

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
January 5, 2026
City Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King, Council Members Jason Baskin, Oballa Oballa, Paul Fischer, Michael Postma, Rebecca Waller, and Council Member-at-Large Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member 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, Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Director Jason Schon, Human Resource Director Trish Wiechman, Finance Director Emily Burns and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON:

Mayor Steve King opened the meeting at 6:44 p.m. He requested Item #4 be moved to the top of the discussion as there were members in attendance who were here for this discussion.

Item #4 Point of Sale Working Group Overview – Steven Lang

Public Works Director Steven Lang recapped on the discussions the point of sale working group worked through and the changes they are proposing to make to the point of sale ordinance. Mr. Lang stated they had four meetings with the group and the members consisted of the following individuals: Molly Cass, Tom Mork, Kris Heichel, Lisa Schara, Crystal Kittridge, Matt Laack, Eric Brownlow, Matt Bartholomew, Jacob Smith, Gene Dornink, Mayor King, Council Member Austin, Craig Clark, Craig Byram, Steven Lang, Mike Loucks and Joel Rachwitz. They would like for the proposed changes to the ordinance to go into effect by March 1, 2026.

Mr. Lang stated the recommendations from the working group are as follows:

1) Ordinance Revisions

- a. Expanded definition of point of sale (will not apply to transactions that are exempt from payment of Mn Deed Tax)
- b. Narrowed definition of what triggers non-compliance (eliminated roots and mineral deposits)
- c. Eliminate licensed plumber requirement for service televising (maintained license plumber requirement for sump inspection)
- d. 10-year time period for both sump and service inspection
- e. 10-year time period for new home build, initiated at Cert. of Occupancy

- f. Extended timeline to repair from 90 to 180 days
- 2) Service Line Warranties of America, dba HomeServe
 - a. Opt-In agreement between HomeServe and property owner
 - b. Marketing agreement between City and HomeServe
 - i. Initial term of 3-years, with optional renewal
 - ii. Licensing fee reimbursement to City of 10% of membership fees
 - iii. External sewer line \$10.99 per month for \$8,500 of coverage
 - iv. Internal plumbing \$10.99 per month for \$3,000 of coverage
 - v. HomeServe may conduct up to three (3) campaigns per year
 - c. HomeServe materials:
 - i. HomeServe Service Line Warranty Program
 - ii. HomeServe Marketing Agreement
 - iii. Exterior Sewer/Septic Line Terms and Conditions
- 3) Sewer service televising educational program
 - a. City offers up to 3 meetings to review with prospective televising companies' requirements for televising quality
 - b. Televising companies are required to attend in order to submit televising videos

Realtor Tom Mork stated it didn't make sense to have a certified plumber be required to do the sump pump inspections.

Mr. Lang stated they are in favor of plumbers doing the inspections as they are the experts in this field and know what they are looking for.

Realtor Molly Cass asked if there would be a way to look to see if a home was in compliance with the ten-year approval.

Mr. Lang stated they would be keeping track of this in the engineering department. He also stated if they are having a televising of their sewer system done they should be completing an inspection of their sump pump at the same time as this certificate would be for both systems and would cover the home for the ten year period.

Council Member Baskin asked Mr. Lang what priority this takes with his staff time.

Mr. Lang stated this is very important. Following the flood, it would be listed as a top priority from an engineering standpoint. Looking at flows to the treatment plant, they are always looking to decrease I/I. He stated it is very important to get this going and start making it better for people in the future, 50 years from now, hopefully somebody looks back on this council and says, "I'm glad they implemented it when they did". He stated this would be his goal.

Council Member Postma stated he is in favor of offering the HomeServe Warranty Program but fears there will be confusion on the citizens' end when signing up for it and what the program covers.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Oballa to approve this ordinance with an implementation date by March 1st, 2026. Carried. 5-1 (Council Member Baskin voting nay).

The item will be on the January 20, 2026 Council Agenda.

Item #1 – Even/Odd Parking Discussion – Council & Department Heads

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the Public Works Department would be favor of alternate side parking in an effort to improve department efficiencies. Mr. Lang stated with the two (2) positions have been cut from the Streets Department for the 2026 budget year, they have been tasked to find efficiencies within the department in order to provide the same level of service with less staff. Year-round alternate side parking would provide efficiencies for the following street maintenance activities: snow removal, street sweeping, leaf collection, crack filling, chip sealing, and pavement patching. He also stated this would force the relocation of boats, trailers, and campers that sit on the road for extended periods of time.

Mr. Lang stated if they were to keep this a year long program this would create consistency and help with the enforcement of illegally parked vehicles. In the summer months, this would assist with efficiencies for the street department with street sweeping, leaf collection, and chip sealing.

Mayor King stated they need to address the issue with year round enforcement first. He asked Mr. Lang if he would not be in favor of moving forward if Council would not endorse year round parking.

Mr. Lang stated he would be in favor of any accommodations.

Council Member Fischer stated he would only like even/odd parking to occur from November to March.

Council Member Baskin doesn't want to enforce this. He believes this will create a burden for the public.

Council Member Fischer stated with cars being on both sides of the road the plow driver has to go down the road multiple times creating inefficiencies. If they were to do even/odd parking they would be able to save on budget.

Council Member Baskin stated he has not seen anything to suggest this. He stated moving cars would be a harm to the public.

Council Member Waller agrees and stated she has had no public ask for even/odd parking. She stated if the City wants they can declare a snow emergency and also in the last three to five years they haven't had any large snow events. She also stated she lives on a narrow street and there has been a car that sat for six weeks before it was towed so there is no enforcement. If you can't police it, people will park where they want.

Council Member Postma stated he sees the pros and cons to both sides. He hasn't heard from residents on this but he does live in a residence with wide streets. He stated the previous weekend he was in some of the town's core streets and they had to maneuver around a vehicle that had clearly been sitting there for weeks so this speaks to the enforcement issues. There is a concern but nothing that has stopped things from happening at this time. He stated the City used Facebook to ask the public to not park downtown so they could do a snow clean up and he stated this sounded like ad-hoc and didn't like how it came across. He asked why they couldn't have declared a snow emergency.

Mr. Lang stated they didn't declare a snow emergency because it makes the department even less efficient. When they call a snow emergency, it forces them into a three-day plowing event in which they can only plow one side of the street each day. The effort on Facebook was to get citizens to abide by the already signed parking downtown that states they cannot park in this area from 2am to 6am, which they have been having a problem with. Snow emergencies also impact everyone City wide, and they only needed to get the downtown area cleaned up.

Council Member Postma asked if they can tow a vehicle or if they have to ticket them.

Chief McKichan stated they can tow in a snow emergency per state statute.

Council Member Postma asked if they have not had the manpower to ticket the cars illegally parked in the downtown area.

Chief McKichan stated the officers are willing to help, he does not know if this is the best use of staff. He stated this is not successful without dedicated enforcement over time.

Council Member-at-Large Austin asked if there would be a way to change the ordinance to have different rules for snow emergencies for the whole City and for downtown. He is not in favor of even/odd parking for the whole year or temporarily. He would like to change the ordinance and use this more aggressively

Mr. Lang asked would Council Member-at-Large Austin suggest there be no parking on the street during a snow emergency.

Council Member-at Large Austin stated why pass an ordinance if we can't enforce it.

Mr. Lang stated as other cities surrounding Austin call snow emergencies, they stated there is no on-street parking and this is what is making their communities so efficient. If they had that it would be great for their department.

Mayor King stated many communities have even/odd parking rules.

Council Member Oballa stated November to March is a long period, he believes it should be shorter.

Police Chief McKichan stated the parking tickets are \$10.00 and the snow emergency tickets are \$25.00.

Mayor King stated they need to look at the amount of the fines and increase them moving forward.

Council Member Postma would like to look at the fines and be more aggressive with them. They also need to look at cars that have been sitting for long periods of time.

Mayor King stated they will not be advancing the even/odd ordinance.

Chief McKichan asked for clarification and stated are the instructions to be more aggressive on towing and to reach out to other cities to see what their parking fees are and present to council his findings.

Item #2 – Capital Improvement Plan Discussion – Council & Department Heads

Finance Director Emily Burns stated the total request for the 2026-2030 capital improvement plan is \$132,678,650. Each department head went through their budgets and talked about the main points.

Council Member Baskin asked where the City of Austin was on police body cameras compared to other communities.

Chief McKichan stated other communities have them and we do not. The City does not have the administrative staff to assist with the maintenance and administration of handling these.

Council Member Baskin asked Mr. Lang about the vehicle maintenance schedule and if there needs to be another look taken at it.

Mr. Lang stated no, they are not hiding any equipment. They are transparent in their vehicle ordering and replacement.

Council Member Baskin asked Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Director Jason Sehon if he is aligning the P&R master plan with the CIP.

Mr. Sehon stated yes, he is looking at both documents to ensure they align.

Council Member Baskin stated he is looking at the year 2027 and he sees there is a large purchase being requested and he would like to know why.

Mr. Sehon stated there is a large request for playground replacements and a roof at the maintenance shop that needs to be replaced. If they do not replace these, they will continually get pushed down the road. He will be trying to obtain grant funding for the playgrounds.

The public hearing for the CIP was previously tabled to the January 20th, 2026 Council Meeting. This item will be on that meeting agenda.

Item #3 – 2026 Assessment Rates Discussion – Andrew Sorenson

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated they have seen a significant increase in project costs over the past several years. The City Council previously approved 7% assessment rate increases for the past 5 years. To continue to try keep pace with construction cost increases, without overburdening property owners, they would recommend another 7% increase to the paving assessment rates in 2026. This will likely keep our assessments close to 30% of the total street construction cost. This 7% increase would apply to the residential, commercial/industrial assessment rates and mill & overlay rates assessment rates.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin. This item will be on the January 20, 2026 Council Agenda. Carried.

Item #5 – Administrative Report

None

Item #6 – Open Discussion

Council Member-at-Large Austin would like Department Heads to look at other ways they may be able to raise revenue. He would like to have a discussion about this in late February or March.

Council Member Postma stated he and Council Member Baskin met with individuals who were interested in opening a municipal cannabis retailer. He stated there are other cities that are interested in doing this so this may be an opportunity.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large, to adjourn the meeting at 8:55 PM. Carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brianne D. Wolf, City Clerk