

BRAINERD LAKES REGIONAL AIRPORT
JANUARY 8, 2026, MEETING MINUTES

A brief discussion began about the Airport Manager employment agreement prior to the start of the meeting amongst the Commission.

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, the regular meeting of the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission was called to order at 9:30 a.m. in the Airport Conference Room by Commissioner Neil Bratney.

The following Commission members were noted present: Steve Barrows, Neil Bratney, Andrew Shipe, and Kevin Yeager. Members noted present according to Minn Statute 13D.021 via video call: Darrel Palmer. Glen Nygard was present at the table but was unable to vote due to term expiration. Also present: Jessica Ruehling; Assistant Manager of Administration, and Michelle Baird, Consulting Engineer Program Manager.

APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS:

A. Chair Nomination:

Neil Bratney nominated Darrel Palmer for Chair. Second nomination is from Kevin Yeager for Darrel Palmer for Chair. All members present voted “aye” in favor of Darrel Palmer for Chair of the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission.

B. Vice Chair Nomination:

Kevin Yeager and Darrel Palmer nominated Neil Bratney for Vice Chair at the same time with a Second from Andrew Shipe. All members present voted “aye” in favor of Neil Bratney for Vice Chair of the Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – Approved.

MOVED AND SECONDED BY BARROWS AND SHIPE, DULY CARRIED THAT THE AGENDA BE APPROVED.

CONSENT CALENDAR – Approved.

MOVED AND SECONDED BY YEAGER AND BARROWS, DULY CARRIED THAT THE CONSENT CALENDAR BE APPROVED.

Upon roll call, all members present voted “aye” to approve the Consent Calendar.

APPROVAL TO PAY BILLS – Approved.

Discussion about reviewing 2025 financials and budget. Ms. Ruehling advised that the 2026 adjusted budget will be an agenda item at the regular meeting in February and additional financial items can be discussed at that time.

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MOVED AND SECONDED BY BARROWS AND YEAGER, DULY CARRIED THAT THE PAYMENT OF ALL BILLS DISTRIBUTED AND REVIEWED WITH THE COMMISSIONERS VIA EMAIL AND DURING THE MEETING BE APPROVED.

Upon roll call, all members present voted “aye” to approve to pay the bills emailed to Commissioners prior to the meeting.

PUBLIC FORUM

Introductions and Items Not on Agenda

Michelle Baird; Mead & Hunt, Mike Petersen; Hangar Tenant, Mark Nesheim; Wing’s Airport Café, Sarah Peterson; Wing’s Airport Café, Coreen Roberts; Hangar Tenant, Whitney Jeninga; Unifi, Aaron Hautala; Strateligent, Zach Jackson; Local Pilot, Walt Robets; Hangar Tenant – Mr. Roberts provided the Commission with information about missing NOTAMs in the system for pilots and there were piles of snow on the ramp that if left overnight could cause a hazard to pilots. Mr. Palmer advised that Neil has been absent due to some health issues and some of this could have been lack of management oversight, but staff should know what to do and he thanked Mr. Roberts for the information. Cory Zeien; ARFF/Operations. (Mr. Planzer reviewed these minutes for Jan. 8, and will advise Mr. Roberts to contact the Operations staff about immediate concerns and he will advise that this is not a NOTAM issue.)

REPORTS

A. Airport Staff & Marketing/Creative Services

Ms. Ruehling briefly reviewed the staff report with the Commission and added that BLAEDC and CTC will be out at the airport working on the advertising monitors as the majority of the screens are currently shutdown. BLAEDC has also assumed the cost of the annual fee for the airport to have those monitors. Mr. Bratney asked if staff has heard any information from the DOT about the Essential Air Service Contract. Ms. Ruehling advised that no new information has been received.

Strateligent presented press release information that is planned and ready to be released once the airport receives confirmation on the new contract with the airlines. The press release included quotes for the Commissioners. Three quotes were provided: one for Mr. Yeager, one for Mr. Palmer and one for Mr. Bratney. Each of these quotes were approved for Strateligent to use in this press release. The press release will be sent out once confirmation is received from the DOT. Mr. Bratney asked which media reaches the public the most? Mr. Hautala informed the Commission that the biggest bang for your buck is radio because it reaches multiple counties. Walt Roberts: Hangar Tenant also advised that word of mouth is a great way to inform the public.

B. Consulting Engineer

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Mead & Hunt reminded the Commission that the airport submitted a grant request to replace HVAC and boilers in the terminal building back at the end of October, we are still waiting for that. We will be submitting a second grant request for the same exact main terminal HVAC and boilers. The airport can only accept one but applying for both increases the chances for at least one to be approved. The second grant request is due to be submitted by January 16, 2026. Michelle is working with Jessica to get this completed and turned it in on time. Mead & Hunt is working on the final design portion of the taxi lane and helipad project. There is a meeting set up for January 21st with the airport, Mead & Hunt, Brainerd Helicopter and North Memorial to discuss the project. The project should take about a month and a half to complete and the tentative plan is to begin the first week of August.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. Airport Manager - Hiring

Two employment agreements were provided to the Commission for the new airport manager. The Commission discussed the employment agreements, and they felt that the agreements don't have enough details about the term or expectations of the airport manager. Mr. Yeager, Mr. Barrows and Mr. Palmer all agree that this agreement doesn't have enough information to formally adopt the new manager. Her tentative start date was January 12, 2026, but the Commission wants some of the details of the employment agreement flushed out and brought back to a special meeting for review. Mr. Barrows suggested to table this for one week and once it's agreed upon, airport staff will distribute it to the Commission and then meet at a special meeting for approval.

Motion to table the approval of the presented employee agreement for one week and then gather at a special meeting to review and approve a complete agreement that the Commission can review via email prior to the meeting. After not hearing a second and further discussion, the motion was withdrawn.

The Commission is in agreement that they would like to see a complete employment agreement. The document lacks information about performance reviews, or severability. Discussion about the term of the agreement and it was agreed that the document would be worded with employment at will with annual reviews.

Motion to turn the presented employment agreement back to Neil Planzer; Interim Director, to work out the arrangements with Jennifer Roach and craft an employment agreement for the new Airport Manager and present it to the Commission for review and approval.

MOVED AND SECONDED BY YEAGER AND SHIPE; DULY CARRIED THAT THE PRESENTED EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT BE TURNED BACK TO NEIL PLANZER; INTERIM DIRECTOR, TO WORK OUT THE ARRANGEMENTS WITH JENNIFER ROACH AND CRAFT AN EMPLOYMENT AGREEMENT FOR THE NEW AIRPORT MANAGER AND PRESENT IT TO THE COMMISSION FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL.

Upon roll call, the motion passes with a 4-1 vote with Commissioner Bratney voting no.

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Mr. Bratney proposed that the Commission offer Jennifer a contract to begin work from January 12 through February 28 until the employment agreement is completed. It was questioned that she could work under the 12-month probationary period. It was agreed that it might be risky to have another contract provided to her.

Mr. Barrows advised that the Commission needs to start looking at what their authority is as the Airport Commission vs. Brainerd and Crow Wing. We need to utilize our own agreements and stop using the City's. This would make the airport more independent, and it would be clearer for the Commission to know what their authority is.

Commissioner Palmer left the meeting via Teams at 10:24am.

B. Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Top Priorities

The Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Top Priorities list didn't have any changes from the previous month and with the absence of the Interim Director, the list was provided to the Commission as an ongoing opportunity for discussion during the regular meetings.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Personnel Policy Manual Review/Update

The Commission would like to review the revised Personnel Policy Manual and the redlined copy prior to approval.

Motion to request staff to distribute the revised Personnel Policy Manual and the redlined copy to the Commission for review prior to next month's meeting.

MOVED AND SECONDED BY YEAGER AND BRATNEY; DULY CARRIED, TO REQUEST STAFF TO DISTRIBUTE THE REVISED PERSONNEL POLICY MANUAL AND THE REDLINED COPY TO THE COMMISSION FOR REVIEW PRIOR TO NEXT MONTH'S MEETING IN FEBRUARY.

Commissioner Barrows noted that Mr. Nygard has not been taking votes during today's meeting because his term was up at the end of December and it is approved for him to be present but isn't able to vote on any matter.

B. Pay Equity Discussion & Report

Pay Equity reports are required to be completed by the airport every two years. Information was provided to the Commission with the bill report. This missed distribution with the meeting packet because it wasn't yet received by City HR. The completed pay equity report gets submitted to the state with completed information about pay for all staff. The biggest change for this report is the role and pay change for Jessica Ruchling. Commissioner Yeager informed everyone in the room that the purpose of sending the bills out after the meeting packet is to collect any additional bills received between that day and the Tuesday prior to the meeting, included for review and approval during the regular meeting.

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Motion to table the pay equity report and discussion to the next meeting to allow the Commission time for review.

Ms. Ruchling advised that the pay equity needs approval before the deadline of January 31, 2026, and requested that this be an additional agenda item at the special meeting that will be held later this month.

MOVED AND SECONDED BY YEAGER AND BRATNEY; DULY CARRIED THAT THE PAY EQUITY REPORT AND DISCUSSION BE AN ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEM AT HE SPECIAL MEETING THAT WILL BE HELD LATER THIS MONTH.

C. Mills Hangar Lease Update

Commissioner Yeager informed everyone that Mills has been trying to get a new owner and a conversation about the airport owning the hangar may take place. The airport hasn't formally been asked to purchase this hangar. With Commissioner Palmer being absent at this point in the meeting, the Mills Hangar item will be brought to the next regular meeting for further discussion.

NEXT MEETING:

A special meeting to discuss the Airport Manager Employment Agreement and Pay Equity will be determined at a later day in January 2026.

ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED AND SECONDED BY YEAGER AND BARROWS, DULY CARRIED THAT THE COMMISSION PUBLIC MEETING ADJOURN TO A SPECIAL MEETING THAT IS TO BE DETERMINED AND SET IN JANUARY 2026, AT 10:35 AM.

Upon roll call, all members present voted "aye" to adjourn.

Respectfully submitted,



Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport Commission

