CITY OF NISSWA
MINUTES – SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026 – 10:30 A.M.
NISSWA CITY HALL

Members present: Jennifer Carnahan, Bruce London, Jesse Zahn, Joe Hall, Mark Froehle
Other Members Present: Wendell Sande and Hannah Keltgen with South Central Service Cooperative
Members absent: none
City staff present: Maggi Wentler, Interim City Administrator; Tom Blomer, Public Works Director; Steven Timblin, City Planner

Audience members: 2 members of the public were present

A. Call to Order

Mayor Jennifer Carnahan called the special meeting of the City of Nisswa City Council to order on Tuesday, February 17, 2026, at 10:34 AM at Nisswa City Hall.

B. City Administrator/City Clerk Interviews

The Council conducted interviews for the City Administrator/City Clerk position that has been vacant. The interviews were facilitated by Wendell from South Central Service Cooperative, the firm engaged by the Council to assist with the search process.

Mayor Carnahan provided an overview of the interview process, noting that each candidate would have approximately 55 minutes for their interview with 5-7 minutes at the end for wrap-up and questions from the candidates. She emphasized the importance of asking consistent questions of all candidates to maintain fairness throughout the process.

Four candidates were interviewed during the session:

Interview with Jamie Lawrence

Mr. Lawrence participated virtually due to a previously scheduled vacation. He introduced himself as having served nearly 9 years as City Administrator in Sac City, Iowa. He shared his background in municipal government, including experience with the US Forest Service, Department of Corrections, economic development, and regional planning.

Mr. Lawrence emphasized his experience with infrastructure projects, particularly water and wastewater systems, housing development, and recreational opportunities. When asked about his interest in Nisswa, he mentioned visiting the community during Christmas and being impressed with the town, its amenities, and people. He expressed that he was seeking a position where he could settle until retirement.

During questioning, Mr. Lawrence discussed his approach to communication, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and economic development. He highlighted his philosophy of being a good liaison between council and staff, focusing on transparency, and establishing clear roles. He noted his experience with TIF financing and housing development initiatives.

When asked about his expectations from the council, Mr. Lawrence emphasized the need for clear direction and understanding of council's expectations. He described how he would spend his first month by developing relationships with staff, council members, and the community.

Interview with Emily Burns

Ms. Burns introduced herself as having experience in municipal government, including roles as assistant finance director, assistant city administrator, and finance director. She shared that she began her career in juvenile probation before moving to the public sector, with extensive experience in budget management and grants.

She discussed her time as assistant city administrator for Cimarron, Kansas, where she handled various responsibilities including utility billing, ordinance enforcement, and economic development. Ms. Burns explained that she had moved to Minnesota when her current position as finance director in Owatonna opened up, and is now seeking a position closer to the Little Falls area due to family considerations.

During questioning, Ms. Burns emphasized her approach to communication, conflict resolution, and building relationships with staff and the community. She discussed her experience with economic development projects, including working with a port authority and exploring options for vacant buildings.

When asked about her leadership style, Ms. Burns stated she values passion and providing staff with the tools they need to accomplish goals. She noted that she would spend her first month getting to know staff, reviewing budgets, and understanding the community's needs and priorities.

Two community members, Mr. Duy and Mr. Landers, were invited to ask questions. Mr. Dewey expressed appreciation for direct communication, and Mr. Landers asked about Ms. Burns' experience with planning and zoning issues.

Interview with Zeke Jackson

Mr. Jackson shared his background in local government, including roles as town manager in Exmore, Virginia, and village administrator positions in Wisconsin communities with tourism-focused economies. He emphasized his experience in economic development, infrastructure management, and planning.

He explained his personal interest in the position was partly due to family connections to Minnesota, as well as his professional experience with water-based communities that have a tourism focus. During questioning, Mr. Jackson demonstrated knowledge of Nisswa gained through research and a visit to the community, including observations about the Paul Bunyan Trail, business mix, and lakefront development.

When discussing his approach to communication and conflict resolution, Mr. Jackson emphasized the importance of reading people's responses and adjusting accordingly. He explained his collaborative approach to strategic planning, involving residents, business owners, and stakeholders in the process.

Mr. Jackson shared his philosophy on economic development, suggesting a review of zoning codes to remove barriers to development and ensure appropriate infrastructure is in place. He

emphasized his experience with tourism development and described his management style as expecting excellence and cooperation.

Interview with Jessica Albrecht

The fourth candidate, Jessica, introduced herself as originally from the area, having graduated from Brainerd High School. She explained that she had moved away but maintained connections to the area and had returned about 8 months ago to reestablish herself in the community.

She expressed interest in the position as an opportunity to serve the community and be part of Nisswa's growth, acknowledging the challenges of being a small town with a large seasonal population and tourism economy. During questioning, Jessica emphasized her approach to communication, facilitation, and conflict resolution based on her international experience.

When discussing strategic planning, Jessica emphasized the importance of input from department heads, council, and the community to develop feasible plans that align with budgets and priorities. She noted her legal and financial experience would be beneficial to the role of city administrator.

Jessica described her management style as collaborative with an open-door policy, emphasizing clear communication of expectations and being open to feedback from staff. When asked about her priorities for Nisswa, she mentioned road upgrades, developing plans for the recently purchased property, and improving community communication.

C. Closed session pursuant to MN Statutes 13D.03 labor negotiations

After completing the interviews, the Council discussed whether to proceed with deliberations in closed or open session. While the agenda indicated a closed session was planned and South Central Service Cooperative representatives noted this was their typical practice with other cities, the City's labor attorney had provided guidance to remain in open session.

After discussion about the benefits of a thorough conversation in closed session to properly evaluate candidates without potential concerns about hurting feelings, Council member Zahn made a motion to move into closed session.

Motion by Council Member Zahn, seconded by Council Member London, to move to closed session pursuant to Minnesota statutes 13D.03 regarding labor negotiations specifically for the purpose of discussing an employment agreement/negotiations for the city administrator/clerk position.

Motion carried unanimously.

The Council moved into closed session at approximately 3:15 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Carnahan, Mayor

Maggi Wentler, Interim City Administrator