

AITKIN CITY COUNCIL MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
AITKIN PUBLIC LIBRARY

November 17, 2025

6:00 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mayor Gary Tibbitts, Council Members Chris Dotzler, Jason Henke, Julie Miller, Justin Cartie

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** None.

**ALSO PRESENT:** Street Supervisor Lon Nicko, Police Chief Colter Riedel, Kat Robb, Robert Burchett, Tami Jacobs, Seth Jacobs, Tony Mindrum, Stan Gustafson, Peggy Jones, Jenn Collins, Tamara Lowney, Scott Miller, Darshan Christy, Kristi Hills, Linda W.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Addition under New Business:

- Letter to the Editor Response

A motion to approve the agenda as amended was made by Jason Henke, seconded by Chris Dotzler. The motion carried with all voting aye.

**CONSENT AGENDA**

The following items were included in the consent agenda:

- Minutes – Regular Council Meeting 11/3/2025 (Amended)
- Accounts Payable
  - City
  - Liquor Store
- Financial Reports as of: 10/31/2025
- Employee Recognition Policy (Updated)
- 2026 Tobacco License Renewals (6 Licenses)
- CLA Statement of Work – Audit Services
- Resolution No. 2025-11-17D Renewal of CD at SSB X3292
- Resolution No. 2025-11-17E Authorize termination with Northland Securities and Approval to continue with Ehlers.

A motion to approve the consent agenda with the amended Council Minutes was made by Jason Henke, seconded by Justin Cartie. The motion carried with all voting aye.

**PUBLIC HEARING**

- None.

**MAYOR'S REPORT**

- None.

**ADMINISTRATION REPORT**

- None.

**OLD BUSINESS**

- **Nuisance Properties / Property Maintenance Discussion**
  - Council Member Miller was not aware that molding siding was a part of the Property Maintenance Ordinance that was passed earlier this year. If the homeowner is not responsive to the City's efforts, it will then be the City's responsibility to abate molding siding. Miller would like the Council to consider if the City would like to be getting into this business with homeowners because that will be costly to the City.
  - City Administrator Thompson sent out notices to the Gas Station downtown with the boarded windows. Windows, sidings, maintenance in the ordinance and how the City corrects the violations is a work in progress. City staff will continue to try to find a solution. A list of resources is sent to all properties with violations.

**NEW BUSINESS**

- **APT Presentation – Peggy Jones / Tamara Lowney**
  - Resolution No. 2025-11-17C Support a Job Creation Fund Application in connection with APT
    - American Peat Technology (APT) was founded in 2003 and headquartered in Aitkin, MN. It manufactures high-value, natural peat-based products used in agriculture, water treatment, and goods. The company is privately owned by 57 families, all with ties to Aitkin County. The proposed Applied Research Center (ARC) expansion will extend APT's capabilities. The location will be in a newly acquired facility in downtown Aitkin. APT is looking to invest \$1,325,000 into the community through property acquisition, building renovation, and new construction/equipment. APT is

leveraging several grant programs, including the MN DEED Job Creation Fund. The microbiology and R&D lab will attract and retain technical talent to Aitkin County, creating high-skill positions rarely available in rural Minnesota.

A motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-11-17C was made by Justin Cartie, seconded by Julie Miller. The motion carried with all voting aye.

- **Advance Acquisitions Hazardous Buildings**

- Resolution No. 2025-11-17A Notice to remove Hazardous Bldg. – 768 4<sup>th</sup> St SE
- Resolution No. 2025-11-17B Notice to remove Hazardous Bldg. – 780 4<sup>th</sup> St SE
  - Approving these resolutions prepared by the City's Nuisance Attorney will order the property owner to remove the hazardous buildings from the property. If the property owner does not remove them, the City will bid the work out, remove the buildings, and either assess the work or file a judgment against the business.

A motion to approve Resolution No. 2025-11-17A and Resolution No. 2025-11-17B was made by Julie Miller, seconded by Jason Henke. The motion carried with all voting aye.

- **Water Storage Improvements – Pay Request No. 6**

- Pay Request No. 6 in the amount of \$185,345.00 for the Water Tower Project.

A motion to approve Pay Request No. 6 was made by Chris Dotzler, seconded by Justin Cartie. The motion carried with all voting aye.

- **Power at Central Park**

- The Park Committee has been discussing ideas for Central Park. The Park Committee hosted a Concert in the Park this past Summer and since then the City has received increased inquiries regarding the bandstand area. The City is hoping to have a Concert in the Park once a month during the Summer months. To do this, the power needs to be upgraded so extension cords do not have to run across the lawn. The City received 3 bids, and the lowest bid is from Dutch's Electric, Inc. for \$2,900.00. There are enough funds in the Park Fund to pay for this upgrade.

A motion to approve the quote from Dutch's Electric, Inc. for \$2,900.00 was made by Jason Henke, seconded by Justin Cartie. The motion carried with all voting aye.

- **WWTF Pay Invoice No. 1**

- The first payment towards CMAR for \$12,400.00 for CMAR Basic Preconstruction Services for the Wastewater Treatment Facility.

A motion to approve WWTF Pay Invoice No. 1 was made by Justin Cartie, seconded by Chris Dotzler. The motion carried with all voting aye.

- **FD/PD Roof Pay Application No. 1 & Final**

- Thelen Roofing has completed the roof project. It has been signed off by the City's Building Official. The City has received the final inspection and the warranty paperwork associated with it. There was 1 change order. The total amount for the final including the change order is \$130,400.00.

A motion to approve the FD/PD Roof Pay Application No. 1 & Final was made by Jason Henke, seconded by Chris Dotzler. The motion carried with all voting aye.

- **Letter to the Editor Response**

- Council Member Miller felt the City should provide factual information based on a Letter to the Editor in the Aitkin Independent Age that was written by a former City Employee, which contained inaccurate statements. Miller indicated that she knew of at least one person who voted against the referendum because of the letter and referenced comments from the letter regarding infrastructure and site issues. To address claims stated in the letter to the editor, Miller presented a letter from City Engineer Phil Martin and a letter from JLG Architects with a supporting geology report prepared by Widseth. Martin's letter explained that extending a watermain to the school site had already been modeled using the city's existing water distribution system. With city watermain located approximately 1,500 feet from the property, Martin stated that normal water supply and pressure needs were expected to be met. He added that fire protection demands might require supplemental flow depending on the school's design. On sewer service, Martin clarified that wastewater would be collected at an on-site lift station and pumped about 3,000 feet to the city's collection system on Red Oak Drive. He noted the city already operates 11 lift stations throughout its system. JLG Architects stated, "based on the data that is available for the proposed school site, the risk of potential foundation settling issues due to grades or soil conditions can be considered very low and is not beyond the normal expectations for proposed projects of this scope." In December last year, the Council committed \$10,500 to hire a lobbying firm's fee to aid in seeking funding for the potential referendum. Miller stated that a letter written to the editor is based on opinion and not facts and we owe it to our taxpayers to present them factual information.
- Mayor Tibbitts called for public comment.

- Stan Gustafson was saddened to hear the school levy did not pass. He noted that schools have historically relied on support from many sources and stated that if the levy comes back for a future vote, it is important for residents to be well-informed and to have accurate information. He emphasized that there will always be children in school and they need a great place to receive education.
- Scott Miller wanted clarification that the cost share for the lobbyist group helped secure a grant tied to the \$5 million in infrastructure. Because the levy did not pass, the \$5 million in grant funds is no longer available.
- Discussion continued between council members and Mayor Tibbitts used his gavel to bring the meeting back to order. Council Member Miller stated she wanted to set the record straight by addressing this issue at a public meeting.

**PUBLIC WORKS**

- None.

**BUDGET COMMITTEE**

- None.

**PLANNING & ZONING**

- None.

**PARK COMMITTEE**

- None.

**LIBRARY COMMITTEE**

- None.

**AIRPORT COMMISSION**

- None.

**PERSONNEL COMMITTEE**

- None.

**EDA**

- None.

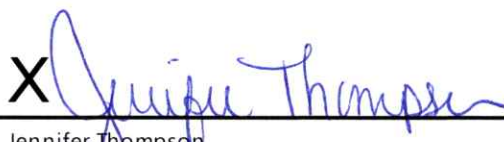
**COMMENTS FROM VISITORS**

- Darshan Christy commented that the City needs to determine how to attract more people, noting that growth depends on understanding what people are looking for. He stated that it is the City's responsibility to bring people in and ask what the plan is to increase population and job opportunities.
- Kristi Hills agreed with Darshan's remarks. She expressed disappointment that members of the Council said Yes to APT and No to the school, stating that the issues appeared very similar.
- Scott Miller stated that he was disappointed the referendum failed but was more concerned what he viewed as a lack of leadership on social media regarding the issue. He commented that the role of the City and elected officials is to support community growth and create a community that attracts new residents. He added that the only way to lower taxes is to grow the tax base and the City lost an opportunity to do so along with the \$5 million grant for infrastructure.

**ADJOURNMENT**

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:10 pm was made by Chris Dotzler, seconded by Julie Miller. The motion carried with all voting aye.

**X**   
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 Gary Tibbitts  
 Mayor

**X**   
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 Jennifer Thompson  
 City Administrator