THE OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF
THE WESTERN NEBRASKA REGIONAL
LAND BANK BOARD MEETING

April 1, 2026

A meeting of the Western Nebraska Regional Land Bank (WNRLB) Board was held in open session on April 1, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. in the Gering City Hall Conference Room, 1025 P Street, Gering, NE and via Zoom teleconference. Present were Board Members Nancy Garrett, Gabe Ingram, Tony Kaufman, Amy Newman (1:06 p.m.), John Stinner and Sarah Flores. Absent: Brady Shaul. Also present were the following: Pat Heath (Gering City Administrator), Annie Folck (Gering City Engineer), Karen Heins (Gering Admin Support) and Michelle Coolidge.

1. **Call to Order and Roll Call**
   Board Chair Tony Kaufman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. It was noted that a quorum of the WNRLB Board was present and business could be conducted.

2. **Open Meetings Act**
   Chairman Kaufman reviewed the Nebraska Revised Statutes Chapter 84, Article 14, which requires at least one copy of the Open Meetings Act be posted in the meeting room. Notice of the meeting was given in advance thereof by publication in the Star Herald, the designated method of giving notice. Availability of the agenda was communicated in advance to the Media and Board Members. All proceedings hereafter were taken while the meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

3. **Approval of Minutes of the March 9, 2026 WRNLB Board Meeting**

   A motion was made by Board Member Stinner to approve the minutes of the March 9, 2026 WRNLB Board meeting. Seconded by Board Member Ingram. There was no discussion. The Secretary called the roll. "AYES": Flores, Kaufman, Garrett, Stinner and Ingram. "NAYS": None. Abstain: None. Absent: Newman and Shaul. Motion carried.

4. **Discussion on Establishing Criteria and Guidelines for Property Acquisition and Disposition**
5. **Discussion and Identification of Potential Properties**
   Chairman Kaufman opened the discussion by introducing the need to establish criteria and guidelines for property acquisition and disposition and invited Michelle Coolidge to provide an overview of available options.

   Michelle Coolidge explained that acquisition strategies would depend largely on the specific property and its status. She noted that considerations include whether an owner is identified, and whether the property could be purchased outright, donated, or acquired through foreclosure or other legal processes. She emphasized that the approach would vary based on the circumstances of each property.

   Annie Folck added that staff had compiled a list of potential properties and initially filtered out those that were still occupied, noting that the group did not need to address occupied properties at this early stage. She explained that reviewing specific examples would help illustrate the range of situations. Ms. Folck also referenced discussions from a recent NPCA conference, highlighting the concept of setting a maximum acquisition amount (e.g., $5,000) to encourage voluntary cooperation from property owners, which could be more cost-effective than pursuing legal action.

The Board discussed whether to first identify properties or establish criteria, concluding that both topics were closely related and should be considered together. Ms. Folck then presented several example properties, describing varying conditions such as estate disputes, severe deterioration, longstanding neglect, and properties with significant back taxes.

Discussion followed regarding challenges associated with tax sales, particularly in light of a recent court ruling requiring purchasers to compensate property owners for equitable value. Members expressed concern that this ruling reduces the attractiveness of tax foreclosure as a tool. Questions were raised about how equity is calculated and whether investments made by the Land Bank (e.g., cleanup or demolition) could be factored into that valuation. The Board agreed that clarification from legal counsel would be necessary.

Board members also discussed the financial implications of acquiring and rehabilitating properties, noting that costs to clear or improve properties could exceed their market value. Some suggested that offering property owners a modest payment to voluntarily relinquish ownership could be more efficient than pursuing legal remedies.

Ms. Coolidge emphasized the importance of being strategic and intentional in acquisitions. She cautioned against acquiring properties without a clear plan for redevelopment or disposition, stressing the need to prioritize efforts based on community goals. She further explained that each community should establish its own process for identifying and prioritizing properties before referring them to the Land Bank.

The Board discussed the role of local communities in vetting properties and developing priority lists. Chairman Kaufman summarized that each city should identify and evaluate potential properties, then submit a prioritized list to the Land Bank. He suggested beginning with a limited number of projects—potentially one per community—to ensure a manageable and effective start.

Members also discussed prioritizing properties that could be donated, as well as those with strong redevelopment potential. The importance of aligning with developers and understanding market demand was emphasized, including the possibility of preparing sites for housing development or partnerships with local schools and workforce programs.

Further discussion addressed the need to establish clear processes for different acquisition methods, such as donations, tax foreclosures, and condemnations. Ms. Coolidge confirmed that each method would require distinct procedures and that the Land Bank's role would be to evaluate and prioritize properties once referred by the communities.

The Board acknowledged that local processes—such as Problem Resolution Teams (PRTs), planning groups, or other entities—may vary by community but must be formalized and approved to ensure proper authority for property referral. Ms. Coolidge offered to assist communities in developing these processes and indicated she would begin drafting recommendations.

Members agreed that establishing clear procedures and maintaining compliance with state requirements is critical. Chairman Kaufman emphasized the importance of having a well-defined, transparent process in place to withstand scrutiny and ensure accountability. Discussion also included funding considerations. It was noted that both Gering and Kimball had contributed approximately $100,000 each to support Land Bank efforts. Additional funding opportunities, including private sector contributions and partnerships, were discussed. Members expressed interest in expanding funding sources to ensure sufficient resources for project completion.

The Board further considered operational factors, including ongoing maintenance responsibilities for acquired properties and the potential role of city staff in managing those duties. Opportunities to leverage workforce development programs, including high school construction programs, were also discussed as a way to support redevelopment efforts. Michelle Coolidge indicated she would coordinate with communities and provide draft procedures and updates at the next meeting. Board members expressed support for moving forward with developing local processes and identifying initial pilot projects, with particular interest in beginning with a donated property in Kimball to demonstrate the program's effectiveness.

The discussion concluded with consensus that the next step is to push responsibility back to the individual communities to formalize their property identification and prioritization processes, which will then feed into the Land Bank's decision-making framework.

6. **Update on Incorporation Status**
The Board briefly discussed the status of the corporation's formation. It was confirmed that the necessary documents have been filed with the Secretary of State, though formal approval is still pending.

Michelle Coolidge reported that she has been in contact with an attorney from the Banking and Finance Division who had previously advised the Falls City Land Bank. She stated that she forwarded the current organizational documents for preliminary review and anticipates that, once approval is received from the Secretary of State, a required letter from the division can be issued. Ms. Coolidge noted that efforts are being made to move the process forward as efficiently as possible, acknowledging that finalizing the organization name has caused some delays.

The Board also discussed the need to develop materials to support outreach and funding efforts. Chairman Kaufman suggested creating a professional presentation or informational packet that could be shared with potential private-sector partners and stakeholders. He noted that such materials would be necessary to support larger funding requests and allow organizations to present the opportunity to their respective boards for consideration.

Ms. Coolidge indicated that she could build upon existing materials and assemble a packet for this purpose.

Board members discussed potential funding structures, including multi-year commitments, and expressed general agreement on the importance of securing additional financial support.

7. **Next Steps**
Chair Kaufman summarized that the Board's priority is to establish clear processes, coordinate with local communities, and ensure compliance with legal and procedural requirements before proceeding with acquisitions.

8. **Open Comment:** Discussion or action by the Western Nebraska Regional Land Bank Board regarding unscheduled business will not take place. This section is for citizen comment only.

There were no citizen comments.

9. **Adjourn**

Motion to adjourn was made by Board Member Stinner and it was seconded by Board Member Newman. There was no discussion. On roll call vote, the following voted "AYE": Kaufman, Flores, Garrett, Newman, Stinner and Ingram. "NAYS": None. Abstain: None. Absent: Shaul.

Meeting adjourned at 1:48 p.m.

Tony Kaufman, Chairman

ATTEST:

Karen Heins, Administrative Secretary