

M I N U T E S  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
November 3, 2025  
5:30 PM  
Council Chambers

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

MEMBERS ABSENT:

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, Park, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Schon, City Attorney Craig Byram, Human Resources Director Patricia Wiechmann, 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 Oballa, approving the agenda as amended. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving Council minutes from October 20, 2025. Carried.

Mayor King recognized the Human Resources Department for their work on the employee anniversary recognition breakfast.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving the consent agenda as follows:

Licenses:

Edible Cannabinoid: One Stop Liquor and Tobacco, Austin, MN

Claims:

a. Pre-list of bills

Carried.

## PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

City Administrator Craig Clark requested funding to extend a contract with the Wright Here, Right Now podcast. He would like to extend the current contract through the end of 2025 and continue the contract for the entirety of 2026. He stated funding would come from the Mayor and Council budget.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, Seconded by Council Member Oballa, approving a contract extension with the Wright Here, Right Now podcast for \$3,540. Carried 7-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the City has applied for and received initial authorization for a DNR Flood Hazard Mitigation Grant for property acquisition. The DNR has identified up to \$490,000, which would be paired with the Local Option Sales Tax dollars for a total project budget of \$980,000. These dollars will be used to purchase and remove repetitive loss properties or those most susceptible to flooding from the floodplain. The next step in securing the grant is to pass a resolution authorizing the 50% match or \$490,000 from the Local Option Sales Tax Fund 40000. Mr. Lang is requesting approval of this resolution.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, Seconded by Council Member Oballa, approving a resolution authorizing a 50% match from the Local Option Sales Tax fund for a DNR Flood mitigation grant. Carried 7-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark requested Council approve a collaboration with Mower County for prosecuting attorney services. The services would cost \$17,622 a month. This is the same as the previous contract they had with Baudler Law Office.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Postma, approving a contract with Mower County for a prosecuting attorney. Carried 7-0.

City Administrator Craig Clark requested the Council approve the 2026 health insurance program. He stated the City will be moving from their current broker of Kraus-Anderson to North Risk Partners as the provider. They will be moving to Triad who partners with Cigna. They will also be utilizing the local HELPCare Clinic to assist with care services. The plan they will offer has two different alternatives of deductibles and the deductible costs in the packets are essentially comparable to what the City currently has. This is a level funded program which is partially self-insured, so the city does bear some risk.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution setting plans, qualifications, and rates for 2026 health insurance program. Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Postma, Seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting a resolution for the 2026 health insurance section 105 plan arrangement Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, Seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution for the 2026 health insurance contributions and plans for non-bargaining unit employees. Carried 7-0.

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 406 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SE, Raygor Homes LLC Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Postma, Seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, approving a request for funding not to exceed \$5,000 for an outdoor ice rink at Packer Arena with funds coming from fund balance. Carried 7-0.

#### CITIZENS ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL

Judith Bjorndal, 2002 11<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, stated their group is convening regularly with the goal of providing shelter for unhoused individuals during the cold months of the year, starting in August. There are others who have been more involved in this initiative than she has, and they are also working on preparing the former Knights of Columbus building, which is located south of the post office. She stated the initiative is modeled after successful programs in Winona, Rochester, and Owatonna.

Ms. Bjorndal stated Catholic Charities is committed to providing staffing and oversight for the program, along with funding. However, there are still many questions to be answered regarding zoning, potential variances for usage, and the overall intent of ensuring everything is well-defined. She is in front of Council to plant the seed for this idea and encourage Council members to gather information on the successful sites in Rochester and Winona, as Winona is a more comparable community to Austin. It would be helpful to understand how those models work, the challenges they have faced, and how they have managed to make their initiatives successful.

#### REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

City Administrator Craig Clark stated Dave Unmacht will report to Council at the December 1<sup>st</sup> meeting.

City Clerk Brienne Wolf stated the election is tomorrow. She reminded everyone that election judges are friends, neighbors, and members of the community who make it possible for everyone to vote and have their voices heard. She asked all who vote to have patience, show respect, and appreciation for the service of the election judges. She stated democracy works best when everyone treats each other with kindness.

Public Works Director Steven Lang gave an update on the Interstate 90 bridge construction and an update on the Oakland Avenue project.

Council Member Oballa stated that he has received numerous emails regarding the proposed warming center. He would like to visit the warming center site and see the actual building before the discussions begin. He would like to know who to contact regarding this matter.

Ms. Wallace stated there is potential for a second site to be chosen, as the first site may not be chosen due to possible obstacles for the renovation. They will look into getting him contact information for him to view the building.

Council Member Helle reminded the public that the Culture and Arts Commission has a "Call for Art" open for the utility box project; those interested may visit the Austin Area Arts website for details. They are accepting art from youths who live in Mower County, including college students, Gerard students, and others. Selected artists will receive a small stipend for their work, and the art will then be used to create additional wraps to cover utility boxes, which is part of the long-term anti-graffiti plan. She thanked the clerks, volunteers, and partners at Mower County for their efforts on Election Day. She echoed the Mayor's thanks to the human resources team for the employee recognition breakfast last week. She appreciates everybody's time in getting it started and getting the momentum going.

Council Member Postma hoped everyone had a good Halloween weekend. He stated he was handing out candy, and a police vehicle drove by playing Ghostbusters. It was fun to see everybody out in the city. He noted that it was great to see the families downtown for the Trick-or-Treat event on Saturday. Also, Discover Austin has a new website. He encouraged all to check it out.

Council Member Baskin commented on the community engagement of the Austin Police Department on Halloween. He appreciated them going through the neighborhoods with music on and engaging positively with kids. He commended them on the great work. He thanked City Clerk Brienne Wolf, the staff, and election judges for their work on the election. They put in long hours to assist with this process. He stated, as a person who has served as an election judge in the past, he knows there is a lot of thankless work that goes into this process, but it is vital for democracy. Lastly, as an alumnus of Austin Public Schools and a parent of children in our public schools, he can tell the public firsthand that many of these things are needed, and he will be voting yes and encouraged others to do the same.

Mayor King stated that the county and the city are going through challenging times with their workforces, involving some restructuring and reorganization. He would like everyone to know they will get through this. There will be some tough times ahead, but our thoughts are with those who may be affected by reorganizations and restructuring. He read off the November Employee Anniversaries.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adjourning the meeting to November 17, 2025. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:02 p.m.

Approved: November 17, 2025

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

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