

M I N U T E S  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
April 20, 2026  
5:30 PM  
Council Chambers

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Council Member Jason Baskin

STAFF PRESENT: City Administrator Craig Clark, Police Chief David McKichan, City Attorney Craig Byram, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Planning and Zoning Administrator Holly Wallace, 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

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 Waller, approving Council minutes from April 6, 2026. Carried.

Mayor King read a proclamation declaring the month of May as Arbor Month.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

Licenses:

Right of Way: Trinity Asphalt Paving LLC, Riceville, IA

Right of Way: MetroNet, Evansville, IN

Mobile: Mimi's Cones, Austin, MN

Claims:

a. Pre-list of Bills

b. Credit Card Report

Events:

Beer, Bacon, & Beignets on May 2, 2026

VFW Car Show on May 16, 2026

Appointments:

Emilia Rojas Felix to the Library Board – term expiring December 31, 2026

Carried.

BIDS AND AWARDS

Public Works Director Steven Lang spoke about the bids for the mill and overlay project for 14<sup>th</sup> Street NW. He stated they received two bids. One from Rochester Sand & Gravel in the amount of \$395,296.00 and another from Ulland Brothers, Inc. \$462,962.20. The Engineer's estimate is \$397,363.50. Mr. Lang stated the funding from the project will come from Funds 42 & 61. He would recommend awarding the bid for this project to Rochester Sand & Gravel.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Waller, awarding the bid to Rochester Sand & Gravel. Carried 6-0.

PETITIONS AND REQUESTS

Moved by Council Member Oballa, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving how write in votes are counted in municipal elections. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution appointing the election judges for 2026. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution approving an Airport Statement of Qualifications with SEH. Carried 6-0.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving an off-site gambling application for the American Legion Post 91. Carried 6-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the Council discussed an agreement with the Minnesota Department of Transportation regarding the City's share of costs and future maintenance responsibilities for a proposed I-90 noise wall and pedestrian bridge over the Cedar River. The project was initially presented in 2023 under the Greater Minnesota Noise Wall Program, which provides 90% state funding and requires a 10% local match. At that time, the total project cost was estimated at approximately \$1 million, resulting in a \$100,000 local share split evenly between special assessments and the tax levy. Updated cost estimates presented at a recent meeting indicated the total project cost has increased to approximately \$2 million due to rising construction expenses, including materials and labor. As a result, the City's local share has increased to approximately \$200,000, with about \$104,000 to be assessed to benefitting property owners and a similar amount funded through the tax levy. These increases have more than doubled the financial impact on both the City and affected residents, prompting concern and further discussion.

Mr. Lang stated City staff contacted MnDOT to explore the option of removing the noise wall portion from the project. MnDOT advised that removal is possible but requires immediate action

due to the project's upcoming bid letting. To proceed, the City would need to adopt a resolution requesting removal of the noise wall, after which MnDOT would delay bidding for approximately one month to revise plans and specifications. The City would then terminate the existing cost-share agreement and later establish a new maintenance agreement for the pedestrian bridge only, which would return to Council for approval. A draft resolution was presented reflecting these steps and citing concerns over increased local costs. The item was then opened for Council discussion and potential public comment prior to a final decision.

Susan Bednar, 1414 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW, expressed long-standing concerns about increasing highway noise affecting her neighborhood, citing significant changes in traffic over the past 35 years, including higher volumes of semi-trucks, engine braking, aftermarket exhaust, and emergency vehicle traffic. She noted that a City-commissioned noise study confirmed unsafe decibel levels impacting 11 homes. While not unanimous, a majority of affected homeowners supported the noise wall project and agreed to special assessments based on benefit received.

Ms. Bednar emphasized the City Council approved the project in May 2023 in coordination with the Minnesota Department of Transportation bridge work, and residents relied on assurances that costs would remain within agreed limits. Since then, engineering, coordination, and preparation for bidding have already occurred, representing a significant investment of time and public resources. She acknowledged rising costs but stressed that the residents acted in good faith based on prior approval and project progress.

Ms. Bednar raised concerns about the City reconsidering the project at a late stage, questioning whether deliberations are occurring transparently within the public process. She concluded by urging the Council to honor its prior commitment, keep the noise wall in the project, and follow through on what residents view as the only meaningful solution to the documented noise problem.

Council Member Postma asked if Ms. Bednar was in favor of paying for the sound wall at the higher cost and Ms. Bednar stated she was not.

Mr. Lang stated if the residents' portion was to stay at the 2023 pricing where they were to only pay \$50,000, the City would have to come up with \$150,000 to cover the costs.

Council Member Postma stated that while he personally likes the concept of the noise wall, he has consistently opposed the project because he does not believe it is a good use of City resources. He acknowledged residents' frustration and the feeling that the project may be taken away after they expected it to move forward. However, he emphasized that the situation now presents only two realistic options: either cancel the noise wall project entirely or proceed with it at significantly higher costs, which would approximately double the financial burden for both the City and affected residents. He stated he has not yet made a final decision and intends to base his vote on input from neighborhood residents. Specifically, he is seeking feedback on whether residents are willing to accept the increased costs to move forward with the wall or if they believe the higher expense is no longer justified.

Mayor King stated this item is back on the agenda due to calls from residents stating the price is too high. He stated this sound wall is benefiting eleven residents and would be costing

approximately 1% of the tax levy if the City were to cover the \$150,000 it would cost to carry this forward.

Gary Quednow, 1407 2<sup>nd</sup> Street NW, explained that he personally contacted nearly all affected neighbors, speaking with nine out of eleven households, and found consistent support for the noise wall at the originally agreed assessment levels. However, those same residents expressed clear opposition to the significantly increased costs. He shared his own situation as an example, noting his assessment would rise from approximately \$9,700 to \$21,000, or over \$31,000 if financed through property taxes, which he stated he cannot afford.

Mr. Quednow reiterated that he still supports the noise wall as a concept and believes it is needed. He emphasized that neither he nor the neighbors he spoke with are willing to move forward at the higher cost. He acknowledged the Council is facing a difficult decision but stressed that the increased financial impact has changed residents' positions. He also raised concerns about communication, noting that some residents learned about the cost increase informally rather than through official channels, and suggested earlier notification could have allowed for more timely public input.

Kris Ansorge, 300 14<sup>th</sup> Place NW, was frustrated with the lack of transparency and reading about the increase with this project in the newspaper.

Council Member Oballa believes the residents are overwhelmed with the increase of the assessment.

Council Member Fischer understands the residents' concerns and feels there is no need to move forward with the increase in assessment. The City's budget is already tight and requesting funding on a wall would not be a good use of funding.

Adam Ansorge, 300 14<sup>th</sup> Place NW, asked if there would be a possibility of planting a tree or bush buffer line in that area to help alleviate the noise issue. He would like to know if this would be a possibility for something that could be investigated.

Moved by Council Member Postma, seconded by Council Member Oballa, adopting a resolution approving the cancellation of the MnDOT noise wall project. Carried 6-0.

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated they were experiencing coating failure at Industrial EQ/Digester No. 2 at the City's wastewater treatment facility. Mr. Lang emphasized the need to determine the root cause of the coating's failure prior to reapplication in order to prevent recurrence. A proposal was received from KTA-Tator, Inc., a firm specializing in protective coatings and linings, to provide consulting and engineering services to evaluate the failure and identify contributing factors. The proposed cost for this analysis ranges from \$13,500 to \$15,500. He requested Council approval of a contract with KTA-Tator, Inc. in an amount not to exceed \$15,500 and requested authorization for the City Engineer to execute the agreement.

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, adopting a resolution approving a contract with KTA-Tator, Inc. for engineering services at the Wastewater Treatment Plant. Carried 6-0.

#### CITIZENS ADDRESSING THE COUNCIL

Nancy Quednow, 1407 2nd Street NW, stated she is dissatisfied with the outcome of the noise wall project. She would like to know how the assessment for the noise wall only was applicable to eleven homeowners and not the twenty-three that live in that area. She hopes future citizens will continue to advocate for this issue.

#### REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Council Member Helle stated 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Fest will be on June 3<sup>rd</sup> at Horace Park. She thanked the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Staff for fabricating a new dock approach for Mill Pond. She stated they reused old bleacher parts to save money when creating this.

Mayor King read the April employee anniversaries.

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Waller, adjourning the meeting to May 4, 2026. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:14 p.m.

Approved: May 4, 2026

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

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