



**Board of Riley County  
Commissioners  
Regular Meeting  
Minutes  
February 9, 2026**

2101 Claflin Road  
Manhattan, KS 66502  
[www.rileycountyks.gov](http://www.rileycountyks.gov)

Cindy Kabriel  
785-565-6200

**Family Child and Resource Center RM #124**

**8:30 AM**

[District 1 – John Ford, Vice-Chair](#)

[District 2 – Greg McKinley, Member](#)

[District 3 – Kathryn Focke, Chair](#)

**8:30 AM**

**Call to Order**

| Attendee Name     | Title                                 | Status  | Arrived  |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| John Ford         | County Commissioner                   | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Kathryn Focke     | County Commissioner                   | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Greg McKinley     | County Commissioner                   | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Rich Vargo        | County Clerk                          | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Jacob Hansen      | County Counselor                      | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Brittany Phillips | Budget and Finance Officer            | Present | 8:30AM   |
| John Ellermann    | Public Works Director/County Engineer | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Alvin Perez       | Operations and Fleet Manager          | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Vivienne Leyva    | PIO                                   | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Anna Burson       | Appraiser                             | Present | 8:30 AM  |
| Elizabeth Ward    | Human Resources Director              | Present | 8:36 AM  |
| Shilo Heger       | Treasurer                             | Present | 9:24 AM  |
| Michael Hawthorne | Assistant County Counselor            | Present | 9:24 AM  |
| Katharine Hensler | Museum Director                       | Present | 10:08 AM |

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Public Comment**

**Commission Comments**

Ford's Comments:

Not a lot going on at the end of the week and into the weekend. I did attend the 77<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Riley County Conservation District at Pottorf Hall. After some opening

welcomes and introductions, they had their regular business meeting, including passing of the minutes from 2025 and an update of both the treasurer and annual report. Had an election of two new supervisors, and we had dinner which was catered by the Farmhouse. Ashlee Westerhold was the guest speaker and she spoke on farming and ranching retirement. Then the Kansas Bankers Association award was presented to Buzz and Rose Harris and the Riley County Conservation District Award was presented to Brian and Stacy Wurtz.

The rest of the weekend was spent at home. I did watch Super Bowl LX last night with some friends as the Seattle Seahawks beat the New England Patriots 29-13 in a game that really wasn't all that close.

#### McKinley's Comments:

Thursday afternoon was the Pre-Law Board meeting. Director Peete was out so we met with Deputy Director Freidline. Discussed what was on the agenda and added some things we wanted to cover. We went over the budget process with the finance manager and showed her some changes we would like to see this year. We want to see more detail in the personnel cost breakdown.

Thursday I had a long call from a resident in the Swede Creek area. He had a lot of questions about maintenance and snow removal on county and township roads. He also had some complaints about the pay structure. I have talked this over with John Ellermann and Alvin Perez to gather the correct facts. I will be calling him back later today.

Saturday we went to the 3 Dog Night concert at the Stiefel Theater in Salina. Enjoyed the show but people evidently were shorter when this was built 90 years ago.

#### Focke's Comments:

Thursday afternoon I attended the Pre-Law Board meeting at the RCPD headquarters. We, along with Commissioner McKinley, discussed the upcoming Law Board meeting. An addition to the agenda will be calls outside of Riley County, including time and other issues needing RCPD intervention. We also added an additional executive session.

Friday I went to my scheduled appointment with my neurosurgeon, however, they had changed the appointment to February 3rd without my knowledge, so had to reschedule, this time in Topeka in March. Friday evening, I went to the Riley funeral home for family visitation for Mel Nudson.

On Saturday I went to his funeral in Keats at the Lydia Chapel. Afterwards, I caught up with some housework and walks with my dogs.

Sunday I went to my friends' home to watch the Super Bowl. It was a fun time, especially the half time show.

#### **Business Meeting**

**Review Minutes**

1. Board of Riley County Commissioners - Regular Meeting - Feb 5, 2026 8:30 AM

Move to approve the minutes of February 5, 2026 as presented.

|                  |                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>Passed</b>                           |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Commissioner John Ford                  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Commissioner Greg McKinley              |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Greg McKinley, Kathryn Focke, John Ford |
| <b>NAYS:</b>     | None                                    |

**Review Tentative Agenda**

2. Tentative Agenda

**Press Conference Topics****9:00 AM****Rich Vargo, County Clerk**

3. Year to Date Budget and Expenditures

Vargo presented the year to date budget and expenditure reports.

**9:15 AM****Laurie Harrison, Emergency Management Coordinator**

4. Adoption of the Region I Hazard Mitigation Plan

Stukey requested the adoption of the Region I Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Move to approve "Resolution No. 020626-05, Adopting the Kansas Homeland Security Region I Hazard Mitigation Plan."

|                  |                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>Passed</b>                           |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Commissioner John Ford                  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Commissioner Greg McKinley              |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Greg McKinley, Kathryn Focke, John Ford |
| <b>NAYS:</b>     | None                                    |

**9:30 AM****Press Conference**

5. Riley County 2026 Property Valuation Increase and Notification - Anna Burson (3 minutes)

Burson presented the Riley County 2026 Property Valuation Increase and Notifications.

Burson said the Riley County Appraiser's Office has completed its required studies and analysis for the 2026 property valuations. Change of Value Notices (CVNs) will be mailed to property owners on February 25th.

Burson said CVNs show how a property's value has changed from the previous year. Changes may be due to shifts in the local real estate market or updates made to

individual properties, such as additions, removals, renovations, or classification changes.

Burson said in 2025, the average price of all valid home sales in Riley County was \$301,998, compared to \$275,000 in 2024 and \$265,000 in 2023. The median home price in 2025 was \$270,000, up from \$250,000 in 2024 and \$238,000 in 2023.

Burson said the median price is often a better measure of market trends. Burson said the median price is a more reliable reference point because it is less affected by unusually high or low sales.

Burson said based on current market data, residential property values show an overall average increase of 3% to 10%. Commercial property values are trending upward by 2% to 6% on average. Individual property values may vary and may not follow these general trends due to property-specific changes, data corrections, or market activity within a particular area.

Burson said as in previous years, the CVN mailing will include a form for property owners who wish to appeal their valuation. To meet Kansas statute requirements, appeal forms must be fully completed, signed, and returned to the Riley County Appraiser's Office within 30 days of the mailing date. Appeal request forms may be emailed, dropped off, or mailed with postmark no later than March 26th.

Burson said appeal forms can be emailed to [valuationappeal@rileycountyks.gov](mailto:valuationappeal@rileycountyks.gov) or delivered to the Appraiser's Office on the third floor at 110 Courthouse Plaza, Manhattan, KS 66502. An appeals phone line 785-537-6316 is available for appeal related questions or to request information only. Appeals cannot be filed by phone. Once a completed and signed form is received, staff will contact the property owner or their authorized representative to schedule an appeal meeting.

Burson emphasized that a higher property value does not automatically mean higher taxes. Burson said our role is to determine fair market value based on sales. Burson said we do not set tax rates. Property tax bills reflect a property's share of the budgets approved by the commissions, school districts, cities, and other taxing authorities. The mill levy represents the amount needed to fund those budgets. Property valuation simply determines how that cost is shared.

Burson said property data for parcels in Riley County can be viewed online using the Parcel Search data at Beacon - Riley County, KS - Search with updated values displaying by noon on February 27th. Property record cards, change of value notices, and comparable sales reports are accessible through the site.

Burson said residents may contact the Riley County Appraiser's Office at (785) 537-6310 for general questions or if your questions are directly related to an appeal, please call the Appeal Line at 785-537-6316.

6. Public Notice - Alvin Perez (1-2 minutes)

Ellermann said a culvert replacement project on N. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street is scheduled to begin

Wednesday, February 11, 2026. The project is located approximately 5/10<sup>th</sup> of a mile west of W. 59<sup>th</sup> Avenue. During construction N. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street will be closed to through traffic from W. 50<sup>th</sup> Avenue west to Kitten Creek Road. The work is expected to be completed on the same day weather permitting.

**9:35 AM Shilo Heger, Treasurer**

7. January 2026 Treasurer Report

Heger presented the January Treasurer's Report.

**9:50 AM Jacob Hansen, County Counselor**

8. Administrative Work Session

Hansen discussed SB 254 regarding illegal aliens receiving benefits.

Hansen discussed SB 329 regarding appraisers issuing a single appraisal report.

Hansen discussed SB 335 on public construction contracts.

The Board agreed by consensus for Hansen to provide testimony on SB 335.

Ford asked Hansen to track HB 2745.

9. Staff Update

Hansen stated they are working with departments on items and the church litigation.

**10:10 AM John Ellermann, Public Works Director/County Engineer**

10. Monthly Update

Ellermann presented the Public Works monthly update.

Ellermann discussed issues with carpet installation in the CPE Commission Chambers renovation. He said carpet cannot be installed until March 1, 2026.

**10:25 AM Michael Hawthorne, Assistant County Counselor**

11. Executive session to discuss confidential legal advice regarding pending litigation issues

10:25 a.m. Move that the County Commissioners, including Chairwoman Focke, Vice Chairman Ford, and Commissioner McKinley, along with Jacob Hansen, County Counselor, and Michael Hawthorne, Assistant County Counselor, attorneys for the commission, recess into executive session for legal consultation regarding pending litigation, an exception to the Kansas Open Meetings Act, the open meeting to resume in the County Commission Chambers at 10:35 a.m.

|                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b> | <b>Passed</b>          |
| <b>MOVER:</b>  | Commissioner John Ford |

|                  |                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Commissioner Greg McKinley              |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Greg McKinley, Kathryn Focke, John Ford |
| <b>NAYS:</b>     | None                                    |

10:35 a.m. Move the Board of County Commissioners come out of executive session.

|                  |                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>Passed</b>                           |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Commissioner John Ford                  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Commissioner Greg McKinley              |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Greg McKinley, Kathryn Focke, John Ford |
| <b>NAYS:</b>     | None                                    |

Move the record reflect action shall be taken consistent with the consensus reached in executive session.

|                  |                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>Passed</b>                           |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Commissioner John Ford                  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Commissioner Greg McKinley              |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Greg McKinley, Kathryn Focke, John Ford |
| <b>NAYS:</b>     | None                                    |

## 10:35 AM Katharine Hensler, Museum Director

### 12. Staff Update

Hensler presented the Historical Museum update.

### Adjournment

10:51 a.m. Move to adjourn.

|                  |                                         |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>Passed</b>                           |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Commissioner John Ford                  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Commissioner Greg McKinley              |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Greg McKinley, Kathryn Focke, John Ford |
| <b>NAYS:</b>     | None                                    |

### Announcements

Riley County Planning Board/Board of Zoning Appeals meeting will be held tonight at 7:00 p.m. in Room #124 at the Family & Child Resource Center, 2101 Claflin.