# MINUTES

**PORT AUTHORITY SPECIAL MEETING**
**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28TH 2026**
**5:00 P.M.**
**CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**Members Present:** **Steven Leif, Jeff Austin, Geoff Smith, Tim Ruzek, Kris Heichel President Jason Baskin (5:37 P.M.)**

**Members Absent:** **Lee Bjorndal**

**Staff Present:** **Port Authority Executive Director Craig Clark, Port Authority Attorney Craig Byram, Port Authority Assistant Treasurer Emily Burns, Port Authority Secretary Brianne Wolf**

**Others Present:** **Austin DCA President John Garry, Austin DCA Vice President of Business and Community Development Nan Hanegraaf, Austin Daily Herald Staff Eric Johnson**

Commissioner Jeff Austin called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m.

**Item #2. – Approval of Minutes from the December 3, 2025 and January 7, 2026 meetings:**

Motion by Commissioner Heichel, seconded by Commissioner Smith approving the minutes from the December 3, 2025 and January 7, 2026 meetings. Carried.

**Item #3. – Approval of Claims for Payment – November 21, 2025 – December 31, 2025:**

Motion by Commissioner Ruzek, seconded by Commissioner Smith approving the claims from November 21, 2025 – December 31, 2025. Carried.

**Item #4. – Review of September 30, 2025 Unaudited Financial Statements:**

Assistant Treasurer Emily Burns stated the Finance Department is currently working through the last Quarter of 2025 statements with the transitions in the Finance Department. She stated since not all transactions have been posted as of December 31st. They will have those reports available at the next meeting. She stated what was provided was the same information as the last meeting with no edits since.

**Item #5. – DCA Strategic Planning**

Director Craig Clark stated collaboration with the Austin DCA continues to support Austin's economic development. He introduced Austin DCA President John Garry to discuss the outcomes of Austin DCA's strategic planning session and latest efforts.

Austin DCA President John Garry stated instead of starting a plan from scratch, Austin DCA tried to base their strategic plan on both the City's and County's existing Comprehensive Plans.

Mr. Garry stated there was a survey which asked what top priorities are and what would make Austin more attractive. There were also questions geared toward downtown. There were hundreds to thousands of responses to the survey.

The SEH consultants and people who work with them (planning/action committee) identified 12 opportunities for growth: Retaining/expanding businesses, attracting businesses that compliment Austin's character, attracting and retaining young professionals, regional collaboration, strengthen downtown, food city concept, business incubator, tourism, economic development/expanding housing, a downtown hotel, intermodal transportation hub (airport, rail, highway) and local collaboration.

The DCA identified which of these are most core to DCA's purpose: Retaining/expanding businesses, attracting businesses that compliment Austin's strengths, and a downtown hotel. The DCA is partnering with the Austin Chamber of Commerce to do some visits of current businesses to gather a sense of how things are going.

Austin DCA Vice President of Business and Community Development Nan Hanegraaf spoke about streamlining a "landing page" on the internet so that all three entities of Discover Austin, the Austin DCA/Impact Austin and the Austin Chamber of Commerce are linked and not all in separate places.

**Item #6. – Downtown Easement Sign Committee/BEEP:**

Austin Housing & Redevelopment Authority Taggert Medgaarden requested feedback on the proposed sign committee. Mr. Medgaarden laid out more details and is seeking approval for the committee to take on the role as outlined in his proposal. Commissioners Heichel, Smith and Austin all indicated they would like to relinquish this authority to the sign committee as proposed, but thought it would be ideal to have a member of the Port Authority on the committee to maintain consistency. This is not something they view as a requirement, but rather a suggestion. A motion for approval was made by Commissioner Smith to approve the delegation of sign review to the sign committee as proposed. Carried.

**Item #7. – Waiver of Restrictions to the Contract for Private Development of 34.524.0010:**

Director Craig Clark stated representatives of Carrington Capital Investments LLC (owners of the former Younkers building) in previous development on the Oak Park Mall had a TIF agreement on that project and there is a memorandum of contract for private development which restricts any use of the property that would make it tax exempt.

Mr. Clark stated an interested party is looking to lease a portion of the building. They plan to divide it into two sections: one will occupy 21,500 square feet, leaving an additional space of 18,500 square feet available for another tenant. The organization interested in leasing the space is Goodwill Industries, which is known as a charitable organization. They anticipate investing $2 million plus on the remodel and preparing the build-out of the facility. They want to make sure those investments are protected. As a result, they have requested a modification to clarify that they are permitted to proceed without putting the property tax payments or the TIF agreement at risk. Our primary responsibility here, apart from ensuring compliance with the current zoning code, is to oversee the TIF, which is currently in effect. If the TIF were to terminate or expire, we would lose the ability to regulate who occupies the facility. Nevertheless, due to the charitable provision, we need to provide them with some assurance. Attorney Byram has reviewed this matter. The Port Authority is being asked to sign the agreement with the understanding that, as long as the lease and use do not result in the property becoming tax-exempt, the Port Authority will be adequately protected.

A motion for approval was made by Commissioner Austin, seconded by Commissioner Heichel. Carried.

**Item #8. – Strategic Roadmap Updates/Executive Director Report:**

President Baskin provided background on how the strategic roadmap was developed to update the new Port Authority member, Commissioner Leif. Director Craig Clark stated he has been in communication with the City of Hutchinson for their input on helping Austin to develop a Growth Area Plan similar to Hutchinson's. Mr. Clark stated, to position Austin for future economic growth, he would like to consider creating a growth master plan. In speaking with consultants at SEH, the cost for a growth master plan is in the range of $60,000-$80,000, if the Port Authority is interested in moving forward. Mr. Clark stated the Port Authority may also solicit proposals from other companies.

Mr. Clark stated efforts continue on the 13-acre I-90 Business Park and the EPA Brownfield Grants. He reiterated the property has environmental concerns, so the priority will be to ensure the property is positioned for use.

Mr. Clark stated the structural assessment for the Walker Building's reroofing project is being signed by President Baskin to both protect the investment and take care of the tenant. Mr. Clark stated he still has not found anyone to help evaluate lease terms on the Walker Building. He stated these efforts will continue.

Mr. Clark stated Creekside Business Park/Nu-Tek property is part of strategic imperative 1 and there is nothing new to report for other possible tenants and exercising that right of first refusal or option to purchase that the Port Authority has approved in the past. Austin Utilities has a designated site for a future water tower and is assessing the water reservoir to determine whether to move forward with construction at that location. There may be a road built through Creekside, but there are many sewer-related considerations before it could be done. It would also be very costly, and Mr. Clark proposed a service road instead.

President Baskin summarized what he felt were action items for the Port Authority to follow up on. First, the Growth Master Plan: Mr. Clark is seeking Port Authority feedback on whether we want to pursue it. Commissioner Ruzek would like DCA's feedback on how this fits in with existing plans. John Garry of Austin DCA stated that, for commercial and residential developers, the Growth Master Plan would be very appealing and reassuring. Commissioner Heichel wants to know what kind of marketing plan would be in place if we were to pay $60,000-$80,0000 to create a Growth Master Plan. President Baskin proposed tabling the idea for the next two quarters to allow the Port Authority to finish its Comprehensive Plan, and we also have the DCA Strategic Plan. He feels that at that point, the Port Authority could reassess whether it is necessary, as well as consider how to integrate all that information and market it effectively.

Commissioner Ruzek raised concerns about the need for environmental cleanup/mitigation at both the 13- and 25-acre Port Authority-owned sites. He feels efforts have been initiated on those projects, and they need to find out whether there are grants/mitigation funds before investing $60,000-$80,000 in a plan focused on developing those areas if they can't be mitigated first.

President Baskin proposed this is revisited at the next Port Authority Meeting.

**Item #9. - Closed session under Minnesota Statute 13D.05, subd. 3(c) for the purpose of discussing the sale of 5 acres on the north section of the 25 acre parcel (34.905.0101)**

Motion by Commissioner Austin to close the meeting pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.05, subd. 3(c) for the purpose of discussing the sale of 5 acres on the north section of the 25 acre parcel (34.905.0101), seconded by Commissioner Ruzek. Carried.

CLOSED SESSION begins at 6:13 P.M. – See DVD of Closed Session.

Motion by Commissioner Austin, seconded by Commissioner Ruzek to open the closed meeting at 6:46 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Austin, seconded by Commissioner Heichel, to adjourn the meeting at 6:46 p.m. Carried.

Approved: ____________________________

President: ____________________________

Secretary: ____________________________