



CITY OF NORMAN, OK CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCE

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

Tuesday, November 25, 2025 at 5:00 PM

MINUTES

The City Council Conference 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, November 25, 2025 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.

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 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 Brandon Nofire
Councilmember Ward 6 Joshua Hinkle
Councilmember Ward 7 Kimberly Blodgett
Councilmember Ward 8 Scott Dixon

OTHERS PRESENT

Darrel Pyle, City Manager
Shannon Stevenson, Assistant City Manager
Rick Knighton, City Attorney
Kathryn Walker, Assistant City Attorney
Scott Sturtz, Director of Public Works
Jamie Meyer, Deputy City Clerk

AGENDA ITEMS

1. DISCUSSION REGARDING ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE CLEVELAND COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COALITION.

Ms. Kathryn Walker, Assistant City Attorney, presented a detailed overview of the existing relationship between the City and the Norman Economic Development Coalition (NEDC) and the proposed transition to participation in the Cleveland County Economic Development Coalition (CCEDC).

Ms. Walker reviewed the history of NEDC, formed in 1996 by the City, the Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Oklahoma, including its original scope of services, reporting requirements, and funding structure. She noted that the City's annual contribution increased over time from \$75,000 to \$125,000 and that Moore Norman Technology Center later joined as a participant. Since 1996, the City has contributed just over \$3 million to NEDC operations. In addition, in 2022 the City entered into a subrecipient agreement with NEDC and provided \$1 million in ARPA funds for development of a business incubator (Startup 405), now under construction at the former Copeland's site.

Ms. Walker reported that NEDC has expanded to a county-wide model under the trade name Cleveland County Economic Development Coalition (CCEDC). The proposed contract would broaden the mission to elevate the Cleveland County economy as a whole, modernize the scope of work to include marketing and work with site selectors, and set City funding at \$1 per capita (approximately \$130,046 as of July 1, 2025). The term would run from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, with automatic annual renewals subject to appropriation and a 90-day termination option.

Ms. Walker highlighted key differences from the historic NEDC contract, including:

- The proposed contract prohibits use of City funds to support or oppose candidates or political parties but is silent on ballot measures, unlike the prior contract that barred use of funds for any political activity, including support or opposition to state or local questions.
- The proposed contract does not require the provision of quarterly activity reports, audits, budgets, or other financial documentation directly to the City.
- Board membership has expanded significantly; the City Manager would continue to serve on the board and nominating committee as the City's representative if the City joins.
- Funding for cities is set at \$1 per capita for those with at least 15% of the county population; Cleveland County itself is also contributing on a per-capita basis.

Ms. Walker also summarized the ARPA-funded incubator project, noting that the City's agreement requires the facility to be located in a Qualified Census Tract and that Startup 405 will prioritize acceptance of women, minority, Native American, and veteran-owned startups, as well as space for Norman Public Schools, Moore Norman Technology Center, and the OU Innovation Hub.

Ms. Walker reminded Council that when this contract was last discussed in June, concerns were raised regarding:

- Lack of financial transparency and access to audits and quarterly reports;
- Accountability for performance and return on the City's long-term investment;
- Equity issues related to the City's historic contributions and the \$1 million ARPA incubator funding;
- Per-capita funding and the potential for Norman residents to effectively pay twice (as City and County taxpayers);
- The narrower political activity prohibition in the proposed contract; and
- Whether CCEDC should follow the Open Meeting Act and Open Records Act with respect to public funds.

Ms. Walker reported that, after further discussions with the CCEDC Director, Mr. Lawrence McKinney, he declined to make the requested changes, including expanding the political activity prohibition to ballot questions, committing to provide audits and budgets directly to the City, or agreeing to follow the Open Meeting Act and Open Records Act. He asserted that CCEDC's audits have been clean and that the organization has generated substantial recent economic impacts, including significant capital investment and state funding for local projects.

Council discussion followed and reflected a range of views:

- Several Councilmembers reiterated concern about financial transparency and accountability, stating they would like to see past audits, financial reports, and evidence of return on investment before considering a new contract. Some expressed discomfort that audits reportedly exist, but have not been provided to the City despite past contract language requiring them.
- Some Councilmembers questioned funding equity and potential "double payment" by Norman residents through both City and County per-capita contributions and asked for clarity on which municipalities and entities are participating in CCEDC.
- Others emphasized the need for robust economic development efforts to attract higher-wage jobs, noting that Norman's median income has been lagging or declining compared to peer cities and that communities such as Broken Arrow and Edmond invest significantly more annually in economic development. They characterized the proposed \$130,000 contribution as modest relative to other City expenditures and part of a broader strategy to reduce homelessness and improve overall economic health.
- Several members expressed concern about leadership, governance, and the refusal to modify contract terms, including the narrowed political activity language and the lack of commitment to provide audits and reports directly to the City.
- There was discussion of the ARPA-funded incubator, including whether businesses from other communities might benefit from a facility substantially funded and sited in Norman, and how contributions from other jurisdictions should be considered.
- Councilmembers also discussed whether Norman's long history with NEDC and financial participation should result in any distinction in status or board representation compared to new participants and noted the Director's statement that all "investors of record" as of December 31, 2025, would be considered founding partners.

Councilmembers expressed interest in additional information, including a list of participating and non-participating municipalities, copies of prior NEDC contracts, and available audit information related to ARPA funds and NEDC generally. Several members indicated a desire to continue discussions with CCEDC leadership, if possible, before the deadline for "founding partner" status on December 31, 2025.

2. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE NORMAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY.

Ms. Kathryn Walker, Assistant City Attorney, provided a background on the creation and purpose of the Norman Economic Development Authority (NEDA).

Item 2, continued

Ms. Walker explained that, in 2011, the Council and the Business and Community Affairs Committee (BACA) identified the creation of a public trust to facilitate economic development incentives as a priority. Following multiple meetings, a public forum, and development of an economic development incentives policy, Council approved the trust indenture for NEDA and accepted beneficial interest in June 2012. An Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB) was created by ordinance to advise on proposed projects and apply the Council-adopted policy.

Ms. Walker stated that NEDA was structured similarly to other public trusts, with the City Council serving as trustees. NEDA can be used as a vehicle for long-term contracts, debt issuance, and property ownership to support economic development projects. The accompanying incentive policy, adopted in 2013, focuses primarily on targeted industries and job-creating projects, though it allows for some retail-related incentives. EDAB meets on an as-needed basis to review proposals and recently met to consider a new incentive request.

Ms. Walker noted that, although the legal structure is in place, NEDA has not been used frequently, in part because there is no dedicated funding source for economic development incentives. Historically, some economic development efforts have been handled through Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts and the Norman Tax Increment Finance Authority, while staff-level work on retail recruitment has been conducted internally in the City Manager's Office.

Council discussed potential uses and advantages of NEDA, including:

- Serving as a vehicle to hold property for economic development purposes, such as future (Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) station sites or Gray Street redevelopment, and to structure long-term agreements separate from the General Fund.
- Providing a framework for performance-based incentives, including sales-tax sharing or support for mixed-use projects that incorporate attainable housing or commercial space in underperforming areas.
- Allowing Council, as trustees, to maintain direct oversight and alignment with community priorities, with EDAB providing technical review and recommendations.

Councilmembers also discussed funding options, including the idea of dedicating the same approximate amount proposed for CCEDC membership (about \$130,000 annually) to NEDA instead. Concepts included:

- Depositing funds annually into an NEDA-related account to build capacity for future incentives;
- Using a portion of any annual allocation to fund additional Staff capacity focused on economic development while reserving the remainder for projects; and
- Considering, in the future, whether a dedicated funding source (such as a portion of sales tax or other mechanism) should be proposed to voters.

Staff noted that tax increment revenues would continue to be handled through existing TIF authorities, but NEDA could be used in combination with TIF or for non-TIF projects, including smaller, incremental efforts such as revitalizing existing commercial centers or supporting strategic mixed-use developments.

Item 2, continued

Several Councilmembers expressed interest in “resurrecting” NEDA as either an alternative or a complement to participation in CCEDC, especially to support locally defined priorities such as incremental infill, attainable housing, and targeted business recruitment. Others acknowledged that NEDA’s effectiveness will depend on the level and consistency of funding provided.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:22 p.m.

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor