

**Lanesboro City Council
Regular Meeting Minutes
Monday, December 1, 2025
Lanesboro Community Center Meeting Room**

Present Members:

Mindy Albrecht-Benson Chase Bakke Joe Cullen Alicia Pearson Kathryn Wade

Staff:

Mitchell Walbridge Darla Taylor David Haugen Mark Lawstuen Jerod Wagner
 Tara Johnson Joseph O'Koren Michelle Marotzke

Guests: Jennifer Biedermann, Hannah Wingert, Delia Bell, John Nicol, Elve Albrecht, Melissa Wagner, John Lenczewski, Mike Majeski, Jon Pieper, Don Bell, Luis Hummel, Angie Taylor, Scott Taylor, Joe Goetzke, Sandy Webb, Jonathan Levine, Lance Prado, Vicki McKinney, Betsy Holbrook, Dale Forster; *Via Zoom* – Lori Bakke, Deane Benson, Allie Palmer, Anna Loney, Sheila Walbridge, Jon Buggs, Brooke Pfeffer

Truth In Taxation Public Hearing: Mayor Pearson opened the Truth in Taxation hearing at 6:00 p.m. City Administrator Walbridge shared information regarding Truth in Taxation, the Minnesota property tax system, and the City's budget process.

- Don Bell asked the City Council about the increase in the value of his property as well as the preliminary tax levy increase percentage.
- Delia Bell asked the City Council about the tax levy increase percentage.

Mayor Pearson closed the Truth in Taxation hearing at 6:12 p.m.

Mayor Pearson called the regular meeting to order at 6:12 p.m.

A. Agenda Approval: Administrator Walbridge requested that consideration of an estimate for a new snowplow attachment be added to New Business. Member Albrecht-Benson requested that a letter from the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors be added to New Business. Mayor Pearson requested that Eminent Domain be added to New Business. Member Albrecht-Benson entered a motion to approve the agenda with the requested additions; Member Bakke seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.

B. Public Comments:

- Luis Hummel asked the City Council how he may be able to pursue a parking closure permit in front of his business on Coffee Street. Hummel stated he had a petition started as to how this would not disrupt downtown businesses.
- John Nicol thanked the City Council for leaving a budgeted amount to donate to the Lanesboro History Museum.
- Sandy Webb stated that she was thankful for the Legion Lights Holiday Light Show, the snowplowing completed by the Lanesboro Public Works staff, and recent food donations given for Thanksgiving.

C. Approval of Minutes:

- a. November 3, 2025, Regular Meeting
- b. November 25, 2025, Special Meeting

Member Albrecht-Benson entered a motion to approve the minutes as presented; Member Wade seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.

D. Consent Agenda:

- a. Accounts Payable
- b. Granny's Liquor, LLC Off Sale Intoxicating Liquor License Transfer – December 31, 2025

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Member Wade entered a motion to approve the Consent Agenda; Member Albrecht-Benson seconded the motion. During discussion, Mayor Pearson asked about the payable to Norby Tree Services.

Administrator Walbridge clarified that this was for a tree in Elmwood Street right-of-way that needed to be removed. The motion carried with all members voting in favor.

Minnesota Trout Unlimited Root River Project Presentation

Project team members of Minnesota Trout Unlimited including Jennifer Biederman, John Lenczewski, and Mike Majeski presented the design plan for an upcoming project along the Root River in Lanesboro. The project team asked how it would be best to get city approval of the project as well as public input on the project, including the tree replacement plan.

It was decided that the Planning Commission would hold a hearing at the December 17, 2025, commission meeting and that a resolution of support would be drafted for the January 5, 2026, city council meeting.

Department Updates

- A. TH250 Road/Utility Project:** Administrator Walbridge shared that property and land acquisition letters were sent to affected property owners in the project area.

New Business

- A. FY2026 Final Budget:** Administrator Walbridge shared a final budget summary based on the budget meetings and workshops. Member Albrecht-Benson entered a motion to adopt the 2026 final budget as presented; Member Wade seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.
- B. Resolution 2025-52 – Approving the Final 2026 Tax Levy:** Based on the 2026 final budget, Administrator Walbridge introduced Resolution 2025-52 that reflected required levy amounts. Member Wade entered a motion to adopt Resolution 2025-52; Member Bakke seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.
- C. Amendments to City Ordinance 54.06 – Utility Fee Schedule:** Utility fee rate amendments as recommended by the Lanesboro Public Utility Commission were presented to the City Council. Water rates are proposed to increase 1.0%, sewer rates are proposed to increase 1.5%, and electric rates are proposed to increase 1.0%. Administrator Walbridge explained the utility fee schedule is adopted by ordinance, so amendment to the ordinance is required. Administrator Walbridge also stated that amendment to an ordinance requires a public hearing. Member Albrecht-Benson entered a motion to call for a public hearing to consider amending the utility fees and rate schedule; Member Bakke seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.
- D. Amendments to City Ordinance 30.11 – City Fee Schedule:** Building permit fee amendments as recommended by the Lanesboro Planning and Zoning Commission were presented to the City Council. Administrator Walbridge explained that the city fee schedule is also adopted by ordinance, so an amendment to the ordinance is required, as well as an additional public hearing. Member Albrecht-Benson entered a motion to call for a public hearing to consider amending the city fee schedule; Member Bakke seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.
- E. Consider Estimate for New Snowplow Attachment:** Due to damage to one of the current snowplow attachments, Administrator Walbridge presented quotes from Universal Truck Equipment of Galesville, Wisconsin. Two estimates were for repair to a current snowplow, and one estimate was for a replacement plow attachment. Administrator Walbridge recommended a new snowplow attachment as the Public Works truck is planned to be replaced in 2026, and a new plow attachment would be needed. Member Wade entered a motion to approve the quote from Universal Truck Equipment for a Hiniker 8-1/2' V-Plow replacement; Member Bakke seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.
- F. Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors Letter:** The Lanesboro City Council received a letter from the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors questioning the City's role and participation in what is called the Rural Health Innovation Initiative. Mayor Pearson explained that she is working alongside on the initiative to improve rural health care access for Lanesboro.

Member Albrecht-Benson questioned why Mayor Pearson felt the need to use her title of mayor as part of the initiative and project when the City is not involved. Member Albrecht-Benson expressed that she felt using the mayoral title is misleading. Mayor Pearson stated that she has gone above and beyond what is required by also clarifying that she is acting in her personal capacity.

Member Albrecht-Benson stated that in the promotional video, Mayor Pearson identifies herself as the Mayor of Lanesboro but does not state that she is working on the project in a personal capacity. Member Albrecht-Benson raised concerns regarding the Lanesboro City Council Code of Conduct and stated that Mayor Pearson may be using her title to benefit a private or personal interest. Mayor Pearson stated that she was not receiving any personal benefit.

Member Bakke asked why Mayor Pearson feels she needs to use her title of mayor when acting in her personal capacity. Member Bakke also expressed concern about the Lanesboro logo being used on the project website. Mayor Pearson replied that Omcare has already removed the logos and that she does not control the website.

Member Albrecht-Benson asked Mayor Pearson about Hope Corps and how money is being handled through the nonprofit. Mayor Pearson explained that funds received are controlled by the nonprofit and are used to produce a documentary.

Member Albrecht-Benson questioned whether the citizens of Lanesboro are interested in this initiative and whether there has been any opposition. Mayor Pearson replied that she has conducted extensive research, including a survey with 133 respondents, and that most residents were interested in the initiative. Administrator Walbridge asked Mayor Pearson how she knew the survey respondents were actual residents if the survey was completely anonymous. Mayor Pearson stated that a few respondents may have participated who were not citizens of Lanesboro.

Member Wade stated that she felt the documentary trailer was misleading and not factual, as there are healthcare and pharmacy options available around Lanesboro within a 30-mile radius. Mayor Pearson then stated that the Rural Health Innovation Initiative and the documentary are two separate things and cannot be involved with each other.

Member Albrecht-Benson pointed out in the Code of Conduct that council members should not use their positions to improperly influence. Mayor Pearson asked if former Mayor Ressman used improper influence to promote the Trout Unlimited Project. Administrator Walbridge stated that he did not think so, as the City Council is considering adopting a resolution of support for the project.

Member Bakke explained that he thought using the mayoral title carries weight and that using the title is improper when it does not represent the unified voice of the City Council. Mayor Pearson went on to explain that she felt she is acting in her personal capacity.

Member Wade asked Mayor Pearson if it would be difficult for her to leave out that she is the mayor when acting in a personal capacity, as this would eliminate the entire issue. Mayor Pearson stated that it would eliminate the issue, but that she does not agree. Mayor Pearson stated that she believes she can legally and ethically use the mayoral title to bring good things to Lanesboro.

Administrator Walbridge told the council members that using titles of council member and mayor creates additional work for staff by generating perceptions that staff then must explain.

Member Albrecht-Benson stated that it would be simple if Mayor Pearson discontinued using her title of mayor. Mayor Pearson stated that she was unwilling to do that but is open to other suggestions that council members may have.

Member Wade expressed that she felt the entire project was being jeopardized by the confusion that is being created. Mayor Pearson stated that she believes people who see a problem and do not act or do not help solve a problem want to see a potential solution fail rather than see something succeed. Mayor Pearson stated that there would be no trial if she had not gone out seeking healthcare for Lanesboro. She further stated that getting partners on board for the Rural Healthcare Innovation Initiative would have been impossible if she were not mayor.

Member Bakke pointed out that Mayor Pearson used her title to gather people together for the project. Mayor Pearson responded that she does explain that she is acting in her personal capacity at the same time. Member Albrecht-Benson stated that she does not present herself that way in the video clips that

have been circulated. Mayor Pearson responded that the videos are trailers and are unedited. She stated that the final video would be released in roughly 1.5 years and that the video is separate from the study. Member Wade asked about the University of Minnesota's involvement. Mayor Pearson stated that the University of Minnesota is under contract for the project. Member Wade asked who was paying the University of Minnesota contract. Mayor Pearson responded that Omcare is paying the University of Minnesota through the contract.

Member Bakke asked Attorney O'Koren if there were any concerns with Mayor Pearson using her mayoral title on the project and going against the Code of Conduct. Attorney O'Koren stated that there is a gray area with the way the Code is written and that Mayor Pearson should only be acting in her personal capacity. He stated that any conflict of interest would be tied to financial gain. Attorney O'Koren further stated that appearance of impropriety is not enough to be considered an official conflict. He recommended that the City could make an official statement of position about its level of involvement.

Administrator Walbridge asked for clarification as to what part of this the City was asked to be a fiscal agent. Mayor Pearson responded that it would be for Omcare's initiative so that Omcare could collect donations and obtain grant dollars. Administrator Walbridge stated back, for understanding, that the reason Omcare wanted the City to be the fiscal agent was so that a private industry could be the recipient of donations and increase eligibility for grant dollars. Mayor Pearson responded that the City said no to being the fiscal agent, so she was unclear why this was being discussed again.

Administrator Walbridge stated that he remembered the City said no to being a fiscal agent because, when asked the size of the budget and types of expenses that it would be managing, Mayor Pearson did not know. Mayor Pearson responded that she was under the impression the City would only be paying a community liaison a flat stipend of \$10,000 per month. Administrator Walbridge stated that he did not understand how that would be the only expense associated with the project. Mayor Pearson responded that it did not matter as the City said no to being the fiscal agent. Administrator Walbridge stated that it did matter because he wanted to understand the discussion and the fiscal agent need. Mayor Pearson stated that a fiscal agent had been found which is the Russell B. Hagen Foundation, and that the fiscal agent will do whatever a fiscal agent does.

Member Albrecht-Benson asked if a response to the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce Board's letter was needed. Attorney O'Koren recommended formulating a statement of position as a response to the Chamber Board.

Member Bakke asked if Omcare was an LLC and for-profit business. Mayor Pearson responded that she did not know. Member Bakke asked if using the mayoral title to promote a for-profit business and product would be a conflict of interest. Mayor Pearson responded that it would only be a conflict if she made a financial gain, which she stated she is not and would not.

Member Albrecht-Benson stated that she felt the Chamber of Commerce Board is deserving of a response. Administrator Walbridge stated that the Chamber of Commerce has always been a very good partner with the City and that if the City Council were to send a letter to the Chamber, he would hope they would respond similarly as he hopes the City Council will. Member Albrecht-Benson asked Administrator Walbridge if he could draft a response. Administrator Walbridge responded that he would if the City Council made it a priority.

Member Albrecht-Benson entered a motion to have Administrator Walbridge draft a statement of position that could be sent back to the Lanesboro Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors; Member Bakke seconded the motion. Motion carried with all in favor.

G. Eminent Domain: Mayor Pearson asked for clarification on the use of eminent domain as part of the TH250 Road and Utility project. Recent correspondence sent to property owners who may be part of the property acquisition process stated that eminent domain may be used if property owners do not agree with the conveyance process. Administrator Walbridge explained that the usage of eminent domain terminology was in a letter enclosure, but not the letter itself. To his knowledge, Administrator Walbridge stated that this is MnDOT's standard language used for its projects, and there may be some circumstance where the use of eminent domain may arise. However, Administrator Walbridge stated he

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was not aware of any intent that the City planned to or would need to exercise the eminent domain process on this project. Furthermore, Administrator Walbridge stated that eminent domain has procedural steps that would require City Council involvement. No action was taken.

Mayor Pearson adjourned the meeting at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell Walbridge
City Administrator/Clerk