

CITY OF HASTINGS, NEBRASKA
MINUTES OF CITY COUNCIL WORKSESSION
Monday, May 19, 2025

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a Worksession Meeting of the City Council of the City of Hastings, Nebraska was conducted at the Hastings Municipal Airport, 3300 W. 12th Street, on May 19, 2025.

The Worksession Meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Council President Steve Huntley with the following members present: Michael Anderson, Brad Consbruck, Larry Consbruck, Maggie Esch, Marc Rowan, Brian Hoffman, Matt Fong.

City Officials Present: Mayor Jay Beckby, Mark Funkey, Jesse Oswald, Lori Vorderstrasse, Troy Vorderstrasse, Erik Nielsen, Roger Nash, Jeff Hassenstab, Lee Vrooman, Teresa Kreutzer-Hodson, Marty Stange, Tony Herrman, Lori Hartman, Tyler Ficken, Derek Zeisler, Trent Clark.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Moved by Brad Consbruck seconded by Michael Anderson to adopt the current agenda for the May 19, 2025 City Council Worksession. Roll Call: Ayes: Steve Huntley, Michael Anderson, Brad Consbruck, Larry Consbruck, Maggie Esch, Marc Rowan, Brian Hoffman, Matt Fong. Nays: None. The motion carried.

Official Notice of the Worksession was published in the Hastings Tribune on Friday, May 16, 2025. Pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute Section 84-1412, the public is advised that a copy of today's agenda and all reproducible written material which will be discussed at today's meeting is available for public review and a current copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act is posted and accessible to members of the public.

CITIZEN COMMUNICATIONS

None.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Agenda 101.

Tyler Ficken, City Clerk, stated he would be going through the basics of the agenda creation process to ensure items get on the agenda.

Overview of agenda process

- Mayor/four Councilmembers add item(s)
- Submit item(s)/supporting documents by Friday (10 days prior to meeting)
- Include all supporting documents

City Staff

- Add items in accordance with existing City laws, policies & State Statutes
- Same Friday deadline
- Legal/admin final review required
- Incomplete items may be deferred

City Clerk

- Compiles and publishes agenda

Mr. Ficken stated that before items are formally presented to City Council, they often go through several layers of discussion and review and many items are first considered by advisory boards who are subject matter experts and community representatives that provide input and recommendations. He stated Councilmembers may also discuss future agenda items during worksessions or retreats. He stated that City staff play an important role in coordinating across departments and researching background information for items that are presented to Council.

Mark Funkey, City Administrator, wanted to discuss how the process works and stated an important thing to note is that most things coming through on the agenda are general business like paying bills or are items that are brought forward from the CRA, Planning Commission and Utility Board. He stated that with some of the concerns that have come forward, we have been working internally to find ways to improve things to get information out to the Council as soon as possible so there is more time for Council to review and bring questions and concerns forward to staff to make sure everyone is on the same page. Mr. Funkey indicated the final version of the agenda is produced on Thursday but he will start sending the Council the preliminary agenda, with the Council aware that it is subject to additions or deletions, by Tuesday noon with a standard paragraph noting it is a draft version to help lessen any confusion. He addressed the four councilmember agenda item request form and when those forms come in, they will be shared with the Mayor and all the Council to hopefully offset concerns of all Councilmembers not being on the same page regarding additions to the agenda. Councilmember Rowan stated he appreciated receiving the agenda a couple of days early and appreciated the Council being able to put items on their own agenda and felt it was a wonderful change. Councilmember Fong asked about the process for citizen requests for items to be placed on the agenda. Mr. Funkey indicated it depends on what the item is from the citizen, but they would accommodate citizens as best they can. Councilmember Anderson asked about potential items coming to the agenda and if they could know about those. Mr. Funkey stated it may be hard to do it earlier than Tuesday because staff will need to review the item and there will have to be internal discussions. He stated that the goal is to provide the agenda to the Council a week before the meeting. Mr. Funkey indicated the preliminary agenda will not be published where citizens can view it. Councilmember Brad Consbruck just wanted everyone to be aware that if you share the agenda with citizens, they need to know it is subject to change and they have to remember that. Councilmember Hoffman asked about contentious items and who makes that decision if items go to a worksession or council meeting. Mr. Funkey stated his recommendation would be that contentious items always go to a worksession to be able to have conversations with the public and there would also be internal discussions with the Mayor to determine if this is the agenda the item belongs on. He said that if four Councilmembers want an item added, they would try to accommodate it on the next available agenda. Mayor Beckby indicated that his goal was to be transparent and to bring everything in front of the citizens, but one thing that was going to be up to him in his job was to review the items and if he felt they were going to be contentious, then he would hold them to go to a worksession and then put them through when the Council and citizens have had an opportunity to discuss them. Councilmember Anderson asked if four Councilmembers ask for an item to be placed on an agenda, would they get an explanation if it doesn't get on an agenda. Mr. Funkey stated that they would. Mayor Beckby agreed it would go on an agenda and stated that is when he may decide it should go before Council at a worksession first before going on a formal council meeting. Council President Huntley questioned the Mayor's authority to do that. Councilmember Esch stated that is why they are trying to set up a process so that everyone is on the same page and that gives Mayor Beckby and staff the ability to move it forward to a worksession. Mr. Funkey also clarified that if something doesn't make an agenda it would be because they may no longer have four signatures and Council will be informed of that. Councilmember Anderson questioned if the link to the City website was listed in the Tribune. It was determined that the website link is noted in the public meeting notice for all council meetings and worksessions.

Presentation on Nitrates.

Marty Stange, Environmental Director, began his presentation regarding Nitrate Legacy: Sustainability, Public Health and Future Liability. He indicated they have been dealing with these same issues for a long time and are still dealing with them today and that we as humans are causing this pollution and are passing on the nitrate legacy to the next generation. Mr. Stange spoke about the following in his presentation:

- defining the nitrate problem, short term and long term management, public health impacts, who pays for the nitrate cleanup
- Platte River supplies approximately 50% of total groundwater recharge impacting our municipal wells (50 year travel time)
- 25% recharge from rainfall, 25% recharge from irrigation, 50% recharge passes through the root zone

Councilmember Hoffman asked about rebate sensors. Mr. Stange indicated they try to get information out on the rebate sensors but most say it isn't worth their time so it will probably take a behavioral change.

- municipal well nitrate sampling, can be tested as to where the nitrogen is coming from
- groundwater contamination, some areas within the Wellhead Protection Area have nitrates 7.5 times the MCL of 10 mg/l
- when wells exceed the 10/mg MCL for nitrates, the wells are shut down, to date eight wells have been taken out of service at a cost of \$600,000 per well
- water supply loss, more losses due to industrial contamination
- Vadose Zone Study, source of nitrates is commercial fertilizer with a 30% increase between 2011-2016
- Vadose Zone Study, urban land use nitrates decreased by 44%
- 2015 uranium map, uranium is naturally occurring in the geologic formation, uranium is not normally mobile, however, uranium is being released due to microbial respiration
- uranium contamination and water supply impacts, uranium found in rural areas and rural residents are unaware
- Hastings Wellhead Protection Plan identified nitrate and uranium contamination
- Aquifer Storage Restoration Project - dual pumping, focused water treatment, aquifer storage and restoration, irrigation management, blending and storage
- water quality effects on health and crop production, blue baby syndrome and respiratory issues
- nitrates related to cancer and birth defects, Adams County is at the highest birth defect rate and it could be due to multiple exposures in water
- uranium contamination in drinking water, it mimics calcium and is stored in the body and can cause cancer as well as liver, kidney and bone disease
- uranium attaches to the plant roots and stresses the plant like it has drought
- best management practices are to reduce fertilizer, avoid excess irrigation, improve soil health and soil testing
- according to UENRD, 77% of fields are receiving too much nitrogen
- producers are not willing to share nitrate application data
- cover crops don't need to be drilled, they can be planted
- crop rotation can reduce nitrogen
- implementing action items and determining who pays and implements control, it is not just a Hastings problem and is happening throughout the Midwest
- who pays for safe drinking water - polluters, NRD, City, Federal government, countries that benefit from our food production, consumers buying alcohol fuel, increased production benefits the farmer in the short term so should government pay farmers to not produce, fertilizer companies, food consumers, foreign countries we sell to, combination of responsible parties

- how do we get the public and responsible parties to find a solution when there are many other issues that need our help, how do we get the message out and get factual information to the decision makers, how do we convince the public that governmental regulations are necessary (urban verses rural), implementing social behavior changes to protect groundwater without regulations or taxes, combating "tyranny of small decisions"
- burden on future generations, nitrate issue will not go away and will continue to be a problem and failure to find solutions is allowing the contamination to become worse and increasing the human cost
- past and current generations have caused the problem and it will take managing the problem by supporting academic research with labor and funding to solve the problem

Mr. Stange stated that protecting drinking water is everyone's responsibility, urban and rural. He stated in his time with the City of Hastings they have been able to at least define the problem and opened up doors for further research that needs to be done but there needs to be work done on creating the behavioral change. He indicated the community needs other professionals to help make that behavioral change.

Councilmember Huntley wanted it to be clear that Hastings' drinking water is safe and being monitored. Mr. Stange explained the lines of defense that the City of Hastings has with the Wellhead Protection Areas, the treatment of water (ASR Project), good design of the water system, water operator with the government making sure operators are trained and the Water Department is properly funded. Councilmember Esch questioned if there is any chance of solving this problem or is it all about mitigating risk. Mr. Stange thought the problem could be solved with a reduction in the source of the pollution by stopping adding to the problem and then managing the problem. Councilmember Hoffman stated he appreciated the presentation. Councilmember Rowan asked how citizens would go about finding information regarding the rain sensor. Derek Zeisler, Utility Manager, indicated citizens could go to the Utility Customer Service Department or the website for more information on the rebates program, which includes the rain sensor. Councilmember Anderson asked if you had to have a sprinkler system to do the water rebate. Mr. Zeisler indicated yes. Mr. Stange talked about raising rates as a water conservation incentive. Councilmember Anderson asked what the goal was in raising rates. Mr. Stange indicated if you want to promote conservation, the way to do it is to raise rates to keep people from using excess water and promote environmental compliance. Mr. Zeisler added that the City's rates are representative of what the cost is to get the water to the customers and that they don't raise rates to force people to use less water, conservation is just a by product of increased rates.

Presentation on Highway 6 Project.

Lee Vrooman, City Engineer, began a presentation on Hastings Southeast/Highway 6 Project.

Council approvals timeline

- Agreement for 5-Lane project - approved July 11, 2016 (80% paid by NDOT, 20% paid by City)
- Resolution of Support for 3-Lane Project with Roundabout - approved April 10, 2023
- Supplemental Agreement No. 1 - approved February 10, 2025 (Updated project scope to 3-Lane project)
- Project to be bid in fall 2025 with construction in 2026 – 2027
- Phase 1 - 2026
 - J Street, Elm Avenue, roundabout at Elm Avenue and South Street, 5th Avenue
- Phase 2 - 2027
 - South Street and Showboat Boulevard intersection
- Utility relocation work
 - Phase 1 completed by January 1, 2026

- Phase 2 completed by January 1, 2027 (Utility relocation due to conflicts with storm sewer, drainage, roadway realignment and age of manholes.)
 - Electric - work has begun on Park Street/Duncan Field area, overhead line on South Street will be underground, contractor for all duct installation
 - Gas - work has begun in South Street and Elm Avenue area, along with 5th Avenue area, relocation of 8" beltline on J Street and 5th Avenue
 - Water - two phases of water construction all by contractor, currently bidding Phase 1
 - Sewer - Bosselman's area by a contractor, most of sewer work is part of the Nebraska Department of Transportation contract
- Utility relocation work cost estimate breakdown: Electric-\$5,055,923, Gas-\$718,342, Water-\$3,389,602, Betterment-\$-326,088, Sewer-\$735,344, **Total-\$9,573,123** (NDOT 80% reimbursement estimated at \$7,658,498)

Councilmember Huntley asked if the right-of-way acquisitions were done. Mr. Vrooman stated they are still actively buying property. Councilmember Rowan asked about reimbursements. Mr. Vrooman indicated that they would be working with Finance and reimbursements would probably be done quarterly and will start in a few months.

Moved by Michael Anderson seconded by Maggie Esch there being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:03 p.m. Roll Call: Ayes: Steve Huntley, Michael Anderson, Brad Consbruck, Larry Consbruck, Maggie Esch, Marc Rowan, Brian Hoffman, Matt Fong. Nays: None. The motion carried.