

M I N U T E S
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
October 6, 2025
5:30 PM
Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King. Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, Michael Postma, Oballa Oballa, and Jason Baskin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Rebecca Waller and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, Fire Chief Jim McKoy, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Planning and Zoning Director Holly Wallace, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Parks, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Schon, City Attorney Craig Byram, Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann, Administration, Clerk & Cashier Kellie Humphress, and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Members of the Community

Mayor King called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Oballa, approving the agenda. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving Council minutes from September 15, 2025 & September 22, 2025. Carried.

Chief McKichan introduced the new part-time CSO/Cadet, Michael Hanson. Mayor King welcomed the new cadet to the police force.

The ArtWorks committee members, Kelsey Ritchie and Lisa Dunlop presented the ArtWorks Festival City Art Award to Council. The piece was called Galaxy Circle and was created by Promila Kumar. It will be displayed at City Hall.

City Administrator Craig Clark announced Senior Accountant Melissa Wilson will be acting as interim Finance Director until the position is filled.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Oballa, approving the consent agenda as follows:

Licenses:

Cab Driver: Abram Menchaca, Austin, MN

Massage Therapist: Jian Guangshao, Austin MN

Mobile Business: Steamworks Café, Grand Marais, MN

Lodging Establishment: Brit A Noser, Inc., 300 2nd Avenue NW, Austin, MN

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of bills
- b. Credit Card Report
- c. Financial Report

Event Applications:

Austin Fire Department – Fire Station Open House on October 8, 2025

No Kings 2 on October 18, 2025

Carried.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

A public hearing was held for a tax abatement requested by Bigelow & Lennon. They are proposing to build a single-family home located at 1801 12th Avenue NE, parcel number 34.468.0120, valued at approximately \$300,000.00. City Administrator Craig Clark stated the application is in conformance with the City's policy for tax abatement.

There were no comments from the public.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Baskin, approving the tax abatement. Carried 5-0.

Mayor King requested public hearings for the fall assessments. He stated for each type of assessment, the individual property owners were mailed a notice of hearing, and a public notice was also published in the Austin Daily Herald. He stated the Clerk's office is requesting Council adopt the assessments set forth in the resolutions presented tonight. He stated the property owners will have until October 31st, 2025 to pay the assessments or the assessments will be placed on to their property taxes.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of hazardous housing abatements.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting the assessment roll for hazardous housing. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of miscellaneous sidewalk and driveway projects.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting the assessment roll for miscellaneous sidewalk and driveway projects. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of snow removal.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, adopting the assessment roll for snow removal. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of junk removal.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting the assessment roll for junk removal. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of grass/weed removal.

Shane Rose, 104 3rd Ave SE, stated he received two notices. He stated the property being cited has been partially burned in a fire and he can't afford to fix it. He believes the fees are excessive. Mayor King advised Mr. Rose to set an appointment with Parks, Recreation & Forestry Director Jason Sehon to discuss further.

Craig Clark notified Council about a letter received from Jesse Deisher objecting to mowing fees received for his property located at 401 8th Street NE. Mr. Deisher doesn't understand the reasoning for his property being mowed or for the citations.

Council Member Helle questioned the notification process for P&R citations/mowing. Mr. Sehon explained the process on how residents are notified. Council Member Helle questioned the process of notices being delivered via certified mail and City Attorney Craig Byram further elaborated on why that is the most feasible option currently.

Council Member Helle feels there should be some more information given at the time the inspections are completed. She would like more information to be given to the public when they are cited.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting the assessment roll for grass/weed removal. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of tree removal.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting the assessment roll for tree removal. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of park, recreation and forestry administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting the assessment roll for park, recreation and forestry administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of zoning administrative citations.

Jim Sauer 600 38th Avenue NE, questioned a citation he received for a “tent” structure he uses on his property for keeping vehicles stored in. He would like to understand the reasoning for the citations.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace stated the structure has not been permitted, it exceeds the square footage allowed and the property owner has exceeded the allowed structures on his property per city code.

Mayor King asked that Mr. Sauer schedule a follow-up meeting with Holly Wallace in Zoning but the citations would be adopted on the assessment roll.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting the assessment roll for zoning administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of rental housing administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting the assessment roll for rental housing administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of sump pump administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting the assessment roll for sump pump administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of building/substandard housing administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting the assessment roll for building/substandard housing administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of lodging establishment administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting the assessment roll for lodging establishment administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of fire code administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting the assessment roll for fire code administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of backdated sewer usage.

Brandon McFarland, 409 36th St NW, stated sewer was put in four years ago and he didn't know the usage wasn't being monitored properly. Public Works Director Steven Lang explained the inspection process and how the homeowner hadn't properly completed these steps. This led to the backdated reading of the sewer usage from May 2021 to current.

Mayor King asked that Mr. McFarland schedule a meeting to follow up with Steven Lang but the but the citations would adopted on the assessment roll.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting the assessment roll for backdated sewer usage. Carried 5-0.

A public hearing was held for the assessment of vacant property administrative citations.

There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting the assessment roll for vacant property administrative citations. Carried 5-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated they received quotes for replacement of the siding and roofing on the Transfer Station. Items to be replaced in this quote include the siding, roofing, flashing and trim, gutters and downspouts, insulation, overhead door, two service doors and includes the installation of an additional industrial exhaust fan.

Mr. Lang stated they received bids from The Joseph Company, Inc. and Eagle Ridge Construction, LLC. Eagle Ridge Construction, LLC came in with the low bid of \$124,226.00. Mr. Lang requested approval to award this project to them.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, awarding the bid for the transfer station siding to Eagle Ridge Construction, LLC. Carried 5-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark requested Council approval to authorize Melissa Wilson as the Interim Finance Director and approval to delegate himself and Ms. Wilson as the authorized individuals for the Northland Securities, Inc. account.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, authorizing the approved individuals for the Northland Securities, Inc account and approving the Interim Finance Director. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, authorizing the City Clerk to sign a waiver stating the city does not waive the statutory tort limits. Carried.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the agreement presented to Council is a preliminary agreement with Mower County allowing the Austin Police Department to occupy part of their building. The agreement would move to a percentage based versus a fixed cost and the percentage would be 14.89%. This agreement would also transition the IT services and records staff to being City employees.

Council Member Baskin asked why the City is making these changes and would like more background on this.

Chief McKichan stated they have always had these joint powers arrangements with the County. They previously had a set fee for the contract, and now they are moving to a percentage-based contract. They are now contracting for their own IT and moving to their own servers due to the ransomware attack the County endured this summer. They would also take on their own records staffing, giving them control over who they hire and what their staff would do on a day-to-day basis.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Baskin, approving an agreement for the Joint Law Enforcement Center with Mower County. Carried 5-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated due to the retirement of Tom Dankert, the Director of Administrative Services, they need to update the responsible authority and compliance official for data requests.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving the responsible authority and compliance official for data requests. Carried 5-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark requested Council authorize the extension of the housing tax abatement program. The program would continue from 2026 to 2028.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, authorizing the renewal of the housing tax abatement program for 2026-2028. Carried 5-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested Council approval for setting a public hearing for the Nature Ridge Fourth division.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Oballa, setting a public hearing for October 20, 2025 for this street improvement project. Carried 5-0.

City Clerk Brianne Wolf stated the Clerk's office worked with departments heads to update the fees for 2026 and she requested Council approve the fees for 2026.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Baskin, approving the 2026 fee schedule. Carried 5-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated the employee separation incentive program is a voluntary program. It would be offered to qualifying employees that hold a regular full time (32 hours or more per week) position and have active employment status with the city, have a minimum of ten years of service, and employees would be in one of the following groups: UAW – Parks Maintenance, UAW

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Street Maintenance (who are general fund supported), AEA – Library employees, and administration. In special circumstances, other positions may also be considered. Mr. Clark stated employees who participate may choose one of the following benefit options, subject to a maximum total value of \$20,000: 1) A cash incentive equal to one week of base pay for each completed year of service, not to exceed: 1) \$20,000. 2) Employer-paid health insurance coverage for the number of months equal to the time until the employee reaches sixty-five (65), capped at a total value of \$20,000. 3) A combination of cash and health insurance coverage, with the combined value not to exceed \$20,000.

Mr. Clark requested Council approve the employee separation incentive program.

Council Member Helle asked how much time the Council had before the end of the year to figure out what they were going to cut if no employees took the voluntary separation and how many positions did administration think needed to be cut.

Mr. Clark stated they would not have a lot of time as the truth in taxation hearing is held at the start of December.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, approving an employee separation incentive program. (Council Member Fischer and Helle – Nay) Carried 3-2.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Helle, accepting donations to the City of Austin. Carried. 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Oballa, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 515 11th Avenue SW, Beaman Property. Carried.

REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Library Director Julie Clinefelter relayed they will be welcoming Millie the Mill Pond Monster on Thursday, October 16 at the Library. The event will take place from 4 pm to 6 pm and is open to the public. The received a grant and several donations to help bring this vision to life and she will be used as a local attraction.

Council Member Baskin went to a conference in Sioux Falls, SD and stated he learned many other communities are sharing the same problems as Austin. He stated other communities are also trying to balance taxes with inflation. He also noted when looking at the comprehensive plan for the City of Austin, Sioux Falls has done a great job embracing the river that runs through their town and it has transformed the community and the vibe of the city.

Council Member Helle stated the Culture and Arts Commission would like the youth of Mower County to submit their art for judging and placement on utility boxes throughout Austin. She stated the playground equipment is being updated at Todd Park. They will not be removing the Robot. She stated the deer hunt is going to begin around the community. She also thanked Parks, Recreation & Forestry Director Jason Sehon for his work with the Austin Public Schools Austin Transition Program. This program collaborates with special education or special needs individuals, assisting them in gaining on-the-job training. Mr. Sehon has played a role in securing jobs for them within the Parks, Recreation & Forestry department.

Mayor King highlighted Council Member Helle's comments on the transition program. Mayor King stated he was able to go and kick off this program, as this is the second year the City has participated. Mayor King read the Employee anniversaries.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adjourning the meeting to October 20, 2025. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:45 p.m.

Approved: October 20, 2025

Mayor: _____

City Clerk: _____