

WORKSHOP MINUTES
OAKDALE CITY COUNCIL
JANUARY 27, 2026

The City Council held a Workshop on Tuesday, January 27, 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
Greg Brady, Chief Building Official
Hannah Dunn, Community Development Specialist
Jake Foster, Assistant City Administrator
Andy Gitzlaff, Community Development Director
Melanie Lee, Human Resources Director
Luke McClanahan, City Planner
Nick Newton, Police Chief
Lori Pulkrabek, Communications Manager
Ivan Stepanov, Finance Director
Ryan Stuart, Police Captain
Cory Tietz, Public Works Director

TURF GRASS AND VEGETATION CODE REVIEW + CONSIDERATION OF VOLUNTEER CODE ENFORCERS

Community Development Director Andy Gitzlaff introduced Chief Building Official Greg Brady.

Mr. Brady explained that the City's current ordinance language related to allowable grass height is more restrictive than many cities; therefore, inspections due to complaints and abatement take a lot of staff time. Over the last five years, complaints have steadily increased with the addition of SeeClickFix, the City's 311 online platform, and a couple of rainy seasons.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about repeat offenders, Mr. Brady identified at least six, and shared the reasons for the lack of compliance.

Mayor Zabel inquired about including a message about lawn care maintenance when property owners request that the utilities be turned off due to the property being vacant. Mr. Brady said that is a possibility.

Mr. Brady indicated that raising the allowable grass height from 6" to 8" would also eliminate or reduce the number of complaints.

The Council was supportive of raising the allowable grass height from 6" to 8". Then in 2027, the City will sunset its current process of delaying enforcement for long grass until June 1st, but provide education about pollinator habitats, tree health, etc. in fall and winter, 2026-2027.

Regarding the hiring of paid seasonal part-time staff to assist with long grass complaint enforcement, the Council requested that City staff quantify personnel needs.

Council Member Severson brought up native plantings for pollinators and how the City Code might govern these plantings. Mayor Zabel pointed out that there are protections under State law for specific native plantings, but turf grass would not fall into this category. Council Member Morcomb suggested that the Environmental Management Commission investigate how the City may address these types of plantings.

Next steps include staff quantifying personnel needs for long grass complaint enforcement and hiring a seasonal position, as needed; and updating the applicable City Code language by May 1, 2026, based on Council's direction.

The Council identified \$5,000 out of the Special Projects Fund as a source for any necessary seasonal hires in this regard, once the need is quantified.

RECREATIONAL VEHICLE STORAGE CODE REVIEW

Mr. Brady indicated that this item is a follow-up from a previous Workshop in which Council discussed recreational vehicle storage. Since then, as part of the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance Update project, a requirement was added so that recreational vehicles must be stored on impervious surfaces. Staff asked for Council feedback on setback requirements, the number of vehicles allowed to be stored, the timeframe (May 1 through November 1 or November 1 through May 1) in which certain recreational vehicles are allowed to be stored, and if length of the recreational vehicle should play a role in compliance.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about how the storage timeframe applies to a covered trailer when City staff does not know what is being stored, Mr. Brady stated that the City has the right to verify what is being stored underneath the covering.

The Council agreed that the restriction on the number of recreational vehicles allowed should be raised to a maximum of four all year long, which applies to vehicles being stored in the front, side, or rear of the home. The length of the vehicle(s) does not matter as long as the vehicle(s) fit on the driveway.

Regarding recreational vehicle storage location, the Council agreed on the following:

- Storage in front of the home must be on an improved surface outside of the 15-foot setback.
- Storage on the side of the home must be outside of the 5-foot setback,
- Storage in the rear of the home must be outside of the 5-foot setback.
- All recreational vehicles must have current registration, be operable, and not leaking fluids.

Next steps include staff updating the current City Code language and sending anything that needs clarity to Council for their feedback. Because this is a change to the Zoning Ordinance, it will require a public hearing at the Planning Commission prior to City Council approval.

Council Member Morcomb expressed his appreciation for the work Mr. Brady does for the City.

CITY MARKETING PLAN

Mr. Gitzlaff introduced the City Marketing Plan as a recommendation that came out of the Business Retention, Expansion, and Attraction (BREA) Program. It was noted that the current budget set aside for the marketing plan is \$37,500.

Communications Manager Lori Pulkrabek stated that staff is seeking Council feedback on the draft scope of work, and explained that a consultant could assist in facilitating honest feedback during the stakeholder interviews.

Mayor Zabel pointed out that when the City Marketing Plan was first brought up it was to fill identified gaps; however, over recent years, some gaps have already been addressed. He was supportive of the business community being an active partner in shaping the scope.

Council Member Moore shared appreciation for the City's involvement in the BREA Program. She was concerned about how a City Marketing Plan might put a constraint on staff's time.

Mayor Zabel noted that re-evaluating redevelopment opportunities in the City may affect the City's Marketing Plan.

Council Member Morcomb was appreciative of the draft scope of work outline that was provided, but was supportive of revisiting this conversation in a year or two and take a more targeted approach.

In response to City Administrator Chris Volkers' question about the intent of the City Marketing Plan, Mr. Gitzlaff stated that the City has a Business Resource Guide, but this could offer a more robust marketing package for the City.

Council Member Moore suggested utilizing the City Administrator recruitment package as short-term collateral as a starting point.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about how often the Business Resource Guide is updated, Mr. Gitzlaff said annually.

Council Member Severson agreed that the business community should be an active partner in shaping the scope, but was hesitant to move forward given the constraint on staff capacity. Council Member Wrich agreed.

The Council agreed to revisit this item during future budget discussions. Mayor Zabel suggested reallocating the funds for this item to the Comprehensive Plan.

REVIEW OF MAYOR/COUNCIL MEMBER PAY AND CHAPTER 2, OAKDALE CITY CODE OF ORDINANCES REVISIONS

Ms. Volkers stated that this item is a follow-up from a previous Workshop in which it was mentioned that Mayor/City Council pay should be revisited. Along with this discussion is the suggestion to classify the City Council Workshops as Regular Meetings within City Code.

City Attorney Jim Thomson explained that the City Council Workshops are considered Special Meetings under the Open Meeting Law (OML). Because of this designation, the Council can only discuss what has been posted on the agenda, and does not have the flexibility to add or remove items after the agenda has been posted. Additionally, some agenda items may be too vague in nature and may not properly inform the public of the subject matter of that item.

In reference to the proposed language changes in City of Oakdale Code of Ordinances Chapter 2, Article 3, Secs. 2-20 and 2-23, the Council agreed to remove "normally" and the last portion of the last sentence in Sec. 2-23 starting with "...but the..." .

City staff will review the entirety of City of Oakdale Code of Ordinances Chapter 2 and propose other necessary changes, like Sec. 2-27. *Order of Business*.

In response to Mayor Zabel's question about whether a technology reimbursement is considered compensation, Attorney Thomson indicated it is not under City Policy.

After a brief discussion, the Council agreed that Council Members should be offered a City-owned laptop for use during their term(s), along with the offer of a City-issued cell phone or the allowance/reimbursement option. City staff will draft a City Policy similar to the current policy that governs staff.

Regarding an increase in Mayor/Council Member pay, Attorney Thomson suggested using a fixed percentage written in the City Code language. The Council agreed on an annual 3% increase.

Attorney Thomson will verify that State Statute allows a fixed percentage annual increase for Mayor/Council Member pay.

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

City Attorney Jim Thomson provided an overview of the “Open Meeting Law.” He defined “meeting” and “serial meeting” as it applies to the Open Meeting Law.

Attorney Thomson talked about the importance of treating emails, tweets, and text messages like phone calls; and not using “reply all” in email conversations but, rather, responding only to the city administrator who would then forward the comments to all members.

Regarding social media, Attorney Thomson explained that in 2014, the OML was amended to state that “use of social media by members of a public body does not violate the OML as long as the social media use is limited to exchanges with all members of the general public.”

One final note Attorney Thomson shared is that emails between council members will almost always be public data; however, an email between a council member and a constituent is always private unless either party makes it public.

In response to Mayor Zabel’s question about the nature of the email affecting whether it is public or private, Attorney Thomson clarified that the email itself can be made public, but the data within it could be private, and if the email was released, the private data would have to be redacted.

ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Ms. Volkers did not have an update.

COUNCIL TOPICS

Mayor Zabel brought up the *Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance* item on the subsequent regular meeting agenda and noted that he will be offering an amendment to Section 25-09-201 related to the requirement of a driveway to a private garage. He also mentioned that Council could discuss intent surrounding accessory buildings and private garages at a future Workshop.

Regarding the City’s support for a Washington County Community Development Agency Predevelopment Grant for a small area plan near the southwest corner of the I-694 and MN-36 interchange, in partnership with Pine Springs, Mayor Zabel questioned whether the Council should discuss their intent for that area prior to moving forward with this study.

In response to Council Member Morcomb’s question about the purpose of this study, Mr. Gitzlaff stated that there have been past conversations between City staff and Pine Springs staff about properties in this area and related infrastructure, and a third-party study will help provide answers to unknown questions.

There was general Council support to move forward with the study by writing a letter of support and agreeing to the local match. City staff will bring forward a budget amendment for Council approval at a future regular meeting, if needed.

WORKSHOP RECESSED FOR THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING AT 6:50 PM

WORKSHOP RECONVENED IN THE HADLEY CONFERENCE ROOM AT 8:35 PM AFTER THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING

COUNCIL TOPICS, CONTINUED

Mayor Zabel provided an update from a call with the Office of Congresswoman Betty McCollum, noting that the Department of Defense is studying the containment and treatment of PFAS which may alleviate the City's funding pressures in this area.

Council Member Wrich shared her positive experience doing a ride along with the Fire Department. She encouraged other Council Members to schedule one as well. She also said that she had a great tour of the new Public Works facility for her final onboarding with Ms. Volkers, led by Public Works Director Cory Tietz.

Council Member Morcomb noted that most of his 2025 priorities have been completed or are in the process of being completed. He encouraged other Council Members to declare and track their priorities. He thanked City staff for their work on these items.

Council Member Moore also shared her 2025 priorities list and the status of each item, along with items on her 2026 priorities list.

Regarding the newly approved Social Worker position within the Police Department, Ms. Volkers noted that Washington County will provide an update on funding and timeline in the next few weeks.

The Council discussed a joint-Council statement from the Mayor regarding U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the community. It was determined that the message would go out by the end of the week.

Ms. Volkers provided an update on the recruitment timeline for the next City Administrator.

In reference to the *Civic Pledge for a Stronger Minnesota*, the Council agreed to have Shannon Watson at Majority in the Middle attend the February 10, 2026 regular meeting to present the certificate.

ADJOURNMENT

The Workshop was adjourned at 9:06 PM.