

CITY OF ST. FRANCIS
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA
St. Francis City Hall 3750 Bridge Street NW
March 2, 2026
6:00 p.m.

1. CALL TO ORDER/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The regular City Council meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mayor Mark Vogel.

2. ROLL CALL

Members Present: Mayor Mark Vogel, Councilmembers Kevin Robinson, Sarah Udvig, Amy Faanes, and Joe Muehlbauer.

Also present: City Administrator Kate Thunstrom, Deputy Administrator-City Clerk Jenni Wida, Community Development Director Jodie Steffes, Deputy Administrator-Public Works Director Paul Carpenter, and Police Chief Todd Schwieger.

Assistant City Attorney Dave Schaps (Barna, Guzy & Steffen) joined the meeting at 6:21 pm via Zoom.

3. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

MOTION BY: MUEHLBAUER SECOND: ROBINSON APPROVING THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL AGENDA

Ayes: Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, Faanes, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

4. CONSENT AGENDA

A. City Council Minutes - February 17, 2026

B. Acknowledgement for Conducting Excluded Bingo Permit

C. Mower Replacement

D. Rental License Approvals

E. Payment of Claims

MOTION BY: UDVIG SECOND: ROBINSON APPROVING THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL CONSENT AGENDA

Ayes: Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, Faanes, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

Robinson asked about a check written to WSB for \$30,000 and whether it was

related to Highway 47 traffic counts. Thunstrom explained that \$21,000 was allocated for Highway 47 design and environmental work, with the remaining \$2,000 for a Bridge Street traffic study. She noted that the traffic study should be completed by the end of April. Robinson asked if the county would assist with or help pay for the traffic study data. Thunstrom stated that the county would not help pay for the data but would review the information to provide input on the intersection.

5. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Tina Carroll, a resident, asked whether the City or County would be responsible for placing a "No Jake Braking" sign on Ambassador Avenue, as she and her neighbors are frequently disturbed by the noise from semis using Jake brakes. Deputy Administrator-Public Works Director Paul Carpenter indicated it is likely a county road matter but noted uncertainty about whether Jake brake restrictions fall under county road authority or city ordinance. City Administrator Kate Thunstrom stated she did not have a direct answer but offered to contact the county. Carpenter agreed to look into the matter.

Mike Powell, a resident, addressed the Council regarding his inability to attend all meetings due to personal circumstances, including family health issues and his own medical condition. He expressed concern that Council members had suggested that residents who do not attend meetings have less voice in city decisions. Powell also raised concerns about city spending, including expenditures on landscaping, benches, and development incentives, and questioned whether the city is building for growth that residents do not want. He noted that property values have declined while taxes have increased and asked the Council to focus on reducing spending rather than pursuing expansion projects.

6. SPECIAL BUSINESS - NONE

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS - NONE

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. None.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Council Meeting Schedule - Discussion

Mayor Vogel noted that the Council has discussed the meeting schedule and asked City Administrator Kate Thunstrom to present research on the topic. Thunstrom explained that the City currently holds two meetings per month and reviewed the past year's meetings, noting that six to eight meetings could potentially have been canceled if the City did not maintain a set schedule. She noted that a city of approximately 12,000 residents had recently reduced to one meeting per month. Thunstrom asked whether the Council wanted to research reducing to one meeting per month, keeping two meetings, or maintaining the current structure.

Robinson expressed interest in having more substantive discussions at meetings and asked whether reducing to one meeting would create charter issues. Thunstrom explained that the charter requires two readings for ordinances, which would necessitate a second meeting for land use items. Robinson suggested that if the Council reduced meetings, it should allocate time for budget discussions during regular meetings.

Udvig noted that reducing to one meeting would likely result in longer meetings and asked whether other cities have had to call special meetings. Thunstrom stated that Big Lake was reduced to one meeting with the ability to call special meetings as needed. Udvig noted that Big Lake is not a charter city and therefore does not require two readings for ordinances.

Faanes suggested keeping the second meeting as tentative on the calendar and potentially using it for work sessions instead of scheduling separate work session meetings. She expressed concern about having three meetings in a month when work sessions are scheduled separately.

Muehlbauer stated he had no problem reducing to one meeting with a tentative second meeting as needed. He noted that the Council's process is transparent and follows state law, and that public perception of the process is important.

Mayor Vogel stated he would prefer to keep two regular meetings and incorporate all work session items into regular meetings rather than scheduling separate work sessions. He noted that work sessions require additional scheduling and that discussion items can be addressed during regular meetings.

Thunstrom noted that the Council provided varying perspectives and asked for clarification on the consensus. The Council agreed to maintain two standing meetings and incorporate all work session items into regular meetings, eliminating separate work sessions.

B. Adopt Resolution Requesting General Election Post-Election Review
Resolution 2026-08 Requesting General Election Post-Election Review

Mayor Vogel explained that the City sent a letter to Anoka County regarding post-election reviews and received no response. He noted that seven other cities have already passed similar resolutions due to concerns about election integrity. Vogel explained that a post-election review is a hand count of ballots and that the City would be willing to pay for such a review if requested.

City Clerk Jenni Wida explained that state statute requires four precincts to be randomly selected for post-election review. She noted that Anoka County selected an additional four precincts in the last general election to demonstrate good faith. Vogel stated that he does not understand why the county resists allowing cities to conduct their own post-election reviews if they are willing to pay for them.

Muehlbauer asked for clarification on the resolution language. Thunstrom

explained that the resolution requests a post-election review if the City is selected and also requests that the county conduct a second lottery selection that includes the City if it is not initially selected.

Faanes asked about the cost of a post-election review. Vogel stated that the cost was roughly estimated at a couple of thousand dollars. Faanes asked whether the review would be hand-counted or run through machines again. Wida confirmed it would be hand-counted. Thunstrom explained that election judges are pulled to hand-count every ballot from each precinct if the City is selected.

Udvig expressed concern that passing a resolution without the county's willingness to comply would be ineffective. She stated she would be more likely to support the resolution if she saw evidence that Anoka County was willing to appeal to the state. Udvig noted concerns about the availability of election judges, as most are elderly and the position requires long hours.

Robinson stated that the lack of response from the county speaks volumes and that the resolution represents a bottom-up movement to encourage the county to change its position.

Faanes asked how many election judges the City has and whether they are always the same individuals. Wida stated that the City is required to have four election judges per precinct and has more than that. She noted that most election judges are older and that recruiting new judges is challenging. Wida explained that election judges can work up to 16 to 18 hours on election day and are paid for their service. She noted that election judges do not have to be City residents.

Faanes asked whether she could serve as an election judge. Wida stated she would need to verify whether a standing elected official could serve in that capacity.

Robinson stated that the issue is about election integrity, not election judge availability, and that the City should be willing to pay for a post-election review if needed.

MOTION BY: FAANES SECOND: ROBINSON ADOPTING RESOLUTION 2026-08 REQUESTING GENERAL ELECTION POST-ELECTION REVIEW

Ayes: Muehlbauer, Robinson, Faanes, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: Udvig.

Motion carries: 4-1

10. MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

Aaron Berg, a resident, addressed the Council and thanked them for passing the post-election review resolution. He noted that citizens he has spoken with also support the resolution and expressed appreciation for the Council's action on election integrity.

Mike Rodger, a resident, thanked the Council for the newsletter and asked for clarification on whether Highway 47 construction would begin in 2027 or 2028. Mayor Vogel explained that the timeline has shifted and that the City is working on securing funding for the underground portion of the project. Thunstrom stated that the City has secured \$2,000,000 in federal appropriations for underground work.

Mr. Rodger asked about the estimated cost of the underground work and whether the City would extend utilities to the northern part of town to promote development of the 40 acres the City owns. Muehlbauer stated that extending utilities that far north would cost millions of dollars and is not feasible in the near term.

Mr. Rodger asked whether the City has a noise ordinance that could be enforced against Jake braking. Mayor Vogel stated he was not familiar with the ordinance. Police Chief Todd Schwieger stated that he could document illegal noise violations if needed.

Mr. Rodger asked about the difference in code enforcement properties between 2020 and 2025. Community Development Director Jodie Steffes explained that in 2020, more people were home due to the pandemic and were more particular about code violations. She noted that there were also more home sales between 2020 and 2022.

Mr. Rodger noted that permit fees are down and asked how the City would recover the lost revenue. Steffes explained that permit fees were up in 2024 due to large commercial projects like Vista Prairie and AutoZone, but are down in 2025.

Mr. Rodger expressed concern that property values are down 5.4% while city taxes are up 16.5%, and asked when the City would stop paying more and getting less. He suggested that the City needs to find ways to generate revenue or reduce spending. Roger noted that the Council discussed cost-of-living adjustments and asked what the COLA would be for the next year.

Muehlbauer stated that taxes are always going to go up as costs increase.

Mr. Rodger suggested that the City consider alternative revenue sources, such as a wheelage tax or selling city property. He noted that Cambridge has not raised property taxes since 2020 and suggested the Council research what Cambridge is doing differently.

Mayor Vogel cautioned that tax rates and tax dollars are different and suggested verifying the information about Cambridge.

Mr. Rodger asked about the warning siren and noted that he cannot hear it from his property. He suggested that the City work with the golf course to install a siren there. Roger concluded by expressing concern about city spending and suggesting that the Council focus on reducing expenses rather than pursuing expansion.

Tina Carroll, a resident, asked how residents can become election judges. City Clerk Jenni Wida explained that the City advertises for election judges in the quarterly newsletter, on social media, and through existing election judges.

Ms. Carroll expressed support for the Council's discussion about consolidating meetings and suggested that the second meeting could be used for budget discussions with department heads. She noted that the budget contains items labeled "miscellaneous" or "other" that are not transparent and suggested that the community should be involved in budget discussions.

Wendell Gordon, a resident, stated that he has lived in the City for four years and has observed that cities are spending too much money. He expressed appreciation for the Council's decision to keep the 1957 Minnesota State flag and asked how the state passed the new flag ordinance without a consumer vote.

Mayor Vogel explained that the state statute does not require cities to fly any state flag and that cities are left to their own discretion.

11. **REPORTS**

A. City Administrator Report

City Administrator Kate Thunstrom provided updates on several projects. She noted that the pre-design and environmental work for Highway 47 is out for staff signatures and will be submitted to the state for final design, with bidding expected in 2027. Thunstrom reported that the City is working on a new website and noted that the current platform is being transitioned. She stated that the website will be a continuous improvement project for three to six months. Thunstrom reminded the Council that the March 23rd work session is scheduled for interviews for the finance director position.

B. Community Development Annual Report

Community Development Director Jodie Steffes presented the 2025 annual report for the Community Development Department. She noted that the department's core functions include building and code inspections, planning and zoning, economic development, communications, code enforcement, and rental and housing programs.

Steffes reported on economic development initiatives, noting that the City is working with North Shore Development Partners on a potential townhouse community. She noted that the property at 3518 is listed for sale and has received inquiries. Steffes reported that the City is working with the new owners of the Rum River Inn and has offered guidance on city, state, and local codes. She noted that the Rum River Preserve property owners have requested demographic data to assist in finding commercial tenants.

Steffes reported that the Farmer's Market completed its third season with record

attendance of approximately 450 visitors per week over 17 weeks. She noted that the market added live music in 2025 and will continue that in 2026. Steffes reported that the market was relocated from the Highway 47 parking lot to an area near the park trail, which improved attendance and parking availability.

Steffes reported on residential development, noting that housing inventory remains constrained due to low inventory. She noted that sales prices in St. Francis dropped 5.4% from 2024 to \$3.38 million but remain 12.5% higher than 2021 levels. Steffes reported on several development projects, including the Bluffs of Rum River, Vista Prairie at Eagle Point, River's Edge 8th Addition, and Dalton River Villas.

Steffes reported that Vista Prairie at Eagle Point welcomed its first tenant on November 12, 2025, and consists of 65 independent, 40 assisted living, 24 memory care, and aide care suites. She noted that the planning commission met six times in 2025 and made recommendations on several development projects and ordinance amendments.

Steffes reported on the building department, noting that permit revenue is down compared to 2024 due to the absence of large commercial projects like Vista Prairie and AutoZone. She noted that 75% of permits in 2025 were flat fee permits that do not require review. Steffes reported that there were 568 permits in 2025, a decrease of 91 permits from 2024.

Steffes reported on code enforcement, noting that 73 properties received administrative notices in 2025, with six receiving citations. She noted that the top three complaints were vehicles and parking issues, junk and debris, and work without a permit. Steffes reported that one large code enforcement case was resolved successfully.

Steffes reported on the rental license program, noting that there are 119 registered rental properties, a slight increase from 114 in 2024. She noted that the vacant registration program tracks one known property, the Rum River Inn, and four properties that have since been reoccupied.

Faanes asked whether the Farmer's Market location had changed from previous years. Steffes confirmed that the market was moved from the Highway 47 parking lot to an area near the park trail and noted that attendance improved after the move. She stated that the market will be located in the same area in 2026.

Udvig stated that she looks forward to the Farmer's Market and noted that it is one of her favorite community events.

Robinson noted that Vista Prairie has exceeded occupancy benchmarks and asked about Midco's plans for broadband expansion. Steffes explained that Midco's expansion was grant-based and that they require a certain number of

housing units before expanding service. Robinson asked whether the City should reach out to other broadband providers about addressing blind spots in coverage.

Thunstrom explained that broadband providers require a certain number of rooftops to justify expansion and that growth is necessary to attract new service providers.

Robinson asked about the status of a code enforcement case on University Avenue. Steffes reported that the property has not had recent complaints and has met interim checkpoints at 60% completion.

Robinson asked about the Rum River Inn and whether the new owners are investigating structural issues. Steffes stated that she has not heard of any structural investigation and that the owners are working toward opening the hardware store.

Mayor Vogel expressed appreciation for Steffes' work and noted that she handles difficult situations well and is engaged with the community.

12. COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS

Robinson reported that he visited the City sign discussed at the previous meeting and noted that it has a splint holding it together. He stated that he will investigate options for repair or replacement and will bring numbers to the Council. Robinson reported that he attended the Rum River Fire District meeting and noted that the fire chief has inquired about the City's contract template. Robinson reminded the Council that daylight saving time is coming up this weekend. Robinson reported that he visited the new barbershop in town and praised the owner for his work and community engagement.

Udvig reported that she attended the work session and inspected the City sign. She noted that she met with City Administrator Kate Thunstrom to discuss various matters.

Faanes reported that she was out for medical reasons for a couple of weeks and is glad that it is resolved. She noted that she has heard positive feedback about the flag decision.

Muehlbauer reported that he attended the work session. He addressed comments made during public input, stating that the Council has never said that residents who do not attend meetings have no voice. He noted that there are multiple ways for residents to be involved, including email, phone calls, and committee participation. Muehlbauer clarified misconceptions about TIF and abatements, noting that the City does not pay taxes for developers but rather foregoes future tax increases. He stated that the Council wants community involvement and encourages residents to contact Council members with their concerns. Muehlbauer explained that property taxes are reasonable because residents can see where their money is going and

that cities do not have the same waste and subsidies as the state and federal governments. He noted that city growth helps spread costs across more residents and that without growth, costs per resident increase. Muehlbauer stated that the Council encourages community involvement and is always looking for ways to reduce tax increases.

Mayor Vogel reported that he attended the February 3rd Anoka Chamber meeting with Jodie Steffes and Kate Thunstrom and found it helpful for making connections. Vogel reported that he visited the new barbershop and praised the owner for his engagement and work ethic. Vogel reported that he attended the February 23rd work session and found it productive. Vogel reported that he attended the Fire Board meeting on February 24th with Kevin Robinson. He noted that the Fire Board is hoping to launch the website on March 19th and is planning to begin live-streaming meetings in midsummer. Vogel reported that the Fire Board is planning quarterly reports to the cities and is working on burn permits. Vogel reported that he attended the Poland retirement party and noted that it was well attended and a good community event.

13. UPCOMING EVENTS

March 3 - URRWMO Meeting - 6:30 p.m.
March 16 - City Council Meeting - 6:00 p.m.
March 18 - Planning Commission Meeting - 7:00 p.m.
March 23 - City Council Special Meeting - 5:00 p.m.
March 24 - Rum River Fire Board Meeting - 5:00 p.m.

14. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY: MUEHLBAUER SECOND: FAANES TO ADJOURN THE MEETING

Ayes: Muehlbauer, Robinson, Udvig, Faanes, and Mayor Vogel.

Nays: None

Motion carries: 5-0

There being no further business, Mayor Vogel adjourned the regular City Council at 7:37 p.m.

Jennifer Wida, City Clerk