

**REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY OF ALBERT LEA
January 12, 2026 – 7:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Mayor Rich Murray, Councilors Rachel Christensen, Larry Baker, Jason Howland, 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.

ADDITIONAL STAFF PRESENT: Chief of Police Darren Hanson, Fire Chief Jeff Laskowske, and Building/Zoning Official Wayne Sorensen, Building Inspector Rob Rice

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. Mayor Murray read the Proclamation declaring January as National Mentoring Month and presented the STARS volunteers with their certificate. Afterward, STARS Program Director Watsana Thiravong offered brief remarks, then surprised Mayor Murray with a special acknowledgment honoring his outstanding contributions to mentoring and community service.

PUBLIC FORUM – None

CONSENT AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

- A. Approve Minutes of the December 22, 2025 Regular Council Meeting
- B. Approve Minutes of the December 22, 2025 Work Session
- C. License & Permits
- D. Resolution Establishing 2026 Appointments and Designations
- E. Resolution Naming Official Newspaper for 2026
- F. Resolution Designating Depositories and City Funds-Signatories-Wire Transfers for 2026
- G. Resolution Authorizing Pay Equity Plan Submission
- H. Resolution Receiving Feasibility Report & Calling Public Hearing for the Valley Avenue and Marshall Street Reconstruction Project (Job 2517)
- I. Resolution Approving Trail Section Construction and Consulting Services for Songbird Trail in Cooperation with Freeborn County – Job 2411

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, Howland, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 25-001 through 25-006)

Included with these minutes)

Mayor Murray asked City Manager Rigg to provide an update on the Pay Equity Report included in tonight's consent agenda. Rigg explained that the data in the report's graphs show the recent changes are producing positive results. While the process required some financial sacrifice, the estimated pay equity outcomes were strong and met all expectations.

PETITIONS, REQUESTS, AND COMMUNICATIONS - None

UNFINISHED BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS

A. Public Hearing Regarding Order for Abatement of Hazardous Structure – 627 Fountain Street

Rigg explained that on or about July 30, 2025, the city placarded the structures at 627 Fountain Street as being structurally unsafe and unfit. The property was deemed a nuisance property. The structures continue to further deteriorate. In the interest of public safety, the City would like to abate the structure and property because of the unsafe condition. Notice of this hearing has been published and mailed. Staff recommends the structure and property be abated through repair or removal as allowed by Statute and Ordinance.

Building and Zoning Official Wayne Sorensen presented a PowerPoint outlining photos of the structures at 627 Fountain Street, along with a history of related complaints and violations. He noted that while he recommends demolishing the detached garage as soon as possible, the house may still be salvageable if the necessary repairs are completed. Staff recommends pursuing abatement of the main residence by repair, although if progress is not attained within 180 days, it could progress to abatement or removal. In response to Councilor Anderson's question, Sorensen explained that if the City were to take ownership of the house, the property would need significant exterior work, including a new roof with possible sheathing and shingles, several new windows, repairs to the sheathing and siding, and tuckpointing on the foundation to stabilize the structure. He added that any interior renovations would fall to a future buyer. Rigg noted that the city has previously succeeded in stabilizing deteriorated homes and then selling them to buyers who complete the remaining repairs.

Mayor Murray opened the public hearing. During the first call for comments, Brandon, a neighbor from that area, spoke in support of abating the property at 627 Fountain St. He described the home's severe deterioration and noted that several contract-for-deed tenants over the years had attempted repairs, but their efforts ultimately worsened the condition. He and other neighbors have witnessed wildlife coming in and out of the house, including bats and mice.

Hearing no response after two additional calls for comment, Mayor Murray closed the public hearing.

A1. Resolution 26-007 Approving Order for Abatement of Hazardous Structure – 627 Fountain Street

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

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-007
Included with these minutes)

In response to Councilor Baker's comments, City Manager Rigg clarified that the 180 days is intended less for the property owner and more to allow time to assess whether the home can be rehabilitated or if demolition will be necessary. He also noted that the HRA has the option to purchase the property, redevelop it, and potentially use it as a rental unit, which he described as an appropriate use of HRA levy funds.

Councilor Howland questioned whether the process could be expedited, noting that 180 days feels excessive when it's clear the current owner has no intention of rehabilitating the property. He suggested the city should be able to act sooner. Sorensen responded that the 180-day notice period is necessary to allow time for a new owner to obtain a building permit if the property changes hands.

Rigg added that in some cases, after the city initiates these actions, the property owner realizes they cannot complete the rehabilitation and ultimately chooses to either donate the property to the city or sell it at a very low price to avoid further liability.

Councilor Christensen asked whether the owner is current on property taxes, and Sorensen responded that he believes the owner is three to four years delinquent.

B. Resolution 26-008 Approving Contract with Freeborn County Opioid Epidemic Response Funds

The City of Albert Lea and Albert Lea Fire Rescue have submitted an RFP to request a portion of the Opioid Epidemic Response funds allocated to Freeborn County. The request includes funding for the purchase of a LIFEPAK 35 monitor/defibrillator and a supply of Naloxone (Narcan). The cost of the monitor, including training and supplies, is \$55,000. The three-year Naloxone supply is estimated at \$6,000.

Albert Lea Fire Rescue would serve as the central Naloxone distributor for all 15 fire departments in Freeborn County (Albert Lea, Alden, Clarks Grove, Conger, Emmons, Freeborn, Geneva, Glenville, Hartland, Hayward, Hollandale, London, Manchester, Myrtle, and Twin Lakes), as well as the Freeborn County Sheriff's Office and the Albert Lea Police Department. Centralizing ordering and distribution would reduce overall costs and provide a single, reliable pickup location for agencies needing replacement doses.

The primary target population includes individuals experiencing overdoses who call 911 within our communities and throughout the county, whether due to illicit drug use or accidental

medication overdoses. The overarching goal is to reduce fatalities from opioid overdoses, particularly among rural, aging, and lower-income residents, and to give individuals a second chance at treatment and recovery.

A secondary goal is to protect first responders. Ready access to Naloxone can be lifesaving for responders who may come into contact with opioid substances. Minnesota Statute 626.8443 requires law enforcement personnel to carry at least two doses of Naloxone.

The funding also includes equipping Albert Lea Fire Rescue with a cardiac monitor. This device is essential for assessing and supporting cardiac and respiratory function during overdose responses. As a non-transport EMT agency, Albert Lea Fire Rescue has the trained personnel and medical direction necessary to use this equipment during emergency calls. The monitor will also support responses to other medical emergencies involving cardiac or respiratory issues.

Rigg invited Fire Chief Laskowske to approach the podium and provide additional information and respond to questions from the council.

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

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-008
Included with these minutes)

C. Resolution Amending Purchase Agreement on Tax Forfeiture Properties

Rigg explained on Tuesday, January 6th, 2026 the Freeborn County Commissioners voted to approve the amended purchase offer, increasing the amount to cover all lost taxes for the County and the School District. The County expressed its responsibility to the taxpayers of Freeborn to get more money from the City of Albert Lea for these losses. It was explained by the City Manager that there are pending losses to the City and that the request of \$0 or \$1 was a sign of partnership between the City and County on rehabilitating neighborhoods, increasing the tax base long term, and providing housing. The Commissioners stated that the increased purchase price would be earned back in the sale. When the City Manager explained that the projects are intended to be losses, and it would not be recouped, the Commissioners voted to increase the number of sales.

The original offer drafted by the City Manager and City Attorney was generous to Freeborn County, as it took on all maintenance and abatement liability that the County is legally responsible for. It also provided indemnity against any actions related to Tyler v Hennepin. The purpose of the agreement was to get two houses that were to be or were recently demolished and place a house on the site immediately to save costs and provide affordable housing. This would have tested a model of using a special levy that can both pay to demolish blighted properties and re-establish new housing in neighborhoods where the private sector cannot or will not afford the risk. From their vote, this is insufficient for the Commissioners.

As being responsible to the taxpayers of Albert Lea in a purely short-term manner, it is in their interest to instead have the County pay for the continued maintenance of all their tax forfeited properties and the demolition of hazardous buildings. As an example of what was accomplished when we worked together, the property at 1039 Broadway Ave South was given to the City for \$1. After City and private investments were made, the property was saved, improved, and the first substantial year of increment generation in 2026 will cover almost, if not all, County and District 241 losses from the tax forfeiture period. The City's repayment through taxes will take far more time, but the benefit was new jobs, utility users, and improvements to the area.

Until the County Commissioners accept the loss of liability as their gain, and the tax shortage as short-lived, I see no reason to take on more tax forfeited properties for any amount of money at this time. Approval of amending the purchase price is not recommended. Councilor Christensen described her disappointed that the county has taken this action, but hopes they will reconsider and return to the city's original proposal. To Councilor Anderson's question, Rigg responded to the councilors' questions.

No action was taken by the council. Mayor Murray declared this resolution failed for lack of motion.

D. Resolution 26-009 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.

- Twin City Vans – Albert Lea Fire Department
- Twin City Vans – Albert Lea Police Department

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

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-009
Included with these minutes)

E. Resolution 26-010 Accepting Resignation and Declaring a Vacancy – Ward 3

Councilor Jason Howland has submitted his written resignation from the 3rd Ward council seat. This resolution formally accepts his resignation and declares the seat vacant effective January 13, 2026, marking the first step in filling the position. The city extends its heartfelt appreciation to Councilor Howland for his ten years of dedicated service to the residents of Albert Lea and his steadfast commitment to the community. In accordance with City ordinance, the mayor may appoint a qualified Ward 3 resident to serve until a special election is held in conjunction with the general election on November 3, 2026.

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, Howland, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Resolution 26-010
Included with these minutes)

Councilor Baker extended his appreciation to Councilor Howland for his years of service. Mayor Murray extended his heartfelt appreciation to Councilor Howland for his excellence in representing the community for ten years.

Mayor Murray invites anyone interested in filling the council vacancy to contact him directly by phone or email. Applicants are asked to provide the following:

1. Why do you wish to serve as a council member
2. What skills or experience would you bring to the role
3. A current résumé

He said he expects to announce the next council member at the January 26 council meeting, though he may postpone the decision by up to two weeks if the timing isn't right.

Rigg added that applicants must also include their home address to ensure they live in the third ward.

MAYOR AND COUNCIL REPORTS

First Ward, Councilor Christensen reported:

- Ward Items – None
- Committee Update – None
- Public Announcements – Invited the public to attend a special program offered by the local VFW next week titled "Living with PTSD and Preventing Suicide", presented by several organizations. Mentioned Blue Zones is in its 10th year since being certified, and many new events will be announced in the coming year. Wish Councilor Howland the best.

Second Ward, Councilor Baker reported:

- Ward Items – None
- Committee Update – Attended an ALEDA meeting remotely with the Executive Director in Albania. They are interviewing for an Assistant Executive Director.
- Public Announcements – None

Third Ward, Councilor Howland reported:

- Ward Items – None
- Committee Update – None
- Public Announcements – Councilor Howland read his farewell speech aloud.

Fourth Ward, Councilor Olson reported:

- Ward Items – He is eager to see the conversation around cannabis open up
- Committee Update – None
- Public Announcements – He congratulated Councilor Howland and wished him well, and said the Marion Ross Theatre staff will very much miss him and appreciate all he has done for the theatre.

Fifth Ward, Councilor Van Beek reported:

- Ward Items – None
- Committee Update – None
- Public Announcements – Extended well wishes to Councilor Howland, and commended his efforts in raising money for St. Jude’s Hospital

Sixth Ward, Councilor Anderson reported:

- Ward Items – None
- Committee Update – None
- Public Announcements – Wished Councilor Howland well, and extended his appreciation for all the years working with him.

MAYOR REPORT:

Attended the following events:

- 21 applications were received for the Assistant Executive Director position, and we will narrow that down to eight or nine to interview.
- Served on the District #241 Auxiliary Commission
- Met with City Manager and staff to discuss filling several Board and Commission positions with the city.
- Winter sports are starting up, encourages the community to attend any of the activities
- Toured Select Foods last week. He said they have 580 employees, although it was originally built for just 280 employees. He said 70% of the employees live in Albert Lea or the surrounding area.

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

CITY MANAGER REPORT

- Mentioned the draft ordinance he sent to the council for review related to tobacco and cannabis, with the largest focus on protecting and interaction as it relates to minors. The ordinance will be discussed at the next council meeting, with final adoption anticipated by the end of February. The council will also consider whether to increase the number of permitted cannabis retail licenses.
- Met with the Human Rights Commission to discuss several topics, including the recent shooting in Minneapolis. He clarified that the ALPD focuses solely on criminal warrants and does not assist ICE, noting that ICE generally does not work directly with local law enforcement. He also explained that while the city jail may hold ICE detainees, this occurs only through a defined legal process. The purpose of this update is to reassure the community and encourage residents with questions or concerns to reach out to him directly.

- Expressed his well wishes to Councilor Howland and noted the pleasure of working with him.

APPROVAL OF CLAIMS

A. Resolution 26-011 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 Anderson to approve as read, seconded by Councilor Howland. On roll call vote, the following councilors voted in favor of said motion: Christensen, Baker, Howland, Olson, Van Beek, Anderson, and Mayor Murray. Mayor Murray declared the motion passed.

(See Secretary's Original Ordinance 26-011
(Included with these minutes)

Councilor Howland motioned for adjournment; Councilor Howland 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, January 26, 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: 8:25 PM

Mayor Rich Murray

Daphney Maras
Secretary of the Council