Hanover, some more extensive than others. For instance, the College received WIP funding for Outdoor Education that was focused on equipment. Through survey work, it was determined that there was an opportunity to develop a Ski Operations program, which the College implemented and accepted students into this past fall.

The College felt there was a need to work with K-12 to determine whether the College is meeting their needs and what could be done to better serve them. In-depth interviews were conducted with superintendents and principals, as well

as teachers and counselors. This allowed the College to learn from many different viewpoints regarding the needs of area schools and how best to work with them.

Employer Needs Assessment surveys have also been conducted in the Healthcare Sector, with project outcomes pending. Next, two Needs Assessments are in development in the Agriculture Industry, geared at Farming and Ranching.

The Capstone Report provides an overview of the completed projects, promising programmatic opportunities, potential directions for continued study, and outcomes resulting from the various studies.

President Watson stated that the difficult part of the high-level study and the process of receiving a list of potential programs is determining whether they are viable. However, it can be determined whether further analysis or research is needed in a given area. For instance, Cosmetology is listed as a potential growth opportunity; however, the data only represent public institutions. Given the presence of private institutions operating in Cody, Lovell, and Billings, the College would need to further explore the feasibility of starting a program.

The purpose of doing these studies is to determine if current program offerings meet the needs of students and employers. It also provides the College with an opportunity to prioritize where to spend time, research, and funding for the development of new programs. It allows the College to stay responsive to the students and community that it serves.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that when Hanover refers to Northwest College as “standing out among its other two-year college partners,” it is comparing it to many colleges and universities nationwide. For example, they were surprised by the level of engagement from the College’s partners they received during the Healthcare and K-12 interviews.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the College has not asked Hanover to research the costs of developing any of the suggested programs. The work thus far has been focused on building on existing relationships and establishing the College’s programmatic inventory to determine needs. The College could potentially work with Hanover to do further analysis on program development costs in the future.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that during the WIP analysis, it was determined that the majority of jobs in the hospitality sector are not high-paying. Because other Wyoming schools provide retail and hospitality management programs, Northwest College has historically focused on Outdoor Education.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the Fire Science/Fire-Fighting program was suggested as an opportunity based on the Economic Regional Needs Assessment, based on job growth and student interest. Casper College has a well-established Fire Safety program, and the Cody Fire Department also conducts fire safety training. The College would need to conduct further analysis to determine whether there is sufficient opportunity to implement its own Fire Science program.

In response to a question from Trustee Wurzel about creating a program that meets the needs of area businesses that may require workers with broad skill sets, President Watson stated that the College has discussed developing programmatic themes. For instance, while creating a diesel mechanic program

would be cost-prohibitive, maybe the College could create a diesel technician program. The College has discussed conducting further research on certificate or associate offerings in technology analysis, so that, when completed, students would be able to analyze data and reach a conclusion or determine a solution.

President Watson stated that the College works closely with Workforce Services, Job Services, and Vocational Rehabilitation to better understand employer needs in the area.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that when Hanover considers new program opportunities for the College, it also considers the cost of developing and maintaining the program relative to the number of students needed to “break even” and the number likely to enroll in any given semester.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that Hanover’s student interviews found that the cost of attendance is the most valued factor in choosing a college, which is why the College works hard to build scholarship funds. But the College must also provide relevant academic programs to meet students’ interests and employers’ needs.

Legislative Session Letter and Guiding Principles

President Watson stated that she provided a listing of WACCT’s (Wyoming Association of Community College Trustees) Legislative Guiding Principles in the Board packet. Erin Taylor, WACCT Executive Director, has requested that Trustees provide feedback on advocacy priorities before the Legislative session.

Also included in the Board packet is a letter to the Joint Appropriations Committee on behalf of WACCT outlining concerns about the lack of consideration for key budget elements in the Governor’s budget, as requested by the Wyoming Community College Commission.

President Watson recommended that Trustees visit the WACCT website throughout the budget session to stay abreast of developments in Cheyenne.

Trustee Kost stated that Erin Taylor will be hosting Zoom meetings on Fridays during the Legislative session. Trustees were sent notices earlier in the day.

Policy Review – 1300 Mission

Trustees reviewed Policy 1300 Mission. There were no suggested changes.

CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM

The Citizens' Open Forum convened at 5:00 p.m. No citizens requested to address the Board; therefore, the Citizens’ Open Forum adjourned.

A UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There were no unfinished business items on the agenda.

A NEW BUSINESS:

Course/lab fee proposals

Vice President Erickson explained that the course fee proposals for the Nursing and Art courses are due to increased vendor pricing.

A motion was made by Trustee Housel and seconded by Trustee Wurzel to approve the course/lab fees as presented. Motion carried.

ORB Renovation Change Order

Vice President Reynolds stated that as part of the ORB renovation project, the College is requesting that Trustees approve a change order utilizing plant fund revenues and reserves.

The change order includes redesigning the President's Office and Foundation to provide emergency egress for safety and security, and improve functional and collaborative space. Modifications to the Academic Affairs and Business Offices enhance functionality and accessibility. In addition, it is recommended that transom windows be installed in strategic locations throughout the building to bring natural light into interior spaces. The total cost for the change order is \$70,000, including \$63,649 for materials and installation, and a 10% contingency for unforeseen issues.

Vice President Reynolds explained that performing the work during the current renovation prevents the need for future construction that would cause displacements and disrupt daily operations.

A motion was made by Trustee Kost and seconded by Trustee Ogden to approve the ORB Renovation Change Order, not to exceed \$70,000, as presented.

Trustee Housel stated that when the Facilities Committee toured the ORB project, he noticed that many of the walls in the building are rough cinderblock that has been painted over. He feels that if it's not cost-prohibitive, it would be a good time to cover the walls to improve the building's ambiance and appearance.

President Watson stated that the College could seek estimates on improving the finish of the walls. Her concern would be the time it might add to the project and the potential delays in moving back into the building. However, she feels it could be cost-effective to complete the work now and would improve the space's appearance. She is amenable to investigating the costs.

Motion carried.

Set Date for March Board Meeting

President Watson stated that she has been asked to present at a conference in Pittsburgh during the week of the March Board meeting. She has not been told the actual date she will be presenting and is concerned it may interfere with the Board meeting.

Trustees elected to wait and see whether the dates conflict and stated they are open to the President participating in the Board meeting via Zoom if needed.

Set Date for April Board Meeting

President Watson stated she will be attending the AACCC Conference in Seattle the week of the April Board meeting. She suggested moving the April meeting to April 15th or April 20th. Keli will create a Doodle Poll to determine the best date that works for everyone.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS
FEEDBACK TO CITIZENS'
OPEN FORUM TOPICS:**

February 9, 2026, upcoming:

- Designation of depositories
- Disclosure of Interest forms (to be completed by March meeting)
- Completions and Transfer Summary
- Student Center Memo
- FY2027 Proposed Residence Hall Rates
- FY2027 Proposed Meal Plan Rates
- FY2027 Proposed Mandatory Student Fees
- Other TBD

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

New Student Orientation, Jan 12, 2026, YB, NWC
Classes begin Jan 13, 2026, Northwest College
MBB/WBB vs. LCCC, Jan 15, 2026, 5:30/7:30 p.m. NWC
Wrestling vs. WWCC, Jan 16, 2026, 6 p.m. NWC
MBB/WBB vs. EWC, Jan 17, 2026, 2:00/4:00 p.m. NWC
MBB/WBB vs. WWCC, Jan 21, 2026, 5:30/7:30 p.m. NWC
Wrestling vs. Colorado Northwestern, Jan 22, 2026, 6 p.m., Vernal, UT
Wrestling vs Snow/Trinidad, Jan 23, 2026, Richfield, UT
MBB/WBB vs. Gillette, Jan 24, 2026, 2:00/4:00 p.m., Gillette, WY
MBB/WBB vs. Casper, Jan 28, 2026, 5:30/7:30 p.m., NWC
Wrestling – Apodaca Duals, Jan 30-31, 2026, NWC
MBB/WBB vs. EWC, Feb 5, 2026, 5:30/7:30 p.m., Torrington, WY
Wrestling vs. University of Providence, Feb 7, 2026, 1 p.m., NWC
MBB/WBB vs. LCCC Feb 7, 2026, 2:00/4:00 p.m., Cheyenne, WY
Next meeting, February 9, 2026, 4:00 p.m., YB, Powell, WY

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

A motion was made by Trustee Kost and seconded by Trustee Newsome to move into Executive Session. Motion carried, and the Executive Session convened at 5:47 p.m.

A ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

R.J. KOST, Vice President/Secretary

Date