

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

September 14, 2026

MEMBERS PRESENT: President Ms. DENISE LAURSEN (via Zoom); Vice President/Secretary Mr. R.J. KOST; Treasurer MR. BOB NEWSOME; Trustees MR. JOHN HOUSEL, MS. TARA KUIPERS, MR. SHANE OGDEN, and DR. MARK WURZEL (via Zoom).

MEMBERS ABSENT:

OTHERS PRESENT: MS. LISA WATSON, President; MR. DAVE ERICKSON, Vice President for Academic Affairs; MR. BURT REYNOLDS, Vice President for Administrative Services and Finance; MS. JILL ANDERSON, MS. ERIN BEAVERS, MS. JACQUE COBOURN, MS. ANNA CRAGOE, MS. KAREN DECKERT, MR. DUSTIN DICKS, MS. TRACY GASAWAY, MS. CHRISTI GREAHAM, MR. JEFF GREAHAM, MS. KATHLEEN JACKLING, MS. JESSICA JATKOWSKI, MS. MICHELE O'BRIEN-ROSE, MS. DOSSIE OVERFIELD, DR. GREG SMITH, MS. LISA SMITH, MS. BRITTA SPANN, MR. CHRIS THOMAS, MR. OSCAR TREVIÑO, MS. SHELBY WETZEL, MR. LOGAN STAYTON, *Powell Tribune*; and MS. KELI BORDERS, Executive Secretary to the President and Board of Trustees.

CALL TO ORDER: Vice President/Secretary R.J. Kost called the regular meeting of the Northwest College Board of Trustees to order on Monday, September 14, 2026, at 4:02 p.m. in the Yellowstone Building Conference Center.

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

MISSION MOMENT President Watson introduced new and reassigned employees to Trustees. Those present for introduction were Erin Beavers, Nursing and Health Professions Program Specialist; Jeff Greaham, Fitness Center Specialist; Kathleen (Kat) Jackling, Assistant Professor of Sociology; Michele O'Brien-Rose, Instructor of Business; Britta Spann, Assistant Professor of English as a Second Language; Christi Greaham, Training and Development Program Coordinator; Jessica Jatkowski, Instructor of Political Science; and Chris Thomas, Instructor of Business.

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

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that the Wyoming Community College Commission approved its supplemental budget requests and forwarded them to the Governor's Office. Because the upcoming legislative session is a policy year, not a budget year, the Governor is very conservative with budget requests. Additional information regarding the Governor's approval is anticipated in early November.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel regarding enrollment, President Watson stated that as of September 6th, headcount is up 4% (full-time – 1%, part-time – 6%), and FTE is up 2% (full-time – 2%, part-time – 1%). The number of students taking dual and concurrent classes increased by 7%, while dual and concurrent credits increased by 12%. Statewide enrollment appears to be relatively flat.

Recent statutory changes have expanded dual enrollment opportunities, and the College continues to work with area high schools, counselors, and homeschool families to provide information and help students enroll.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that she attends Forward Cody and PEP meetings and recently met with members of the Big Horn County Economic Development group. Her participation with these

groups allows her to stay engaged in regional needs and projects and to share information about the College's programming and learn about needs that can support areas of growth.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson said the boilers in the Yellowstone Building failed and needed replacement. The College completed the work in-house, saving considerable labor costs.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson said that College employees replaced the roofs on the pump houses and water stations at the Field Station.

In response to a question about international student enrollment, President Watson said the most recent count was in the mid-90s, but she did not have the current number.

In response to a question from Trustee Housel, President Watson stated that both bachelor's degree programs are running and a new Business cohort began this fall.

In response to a question from Trustee Kuipers, President Watson stated that the Orendorff project is substantially complete, departments have returned to the building, and remaining electrical, plumbing, and signage items are being completed. The College will host an open house and an 80th anniversary celebration on October 13th from 4-6 p.m.

Trustee Kuipers expressed her appreciation for the new clinical placement opportunity for nursing students within the Park County jail system. She appreciates that students are being placed into community sites for expanded learning experiences.

Motion carried, and the consent agenda, including the minutes of the August 10, 2026, regular meeting, and the August 27, 2026, Special Meeting/Mini Retreat, was approved.

DISCUSSION/ INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

HLC Accreditation

President Watson provided an update on Northwest College's upcoming Higher Learning Commission comprehensive evaluation. The College follows the Higher Learning Commission's (HLC) Open Pathway and is preparing its Assurance Argument for the College's ten-year comprehensive review. Institutional Research Manager Lisa Smith serves as the College's ALO Officer, and Dean of Student Learning Martin Stensing serves as instructional support.

President Watson explained that the College must write an Assurance Argument explaining the work it's doing related to four criteria areas. Members of the Accreditation Steering Committee have been assigned writing responsibility for sections of the Assurance Argument. The College is working toward completion of a rough draft during the Fall 2026 semester to allow sufficient time to gather and link supporting evidence, incorporate updates, and edit the document into a consistent narrative.

President Watson stated that Northwest College's Comprehensive Evaluation Visit is scheduled for September 27-28, 2027. During the visit, HLC peer reviewers will meet with various campus groups, including members of the Board of Trustees.

VPAA Dave Erickson also discussed the College's required Quality Initiative. The initiative has focused on redesigning academic program review, analyzing academic program demand, revising support-service program review, and exploring and developing co-curricular assessment. Although the final report is due June 1, 2027, the College intends to complete and submit it by the end of the Fall 2026 semester.

Lisa Smith highlighted two criteria related to the Board of Trustees. Criterion 2.A Integrity - states that the actions taken by the institution's governing board, administration, faculty, and staff demonstrate adherence to established policies and procedures; and 2.C Board Governance – states that in discharging its fiduciary duties, the institution's governing board is free from undue external influence and empowered to act in the best interests of the institution, including the students it serves.

Employee satisfaction/ PACE survey results

Lisa Smith presented the results of the 2026 PACE Climate Survey. Of the 249 employees surveyed, 132 (53%) completed the survey.

Lisa reported that Northwest College's mean scores were higher than both the PACE Normbase and the comparison group of small institutions across all climate factors. The College's overall mean score was 3.986 on a five-point scale.

The highest-rated items reflected employees' understanding of their responsibilities regarding anti-harassment and anti-discrimination, pride in their work, and belief that their jobs are relevant to the College's mission. The lowest-rated items related to compensation, opportunities for advancement, and employees' ability to influence the institution's direction.

Employees were asked supplemental questions related to student success and best practices. Responses indicate that employees are more familiar with how the College identifies degree pathways for students and assesses learning outcomes. They are less familiar with how the College tracks student employment after graduation, labor market outcomes, and how it disaggregates data to show how programs serve different groups of students.

Employees were also asked three open-ended questions related to their successes, barriers to success, and areas they wanted administration to address. Employees indicated they feel most successful when their supervisors demonstrate confidence in them and their abilities, communicate clearly, and offer opportunities for involvement. Barriers centered around budgeting and funding, specifically regarding compensation and benefits. They would like leadership to continue to support morale and effectiveness.

President Watson stated that the College continues to focus on employee retention, compensation, and professional development. She noted that advancement opportunities can be limited within a smaller institution because there are fewer administrative levels and positions into which employees can advance.

2026 President's Operational Plan

President Watson reviewed the FY2026 President's Operational Plan and updated the Board on activities and outcomes tied to the College's strategic priorities.

President Watson stated that many initiatives are multi-year projects and will continue into FY2027. Work has included implementation of the 2030 Strategic Plan, enrollment and marketing initiatives, grant development,

employee recruitment and retention, academic programming, student-success initiatives, and campus revitalization.

President Watson highlighted continued work on strategic enrollment and the MORE campaign, including collaboration among Admissions and Marketing to strengthen recruitment messaging. She also noted completion of the Orendorff Building renewal project and the return of departments to the renovated building.

The FY2027 Operational Plan is currently being developed and will continue to align annual priorities with the 2030 Strategic Plan.

Trustee Ogden expressed appreciation for the Operational Plan format and its transparency in identifying initiatives that remain in progress or require multiple years to complete.

Policy follow-up –
2130 Board Communications

President Watson revisited Policy 2130 Board Communications following the Board's discussion at its August meeting. She feels the number of changes needed to the policy exceeds the minor changes the Board has made to various policies during its review cycle. Procedures related to Policy 2140 Board Policy Development suggest a process in which employees are involved through shared governance. She requested that the changes follow the regular policy-change process.

President Watson stated that she would take Policy 2130 back for refinement through the procedural process, then back to the Board in a timely manner.

Policy Review – 2140 Board
Policy Development

Trustee Ogden questioned whether the procedure should be removed from Policy 2140 and noted that the Board has the authority to create, revise, adopt, or revoke policy.

President Watson stated that before the Board Policy Manual was created, the College operated through an employee handbook. When the College worked to develop the Board Policy Manual, discussions occurred around separating procedure from policy. It was determined that, as policies were reviewed or developed, procedures would be separated and provided to ensure transparency for employees.

President Watson stated that there is a lot of history around shared governance and campus involvement. Due to this history and the development of the Policy Manual, not all procedures associated with policy are broken out. From review of other college manuals, it was noted that procedures may or may not be provided. If the Board decides to eliminate procedures from all policies, the President, will need to work on creating a procedure repository.

President Watson noted that the procedures outlined in Policy 2140 can slow the process, as the college does not schedule for constituent members to be available to work on policy full-time. In response to a question from President Laursen, President Watson said there are no legal concerns about listing procedures with the policy.

Trustee Housel stated that, having served on the Board Policy Committee for many years, he understands the history and work that went into creating Policy 2140 and its procedures. After visiting and revisiting this particular policy many times, what is before the Board for review is the outcome. He appreciates that it provides criteria and elements for the policy development process.

Trustee Ogden stated that he is concerned that, because the procedures are listed under the policy, they also become policy. In that case, any small changes the Board makes during the policy review process would violate the policy.

Trustee Kuipers stated that while she appreciates the history and the sensitivity of separating policy from procedure, she's not in favor of listing procedures with the policy. She feels the Board should not manage process and procedure and doesn't want the campus community to perceive the Board as overstepping or disregarding the role of the President and the use of shared governance.

In response to a question from Trustee Ogden, President Watson said the College attorney thoroughly vetted the policy when it was created. It clearly states that the Board oversees policy, and that the College's process for managing the operational flow of creating policy is procedural.

Trustee Ogden questioned whether the current language clearly identifies which policy changes require the full shared-governance review process and how the Board may exercise its statutory authority when circumstances warrant more immediate action.

In response to a question from Trustee Laursen, President Watson stated that now that the College has completed its two major construction projects, has hired a Grant Writer, etc., it can focus on policy work.

President Watson expressed her appreciation for Trustees' comments and thoughtful consideration. Trustees can further consider whether to remove procedures from the Board Policy manual and revisit the topic during the October Board meeting.

Distribute Board Self-Assessment
and President's Evaluation

President Watson stated that Trustees will be receiving the Board Self-Assessment and President's Evaluation instruments electronically. She encouraged Trustees to complete the assessment and evaluation before the Fall Retreat, particularly those Trustees whose terms are ending.

CITIZENS' OPEN FORUM

The Citizens' Open Forum convened at 5:00 p.m.

Karen Deckert, a former Northwest College student, attorney, and parent of a first-year Northwest College student, addressed the Board regarding the Residence Life and Housing Residence Hall Guide/Owner's Manual. She stated that, in her opinion, applying certain provisions may raise concerns about due process and other legal protections.

No other citizens requested to address the Board; therefore, the Citizens' Open Forum adjourned at 5:03 p.m.

A UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There were no unfinished business items on the agenda.

A NEW BUSINESS:

Course/lab fee proposal

VPAA Erickson presented proposed Allied Health course fee changes. He explained that costs associated with required software and certification examinations have increased and that the division has absorbed some of those increases. The proposed changes align fees with the actual costs associated with the Clinical Medical Assistant and Medical Office Assistant programs.

A motion was made by Trustee Ogden and seconded by Trustee Laursen

to approve the Allied Health fee changes as presented. Motion carried.

VPAA Erickson presented a proposed change to the CDL course fee for the credit pathway. He explained that when the credit pathway was established, additional institutional and course fees were not fully accounted for, resulting in the credit option costing more than the non-credit option.

The proposed adjustment reduces the course fee associated with the credit pathway so that the total cost is approximately \$300-\$350 less than the non-credit option. VPAA Erickson stated that the adjustment is intended to encourage students to pursue the credit pathway, which also allows the College to receive state reimbursement for credit-hour enrollment.

A motion was made by Trustee Kuipers and seconded by Trustee Ogden to approve the CDL course fee change as presented. Motion carried.

Resolution

President Watson presented a draft resolution regarding Initiative #1 on the November 2026 ballot and its potential effect on Northwest College's local property-tax revenue. The draft had been developed by WACCT and circulated for revision among the Wyoming community college Presidents and their Board Presidents.

Finance Director Mark Grant explained that the College has already experienced a reduction in residential property tax revenue, combined with the reallocation of funding through the funding allocation model, resulting in an approximately \$1.2 million reduction. The College developed the current budget with these reduced funds by removing discretionary funds from every line, including utilities.

President Watson stated that the College has eliminated four open positions following retirements and has no flexibility remaining in most operational areas. She said additional revenue reductions would result in reduced programs, services, and/or positions.

Trustee Wurzel stressed the importance of informing the public about the potential financial impact on Northwest College and other state agencies. He would like to pass the resolution now to allow ample time to educate the public on the financial impact of passing Initiative #1 in November.

A motion was made by Trustee Wurzel and seconded by Trustee Kuipers to approve the Resolution. Motion carried.

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

October 12, 2026, upcoming:

- Longitudinal Enrollment Report
- Academic program updates
- President's Operational Plan
- Reserve overview
- Facilities Master Plan update
- Strategic Plan update
- Policy Review – Policy 2200 Board Membership
- Other TBD

Following the Citizens' Open Forum, Trustee Housel stated that the concerns raised appeared to be more appropriately addressed directly by the College President.

President Watson stated that she had not previously been made aware of the specific matter raised during the Open Forum. She noted that the College

maintains student and residence-life policies and procedures that have undergone legal review and stated that she would review the concerns and work on an appropriate resolution.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Volleyball vs Miles CC, Sept 18, 2026, 7 p.m., Miles City, MT
W & M Soccer vs. Casper, Sept 18, 7 p.m., Casper
W & M Soccer vs. Gillette, Sept. 19, 3 p.m., Gillette
High School Arts Immersion Day, Sept 22, FAB
Volleyball vs Gillette, Sept 25, 6 p.m., NWC
Vocal Jazz Academy, Sept 26, LCCC
W & M Soccer vs. Central, Sept. 26, TBA, NWC
Volleyball vs. Casper, Sept 26, 2 p.m., NWC
W & M Soccer vs. LCCC, Oct. 3, 2 p.m., Cheyenne
Volleyball vs. Eastern, Oct. 2, 6 p.m., Torrington
Volleyball vs. LCCC, Oct. 7, 6 p.m., Riverton
WCCC meeting, Oct. 8-9, 8:30 a.m., Rock Springs
W & M Soccer vs. Northeastern Junior College, Oct. 9, 1 p.m., Sterling, CO
W & M Soccer vs. Lamar CC, Oct. 10, 3 p.m., Lamar Valley, CO
NCO – Small Groups, Oct. 10, 6:30 p.m., Student Center
Next Board Meeting, Oct 12, 2026, 4 p.m., Yellowstone Building

A ADJOURNMENT:

The meeting adjourned at 6:37 p.m.

R.J. KOST, Vice President/Secretary

Date