

M I N U T E S  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
February 2, 2026  
5:30 PM  
Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King, Council Members Jason Baskin, Michael Postma, Rebecca Waller, Oballa Oballa (5:33 p.m.), Laura Helle and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Paul Fischer

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, Human Resources Director Tricia Wiechmann, Fire Chief Jim McCoy, City Attorney Craig Byram, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Planning and Zoning Director Holly Wallace, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Park, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Sehon, Finance Director Emily Burns and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Honorary Council Member Lindsey Compton, Austin Daily Herald

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

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving the agenda as amended. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving Council minutes from January 20, 2026. Carried.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Postma, approving the consent agenda as amended.

Licenses:

Temporary Liquor: Austin Area Chamber of Commerce on March 10, 2026

Temporary Liquor: Austin Area Chamber of Commerce on June 9, 2026

Low Potency Hemp Edible Retailer Registration: Austin Tobacco, 1004 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW Ste. C

Low Potency Hemp Edible Retailer Registration: Tobacco Hut, 1402 18<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW

Tree Service: Austin & Albert Lea Tree Service, Hollandale, MN

Claims:

a. Pre-list of Bills

Carried.

## PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Austin Utilities General Manager Tom Dankert presented a request to Council on behalf of Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency (SMMPA) as they are constructing a combustion turbine generation facility fueled by natural gas. SMMPA is requesting the City support an amendment to the Minnesota property tax statutes exempting the Project's electrical generation equipment from personal property taxes, taxing only its real property value based upon the real property tax rate structure.

Mr. Dankert stated the project's preliminary costs are estimated at \$85 million. It would provide electricity for the 17 members of SMMPA including the City of Austin. This project will also be designed to provide backup and emergency power service to the City of Austin in the event of transmission emergencies or outages. The location of the facility would be where the previous Austin Utilities coal plant was located.

Mr. Dankert requests Council approve a resolution of recommendation in favor of the personal property exemption for this power station to be sent to the State of Minnesota. This would be taken up during this legislative session. The goal is to have this power station up and running by 2030.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin adopting a resolution approving a request for legislative exemption from personal property tax for Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency. Carried 6-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang presented to Council the HomeServe Warranty Program for approval. Mr. Lang stated this agreement was a three-year agreement to allow HomeServe to work in the community and send out informational materials to property owners. HomeServe provides services to private service and plumbing lines.

Mr. Lang stated the program provides two voluntary coverage options with no service fees, deductibles, or annual/lifetime limits. Participation is fully optional, and residents may cancel their coverage at any time. The City would also receive a 10% reimbursement for any memberships HomeServe is to complete during the three-year agreement. The City would allow the City logo to be placed on the informational material being sent out to property owners.

Council Member Baskin asked if we allow any other companies to use the City logo for marketing purposes.

Mr. Lang stated the Public Works department does not but he would not know about other departments.

Council Member Baskin asked how they move forward to ensure the City logo cannot be used by other private businesses if they were to ask for permission.

Council Member-at-Large Austin stated this is an action that Council has taken and by enacting the Point of Sale ordinance it has been requested to use this company and in turn they are going to allow them to use the logo.

Council Member Baskin asked how questions or concerns will be addressed with this company if issues arise. Will City staff deal with this since this is a City endorsed program.

Mr. Lang stated City staff will have to field calls but HomeServe does have a customer service department that will assist with questions and concerns.

City Attorney reiterated the City is not a partner with HomeServe or working with them. They are only allowing for the use of the City logo to be placed on the informational literature. This was a recommendation from the working group to be brought forth as property owners may not be aware of the costs of repairs with services lines to their home. If the property owner chooses to purchase the product, that is up to them.

Mr. Byram stated this program is in place in other cities and is in the neighboring community of Albert Lea. If the City is not satisfied with their services within the first year, the City can give notice and discontinue the contract with HomeServe.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving the agreement with HomeServe Warranty Program. Carried 5-1. (Council Member Baskin Nay)

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the Minnesota Area Transportation Partnership for District 6 provides for Federal Transportation Project Grants for the year 2030. These grants are highly competitive and require the local unit of government to financially participate. In reviewing the grant criteria and projects that have the potential for funding, they have identified 8<sup>th</sup> Street NE for potential funding.

Mr. Lang stated this project would be a concrete pavement reconstruction project consisting of pavement replacement on 8th Street NE from 10th Avenue NE to 14th Avenue NE. In addition, the project would include the removal of the Crane Lift Station, sanitary sewer replacement, storm sewer replacements and sidewalk & pedestrian ramp replacements. This section of 8th Street NE was previously reconstructed in 1988. The grant submittal date is February 6, 2026, and a Council resolution is required to be submitted with grant application. He is requesting Council approval for the resolution.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Postma adopting a resolution approving a STIP grant application. Carried 6-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated in preparation for the 2026 MnDOT construction project, in which the City is responsible for 10% of the total construction cost, and benefitting properties will be assessed 50% of the City's cost or 5% of the total construction cost, they have prepared a timeline to meet the critical dates required for the assessment process. The initial

step in the process is for Council to request feasibility reports. He requested Council approve the resolution calling for the feasibility reports.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution ordering preparation of a feasibility report on I-90 and 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW (Neighborhood SE of the Intersection) Project 22321. Carried 6-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested Council approve a one-year lease for 2026 to Kevin Finley for farming at the Cook Farm Location.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving a farm lease with Kevin Finley. Carried 6-0.

Mayor King recognized all who have donated to the Austin Flower Basket Program for 2026. He requested that donations be accepted.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution accepting flower donations to the City of Austin. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution updating the 2026 fee schedule with the applicable parking fines. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Postma, 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 909 3rd Avenue NW, Greene Property. Carried.

#### HONORARY COUNCIL MEMBER COMMENTS

Honorary Council Member Lindsey Compton thanked Council for allowing her to attend. She is enjoying her experience.

#### REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

City Administrator Craig Clark congratulated the Austin Daily Herald on receiving sixteen awards at the Minnesota Newspaper Association and Eric Johnson took first place in a couple of the categories. He commended him and the local newspaper.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the Point of Sale ordinance will go into effect on March 1<sup>st</sup>. They sent out a mailing to all the local realtors. They will be posting information on Facebook, putting an article in the newspaper and doing a segment with the Wright Here, Right Now podcast. They have also scheduled a meeting with the local plumbers to inform them of the items they are looking for when they are performing the inspections.

Council Member Baskin congratulated the Austin Daily Herald on their incredible work. He wished all the local sports teams good luck as they start their sectional playoffs this week.

Council Member Postma stated Paint the Town Pink is in full swing and kudos to all those who jumped into the lake this past weekend. He thanked City staff that were involved in this event. He encouraged citizens to get out and get involved in the upcoming events.

Council Member Helle encouraged the public to shop local especially those owned by immigrants and refugees. She stated the Parks crew has worked very hard on the outdoor ice this year and she encouraged citizens to utilize these rinks. She stated the Parks, Forestry, and Recreation department will be welcoming conservation corp. staff to the Parks and Rec department on February 17th. Lastly, she stated the Culture and Arts Commission is moving forward with their utility box wraps and will install those once the weather warms up.

Council Member Oballa echoed what Council Member Helle stated about supporting local businesses. He congratulated the Austin Daily Herald and Eric for his work.

Mayor King announced the timeline for the Chief of Police retirement and hiring process.

Council Member Baskin asked who sits in on the interviews.

Mayor King stated the Police Civil Service Commission will do this process.

Council Member Baskin asked if the finalists would be presented to Council.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated he would be the one who would be making the final decision on the candidate.

Mayor King read the February anniversaries.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adjourning the meeting to February 2, 2026. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:11 p.m.

Approved: February 2, 2026

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

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