



MINUTES

**Mankato City Council
Regular Meeting
February 9, 2026 - 6 p.m.
IGC - Council Chambers**

1. **Call Meeting to Order**

Roll Call

Members Present: Jen Melby-Kelley, Jessica Hatanpa, Kevin Mettler, Mike Laven, Dennis Dieken, Michael McLaughlin, and Mayor Najwa Massad.

Staff Present: City Manager Susan Arntz, Community Development Director Mark Konz, Director of Public Safety Jeremy Clifton, Interim Public Works Director Karl Keel, City Engineer Cory Bienfang, and City Clerk Renae Kopischke.

Pledge of Allegiance

2. **Approval of Agenda**

Ms. Hatanpa moved and Mr. Mettler seconded a motion to approve the agenda as written. The motion carried unanimously.

3. **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Dieken moved and Ms. Hatanpa seconded a motion to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 26, 2026, as written. The motion carried unanimously.

4. **Public Open Forum (15 Minutes)**

The following spoke related to federal immigration enforcement and potential city actions: Wyatt Biren, Jacob Bases, Jameel Haque, Christ Shoenstedt, Jeremy Kuznia, Rachel Maccabee, and Luis Orozco.

5. **Consent Calendar**

NOTE: All items listed under the Consent Calendar will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussion of these items. If a Council Member wishes to discuss any of these items, they may ask that the item be removed from the Consent Calendar. Removed item(s) will be discussed and acted upon by separate motion.

Ms. Hatanpa moved and Mr. Laven seconded a motion to approve the Consent Calendar as written. With all members voting in favor, the motion carried.

- A. Proclamation designating February 18, 2026, as "School Bus Driver Appreciation Day" in the City of Mankato.
- B. Motion approving appointment of Lisa Bigham as a regular member of the Planning Commission.
- C. Motion approving allocations for 2026 Special Event Support Grants.
- D. Motion approving On Sale Intoxicating, Sunday, and Non-Enclosed Premise (patio) Liquor Licenses for Ippin Ramen Sushi Mankato Inc DBA Ippin Ramen Sushi & Bar, 1861 Adams Street, Suite 400, Mankato.
- E. Motion approving Off Sale Intoxicating Liquor License to Rainy Lake Retail LLC DBA Rush Liquor & Smokes (new ownership), 2112 Hoffman Road, Mankato.
- F. Motion approving a License to Encroach for 905 South Victory Drive.
- G. Resolution accepting feasibility report and ordering project for Capital Improvement Project 10839; Public Works Center Welding Bay Exhaust and Tool Replacement.
- H. Report on project and Change Orders 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9 for Capital Improvement Project 10884; Kern Bridge.
- I. Resolution directing No Parking within 30 feet of a traffic signal at 629 North Riverfront Drive.
- J. Resolution directing Traffic Control at the NE quadrant of the intersection of 1st Avenue and 3rd Avenue adding a No Outlet sign to the existing street name sign assembly.
- K. Resolution directing Traffic Control at the intersection of 1st Avenue and Spruce Street by installing a Stop sign on the westbound approach of Spruce Street.

- L. Resolution directing Traffic Control at the intersection of Trestle Trail, Owatonna Street, and Sibley Parkway by installing a Yield sign on the southbound approach of Trestle Trail.
- M. Resolution directing Traffic Control along Augusta Drive between North Riverfront Drive and Trunk Highway 22 by adding additional 30 mph signs.

6. **Planning Commission**

- A. Mr. Konz stated that the applicant has submitted a request for a conditional use permit to allow a drive-through with driving lanes located between the building and the property frontage within the Highway Gateway Overlay District at 1831 Premier Drive. He noted that the request also includes a certificate of design compliance for the construction of a new structure of approximately 6,830 square feet in the Highway Gateway Overlay District; preliminary and final plat approval for Blaze Mankato Addition; and the vacation of a portion of a 10-foot utility easement located between Lots 1 and 2, Block 2, as recorded in the plat of Mills Addition to Mankato.

Mr. Konz commented that a condition of approval is that the standard easement along Premier Drive be expanded from 10 feet to 15 feet to accommodate a future sidewalk and/or a private easement be provided to allow installation of the sidewalk. He added that the request includes vacating an existing private utility easement located between the underlying lots; thus, the 10-foot easement must be vacated to allow construction of the new building over this area. He mentioned that the standard easements along the eastern and western property boundaries will remain.

Mr. Konz explained that Blaze Credit Union proposes constructing a new branch office and contact center to provide financial services to existing and prospective members. He indicated that site plans show a 5,050-square-foot credit union building with an attached 1,780-square-foot contact center, centrally located on the combined parcels. He noted that the building placement meets all the setback requirements and that the structures do not exceed the allowable 75 percent lot coverage.

Mr. Konz explained that the proposal has two access points from Premier Drive and is supported by a traffic analysis evaluating trip generation, site circulation, and broader roadway impacts. He mentioned that the development is expected to generate about 51 trips during the morning peak hour, 113 during the evening peak hour, and roughly 610 trips daily, with peak periods aligning closely with surrounding roadway traffic patterns. He commented on Premier Drive, as well as nearby Victory

Drive and Highway 22, and how the roadways are operating well below capacity; thus, even with an estimated 500–700 additional daily trips distributed through the network, impacts would be minimal—equating to only one or two extra vehicles per minute during peak hours—and no infrastructure improvements are required. He added that the analysis also confirms adequate drive-through stacking, circulation, and parking, with conditions addressing signage, landscaping, and truck maneuverability.

Mr. Konz stated that the site exceeds City Code parking requirements, providing 57 stalls where 36 are required. He noted that the drive-through design includes three lanes with the required nine stacking spaces, as well as a bypass lane to prevent conflicts with parking or internal circulation. He explained that related to gateway standards, a pedestrian connection from the public right-of-way to the building entrance is required, while a connection to the eastern trail was evaluated, it was deemed impractical due to alignment, grade, and safety concerns related to crossing drive-through lanes. He stated that instead, a continuous sidewalk along the east side of Premier Drive is recommended, including curb cuts serving adjacent properties and a temporary mid-block crossing to the west-side sidewalk until a future project completes the eastern sidewalk.

Mr. Dieken moved and Mr. Mettler seconded a motion to approve the Resolutions approving a Conditional Use Permit and Certificate of Design Compliance to allow a new structure with a drive-through in the Highway Gateway Overlay District; the Final Plat of Blaze Mankato Addition; and vacation of a 10' utility easement located between Lots 1 and 2, Block 2, Mills Addition to Mankato (1831 Premier Drive). The motion carried unanimously.

7. Public Hearings

- A. Mr. Bienfang stated that this is a public hearing on Capital Improvement Projects 11206; Hiniker Parkway, and 11214; Range Street. He indicated that the existing Range Street roadway from Butterworth Street to River Lane will be removed as part of the Trunk Highway (TH) 169 revitalization project scheduled for 2027; the existing intersection of West Lind Street and TH 169 will be disconnected; and access to TH 169 will be provided via a roundabout at TH 169 and River Lane, which will connect to Hiniker Parkway. He noted that Hiniker Parkway (from Butterworth Street to Range Street) and Range Street (from Hiniker Parkway to Lind Street) are proposed to be improved in 2026. He commented that the projects will serve as critical local access routes during and after the TH 169 project. He mentioned that to construct Hiniker Parkway, a small sliver of right-of-way is required along the north side of Butterworth Street; thus, staff are working with the City Attorney to complete this acquisition (valuation less than \$1,000).

Mr. Bienfang commented that for the Hiniker Parkway and Range Street projects, staff hosted a joint informational meeting on January 6, 2026, where staff presented the proposed plan, estimated costs, and proposed preliminary assessments for the projects. Residents abutting the projects were mailed and hand-delivered notices of the informational meeting, and representatives from two of the four adjacent businesses attended. He concluded that staff is recommending the Council consider the improvements per the attached feasibility reports, estimated costs, and funding sources as presented.

Mr. Laven referred to the map and the “green section” of roadway and wondered who benefited from the street. He inquired as to why the services are not being abandoned and the roadway vacated. Mr. Bienfang replied that there is a section of roadway that will be completely removed and noted access.

Mr. McLaughlin inquired if there would be any parking along Hiniker Parkway. Mr. Bienfang responded no.

Mayor Massad opened the public hearing for Project 11206; Hiniker Parkway, and for Project 11214 Range Street.

Randy Dinsmore, operator of the Neighborhood Thrift Store, mentioned how they provide food to the community and how the assessment will affect their costs in being able to continue to provide such services. He commented that, in addition, he was informed that they would have to pave their parking lot. He asked for some assistance with the costs. He mentioned the changeover with the Highway 169 project.

Ms. Arntz explained the stages of the projects and how more information would be known once bids were received.

James Fallenstein, who works on Route 7 for the Post Office, asked about the entrance into the hotel and the cutoff of the road. He asked about the addition of a traffic circle and wondered if it was necessary.

Mr. Bienfang noted that the Highway 169 project is a two-year project that is being done by MnDOT.

Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Mr. Bienfang stated that this is a public hearing on Capital Improvement Project 11141; CSAH 5 (3rd Avenue). He indicated that the reconstruction project proposes improvements from Riverfront Drive to Cleveland Street, which is a Blue Earth County roadway, with certain city-owned utilities beneath the pavement. Staff and members from Blue Earth County hosted an informational meeting on February 3, 2026,

where staff presented the proposed plan, estimated costs, and proposed preliminary assessments for the projects. Residents abutting the projects were mailed a notice of the informational meeting. He added that the City and Blue Earth County entered into an “agreement to cost participate” for the design of the improvements in February 2024. He concluded that staff is recommending the Council consider the improvements per the attached feasibility reports, estimated costs, and funding sources as presented.

Ms. Hatanpa mentioned the RR crossing and the possibility of making them safer. Mr. Bienfang stated that there is some roadway work being done with the railroad.

Mr. Keel mentioned that a study was done on several of the RR crossings and noted that what was proposed is not recommended for implementation at this time but was something that could be looked at as a possibility in the future.

Mayor Masad opened the public hearing for Project 11141; CSAH 5 (3rd Avenue). There being no one wishing to speak, Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Ms. Hatanpa moved and Mr. McLaughlin seconded a motion to approve the Resolutions receiving feasibility reports, ordering improvements, preparation of plans and specifications, and ordering advertisements of bids for Capital Improvement Projects: 11206; Hiniker Parkway; 11214; Range Street; and 11141; CSAH 5 (3rd Avenue). The motion carried unanimously.

- B. Mr. Konz reported that KJ2 Properties is requesting a variance from the Mankato City Code to increase the number of units per building from four to five on multiple lots within the Groh Farm Subdivision, located in the Shoreland District. He indicated that although the properties are zoned R-3 (Limited Multiple Family Dwelling), which allows up to eight units per building if zoning standards are met, the 2022 adoption of a Shoreland Overlay District reclassified the lots due to their proximity to a public water basin. He noted that the lots are considered legal non-conformities because they were platted prior to the shoreland ordinance. He commented that in 2023, the owner created a Common Interest Community (CIC) establishing four units per lot, and in 2025 dissolved that CIC. He added that the applicant now seeks to construct five-unit buildings instead of four, and because the property is within the Shoreland District, the variance requires review in coordination with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Mr. Konz stated that staff evaluated the request using the statutory criteria for variances, including reasonableness, uniqueness, and essential character, as well as harmony with the ordinance and consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. He stated that staff found the request reasonable, noting that absent the privately created CIC, up to eight units per lot could be allowed under the underlying zoning. He mentioned that the proposal would not undermine shoreland protections, as the development would connect to public sewer, maintain existing vegetation allowances, and significantly reduce impervious surface coverage —thereby improving stormwater management and potentially benefiting water quality. He also commented that staff determined the circumstances are unique due to the shoreland designation occurring after platting, and that five-unit buildings would remain consistent with the surrounding residential character. He concluded that the proposal aligns with the City's Comprehensive Plan and Strategic Plan goals supporting high-density residential development and expanded housing options. An administrative hearing was held on January 28, 2026, and no additional public comments were submitted.

Mayor Massad opened the public hearing. There being no one wishing to speak, Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Mr. McLaughlin moved and Mr. Mettler seconded a motion to approve the Resolution approving a variance from Chapter 10, Article VIII, Division 1, Sec.10-1059 of the Mankato City Code to increase the number of units in a building from 4 to 5 in the Shoreland District (Lots 17-22 Block 5 Groh Farm Subdivision). The motion carried unanimously.

- C. Mr. Konz reported that Bolton and Menk, on behalf of property owner Ron Goodrich, is requesting a variance to reduce the required transitional yard setback from 30 feet to 6 feet at 120 Pine Street and 1700 3rd Avenue, the site of the existing Maker's Space building. The property is zoned M-1 (Light Industrial) and is adjacent to R-3 (Multiple Family Residential) zoning to the west. The City Code requires a 30-foot transitional yard between industrial and residential districts. He stated that the applicant seeks the reduction to allow paving and improvement of an existing gravel parking lot, including installation of pavement, curb and gutter, landscaping, and striping for 13 standard parking stalls and one accessible stall. He indicated that access would remain from Pine Street using the existing curb cut, and the overall parking area would remain similar in size (approximately 0.35 acres). He noted that the improvements are intended to bring the currently nonconforming gravel parking and loading area into compliance with City standards.

Mr. Konz explained that the request is also driven by the need to accommodate truck turning movements associated with multiple overhead doors added to the building's west side after its original construction. He mentioned that the applicant submitted a site and turning movement plan demonstrating safe truck access and circulation on site.

Mr. Konz stated that the surface water will be redirected to an existing culvert under the railroad tracks to prevent drainage onto adjacent residential property. He noted that the applicant would submit detailed drainage, paving, landscaping, and accessibility plans prior to permitting and acknowledges potential increases in stormwater and frontage surcharges. He added that the adjacent residential property owner provided a letter of support for the variance, and the request was evaluated under Minnesota Statute §462.357, which requires that variances be in harmony with the ordinance, consistent with the comprehensive plan, and justified by practical difficulties without altering the essential character of the area.

Mayor Massad opened the public hearing. There being no one wishing to speak, Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Mr. Dieken moved and Mr. Laven seconded a motion to approve the Resolution approving a variance request from Chapter 10, Article VII, Division 3, Sec.10-1005 of the Mankato City Code to decrease the transitional yard setback from 30 feet to 6 feet in the M-1, Light Industrial, zoning district (120 Pine Street and 1700 3rd Avenue). The motion carried unanimously.

- D. Mr. Konz indicated that APX Construction Group is requesting a variance to reduce the wetland setback from 16.5 feet to 5 feet for the purpose of constructing a sidewalk in the area between Victory Drive and the wetland next to Evenson Subdivision. He noted that the proposed sidewalk is 5 feet wide and will provide a connection from the proposed apartment complex to the sidewalk network at the intersection of Victory Drive and Stadium Road.

Mr. Konz explained that Evenson Subdivision was approved at the December 8, 2025, Council meeting, and the resolution contained conditions requiring the applicant to apply for a license to encroach and a variance to place the sidewalk within the public right-of-way.

Mr. Konz stated that the applicant submitted their responses to the five questions set forth in the League of Minnesota Cities Land Use Variance, and mentioned that when considering the variance, three factors to establish the practical difficulty threshold should be considered; reasonableness, uniqueness, and essential character.

Mr. Konz added that the comprehensive plan addresses properties and their use, and the land use designates the zoning district as B-3, Highway Business District, which is intended to provide sites for a range of commercial developments. He commented that the variance is not requesting the property to be used in a different manner than commercial/multi-family use, it is only requesting the setback be reduced for installing a pedestrian connection. The variance meets this requirement as the use is not proposed to change.

Mr. Konz indicated that an administrative hearing regarding the variance request was held on January 28, 2026, where staff explained the criteria for evaluating the variance for conformance with Minnesota Statutes and gave a prompt overview of the proposed variance, and no additional comments related to the proposal were submitted.

Mayor Masad opened the public hearing. There being no one wishing to speak, Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Mr. Mettler moved and Ms. Hatanpa seconded a motion to approve the Resolution approving a variance from Chapter 10, Article X, Division 2, Sec.10-1500 (e) of the Mankato City Code to reduce the required setback from a wetland from 16.5 feet to 5 feet for the purpose of constructing a sidewalk (905 South Victory Drive). The motion carried unanimously.

- E. Mr. Konz stated that it is requested that Mankato City Code, Section 10-1246, relating to Floodplain Management be amended as a previous revision to the flood hazard maps and associated information for parts of Blue Earth County, including some areas of Mankato, took effect on December 11, 2023. With this, the city's regulations were updated, reviewed, and approved by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Mr. Konz indicated that at the time of the previous adoption of this ordinance, the Le Sueur County Community Panels were not yet completed; therefore, this separate ordinance amendment adoption of the Community Panels is required now that the noted maps have been updated.

Mayor Massad opened the public hearing. There being no one wishing to speak, Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Ms. Hatanpa moved and Mr. Laven seconded a motion to approve the Ordinance amending Chapter 10-1246 of the Mankato City Code related to floodplain ordinance maps and adoption dates, and a motion approving summary publication. The motion carried unanimously.

- F. Mr. Konz stated that if the city receives a request for reasonable accommodation from a resident with a disability, the accommodations are often associated with barriers to accessing housing. He explained that an example would be accommodation from setback regulations impacting the construction of an accessible ramp in the front yard for the resident to safely access their home. He mentioned that requests are administratively processed through the City Manager's office instead of requiring a hearing process, which is done to comply with the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Fair Housing Act (FHA).

Mr. Konz noted that the ADA and FHA require public entities to consider requests for accommodation and, when reasonable, including when not overly burdensome to the city, to grant those accommodations or modifications to rules, policies, practices, or services that may be necessary to afford persons with disabilities an equal opportunity to use and enjoy a dwelling. He added that while the accommodations are often associated with a zoning standard (setback and occupancy), there are other regulations that may be subject to reasonable accommodations, and other requests may include rental regulations, parking standards, and building code standards.

Mr. Konz commented that while the requests are not frequent, the number of requests has increased, particularly with the aging and recovery populations; therefore, staff expects the number of requests for accommodations to continue to increase and be associated with a wider variety of situations.

Mr. Konz elaborated that to demonstrate that the requested accommodation may be necessary, there must be an identifiable relationship between the requested accommodation and the individual's disability. In addition, a request for reasonable accommodation may be denied if providing the accommodation is not reasonable, if the reasonable accommodation imposes an undue financial and administrative burden on the city or would alter the nature of city operations. He concluded that to respond to the requests and to ensure consistency in process and standards for consideration, it is recommended that a reasonable accommodation ordinance be adopted as part of the City Code.

Mayor Masad opened the public hearing. There being no one wishing to speak, Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Mr. Laven moved and Ms. Hatanpa seconded a motion to approve an Ordinance amending Chapter 2 of the Mankato City Code, adopting an ordinance addressing requests for reasonable accommodations, and a motion approving summary publication. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. McLaughlin requested to be excused at 7:12 p.m.

- G. Ms. Kopischke stated that recently, a review was done of Mankato City Code Chapter 2, Administrative Procedures, and of Chapter 4, Alcoholic Beverages, to clean up former amendments that were missed and to provide further clarity of licensing requirements.

Ms. Kopischke indicated that the changes to Chapter 2, Administrative Procedures, were being requested to provide clarification and reflect current practices, which was additional cleanup needed following the recodification that took place in 2025.

Ms. Kopischke summarized some of the amendments to Chapter 4, Alcoholic Beverages, which included cleanup of the occupancy limit of under 400 that applies to all licenses as well as cleanup to the movie theater information; lowering of the food requirement for a Class R to 30 percent from 40 percent to allow businesses more flexibility in meeting the requirement; and revising the language for the Class B, bar to include the “grandfathered” license information to help provide clarify on the licenses that are for legal non-conforming uses.

Mayor Massad opened the public hearing.

Jacob Bases, commented that lowering the food requirement was a good idea. He noted that he was considering opening a venue at one time, and in doing a review of the license information, felt that the requirements would be hard to meet based on his current experiences.

Mayor Massad closed the public hearing.

Ms. Hatanpa moved and Ms. Melby-Kelley seconded a motion to approve the Ordinances amending Chapter 2 of the Mankato City Code related to Administrative Procedures, and Chapter 3 related to Alcoholic Beverages; Resolution amending the Penalty/Strike Matrix for Liquor Licenses, and motion approving summary publication. The motion carried unanimously.

8. **Council Business**

- A. Ms. Arntz stated that at the Council meeting on January 26, the Council passed two actions and some further requests for staff work which included: a motion directing the City Attorney and staff to prepare and file an amicus brief in relation to the State’s lawsuit against the federal government; a motion directing staff to develop a draft of an ordinance relating to any agency outside of Mankato that was conducting law enforcement activities in Mankato to wear a body camera, be unmasked, and provide identification, and a request to review possible grants.

Ms. Arntz reported that since the meeting, staff have been working with an attorney at Kenney & Graven who will be assisting with the filing of the amicus brief and are following the recent order that was issued in this matter. She noted that two meetings have taken place with the attorney to review the potential information that may be used in the amicus brief, and that currently, there wasn't any draft language to share.

Ms. Arntz indicated that a draft ordinance has been shared with the city and is currently under legal review to identify potential conflicts and ensure it is as effective as possible. She asked the Council to consider whether to adopt it as an emergency ordinance or a regular ordinance. She summarized the differences between an emergency versus a regular ordinance. She stated that the draft ordinance will be presented at the next Council meeting, where the City Attorney will review potential legal risks and conflicts, including issues related to state or federal preemption. She added that while the city has authority under its statutory police powers to enact ordinances to protect public health, safety, and welfare, careful legal analysis is necessary to ensure compliance with broader laws and to minimize risk.

Ms. Arntz clarified that the Council has authority to provide a grant to organizations for the distribution of food, per Minnesota Statute 465.039. She mentioned that the city may appropriate money from the general fund or unrestricted money to provide grants to nonprofit organizations operating community food shelves that provide food to the needy without charge. She noted the three primary programs that provide food support in Mankato, which include ECHO Foodshelf, Southern MN Food Recovery, and Feeding Our Communities Partners. She concluded that should the Council wish to make a grant to one or more of these agencies, staff would recommend using the city's undesignated fund balance and then, throughout the year, staff will identify if there are projects or programs that can be removed to cover the amounts of the grants.

Discussion centered on creating an emergency ordinance versus a regular ordinance, with the consensus being an emergency ordinance.

Ms. Melby-Kelley moved and Mr. Mettler seconded a motion to approve grants in the amount of \$10,000 each to ECHO Foodshelf, Southern MN Food Recovery, and Feeding Our Communities Partners as per Minnesota Statute 465.039. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Laven commented on two resolutions that were provided that requested that the city create a Human Rights Commission. It was noted that the Greater Mankato Diversity Council is recognized for the Greater Mankato area.

Brief discussion on the creation of a committee. It was also noted that the city has a Public Safety Advisory Committee and that there is a current vacancy in Ward 3.

9. **Reports and Miscellaneous Business**

View all city committee meetings by clicking on our [City Calendar](#)

Regular Council Meeting, February 23, 2026, 6 p.m., Council Chambers
(with Work Session to follow)

Work Session, March 2, 2026, 6 p.m., Minnesota River Room

Regular Council Meeting, March 9, 2026, 6 p.m., Council Chambers (with
EDA to follow if needed)

10. **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Ms. Melby-Kelley moved and Mr. Mettler
seconded a motion to adjourn. With all members voting in favor, the
meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Minutes Approved.

Mayor Massad

ATTEST:

Renae Kopischke
City Clerk