

**WORKSHOP MINUTES
OAKDALE CITY COUNCIL
JANUARY 13, 2026**

The City Council held a Workshop on Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at Oakdale City Hall, 1584 Hadley Avenue North, Oakdale, Minnesota. The meeting began at 5:00 PM.

Present: Mayor Kevin Zabel

Council Members: Andy Morcomb
Kari Moore
Gary Severson
Katie Wrich

City Staff Members: Christina Volkers, City Administrator
Sara Ludwig, City Clerk
Jim Thomson, City Attorney
Brian Bachmeier, Consulting City Engineer
Jake Foster, Assistant City Administrator
Andy Gitzlaff, Community Development Director
Melanie Lee, Human Resources Director
Luke McClanahan, City Planner
Lori Pulkabek, Communications Manager
Ivan Stepanov, Finance Director
Ryan Stuart, Police Captain
Cory Tietz, Public Works Director
Kevin Wold, Fire Chief

Others Present: Roger Green, Board Member, Washington County Board
Community Development Agency
James Lasch, Tree Board Candidate
Michelle Rietgraf, Tree Board Candidate
Melissa Taphorn, Executive Director, Washington County
Community Development Agency

TREE BOARD INTERVIEW CANDIDATE: MICHELLE RIETGRAF

Michelle Rietgraf provided a brief introduction about her residency and personal interests.

Mayor Zabel spoke about the role of the Tree Board (TB).

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about ideas for possible new TB events, Ms. Rietgraf mentioned integrating with current City events to meet residents where they are currently.

In response to Council Member Moore's question about knowledge or skills that Ms. Rietgraf can bring to the TB, she shared her ability to follow through on ideas, debrief after events, and participate in community engagement.

In response to Council Member Severson's question, Ms. Rietgraf confirmed she is willing to make the time commitment needed to serve on the TB.

Council Member Wrich asked about Ms. Rietgraf's interest in the TB versus the other advisory bodies. Ms. Rietgraf explained that she would like to get more involved in the community and make an impact on the environment to benefit future generations.

Ms. Rietgraf asked about future opportunities for the TB. Mayor Zabel stated they can assist with getting the word out about Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) and look for ways to assist with ongoing maintenance of the City's current tree canopy through the organization of a volunteer group.

Mayor Zabel told Ms. Rietgraf that Council will discuss the interview and staff will be in contact about their decision.

TREE BOARD INTERVIEW CANDIDATE: JAMES LASCH

Jim Lasch provided a brief introduction about his residency and interest in the TB.

In response to Council Member Moore's question about knowledge or skills that Mr. Lasch can bring to the TB, he shared his passion for a diverse tree canopy and ability to do research as questions arise.

In response to Council Member Severson's question, Mr. Lasch confirmed he is retired and able to make the time commitment needed to serve on the TB.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about ideas for possible new TB events, Mr. Lasch mentioned getting information out about tree replacement.

Council Member Wrich asked about Mr. Lasch's interest in the TB versus the other advisory bodies. Mr. Lasch explained that he is passionate about trees.

Mr. Lasch asked about specific tasks for the TB. Mayor Zabel stated they are tasked with selecting the trees for the annual Arbor Day Tree Giveaway and being hands-on at events in the City.

Mayor Zabel told Mr. Lasch that Council will discuss the interview and staff will be in contact about their decision.

OVERVIEW OF THE 2050 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

Community Development Director Andy Gitzlaff introduced the agenda item as an overview of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan process.

City Planner Luke McClanahan went over the purpose of a Comprehensive Plan, the statutory requirement relating to timeline and Plan elements, and how the City will integrate current planning documents.

Mayor Zabel cautioned staff not to wait for the completion of other planning documents to move forward with work on a related Plan element.

Regarding areas of focus, Mr. McClanahan asked for feedback on what is being proposed. Mayor Zabel pointed out that community engagement feedback during this process may differ from community engagement feedback within the other approved planning documents, and staff must reconcile these differences.

Council Member Morcomb inquired about identifying gaps in the community engagement feedback versus redoing the work that has already been done. Council Member Moore agreed. Mayor Zabel noted that the stakeholders should be given a starting point (i.e., reference to current approved planning documents) and guardrails to steer the feedback.

City Administrator Chris Volkers brought up a past discussion about a centralized Fire Station and how related land use decisions might fit into the Comp Plan. Mayor Zabel stated that discussion may fit better into a Strategic Plan, but the heat map and service study that was presented as part of that past discussion should likely be included as it may help determine future land use decisions.

The discussion moved to other Council priorities to add to the areas of focus. Mayor Zabel inquired about the parameters to be set around these priorities. Council Member Morcomb pointed out that there may be areas in which Council provides granular details and others where they remain intentionally broad. Council Member Moore asked about how involved the consultant will be in establishing these parameters.

Mr. McClanahan reviewed the draft schedule and the role of the consultant versus City staff.

Mayor Zabel shared thoughts on how to strategically breakdown the public engagement process into manageable touchpoints over the course of 12-15 months to capture as many voices from the public as possible. Council Member Morcomb suggested developing a timeline for the public engagement opportunity for each Plan element.

The Council agreed to develop the 2050 Comprehensive Plan utilizing a different process than what was done in 2017. City staff was directed to lean into the consultant for strategic public engagement best practices while leveraging current advisory body members and focusing on each Plan element. Additionally, the Council will define the parameters for each Plan element prior to the public engagement session. Then once public engagement feedback is received, the Council will review and finalize.

Council Member Morcomb suggested getting feedback from the grant writers while developing the Comp Plan to ensure it is written in a way that opens the City up to possible applicable grant opportunities.

Mayor Zabel stated that the *Implementation* Plan element will likely directly overlay with Strategic Planning.

LOCAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING AID UTILIZATION

Mr. Gitzlaff stated that this is a follow up from the November 10, 2025 Workshop in which Council was supportive of a partnership program with the Washington County Community Development Agency (CDA) and to further discuss potentially setting aside 10% of Local Affordable Housing Aid (LAHA) funds for self-administered projects. The discussion tonight will review the draft agreement terms and finalize Council direction on how LAHA funds will be allocated.

Melissa Taphorn, Executive Director with Washington County CDA, provided background on the agency including programs offered, how cities' funds are expended, and what resources are available to cities.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about the demand for the various CDA programs being offered, Ms. Taphorn explained that the CDA utilizes data and provides reporting which can help cities determine if their allocation percentages make sense or if adjustments are needed. Additionally, the City Council has discretion to set a dollar amount allocation limit versus a percentage allocation limit.

Mayor Zabel inquired about splitting the allocation for the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investments Partnership Program (HOME). Ms. Taphorn stated that a proposed single solicitation process is set aside for grants to third party providers (including but not limited to Two Rivers Community Land Trust and Habitat for Humanity) for acquisition, rehab, construction, and sale of affordable owner-occupied housing, as the CDA is oversubscribed on these types of requests every year.

Council Member Moore brought up utilizing a portion of the Home Improvement Loan Program funds for residents that may need financial assistance to remediate a diseased tree in their yard, for example.

Mayor Zabel noted that per the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, cities determine which Home Improvement Loan Program projects qualify under LAHA, depending on how the program language is written for their city. In the example of tree remediation, the City could write the program to include that the qualifying work must be incorporated as part of a broader home improvement project, the tree must be declared a nuisance, and/or the tree poses a threat to the home. Regardless of the parameters set forth by Council, the City must write the program language to meet and comply with State reporting requirements.

Council Member Moore reiterated her preference that all expenses related to the Home Improvement Loan Program project be covered as part of the grant.

Regarding allocation of the LAHA funds as presented in the *Council Memorandum*, the Council decided on the following:

- The CDA's First Generation Homebuyer Program will be provided as \$10,000 grants, up to 10% of LAHA funding.
- The CDA's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) / HOME Investments Partnership Program (HOME) will be provided as grants, up to 45% of LAHA funding.
- The City's parameters around the CDA's Home Improvement Loan Program are still being discussed by Council; therefore, an amendment to the agreement will be presented and signed once those parameters are agreed upon.
- The City Council preferred that the LAHA funds be expended as grants versus loans.
- The distribution of funds for Qualifying Projects that exceed the percentage allocation identified above shall be subject to the approval of the City Council, not the City Administrator.

Next steps include City staff working with the CDA and the City Attorney to update the agreement template (to include only the First Generation Homebuyer Program and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program / HOME Investments Partnership Program (HOME)) and then bring the final agreement to a future City Council meeting for consideration of approval.

CITY ATTORNEY PRESENTATION: OPEN MEETING LAW, SERIAL MEETINGS, MORE

Due to timing constraints, this agenda item will carry over to a future Workshop.

ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Ms. Volkers reminded the Council to read the development report emails and provide feedback to staff, when applicable.

COUNCIL TOPICS

Ms. Volkers brought up the status of the Oakdale Athletic Association (OAA) contract to confirm Council's timeline for a signed agreement. The Council agreed that the agreement must be signed by OAA by February 12, 2026 to guarantee priority field usage.

City Attorney Jim Thomson provided an update on the status of the Oak Marsh Golf Course lease, noting the City has the first right of offer. If the City declines, then the current owner must present the same terms to any future prospective buyer within six months. Several key terms presented include annual rent at 2.5% of gross revenue paid to the City (in addition to property taxes), compliance with environmental laws, and the City having the right to consent to any future assignments.

The Council asked that staff request past financial reports, per the current lease, and if any discrepancies are found, work with Attorney Thomson on the City's next steps.

There was general Council support to keep the site functioning as a golf course and decline the first right of offer, allowing the current owner to seek out another prospective buyer under the same terms.

Public Works Director Cory Tietz reported that the current owner is working with City Forester Tim Mehlhorn to replace the EAB-infected trees that were cut down on the property.

DISCUSS TREE BOARD APPLICANTS

The Council agreed to appoint Michelle Rietgraf to the Tree Board.

WORKSHOP RECESSED FOR THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING AT 6:53 PM

WORKSHOP RECONVENED IN THE OAK ROOM AT 7:28 PM AFTER THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING

ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE, CONTINUED

The Council discussed the proposed 2026 City events calendar and made the following decisions:

- Keep Family Fun Flatables as a free City event, as proposed.
- Revamp outreach for tabling and sponsorship opportunities for Family Fun Flatables.
- Staff will set the dates for Pop-Up Splash Pads and Waterslides during the months of June, July, and August.
- Staff will reach out to past Summerfest parade participants to inquire if a Saturday morning parade is an option, then report back the results to Council at a future Workshop.

COUNCIL TOPICS

Mayor Zabel brought up a letter drafted by the Mayor of Crosslake to Minnesota State Representatives, Senators, and Governor Walz related to fiscal discipline, pro-growth policies, and local government stability which has garnered 241 Mayoral signatories, inquiring whether Council is supportive of him (on behalf of the City of Oakdale) signing the letter or not. The Council had a robust conversation about the letter's statements, the sources cited, and what it might mean as a City to sign the letter or not. Ultimately, the Council agreed that Mayor Zabel should sign the letter (on behalf of the City of Oakdale).

Mayor Zabel asked the Council if they would be supportive of signing the *Civic Pledge for a Stronger Minnesota* drafted by Majority in the Middle, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. The Council agreed to sign the pledge as a group. Mayor Zabel will reach out to Shannon Watson at Majority in the Middle and coordinate a signing event through Ms. Volkers.

Additionally, the Council was supportive of a similar proclamation to be put on the January 27, 2026 regular City Council meeting agenda. Mayor Zabel offered to draft language and send to Ms. Volkers.

Mayor Zabel shared information about JustServe.org, a free online service that links community volunteer needs with volunteers. The Council was supportive of joining the JustServe City program. Staff will create an account and post City volunteer opportunities, while Mayor Zabel will reach out to other community groups encouraging them to do the same. Mayor Zabel will also follow up with a proclamation template to be put on the January 27, 2026 regular City Council meeting agenda.

Regarding the agreement for final design and construction administration services that was pulled from the City Council regular meeting agenda because the contract was not ready for signature, Mayor Zabel inquired about the construction timeline for Tanners Lake Park as well as the cost-benefit of hiring a full-time employee to do this type of work versus a consultant for each upcoming park project.

Mayor Zabel asked about the cost of Golfview Park and Tower Park portions of the consultant's proposal. Mr. Gitzlaff stated that he would follow up with those numbers.

Mr. Gitzlaff noted that bringing aspects of the construction project management in-house is possible if the Council adds staff capacity and that the consultant contract has built-in flexibility to reduce services if this occurs in 2026 or 2027. Mr. Gitzlaff further explained that there are aspects that will still need people with specialty skills (civil engineer, stormwater engineer, landscape architect or architect, geotechnical engineer, surveyor) even for more modest park improvements at a lesser scale.

Ms. Volkers cautioned that removing Golfview Park and Tower Park from the consultant's proposal may be unfair to other firms that submitted competitive proposals for all components.

Mr. Gitzlaff stated that the three City projects – P2026-01 (Tanners Lake Park), P2026-02 (Tower Park), and P2026-05 (Golfview Park) – were part of one Request for Proposals (RFPs) for design and community engagement efficiencies and cost-effectiveness modeled after what is done for the annual street project.

Ms. Volkers said that staff will run a cost-benefit analysis related to hiring a full-time employee to take on some of the final design and construction administration responsibilities.

Mr. Tietz provided insight into staff's request to hire a consultant which includes them partnering in community engagement efforts and providing the technical expertise that is not currently available internally. He also went over high-level details of the Tanners Lake Park construction timeline and clarified that some construction preparation activities could start in 2026, but the bulk of the work would be completed in 2027.

Council Member Morcomb suggested adding the possibility of hiring a full-time Community Engagement Specialist to the upcoming 2027 budget discussion.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about the community engagement expectations for these park projects, Mr. Gitzlaff shared the RFP requirements, but noted that staff can be flexible given Council's direction. Once the consultant is on board, the first deliverable is a public engagement plan that the Council will be given an opportunity to review.

Council Member Morcomb requested that a few extra copies of the City Council regular meeting agenda be printed and placed on the back counter for members of the public.

Council Member Morcomb reported that there is a planned walk-out at Tartan High School on Wednesday, January 14th in protest of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the community.

Council Member Wrich thanked Ms. Volkers and City staff for the many hours of onboarding over the last few months.

About taking a public position on ICE in the community, the Council agreed to put out a joint-Council statement from the Mayor attaching current related City policies.

ADJOURNMENT

The Workshop was adjourned at 8:29 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Ludwig, City Clerk