



MINUTES
CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
September 16, 2025

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:04 pm.

Present: Mayor: Charlie Miner; Council: Jahn Dyvik, Mike Feldmann, and Deirdre Kvale

Staff Present: City Administrator: Scott Weske; Finance Director: Amanda Nowezki; City Attorney: John Thames; Public Works Director: Sean Diercks; and City Clerk Jeanette Moeller

Absent: Council: Todd Newcomer (with prior notice)

APPROVE AGENDA

A motion was made by Feldmann, seconded by Kvale, to approve the agenda as presented. Ayes: all.

OPEN CORRESPONDENCE

No one was in attendance to address the City Council during under Open Correspondence.

REGULAR BUSINESS

A. Discussion Regarding City Right-of-Way

City Clerk Moeller mentioned that because the Council had been having so many discussions related to right-of-way due to the Emerald Ash Borer situation, she had asked City Attorney Thames to be present tonight to answer questions or clarify information for the Council.

City Attorney Thames gave a high-level overview of right-of-way. He clarified that the City has an obligation to maintain the right-of-way and keep it safe, which includes the removal of trees that may present a hazard. He noted that cities handle tree removals in right-of-way differently, but many cities take on the expense as a cost of maintaining the right-of-way and absorb it within their overall budget. He explained that Minn. Stat. 429.101 would allow the City to assess costs for tree maintenance related to the right-of-way to residents; however, he recalled Moeller had done some regional research and found that most of the neighboring cities have not utilized the statutory authority to assess the cost of removal of dead or dying trees within right-of-way, and have opted to absorb it as a City cost for maintenance of the right-of-way.

Councilmember Kvale asked if just ash trees were proposed for removal.

Public Works Director Diercks replied that staff was focusing on ash trees currently and had identified 45 trees of concern. Public Works staff have already taken down two huge trees, another is planned for removal the following day, and three additional trees are scheduled to be removed in the near future. He noted that they have marked the trees for removal with white spray paint.

Mayor Miner asked Thames if there were areas where the Council needed to be more cognizant of potential liability issues within the prioritization of trees to be removed.

Thames stated that prioritization of tree removals should be tied to the danger of the specific tree and suggested that the City move forward with the removal of trees that are presenting the largest hazard. He reiterated that keeping the right-of-way safe for travel was definitely a function of the City and something they were responsible for.

Councilmember Kvale voiced concern that the City was creating a precedent that the City would be paying for everything, and asked what they were looking at for the final sum, since Public Works can take down some of the smaller trees.

Councilmember Feldmann questioned about the distribution of what Public Works can do in-house versus what they would need a contractor to do.

Diercks responded that of the 45 trees they've identified, he believed that Public Works could handle them all, other than two huge ones. Staff will be working to remove whatever they can in-house, but if any trees are deemed to be dangerous to Public Works staff or the public, he would bring in contractors. He estimated that the City may need to contract for the removal of about 40% of the trees over the next few years, and the rest could be handled by Public Works staff.

Councilmember Kvale asked what the expected cost would be.

Diercks believed that over a five-year period, it may cost the City about \$200,000 to remove trees.

Councilmember Dyvik asked if the City could have a program where they prioritize the order in which the City wanted them to be removed, but if homeowners wanted the trees down sooner than that, they could partner with the City via a cost-share to move their tree up in the queue.

Diercks confirmed that a cost-share would always be an option, and people can contact him to discuss it.

Councilmember Kvale reflected that the comment had been made that other cities in the area were paying for the ash tree removals, but those cities may have a different financial situation than Long Lake as they are larger and better able to absorb the cost. She supported Councilmember Dyvik's idea of a cost-sharing program for the tree removals.

Moeller noted the different kinds of feedback the City could potentially receive from residents because some feel the City should provide all of these services, while others don't want their tax money to pay for the removal of other people's trees. She observed that the City's challenge is to strive for maintaining balance in meeting the varied needs of residents. While any tree that is a hazard becomes the City's responsibility, for those that are not an immediate hazard, property owners could reach out to Public Works Director Diercks and work on negotiation of cost-sharing for earlier removal to prevent a tree from becoming a future problem.

Councilmember Dyvik suggested that the City take down the trees that need to come down immediately and do as much of the cost-sharing as they can with the trees that were further down on the list. He indicated that the City should have an annual commitment to remove a certain number of trees.

Councilmember Kvale asked if tree removals were always going to be an issue.

Diercks replied that he anticipated ash tree removals to be an issue for at least the next five years.

Council and staff discussed plantings in City right-of-way, draft ordinance language related to right-of-way planting, the benefit of having Public Works staff be able to take down some of the trees, and reviewed examples of how other cities have been handling trees in the right-of-way that needed to be removed.

Finance Director Nowezki commented that it was important to understand the City would not be taking down trees by request. Tree removals would be based on Public Works Director Diercks' determination and his sole discretion. Staff has also talked about communicating with commercial properties as well to encourage them to address their ash trees in right-of-way.

B. Continued Review of Proposed Preliminary Levy and Budget

City Administrator Weske provided review of the proposed preliminary levy and budget information that would be presented at the regular City Council meeting for approval.

Council and staff discussed the City's tax rate, tax capacity, changes to residential and commercial property valuations, reasons the City may pull some funds out of reserves to have available as cash, depreciation, ways the City can plan differently and be proactive instead of reactive, and plans for further review after the preliminary budget and levy has been adopted to work towards a lower number for final levy.

Mayor Miner shared that Councilmember Newcomer had sent in comments about his thoughts and was supportive of giving the City some cushion by setting the preliminary levy and budget a bit higher tonight, and then adjusting as they are able before the final version is adopted. He added that he recently learned that many other cities have followed the strategy of setting the preliminary levy higher and then making adjustments.

Council members discussed their preferences for the preliminary levy amount that they would be voting on during the regular City Council meeting.

Moeller confirmed that there appeared to be a consensus among Councilmembers to proceed with a preliminary levy scenario reflecting a 9.437% increase, and indicated that she would make adjustments to the approving Resolution before the Council meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

ADJOURN

Hearing no objection, Mayor Miner adjourned the meeting by general consent at 6:01 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Scott Weske
City Administrator