

**REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING  
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY OF ALBERT LEA  
February 9, 2026 – 7:00 P.M.**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Rich Murray, Councilors Rachel Christensen, Larry Baker, Reid Olson, Keith Van Beek, Brian Anderson, City Manager Ian Rigg, Public Works Director Steven Jahnke, City Attorney Joel Holstad of Lakes National Law LLP, and City Clerk Daphney Maras.

Following the resolution appointing him as Third Ward councilor and the affirmation of his Oath of Office, Councilor Ted Herman joined the council at the dais.

**ADDITIONAL STAFF PRESENT:** Chief of Police Darren Hanson, City Planner Megan Boeck, Human Resource Director Mike Zelenak

**CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL** - Mayor Murray called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. City Clerk Maras administered roll call.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** - Mayor Murray asked all in attendance to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CEREMONIAL ITEMS**

**A. Resolution 26-026 Appointing Ted Herman to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ward Vacancy**

Motion made by Councilor Anderson to approve the appointment of Third Ward Councilor Ted Herman, seconded by Councilor Christensen. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-026  
(Included with these minutes))

**B.** City Clerk Maras administered the Oath of Office to Third Ward Councilor Ted Herman

**PUBLIC FORUM**

**Police Chief Hanson** read a statement aloud, opening with the events that unfolded early Wednesday morning. The ALPD was dispatched on Wednesday morning, where officers responded to a report of a traffic crash and the concern for a child inside the vehicle. The child's welfare was the primary concern, and the call required an immediate response based solely on public safety considerations. As previously noted, the ALPD is responsible for enforcing Minnesota law and City ordinances. They do not enforce federal immigration law, nor do they participate in federal immigration operations. Those duties rest solely with federal agencies, which do not notify the ALPD in advance of any activity occurring within the city. When ALPD officers are present during federal operations, their involvement is limited strictly to ensuring public safety; decisions related to detention or enforcement fall entirely outside the ALPD's authority.

Although this incident involved a federal operation that took place within Albert Lea, the ALPD recognizes the effect it had on the community. Chief Hanson emphasized that the ALPD does not assist or coordinate with ICE on enforcement actions. The department remains focused on public safety, professionalism, and serving all members of the community within the scope of its legal authority.

Mayor Murray opened the public forum:

**Chris Gracia**, owner of Matchbox Farms, one of Albert Lea's two licensed cannabis retailers, shared an update on their progress and ongoing challenges. Although he received state licensure last August, he explained that he has been unable to open due to the lack of available product. The earliest projected availability is now June, but the number of licensed retailers currently exceeds the number of cultivators able to supply them. He also noted concerns that any of the eleven Tribal Nations could choose to open a retail operation in Albert Lea. Given these uncertainties, he urged the council not to consider increasing the number of cannabis retailer licenses at this time.

**Bethany Greiner**, a resident of Albert Lea who works with special-needs children in School District 241, spoke about the fear felt by students and their families in response to recent ICE activity in the community. She outlined the district's protocol should ICE enter school property and request access to a student. Bethany urged the city council to speak on behalf of the community by drafting a message to Congressman Finstad, asking him to advocate for the children of District 241 and affirm that they can safely receive their public education without interference from ICE.

**Rev. George Favell** expressed his concerns about ICE's presence in the community and urged the city council to act as the community's voice by sending a resolution to state and federal representatives addressing ICE's policies and conduct

**Terry Gjersvik** reported the events of Wednesday morning involving the traffic crash and ICE's presence, as he was on scene and witnessed the entire incident.

**Tiffany Paino** highlighted the diversity within Albert Lea and the deep fear many residents feel in the presence of ICE. She stressed that this level of fear is unsustainable for the community. While she acknowledged that the City Council cannot halt ICE enforcement or intervene in federal operations, she urged council members to use their voices to stand with and support the community.

**Jeremy Corey Gruenes** stated that while he is not here speaking on behalf of the school district, he is a teacher at the high school in School District 241. He referenced ICE and DHS data indicating that many individuals with "brown skin" in the community either have legal status or are actively pursuing it. He explained that many children of local immigrant families are afraid to attend school for fear of being detained by ICE, and that parents are hesitant to go to work because ICE has been targeting businesses employing undocumented immigrants, including individuals who do, in fact, have legal status.

He reported that earlier this month, ICE detained two young mothers here in Albert Lea in what he described as abductions. He also referenced two recent deaths in Minneapolis involving ICE. He expressed concern that ICE's presence is harming families, schools, businesses, and churches. He urged the council to speak out on behalf, and in support of Albert Lea residents.

**Jeff Miller**, who moved to Albert Lea in 1983 and spent 13 years working in the public school system, spoke about the impact current events are having on local students. His adult children now teach in Albert Lea, and his grandchildren attend the district's schools. He shared the difficult questions his grandchildren are asking as they worry that their friends with brown skin might be taken away by ICE. He emphasized the trauma these children are experiencing.

He also described a peaceful protest at Albert Lea High School, where one student, concerned for their safety, requested adult supervision. During the protest, a white Chevy pickup reportedly pulled up, revved its engine to fill the area with exhaust, and the person inside shouted obscenities at the students. Another student expressed fear about leaving her home to go to the Albert Lea Public Library after noticing an unmarked vehicle parked near her home.

Miller urged the council to take a clear stand in support of the immigrant community and to engage with elected officials on their behalf.

**Wende Taylor**, a long-time day-care provider in Albert Lea, shared her deep concern about the fear being felt by children and parents in response to recent ICE activity in the community. She is especially troubled by reports of residents who are in the process of obtaining citizenship being handcuffed and deported. She is asking the City Council to stand with and support the community during this difficult time.

**Terese Salazar**, who moved to Albert Lea from Mexico in 1996, said she is deeply afraid for her own safety and her daughters'. She explained that her daughters, who are U.S. citizens, feel compelled to carry their passports everywhere they go. One daughter, a resident assistant at her college, lives in constant fear that ICE could enter the campus and detain students. She also worries about her mother leaving the house when ICE is present in the community. Ms. Salazar urged the council to reach out to Representative Finstad and to speak up on behalf of the community.

**Brandon Krueger**, who runs a roofing company in Freeborn County, emphasized that immigrants contribute to the community by paying taxes like everyone else. His business relies heavily on Latino and Hispanic workers, and he spoke about how challenging the path to U.S. citizenship can be. He expressed deep concern for the future of these workers and his business if they are forced to leave.

**Mary Hinnenkamp** spoke about the recent killing in Minneapolis involving ICE, an incident that occurred in the neighborhood where her grandchildren live, and forced their school to move classes to Zoom because of safety concerns. She said that without a congressman willing to listen to the community, residents are relying on the city council to be their voice.

Mayor Murray emphasized that the Albert Lea City Council truly values the perspectives shared by tonight's speakers. He noted that the council recognizes how essential immigrants are to the strength and vitality of our community.

### **CONSENT AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

- A. Approve Minutes of the January 12, 2026 Regular Council Meeting
- B. Approve Minutes of the January 12, 2026 Work Session

Motion made by Councilor Baker to approve the consent agenda as read, seconded by Councilor Anderson. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

### **PETITIONS, REQUESTS, AND COMMUNICATIONS** - None

### **UNFINISHED BUSINESS** - None

### **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Public Hearing Regarding Ordering Improvement and Preparation of Plans for the Valley Avenue and Marshall Street Reconstruction Project (Job 2517)

After the City Manager read the report on this item, Mayor Murray opened the public hearing. He called the first time. Celeste Kraus addressed the Council regarding the proposed excess assessment on her property. She stated that the existing sidewalk, curb, and gutter are in good condition and questioned the need for the project. She also expressed concern about increased project costs due to tariffs. Ms. Kraus explained that she already works three jobs and does not know how she could afford a \$25,000 assessment for a project she believes is unnecessary at this time. She requests that city staff call her and provide additional information about the project.

Mayor Murray called a second time. Kim Thomas explained that she attended the informational meeting on February 3, but felt the notice was not provided in a timely manner. As a result, she believes residents did not have a fair opportunity to share their input. She also noted that she recently retired and will have difficulty paying such a large assessment, and she asked that the amount be reduced.

Bethany Greiner, who lives on Johnson Street, told the council that between recent property tax increases and the existing street assessment, her family cannot afford another large assessment. She urged the council to consider the impact on every household in town when making decisions about future street assessments.

He called for public comment a third time. No one else came forward, and he closed the public hearing.

The City Manager outlined the legal process available to property owners who wish to contest

their assessment. He also described the city's deferment option and explained how that program works. He added that the actual bids have not been received yet, so the final assessment amounts are yet to be finalized.

Public Works Director Jahnke added that the city did receive \$1.7 million in federal funds toward this project. He answered council questions as presented.

**A1. Resolution 26-027 Ordering Improvement and Preparation of Plans for the Valley Avenue & Marshall Street Reconstruction Project (Job 2517)**

A public hearing was held for public input for the Valley Avenue & Marshall Street Reconstruction Project, City Job No. 2517.

The proposed project calls for the complete reconstruction of portions of Valley Avenue, Johnson Street, and Marshall Street (approximately 2,291 total feet). Proposed work will include complete removal and replacement of the pavement, curb & gutter, sidewalk, sanitary sewer, storm sewer, and watermain. The street descriptions are:

- Valley Avenue – Hawthorne Street to Johnson Street
- Johnson Street – Valley Avenue to Marshall Street
- Marshall Street – Johnson Street to Bridge Avenue

Both streets will be reconstructed to similar configurations as the existing streets, with minor changes to the street widths, boulevard widths, and accessibility improvements. Both streets have sidewalks on both sides of the street. On-street parking is allowed on both sides of the street on Valley Avenue, and is restricted to the east side only on Marshall Street.

The City intends to use special assessments, bonding, water and sewer funds, State Aid, and Federal funds from the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to finance the project. The city was awarded \$511,250 in the 2026 STIP, \$600,000 from the 2027 STIP, and another \$600,000 from the 2028 STIP. The funds from the 2027 and 2028 STIPs will be advanced for use in 2026.

Assessments will be levied to the benefiting properties based upon replacing the pavement and curb & gutter as a standard width, bituminous residential street. The proposed assessment rate is \$149.17 per foot.

Sixty-two properties are proposed to be assessed with this project. Following the assessment policy, the assessments will be over 5, 10, or 15 years, depending on the assessment amount. The interest rate will be based on bonding in 2026.

The estimated project cost is \$4,902,484.40 and would be paid for with assessments, bonding funds, sanitary sewer funds, water funds, Federal funds, and Municipal State Aid Street funds. A neighborhood meeting was held February 3, 2026 to discuss the project with affected residents.

Motion made by Councilor Olson to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Van Beek. On roll call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Councilor Baker voted nay. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-027  
(Included with these minutes)

**B. Resolution 26-028 Approving Purchase of Mohawk Truck Hoist – 2026 Misc. 42**

City Manager Rigg said the item up for replacement is the City Garage Truck Hoist. This is CIP (CIG-E-26-01) budgeted at \$150,000. The item to be replaced is a 1990 Rotary AT70E In Ground Truck Hoist. This truck hoist is 36 years old.

City staff is seeking approval to move forward with this purchase. This hoist is used for the service and repair of equipment at the city garage. The 36-year-old hoist is no longer safely able to pick up the larger trucks and equipment that have gotten bigger and heavier over the years. Additionally, repair parts for the hoist are unavailable.

The replacement for this hoist is a mobile wireless column lift system made by Mohawk Lifts that could be moved to different locations in the future if needed. The new truck hoist is available through the MN State Bid Contract and would be purchased from Mohawk Lifts of Amsterdam NY. The price for the new truck hoist is \$123,749.47. The old truck hoist would be removed from service, and the floor where it is installed would be repaired by the street department.

Motion made by Councilor Anderson to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Baker. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-028  
(Included with these minutes)

**C. Resolution 26-029 Accepting Donations as Presented to the City of Albert Lea**

The City of Albert Lea is generally authorized to accept donations pursuant to Minnesota Statutes Section 465.03 for the benefit of its citizens. Staff recommends acceptance of the following donations as submitted for Council review and approval.

- *Bill Howe – \$500 Concrete Pad for a Custom Bench*
- *Blazing Star Trail – \$1,000 towards the Trailhead Shelter*
- *Bridge Community Church – \$75 to Albert Lea Police Department Reserves*

Motion made by Councilor Baker to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Anderson. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-029  
(Included with these minutes)

**D. Ordinance Amending 26-150 Amending Chapters 5 Cannabis (1<sup>st</sup> Reading)**

**Ordinance Amending 26-151 Chapter 12 Tobacco (1<sup>st</sup> Reading)**

The cannabis ordinance changes bring greater parity with alcohol licensing on approval, denial, or revocation. This removes some ambiguity about what is considered public health and safety in Sec. 5.001. There are a few other items adjusted as concerns developed over time relating to the length of wait for a business to become operational when we limit the number of businesses. We also address the “waiting list” some assume exists. Once an application for registration is in, if there are no openings, the application is void after 30 days.

The number of licenses should be discussed. Given that some approved registered businesses are not operational and the possibility of them holding the license to try and sell it later, we should increase the number of registrations and limit the amount of time said registered license holder becomes operational.

Changes to tobacco are resolving certain issues as it relates to holding multiple licenses. Unlike the restrictions for off-sale alcohol, tobacco store owners could hold multiple licenses to limit their competition. This change corrects that. Other details that are part of an alcohol or cannabis registration are now part of tobacco following recommendations from the Department of Revenue.

Councilor Olson requested clarification on the current limit for cannabis registrations. In response, Councilor Christensen amended her original motion, proposing to increase the number of registrations from two to four. Councilor Anderson indicated support for the amendment.

Councilor Anderson noted that he has consistently supported increasing the number of registrations, despite Mr. Gracia’s earlier remark that the market remains unclear due to limited product availability. He added that he does not believe capping registrations at two will benefit a free market.

Mayor Murray stated that he intends to vote no on this item. He expressed that he does not support cannabis, believing it can lead to other concerns, and he stands firmly with the members of the community who share this viewpoint.

Motion made by Councilor Christensen to approve as read, upon further discussion, she amended her motion to increase the number of registrations from two to four. Seconded by Councilor Anderson. On roll call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Olson, Van Beek, and Anderson. Councilor Herman and Mayor Murray voted nay. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Ordinance 26-150 and 26-151)

(Included with these minutes)

**E. Ordinance 26-152 Amending Chapter 50, Article IV, Section 50.0845, 50.0846, and 50.0847 -Signs (1<sup>st</sup> Reading)**

After a complete overhaul of the sign ordinance in May of 2024, staff continues to find adjustments that will simplify the sign ordinance and clarify language for both property owners and developers.

Attached is an ordinance amendment that works to correct the site trainable setback in section 50.0845 residential districts which should be 25 ft not 20 ft. The amendment also removes the limit of the number of walls signs and instead regulates with a maximum of 200 square feet in Section 50.0846 commercial districts and Section 50.0847 industrial districts.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing on February 3, 2026 in regard to these amendments and recommends approval.

Motion made by Councilor Anderson to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Olson. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Ordinance 26-152  
(Included with these minutes)

**F. Resolution 26-030 Waiving Assessments Against Property, Paying Taxes, Recording the Deed, and Abating Hazards at 809 Clark Street West.**

This property was sold for \$1.00. The property needs demolition. It is a lot suitable for redevelopment and should be explored as such. In order for the City to have ownership and pursue redevelopment, we must own the property first in this situation. In order to have it recorded in our name all taxes and assessments must be paid or waived.

Motion made by Councilor Anderson to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Baker. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-030  
(Included with these minutes)

**MAYOR AND COUNCIL REPORTS**

First Ward, Councilor Christensen reported:

- Ward Items – Attended the Public Finance session in Edina.
- Committee Update – The Planning Commission met last week and welcomed two new members. The Commission also expressed interest in learning more about Data Centers. The Senior Citizen Advisory Committee is scheduled to meet on Wednesday. Additionally, on Wednesday, the Engineering Department will host neighborhood meetings regarding

the upcoming street reconstruction projects.

- Public Announcements – She noted that this Thursday’s Lunch and Learn in the Library will feature bird enthusiast Bryce Gaudian and encouraged the public to attend. She also expressed appreciation for the comments shared during the public forum and the public hearing earlier in the meeting.

Second Ward, Councilor Baker reported:

- Ward Items – Will be attending Neighborhood meetings three days this week.
- Committee Update – Attended the ALEDA Board meeting and announced they are now down to interviewing four candidates for the Executive Director position.

Third Ward, Councilor Herman reported:

- Ward Items – None
- Committee Update – None
- Public Announcements – Thanked the council for the warm welcome

Fourth Ward, Councilor Olson reported:

- Ward Items – Welcome new Ward 3 Councilor Herman
- Committee Update – None

Fifth Ward, Councilor Van Beek reported:

- Ward Items – Turned his ward items over to the City Manager
- Committee Update – Will be attending the neighborhood meeting and Human Rights meeting this week.

Sixth Ward, Councilor Anderson reported:

- Ward Items – Attended a training session in Edina, presented by Ehlers and the League of MN, and learned of other cities' Emergency Preparedness Plans.
- Committee Update – None

### **MAYOR REPORT:**

Attended the following events and provided details of each:

- Reported that six good candidates were interviewed to fill the Ward 3 council vacancy. He encourages all candidates to stay involved in the community
- On January 27<sup>th</sup> received an ALEDA update from Phillip Johnson via Zoom.
- On January 28<sup>th</sup> joined the YMCA walking MOIA.
- Participated in the District 24 facilities meeting and reported that, due to declining student enrollment, the district will need to evaluate whether all buildings can remain in operation
- The ALEDA Executive search is down to four candidates. Live interviews in Albert Lea and tours will take place on February 26<sup>th</sup>.
- Housing projects are the main discussion with ALEDA
- Met with County Commissioner Chair, Brad Edwin, and discussed strengthening communication between the City and County going forward.
- Attended the Big Island Rendezvous School Days fundraiser at the American Legion

- Attended the Girls Hockey game on Saturday night. He congratulated the team on their win to move on to play the Section Championship next Thursday
- Reminds the community to attend and support the high school activities

Mentioned the upcoming events and said they are also listed on the City's website.

### **CITY MANAGER REPORT**

- Will be reconvening the budget committee to review the CIP projects
- Will begin gathering the information needed to support lobbying efforts at the Capitol, including continuation of the existing sales tax, funding for the Wastewater Treatment Plant, exempting WWTP improvement materials from sales tax, and proposed updates to the economic revolving loan fund program
- He expressed appreciation for those who spoke during the public forum, acknowledging the community's concerns related to recent ICE activity and the importance of the issue to residents. He also noted his gratitude for the professionalism demonstrated by the ALPD.

### **APPROVAL OF CLAIMS**

#### **A. Resolution 26-031 Approving Claims**

- (1) Presentation of Claims Over \$25,000

The attached resolution directs the Mayor and City Treasurer to issue the payment of claims as presented in the Detail of Claims report. In addition, Maras displayed a list of claims over \$25,000 for the public's viewing, transparency, and education.

Motion made by Councilor Baker to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Herman. On voice call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Herman, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Ordinance 26-031  
(Included with these minutes)

Councilor Christensen motioned for adjournment; Councilor Anderson seconded. That there being no further business, the Council meeting adjourns until the next regular meeting of the Albert Lea City Council at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, February 23, 2026. On a voice call vote, all councilors voted in favor of said motion.

Mayor Murray declared the motion passed, and the meeting adjourned.

### **ADJOURNMENT: 8:48 PM**

---

Mayor Rich Murray

---

Daphney Maras  
Secretary of the Council