



CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
September 8, 2025 AT 6:30 PM
FINLAYSON CITY HALL

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1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 6:32 PM by Mayor Auchter, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.
 2. **ROLL CALL:**
 - a. Council members present: Dave Auchter, Barb Morgan, Kim Schaefer, Jeff Flaws, Rhonda Kriesel
 - b. Council members absent: None
 - c. Others present: James Gilpin, Vickie Oetterer, Ed Melzark, Wyatt Lucht, Bill Morgan, Marge Haefner
 3. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
 - a. Correction to motion made by Morgan in New Business A. *Motion by Schaefer to approve minutes with correction. All in favor. Motion carried.*
 - b. Request by Morgan to add Bollig presentation to official Minutes. *Motion by Morgan to approve minutes with addition. All in favor. Motion carried.*
 - c. Correction to Approval of Minutes section, specifically the wording on contracting with Brigan. Additional correction on New Business K, correcting that the motion carried in full. *Motion by Schaefer to approve minutes with corrections. All in favor. Motion carried.*
 4. **PUBLIC FORUM:**
 - a. Oetterer spoke regarding the rezoning of the two Oetterer properties from R1 to RR. Oetterer also spoke on order of business for council meetings, noting that it would make more sense for Council to address Old Business items prior to New Business. (Auchter stated that Bylaws, which address order of business on agendas, are in review.)
 - b. Gilpin spoke regarding the blight at 6533 School Street, the old Catholic Church. Clerk confirms letter was sent to property owner regarding blight in August.
 5. **CONSENT AGENDA:** *Motion was made by Schaefer to approve consent agenda. All in favor. Motion carried.*
 6. **PRESENTATIONS / REPORTS:**
 - a. **Personnel & Policy (Morgan, Schaefer):** No updates but have been working on PFML, handbook, etc. Auchter requested a council report for October meeting from the Personnel Committee.
 - b. **Public Works & Infrastructure (Auchter, Flaws):** Most items covered at Aug. 11 Special Meeting. Noxious weeds have been sprayed, mowing @ Dixon done. Request to Clerk to add "mowing" to future council agenda.
 - c. **Budget & Finance (Flaws, Kriesel):** Working on Budget and final approval of Levy.
 - d. **Planning & Zoning (Flaws):** Items outlined in P&Z Meeting minutes. **Added: The Bandin Foundation grant deadline was extended to December 2025.**
 7. **STAFF REPORTS**
 - a. **Water & Sewer Contractor (John Mikrot):** Hydrant flushing beginning of Oct. Need a chemical pump replacement; John used his personal stock & City will need to purchase one from Hawkins. Tower will be down for 3 days late Sept/early Oct for inspection with Maguire.
 - b. **Zoning Administrator (Ed Melzark):** Permit issued for shed @ Peace Lutheran. Council will need to determine timeline for rezoning (both map corrections and Oetterer properties.)
 - c. **City Maintenance (Randy Millner):** All is well; will get garbage cans out for Community Club to use for Farmer's Market in late Sept (and bags.)

- d. **Bar Manager (Joe Luedtke):** Reported \$36k profit; invoices to be paid in Sept. Losing a bartender for 8+ months for military leave, and another out 4+ months for medical. Has hired Brittany Volk and Hailey Erickson to fill in day shifts. Wants to revisit wages; Auchter asked Joe to provide a proposal for Oct meeting.
- e. **Fire Chief (Wyatt Lucht):** 12 calls in August; 10 medical, 1 MVA, 1 mutual aid fire (McGrath.) 70 man hours utilized. Shared concern that policy approved by Council conflicts with Fire Department manual. [Clarification: Fire Department is a department of the City, and the City policies override departmental policies. Clerk researched and confirmed there is no identified conflict.] Received resignation from Shelly Goodman; moving. Will be presenting to local school-aged kids for Fire Prevention in October. November 3rd is the Township meeting. Mentioned a Rescue Unit will be needed; was asked to make recommendation to Council. Received two applicants; will review and make recommendation to Council next month. MN Fire Walk will be held 9/16, encourages community to join & cheer on.
- f. **City Clerk (Liz Bernhardt):** No additional updates.
- g. **City Financials:** *Morgan motioned for the portion of the security cameras allocated to the fire department be moved to the liquor store. All in favor. Motion carried.* Discussion about how to allocate charges across city departments and funds. Clerk will present proposal at October meeting.

8. NEW BUSINESS

- a. **Clerk Resignation:** Mayor acknowledged that previous clerks had described the City's work environment as "toxic" and called for a workshop meeting with the League of Minnesota Cities to provide council training on workplace culture. Auchter recognized his responsibility in facilitating meetings and stated he will adhere to proper meeting conduct. He publicly thanked Liz and expressed regret for the difficulties experienced over the past several months. Auchter acknowledged Liz's skills and talents, noting that the City Auditor, City Attorney, City Engineer, and a County Commissioner had spoken highly of her work. Council Member Kriesel commended Liz for her efforts and leadership. *Motion by Auchter to retain Liz until the Council feels comfortable releasing her of her duties, at the requested wage of \$30.00/hr. All in favor. Motion carried.*
Morgan stated that Al (Brigan) is willing to work at the liquor store (added: and city staff) and she will talk to him to see if he can come to a future workshop.
- b. **Hiring Process for Clerk Position:** Auchter recommends posting this week, with a wide search, utilizing LMC. Council determined that posting should include "previous city experience", and set wage at \$28-\$32/hour; to get "good people" you have to pay "good wages." Council discussed the need to change the environment and compensation plan to retain a clerk. Personnel Committee will screen, along with Flaws, Kriesel and Auchter (all volunteered.) Proposal to include Liz on screening, to narrow down to two candidates, at which point full council would review. Beneficial for Deputy Clerk to sit in. Kriesel inquired about hiring process; Schaefer has a system she modified from LMC. Auchter recommend to use the Thomas Killman Conflict model for screening. Kriesel inquired about exit interview; Aimee from LMC will be conducting exit interview. Auchter mentioned he'd be retiring (as Mayor) in 2026, and will need new mayoral candidates this time next year. *Motion by Schaefer to post the City Clerk position for \$28-\$32/hour, with an assumed 32-40 hrs/wk, and previous city experience. All in favor. Motion carried.*
- c. **Preliminary Levy:** Budget & Finance Committee presented an overview of the preliminary levy. Council can reduce levy, but cannot increase it once preliminary is submitted (by 9/30/25.) *Motion by Flaws to adopt "option 1" of the preliminary levy for a total of \$143,000, which is roughly a 6% increase over last year. All in favor. Motion carried.*
Motion by Morgan to set the date & time of the regularly scheduled meeting at which a final budget & levy will be discussed for the December 8 regular council meeting. All in favor. Motion carried.

Motion by Flaws to extend the regular council meeting by 15 minutes. In favor: Auchter, Morgan, Flaws, Kriesel. Opposed: Schaefer. Motion carried 4:1.

- d. **Fire Formula:** *Motion by Auchter to adopt the majority-selected fire formula (Option B) for a period of five years, and to include the fire building's depreciation and interest in the formula.* Morgan is concerned about the five-year term. Wyatt stated he "knows nothing" of fire formulas. Clerk confirmed

Wyatt was provided eight options in March, Wyatt requested to reduce options to five, and clerk confirmed he received emailed copies of the formulas and emails that went out to each township. *All in favor. Motion carried.*

- e. **Council Priorities:** Topic was not discussed, without motion to postpone or table.
- f. **COLA for Employees:** Council reviewed background & recommendation by Auchter to pass a COLA for 2025. Discussed that COLAs are not generally merit-based. **Edited: Shaefer concerned that bar employees have not been given annual reviews, nor any merit-based increases. Wants to clarify that COLA increases would not eliminate merit-based increases based on performance reviews.** *Morgan motioned to pass a 2.6% COLA for Public Works, Bar Manager and Deputy Clerk positions, effective (or retroactive) to their anniversary date for the 2025 year. All in favor. Motion carried.*
- g. **Bar Employees Wage Increase:** Joe will present recommendation at October meeting.

Motion by Schaefer to adjourn the regular council meeting at 8:52PM. All in favor. Motion Carried. The remaining items on the agenda were not addressed:

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- a. Update on Broadway Road Dedication
- b. Snowplow Equipment
- c. Bylaw Update Recommendations (Flaws/Morgan)
- d. Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML)
- e. Legalities of City Fundraising & Expenditures (April 2025)
- f. Sedillo Property Hwy 18 – Council to vote on pursuing blight cleanup or not
- g. Rezoning Recommendations by P&Z Commission
- h. Liquor Store Holiday Hours
- i. MN Basic Code of Ordinances
- j. Policies & Procedures
 - i. Employee Supervision & Reporting Structure
 - ii. Municipal Liquor Store Policy on Banning Patrons & Incident Form
 - iii. Allocating Administrative Charges to Funds
 - iv. Municipal Liquor Store Donations
 - v. Employee Handbook
 - vi. Security Camera Use & Access

Submitted by Liz Bernhardt, City Clerk, September 8, 2025

