

**MINUTES**  
**COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION**  
**December 15, 2025**  
**City Council Chambers**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King, Council Members Jason Baskin, Oballa Oballa, Paul Fischer, Michael Postma, Rebecca Waller, 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, Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Director Jason Schon, Human Resource Director Patricia Wiechman, and City Clerk Brienne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON:

Mayor Steve King opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

**Item #1 Organization Development & Culture Study Presentation – Craig Clark**

City Administrator Craig Clark provided the Council with a “To Do List” in a spreadsheet of the highlighted elements from the Workplace Culture and Organizational Development Study. He also presented the recommended timeline from Dave Unmacht and Laura Kushner and requested that Council rank the items as a priority. He suggested nominating a point person for each project.

Mayor King stated they will engage with the Employee Engagement Committee to get suggestions on some of the items listed on the spreadsheet and how they would like to see them rolled out to employees. He would like the committee's input on who they would like to see as a point person for some of these items.

Council Member Helle stated she wanted this on the agenda to obtain Council input on the bolded items, determine what action they wanted to take, and set a timeline for these items. She wanted to be more aggressive with the timelines, as they have been working on these items for quite some time. She would be open to going down the list item by item and discussing where they think it lands on their priority list and when they think it could start happening. As she reads them, she believes quite a few of them fall within the City Administrator's job description.

Council Member Fischer would not like to do that.

Mayor King stated the City Administrator already has a lot on his plate.

Council Member Baskin said it would be worthwhile to have a detailed discussion of the bolded items, noting that about 4 seem reasonable to pursue, while 1 may not be necessary. He emphasized that the Council had not previously discussed these items in depth and that a thorough review is needed to determine where everyone stands. He also supported moving forward with the employee engagement component, but stressed that by January, each item should have one clearly assigned individual who is ultimately accountable. Additionally, he wants clarity on timelines and steps for each item so the Council can track progress and evaluate whether efforts are moving forward effectively.

Council Member Postma stated he doesn't believe they need to review every single item, but he would like to start with the bolded ones and see where that takes them.

Mr. Clark provided Council's feedback on the request to complete a mission, vision, and values statement. He has contacted Mr. Unmacht, who will supply the City with a proposal for assistance in creating these statements. He stated some of the items listed on the handout given to the Council are already in motion or have been started. The creation of employee engagement is one. He stated flexible work schedules are already in motion. He also stated he has spoken with a firm about a technology assessment.

Council Member Baskin stated he would like to start with the mission, vision, and strategic direction.

Mayor King asked whether the Council agreed to start with the mission, vision, and strategic direction and wait to receive the proposal from Unmacht before they begin the work.

Council was in agreement.

Council Member Baskin stated it would be good to bring in an outside facilitator.

Council Member Postma stated they had done good work with Sicora, but they had left it unfinished, and he would like to incorporate some of that work into this.

Council Member Baskin stated a best practices guide would be a low priority for him. He doesn't see as much value in this compared to all the work that needs to be done in the City.

Mayor King believes there needs to be a refresher in this.

Council Member Helle agrees this is a low priority. She would like to speak with Mr. Unmacht to determine where this is coming from and what problem they would be solving by addressing it.

Council Member Postma believes this comes from how Council engages City staff. There was mention of some departments encouraging staff to address the Council however they see fit, whereas other departments believe they're under the impression that they are not allowed to speak with the City Council. He doesn't know if they have an official Code of Conduct. He believes it would be a good idea to review this.

Mr. Clark stated they have a Code of Conduct, and one of the recommendations is to go through the Code of Conduct to see what they are not following, what they should be following, and what they may want to change.

Council Member Baskin stated it feels like a good practice to have a Code of Conduct but he doesn't know what the tangible impact is going to be because at the end of the day, they can update a Code of Conduct and they can say here's how they want to do it. All of them are elected, they answer to the voters and what he has experienced in the six or seven years as a Council Member is they are going to do whatever they want to do. He questioned whether they should have a Code of Conduct. He questioned how confident he is that the Council is going to follow it, then stated not very confident.

Council Member Baskin stated he believes labor negotiations, culture, and practices have some value. He thinks there was a lot of misunderstanding of what the City Administrator and the Finance Director were doing (in negotiations) versus what was coming back to Council. He stated collective bargaining, in the best of times, is set up to be an adversarial system. He believes a bit more education on how we approach it would be beneficial.

Council Member Helle stated she sees at least three key components to address. First, there should be a general overview of labor relations, including how the process works and what it is intended to accomplish for all parties involved. Second, there needs to be a more in-depth discussion specifically for department heads and supervisors who experience divided loyalty. They want to advocate for their staff, but they also serve as leaders of the city and must represent the City's interests. They have largely left department heads to navigate this tension on their own, and it is a difficult challenge. Third, she would like more information about how other cities structure their labor relations teams. Who typically sits at the negotiating table? Mr. Unmacht told her he is not aware of other cities where the City Administrator participates directly in negotiations, so she is curious about alternative models and whether another structure might work better.

Mayor King stated he was told it is common for City Administrators to be at the table. Human Resources Director Trish Wiechmann stated it is a combination. Mayor King stated he himself did not participate in negotiating. Ms. Wiechmann stated she did a study in Southeast Minnesota, and it was split if an administrator was involved in negotiations.

Mayor King stated he is not opposed to removing the City Administrator from negotiations. The working groups are recommending that it be a team of management and labor representatives. He asked the City Administrator what his vision was for this.

Mr. Clark stated he still wanted to visit more with Mr. Unmacht about this. He has given Mr. Unmacht a list of questions on the topic. Mr. Clark did suggest the Bureau of Labor Management come to a session.

Council Member Baskin stated for the labor negotiations culture and practices he would think they would include Mr. Clark, department heads, representatives of the extended leadership team, and then form a five-person working group. The group would develop a point of view and a recommendation.

Mayor King asked whether they would include both external and internal representatives from the union groups.

Council Member Postma stated it may be hard to find an unbiased third party.

Council Member Helle asked if Council would have a seat at this table.

Mayor King stated he would like a seat at the table. He asked what the Council's next objective on the list would be. Would they like to work on communications practices and transparency?

Council Member Baskin agreed. He stated they have to figure out how they communicate more consistently and transparently. They also must figure out how to build trust, but he doesn't know if a flexible work schedule and technology updates are going to build trust. It's experiences that create beliefs which ultimately change actions.

Mayor King stated a flexible work schedule is part of a workplace culture, which might not be a trust issue, but he believes they need to do this.

Council Member Baskin stated they need to figure out who the point person is; he believes it's ultimately Mr. Clark, and then whoever else he wants to bring into the conversation.

Mayor King would like to see what the employee engagement team has to say about this.

Council Member Postma asked what the deliverable metric is for this.

Council Member Helle stated the two most important items for her to start working on right now would be the mission, vision, and strategic direction, and labor relations, culture, and practices. She would like to establish a lead person and a deadline for these two items.

Mayor King stated Mr. Clark is waiting to hear back from Mr. Unmacht regarding a proposal to continue work on the mission, vision, and strategic direction.

Council Member Baskin stated Mr. Clark would be the point person for the labor relations piece to report back to Council and establish who else would be a part of the groups and what that would look like. In terms of workplace trust and communication practices, transparency, Mr. Clark would be the point person, ultimately accountable for that. He stated it would make sense to work with the employee engagement team and outline what they will work on to reach their end goal. What he would want to see is the workplace culture and trust, communication practices, and transparency. Here is the plan they want to put together to start improving this area, and here are the two or three big actions under each one, and here's how we start putting it together. Here's the stuff that they think they're going to do short term, and here's the stuff that they're going to do long term in order to bring that to life. And then they can hold themselves accountable on a quarterly basis and, as they progress through each item, assess whether they are reaching their goals.

Council Member Helle stated workplace culture and trust are going to be shaped by the vision and mission statements. If they get the vision and mission statements right, it's going to start informing all these other pieces.

Council Member Postma stated communication practices and transparency are going to be easier to frame as far as metrics and deliverables once they create a playbook everyone is willing to play by. He agrees with Council Member Helle that creating the mission and vision statements will help build the culture and trust within that framework.

Council Member Baskin expressed concern that there is a perception that the council does not take this issue seriously. He believes that while they view this effort as a marathon rather than a sprint, they have been discussing it for three years. It's time to transition from discussions to tangible actions and create a timeline for their completion. This is an initiative that the leadership team and the council must take ownership of.

Council Member Baskin emphasized the need to identify which quick wins can be implemented immediately and which may take longer to achieve. He stated that if they are genuinely committed to fostering employee engagement and building a positive culture, they must develop

a clear plan for their actions. Otherwise, they should reconsider whether to continue these efforts at all.

Mayor King stated he feels the Human Resources Department has moved the needle through its communication, and he would like to see this continue. They are doing a great job with this. He asked if the Council would be ok with HR being the point or lead for this.

Council Member Postma was in favor of this. He also stated if they are going to sprint on anything, he would like to start with the mission, vision, and strategic values, as some of the work on this has already been completed. He stated having this set will inform the other things. He stated getting this completed by the March 1st deadline may be hard, as they will have to hold meetings outside their regular twice-a-month sessions. He does believe Council can complete this by early spring.

Council Member Helle stated the vision and mission have been part of the goal since the very first report, and the entire year of 2025, they were going to work with Mr. Unmacht, and then they got the report, and she doesn't want it to be another year from now that they have just completed their vision, mission, and strategic values statements. If they set the deadline for March 1st and don't get it completed by then, they can extend it. She would like to get this completed.

Council Member Baskin stated that it is fair for the Council to set a March 1st deadline for this project. They have established an accountable person and a deadline, which tends to drive action. Council Member Helle asked the Council if they are settled on working with Mr. Unmacht, and they aren't going to consider any other proposals.

Council Member Postma stated they do not have a cost proposal for this work and have not budgeted for it. Do they have other resources they can pull from to complete this work? Ms. Wiechmann stated they did not spend all of the 2025 employee recognition budget, and Council could request to carry it over to 2026. If they needed more funding, they would have to make additional requests.

Council Member Postma doesn't feel they should look to another employee group, as this would be the fourth or fifth group they've considered working with.

Council Member Helle stated looking at other groups or proposals would take additional time they do not have.

Council Member Baskin stated he would wait to see the proposal from Mr. Umacht, and if another proposal comes, great, but he would like to get this moving.

Council Member Postma would like to get the momentum moving, and if a proposal were to come through from Mr. Umacht, it would be moved to the Council meeting agenda rather than put on the work session to save time.

Council Member Helle would like closure of the previous work with consultants.

Council Member Postma hopes this will wrap into the vision and mission piece. He stated on the labor relations piece that he has concerns with the timing of the discussions, as they are actively negotiating. Would they wait until they are done negotiating?

Council Member Helle asked when they will be done negotiating the open labor contracts.

Mr. Clark stated this will be completed by the first quarter of 2026.

Council Member Postma stated he would like to do this after the first quarter or once negotiations are completed, and to get feedback from the groups on what they would like to see done differently. He stated this way, it would be fresh in everyone's mind.

Council Member Helle agreed this was a tangible milestone.

Council Member Baskin agreed and stated they have to keep in mind who is accountable for the project. Here is the progress they are making, what they need to do to make more progress, and keep pushing forward so they can put some tangible progress on the board.

Mayor King stated the quickest timeline would be the mission, vision, and strategic values, followed by continuing the ongoing communications, and then labor relations.

Council Member Postma stated once we do the mission of vision values, we can see where and in what order these next ones might fall.

Council Member Helle stated there are several things on this list that require funding and will only happen if the Council comes up with ways to fund them. If they are committing to this report and these action steps, it will come with a price tag, and hopefully, they will have the courage in their convictions when it comes time to work on the budgeting process.

Council Member Postma would like to discuss technology during the CIP discussion. No further action is required.

**Item #2 – Review of Bids for Riverside Arena Sidewalk Replacements – Steven Lang**

**Item #3 – Review of Costs to Upgrade Electrical in Bruins Office – Steven Lang**

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the City has budgeted \$50,000 for the replacement of the sidewalks on the west side of the Riverside Arena. They have not been able to complete the project in the previous years, but they recently received bids for the removal and replacement of the concrete sidewalk around the southwest entrance and along the south wall of the arena entryway. It will include pedestrian ramp improvements and will be completed with future consideration for landscaping between the front doors and the street corner, including the existing flagpole.

Mr. Lang stated they received three bids. Hansen Hauling & Excavating, Inc. came in with the low bid of \$43,471.50. He stated the City has been in negotiations with the Austin Bruins, who have been requesting a lobby expansion and a heated sidewalk in this area. If they were to replace the sidewalk, it would encroach into this area, and he does not want to replace this only to have to tear it up again. This project is currently budgeted for 2025, and he does not want to impact any negotiations with the Bruins

Mr. Lang stated the next item, Item #3, was flagged by the Fire Department. The offices at Riverside Arena are used by the Bruins, and they are overtaxed by the number of monitors and electrical demands in there. To correct this issue and bring the space into compliance, staff requested a proposal from Fox Electric. The contractor has provided a quote totaling \$1,675.00 to install three (3) quad electrical receptacles, including all necessary conduit, wiring, and inspection fees.

Mr. Lang is looking for Council direction on how to proceed:

1. Require the Bruins to pay the full cost of the electrical upgrades;
2. Share the cost between the City and the Bruins; or
3. Have the City cover the full cost at this time.

Council Member Baskin asked about the concrete piece. He asked, hypothetically, whether, if they awarded the bid today, that would legally obligate them to move forward with the project? And if they move forward, they said, yes, let's lock these dollars in, and two months from now, they decided they want to expand the lobby. Do they have to do it, or is there a way to change that? Or if they are not going to do this project anymore, how does that work?

Mr. Lang stated it is not a practice they like to get into from a reliability standpoint. They do not want to take bids and then give people false hope. He stated if there is hesitation, he would ask that they speak with the contractor to see if they would be willing to hold their bid for a couple of months while they work something out. He would recommend that instead of awarding the bid and signing contracts.

Council Member Baskin stated he is in favor of this approach with the concrete piece of this proposal.

Council Member Postma stated he is also in favor of this. He would agree that taxpayers would not be in favor of doing the work and then ripping it out in a year. He stated the electrical is a minor issue and that he would be open to getting it taken care of. He believes the discussions on the lobby and the concrete should be finalized by March or April.

Mayor King stated the City owns the building and they should take care of it. He is in favor of fixing the electrical issue. He would suggest pausing on the concrete.

Council Member Baskin agreed and stated Mr. Lang would be able to speak with the contractors and ask them to pause the concrete bid until March.

Mr. Lang stated he will pause the concrete work and proceed with the electrical repairs, with the City funding the project.

The item will be on the December 15, 2025 Council Agenda.

#### **Item #4 – Administrative Report**

Mr. Clark stated the Holly, Jolly, Jingle & Mingle is tomorrow from 2 pm to 4 pm in Council Chambers.

#### **Item #5 – Open Discussion**

None

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Baskin, to adjourn the meeting at 6:41 PM. Carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Brianne D. Wolf, City Clerk