

M I N U T E S
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
October 20, 2025
5:30 PM
Council Chambers

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor King, Council Members Paul Fischer, Laura Helle, Michael Postma, Rebecca Waller, and Council Member-at-Large Jeff Austin

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Oballa Oballa and Council Member Jason Baskin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Planning and Zoning Director Holly Wallace, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Park, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Sehon, City Attorney Craig Byram, and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Members of the Community

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

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

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, approving Council minutes from October 6, 2025. Carried.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving the consent agenda as follows:

Licenses:

Lodging Establishment: Sonya Matter – Matter Loft, 103 12th Street NE,
Austin, MN

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of bills
- b. Investment report

Event Applications:

Downtown Austin Halloween Block Party on October 31, 2025
Hometown Christmas on November 28, 2025

Carried.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Mayor King spoke about the public hearing on street improvements on 14th Avenue NE, 18th Street NE, & 19th Street NE, Project 25303. The amount to be assessed is \$1,153,565.33 at 5.75% for 15 years. Mayor King stated there have been no written objections to this project. There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution declaring the cost of Project 25303. Carried 5-0.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution adopting the assessment roll of Project 25303. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving a four-way stop sign at 2nd Avenue NW and Main Street. Carried.

Planning and Zoning Director Holly Wallace stated the Planning Commission recently reviewed a variance request for a shed. The variance was to add a 160 sq. ft. shed located at 1508 6th Avenue NW. The Planning Commission recommended approving the variance. The variance is now being brought to Council.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving the variance request. Carried.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Postma, accepting donations to the City of Austin. Carried. 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 103 21st Street NW, Phyo Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving a liquor license premises expansion for the American Legion 91. Carried. 5-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang requested Council approve the purchase of a 938 Cat Wheel Loader with funds coming from the 2026 CIP in the amount of \$280,445.17. This would be a cost savings of \$11,379.53 as they would purchase the equipment versus leasing it for future use.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, approving the purchase of a 938 Cat Wheel Loader. Carried. 5-0.

CITIZENS ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL

SEMCAC representative Shelly Hovland requested the City Council to amend the zoning ordinance to allow a conditional use permit for a warming center in Austin. She stated a warming center will serve unhoused people. Over the last five years, an average of 83 people per year have been unhoused in Austin. She stated that being unhoused means lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, which can include people living on the street, in a camper storage unit, in their vehicle, or couch surfing.

As of today in 2025, 65 people have been identified in some capacity as unhoused. That includes 58 adults and seven children. She stated a warming center would reduce the harm experienced by unhoused people. She stated unhoused women are 44 times more likely to be raped. Violent assault among unhoused people is 49% more than in the general population. She stated this solution of a warming shelter is more cost-effective than housing any individual in jail for even one night. Here are some demographics: In 2025, 65 people were unhoused; in 2024, 98 people were unhoused; in 2023, 78 people were unhoused; in 2022, 110 people were unhoused; and in 2021, 69 people were unhoused. Their ages range from infants to 72 years old. The majority in this community is Caucasian, but all races in this community have been represented by these numbers. There are many barriers to housing in Austin. There are a lot of complex processes. Some landlords are asking for double deposits. Some unhoused persons have also been victims of crimes where they have had their IDs, social security cards, or phones stolen, and this makes the process even more challenging for them.

Ms. Hovland stated the majority of the people she has worked with in the past five years have income, are working, or have earned income, or it could be Social Security, SSDI, or some other form of income. They are contributing members of this community. The group she is working with has identified the Catholic Charities warming shelter model and believes it would work in Austin, as there is community support for this.

Rudy Dahl, the Director of Housing and Shelter Programs with Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota, 218 13th Street NW, Rochester, MN 55901, stated he has been with the program since it started in 2019. It was intended to be just a seasonal shelter, but then it grew into a year-round facility. Over the years, they've continuously grown. They have been at capacity for approximately the last three years. Last year, they opened up an overflow site when they partnered with the Salvation Army.

Mr. Dahl stated that last year, at the height of the winter season, they were sheltering anywhere from 80 to 90 people. He understands the concerns that come along with building a shelter, but he wants the Council to understand that a shelter helps people within their own communities. He understands another concern is that they are a low-barrier shelter, and this can lead to bad activity, but they have worked really hard with the Rochester Police Department. They try very hard not to have to call the police. It's only as a last resort that they call them. They practice de-escalation, they learn trauma and informed crisis management. He is excited to be a part of this project and to share Catholic Charities' interest in helping create the shelter. They believe that regardless of a person's situation, everyone is worthy of shelter, especially during cold days. He thanked the Council for their time.

REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Director Jason Sehon stated they met with the Cedar River Farmers Market board and recently discussed updates for the Cedar River Farmers Market for 2026. They plan to enhance marketing and promotion to attract more attendees and vendors, including local community garden growers. They are also pursuing a primary vegetable grower to increase vegetable offerings at the market. Additionally, they are looking to fill a market manager position. This is a priority for ongoing operations. They are excited to support the Food City initiative in the 2045 comprehensive plan and will provide further updates as they learn more.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated that last weekend I-90 was closed, resulting in increased traffic in Austin. A temporary signal light on 14th Street was damaged by a semi. Despite that, things went relatively smoothly. They expect more weekend and overnight closures soon as work continues on the 4th Street Bridge, including necessary under-bridge work. An additional weekend closure is planned for this upcoming weekend, pending confirmation from MN DOT. He will keep the council and public updated, relying on formal notices from MN DOT and sharing information on the City's Facebook account as soon as it becomes available. The situation may change as work progresses.

Council Member Helle announced a call for artists in Mower County to submit work for the Culture Arts Commission, which will be featured as graphic wraps on utility boxes in Austin. More details can be found on the Austin Area Arts website. Additionally, deer hunting is ongoing, but parks like the Nature Center and Todd Park remain open; wearing bright clothing is advised. The Parks and Rec department has planted 250 trees this fall to help recover from the emerald ash borer. Lastly, she congratulated the Pride committee for successfully organizing a recent event, showcasing improved leadership.

Council Member-at-Large Austin is excited about the launch of Millie, the Mill Pond Monster. Millie was brought to life through a collaborative effort among various individuals and organizations. The opening event took place on the 16th from 4 to 6 PM, with more opportunities for engagement to come. Looking ahead, they plan to update the strategic plan in 2026. He already has some ideas for this. Additionally, they reviewed and approved several library policies regarding programming, material selection and reconsideration, and meeting room use, finding that no changes were necessary.

Council Member Postma congratulated the Housing Redevelopment Authority (HRA) on securing a \$5 million grant for replacing the piping in the Twin Towers. This funding is crucial for maintaining a significant source of low-income housing for Austin and the greater community. Protecting this fifty to sixty-year-old investment is essential. A \$5 million grant is a substantial achievement. Kudos to everyone involved!

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Waller, adjourning the meeting to November 3, 2025. Carried.

Adjourned: 5:57 p.m.

Approved: November 3, 2025

Mayor: _____

City Clerk: _____