City of Fairmont
100 Downtown Plaza
Fairmont, MN 56031

City Council Minutes
Regular Meeting

September 14, 2026
City Hall, 5:38 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

The Fairmont City Council met in regular session at the City Hall Council Chambers. Mayor Baarts called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Council present:
Lee Baarts, Mayor
Wayne Hasek, Councilmember
Britney Kawecki, Councilmember
James Kotewa, Councilmember
Randy Lubenow, Councilmember
Jay Maynard, Councilmember

Absent: None

Staff present:
Jason Baker, City Administrator
Matthew York, Director of Public Works/Utilities
Paul Hoye, Finance Director
Michael Beletti, Chief of Police
Ned Koppen, Economic Development Director
Rachel Viesselman, Human Resources Manager
- Joined meeting for Agenda Item 6.C.5 and presented on topic

Betsy Steuber, City Clerk
- Left the meeting, following Agenda Item 4.1

Troy Nemmers, City Engineer (Bolton & Menk)
David Assaf, City Attorney, via telephone (Flaherty & Hood)

ROTATING VOTES

Please note that votes taken by roll call are called by the City Clerk on a rotating basis; however, the written minutes list the Councilmembers in alphabetical order.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The City Council and all present stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Prior to approval of the agenda, Mayor Baarts stated that, per Legal advisement, Agenda Item 9.A.1 (Consideration of the 2026 Overlay Projects and Assessment Roll) and Agenda Item 9.A.2 (Consideration to Call a Public Hearing on the Proposed Assessment of the 2026 Overlay Projects) be removed from the agenda and considered at the September 28, 2026 meeting, following Council's consideration of an updated assessment policy.

Councilmember Kawecki requested Agenda Item 6.C.4 (Consideration to Declare Equipment as Surplus and Remove from the City's Inventory) and Agenda Item 6.C.5 (Consideration of an Executive Search Firm for the Community and Economic Development Director Position) be removed from the Consent Agenda and placed under New Business to allow for further Council discussion. Mayor Baarts stated the items would be considered under New Business as Agenda Items 9.A.5 and 9.A.6.

Motion was made by Councilmember Kawecki to table Agenda Item 9.A.3 (Consideration of One-Year Contract with the Fairmont Ag Society – Fair Board). Motion failed due to lack of a second.

Motion was made by Councilmember Kawecki to table Agenda Item 9.A.4 (Consideration of One-Year Contract with the Fairmont Youth Hockey Association). Motion failed due to lack of a second.

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Lubenow, to approve the agenda as amended, removing Agenda Items 9.A.1 and 9.A.2 from the agenda and placing Consent Agenda Items 6.C.4 and 6.C.5 under New Business. Councilmembers Hasek, Kotewa, Lubenow, and Maynard voted in favor; Councilmember Kawecki voted against. Motion carried.

RECOGNITION/ PRESENTATIONS

Item 4.1

Chief of Police Beletti introduced Officer Seth Reinke, Fairmont's newest member of the Police Department, to the Council and community prior to him being ceremonially sworn in by City Clerk Steuber.

Item 4.2

State Representative Bjorn Olson, Minnesota House District 22A, provided a legislative update and discussed potential state funding opportunities for Fairmont. Representative Olson encouraged the City to identify priority projects for which he could pursue funding, including recreational facilities, water quality, housing and infrastructure.

Item 4.3

Finance Director Hoye presented the Second Quarter Financial Report, through June 30, 2026. Hoye reviewed General Fund revenues and expenses, noting General Fund expenses are currently under budget, while anticipating the General Fund will end the year around 60%, well within the target range of 55-65%. In response to a question regarding the $3.4 million transfer to the Capital Project Fund, Hoye noted the transfer has not yet been made and is anticipated toward the end of the year, with Hoye providing Council with the anticipated Capital Project Fund balance following the transfer.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION/ COMMENT

Todd Smith, resident of Fairmont, addressed Council on the Martin County Arena and facility study conducted by WOLD. Mr. Smith questioned information in the study related to the fire protection system. Mr. Smith also commented on City spending, data practices, General Fund transfers, Fairmont Youth Hockey, and the Martin County Arena.

Councilmember Lubenow read a statement submitted to him by Fairmont resident Bill Cieslinski regarding financial challenges faced by residents regarding taxes, local levy and governmental spending.

Luke Ebeling, resident of Fairmont and President of the Fairmont Youth Hockey Association (FYHA) addressed Council regarding the proposed one-year agreements for Council consideration at this meeting concerning the Martin County Arena and Fairmont Youth Hockey Association. Mr. Ebeling requested Council approval to allow timely preparations for the upcoming season and that FYHA would continue working toward a long-term agreement.

Gregg Paulson, resident of Fairmont, addressed Council on the condition of the lakes and their importance as a community asset. Mr. Paulson encouraged a nanobubble pilot study while commenting on sedimentation, water quality and maintenance.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Baarts introduced the remaining consent agenda items as listed for consideration to be enacted by one motion unless an item was requested to be removed and placed under New Business. Mayor Baarts reviewed the consent items, as follows:

- City Council Minutes from the City Projects/Capital Improvements Workshop held July 30, 2026
- City Council Minutes from the Budget Workshop held August 12, 2026
- City Council Minutes from Regular Meeting held August 24, 2026
- City Council Minutes from Budget Workshop held August 25, 2026
- City Council Minutes from Budget Workshop held September 1, 2026
- Professional Services Agreement with LE-AST Services/Counseling LLC for the Fairmont Police Department for the term of January 1, 2027 through December 31, 2028
- Submission of a Community Partnerships Grant Program Application through the Minnesota Chiefs of Police Foundation on behalf of the Fairmont Police Department
- Event Permit for Cobweb Manor, Sponsored by Imagine Martin, on October 30, 2026, Including the closure of First Street from Downtown Plaza to the alley on West First Street

- Event Permit for the Homecoming Parade, Sponsored by Fairmont High School on October 2, 2026

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Kotewa to approve the consent agenda as presented with the removal of agenda items 6.C.4 and 6.C.5. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS
Item 8.1

Mayor Baarts provided a summary of the Council's review and evaluation of City Administrator Jason Baker, conducted during the closed session on August 24, 2026. Mayor Baarts stated Council appreciates Baker's service, leadership, and efforts in building a positive culture throughout the City of Fairmont and they look forward to his continued employment and working toward the betterment of the City.

Discussion was held on scheduling City Administrator Baker's next review and evaluation.

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Hasek to schedule the next review and evaluation City Administrator Jason Baker for November 23, 2026 following the regular City Council meeting, utilizing the same format and structure as the previous review and evaluation. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS
MOTION
Item 9.A.3

City Administrator Baker presented the proposed one-year interim agreement with the Fairmont Ag Society (Fair Board) for continued use of the Martin County Arena for the 2026-2027 ice season. Baker reviewed the history of the agreement, proposed agreement terms and responsibilities of each party, expenses and use of the facility for the contract term.

Council discussed the proposed agreement, ownership and use of the facility, structural steel repairs and whether additional evaluation of the structural integrity of the beams should be completed prior to committing to the proposed repairs and cost share.

Motion was made by Councilmember Kawecki to reject the one-year contract with the Fairmont Ag Society (Fair Board) for continued use of the Martin County Arena to Host Ice Events for the 2026-2027 season. Motion failed due to lack of a second.

Additional discussion was held on the agreement, facility ownership, use of the facility, and additional evaluation of the structural integrity of the beams prior to committed to repairs and cost share.

Motion was made by Councilmember Lubenow, seconded by Councilmember Kotewa to approve a one-year contract with the Fairmont Ag Society (Fair Board) for continued use of the Martin County Arena to host ice events for the 2026-2027 season, with removal of 5B and for Legal Counsel to include language regarding further study of the structural integrity of the beams. On roll call, Councilmembers Maynard, Kotewa, Lubenow and Hasek voted in favor; Councilmember Kawecki voted against. Motion carried.

MOTION
Item 9.A.4

City Administrator Baker presented the proposed one-year agreement with the Fairmont Youth Hockey Association (FYHA) for use of the Martin County Arena for the 2026-2027 ice season. Baker reviewed the agreement terms, responsibilities of FYHA and the City, operating and maintenance expenses, use of the facility ,and the $30,000 budgeted for FYHA in 2026. City Attorney Assaf reviewed minor revisions made to the agreement prior to Council consideration.

Council discussed the timing of the agreement and the need for hockey preparations to begin for the upcoming ice season.

Motion was made by Councilmember Lubenow, seconded by Councilmember Maynard, to approve a one-year contract with the Fairmont Youth Hockey Association for use of the Martin County Arena to host ice events for the 2026-2027 season. Discussion was held in response to Councilmember Kotewa's questions regarding availability of open skating opportunities and public use of the facility, with Councilmember Lubenow expressing confidence that open skating opportunities would continue to be available. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

RECESS

Council took a brief recess.

MOTION
Item 9.A.5

Councilmember Kawecki opened discussion on Agenda Item 9.A.5, originally listed as Consent Agenda Item 6.C.4: Consideration to Declare Equipment as Surplus and Remove from the City's Inventory, which she requested be moved to New Business to allow for further discussion. Councilmember Kawecki requested information on how proceeds received from the sale of surplus equipment are accounted for and if an estimated sale value could be reflected when equipment replacement is considered.

Staff explained proceeds from equipment sold are returned to the applicable fund (i.e. water utility truck proceeds would go back to the water fund), are reflected in the City's accounting records, and the amount received can vary based on the sale and bidders. Staff noted that a report could be provided showing equipment sold and the amount of the proceeds received.

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Kotewa to declare the equipment listed as surplus and authorize removal from the city's asset inventory through auction, trade-in, or disposal, as appropriate. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

MOTION
Item 9.A.6

Councilmember Kawecki opened discussion on Agenda Item 9.A.6 originally listed as Consent Agenda Item 6.C.5: Consideration of an Executive Search Firm for the Community and Economic Development Director Position, which she requested be moved to New Business to allow for further discussion. Councilmember Kawecki inquired whether City Administrator Baker should be given additional time to recruit for the position through his professional connections before spending $19,000 on an executive search firm.

Administrator Baker stated he has been utilizing his contacts for several months without success and noted the continued vacancy has placed additional workload on staff. HR Manager Viesselman reviewed the City's previous recruitment efforts and stated David Drown Associates (DDA) could provide a broader network of community and economic development professionals.

Motion by Councilmember Kotewa, seconded by Councilmember Maynard to Approve David Drown Associates (DDA) to Conduct an Executive Search for the Community and Economic Development Director Position at a Cost of $19,000. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

MOTION
Item 9.B.1

Public Works/Utilities Director York presented Task Order No. 8A with Bolton & Menk in the amount of $24,500 for design and bidding services for the pickleball facility at Jeffrey Kot Fields during agenda item 9.B.1.

Discussion was held regarding whether the City should seek proposals from other engineering firms, noting Bolton & Menk's proposed cost had decreased from $37,650 to $24,500. York explained Bolton & Menk serves as the City Engineer and that going through an RFP process would add time and costs to the project and could delay the design and bidding schedule.

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Lubenow to approve Task Order No. 8A with Bolton & Menk in the amount of $24,500 for pickleball facility design and bidding. Councilmembers Hasek, Kotewa, Lubenow, and Maynard voted in favor; Councilmember Kawecki voted against. Motion carried.

MOTION
Item 9.B.2

Director York presented on the Consideration of Bid Award for the Sand Filter Replacement Project at the Fairmont Aquatic Park, noting one bid received from Horizon Pools in the amount of $239,708, which was $10,292 below the $250,000 project budget. Bolton & Menk determined the bid was responsive and recommended award.

Motion was made by Councilmember Lubenow, seconded by Councilmember Kotewa, to award the Fairmont Aquatic Park Sand Filter Replacement Project to Horizon Pools in the amount of $239,708. All present voted in favor. Motion carried.

RESOLUTION 2026-30
RESOLUTION 2026-31
Item 9.C.1

Finance Director Hoye reviewed the proposed 2027 budget and property tax levy documents, including the General Fund, special revenue funds, debt service funds, capital projects and proposed property tax levy, noting the preliminary levy is required to be certified to the County Auditor by September 30, 2026.

Motion was made by Councilmember Lubenow, seconded by Councilmember Kawecki to approve Resolution 2026-30 Adopting the Proposed Tax Levy for 2027 with the removal of the 1984 road grader replacement in the amount of $450,000, the general government City Hall feasibility study in the amount of $20,000, the facilities condition assessment in the amount of $105,000, and the operational staffing needs assessment in the amount of $100,000.

Discussion was held regarding several proposed capital projects, including the City Hall/Police Department feasibility study, operational staffing needs assessment, facilities condition assessment and replacement of the 1984 road grader. Staff provided clarification on the purpose of the proposed studies and the condition of the road grader.

Councilmember Lubenow amended his motion to approve Resolution 2026-30, Adopting the Proposed Tax Levy for 2027, with the removal of the $450,000 road grader and limiting the three proposed studies under General Government to a total of $100,000. The amended motion failed due to lack of a second.

Further discussion was held regarding the proposed equipment replacements and needs assessments. Staff clarified that the operational staffing needs assessment would be an unbiased review of City operations and that the facilities condition assessment would review the condition and needs of City facilities.

Motion was made by Councilmember Kawecki, seconded by Councilmember Lubenow, to approve Resolution 2026-30, Adopting the Proposed Tax Levy for 2027, with the removal of the replacement of the 1993 dump truck in the amount of $260,000 and the replacement of the 1984 road grader in the amount of $450,000. Finance Director Hoye clarified that removing the equipment from the capital projects would not automatically reduce the proposed levy and that the amount of the levy would also need to be reduced. York discussed concerns with continuing to delay replacement of aging equipment. Hoye noted the proposed $710,000 levy reduction would result in an ongoing reduction to capital project funding and increase the funding shortfall in the City's five-year Capital Improvement Plan. Councilmember Kawecki amended her motion to approve Resolution 2026-30, Adopting the Proposed Tax Levy for 2027, with the removal of the replacement of the 1993 dump truck and 1984 road grader and a corresponding reduction of $710,000 to the proposed property tax levy. Councilmember Lubenow seconded the amended motion. Councilmembers Kawecki and Lubenow voted in favor; Councilmembers Hasek, Kotewa, and Maynard voted against. Motion failed.

Motion was made by Councilmember Lubenow, seconded by Councilmember Maynard to approve Resolution 2026-30 adopting the proposed tax levy for 2027. On roll call, Councilmembers Hasek, Kotewa and Maynard voted in favor; Councilmembers Kawecki and Lubenow voted against. Motion carried.

Motion was made by Councilmember Maynard, seconded by Councilmember Lubenow to approve Resolution 2026-31 adopting the proposed budget for 2027. Councilmembers Hasek, Kotewa and Maynard voted in favor; Councilmembers Kawecki and Lubenow voted against. Motion carried.

Due to the length of the meeting, Mayor Baarts declared no staff liaison reports to be shared.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Councilmember Kawecki, seconded by Councilmember Maynard to adjourn the meeting, as there was no further business to come before the Council. All present voted in favor. Motion carried. The Fairmont City Council adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

Lee C. Baarts, Mayor

ATTEST:

Betsy Steuber, City Clerk