MEMO

Finance

To: Finance and Personnel Committee

From: Finance Director Van Rossum

Date: October 20, 2025

Re: Alderperson Travel Reimbursement Restructure

Background information:
Currently, Alders receive a fixed per diem for attending qualifying events, in addition to reimbursement for mileage, parking, and other approved expenses. While well-intentioned, this structure can create confusion and inconsistencies—particularly when both per diem and reimbursement are used for the same event. In light of these concerns and in the spirit of improving fairness and administrative efficiency, staff is proposing a revised model that eliminates the per diem and replaces it with a combination of actual expense reimbursement and a flat-rate stipend for eligible events.

Under this proposed structure, Alders would submit actual expenses, such as mileage, parking, and meals, for reimbursement using the same process currently applied to employees. In addition, for each eligible conference or training event attended, Alders would receive a flat-rate stipend of $150 per day, issued through payroll on their next paycheck. The stipend may be labeled as a Travel Stipend, Conference Allowance, or Training Incentive, depending on Council preference. This approach ensures that Alders are fairly compensated for their time and participation while avoiding overlapping or duplication with the reimbursement process.

Eligibility for the stipend would be based on the type of event, its duration, and the participation format. Full-day in-person events would qualify for the full stipend, while shorter or virtual events may qualify for a reduced amount or reimbursement only. Documentation confirming attendance would be required to support accountability. Staff also recommends introducing an annual limit on the number of stipends, such as two or three per Alder, or setting a dollar cap between $600 and $800 annually. This limit would provide clarity, promote fairness across the Council, and ensure fiscal predictability.

Strategic Plan:
This proposal aligns with the City of Kaukauna's Strategic Plan by supporting key initiatives under the pillars of Operational Excellence, Financial Stability, and Employee & Leadership Development. By promoting Alder participation in relevant training and conferences, the City

fosters a culture of continuous learning and informed decision-making, directly advancing its goal to "develop and support leadership at all levels" and "build a learning organization." The simplified stipend and reimbursement model improves internal processes, contributing to efficient service delivery and responsible financial management. Additionally, this approach reflects the City's commitment to transparency, accountability, and maximizing taxpayer value.

Budget:
Funding for the proposed stipend model would come from the existing Common Council budget line for Travel – City Business and Seminar Expenses. If each of the eight Alders were to receive the maximum suggested stipend, the total annual cost would be approximately $6,400. This reflects an increase of up to $5,400 from the current expenditure of roughly $1,000 per diem that is paid annually. The final impact will depend on actual participation levels and usage of the new stipend option.

Staff Recommended Action:
Approve the proposed reimbursement and flat stipend structure for Alder participation in eligible events, as outlined above. Staff recommends that this policy take effect for all future training and conferences beginning January 1, 2026, with a mid-year review to assess usage and impact.

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Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for reimbursing expenses and providing stipends to members of the Common Council (Alders) who attend eligible conferences, training seminars, and other professional development events. The goal is to fairly compensate Alders for participating in development opportunities that enhance their effectiveness while maintaining transparency and fiscal responsibility.

Scope: This policy applies to all alderpersons

Policy Overview

Reimbursement of actual out-of-pocket expenses, consistent with procedures used for city employees. A flat-rate stipend for attendance at qualifying conferences and training, to recognize the time commitment and encourage professional growth.

Reimbursable Expenses

Alders are eligible to receive reimbursement for actual expenses incurred while attending eligible events. These may include:

- Mileage (based on IRS standard mileage rate stated in 1-11 and 1-10)
- Parking fee
- Meals (within reason and following City of Kaukauna reimbursement guidelines 1-10)
- Tolls or transit fares

Reimbursement requests must be submitted using the standard employee reimbursement form and include itemized receipts or documentation.

Conference Attendance Stipend

In addition to reimbursements, Alders attending approved conferences or training sessions may receive a flat stipend as follows:

- Full-Day Event (6+ hours): $150 stipend
- Half-Day Event (3–5 hours): $75 stipend
- Short Sessions (Under 3 hours): Not eligible for a stipend; mileage and parking may still be reimbursed

The stipend will be issued through payroll and classified as a "Training Incentive" on the Alder's next paycheck.

Virtual Participation

To adapt to evolving participation methods, virtual attendance is addressed as follows:

Virtual Full-Day Event (6+ hours): Eligible for half stipend ($75)

Virtual Short Sessions (under 6 hours) or recorded webinars: Not eligible for stipend. No travel involved limits the justification for flat-rate compensation. Mileage and parking do not apply.

Eligible Events

To ensure public funds are used responsibly, the following types of events qualify for stipends and/or reimbursements:

Eligible:

- Municipal, League, or Governmental Conferences
- Training seminars focused on governance, finance, planning, leadership, or legislative affairs
- Legislative or intergovernmental meetings (e.g., League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Wisconsin Towns Association)

Not Eligible:

- Political fundraisers or campaign-related events
- Social or networking-only functions (e.g., receptions, gala dinners without educational components)

Proof of Attendance and Documentation

To receive the stipend, Alders must submit the following documentation within 14 calendar days of the event:

- Proof of registration
- Event agenda or itinerary
- Badge, certificate, or other proof of actual attendance
- Receipts for reimbursable expenses (where applicable)

*Failure to provide adequate documentation will result in denial of the stipend and/or reimbursement.

Annual Limitations

To ensure fairness and budgetary control, the Alders will be subject to the following limits, based on Council approval:

Budget Cap: Maximum of $800 per Alder per calendar year (including stipends and reimbursements)

The Finance department will monitor expenses and notify Alders if they approach their annual limit.

Administration and Oversight

The Mayor's Office will track conference participation, verify documentation, and initiate payroll stipend requests.

The Finance Department will review and process all reimbursements, ensure compliance with IRS guidelines, and maintain records for audit purposes.

Final interpretation of this policy rests with the Mayor