



CITY OF NORMAN, OK CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Municipal Building, Executive Conference Room, 201 West Gray, Norman,
OK 73069

Tuesday, May 19, 2026 at 5:00 PM

MINUTES

The City Council Study Session of the City of Norman, Cleveland County, State of Oklahoma, met in Regular Session in the Executive Conference Room in the Municipal Building, on Tuesday, May 19, 2026 at 5:00 PM, and notice of the agenda of the meeting was posted at the Norman Municipal Building at 201 West Gray and on the City website at least 24 hours prior to the beginning of the meeting.

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CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Holman called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

PRESENT

Mayor Stephen Holman
Councilmember Ward 1 David Gandesbery
Councilmember Ward 2 Matthew Peacock
Councilmember Ward 3 Robert Bruce
Councilmember Ward 4 Helen Grant
Councilmember Ward 5 Trey Kirby
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Councilmember Ward 7 Kimberly Blodgett
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

AGENDA ITEMS

1. UPDATE ON THE ONE TRANSIT COMMUTER RAIL.

Marion Hutchinson, Norman representative to One Transit, formerly the Regional Transportation Authority of Central Oklahoma, presented an update regarding development of a regional transit system serving Norman, Oklahoma City, and Edmond. Mr. Hutchinson reviewed the history of regional transit planning, noting that planning efforts began approximately 20 years ago and that One Transit was established as an independent governmental agency by the participating cities in 2019.

Mr. Hutchinson discussed projected population growth and increasing traffic congestion throughout the metropolitan area and identified regional transit as an additional transportation option intended to improve mobility, connectivity, workforce access, and economic development. Examples from Salt Lake City, Utah, and Grapevine, Texas, were presented to demonstrate the potential for transit-oriented development, increased property values, business activity, and private investment surrounding transit stations.

The proposed system would initially include commuter rail service between Norman and Edmond utilizing the existing BNSF railroad corridor, with connections to existing and expanded bus service. Three regular commuter rail stations are currently contemplated in Norman, along with a special-event station near the University of Oklahoma for football games and other events. Special-event service could also be provided for Thunder games and regional festivals.

Council discussed the estimated cost of the commuter rail improvements, station locations and amenities, preservation of the historic Norman Depot, anticipated ridership, and coordination with BNSF. Mr. Hutchinson explained that significant improvements to the BNSF corridor, including additional double tracking and sidings, would be necessary to accommodate commuter and freight operations. The preliminary estimate for corridor improvements was approximately \$500 million to \$600 million, with approximately one-half anticipated to be funded through federal transit grants.

The proposed service is anticipated to begin with approximately 12 round trips per day, with greater frequency during peak commuting periods and the ability to expand service in the future. Council also discussed the potential benefits of commuter rail for OU events, tourism, downtown Norman, traffic congestion, and regional connectivity.

Mr. Hutchinson advised that the project is approaching the point at which a regional funding referendum could be considered and that the participating city councils would be responsible for coordinating and calling the election.

2. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE SOONER MALL SALES TAX REBATE AGREEMENT.

Darrel Pyle, City Manager, presented the proposed Sooner Mall Sales Tax Rebate Agreement, which was prepared in coordination with the City Attorney's Office and representatives of Sooner Mall. Mr. Pyle advised that the proposed agreement was consistent with the term sheet previously approved by Council.

Council reviewed the properties included within the agreement and discussed recommendations previously considered by the Economic Development Advisory Board. Staff explained that the proposed agreement provides for a rebate based only upon increased sales tax revenues generated above the established baseline and does not provide funding to the mall in advance. If sales do not increase above the baseline, no rebate would be earned.

The agreement provides for a maximum annual rebate of \$300,000 and an initial five-year term, with two potential three-year extensions subject to Council approval. Staff explained that the rebate applies only to the City's 2.3% discretionary sales tax and does not include dedicated revenues for Norman Forward, public safety, public transit, or capital improvements.

Council discussed the recent decline in sales at the mall, the investment necessary to reverse that trend, potential redevelopment of the former Sears property, and the importance of maintaining the property as a viable commercial development at Main Street and Interstate 35. Discussion also included the potential addition of hotel or other uses to the property.

Council reviewed a provision making approximately 1,800 to 2,000 square feet of space available for a potential police substation. Council discussed whether the language could be broadened to allow another City use if a police substation is not needed, subject to mall management approval.

Council also discussed the length of the optional renewal periods, the financial stability and national portfolio of the mall ownership group, security at the mall, and the role the rebate could play in encouraging continued private investment in the Norman property.

Derek Caldwell, Sooner Mall Manager, subsequently joined the discussion and responded to questions regarding mall operations, prospective tenants, leasing practices, redevelopment opportunities, and the confidentiality associated with negotiations for major tenants.

Council expressed consensus to move the proposed agreement forward for consideration at the following Regular City Council meeting.

3. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE PROPOSED FYE 2027 CITY OF NORMAN BUDGET – ENTERPRISE FUNDS.

Kimberly Coffman, Chief Accountant, presented an overview of the proposed FYE 2027 Enterprise Fund budgets. Ms. Coffman reviewed the budget schedule and explained that enterprise funds operate similarly to private enterprises, with the costs of providing services funded primarily through user charges. The presentation included the Sanitation Fund, Water Fund, Water Reclamation Fund, Sewer Maintenance Fund, and New Development Excise Tax Fund.

Council first reviewed the Sanitation Fund, including residential and commercial collections, yard waste and compost operations, recycling services, transfer station activity, and capital equipment needs. Staff discussed the City's transition to in-house curbside recycling and compared Norman's sanitation rates and services with other Oklahoma communities. Staff noted that Norman's sanitation rate has remained unchanged for approximately 15 years and that the City provides several services within the existing rate that are not provided by many comparison communities.

Council discussed recycling availability in Ward 5 and multifamily developments. Staff explained the challenges associated with providing curbside recycling in lower-density areas but agreed that options could be evaluated, including grouping service areas, additional collection locations, and reconsideration of a multifamily recycling program.

Staff advised that a recent rate study indicates that increases may be needed for sanitation and wastewater services to support ongoing operations, equipment replacement, and infrastructure needs. Council requested that the rate information be brought forward for further discussion and discussed the possibility of providing additional public information regarding the need for any proposed adjustments.

Council reviewed major revenues, expenditures, capital projects, and projected fund balances for the enterprise funds. Discussion included water supply and treatment, water reclamation operations, sewer infrastructure, utility capital projects, and the long-term financial sustainability of the funds. Staff noted that Norman's water reclamation rates remain among the lowest of the comparison communities but that an increase will likely be necessary in the future. Federal funding recently secured for wastewater improvements was also discussed as providing additional time before more significant funding needs must be addressed.

Council discussed maintaining adequate reserves, replacing aging vehicles and equipment, funding infrastructure improvements, and ensuring that utility rates remain sufficient to support reliable services and long-term capital needs.

The proposed FYE 2027 budget is scheduled for a final public hearing on May 26, 2026, with Council consideration for adoption scheduled for June 9, 2026.

4. CONTINUED DISCUSSION OF INTERIM SOLUTIONS FOR HOMELESSNESS.

Lance Harper, Facility and Construction Program Manager, presented updated information and preliminary cost estimates for providing additional temporary shelter capacity at the City's existing shelter property. Mr. Harper reviewed previous efforts to utilize existing buildings on the property and explained construction, code, asbestos, fire protection, and permitting challenges associated with converting the older warehouse structures for shelter use.

Mr. Harper discussed options for installing a fire sprinkler system serving the existing buildings and the additional improvements that would be necessary to address fire barriers, walls, exits, accessibility, heating and cooling, restroom facilities, and other building and life-safety requirements. Staff emphasized that the installation of a sprinkler system would significantly improve safety and reduce the risks associated with relying on fire-watch procedures.

Council discussed the need for additional shelter beds while the permanent shelter and resource facility is being developed. Staff noted that the proposed interim improvements could potentially provide approximately 30 to 35 additional beds but would not address the full number of individuals currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Discussion included the amount of investment appropriate for a temporary facility, particularly given voter approval of funding for a permanent shelter. Council weighed the immediate need for additional safe shelter capacity against the cost of making improvements to buildings that may ultimately be used for another purpose.

Council also discussed previous locations considered for temporary shelter operations, the availability of beds for men and women, the role of City Care in operating the existing shelter, neighborhood impacts, and the importance of providing a safe environment for shelter occupants, staff, and emergency responders.

Council expressed interest in continuing to evaluate a limited interim investment focused primarily on life-safety improvements and additional shelter capacity rather than undertaking extensive renovation of the existing structures. Staff was directed to continue refining the scope and cost of the improvements and provide additional information for Council consideration.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor