

MINUTES
COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE WORK SESSION
May 18, 2026
City Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Steve King, Council Members Laura Helle, Jason Baskin, Oballa Oballa, Michael Postma and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Paul Fischer, Rebecca Waller

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Interim Police Chief Michael Hartman, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Director Jason Sehon, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Finance Director Emily Burns, Human Resource Director Trish Wiechmann, and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, SEH representative Clark Nolan

Mayor Steve King opened the meeting at 6:30 p.m.

Item #1 Comprehensive Plan 2045

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace presented the 2045 Comprehensive Plan to Council. Ms. Wallace gave an overview of how the project came to fruition. She stated the comprehensive planning process began in December 2024 after significant preparation and was developed through a collaborative partnership between the City of Austin, Mower County, Impact Austin, the Hormel Foundation, Mayo Clinic, and other community partners. Unlike previous city-led planning efforts, this process included broad community engagement, resulting in more than 16,000 community interactions through the project website, open houses, workshops, in-person meetings, surveys, student engagement, and advisory meetings. The result is two separate but coordinated comprehensive plans, one for the City of Austin and one for Mower County, that reflect each jurisdiction's needs while also advancing shared regional strategies. Public input helped shape recommendations in areas such as housing, economic development, community character, tourism, arts and culture, agriculture, parks, open space, downtown improvements, and the Cedar River Regional Park concept. The draft plan was published on the project website on March 30, along with an interactive story map highlighting key recommendations and implementation steps. Ms. Wallace requested Council Members provide any comments, concerns, or suggested adjustments before the plan moves forward.

SEH representative Clark Nolan gave a brief summary of the work SEH performed. Mr. Nolan stated the comprehensive plan has been a long-term planning effort built around community input, research, and implementation. The plan is organized into three main sections: an introduction with

the plan purpose, community profile, and engagement summary; core plan elements such as land use, housing, economic development, transportation, utilities, facilities, and parks and recreation; and an implementation section that identifies specific goals, strategies, and action steps. The plan goes beyond a traditional comprehensive plan by incorporating broader topics such as branding, community character, food systems, downtown development, tourism, economic analysis, open space, and parks. A key part of the process was the development of the playbook, which includes big ideas for food systems, tourism, downtown districts, cultural development, entrepreneurship, and community identity. The plan's vision describes Austin as a vibrant, diverse, and connected community that supports culture, education, nature, innovation, inclusivity, tradition, and business growth.

Mr. Nolan stated community engagement played a major role in shaping the plan, with more than 5,200 website users, over 16,000 community interactions, more than 100 online map comments, 11 advisory committee meetings, and more than 400 survey participants. Public input helped guide recommendations related to future land use, expanded housing options, downtown housing, economic development, support for young families and professionals, transportation improvements, sidewalk and trail connections, utilities, parks, and recreation. The implementation chapter is especially important because it prioritizes action items based on impact and level of effort, helping the City identify practical steps that can be taken early while also planning for larger long-term goals. The plan also recognizes that implementation will require more than City action alone; private businesses, nonprofit organizations, community groups, and partner agencies will all play an important role. After revisions, open house feedback, and Planning Commission review, the plan is moving forward for City Council consideration and adoption.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, moving the proposed 2045 comprehensive plan to the Council meeting on June 1, 2026 for approval. Carried.

Item #2 – Administrative Report

None

Item #3 – Open Discussion

Council Member Helle would like to see more financials as they work on adopting more technology to assist in 2027 as they work to keep staffing slim.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 p.m. Carried.

Respectfully Submitted,

Brianne D. Wolf, City Clerk