

M I N U T E S
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
April 6, 2026
5:30 PM
Council Chambers

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

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, City Attorney Craig Byram, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Park, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Sehon, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Finance Director Emily Burns, Human Resources Director Tricia Wiechmann and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

APPEARING IN PERSON: Austin Daily Herald, Scott Knoebel

Mayor King called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving the agenda as amended. Removing item #7. Carried.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving Council minutes from March 16, 2026. Carried.

Parks, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Sehon presented citizen Scott Knoebel with a Step Up Award in appreciation of his volunteer service to the community of Austin.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

Licenses:

Mobile Business: Sunny's Ice Cream & Mexican Food, Austin, MN

Mobile Business: Stage Coach BBQ & Grill, Brownsdale, MN

Massage Therapist: Christine Stiehm, Austin, MN

Right of Way: Landmark Concrete and Landscaping, LLC, Albert Lea, MN

Low Potency Hemp Edible: Dragon Smoke Shop, Austin, MN

Low Potency Hemp Edible: Main Street Pinball, Austin, MN

Exempt Gambling (bingo): Mower County Veterans on July 3 & 4, 2026

Temporary Liquor: VFW Post 1216 on May 16, 2026

Temporary Liquor: VFW Post 1216 on August 15, 2026

Claims:

- a. Pre-list of Bills

Events:

Shamrockin' Run on April 11, 2026

Anywaa Annual Culture Day on July 4, 2026

Carried.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

A public hearing was held for a tax abatement requested by Bigelow & Lennon. They are proposing to build a single-family home located at 1317 18th Street NE, parcel number 34.471.0020, valued at approximately \$400,000.00. City Administrator Craig Clark stated the application is in conformance with the City's policy for tax abatement. The builders however will need to submit another permit as they applied prior to the application being approved.

There were no comments from the public.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, approving the tax abatement. Carried 7-0.

BIDS AND AWARDS

Public Works Director Steven Lang spoke about the bids for the 2026 asphalt street reconstruction projects. He relayed the bids came in as follows:

| <u>Contractor</u> | <u>Total</u> |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Ulland Brothers, Inc. | \$2,521,178.65 |
| ICON, LLC | \$2,777,670.25 |
| Engineer's Estimate | \$2,817,877.25 |

Mr. Lang recommended awarding the bid to Ulland Brothers, Inc.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, awarding the bid to Ulland Brothers, Inc. Carried 7-0.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution approving a five-year lease agreement with the Austin MN Junior Hockey LLC (Austin Bruins). Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving budget adjustment number two to the general fund and the building fund. Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving a contract with WHKS for design services for the 2026 sanitary sewer lining project. Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving an airport entitlement funding transfer in the amount of \$150,000 to the City of Wadena, MN. Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving an airport entitlement funding transfer in the amount of \$77,280 to the City of Glencoe, MN. Carried 7-0.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving a resolution approving change order number eleven for the Wastewater Treatment Plant project. Carried 7-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated planning is underway for a sound wall along I-90 in Austin, as well as a nearby pedestrian bridge over the Cedar River. The City is being asked to approve a cooperative agreement with MnDOT to cover local costs associated with the sound wall project.

Mr. Lang stated Austin previously secured a grant covering 90% of the sound wall cost, leaving the City responsible for 10%, which was planned to be split evenly between tax levy funds and assessments on benefiting property owners. However, updated estimates show the total project cost has nearly doubled, increasing the City's share from about \$100,000 to around \$200,000. This means higher costs for both taxpayers and assessed residents, roughly doubling earlier expectations. Additional levy funds will need to be allocated, and the assessment process will begin once final costs are confirmed.

Mr. Lang stated the agreement also outlines maintenance responsibilities: the City will handle routine upkeep of the pedestrian bridge (like snow removal) and maintain the residential side of the sound wall (such as graffiti removal and debris clearing). Overall, the main issue for Council consideration is the increased cost and funding implications, along with the time-sensitive need to approve the agreement so MnDOT can proceed with bidding.

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving a MnDOT Cooperative Construction Agreement. Carried 6-1. (Council Member Helle Nay)

CITIZENS ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL

Brian Schulz, Austin Bruins Representative, thanked the Austin City Council for their support of the Austin Bruins and for approving the new five-year agreement. He is eager for the upcoming

improvements at Riverside Arena and values the partnership between the Bruins and the community.

DJ Ryther, Hwy 218, expressed frustration and felt disrespected after receiving a letter she perceived as dismissive or exclusionary. Ms. Ryther emphasized her deep personal and historical ties to the community and questioned whether public participation, especially speaking at council meetings, is truly welcomed. She raised concerns about city priorities, particularly the appropriateness of raises during a time of financial struggle, while also acknowledging and praising positive efforts such as city programs and staff work. She highlighted her ongoing civic involvement, including hosting political candidates and advocating for local issues like cannabis businesses. A key concern was access to public participation and whether only residents or property owners should be allowed to speak and whether time limits are fair. She ultimately reaffirmed her intention to stay engaged and continue participating when appropriate, while calling for integrity, inclusivity, and respectful communication from city leadership.

REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public Works Director Steven Lang gave an update on upcoming bridge and road construction that will be performed in the area.

City Administrator Craig Clark stated he attended a Coalition for Greater Minnesota Cities board meeting on housing provisions concerning the legislation.

Council Member Baskin thanked staff for their work during a difficult construction season, noting that increased state and federal funding has intensified disruptions. While recognizing that the construction is inconvenient, he expressed optimism that it will bring long-term benefits lasting decades. He also thanked Representative Mueller and Senator Dornick for staying engaged with local concerns and advocating for the community at the state legislature.

Council Member Helle shared several parks-related updates. She noted Patti Hamilton, an administrative assistant for the Parks and Recreation Department, retired last week and is appreciated and missed. She highlighted winter work by the Parks Department to upgrade flower watering wagons with water recapture systems, which will reduce waste, keep sidewalks drier, limit fertilizer runoff into storm sewers, and improve efficiency. She also encouraged residents to apply for summer park jobs and to sign up for seasonal programming, which includes nearly 200 youth activities such as swimming lessons and nature camps. Lastly, she announced that the 4th Ave Fest, a community event focused on arts, culture, and healthy living, will take place on Wednesday, June 3rd at Austin Horace Park, featuring activities, open swimming, and food trucks.

Council Member Oballa announced the Taste of Nations event will be held on May 16th from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. He invited the community to join in the celebration.

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adjourning the meeting to April 20, 2026. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:26 p.m.

Approved: April 20, 2026

Mayor: _____

City Clerk: _____