

M I N U T E S  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
March 16, 2026  
5:30 PM  
Council Chambers

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Oballa Oballa and Council Member Michael Postma

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

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald

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

Mayor King read a summary statement of City Administrator Craig Clark's performance review.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Baskin, approving Council minutes from March 2, 2026. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, approving the agenda as amended. Removing items #13 & #16. Carried.

CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving the consent agenda.

Licenses:

- Exempt Gambling (raffle): Austin Area Chamber of Commerce on July 7, 2026
- Exempt Gambling (bingo): Austin Area Chamber of Commerce on July 21, 2026
- Temporary Liquor: VFW Post 1216 on April 10 & 11, 2026
- Temporary Liquor: Austin Area Chamber of Commerce on July 21, 2026
- Low Potency Hemp Edible Retailer: One Stop Food Mart, Austin, MN
- Low Potency Hemp Edible Retailer: By the Way Food Mart, Austin, MN

Low Potency Hemp Edible Retailer: One Stop Liquor and Tobacco, Austin, MN  
Mobile Business: Solem Concessions, Austin, MN  
Mobile Business: 1910 Fresh Mexican Kitchen, LLC, Austin, MN  
Mobile Business: La Michoacana Purepecha, Rochester, MN  
Right of Way: Volt Electric, Austin, MN

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of Bills

Events:

No Kings 3.0 on March 28, 2026  
Mental Health Awareness Walk on May 8, 2026  
Cedar Rivers Farmers Market May 15, 2026 thru September 25, 2026  
Austin Area Chamber of Commerce Independence Day Parade on July 4, 2026  
Annual Running with Ella 5k on August 29, 2026  
Travis Manion Foundation 9/11 Heros Run on September 12, 2026

Appointments to Boards and Commissions:

Pam Grubbs to the Culture and Arts Commission – term expiring 12/31/2026

Carried.

## PUBLIC HEARINGS

Public Works Director Steven Lang reported to Council that 141 informational letters were sent out to citizens that were affected by upcoming street projects. The Engineering Department held an informational meeting and five property owners attended. They also sent an FAQ flyer to affected homeowners. He reviewed the assessment payment options and stated there is backup information in the Council packet for review.

Mr. Lang stated the project located on 8th Street SE will replace 100% of the sidewalk, as it was determined to be deficient. He stated that the City has a policy: if 50% of the sidewalk is in need of replacement, they will replace the sidewalk at 100%.

Mayor King called for the public hearing on street improvements on 8th Street SE (8th Avenue SE to 15th Avenue SE), Project 25104. The amount to be assessed is \$1,275,000 at 5.357% for 15 years. There have been no written objections to this project. There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Baskin, adopting a resolution declaring the cost of Project 25104. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, Seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution adopting the assessment roll of Project 25104. Carried 5-0.

Mayor King called for the public hearing on street improvements on 7th Avenue SW (24th Street SW to 8th Avenue SW), 8th Avenue SW (27th Street SW to 7th Avenue SW), & 26th Street SW (5th Avenue SW to 8th Avenue SW), Project 26101. The amount to be assessed is \$130,000 at 5.357% for 15 years. There have been no written objections to this project. There were no public comments.

Mr. Lang stated this will be a mill and overlay project and has different assessment rates versus a full street reconstruction project.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution declaring the cost of Project 26101. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Helle, Seconded by Council Member Fischer, adopting a resolution adopting the assessment roll of Project 26101. Carried 5-0.

Mayor King called for the public hearing on street improvements on 9th Avenue NW (11th Street NW to 14th Street NW) Project 26102. The amount to be assessed is \$825,000 at 5.357% for 15 years.

Mr. Lang stated this project will have 100% of the sidewalk replaced as it was determined to be deficient.

There was one written objection received from Jeremy Carolan, 1001 11st Street NW. His letter was read to Council.

Mr. Lang relayed the property Mr. Carolan owns is a corner lot, it has a larger street frontage and therefore the street assessment is more. Also in the case of this property, 60% of the sidewalk was identified as non-compliant.

Mayor King relayed that staff recommend approving the project and the property owner would have the right to file within District Court to appeal. He also stated Council can cancel the project or create a carveout for this individual due to the objection.

Homeowner Evolett Gonzalez was in attendance and spoke to Council about her objection to the street assessment. Her property is located at 1403 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW.

Council Member Baskin reiterated there are options for payment and asked the department heads to ensure this information is clarified to her.

Mr. Lang outlined the assessment would be spread out over a 15-year period and added to the property taxes.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution declaring the cost of Project 26102. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, Seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution adopting the assessment roll of Project 26102. Carried 5-0.

Mayor King called for the public hearing on street improvements on 5th Street NW (12th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW) & 7th Street NW (13th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW), Project 26103. The amount to be assessed is \$1,100,000 at 5.357% for 15 years. There have been no written objections to this project. There were no public comments.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution declaring the cost of Project 26103. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Helle, Seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution adopting the assessment roll of Project 26103. Carried 5-0.

Mayor King called for the public hearing on street improvements on 14th Street NW (8th Avenue NW to 15th Avenue NW), Project 26104. The amount to be assessed is \$300,000 at 5.357% for 15 years. 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 26104. Carried 5-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, Seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution adopting the assessment roll of Project 26104. Carried 5-0

## BIDS AND AWARDS

Parks, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Sehon presented a proposal for the pickleball court project to include construction of eight courts. Mr. Sehon noted the potential cost savings could be achieved by removing certain non-essential amenities if necessary and by completing the ADA-accessible sidewalk as part of the 2026 summer project rather than delaying it. Other amenities, including shade, benches, tables, drinking fountains, and lighting, could be deferred to a future phase as funding becomes available, or in 2027.

Mr. Sehon stated that the Austin, Minnesota Area Pickleball Association (AMAPA) increased its contribution by \$10,000, bringing its total contribution to \$110,000. The revised funding includes \$150,000 from the City of Austin building fund, \$250,000 from the Hormel Foundation grant, and \$110,000 from the Pickleball Association, for a total of \$510,000 available for the project.

The Park, Recreation, and Forestry Board met and voted unanimously to recommend that the City Council award the bid for construction of the eight courts and postpone other amenities as necessary to ensure project completion. The board also asked staff to explore reallocating funds from the 2026 Capital Improvement Plan to support court-related amenities.

To address the remaining project costs, staff proposed reallocating existing funds as follows:

1. \$15,866 from the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to install the west sidewalk as part of the ADA sidewalk project. There will be cost savings by completing this work during the construction of the courts.
2. \$15,000 from the CIP, miscellaneous roads and trails fund, for parking lot materials.
3. \$19,134 from playground improvements to be reallocated towards the pickleball courts.
4. \$30,000 from the building fund to finalize the project costs.

Staff recommended three actions for Council approval:

1. Award the bid to Ulland Brothers, Inc. as the low bidder for \$507,555.
2. Approve a budget amendment of \$30,000 from the building fund.
3. Approve the reallocation of \$50,000 in 2026 Capital Improvement Plan funds for remaining project expenses.

Council Member Baskin expressed this is a positive example of local government effectively collaborating. He emphasized the strong partnership with a local group aimed at improving the community. He also thanked Mr. Sehon for his contributions to this project and expressed his support for it.

Council Member Helle asked if the three steps were approved today and AMAPA were to bring more funding forward or they were to obtain additional grants, is the city committed to this or is this a worst-case scenario.

Mr. Sehon stated at the end of the project there may be some funding left but they should assume those capital project funds are gone and allocated for this project. He would recommend AMAPA raise funding for the extra amenities.

Council Member Helle clarified they would be using the City funding to build the eight courts and some of the other additional items (fencing, parking lot, sidewalk) and if there were additional funding left over that would be allocated to the extra amenities (shading, seating, hydration station).

Mr. Sehon stated this was correct.

Mayor King asked when the courts would be ready for use.

Mr. Sehon stated the estimated date of completion is the end of September.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Waller to approve awarding the bid to Ulland Brothers, Inc. for \$507,555, approve a budget amendment of \$30,000 from the building fund and approve the reallocation of \$50,000 in 2026 Capital Improvement Plan funds for remaining project expenses. Carried. 5-0.

## PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Mayor King requested a motion for the approval of the Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Association (SMMPA) ordinance. This would authorizing the execution of a ground lease between SMMPA and Austin Utilities.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, for preparation of the SMMPA ordinance. Carried.

Moved by Council Member-at- Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, for the adoption of the SMMPA ordinance. Carried 5-0.

Mayor King requested a motion for the approval of an amendment to the Sidewalk Café ordinance.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Waller, for preparation of the amendment to the Sidewalk Café ordinance. Carried.

Mayor King requested a motion for the approval of an amendment to the ordinance on standards for regulations relating to sewer use and service charges.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, for preparation of the amendment to the ordinance on standards for regulations relating to sewer use and service charges. Carried.

Moved by Council Member-at- Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Waller, for the adoption of the amendment to the ordinance on standards for regulations relating to sewer use and service charges. Carried 5-0.

Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace requested Council approve an annexation request from CCI Granite, at 1407 10<sup>th</sup> Drive SE. Ms. Wallace stated the property would like to access city sewer services. The property is located in Austin Township and is on 1.14 acres. This property is also located in an I-1, light industrial district. She stated once annexed into the City the petitioners would pay the sewer connection fees.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a joint resolution approving the annexation of CCI Granite, 1407 10<sup>th</sup> Drive SE, Austin, MN. Carried. 5-0.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving a budget adjustment to the general fund for 2026. Carried 5-0.

Human Resources Director Trish Wiechman requested Council approve a revised earned sick and safe time leave policy. She stated some items updated were required by statute and also the City updated the following: increase the cash out for sick leave to \$1,000 annually, change the maximum accrual amounts for employees hired after January 1, 2026, and change the retirement

payout amounts. She is requesting Council approval for the updated policy revisions. These changes are requested to be retroactive to January 1, 2026 and would mainly effect non-bargaining unit employees.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving a revised earned sick and safe time leave policy. Carried.

Fire Chief McCoy stated due to short staffing at the fire station they are requesting Council approve a temporary full-time firefighter. Chief McCoy stated they met with the Fire Commission on March 6<sup>th</sup> and they were in approval of hiring the temporary full-time firefighter.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving the hiring of a temporary full-time firefighter. Carried.

City Clerk Brianne Wolf requested Council approval for an off-sale liquor license transfer to Austin South Highway Liquor LLC, 3011 W. Oakland Avenue. Ms. Wolf stated the license was previously held by Austin Highway Liquor LLC. The Clerk's office has received all the necessary documentation for the license transfer and recommends approval.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving a liquor license transfer to Austin South Highway Liquor LLC. Carried 5-0.

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

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Helle, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 703 5<sup>th</sup> Street NW, 703 5<sup>th</sup> St LLC Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 1005 8<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Fink Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, 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 1306 11<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Hastings Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Fischer, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 707 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW, Batikare Property. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Fischer, to grant the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at 1112 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue NW, Dornink Property. Carried.

## CITIZENS ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL

Bob Rosel, AMAPA Representative, thanked Council for their cooperation and support in getting pickleball courts in Austin.

## REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

City Administrator Craig Clark thanked Senator Gene Dornink for his support of the local option sales tax bill. He assisted in the hearing for the Senate tax committee. This funding will assist with a new police station if it were to move forward.

Public Works Director Steven Lang provided an update on the City's snow removal efforts over the last several days. He expressed appreciation to the Street Department, Sewer Department, and Park and Recreation staff for working together on the response. He noted a snow emergency was declared due to the anticipated volume of snowfall and will remain in effect until 8:00 a.m. Wednesday.

Mr. Lang reported crews worked on Sunday from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. during the storm. On Monday, crews began work at 1:00 a.m. to complete downtown snow pickup and windrowing. He stated crews would begin again at 4:00 a.m. Tuesday to finish downtown windrow pickup, continue sanding arterial and secondary streets, and complete cleanup in residential areas throughout the day.

Mr. Lang stated the office received approximately 12 to 15 calls related to the snow event. He noted, although this was more than in past events, it remained manageable given the impact on the entire community. Reported concerns included plowed-in driveways, snow piles at intersections affecting visibility, slippery road conditions, and alley access.

Mr. Lang again thanked the crews for their long hours and early starts in responding to the storm. Council members also expressed appreciation for staff efforts.

Council Member Helle expressed appreciation for City staff and emergency responders who continued working during the snow emergency, noting that law enforcement, firefighters, and other emergency personnel still responded despite poor conditions. Appreciation was also extended to residents who stayed home during the storm, which helped ease response efforts. Council Member Helle noted effective public communication regarding the snow emergency, including Facebook updates from law enforcement and City staff, as well as outreach through major media channels.

Council Member Helle recognized the library for successfully hosting a Comic Con event on Saturday prior to the storm. She thanked the Library Director for the Library's strong community programming and the positive experience it provided for local families.

Council Member-at-Large Austin thanked all the City staff for their efforts during the snow emergency.

Council Member Baskin thanked all City staff for their efforts during the snow emergency.

Mayor King thanked all that serve all on the City's commissions and boards.

Citizen Scott Soderberg 2408 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue SW addressed the Council revisiting his earlier remarks about taxes and clarified that his concern is not with Austin having younger residents, but with the financial pressure rising property taxes place on older residents, retirees, and others on fixed incomes. He stated concern that City spending on property acquisition, demolition, flood mitigation, and transfers to nonprofit entities removes properties from the tax rolls without a clear return on investment, which he believes shifts more of the tax burden onto remaining taxpayers. He referenced several properties as examples and questioned whether those expenditures are producing enough public value or future tax base growth. Mr. Soderberg also urged the City to consider preserving certain local properties and venues that hold historic and community significance, rather than removing them, and said he would like to see stronger efforts to maintain places that contribute to Austin's identity and appeal. He further commented that the public would benefit from better access to information about City decisions and encouraged more residents to participate in the process by attending meetings and voicing their concerns.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Baskin, adjourning the meeting to March 16, 2026. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:36 p.m.

Approved: April 6, 2026

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

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