



First District News

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April 2026

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First District Welcomes Carla Heuer

Hello! My name is Carla Heuer, and I am the new Planner with First District. I am originally from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where I grew up just outside of the downtown area. In 2013, I moved to Watertown, where my family and I now live in a beautiful historic home – also in the downtown!

My husband and I have three children – a 12-year-old, an 8-year-old, and a 4-year-old. As a family, we love spending time outdoors. Some of our favorite activities include camping, gardening, fishing, and hiking. We also enjoy traveling together and have a goal of visiting all 50 states. In my personal time, I enjoy birding, golfing, and reading. My husband and I are also founding board members of both the Watertown Angler’s Association, which focuses on youth fishing and outdoor education, and the Watertown Curling Club.

Prior to joining First District, I worked for the City of Watertown for five years, where I gained valuable experience and had the opportunity to learn a great deal about planning, zoning, and community development. During that time, I earned my Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) certification.

I am excited to be part of First District and look forward to continuing to grow my knowledge and expand my skill set as a planner while serving the region.



Governing Body

The next First District Governing Body meeting with lunch provided will be on Thursday, April 30th at 12 p.m. at our office located at 418 18th Ave NE, Watertown. Agendas will be mailed at a later date.





MY THOUGHTS... By: Todd A. Kays



I am very glad to see Spring in the windshield and the 2026 legislative session in the rearview mirror. This year there were many bills in the legislature that had the potential to impact local units of government. The following is a recap of some of those bills related to planning, economic development and local government.

Originally there were 13 bills introduced that dealt with Tax Increment Financing (TIF). 12 of the bills were either withdrawn, tabled or deferred to the 41st day. SB 228 was a compromise bill that addressed many of the issues identified in the other TIF bills. SB228 modifies TIF district provisions to tighten regulations and ensure financial feasibility. It requires third-party fiscal feasibility review for new TIFs, limits blight criteria from 25% to 50%, and mandates municipal consent for county-created TIFs. The "compromise" bill aims to balance development with fiscal responsibility.

Another "popular" or perhaps "unpopular" topic was Data Centers. A total of ten bills were introduced, with eight ultimately defeated. Several proposals aimed at providing tax incentives or increasing transparency (HB 1005, HB 1246, SB 234 and SB 239) all failed.

Four additional bills focused on regulatory and local governance issues. These included proposals to establish a one-year moratorium (SB 232), limit nuisances (SB 127), set water and electricity requirements (SB 128), and require conditional use permits from adjacent political subdivisions (HB 1198). All were defeated, largely due to concerns that they would infringe upon local control.

Of the two bills that were passed, HB 1038 allows the Public Utilities Commission to assess the actual costs of processing service contracts directly to data centers, ensuring that ratepayers are not responsible for those expenses. SB 135, known as the "Data Center Bill of Rights for Citizens," is intended to protect local utilities and residents from the infrastructure demands of large data centers. The measure requires data centers to cover their own electricity costs, limits eligibility for tax exemptions, and affirms the authority of local governments to regulate data center development.

When it comes to my favorite "local control" topic, there were nine bills introduced that would impact local planning and zoning. Let's start with the bills that failed: **SB 166** was introduced to mandate that county commissioners and zoning commissions hold meetings after 5 p.m. or provide public recordings for later viewing. **SB 1159** aimed to impose a state-wide moratorium on new or expanding industrial dairy operations exceeding 7,499 cows, the bill was withdrawn at the request of the prime sponsor. As previously stated, **HB 1198** would have required a county or city to ask permission of another unit of local government to issue a conditional use permit if a "data center" would be located within a mile of the adjoining city or county. The bill, was deferred to the 41st legislative day. **HB 1288** was an attempt to modify how counties or municipalities adopt ordinances, specifically regarding mining regulations. Basically, it was an attempt to allow a county with a comprehensive plan, but no zoning regulations, to adopt mining regulations absent adopting a comprehensive zoning ordinance. The bill, was deferred to the 41st legislative day.

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For those bills that passed: **SB 3** limits the authority of counties, municipalities, and townships to require permits for specific residential, owner-occupied improvements. The bill aims to reduce hurdles for homeowners, specifically exempting exterior items like siding, windows, and gutters, as well as interior renovations. **SB 91** Clarifies the procedure for petitioning a board of county commissioners regarding changes to comprehensive plans or zoning ordinances. The only substantive change is that a petition to “rezone” property or initiate a textual change to the ordinance now has to be filed with the County Auditor or a person designated by the Planning Commission and a copy of the petition needs to be provided to the Board of County Commissioners. **SB 92** clarifies the rights to appeal and refer certain decisions made by boards of county commissioners. No specific substantive changes were made, basically an attempt to provide a better roadmap for appeals. **SB 129** updated state references to align with the 2024 standard building codes, impacting building regulations. Finally, **SB 237** mandates that counties provide written notice to township supervisors at least ten days before holding hearings on conditional use applications or appeals that impact public infrastructure or rights-of-way.

In January, we said goodbye to Jessica Tesch. Jesse served the district for the past three years, including the last two as a Planner. We wish her all the best in her new career. In February, we welcomed Carla Heuer as our new Planner. Carla is a great addition to the team, bringing valuable experience from her previous tenure with the City of Watertown. That background will serve her well in her role as Hamlin County Zoning Officer.

Last but not least, I would be remiss if I did not congratulate our Office Manager, Suzie Zirbel, on her tenth anniversary with the First District. Over the past decade, Suzie has streamlined operations and introduced ideas that have made the office more organized and productive. I cannot imagine this place without her.

I look forward to seeing you at the April 30th Governing Body meeting. Happy Spring!



FUNDS AWARDED

Brookings-Deuel Rural Water System – \$4,700,000
SDDANR DWSRF loan

Brookings-Deuel Rural Water System – \$1,300,000
Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program loan
100% principal forgiveness

Bryant – \$2,259,000 SDDANR CWSRF loan with
\$1,298,000 in principal

Bryant – \$2,643,000 SDDANR DWSRF loan with
\$2,116,000 in principal

Clear Lake – \$2,130,000 SDDANR CWSRF loan

Clear Lake – \$2,496,000 SDDANR DWSRF loan with
\$1,361,000 in principal forgiveness, \$200,000 CWFCP
grant

Elkton – \$632,000 SDDANR CWSRF loan , \$593,000
CWFCP grant

Elkton – \$512,000 SDDANR DWSRF loan, \$863,000
CWFCP grant

Howard – \$2,816,000 SDDANR CWSRF loan

Kingbrook – (Hamlin County) \$131,804 HMGP grant

Kingbrook – (Kingsbury County) \$158,330 HMGP grant

Lake Norden – \$196,693 SDDOT TAP grant

Lake Poinsett Sanitary District – \$6,299,000 SDDANR
CWSRF loan, a \$2,000,000 CWFCP grant, \$500,000
General Fund grant

Milbank – \$15,500,000 SDDANR CWSRF loan,
\$2,000,000 CWFCP grant

Wilmot – \$850,000 SDDANR CWSRF loan

White – \$596,018 SDDOT TAP grant



**First District
Governing Body Officers**

Mike Bartley.....Chairperson
 Brookings County At-Large

Gary Jaeger.....Vice Chairperson
 Deuel County At-Large

Myron Johnson.....Secretary
 Codington County Commissioner

Todd A. Kays.....Executive Director

Upcoming Events

- April 30**—Governing Body Meeting
- May 25**—Memorial Day, Office Closed
- June 19**—Juneteenth, Office Closed
- June 24**—STIP Meeting, First District Office
- July 3**—Independence Day, Office Closed

DEADLINES FOR SUBMITTING DOCUMENTS TO THIS OFFICE MAY BE PRIOR TO DEADLINES LISTED HERE. PLEASE CONTACT OUR OFFICE.

- October 15**—Bridge Improvement Plan Deadline
- April 30, July 31, Oct. 31, & Jan. 31**—Deadlines for Local Infrastructure Improvement Program
- April 1, July 1, Oct. 1, & Jan. 1**—Deadlines for State Revolving Fund (SRF) Applications
- April 1 & Oct. 1**—Deadlines for CDBG Applications
- May 1, Aug. 1, Oct. 1, & Feb. 1**—Deadlines for State Water Plan (SWP) Applications

SAVE THE DATE

STIP

On June 24, 2026 at 10:30 a.m., representatives from the SD Department of Transportation (SDDOT) will be in the First District Office to give a preliminary look at the 2027-2030 tentative Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Agendas will be sent out to the auditor at a later date.