

M I N U T E S
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
December 15, 2025
5:30 PM
Council Chambers

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Planning and Zoning Director Holly Wallace, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Park, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Schon, City Attorney Craig Byram, Human Resources Director Patricia Wiechmann, Finance Director Emily Burns 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 Waller, approving the agenda as amended. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, approving Council minutes from December 1, 2025 and Truth in Taxation hearing minutes from December 3, 2025. Carried.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving the consent agenda as amended. Carried 5-0. (Council Member Postma Abstaining)

Licenses:

Temporary Liquor: St. Augustine Catholic Church on January 2, 2026
Temporary Liquor: Mower County Fair/Agricultural Society on February 21, 2026
Exempt Gambling (Raffle): Austin Area Chamber of Commerce on February 27, 2026
Sign Installer: BMS Signs & Printing, Blaine, MN
Right of Way: Castrejon Inc., Blaine, MN
2026 License Renewals
(complete list attached to minutes with additions)

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of bills

Making the following appointments and reappointments to Boards and Commissions:

- a. Daniel Bollingberg to the Fire Civil Service Commission – term expiring 12/31/2028
- b. Stephanie Holtorf to the Human Rights Commission – term expiring 12/31/2028
- c. Varinh Van Vugt to the Human Rights Commission – term expiring 12/31/2028
- d. Grady Rambadt to the Human Rights Commission – term expiring 12/31/2028
- e. Stephanie Postma to the Library Board – term expiring 12/31/2028
- f. Sue Grove to the Library Board – term expiring 12/31/2028
- g. Lisa Ganser to the Library Board – term expiring 12/31/2028
- h. Preston Bain to the Park and Recreation Board – term expiring 12/31/2029
- i. Peggy Benzkofer to the Pillars of the City Board – term expiring 12/31/2028
- j. Katie Stromlund to the Pillars of the City Board – term expiring 12/31/2028
- k. Lia Guttormson to the Pillars of the City Board – term expiring 12/31/2028
- l. Rita Srock to the Planning Commission – term expiring 12/31/2029
- m. Jay Lutz to the Planning Commission – term expiring 12/31/2029
- n. Varinh Van Vugt to the Police Civil Service Commission – term expiring 12/31/2028
- o. Stephen King to the Part Time Fire Relief Trustees – term expiring 12/31/2026
- p. James McCoy to the Part Time Fire Relief Trustees – term expiring 12/31/2026

Carried.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

City Administrator Craig Clark requested the public hearing for the Capital Improvement Plan be continued to the City Council meeting on January 20, 2026.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma to approve a request to continue the public hearing for the Capital Improvement Plan to the January 20, 2026 Council meeting.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Finance Director Emily Burns requested the Council approve the 2026 tax levy in the amount \$10,535,000.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving the tax levy for 2026. Carried 6-0.

Finance Director Emily Burns requested the Council approve the 2026 budget in the amount of \$51,571,292.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution adopting the budget for 2026. Carried 6-0.

Finance Director Emily Burns requested the Council cancel certain ad valorem tax levies for 2026 because there is sufficient fund balance to cover the payments on the bonds.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution authorizing the cancellation of certain ad valorem tax levies. Carried 6-0.

City Clerk Brianne Wolf requested the Council designate the Austin Daily Herald as the official newspaper for 2026. Ms. Wolf stated the rate for 2026 remains \$5.64 per column inch.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Baskin, designating the Austin Daily Herald as the official newspaper for 2026. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution granting renewals of 2026 licenses for the sale of hard liquor on-sale, Sunday hard liquor on-sale, 3.2 beer off-sale. Carried 6-0.

Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann requested the Council adopt a resolution setting the 2026 seasonal, temporary and part-time wage rates. Ms. Wiechmann stated all department heads have reviewed the document, and their requests have been incorporated within the ranges.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving the 2026 seasonal and part time wage rates. Carried 6-0.

Director of Public Works Steven Lang discussed work change directive number 10. Mr. Lang stated there are six work change directives as part of the order. With this work change, there is a credit to the overall project. There is a \$433,694.21 decrease to the domestic budget and a \$84,629.21 increase to the industrial budget. He is requesting approval of work change directive number 10.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving change order number 10 for the Wastewater Treatment Plant project. Carried 6-0.

Director of Public Works Steven Lang requested Council approval of a three-year individual control mechanism (ICM) agreement with International Paper. The agreement would expire on December 31st, 2028.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, approving an ICM agreement with International Paper. Carried. 6-0.

Director of Public Works Steven Lang requested Council approval of a three-year individual control mechanism (ICM) agreement with the Hormel Foods Annex. The agreement would expire on December 31st, 2028.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving an ICM agreement with Hormel Foods Annex. Carried. 4-0. (Council Member Baskin and Oballa abstaining)

Director of Public Works Steven Lang reviewed items #15 and #16 together. Mr. Lang stated for the project at the Wastewater Treatment Plant, they have been developing and working through different agreements to accommodate a one-year extension. For this accommodation, there is an additional cost to the city of \$799,408, which is for engineering services.

Mr. Lang stated to offset the cost as part of change order #10, they worked with the contractor to develop a \$448,000 credit that would offset a portion of that extra cost to the city. In addition, this item is a waiver and release with our consultant, SEH, that provides a credit of \$176,000. He stated this would be funded approximately 60% by the contractor, with a 20% credit from the consultant and 20% from the city. The remainder after they apply the two credits is \$175,000 to the city. Then, in item #16, there's an agreement to approve those extra costs under amendment number one, after they've applied those credits. This resulted in a \$175,000 cost to the city.

Mr. Lang stated in addition, there have been extra costs incurred for redesign of city-requested items throughout the project. Those additional costs are \$240,592 of consultant fees for those redesigns. In combination with the extra costs and the credits, the final tally for amendment #1 in item #16 is an additional cost to the city of \$416,000, added to our original engineering services of \$5,000,190, for a new total of \$505,606,000 for engineering fees.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving a design consultant waiver agreement. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, Seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution approving a construction services amendment. Carried 6-0.

Items #17 & #18 were removed from the agenda and not discussed.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting a resolution approving an MOA agreement with the LELS bargaining group for health insurance. Carried. 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 707 6th Avenue SW, Batikare Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 1205 4th Street NW, Lacle Tevi Property. Carried.

HONORARY COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Compton stated the meeting was very “rapid fire” but she is excited to learn more and experience more.

REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Council Member Fischer would like the discussion of even and odd parking to be placed on next work sessions agenda.

Council Member Helle thanked the Parks and Recreation team and the Nature Center for their Merry & Bright event last week. The weather was not favorable, but they had great activities, and many individuals came out to participate. She also stated since she has the benefit of the microphone, that she does not think any person living in Austin or in the state of Minnesota is garbage. She stands with all immigrant communities and wants to be very public about it. She believes Austin has always been a place where immigrants can come and build their own American dream as far back as its history goes, and she hopes it continues to be that.

Council Member Postma stated Austin has many events going on this holiday season and it's been great to see the members of the community out and about. His heart is heavy with the recent shootings that have happened both nearby and far away. He is praying for peace for everybody for the rest of the holiday season.

Council Member Baskin sends his thoughts to the Stewartville community. They know several individuals who have children who go to school in Stewartville. The City of Austin is a neighboring community, so they are holding them close to their hearts as they work through the recent shooting. He thanked the local business owners and business leaders, including our honorary Council member, Lindsey Compton, for attending the last Port Authority meeting to share their thoughts. He believes there are opportunities and ideas to continue accelerating development in Austin. It was a really good conversation. As they review the comprehensive plan and the great work Ms. Wallace and the team are doing, they can start focusing on schools, downtown, and parks, which are absolutely the top three priorities.

Mayor King again welcomed the new Finance Director and thanked the Interim Finance Director, Melissa Wilson, for her work. He stated Council Member Oballa asked him to speak to a class of 7th- and 8th-graders in Buffalo, MN, about how Austin has become so welcoming. He and Council Member Oballa went to the school and spoke with the students, and he stated this is a reminder of how we are doing things right and that there is a lot to learn from the Austin community. Also, he wished the staff, the council, and the citizens happy holidays.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adjourning the meeting to December 15, 2025. Carried.

Adjourned: 5:54 p.m.

Approved: January 5, 2026

Mayor: _____

City Clerk: _____