BIG LAKE CITY COUNCIL
WORKSHOP MINUTES

MARCH 18, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Knier called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Council Members present: Ken Geroux, Paul Knier, Kim Noding, and Paul Seefeld. Council Member absent: Ken Halverson. Also present: City Administrator Hanna Klimmek, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, Finance Director Deb Wegeleben, Police Chief Sam Olson, and Streets/Parks/Fleet Superintendent Norm Michels.

3. PROPOSED AGENDA

Council Member Seefeld motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda as presented. Seconded by Council Member Noding, unanimous ayes, Agenda adopted.

4. BUSINESS

4A. Emergency Response Unit Partnership Discussion

Sam Olson discussed there have been numerous staff meetings with the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office relating to adding one team member each from Big Lake and Becker's Police Departments to the County's existing Emergency Response Unit (ERU), thus making it a Multi-Agency ERU. Chief Olson introduced Sherburne County Sheriff Commander Ben Zawacki, who provided information on the County's ERU and the potential partnership with the Big Lake and Becker Police Departments. Olson also reviewed the Big Lake Police Department received a $10,000 donation from Luther Brookdale Mazda that was dedicated towards purchasing equipment for the ERU team member if we choose to go that direction, noting start-up costs for equipment are estimated to cost $10,459. Zawacki reviewed per the agreement, the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office will provide a budget for the basic operations of the ERU, and will assess each party an annual, non-refundable, per member fee to cover training and other operational expenses related to the Multi-Agency ERU Agreement. Parties will provide and maintain basic uniforms and equipment for their members according to the standard issue equipment list. Specialty equipment supplied by a party for use with ERU will be the responsibility of that party and remain property of that party. Operational costs, maintenance, and other expenses related to specialty equipment will be covered by the party having ownership. All members will be considered on duty by their respective agencies for all ERU training, actual operations, or other ERU related functions. Wages and benefits will be covered by the respective agencies at all times.

Mayor Knier asked what the annual membership fee would be, and Zawacki responded they have not yet determined what the cost will be but expects it will be minimal.

Council Member Noding asked if the specialized equipment would go with the officer if they leave our agency, and Olson responded it would stay with the City, as it would be considered City property. Noding also asked why Elk River is not included as one of the agencies in the ERU. Zawacki reviewed the Elk River Police Department (ERPD) already has an established team, and the two ERU's will back each other up and train together.

Mayor Knier asked if our local police department would lose coverage when the officer is dispatched to the Sherburne County ERU. Olson responded he does not believe our department will lose coverage. It will depend on the time of day, and if the selected officer is working when their service is needed. If the ERU officer is called out during their off-hours there will most likely be overtime costs.

Council Member Seefeld discussed this would provide a professional development opportunity for the officers and noted we currently have donated funds to cover the cost to outfit this officer. This program would bring a more unified voice to the county and could help create more cooperation between departments.

Mayor Knier stated he would like to know what the actual fee will be, and Zawacki responded he will forward that information to the City.

Council Member Geroux stated final costs will determine his support for the program and asked that the annual membership fee cost be provided to the Finance Committee.

Council directed Staff to confirm annual costs of the program, and to move forward with bringing the Multi-Agency ERU agreement to an upcoming Council agenda for consideration.

4B. Lawful Gambling 75% Trade Area Reporting Requirement

Gina Wolbeck reviewed two organizations who did not meet the City's 75% Trade Area requirements for 2025. The Big Lake American Legion Post 147 and the Becker/Big Lake Knights of Columbus have both committed to meeting the trade area requirements going forward. Wolbeck noted staff's recommendation is to monitor quarterly expenditures made by the Big Lake American Legion and the Becker/Big Lake Knights of Columbus for the remainder of the year to ensure the 75% Trade Area requirement will be met for year 2026. Wolbeck noted this would require their accounting firm to submit quarterly reports for the remainder of 2026.

Mayor Knier asked if organizations are required to donate their proceeds, and Wolbeck reviewed per City Ordinance, they are required to expend 75% of their lawful purpose expenditures in the City and Town of Big Lake, but there is no law that regulates they have to donate a specific amount of their proceeds. Wolbeck also discussed there can be tax implications if they do not expend their proceeds according to law. Knier also discussed the City Code discusses quarterly reporting rules, and Wolbeck clarified the City may require quarterly reporting, but we haven't had the need to require additional reporting beyond the annual reporting as the organizations have always met the trade area requirements, until recently.

Council Member Geroux discussed both organizations have a long history of doing things correctly and does not feel we need to make them pay extra to report quarterly at this time.

Council directed Staff to continue to monitor annual expenditures, and to send out reminders of the trade area requirement to the organizations each November.

4C. Discuss Park Design Options and Grant Update

Norm Michels reviewed proposed design options for the potential replacement of the Big Lake Skate Park equipment at Lakeside Park, noting if Council wishes to move forward with replacing the equipment, he is recommending the full concrete above ground design and to move forward with advertising for bids for the project.

Michels also reviewed Council direction at the September 10, 2025 workshop for the removal of playground equipment at Mitchell Farms Park and to not immediately replace the equipment. The Council also directed staff to pursue grants for park equipment replacement. After feedback from residents in the neighborhood, the Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) requested a survey be conducted on the replacement of park equipment at the Mitchell Farms Park. The survey was conducted in December 2025, with 259 individuals completing the survey, with 249 of those being confirmed Big Lake residents. The PAC reviewed the results at their meeting on January 26, 2026. The PAC unanimously voted to approve a recommendation to Council requesting further discussion and to determine a timeline to replace playground equipment at Mitchell Farms Park. Staff asked for Council direction on moving forward, or not, with park equipment replacement at Mitchell Farms Park. If the direction is to research types of park equipment options available, information collected will be presented to the PAC and their recommendation would be brought forward to Council for consideration at a future meeting.

Hanna Klimmek reviewed Community and Economic Development Associates (CEDA) recently completed research on potential grant opportunities to support park projects in the City of Big Lake. After evaluating timelines and competitiveness, two grant opportunities were identified as the best fit. The MN Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) Outdoor Recreation Grant is due March 31, 2026, noting council will be asked to add a Resolution of Support to tonight's agenda for this application. The grant would support the replacement of the City's skate park and would require a 50% local match. If awarded, the anticipated project start date would be spring 2027. CEDA also proposed a grant opportunity through the Blandin Foundation with the City requesting $80,000 to support improvement at parks where the city has recently invested in new playground equipment. If successful, grant funds would be used for related improvements such as sidewalks, mulch, irrigation, and other supporting park infrastructure. Any grant funds successfully secured will help leverage the City's existing parks budget and allow the City to complete more park improvements than would otherwise be possible using local funds alone. Klimmek noted, once the City has determined the future for Mitchell Farms Park, staff will work with CEDA to identify and pursue additional grant opportunities related to that project.

Council Member Geroux suggested putting the new skate park on the vacant Mitchell Farms Park site. Council Member Seefeld responded he feels that is a horrible idea, noting this would create a loud recreational use in a residential neighborhood. Seefeld also discussed skate parks in other communities are in very public areas by design. Michels discussed parking would be a concern at Mitchell Farms Park, and that a skate park probably would not be welcomed by the neighborhood. Council Member Noding discussed she feels a skate park located at Lakeside Park along US Highway can be an attraction. Geroux responded we are here to discuss ideas, and considering putting the skate park at a different location was just an idea he wanted to discuss. The consensus of the Council was they are not in favor of putting the skate park at the Mitchell Farms Park site.

Council Member Geroux discussed he had previously asked for accurate financial data on what it costs to run our park system as a whole so we could have a budget plan. Part of that was to identify parks that were under-utilized. The financial data could be used at the Finance Committee to help create a long-term plan.

Council Member Seefeld asked what we have for park funding. Deb Wegeleben reviewed we have $705,000 in the park maintenance fund, and $144,000 in the park dedication fund. Council Member Noding discussed a park design plan for 2027 could be used by CEDA to search for grants, and Klimmek responded we can do that if we have a project. Noding also discussed we should consider sponsorships and seek out funding from lawful gambling organizations and corporate sponsorships.

Mayor Knier reviewed our park finances are great, noting we are in good standing, but we also want to be considerate of what we are spending on park equipment. We should be frugal when possible, noting playground equipment is very overpriced. We should bring back something kids will still love but may cost less. Michels discussed we have learned a lot during this discussion over the past year, noting people have questioned why this needs to be playground equipment. We do need to look at it with a wider view, as a lot of ideas have come forward, with some not specifically focused on playground equipment. Knier discussed people can choose any park to go to so having a variety of park equipment options throughout the city would be good. Wegeleben discussed the PAC is not necessarily looking just at playground equipment; they just want council direction on researching types of equipment. Noding discussed we should be looking at out of the box ideas that will make a community very happy.

Council directed staff move forward with a formal bid process for a full concrete above ground Skate Park design for replacement of the skate park at Lakeside Park. Council also directed Staff to research types of park equipment options available at Mitchell Farms Park, and information collected will be presented to the PAC and their recommendation will be brought forward to Council for consideration at a future meeting.

4D. Recommended Alternative Approach for the Current GRRL/Police Department Building

Council Member Geroux discussed the Public Building Planning Committee (PBPC) is having a hard time moving the library over to the new public safety facility building due to sizing constraints of the site. The PBPC has revisited this direction and is requesting Council discussion on a potential alternative approach.

The Committee is now evaluating the possibility of retaining the current library building as a city asset.

Council Member Noding discussed she heard from someone today that was happy this is being considered. The Library is crucial to Big Lake and has increasing participation with homeschool families that use their resources.

Klimmek noted library representatives have been notified we are considering this change. Wegeleben noted we will make the final payment on that building in 2028.

A consensus of the Council was to move forward with the PBPC recommended alternative approach, and Council directed staff to bring back an item to the April council meeting to rescind Resolution No. 2026-05.

4E. Code Enforcement Update

Hanna Klimmek reviewed complaint based standard code enforcement procedures the City follows when complaints are submitted for various issues. Complaints are submitted through our online portal, email, or in person. Each complaint is reviewed and then routed to the appropriate department/staff member.

5. OTHER

Mayor Knier discussed the country's 250th birthday coming up, and recommended we offer commemorative flags for sale at City Hall. He feels having these flags available for purchase will bring patriotism and positivity to the community. Council Member Geroux discussed investing in these commemorative flags to hang on the light pole hangers along on Highway 10, and Council Member Seefeld suggested alternating with the US flag and the commemorative flag.

Council directed Staff to obtain costs for purchasing commemorative flags and report back to the Finance Committee.

6. ADJOURN

Council Member Seefeld motioned to adjourn at 5:57 p.m. Seconded by Council Member Noding unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
City Clerk

04.15.2026
Date Approved by Council