PLANNING MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 24, 2026, 5:00 PM
HACKENSACK COMMUNITY CENTER
310 LAKE AVENUE NORTH, HACKENSACK, MN

MINUTES

1. Call to Order

The Planning Meeting of the Hackensack City Council was called to order on Monday, August 24, 2026, at 5:00 PM at the Hackensack Community Center, 310 Lake Avenue North, Hackensack, MN

1.1 Roll Call

Present: Mayor Bill Kennedy, Council Member Fred Karlisch, Public Works Superintendent Rob Triplett, On-Sale Manager Jason Marchwick, Off-Sale Manager Duncan MacFarlane, Clerk/Treasurer Trista Olander

Absent: None

Others Present: Loren Fritze, Sue Toth, Doug Toth, Zachary Johnson

2. Department Reports

2.1. Public Works – Rob Triplett

Superintendent Triplett reported a relatively slow period for Public Works. The primary topic of discussion was a raised or sunken sidewalk panel near American Legion and Rendezvous that had been flagged with safety tape. Council members debated whether the differential was due to settling, water infiltration near the tree grates, or natural frost movement, and noted the variance appeared closer to one inch — a threshold at which repair becomes more pressing from a liability standpoint.

The group weighed options including grinding down the raised edge versus full panel replacement, estimated at approximately $500 for one to two yards of concrete. Mayor Kennedy suggested that if concrete contractors were already being scheduled for other nearby work, it would be efficient to address this panel in the same trip. Superintendent Triplett indicated he would consult with the contractor (referenced as "Nightflake") to get their assessment and would report back. A second panel on the north side of the building was noted as beginning to show similar movement but was not yet considered urgent.

2.2. On Sale – Jason Marchwick

On-Sale Manager Marchwick presented several contractor bids related to potential building improvements, including roofing assessments, siding, and a proposed service door project. He noted that contractor estimates for the door and wall opening tend to run high due to the unknowns of working with the existing brick and block construction. A local contractor (TNT) was expected to submit a more competitive bid.

Discussion centered on a phased approach: prioritizing the installation of an ADA-accessible service door, a concrete landing pad, and a sidewalk connection to the public right-of-way as the most essential and fundable first step. Mayor Kennedy suggested this scope — cutting the wall opening, installing a power door, and pouring the necessary concrete — could potentially qualify for grant funding under ADA accessibility categories, though eligibility would need to be confirmed. Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Olander cautioned that the full scope of improvements presented would exceed current budgetary capacity, and that a strategic, phased approach was prudent given the on- and off-sale operations' existing financial obligations.

Councilor Schneider asked Marchwick to prepare a projected cost and timeline for the ADA door and concrete pad component by September, with the goal of identifying it as a potential 2026 project.

2.3. Off Sale – Duncan MacFarlane

Off-Sale Manager MacFarlane reported that gross sales for July 2026 were up 10.73% compared to the same period in 2025. He attributed part of this growth to increased social media activity, noting that Facebook advertising at approximately $5 per day can reach 4,000–8,000 people in the area for roughly $150 per month, with ads also reaching Instagram users through Meta Business Suite.

Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Olander elaborated on the value of MMBA (Minnesota Municipal Beverage Association) regional meetings, which she had attended previously, noting that many municipal liquor stores are shifting away from newspaper advertising in favor of social media. She also noted the success of a "mystery wine bag" promotion that helped clear slow-moving inventory. Olander indicated she is in contact with MMBA representatives Brenda and Nancy about conducting another store visit to help refresh and elevate the wine selection.

Olander also reported that MacFarlane has been trained on invoice input procedures, and that inventory will be conducted in September and December using newly programmed handheld scanners, which will significantly streamline the process. Mayor Kennedy asked about profitability trends in addition to gross sales, and Olander noted that full profit-and-loss detail is available in the monthly financial reports.

3. Vacation of Alley and End of Third

Mayor Kennedy provided an overview using a reference map, describing the proposal to vacate the alleyway running between the municipal liquor store and the adjacent residential properties, as well as the end of Third Street extending toward the open lot between Lighthouse Church and Mark's Market.

Mayor Kennedy expressed continued support for the vacation, noting that recent improvements to Highway 371 now provide accessible pedestrian and wheelchair routes — including curb cuts and continuous sidewalks — allowing residents from Birchview Gardens to reach Mark's Market without relying on the alleyway. He acknowledged this path is slightly longer but not significantly so.

Discussion touched on the practical implications of the vacation: the city would install concrete bollards at the rear of the liquor store to block vehicle access through the alley, Lighthouse Church expressed interest in extending their existing fence line to limit cut-through traffic on their property, and signage would be placed on Third Street to indicate a dead end or restrict through traffic. Council Member Karlisch raised a related note that new four-way stop signs recently installed in the area lack the standard "4-Way" supplemental plaques beneath them; Superintendent Triplett confirmed he would follow up with the installer to obtain and add the appropriate signs.

Property ownership following vacation — meaning the vacated right-of-way would revert to adjacent property owners — was briefly discussed, with acknowledgment that future development plans, including a potential garage, would need to account for the changed access.

As this was a planning session, no action was taken. Mayor Kennedy thanked all participants for their input.

4. Future of the City Recycling Facilities

Mayor Kennedy summarized the current situation: the county-operated recycling site on Lake Avenue, located on property owned by Karina Wynn, has been the subject of neighbor complaints about litter and wind-blown debris escaping the facility. A request had been made to the county to add a third fence panel to better contain materials, but the county declined, citing the expiration of their four-year lease with the property owner.

County Representative Jeff Woodford was present and provided context. He explained that Corinna Wynn has no current plans for the property and may be open to signing another lease, but has been reluctant due to ongoing complaints being directed to her. The county has indicated it would consider installing infrastructure — such as the requested fence — if a new multi-year lease were in place, as it does not invest in improvements on short-term or expired arrangements.

Mayor Kennedy and the council discussed the broader picture: if no new lease is secured and the site is removed, there is currently no identified alternate city-owned location. The former Walker site hosted a recycling drop-off for many years before the property owner stepped away, with the county subsequently placing bins at locations offered by the WAC and others. A similar community-driven approach might be needed if the Lake Avenue site closes.

The idea of exploring alternative sites — including locations outside city limits — that could accommodate larger container trucks. Mayor Kennedy acknowledged this as a longer-term contingency, while emphasizing that the immediate priority is determining whether Karina Wynn will agree to a new lease sufficient for the county to justify fence installation.

Woodford agreed to reach out to Wynn and report back to Mayor Kennedy and Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Olander. If the lease does not move forward, the county would consider issuing a request for other property owners to volunteer a site, similar to how other communities have handled transitions.

5. Solar Update

Mayor Kennedy noted that there had been no recent updates on the city's solar project, and that the primary contact, Simon, had left the company. Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Olander indicated she had forwarded an email confirming that the relevant grants were still open. Mayor Kennedy stated he would reach out to the solar vendor directly to determine the current status of the project review.

6. 2027 Budget Review

Council Member Schneider introduced the budget discussion, providing context on the city's multi-year approach to financial planning guided by fiscal advisor Jason Gorr (David Brown and Associates). He noted the goal has been to maintain a consistent tax rate of 54.09% while incrementally building the city's capital fund and covering operating costs.

Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Olander presented the preliminary 2027 budget figures. She explained that while the original projection assumed a 3% annual increase in tax capacity, the county's preliminary estimate for the coming year is only 1.65%. As a result, the planned $9,000 increase to the capital improvement fund levy had to be reduced to $2,000. The debt levy also decreased by approximately $2,000 due to a slightly lower payment scheduled for 2027

compared to 2026. The net effect is an approximately $5,000 increase in the overall operating levy — a modest increase that maintains the 54.09% rate.

Olander outlined the bond payment sources for 2028: the liquor stores contributing $50,000, the levy contributing approximately $60,570.00, water contributing $1,212, and sewer contributing $20,392.50, for a total of approximately $132,175.

Schneider expressed pride in the city's fiscal trajectory, noting that the city has avoided direct tax assessments on property owners and has managed to fund infrastructure improvements largely through liquor store profits and disciplined levy management. Mayor Kennedy echoed this, noting that liquor store revenues are reinvested into city infrastructure, which he emphasized as a point of community pride worth communicating publicly.

Mayor Kennedy also raised the previously discussed possibility of purchasing land adjacent to the off-sale liquor store to address parking constraints and enable potential future expansion (e.g., a beer cooler or expanded storage). Schneider noted this had not been incorporated into the current budget projections, and suggested the council continue to monitor the off-sale's operational performance before committing to a capital acquisition of that nature.

7. Draft Sign Ordinance Review

Council Member Karlisch and Doud Toth led the discussion on the ongoing sign ordinance drafting effort. Karlisch reported that he had conducted benchmarking research against other municipalities, noting it was difficult to find comparable examples from towns under 1,000 in population, but that useful language had been identified and incorporated into the draft.

Mayor Kennedy provided an update from his conversations with a state permitting official. Key findings included: within city limits, the city has the final authority over signage, superseding both county and state ordinances. The county's permit authority ends at the city boundary. The state issues permits for signs within state right-of-way, but if a sign is set back sufficiently, only city ordinance applies.

Mayor Kennedy used a specific local example — a sign operated by a business referred to as "Izzy's" — to illustrate the enforcement opportunity. He explained that the original state permit for that sign was for a specific size; the sign was subsequently enlarged without a new state permit, making it out of compliance. The city then issued its own permit for a further modification (adding dynamic display capability), but that permit was issued without the underlying state permit being valid. Mayor Kennedy characterized this as a permit issued "in bad faith" and recommended the council consider revoking the city-issued permit at the next regular council meeting, as a first step toward slowing dynamic sign proliferation while the ordinance is finalized.

Discussion of the draft ordinance highlighted several provisions under development:

Temporary banners and pennants would be required to be removed within 24 hours of a promotion's end and could not be displayed for more than 14 consecutive days. Exceptions could be granted by the city (e.g., for arts council event banners).

Sidewalk signs would be required to maintain a 5-foot clear pathway on public sidewalks and must be removed between November 1st and April 15th for snow removal purposes.

Dynamic display signs (electronic message boards with changing images) generated significant debate. The draft currently incorporates the county's language: no flashing, no scrolling, no animation, and images must remain static for a minimum of 6 seconds before transitioning. Lumen (brightness) controls were identified as a critical addition, with participants referencing a sign in Pine River that, despite attempts to have it turned down, remains excessively bright — particularly when displaying white backgrounds.

A broader philosophical debate emerged about whether the city should permit dynamic display signs at all. Councilor Lundgren stated plainly that she did not want such signage in town, expressing concern that large advertising billboards would detract from Hackensack's character. Mayor Kennedy agreed personally, noting that the city now has a legitimate avenue to restrict or prohibit new dynamic signage through the ordinance process, and that a moratorium on new sign permits may be worth considering while the ordinance is finalized.

The group also noted that signs for businesses no longer in operation must be removed within 14 days of closure, and that enforcement of existing non-compliant signs in town — including contractor advertising signs placed in rights-of-way — should be pursued once the ordinance is adopted.

The sign ordinance committee was asked to continue refining the draft and bring it forward for adoption before the November 1st sidewalk sign removal deadline if at all possible.

8. Mentions

Zoning Audit: Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer Olander noted that a Zoom meeting with a zoning auditor Nate Dorr was scheduled for the following day (Tuesday) at 2:00 PM. Attendees were to include Olander, Superintendent Triplett, and Mayor Kennedy; Council Member Schnieder indicated he would also attempt to attend as an alternate for a council member who could not participate.

Bonna Paulson Park Land Maintenance Proposal: Mayor Kennedy introduced a written recommendation submitted by Andrew Birch regarding maintenance of Bonna Paulson Park. He summarized that without active management, the park's open savannah-prairie character will gradually be overtaken by Aspen saplings and eventually transition to a forested state. The recommendation is to use city equipment — specifically the brush-cutting attachment — to periodically mow down non-mature saplings (approximately 1–2 inch diameter) while leaving established trees, restoring and maintaining the prairie character. As a secondary benefit, this would prevent the recurrence of the overgrowth that required the phone company to perform disruptive clear-cutting. Council members were broadly supportive, viewing this as routine land maintenance within the city's purview. No formal action was required at this time.

Jake Braking: Council Lundren raised growing concern about the frequency of truck engine braking (jake braking) through town, particularly on the south end near the 45 mph transition. Mayor Kennedy noted the issue is most pronounced along the state highway corridor. The group agreed to research whether the city could request that the state allow "No Engine Braking" signs to be posted on both ends of town as far out as permitted, and Mayor Kennedy indicated he would look into the process.

Next Regular Meeting: Mayor Kennedy reminded attendees that the next regular City Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, September 14, 2026 at 5:30 PM in the same location. He noted that he would not be present and would not be attending remotely.

There being no further business, the Planning Session was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Trista Olander, City Administrator/Clerk-Treasurer

Approved by,

Bill Kennedy, Mayor