

CITY OF HERMANTOWN

City Council Meeting

Monday, March 2, 2026

6:30 PM Central

MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Present

Councilor John Geissler: Present

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Present

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Present

CITY STAFF: John Mulder, City Administrator; Joe Wicklund, Assistant City Administrator; Chad Ronchetti, Economic Development Director; Trish Crego, Utility & Infrastructure Director; David Bolf, City Engineer; Gunnar Johnson, City Attorney; Mark Gunderson, Deputy Commander

VISITORS: 20

1. **CALL TO ORDER**

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

3. **ROLL CALL**

4. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

5. **COMMUNICATIONS**

A. Correspondence 26-07 through 26-10 placed on file

6. **PRESENTATIONS**

A. **Utility & Infrastructure Report**

Trish Crego, Utility & Infrastructure Director
(Pre-Agenda Only)

B. **2026 Legislative Efforts**

Joe Wicklund, Assistant City Administrator
(Pre-Agenda Only)

7. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Joann Bates, 5369 Morris Thomas Rd, Hermantown, MN – Spoke in opposition to the proposed hyperscale data center and expressed concern that the final result will vary from the claims being proposed. She spoke on the exemptions for hyperscale data centers and developers from Minnesota House File 16 and voiced that the HF16 does not

do enough to protect her as a citizen. She requested that the proposed data center to be put on hold until there is a process for accountability and lack of damage to the environment is proven reasonable. She stated that time is needed to gain more experience from hyper scale data centers that are currently running.

Sarah Winter, 3658 Birch Road – Spoke about the difficulty experienced when trying to share opinions to Council members. She shares that when communicating with her other representatives she always receives a response and when she emails Council members the only response is that her comment last been recorded. She expressed that no response from Councilors feels unfortunate and its hard to know whether that message has been heard. She expressed opposition to a hyper scale data center in Hermantown. She referenced state of Virginia is home to 510 data centers and in 2008 they implemented a no sales tax and no use tax on computers which has led to a \$2.1 billion revenue loss to the state in the year of 2025. She voiced concern that we do not know the implications of the data center project.

Sarah Lofald, 5502 Hermantown Road – Stated that it is hard decide what to address at these meetings to engage Councilors. She asked how citizens are supposed to have meaningful discussion without Councils response to their concerns. She states that conversation without public record leads to a disperse of information that breeds misinformation and conspiracy. She acknowledged the pending lawsuits in regards to the data centers, and questioned if the situation would have been avoided if the public had been a part of the conversation sooner with reference to definition changes, environmental reviews, property assessments, and staff NDAs. She spoke how she has gotten involved to learn more about governmental process with her take away being that not only Hermantown, but immediate surrounding communities are opposed to the data center development. She stated that while Hermantown has been assured by Council that the project will be different than the others, the reality is Hermantown's constituents do not want it. She asked if citizens of Hermantown come to multiple city council meetings and express their concerns over this project will Council stop it.

Rebecca Gilbertson, 5854 Hermantown Road – Spoke on public health risks and human impact in regards to proposed data center. She stated that back up diesel generators are associated with respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, cancer risk and increase asthma risk. She spoke in regards to the impact of chronic stress on residents and shared its effects. She shared that the individuals that are immediately affected by the data center project need to plan for their immediate futures. She ceded the rest of her time and requested to hear an apology from council stating that it has been a really hard time.

James Thorstensen, 5784 Hermantown Road – Spoke on attending a pre-agenda meeting last month and the presentation that was given by Ehlers. He stated that the presentation was interesting and informative but felt that the use of the word transparency during the presentation was ironic in connection to the data center project. He acknowledged the NDAs signed by City Administration and expressed that even though the Mayor and

Council did not sign NDAs he believed they knew what was going on. He voiced that council could have informed the residents and the public which would lead to a smoother operation in reference to the data center project.

Brea Schminski, 3483 Stark Junction Road – Spoke in opposition to the data center. She spoke about the book “The Radium Girls” by Kate Moore, and described the story. She referenced the continued clean up today of radium in Ottawa and Illinois. She stated that the data center feels like a repeat in history with big companies taking over, only thinking about the money and not caring about the long-lasting effects on individuals. She asked the Council what do they care about, people and environment or money. She shared that even though she does not live in Hermantown she is feeling effects on her wellbeing, experiencing anxiety and having to spend time away from her family to fight for them to not have a hyper scale data center their back yard. She expressed that we don’t know long-term effects there could be from data centers, and maybe the Fortune500 companies already know that there are health effects. She urged the council to vote no on the hyper scale data center and that the council that they have the power to gain back trust from the community and make things right.

Nate Rickard, 4878 Trails End Drive – Stated that he wasn’t going to speak but he would. Stated that the data center thing has gotten out of control, but does not blame Council and was apologetic towards them. He shared that he believes a lot of the blame is on the developer. He expressed that if done correctly it could be something to help us and believes that was the councils’ intentions. He stated that the misinformation that has snowballed is unfortunate and don’t know if we can come back from it. He acknowledged the union trades that he is a part of and that an 8-year project is big for them. He stated that he wouldn’t be in favor of the project if it hurts Hermantown. He urged council to lean on the developer to come with a plan of how it is not going to hurt Hermantown and that they did not give enough information previously.

Clarissa Ek, 3505 Solway Road – Stated 10 acer property is less than a thousand yards from the proposed data center property. She expressed that she was appalled to read the Duluth Monitors article from February 28, 2026 discussing email exchanges between City Administrator Mulder and Mortenson regarding identifying land owners that could be open to selling. She shares the individuals she knew who sold their homes or land for three times their assessed value and stated that resident Tim Resberg was told at a city meeting in April 2025 that there was no plan for a data center. She referenced a health impact assessment from the Community and Environmental Defense Services that found a single data center could pose negative health risk for people living at least 6 miles away and increased air pollution risk that comes from data centers emitting nitrogen dioxide and tiny inhalable particles that harm lungs. She urged the Council to put people over profit which included her own family and trusts they are good people that don’t want to hurt them. She requested a health impact assessment be done and asked the council to put the residents before the money.

Emma Richtman, 5215 Chris Drive – Spoke about the rough day she was having and the events that took place before she attended to the meeting, telling Council that the human factor in all this has been overlooked. She stated she is tired and this is a marathon of endurance which is no where near the end. She expressed that this experience does not fostered trust and the citizens are key stake holders that were last to be involved. She acknowledges that past zoning and city council meetings allowed for public comment on amendments to city ordinances but the knowledge and information the public would have needed to make comments appropriately accurately was protected by NDAs. She questioned cities knowledge of private companies buying private land and why zoning language updates are being described proactive when the there is documentation that shows otherwise. She expressed that the lack of trust and transparency makes her believe hyperscale data centers won't flood the area. She shared her experience going to the capital in regards to hyper scale data center development and that she disagrees with the response from legislators that it should be left to local governments. She opposed the data center and raised concern about lack of protections in place for residents, the environment and watershed with a development this scale. She asked the council is there a quantifiable number of constituents who need to tell you no, we don't want this. She acknowledged that she can't imagine the council is taking the decision lightly and is looking for hope.

8. **MOTIONS**

A. Motion to appoint the following for a three-year term:

Utility Commission

-Barry Simonson

(motion, roll call)

Motion to appoint Barry Simonson to Utility Commission for a three-year term. This motion made by Councilor Geissler and seconded by Councilor Peterson, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

9. **CONSENT AGENDA**

A. **Minutes** - Approval or correction of February 17, 2026 City Council Continuation Minutes and February 23, 2026 City Council Work Session Minutes

- B. **Accounts Payable** - Approve general city warrants from February 16, 2026 through February 28, 2026 in the amount of \$2,991,655.11

Motion to the approve the Consent Agenda. This motion, made by Councilor Peterson and seconded by Councilor LeBlanc, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea
Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent
Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea
Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea
Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

10. **RESOLUTIONS**

- A. **2026-30 Resolution Authorizing And Directing The City Administrator And The Economic Development Director To Execute And Deliver A Business Development Infrastructure Application**

(motion, roll call)

Emma Richtman, 5215 Chris Drive – Asked if the Hawkline Business Park Development involves any type of communication services facilities. Economic Development Director Ronchetti answered by stating in all covariations with the developer no communication services facilities being proposed here

Motion to approve 2026-30 Resolution Authorizing And Directing The City Administrator And The Economic Development Director To Execute And Deliver A Business Development Infrastructure Application. This motion, made by Councilor Geissler and seconded by Councilor Peterson, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea
Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent
Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea
Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea
Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

- B. **2026-31 Resolution Authorizing Support Of The St. Louis Count Business Development Public Infrastructure Program Grant For Improvements On CSAH 49 And CR 284**

(motion, roll call)

Motion to approve 2026-31 Resolution Authorizing Support Of The St. Louis Count Business Development Public Infrastructure Program Grant For Improvements On CSAH 49 And CR 284. This motion, made by Councilor LeBlanc and seconded by Councilor Peterson, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

C. **2026-32 Resolution Receiving Bids and Awarding Contract To Lakehead Constructors Inc., For Improvement District No. 323 Water System Connection And Booster Station Project In The Amount Of \$943,672.00**

(motion, roll call)

Motion to approve 2026-32 Resolution Receiving Bids and Awarding Contract To Lakehead Constructors Inc., For Improvement District No. 323 Water System Connection And Booster Station Project In The Amount Of \$943,672.00. This motion, made by Councilor Geissler and seconded by Councilor Peterson, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

D. **2026-33 Resolution Authorizing The Disposal Of Surplus City Property**

(motion, roll call)

Motion to approve 2026-33 Resolution Authorizing The Disposal Of Surplus City Property. This motion, made by Councilor Peterson and seconded by Councilor Geissler, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

E. **2026-34 Resolution Awarding Contract For A Purchase of Two Police Vehicles In The Amount Of \$109,323.84 Plus Applicable Taxes And Fees**

(motion, roll call)

Motion to approve 2026-34 Resolution Awarding Contract For A Purchase of Two Police Vehicles In The Amount Of \$109,323.84 Plus Applicable Taxes And Fees. This motion, made by Councilor LeBlanc and seconded by Councilor Peterson, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

11. **RECESS**

Motion to recess at 7:11 p.m. This motion, made by Councilor Geissler and seconded by Councilor LeBlanc, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Yea

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Absent

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea

Yea: 4, Nay: 0 Absent: 1

ATTEST:

Mayor

City Clerk