

MINUTES
PORT AUTHORITY SPECIAL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2025
4:30 P.M.
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Members Present: Commissioners Jason Baskin, Geoff Smith, Kris Heichel, Jeff Austin, Michael Bednar, Lee Bjorndal, and Tim Ruzek.

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Port Authority Executive Director Craig Clark, Port Authority Attorney Craig Byram

Others Present: City Clerk Brienne Wolf, Impact Austin Representative Nick Novotny, DCA Representative John Garry & Nan Hanagraff, HRA Director Taggart Medgaarden, Matt Barthomew, Terry Hall, Chamber of Commerce Representative Joe Bower, Planning and Zoning Director Holly Wallace, Lindsey Compton,

President Baskin called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.m.

President Baskin recognized Commissioner Michael Bednar's years of service to the Port Authority as this will be her last meeting.

Item #2. – Approval of minutes of the August 5, 2025 meeting:

Motion by Commissioner Heichel, seconded by Commissioner Ruzek, approving the minutes of the October 22, 2025 meeting. Carried.

Item #3. – Approval of Claims for Payment:

Review of the claims paid from October 10, 2025 through November 20, 2025. Motion by Commissioner Bjorndal, seconded by Commissioner Heichel, approving the claims. Carried.

President Baskin suggested switching agenda Items 5 and 6 for the sake of time. There were no objections.

Item #4. – Walker Building Reroofing Project:

Director Craig Clark stated WHKS performed a structural assessment on the Walker Building property. The building will need to be re-roofed. The cost to develop the roofing project was \$6,200 and he is requesting approval for this project.

Moved by Ruzek to approve, Seconded by Bjorndal. Carried.

Item #5. – Downtown Easement/ Façade Improvement:

Director Craig Clark stated Taggart Medgaarden, Director of the Austin Housing & Redevelopment Authority, included information on the criteria for BEEP grants in the packet, outlining qualifying items. Two applicants are being presented at this meeting. Mr. Terry Hall and Mr. Matt Bartholomew are seeking the Port Authority's input on whether these proposals meet the BEEP grant criteria.

5a. Terry Hall – 117/119 1st Ave NW. This property is currently being rented by Sync Health LLC and used to house Howe Bail Bonds and an embroidery business. Mr. Hall stated he purchased the building from the Howes and had it reroofed. He is seeking the Port Authority's assistance with the exterior improvements to this building. The West part of the building has a plaster exterior, while the East part is brick. Mr. Hall stated they plan to keep the brick but stain it a different color. The proposal is to install a metal façade over the stucco portion and tie it into the header at the top of the brick portion of the building. There would then be vertical and horizontal steel siding in black to match the window frames, which will also be black. Mr. Hall proposes to remove and replace one door. There were two doors; one into each portion of the building. One was not in use when the Howes owned the building. They removed the door, filled it with CMU, and then covered it. Mr. Hall says that he is excited and thinks the photos of the proposed upgrades look great. He supports the tenant's efforts with this proposal.

5b. Matt Bartholomew – 120 3rd Avenue NW. Last year, Mr. Bartholomew purchased the property from Attorney Dan Donnelly. Mr. Bartholomew stated that they first completed an interior remodel of the space after buying it. He stated they spent about \$40,000.00 on interior renovations. Last year, there was a superficial “polishing up” of the exterior to make it slightly more attractive before a Hormel event downtown. Mr. Bartholomew stated the brick is severely deteriorated on the alley side and on the West side of the building. Part of the skin coat over the bricks is about to fall over onto the Morems' portion of the building (next door at 122 3rd Ave NW). Therefore, they will do the brickwork, windows, and doors for the entire building with the steel façade. But before all of that, the roof needs to be replaced, which will protect the investment from the top down. Mr. Bartholomew would also like to see an Austin-themed mural on the alley side of the building. Commissioner Ruzek asked if there would be benefits to Mr. Bartholomew's vision for vacating that alley. Mr. Bartholomew stated there are trucks going in and out of that alleyway every day. If they did a bar space in the rear, it'd be cool to kind of close off some of that alley to have it be more of a patio style area. The air conditioners are definitely a hazard right now.

Mr. Hall stated he would support closing the alleyway to traffic, making it accessible only to foot traffic. His only concern is that there have been issues with graffiti back there. He stated it's so narrow that it just really shouldn't be for traffic. If this were closed off, they may also be able to add more parking.

Commissioner Heichel asked whether that would be an item requiring City Council approval.

President Baskin stated he recalled a similar request from another bar establishment and that Council was able to work with them to accommodate it.

Commissioner Bjorndal stated he appreciates the BEEP program as well as the work these two individuals are trying to put in to improving the downtown area of Austin.

Director Craig Clark stated due to the possibility of new business, the Port Authority would need to take action on the signage and the proposed mural. Zoning would need to approve the signage, and then it would be taken to the Port Authority for review.

Item 5a.: Moved by Commissioner Austin to approve, Seconded by Commissioner Heichel. Carried.

Item 5b.: Moved by Commissioner Bjorndal to approve, Seconded by Commissioner Austin. Carried.

Item #6. – Comprehensive Plan Updates:

Holly Wallace, Planning and Zoning Administrator for the City of Austin, stated she wanted to provide a little background information and then discuss why the Comprehensive Plan, in general, is important, as well as some background on Impact Austin. They are housed within the DCA and are a community initiative whose mission is to build a vibrant community where people and resources connect to revitalize, discover, and invest in authentic ways to grow downtown Austin and Austin in general. The four pillars of impact are: Housing, Identity and Connection, Downtown, and Economic growth. To facilitate this mission, Impact Austin collaborated with Daniel Hintz of The Velocity Group a couple of years ago. He developed a report that included a recommendation to update the City's Comprehensive Plans. At the same time, the City was considering updating the Comprehensive Plan. Mower County has a Comp Plan update in its budget. DCA, Impact Austin, The City of Austin, and Mower County agreed to work together on Comprehensive Plan updates. Impact Austin hired a community engagement specialist, Nick Novotny, to expand coverage in the community and help maintain progress moving forward. With the city and county investments and additional financial support from the Hormel Foundation, Mayo, and Hormel Foods, Comprehensive Plan work began in the fall of 2024. Although it seems logical to combine efforts with the City and County, it's groundbreaking in the planning world, and we're the only example nationally, according to our consultants. Over the past year, we've reached several milestones; most importantly, community outreach with the help of Nick Novotny from Impact Austin, Val Sheedy with Mower County, and our consultants at SEH and Velocity Group. We've had more than 400 online survey responses, almost 4,000 website visitors, and over 5,000 person-to-person interactions throughout the process. The Comprehensive Plan documents are community-driven and are a resource for public officials and others. The Comprehensive Plans provide consistency in decision-making. The plan provides decision-makers with a steady point of reference for taking action and the ability to make informed decisions within a long-term strategic framework. The plan provides facts on existing conditions and trends, enabling decision-makers to understand the impact of their choices better and to preserve community character. It allows communities to identify what's important and how to protect it. It produces positive economic development planning for community health, existing residences, and businesses. It helps predict the future development of an area more accurately. In addition, the planning process allows the community to consider workforce notification and local infrastructure capacity, among other factors, so that appropriate economic development strategies can be developed with the wise use of resources. The plan includes information from different department sources. This information can be used to decide and prioritize which projects to undertake. It can also be used to direct the location of utility extensions and road improvements, while reducing legal risk and conflict. A plan that's been publicly vetted and adopted can reduce legal challenges to zoning and development decisions. It provides a defensible basis for land use regulations and helps avoid arbitrary decisions. Finally, it enhances funding and grant opportunities. Many state and federal grants require alignment with the Comprehensive Plan. A well-developed plan shows that the City is prepared and proactive, making it more competitive for funding.

John Garry from the Development Corporation of Austin spoke about the RFI (Request for Information) Process from the state for businesses looking to establish or relocate in Austin, and the different things the DCA does for Austin. He stressed the importance of confidentiality in this process.

Commissioner Heichel asked how they know what types of businesses the state may be looking for.

John Garry stated these companies are looking for specifics when searching for a site; first and foremost, things like the number of acres or the proximity to an interstate. Director Craig Clark and John Garry would receive an RFI. Austin Utilities and the City's Public Works department would be involved. A tool called Lasso provides information. Only two sites in Southern Minnesota were selected over the last two years, out of 23 RFIs submitted. The reason the number is so low is related to employment, as in the number of jobs being created by the project, and not believing there is enough available workforce to support it.

Nick Novotny stated drafts are being completed for the City and County on the Comprehensive Plan for 2045. He would like to speak to the economic chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. He would like to know where the Port Authority's priorities are and what the goals are as the organization moves forward. What role will the Port Authority play in the economic future of Austin? Development and growth opportunities are where Impact Austin wants to concentrate its focus.

President Baskin stated the essence of strategy is choice. He stated they need to narrow it down to three to five things they want to rally the community around.

Commissioner Bjorndal stated he would like to look at retail businesses. He has dealt with the downtown hotel issues, but this has not come to pass. These are not Port Authority items. He would like to get the industrial property ready for use.

Commissioner Heichel stated she would like to shift gears to smaller projects.

President Baskin stated anything that helps to better attract businesses or expand businesses generally helps with the Port Authority. He feels that strengthening downtown should absolutely be a priority. He stated that a downtown hotel would make a lot of sense for several reasons. It would drive more people downtown, especially now that we've got more market-rate housing.

Commissioner Heichel states she thinks the time is right to revisit the downtown hotel idea now. She stated she does not know what the Port Authority's role would be, but hopes the Port Authority could help them in some way, shape, or form.

President Baskin stated he would like to look at the Cedar River and the White Water park, as there is an untapped opportunity there. He wants to know if there is anything we can do to bring in business. He stated Austin has got to think about what we do have: a great downtown, a river, a Fortune 500 company, and a world-class cancer research institute. He believes that the more we can economically develop and prioritize, the more we can rally people around that.

Commissioner Ruzek would like to encourage downtown development and engage with others that can help connect the dots such as the Chamber of Commerce and the DCA.

President Baskin would like to have Impact Austin/DCA in regularly to see if they are making progress on these items.

Director Craig Clark spoke about the strategic roadmap and how it intersects with the Comprehensive Plan. He stated the growth area plan is an element of the strategic roadmap. He shared the City of Hutchinson has a growth master plan, essentially a marketing document for developers. It's a bit of an extension of a housing report that discusses community attributes, promotes schools, identifies industrial and residential growth areas, and provides more specific land-use detail from the Comp Plan perspective. He mentioned talking with the engineering firm the City worked with on the Comprehensive Plan to do something similar to what was outlined in their growth area plan, which was estimated to cost between \$60,000 and \$80,000. He wants feedback from the board on whether that's something they'd like to advance and actually solicit proposals for. He stated this is more of a marketing document for the City that touches on what Mr. Garry discussed regarding being ready for development.

President Baskin thinks there is value but is struggling to see what they would get out of this. He would like to table this until the next meeting until they get the full Comp Plan to see if this would be something they would need to do. He would also like to know how Hutchinson has used this to attract business.

President Baskin spoke about the Port Authority's next steps as an organization and prioritizing investments. He stated the Port Authority has primarily focused on developing Creekside Business Park. Secondly was the strategic land portfolio management. He noted that the Port Authority wanted to make sure that as Creekside Park filled up, they could start setting themselves up for the next generation of land, because we hate to fill it up and then, a decade from now, not have any land to give the people. Third is positioning Austin for future economic growth. This is a bit vaguer, but it's things like supporting the Comp Plans, Impact Austin, BEEP funding, and so on. He stated they did invite several folks who are part of this and want to hear from them informally as we think about positioning Austin for future economic growth. He wants to know what else should be on their strategic radar and what the pain points are. He then opened it up to the group for a discussion on what else should be on their radar and what they should be thinking about to develop economically.

Nan Hanegraaf with the DCA stated as a collaborative group, there should be partnership to ensure that entities are working together on items and helping one another while keeping each other informed.

Commissioner Heichel stated she agrees that stakeholders from different entities should be working together to tackle things collaboratively.

Craig Clark asked if combining efforts with the DCA is something the Port Authority wants to participate in financially. He asked the board to take a look at item number 8 on the agenda that relates to having a CIP plan of cost infrastructure on pending things that we're trying to accomplish.

Commissioner Heichel feels that quarterly meetings are too far apart.

Item #10. Adjournment:

With no further business, motion by Commissioner Austin, seconded by Commissioner Ruzek, to adjourn the meeting at 5:57 p.m. Carried. The next meeting is scheduled for January 28, 2026.

Approved: _____

President: _____

Secretary: _____