

M I N U T E S  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
January 5, 2026  
5:30 PM  
Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King, Council Members Paul Fischer, Michael Postma, Rebecca Waller, Oballa Oballa, Jason Baskin (Arriving at 5:31 p.m.), and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Laura Helle

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 Tricia Wiechmann, Finance Director Emily Burns and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Members of the Community, Officer Ryan McCormack and Michael Bednar, Austin Daily Herald

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 as amended. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving Council minutes from December 15, 2025. Carried.

Mayor King gave Michael Bednar a key to the City for her service to the Port Authority. She was on the board for 26 years.

Mayor King and Chief McKichan recognized and congratulated Officer Ryan McCormack on his recent promotion to Sergeant.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

Licenses:

Exempt Gambling (raffle): NWTF Cedar River Longbeards Chapter on January 24, 2025

Liquor Catering: Dusty's Bar & Lounge, Austin, MN

Massage Therapist: Daniel Stallkamp, Austin, MN

Massage Therapist: Joy Maryanha, Austin, MN  
Massage Therapist: Elizabeth Rose Wagner, Austin, MN  
Lodging Establishment: Matter Cave, Austin, MN  
Lodging Establishment: Matter Loft, Austin, MN  
Tree Service: Coles Complete Tree Care, Austin, MN  
Tree Service: Carr's Tree Service, Ottertail, MN  
Right of Way: Bustad Dozing & Excavating, Inc., Austin, MN  
Right of Way: South East Septic LLC, Dexter, MN  
Mobile Business: La Michoacana Minnesota Inc., Waseca, MN  
Gas Station: Apollo Gas, Austin, MN  
Gas Station: Apollo Gas & Liquor, Austin, MN  
Tobacco: Apollo Gas, Austin, MN  
Tobacco: Apollo Gas & Liquor, Austin, MN

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of bills

Making the following appointments to Boards and Commissions:

Steven Leif to the Port Authority – term expiring 12/31/31

Carried.

## PUBLIC HEARINGS

A public hearing was held for a tax abatement requested by Curtis Sorenson for Wescott Apartments. Mr. Sorenson is proposing to build an apartment complex consisting of 23 units, thirteen two-bedroom units and ten one-bedroom units, located at 101 14th Street NW, parcel number 34.065.0090, valued at approximately \$3,200,000. City Administrator Craig Clark stated the applicant would be given a three-year tax abatement based on the property value of \$2,185,900. The estimated abatement would be 100% in year one, 66% in year two, and 33% in year three. The abatement application was approved with different terms by Mower County and denied by the School District. Council action is requested to approve the abatement based on the terms provided.

There were no comments from the public.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, approving the tax abatement based on the terms provided. Carried. 6-0.

## PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Finance Director Emily Burns requested the Council adopt a resolution designating the City's deposit and investment accounts for 2026.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting a resolution designating depositories for checking and investment of public funds for 2026. Carried 6-0.

City Clerk Brienne Wolf requested the Council set the mileage reimbursement rate for 2026 at 72.5 cents per mile per IRS direction.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution setting the mileage reimbursement rate for 2026. Carried 6-0.

Finance Director Emily Burns requested the Council approve a resolution delegating the ability to manage the organization's financial, banking and investment accounts and to manage the Northland Securities, Inc account.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution delegating Finance Director Emily Burns to manage the organization's financial, banking and investment accounts. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting a resolution delegating the Finance Director Emily Burns to manage the Northland Securities, Inc. Account. Carried 6-0.

Assistant City Engineer Andrew Sorenson presented a feasibility report to Council for street improvements on 8th Street SE (8th Avenue SE to 15th Avenue SE) Project 25104. Mr. Sorenson stated the project is feasible and will have a total cost of \$1,275,000. Mr. Sorenson reviewed the project and requested a public hearing be held for the improvement on February 17, 2026.

Moved by Council Member Fisher, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution receiving a feasibility report and calling for a public hearing for February 17, 2026 for street improvements on 8th Street SE (8th Avenue SE to 15th Avenue SE) Project 25104. Carried 6-0.

Assistant City Engineer Andrew Sorenson presented a feasibility report to Council for street improvements on 7th Avenue SW (24th Street SW to 8th Avenue SW), 8th Avenue SW (7th Avenue SW to 27th Street SW) & 26th Street SW (5th Avenue SW to 8th Avenue SW) Project 26101. Mr. Sorenson stated the project is feasible and will have a total cost of \$130,000. He reviewed the project and requested a public hearing be held for the improvement on February 17, 2026.

Moved by Council Member Fisher, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution receiving a feasibility report and calling for a public hearing for February 17, 2026 for street improvements on 7th Avenue SW (24th Street SW to 8th Avenue SW), 8th Avenue SW (7th Avenue SW to 27th Street SW) & 26th Street SW (5th Avenue SW to 8th Avenue SW) Project 26101. Carried 6-0.

Assistant City Engineer Andrew Sorenson presented a feasibility report to Council for street improvements on 9th Avenue NW (Blu Line Flats Apts to 11th Street NW) Project 26102. Mr. Sorenson stated the project is feasible and will have a total cost of \$825,000. He reviewed the project and requested a public hearing be held for the improvement on February 17, 2026.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution receiving a feasibility report and calling for a public hearing for February 17, 2026 for street

improvements on 9th Avenue NW (Blu Line Flats Apts to 11th Street NW) Project 26102. Carried 6-0.

Assistant City Engineer Andrew Sorenson presented a feasibility report to Council for street improvements on 5th Street NW (12th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) and 7th Avenue NW (13th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) Project 26103. Mr. Sorenson stated the project is feasible and will have a total cost of \$1,100,000. He reviewed the project and requested a public hearing be held for the improvement on February 17, 2026.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution receiving a feasibility report and calling for a public hearing for February 17, 2026 for street improvements on 5th Street NW (12th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) and 7th Avenue NW (13th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) Project 26103. Carried 6-0.

Assistant City Engineer Andrew Sorenson presented a feasibility report to Council for street improvements on 14th Street NW (8th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) Project 26104. Mr. Sorenson stated the project is feasible and will have a total cost of \$300,000. He reviewed the project and requested a public hearing be held for the improvement on February 17, 2026.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution receiving a feasibility report and calling for a public hearing for February 17, 2026 for street improvements on 14th Street NW (8th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) Project 26104. Carried 6-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the Austin Bruins lease space from the City in Riverside Arena and during an inspection, the Fire Department identified safety concerns in the Bruins' office area related to the excessive use of extension cords and power strips, creating a risk of overheating and potential fire.

Mr. Lang stated 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 quad electrical receptacles, including all necessary conduit, wiring, and inspection fees. He requests Council approval to move forward with the City covering the full cost of repairs and to pay for it with 2026 contingency fund budget.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving the electrical upgrades at the Riverside Arena office area with funding coming from the 2026 contingency fund budget. Carried 6-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark requested Council approval for an agreement between the City and Mower County on a shared Law Enforcement Center. He stated the County requested some updates to the group working agreement. They would establish a new budget review committee, establish quarterly reimbursement to Mower County for items listed on attachment A in the agreement on a 14.89% basis, provide allocation of how records staff will be financially allocated with eventual migration of these positions being employees of the City of Austin, transition for the City to move off of Mower County's technology system, provides how joint efforts for a Computer Aided Dispatch system will be financially allocated and determined moving forward with the initial system

being Pro-Phoenix, how data requests will be processed, required insurance and indemnification, termination and how any amendments can be made. Mr. Clark is looking for Council direction and for approval of the contract.

Council Member Baskin would like to know how this agreement is beneficial to the citizens of Austin.

Mr. Clark stated it provides a home for the Austin Police Department to set up shop. We are paying for the space we occupy vs. the overall facility.

Council Member Baskin asked if this raises the overall tax burden on taxpayers.

Mr. Clark stated the previous agreement was a fixed amount and now it will be for actual expenses. It creates a little uncertainty, but they would like to ensure costs are apportioned fairly.

Police Chief McKichan stated the agreement looks pretty neutral compared to the last two years.

Council Member Baskin asked if the police department breaks apart and has their own IT does this make us more or less effective.

Police Chief McKichan stated last summer Mower County had a bad actor infiltrate their system and the Austin Police Department would be better protected if they were on their own network. During this event last summer, had they already been on their own network, they would not have been affected and they would have been able to serve as a back-up system to Mower County.

Council Member Baskin stated there is still a level of uncertainty in this agreement and he would like to know if they should reject this agreement and request better clarification and present this to the County.

Mr. Clark stated this is the opportunity to get the agreement they would like to live with.

Police Chief McKichan would recommend approving this agreement, when he started with the Police department the City and County operated under a joint powers agreement with split costs. He stated the County has been a good working partner over the last few years. In October both City and County boards did approve a preliminary agreement prior to this.

Council Member Fisher moved to approve.

Council Member Postma stated he is not in favor of the inability to audit. He would like to feel confident that the City's finance team would be able to look at this agreement and financials to ensure this is a fair agreement. He requested input from City Attorney Craig Byram.

City Attorney Craig Byram stated this is an agreement where the City and County would require some level of trust as it is not specifically spelled out as the agreement sits.

Council Member-at-Large Austin asked if the budget review committee would be able to see more detailed documentation. The County is asking for a lot of trust and they have always been a good partner so he would think they would trust us to review some of these documents.

Mayor King called for a second motion approving the agreement with Mower County for the Law Enforcement Center. There was none. Motion dies for lack of a second.

Council Member Baskin moved to table the agreement, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin. Carried.

Police Chief McKichan stated due to the recent events last summer with the bad actor infiltrating the Mower County IT network the Austin Police Department is working to move to their own independent IT network. There are three areas they are looking at and they have met with three different vendors. They are going to work with Pantheon Computers out of Waseca. The estimated cost to move to their own external network will be \$69,052.01 and part of the funding will come from the General Fund's fund balance. They will be moving to their own phone system and the estimated cost for that project will be \$12,220 and would come from the General Fund's fund balance. Lastly, they would like to contract with Co-LASO managed service in lieu of hiring another IT employee. The managed service would help give them ongoing network oversight, a wider availability of IT, and access to more IT professionals than a single employee would. The cost for this service would be \$8,750 a month or \$105,00 a year and would be funded via 42010.6414. He stated other Police Chiefs have recommended working with this company. Also, the Police department has different rules and regulations they must operate by and Co-LASO would be familiar with this.

Council Member Postma asked if there are hardware issues would this company come to assist or would the issue fall on our IT department.

Chief McKichan stated as part of this package they have remote and on site assistance. A lot of the issues they are encountering are connectivity issues and software issues.

Council Member Postma asked if it was cost effective to have the Police department on a separate phone system or would it be better to have them on the City's phone system.

Chief McKichan stated he and IT looked into this extensively and it was better for them to be on their own system.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving the Austin Police Department internal network upgrades in the proposed amount of \$69,052.01 with the funding coming from General Fund. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution approving the Austin Police Department phone system upgrades in the proposed amount of \$12,220 with funding coming from General Fund. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution approving the Austin Police Department Co-LASO Management Services in the amount of \$8,750 monthly or \$105,00 annually. Carried 6-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark is working with Dave Unmacht to develop an outline for an agreement of his services to develop a work plan and process for the Strategic Planning Process. This would include a group session with the City Administrator and Department Heads, interviews with the eight elected officials, joint work sessions with Council and Department Heads, creation of summary documents outlining the findings of the interview sessions and development of a final strategic plan.

Mr. Clark stated the conclusion of this study would tentatively be set for April 20th. He is looking for Council approval for this agreement.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving the agreement with Dave Unmacht for Strategic Planning. Carried 6-0.

#### REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Representative Patricia Mueller gave an update on the legislation session that will be beginning soon and other news.

City Administrator Craig Clark relayed there is a Martin Luther King Jr. dinner on Monday, January 19<sup>th</sup> that all are invited to attend. This will take place from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at First United Methodist Church.

Council Member Postma stated the HRA was awarded a low income housing award and will be working with Three Rivers to start working on this project and bring another housing unit to Austin.

Council Member Baskin thanked the Public Works team for their work during the snow event this last weekend. It does not go unnoticed.

Mayor King read the January employee anniversaries.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, adjourning the meeting to January 20, 2026. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:39 p.m.

Approved: January 20, 2026

Mayor: \_\_\_\_\_

City Clerk: \_\_\_\_\_