



**MINUTES  
CITY COUNCIL MEETING  
MONDAY, JULY 20, 2026  
5:30 PM  
CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mayor Steve King, Council Member-At-Large Jeff Austin, Council Member Jason Baskin, Council Member Rebecca Waller, Council Member Mike Postma, Council Member Laura Helle, Council Member Paul Fischer

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Council Member Oballa Oballa

**MEMBERS LATE/EXITING:**

**STAFF PRESENT:** Interim City Administrator Dave Unmacht, Police Chief Michael Hartman, Public Works Director Steven Lang, Library Director Julie Clinefelter, Park, Recreation and Forestry Director Jason Schon, City Attorney Craig Byram, Human Resources Director Tricia Wiechmann, Finance Director Emily Burns and City Clerk Brianne Wolf

**APPEARING IN PERSON:** Austin Daily Herald, Staff from the Austin Police and Fire Departments, Members of the Community, STARS Mentoring Program representatives Watsana Thiravong, Alani Thiravong, and Taylor McCullough

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

1. Adoption of Agenda

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, approving the agenda. Carried.

2. Approving minutes from July 06, 2026

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Postma, approving Council minutes from July 6, 2026. Carried.

3. \*Consent Agenda

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

- a. License  
Tree Removal: Sanchez Rental, Austin MN

- b. Financial Reports

2026 1st and 2nd Quarter Investment Overview

Claims Report: July 1, 2026 through July 15, 2026

Monthly Financial Report: April 2026

Monthly Financial Report: May 2026

4. Recognitions and Awards

- a. Recognizing Firefighters Kunze, Wyse, Hatten, and Caruso

Mayor King recognized Firefighters Josh Kunze, Matt Wyse, Matthew Hatten, and Ian Caruso for their efforts during a recent flood event. They provided mutual aid outside their usual jurisdiction to rescue two adults, two juveniles, and seven family pets. Their efforts were also commended by the Mower County Sheriff and their department.

5. Presentation

- a. Introduction of the Executive Director of the Parenting Resource Center (PRC)  
Crystal Vandevender

Executive Director Crystal Vandevender was not able to attend.

- b. STARS Mentoring Program Benefit Presentation by Watsana Thiravong

STARS Mentoring Program Executive Director Watsana Thiravong acknowledged Mayor King

for his support of the mentoring program through the 2025 cook-off fundraiser and invited all to attend the upcoming 2026 cook-off fundraiser. Ms. Thiravong stated it will be held this Friday in Albert Lea and Mayor King will be competing against the Mayors of Albert Lea and Conger to see who is the best cook.

Alani Thiravong, the junior representative for the STARS Mentoring Program, spoke to Council about the impact of the STARS mentoring program. She thanked Mayor King for letting her shadow him and be Mayor for the Day.

Taylor McCullough, Board President, thanked the Council for their support of the STARS Mentoring Program.

### **Public Hearings**

#### **6. Reviewing tax abatement applications from HRA Austin**

City Clerk Brienne Wolf stated there are two tax abatements being requested by the HRA Austin. They are proposing to build a duplex dwelling located on a vacant lot on 24th Avenue NW, parcel numbers 34.466.0070 and 34.466.0080, valued at approximately \$385,000.00 for each parcel. The applications are in conformance with the City's policy for tax abatement. The City Clerk's Office recommends approval.

- a. Resolution — Approving a Housing Tax Abatement application from the HRA of Austin for a duplex dwelling located at Lot 7, Block 1, Murphy Creek Meadows Subdivision, Austin, MN (PIN 34.466.0070)

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution approving a housing tax abatement from the HRA for a duplex dwelling located at 34.466.0070. Carried 6-0.

- b. Resolution — Approving a Housing Tax Abatement application from the HRA of Austin for a duplex dwelling located at Lot 8, Block 1, Murphy Creek Meadows Subdivision, Austin, MN (PIN 34.466.0080)

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution approving a housing tax abatement from the HRA for a duplex dwelling located at 34.466.0080. Carried 6-0.

### **Bids & Awards**

#### **7. 2026 Sanitary Sewer Lining Project**

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated the Engineering Department completed the bidding for a sanitary sewer lining project in the Southwest part of town near the fairgrounds. The project will install cured-in-place liners inside existing clay sewer mains, creating a continuous sleeve that reduces joints, root intrusion, and groundwater infiltration. This method is less disruptive and can be completed faster than full sewer reconstruction, with minimal impact on nearby property owners.

Mr. Lang stated the project will extend from 1st Avenue Southwest along 9th Street, west on 4th Avenue to 12th Street, and then south along 12th Street to 11th Avenue Southwest. Two contractors submitted bids, with Insituform Technologies USA submitting the lowest bid of \$1,443,068.29. Staff recommends that the City Council award the project to the low bidder.

Council Member Helle asked why the engineers' estimate was lower than what was bid. Does he know why this is and is there any cause for concern?

Mr. Lang stated he believes it is reflective of the current status of the bidding climate for these types of contracts. They have a twelve-month window to complete this work, so they try to give contractors a large window to get as competitive bids as possible.

Council Member Postma asked if there would be disruption of service to people's services.

Mr. Lang stated there would be coordination with property owners once the project started to ensure communication on any disruptions.

- a. Resolution — Awarding Bid for Sanitary Sewer Lining Project

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Waller, awarding a bid for sanitary sewer lining to Insituform Technologies USA, LLC. Carried 6-0.

### **Petitions and Requests**

8. Approving City Hall Security System Upgrades

- a. Resolution — Approving security system upgrades

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution approving City Hall security system updates. Carried 6-0.

9. Approving an agreement for the School Resource Officer

- a. Resolution — Approving an agreement for the SRO

Moved by Council Member Baskin, seconded by Council Member-at-Large Austin, adopting a resolution approving an agreement for the School Resource Officer for 2026-2027. Carried 6-0.

10. Approving updates to the Data Practices Policy

- a. Resolution — Approving updates to the Data Practices Policy

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution approving updates to the Data Practices Policy. Carried 6-0.

11. Approving extending a conditional purchase agreement with Austin Utilities

- a. Resolution — Approving the extension of a conditional purchase agreement

Moved by Council Member Fischer, seconded by Council Member Helle, adopting a resolution

approving an extension of a conditional purchase agreement with Austin Utilities. Carried 6-0.

12. Resolution — Approving an application to conduct off-site gambling for the Fraternal Order of the Eagles

Moved by Council Member Helle, seconded by Council Member Postma, adopting a resolution approving an application to conduct off-site gambling for the Fraternal Order of the Eagles.

13. Granting the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at the following location: 607 6th St NW, Torres Property

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 607 6th Street NW, Torres Property. Carried.

14. Granting the Planning and Zoning Department the power to contract for the removal of junk and/or illegally stored vehicles at the following location: 711 12th Ave SW, VP Rental Properties LLC

Moved by Council Member Baskin, 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 711 12th Avenue SW, VP Rental Properties LLC. Carried.

### **Citizens Addressing the Council**

Members of the public may address the City Council on items that are not otherwise on the agenda. Each speaker is limited to two minutes. The Council will listen to comments but may not enter into a dialogue, take immediate action, or answer questions during this time.

Nick Novotny, a Development Corporation of Austin representative, thanked City Staff for all their assistance with the Downtown Dish event hosted on June 13th. Mr. Novotny stated this was the first year hosting this event, and hosting events can be very challenging. The City of Austin staff made this very easy and they were very helpful to Mr. Novotny in his efforts to put on this event for the community of Austin.

Becky Rector, 1707 3rd Avenue NE, stated that due to the recent major rain event there was flooding on their street. Ms. Rector stated her neighbor's basements have flooded, and she believes this is due to the recent road construction as this did not occur previously with rain events. She stated the City needs to turn the pumps on because as soon as this occurs the water goes away.

Public Works Director Steven Lang clarified that during high-flow events, the City does not shut down pumps. Instead, additional pumps are placed into operation to help manage the increased flow.

Mr. Lang explained that neighborhoods northeast and southeast of East Side Lake, including the Ellis neighborhood, experienced significant flooding in 2024. Many of the same property owners were affected again following the heavy rainfall around the Fourth of July. Approximately six inches of rain fell on July 2, followed by another six inches about one week later. During the second rainfall event, wastewater flow at the treatment plant reached approximately 27 million

gallons per day. The City's normal dry-weather flow is approximately 4 million gallons per day.

Mr. Lang stated that some basement wall collapses reported in northeast Austin were primarily related to the volume and intensity of the rainfall, the area's clay soils, and the age and condition of the homes' concrete-block basement walls.

Mr. Lang stated since the 2024 flood, the City has worked with WHKS to study the sanitary sewer system and determine whether it is adequately sized. The studies concluded that the system meets standard engineering requirements and is generally designed to accommodate approximately three times the normal flow. However, during extreme rainfall events, flows in some areas may reach four to six times the normal peak flow.

The City has approximately \$3.5 million in sewer improvement projects planned for 2027 and 2028 along Sixth Avenue Southeast and near Ellis Ditch, where a significant number of sewer backups have occurred. The City also implemented a point-of-sale inspection program. The program is intended to identify and eliminate footing-drain connections and other sources of clear water entering the sanitary sewer system.

Mr. Lang emphasized that there is no single solution that will eliminate sewer backups for every property. Improvements will require a long-term, multi-year effort involving infrastructure projects and the gradual removal of excess groundwater and stormwater from the sanitary sewer system. As an additional protective measure, Mr. Lang encouraged homeowners to consider installing a sanitary sewer check valve. A check valve can help prevent sewage from flowing backward through a home's sewer service during periods when the public sewer system is under pressure. Check valves are commonly required in newer homes but were not standard when many homes in the affected neighborhoods were constructed during the 1960s and 1970s.

Scot Novitski, 710 Oakland Place NE, asked if there was something done differently when the road construction was done. He stated he had received an estimate for a check valve and it is \$3,600. He also received sewer backup in his basement with this last rain event.

Mr. Lang stated he does not have an answer, he has spoken with Mr. Novitski before. He has looked at video of his sewer service, and they have looked at the sewer improvements they made when they did the construction, and they cannot pinpoint the reason Mr. Novitski is experiencing these sewer backups. Mr. Lang stated the property may be the lowest in the neighborhood, but they would have to do some surveying, and he has also spoken with Mr. Novitski about disconnecting his footing drains.

Jodi Bergland, speaking on behalf of the property owner Merna Staupe at 1709 3rd Avenue NE, stated this property's wall collapsed due to the recent rain event.

Mr. Lang stated there is a plan in the CIP for a more aggressive approach for the City to go out and scope these services to look for the clear water impact. Unfortunately this project keeps getting moved back on their list based on time and other projects that are going on. He understands this is not what the constituents want to hear. He addressed whether the City should establish a sewer service inspection program similar to the previous sump pump inspection

program. Staff explained that sump pump inspections were limited to visual observations, while inspecting a private sewer service is significantly more intrusive. A sewer inspection may require removing a toilet, installing a new clean out, or making other modifications to gain access to the sewer line. Because these activities could involve entering a residence and altering private property, the City could assume additional liability and risk. For that reason, staff has been reluctant to implement a City-operated sewer service inspection program.

Mr. Lang stated the City has retained WHKS to continue evaluating the sanitary sewer system, including the size and capacity of the sewer mains. The City is also reviewing a lift station in the affected area and exploring ways to reduce the amount of flow entering it, which would also reduce flow into the larger sewer system. The City continues working to identify those sources and determine how they can be reduced or eliminated.

Jacque Mickey, 1705 3rd Avenue NE, experienced flooding with the recent rain event.

Mr. Lang explained that the storm produced approximately six inches of rain within six hours, which is considered a 100-year rainfall event. He noted that the City's storm sewer system is not designed to accommodate rainfall of that magnitude. Although the storm sewer serving the area includes pipes ranging from approximately 30 to 42 inches in diameter, the system was designed to manage a 15- to 20-year storm event. Accommodating a 100-year event could require approximately four times the existing pipe capacity. Mr. Lang stated that installing infrastructure of that size would be limited by available space within the roadway and the significant cost involved. He further explained that municipalities generally do not design storm sewer systems to handle 100-year rainfall events. Standard engineering practice is typically to design storm sewer systems for events ranging from 10 to 25 years. With the exception of the Oakland Place crossing, the storm sewer serving the roadway was constructed to approximately a 15- to 20-year design standard.

Council Member Helle asked when WHKS has looked at these neighborhoods have they found any evidence that there was or wasn't a problem with the street project from a few years ago. Are they examining this?

Mr. Lang stated they televise all the sanitary sewer lines. They started this in 2018. They also will televise the lines after a street reconstruction project. They have not found any issues that would point to the sewer reconstruction being a cause of this issue.

Mayor King stated maybe they could move up the project for Oakland Avenue.

Council Member Baskin stated he would like to look into moving up the Oakland Avenue project on the CIP. He confirmed that previous flooding was from rain coming in from rivers and flooding the area, which the City has created a lot of flood mitigation to deal with. The flooding events of 2024 and 2026 are from rains that came down in a large amount in a short period of time.

Mr. Lang stated this would be an accurate way to look at this. The summer storms are getting stronger and more intense, and they are dropping more water in a shorter period of time.

Vicki Osier, 400 Oakland Place NE, Unit 8, stated that the flood in 2004 was from a large amount of rain in a short period of time, and they did not receive sewer back up in their basement.

Tim Toliver, 400 Oakland Place NE, Unit 7, stated they were impacted by the sewer backup. He would request the City reach out to any state or federal resources to get access to funding for people that were affected.

### **Honorary Council Member Comments**

None.

### **Reports and Recommendations**

City Administrator Council Members

Public Works Director Steven Lang stated phase three of Oakland Avenue has begun. The road is closed from 4th Street to 12th Street NW. This will remain closed until they start to pour concrete.

Council Member Baskin congratulated the girls' softball team that is playing in the Little League World Series.

Council Member Helle thanked all the City employees for all of their efforts during the recent flood events. She appreciates all the extra effort that everyone has to put in. She thanked the community for coming together during these flooding events and helping their neighbors. She thanked the Parks department for extending the hours at the pool over the weekend and giving people a place to cool off.

Council Member Fischer thanked staff for all of their work during the flooding event.

### **Adjourn**

Moved by Council Member-at-Large Austin, seconded by Council Member Helle, adjourning the meeting to August 3, 2026. Carried.

Adjourned: 6:29 p.m.

Approved:

Mayor:

City Clerk: