

CITY OF HERMANTOWN

City Council Meeting

Monday, April 6, 2026

6:30 PM Central

MEETING CONDUCTED IN PERSON

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Absent

Councilor John Geissler: Absent

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Present

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Present

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Present

CITY STAFF: Joe Wicklund, Assistant City Administrator; Jim Crace, Director of Public Safety; Zach Graves, Fire Chief; David Bolf, City Engineer; Gunnar Johnson, City Attorney

VISITORS: 23

1. **CALL TO ORDER**
2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
3. **ROLL CALL**
4. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**
5. **COMMUNICATIONS**

A. Correspondence 26-19 through 26-37 placed on file

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

JoAnne Bates 5369 Morris Thomas Road, Hermantown MN – Spoke in opposition of the data center. She shared that the proposed hyperscale data center using city water allows it to avoid limits set to give residential users first draw to limited aquifers. She shared that an increased electrical use and noise would be due to choosing an air-cooling system. She stated that location of the proposed data center will likely destroy one of the best trout streams in the region. She shared a quote regarding the trout streams significance and cold-water protection. She shared how removal of forest, impervious surfaces, and pollutants from development will impact the ground water. She emphasized that working with a company of Google's size will be difficult to hold them accountable for environmental damage and expands risk to the public.

Karen Harmon 5279 W Arrowhead Road, Hermantown, MN – Asked Council if they have looked into any hearing-impaired accommodations. She asked what considerations for hearing and participating in the conversation will be.

Sarah Lofald 5502 Hermantown Road, Hermantown, MN – Spoke in concern of Project Loon's timeline leading to public release. She discussed the differences of the first AUAR and the new scoping document. She shared a time line of passed ordinances and resolutions leading up to the first AUAR that were directly connected to Googles hyperscale data center. She referenced ordinances amending land use regulations and special use permits related to BLM zoning. She referenced resolutions approving consulting services and a draft AUAR after public comment period expired. She stated that no public comment was made because the public can't comment if they are not made aware of the reason for the changes. She shared the new AUAR does not have the same ambiguity and believes that it will follow a different path. She asked Council if the residents of Hermantown show up to a city council meeting to oppose the development of a massive data center will they listen?

Barbara Opal 328 N 53rd Avenue West, Duluth MN – Stated that her initial concerns regarding the proposed hyperscale data center were about environmental impact. She shared that she is now equally worried about the residents of Hermantown. She expressed being appalled that residents are not being listened to after speaking in opposition week after week. She shared concern that the City is not looking into the potential costs of hyperscale data centers to the community and exclusively listening to Google, Minnesota Power, and Black Rock. She shared with Council that there is no shame in changing their minds. She emphasized that there is shame in not listening to their constituents.

Emma Richtman 5215 Chris Drive, Hermantown, MN – Stated that Googles code of conduct language says, "don't be evil and if you see something that isn't right speak up." She shared that younger generations are the first in history to be dumber than their predecessors, attributing the cognitive decline to over reliance on tech and integrating technology too early in education systems. She shared that tech companies such as Google are built on monetizing data, human attention, and creating dependency. She expressed that guilt is often used to respond to protests of hyperscale data centers by pointing to the oppositions use of technology that data centers support. She stated consumers are made to feel responsible so when tech companies fail they can shift the blame with no accountability. She spoke about the changes to the comprehensive plan and zoning maps as well as shareholders being put ahead of neighbors. She emphasized that these things happening are not right and that she will continue to speak up.

Bob Kohlmeier 5757 St Louis River Road, Hermantown, MN – Spoke about an email response from Councilor Geissler stating that the City is starting over in means of the AUAR and Planning and Zoning applications regarding the proposed data center. He asked if the data center project belongs in a residential district or not. He stated that the only study that can answer the question is an EIS. He shared that the definition of M2 in city ordinances the data center is of heavy industrial nature and an EIS is the required tool that will answer the question of location.

Tom Bates 5369 Morris Thomas Road, Hermantown, MN – Spoke regarding concerns about the difference between an AUAR and environmental impact statement. He asked Council to slow down and take some time while it's still available. He shared his personal experience with rushing into decision making and recovering from mistakes. He urged Council to do the environmental impact statement and take the 6 months look at what is being promised. He stated that if this is done people would have a better feeling about the project.

Nate Rickard 4878 Trails End Drive, Hermantown, MN – Thanked Council for opening public comments on the project. He stated that he supports the data center but believes the developer is dropping the ball. He shared that there are many things that are unknown but the only way it can be successful is if it has comments from all sides. He stated that the developer needs to come in and share what their plans are. He stated that he is not in support of detriment to Hermantown. He emphasized that involvement of the public and community is needed to make this successful

Peter Hafften 5971 St. Louis River Road, Duluth, MN – Shared that he has empathy for the Council and Planning Commissions that are experiencing pressure from Google, Minnesota Power, Saint Louis County, and the State. He shared that he has tried to think what it would be like to be in Councils shoes trying to take in all the considerations. He emphasized the impact this project would leave on an elected officials' legacy. He asked if Council wants their legacy to be known as the ones who approved the data center while many were against it. He questioned if Council would be the ones to take a step back and after learning, not support the data center. He shared instances of small towns that have stopped data centers from coming in. He invited Council to join the opposition.

7. **CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. **Minutes** - Approval or correction of March 16, 2026 City Council Continuation Minutes
- B. **Accounts Payable** - Approve general city warrants from March 16, 2026 through March 31, 2026 in the amount of \$925,530.76

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

Councilor John Geissler: Absent

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Yea

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Absent

Yea: 3, Nay: 0, Absent: 2

8. **RESOLUTIONS**

A. **2026-39 Resolution Receiving Bids And Awarding Contract To Gartner Refrigeration Company, For The Hermantown City Hall HVAC Upgrade Project In The Amount Of \$305,331.00**

(motion, roll call)

Motion to approve 2026-39 Resolution Receiving Bids And Awarding Contract To Gartner Refrigeration Company, For The Hermantown City Hall HVAC Upgrade Project In The Amount Of \$305,331.00. This motion, made by Councilor LeBlanc and seconded by Councilor Hjelle, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Absent

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Yea

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Absent

Yea: 3, Nay: 0, Absent: 2

B. **2026-40 Resolution Authorizing And Directing Mayor And City Clerk To Execute Amendment No. 1 To The Agreement For Geotechnical Services For Street Improvement District No. 547 Not To Exceed \$29,894 (Lightning Drive & Thunderchief Lane Including Sanitary Sewer Extension And Other Infrastructure Improvements In Section 14)**

(motion, roll call)

Motion to approve 2026-40 Resolution Authorizing And Directing Mayor And City Clerk To Execute Amendment No. 1 To The Agreement For Geotechnical Services For Street Improvement District No. 547 Not To Exceed \$29,894 (Lightning Drive & Thunderchief Lane Including Sanitary Sewer Extension And Other Infrastructure Improvements In Section 14). This motion, made by Councilor Hjelle and seconded by Councilor LeBlanc, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Absent

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Yea

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Absent

Yea: 3, Nay: 0, Absent: 2

9. **RECESS**

Motion to recess at 6:57 p.m. This motion, made by Councilor LeBlanc and seconded by Councilor Hjelle, Carried.

Councilor John Geissler: Absent

Councilor Andy Hjelle: Yea

Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea

Councilor Joseph Peterson: Yea

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Absent

Yea: 3, Nay: 0, Absent: 2

ATTEST:

Mayor

City Clerk