

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
June 22, 2026

The June 22, 2026, the City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Blvd. Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The following Council members were present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Jamie Malloy, Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, Finance Director Glenn Gehrke, Community & Economic Development Director Daniel Ritter, Building Commissioner Don Seeman, Assistant City Administrator & HR Director Ashley Monroe, City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Absent were: Alderman Scott Dyke and Alderman Joe Kubal.

Mayor Soliman commented that he spoke with both Alderman Dyke and Alderman Kubal and they were both absent and excused for the meeting.

Mayor Ray Soliman requested that the Council start with Public Works Department item number one first, as representatives from Backflow Solutions, Inc. were present.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

1. Presentation of Backflow Solutions, Inc. (BSI) Agreement to Assist in the Administration, Tracking, and Notification Requirements Associated with the City's Backflow Prevention Program
Victoria Rodriguez and Lauren Bullock, representatives of Backflow Solutions, Inc. (BSI), presented the company's services related to administration of municipal backflow prevention programs, including compliance tracking, notice generation, customer service support, cloud-based data management, and required survey administration under Illinois EPA rules. It was stated that the company works with more than 170 Illinois communities and approximately 1,000 water systems nationwide.

Public Works Director Gary Richardson explained that the City had effectively lost continuity with prior service arrangements and currently lacked reliable records for commercial backflow devices. He said the City needed a reputable system to establish compliance records, assist with state reporting, and help protect the integrity of the municipal water system. He emphasized that this was a budgeted item and said the startup cost for transferring to the new provider would be waived.

Mayor Soliman asked whether the program would cover both commercial and residential properties. Director Richardson responded that the current proposal was for commercial properties only, with residential implementation envisioned as a later step once the City had better control of the larger commercial component.

Alderman Jefferson asked about the risk of not having a functioning reporting system. Director Richardson responded bluntly that the danger was contamination of the water supply and regulatory consequences with the Illinois EPA if the City could not produce records showing compliance.

Alderwoman Gazal asked whether the quoted cost was annual or covered the entire term. Director Richardson explained that the approximately \$21,000 figure covered the three-year survey cycle and setup work, while recurring annual costs after that would be much lower. The BSI representative added that the annual cost was only about \$500 and that the first-year annual fee was being waived.

Alderman Cipiti asked if all buildings have a backflow prevention system. Building Commissioner Don Seeman added that some buildings, such as those with sprinkler systems, are required to have backflow devices, but the City did not yet know with certainty whether all applicable commercial buildings were equipped and in compliance. Director Richardson stated that the survey process and coordination with the fire department would help establish a more complete inventory.

Mayor Ray Soliman stated that the program was long-overdue and especially important in advance of the City's transition to Lake Michigan water. Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve the BSI agreement.

AYES: Ald. Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert.
NAYES: None.
ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

MAYOR

There were no agenda items.

CLERK

There were no agenda items.

TREASURER

There were no agenda items.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR

1. IML Conference Discussion
City Administrator Blaine Wing presented a discussion item regarding policy parameters for attendance, registration, reimbursement, and

accountability for the upcoming IML conference and similar trainings. He explained that City Council had requested the matter be discussed in advance of the 2026 conference, particularly in light of prior concerns about conference-related expenses.

City Administrator Blaine Wing proposed a formal policy under which registrations for elected officials, as well as planning commission and civil service commission members attending conferences or training, would be coordinated through the administrative office. He stated that registration, hotel arrangements, parking, and cancellations would be centralized, and that requests to register or cancel should be made by email for documentation purposes. He also outlined a meal reimbursement approach using the IRS per diem for the Chicago area, rather than requiring receipts for every meal and incidental expense.

Discussion also addressed registration timing, cancellation accountability, and attendance expectations. Alderperson Oberlin agreed that if an official registered for multiple days, the expectation should be that the person actually attend the registered days absent an emergency. It was noted that the IML rate structure makes a three-day registration cheaper than some shorter registration combinations, so the policy language would need to account for that pricing reality while still requiring meaningful attendance.

Council discussion supported a minimum attendance expectation of at least two days when a three-day registration was purchased for cost efficiency.

Alderwoman Gazal questioned both the scope and structure of the proposal. She asked whether the discussion was related only to the IML conference or also to other boards and commissions. City Administrator Blaine Wing clarified that staff had attempted to create a broader policy applicable to training opportunities beyond the IML conference, but he acknowledged that the Council could choose to limit the policy to IML for elected officials.

Alderwoman Gazal also objected to dividing meal reimbursement into prescribed breakfast, lunch, and dinner amounts. She stated that council members had historically been allowed a set daily amount of \$100, within which they could choose how to spend their meal budget, subject to receipts. She expressed concern that providing a cash per diem up front was not sufficiently transparent for taxpayer-funded expenses. Alderwoman Gazal and Alderperson Oberlin both agreed that receipts should continue to be required.

Finance Director Glenn Gehrke explained that a per diem is a standard allowance model and would simplify administration, but acknowledged that the City could continue to use a receipt-based reimbursement system if Council preferred. City Administrator Blaine Wing stated that staff were simply presenting options and would revise the policy direction based on Council's feedback. Alderman Cipiti asked how the per diem would work. Director Gehrke stated that a check will be given in advance to each person attending the conference.

Alderman Albert spoke about the day rate (\$275) versus the 3-day rate (\$375), stating that if you sign up for two days it is actually more expensive than the 3-day rate. He wanted to know if you can transfer a day pass to another person if you cannot attend one of the days of the conference. Administrator Wing stated that there are no transfer capabilities on the passes.

City Administrator Blaine Wing also raised the issue of missed early-bird registration deadlines. City Attorney Mike Stiff suggested allowing late registration if the attendee paid the difference between the early-bird and regular registration rates. Council members indicated support for that concept.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote on one major policy point: using a \$100 per day meal reimbursement cap with receipts required, rather than the IRS per diem approach.

AYES: Ald. Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Deserio.

NAYES: Ald. Jefferson.

ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

1. Discuss Commercial Grant Program Revisions (Formerly Façade Program)

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter presented proposed revisions to the City's existing façade improvement grant program, reframing it as a broader commercial property improvement grant program. Director Ritter explained that the prior program had seen very limited use, with only two grants advanced in recent years, and that those experiences revealed the need for clearer standards and better alignment with the City's redevelopment goals.

The revised draft would move away from funding tenant-specific improvements such as wall signs and instead focus on permanent property improvements that have longer-term public value, including façade work, permanent ground signage, landscaping, site circulation improvements, and similar exterior upgrades. Director Ritter said the intent was to direct public funds toward projects that visibly improve aging commercial corridors and encourage more substantial reinvestment.

Council members responded favorably. Alderperson Oberlin noted one provision regarding permit fee waivers and asked whether permit costs were included within the grant award or in addition to it. Director Ritter responded that permit costs would be incorporated into the grant reimbursement process and agreed that the language should be clarified.

Director Ritter also recommended eliminating after-the-fact grant applications, explaining that such applications are difficult to verify, undermine the program's incentive purpose, and complicate review of

whether costs were reasonable. He stated that the City intended to promote the revised program more actively once the updated policy was finalized, including through business retention visits, direct outreach to property owners, social media, and newsletters.

Alderman Gazal expressed support for stronger promotion of the program and said she would like to see it targeted toward deteriorated commercial properties that most need assistance. She also asked whether the budget could be increased in the future if demand grows. Director Ritter replied that the current budget was \$12,750, but if interest exceeded available funding, a request could be brought back to the Council for additional appropriation.

Questions were also raised about whether multiple grants could be awarded to the same property over time. Staff indicated that the draft contemplated limits on funding for the same improvement category over a period of years, but that clarification would be added to make the policy easier to understand.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote, and council members present indicated support for staff to continue refining the revised program and bring it back for formal action.

AYES: Ald. Gazal, Jefferson, Deserio, Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

2. Plumbing and Windows Discussion

City Administrator Blaine Wing introduced a discussion regarding ongoing plumbing failures and damaged interior security windows at the police department/city hall building. He stated that the City had sought to address the underlying causes of building problems rather than merely continuing short-term fixes, and noted that with additional permanent facilities staff now in place, the City would be better positioned to oversee future maintenance and repair work.

Plumbing Discussion

City Administrator Blaine Wing summarized prior efforts to address the recurring plumbing backups, including replacement of low-flow toilets that were not appropriate for the system. He said those changes had reduced the frequency of clogs but had not solved the fundamental problem. He then outlined three escalating potential responses: (1) installation of a grinder/ejector pump, (2) separation of police department and city hall plumbing lines, and (3) extensive demolition and pipe replacement under the slab.

Discussion of this item was extensive and reflected longstanding frustration over the building's construction history. Alderman Oberlin criticized the original planning, oversight, and construction of the building. Alderman Cipiti stated that the building has been described as "the gift that keeps on

giving” and argued that the City had acted beyond its expertise by serving as its own general contractor. He asked whether any contractors or inspectors involved in the original work could still be held accountable and expressed concern that taxpayers continue to bear the cost of correcting serious deficiencies. City Administrator Wing responded that warranty periods had expired, and City Attorney Stiff explained that while warranty claims were likely unavailable, a breach of contract theory might still be possible depending on the contract terms and facts. However, Attorney Stiff cautioned that litigation would be expensive, uncertain, and potentially complicated by the City’s own inspection and approval role during construction. It was also noted that prior Councils had discussed litigation and chose not to proceed.

Building Commissioner Don Seeman identified Omega Plumbing as the original plumbing contractor. Alderman Jefferson and Alderperson Oberlin questioned how improper back-pitched sewer lines could have passed inspection, and Alderman Jefferson expressed frustration that the City lacked more complete close-out documentation from construction. Alderman Jefferson said he found it difficult to explain to residents why the City could be facing another major repair bill for what appeared to be fundamental construction failures.

Building Commissioner Seeman then described the proposed grinder/ejector pump installation in technical terms. He explained that recurring clogs originate in the locker room area and are worsened by back-pitched piping that allows solids to build up rather than flow properly. The proposed pump would grind solids and force the material through the system with pressure. He emphasized that this recommendation came after review with Highland Plumbing and a plumbing engineer.

Alderman Gazal remained skeptical that the pump alone represented a durable solution and stated that it sounded temporary rather than permanent. Public Works Director Gary Richardson and City Administrator Blaine Wing explained that the most practical approach appeared to be to start with the lower-cost measures before considering demolition of the slab, which could require months of police department displacement and create significant structural risk. City Administrator Wing said the combined effect of a grinder/ejector system and line separation would likely provide a much longer-term solution and was preferable to immediately moving to the most invasive and costly option.

Still, several members asked for further review. Public Works Director Richardson suggested bringing in additional commercial plumbing contractors currently working in the City to examine the system and provide their assessment. This idea received support from the Council. Building Commissioner Seeman and Public Works Director Richardson agreed to coordinate that further evaluation and obtain additional opinions, including review of camera footage showing where the back pitch exists. No formal action was taken on the plumbing matter at this time.

Windows Discussion

The discussion then shifted to the damaged bullet-resistant interior windows in the reception/vestibule area. City Administrator Wing stated that the City had obtained a proposal to replace the windows within the existing frames and had explored alternatives. He said new internal maintenance oversight and procedures would be put in place to ensure the replacement windows were cleaned only according to manufacturer requirements.

Alderwoman Gazal challenged the suggestion that improper chemical cleaning was the primary cause of the damage, stating that a previous explanation to the Council had been that structural settlement was responsible. Building Commissioner Seeman responded that the windows are polycarbonate and that the manufacturer had provided written guidance stating they must be cleaned only with water and that chemical cleaners such as Windex can cause the type of deterioration seen. He also explained that the windows had previously been removed during ADA-related modifications and reinstalled by a different contractor, which had voided the original warranty.

Council discussion reflected some disagreement over the likely cause of the cracking, but there was general recognition that the windows now needed replacement regardless of how the damage occurred. Building Commissioner Seeman reported that using a different style similar to the police department's windows would cost more because it would require frame modifications and additional wall work. The proposal before the City would replace the existing glazing in the same openings, with an optional two-way communication system added.

Mayor Soliman summarized the pricing as approximately \$44,750 for the window work plus \$8,750 for the communication devices, for a total of about \$53,500. Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote for the approval of the window repair.

AYES: Ald. Deserio, Gazal, Oberlin, Albert.

UNSURE: Ald. Jefferson, Cipiti.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

City Administrator Wing stated that the item would be brought to the July 6th council meeting but would not be placed on the consent agenda due to the couple of unsure votes.

City Administrator Wing stated, "Again, the rest of my memo is as it was kind of noted this building is 'the gift that keeps on giving,' so while we're talking about it, I'll just note that again this building also does not have commercial heating and cooling so at some point we'll need to be addressing that. In the future, we'll be looking at a budget so we're setting aside dollars. I'm going to squeeze out as much as we can with our non-commercial heating and cooling, but that's why we have different rooms

that are hotter and colder at certain times. Again, typically the commercial equipment would last ten, fifteen, twenty years, this one will probably give us maybe another three to five, so we'll need to be saving money to replace our heating and cooling system. Again, some of the other toilets in City Hall are also not the commercial so that they do the restrictors as well, so we'll need to most likely change out some of those. We do have some leaky ceilings and roof issues that we continue to work with the contractors that have originally installed so that some things might be the membrane, other ones might be condensation and some other things. Outdoors we have some non-sealed bricks around the memorial, so they didn't put in the sand that actually has the, I forget, the poly, it's the glue in it. So, if we don't do some of that work and just normal maintenance that will then start to shift and we're going to have more work there so we're going to have to spend some time there. And then additionally, some of the City Hall side, there were not the, I guess, appropriate I'll call them kind of fire wall or kind of coordinated off areas it's a big open area with paths so if somebody got in and we had an active shooter event, there's not a few doors or barriers that would segment off so for basically security improvements there will most likely need be potentially some walls, doors. We also don't have on the back a fence, somebody could basically come through and if somebody did, now again we will have bullet-resistant windows, but on the back none of those windows are bullet-resistant and so somebody could get in on that side so most likely would be recommending a fence and not replacing the windows. So, there will be some other improvements that will be..." Alderwoman Gazal asked, "Where are you putting the fence, you said?" Administrator Wing responded, "So, the fence would probably be extended from where the police car, where you're going in to close off before you get to the employee parking back over here, so it would be..." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "You also talked about walls and windows." Administrator Wing said, "Yeah, so interiorly there's probably some doors and walls that would most likely, maybe one or two, to segment off the various areas. Right now, if somebody got in, you would have full access." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "Oh, so we're only saying let's protect the Mayor and some staff, but who cares about the building department. We know exactly why you're putting up those doors. I was told exactly about your conversations about the doors. It's to avoid one particular person, it's not for safety, so let's not go there." Administrator Wing said, "Okay." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "I don't like those games." Administrator Wing said, "So, for safety I've been talking about those potential walls and doors prior to anybody even moving as I first got here and our UPS and FedEx delivery actually come in, so it would actually add a barrier to protect both the building side and the other employees, so you may be talking about some other walls and some other conversations, but the overall security and safety of the employees and individuals here is something that I do take very seriously. And again..." Alderwoman Gazal added, "Oh, I take very seriously too, the staff. All the public works department that doesn't have safety, but you want to protect a particular corner of the building, and I know exactly why you're doing it so come on, let's just not. Like I said, I don't like to play the games. Just be forward and tell us exactly why you want to do it." Administrator Wing said, "I will have the drawings in..." Alderwoman Gazal countered,

“Because you have the park district sitting there as well, so are we going to put a cage around her too? I mean we might as well just put walls just like the prison.” Administrator Wing answered, “We’ll have security experts come in and talk with Council so that you can hear so it’s just not for me, so it’s not just Blaine trying to come up with some plan and hopefully then you’ll be able to ask questions of the security expert as they go through and point out the deficiencies that we have in that section of City Hall. That’s all I had.” Alderman Cipiti asked, “Blaine, you said there’s been work with the roofing contractor that installed the roof when it was built?” Administrator Wing stated, “I did, there has been.” Alderman Cipiti asked, “Are they addressing the leaking ceiling and the roof issues, is that what you’re speaking to?” Administrator Wing answered, “They have been, yeah.” Building Commissioner Seeman stated, “So, Adler Roofing has come out so over time some of these have the standing seam roofs, the metal roofs like that, they can separate with the wind or anything. Adler has come out and is one of the only contractors that has come out and if there are issues, they are taking care of them, and I don’t know if we’ve ever gotten an invoice from them. I think that they have been you know, they gave us the warranty and Chris, the owner, has sent his guys out here and if we have an issue, they have been taking care of it.” Alderman Cipiti stated, “So, they’re standing by their work?” Commissioner Seeman answered, “They have been standing by their work, yes.” Alderman Cipiti asked, “From the original installation?” Commissioner Seeman replied, “Yes.” Alderman Cipiti asked, “Omega Plumbing has refused to do that?” Commissioner Seeman responded, “We haven’t, Omega Plumbing has not been. When we had started having issues here, it was talked about with previous City Administrator that bring in a separate contractor because we didn’t want them basically Omega telling us that something was, it was fine and everything so that’s why. I’ve never talked to Omega Plumbing for any of this.” Alderman Cipiti stated, “It would seem like in the same way we dealt with Adler since they are the original contractor for the roof that we would have, at some point, and I’m not saying you, personally, but anyone from the City would have gone to Omega to say, hey, we’re having these horrible back-up issues, we determined the sewer pipes are going uphill instead of downhill. Give them a chance to stand behind their work. I mean if we’ve never done that. Of course, they are not going to come back and say, ‘How are things going?’ They already got paid. But that’s just how I look at it.” Alderwoman Gazal asked, “Are we going to protect the Council too since we’re doing such high efficiency security when we’re here?” Administrator Wing said, “Yes, we’ll have the…” Alderwoman Gazal said, “Or do we not count? We probably put some railing there and security door. Maybe we can have a police there and check everybody before they come in or maybe we can put metal detectors in everywhere. You know, I’m very frustrated because few staff contacted me and I know for a fact exactly why he’s doing this and it just bugs me because I’m not going to pay a penny to have one particular elected official away from this building. I will not vote for that, and I will make sure all the residents know why exactly you guys are doing it. And call me bold, call me drama, call me pita because that’s my nickname here. I don’t care. I’m always going to say the truth. I know exactly why you guys are doing this and it’s very frustrating that you

don't come transparent and tell me this is why you're going to do it." Administrator Wing stated, "Again we will bring in different security and safety experts and have them explain what they recommend." Alderwoman Gazal said, "Maybe we should have bodyguards too, for each elected official." Mayor Soliman asked, "Do you have anything else, Blaine?" Administrator Wing answered, "I do not."

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

2. Approval of the purchase of a new 2027 Ford Police Interceptor Utility Including a Comprehensive K9 Equipment Package in the Amount of \$63,7070.87
3. Approval of the Purchase of a New 2027 Ford Police Interceptor Utility Including a Comprehensive Patrol Equipment Package in the Amount of \$59,457.13

Public Works Director Gary Richardson presented both police vehicle purchases together. He explained that fleet management falls within the Public Works Department budget and responsibilities and said he chose to present the items directly because he is responsible for equipment planning and replacement. He stated that replacing aging vehicles reduces maintenance costs, improves operational reliability, and preserves resale value when older vehicles are surplus in a timely manner.

Director Richardson reported that recent vehicle and equipment surplus activity had returned approximately \$25,000, with two more pieces still pending at auction. He stated that the proposed purchases included one updated hybrid patrol vehicle and one interceptor outfitted for K9 use, and that the quoted prices included the necessary upfitting packages. City Treasurer Jamie Malloy advised the Council that Finance Director Glenn Gehrke wanted them to know that all items presented by Director Richardson that evening have been budgeted.

Alderman Cipiti asked why a police official was not presenting the purchase, noting that similar requests had previously come through the police department. Director Richardson responded that the fleet function is part of public works and that, with no one previously occupying his role, the department had often done the vehicle planning work behind the scenes. Alderman Jefferson asked which vehicles were being replaced. Director Richardson replied that two older units that had recently been sold were a 2007 and a 2008 gray interceptor, and that the department was working to reallocate the fleet so the newest vehicles would remain in front-line use.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote for both vehicles after it was determined that there was a typo in the K9 unit price and that price should be listed as \$63,707.87.

AYES: Ald. Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

4. Approval of the Purchase of a New 2027 Airtow T14-12 Trailer in the Amount of \$21,530.00

Public Works Director Gary Richardson stated, "My next one is for our medium-sized equipment, the approval for an Airtow T14-12 Trailer that we had budgeted for in our budget for this upcoming budget in the public works department. As I've been here and assessing the department, we have smaller equipment that we just cannot move around, such as skid steers. If you've ever seen a skid steer, it goes down the street at 2 miles per hour. We drive everything around in this City and that is a big issue of mine because it takes us an hour to get somewhere from where we're located to the other side of town or getting caught by the train and he's in a skid steer. This trailer will allow us to move our skid steer around. The skid steer is too heavy for the regular mowing-type trailers so this is a lift-tilt trailer that you can drive right on and drive off. It also helps us with the scissor lift that we have. I remember when I first got here, you guys had to rent a scissor lift for this building. Just the other day, they had to get a trailer for the scissor lift to do the blinds. This will allow us to move our scissor lift around. I hate to say this, but our guys have been working and cutting the trees sometimes on a ladder on the back of the truck. That is unsafe. So, this lift will help us."

Alderwoman Gazal stated, "Gary, just for the record, can you state for the record when I contacted you today that you're not purchasing this because of the golf cart, whatever you want to call it, for the police department. Can you state that is not what for?" Director Richardson stated, "You did call me and questioned me about this. That was, honestly, the first time I heard it. I was not here last week. For the record, I have not talked to police. If you've ever been in my office, all of my pictures of what I'm trying to purchase are up on my board and so yes, I don't know about the LSV." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "Okay, I just wanted that for the record, so I don't get blamed or say that we voted for that and now we're voting for this because of the golf thing because it seems like it came back-to-back and the way you explain it, it's totally something different but then yet the old trailer that you have, the existing trailer I should say that can be used for that golf cart or whatever, the equipment for the police." Director Richardson said, "So, by knowing what they are purchasing, it is not a heavy duty, you don't need a heavy-duty trailer for it. What we trail our mowers on; it would be weighted just enough for that. I understand your comment, I did not know about this trailer, and I went to the administrator and said I need you to pile me up on the 22nd because the next two I'm on vacation. So, that's why all of my stuff hit at one time. That was the plan, I didn't know about

anything else.” Alderwoman Gazal answered, “Okay. Thank you for clarifying again.”

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve the purchase of the 2027 trailer in the amount of \$21,530.00.

AYES: Ald. Gazal, Jefferson, Deserio, Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

5. Presentation of the 2026 50/50 Tree Planting Program

Public Works Director Gary Richardson presented the proposed continuation of the City’s 50/50 tree planting program for fall 2026. He explained that the program allows residents to plant trees on their property while sharing the cost with the City, with applications and payments submitted to the Public Works Department for review and location approval. He stated that the City would coordinate planting with Fields on Caton Farm, Inc.

Discussion focused on eligibility, participation levels, and whether the guidelines should continue to disqualify residents who had received a tree in the previous year. One council member questioned whether prior-year recipients should be excluded if overall program participation remained below the available capacity. City Administrator Blaine Wing responded that, historically, the City had not filled the program to capacity in recent years. Council discussion favored giving first priority to new applicants while still allowing repeat participants if openings remained.

Director Richardson noted that he had carried forward language from prior program materials and said the Council could revise that restriction if it wished. There was also discussion about the number of trees customarily allocated by ward in the past, although members favored a more flexible first-come, first-served approach rather than rigid ward allocations.

It was asked if costs remained the same as in the prior year. Director Richardson responded that he had not yet received updated pricing from the vendor and that, as of the meeting date, costs remained unchanged.

Further discussion addressed planting locations. Director Richardson said the program is intended for residents, but that parkway planting may be allowed where appropriate based on spacing, underground conditions, and City review. He explained that the City manages utility locating for its own infrastructure and coordinates other locating requirements as needed.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve the continuation of the 50/50 Tree planting Program, with revisions discussed to prioritize new applicants and clarify utility easement considerations.

AYES: Ald. Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Jefferson, Deserio.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Dyke, Kubal.

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Resident Stuart Soifer addressed the Council regarding the 50/50 Tree Planting Program. He stated that his homeowners association had long operated under an understanding that individual homeowners could participate in the City's tree program and, with association approval, have those trees planted on association-owned common property rather than on their own small private lots. He explained that the homeowners would apply through the City and the association would reimburse the homeowner for the cost share. He asked if this longstanding practice remains allowed.

Mayor Soliman responded that his understanding was that homeowners associations had been included historically so long as program requirements were met. Public Works Director Gary Richardson added that if a resident qualifies for the program and chooses to plant the tree elsewhere within the HOA context, which has been treated as a matter of the resident's arrangement within the association.

There being no further business before the Council, and no action needed from the executive sessions, the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Approved this ___ day of _____, 2026.

As presented _____

As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR