**CITY OF NISSWA**
**MINUTES – REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING**
**TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026 – 6:00 P.M.**
**NISSWA CITY HALL**

**Members present:** Jennifer Carnahan, Bruce London, Joe Hall, Mark Froehle, Jesse Zahn
**Other Members Present:** Dave Reese, City Engineer; Bill Westerberg, Widseth; Tom Pearson, City Attorney
**Other Members Present via Zoom:** Wendell Sande, SCSC; Flora Delaney and Michael Bitzer, Delaney Consulting; Chris Hoodecheck, Labor Attorney
**City staff present**: Maggi Wentler, Interim City Administrator; Tom Blomer, Public Works Director; Steven Timblin, City Planner; Amber Moon Peterson, Parks & Rec Director; Brian Farrell, Spirits Manager; Terry Wallin, Pickle Manager; Todd Szymanski, Police Chief; Shawn Bailey, Fire Chief; Jane Michaud, Deputy Clerk

**Audience members:** 40 members of the public were present

**A. Call to Order**

Mayor Jennifer Carnahan called the Regular Council Meeting of the City of Nisswa to order at 6:01 PM on Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at Nisswa City Hall.

Mayor Carnahan opened with remarks acknowledging the high level of public engagement at recent meetings and expressing the intent to conduct all future meetings with efficiency, professionalism, and proper decorum—with respect extended to Council Members, city staff, and all attendees. She also offered an apology on behalf of the Council for conduct at the prior month's meeting.

1. Pledge of Allegiance

**B. Approve Agenda**

**Motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

**C. Consent Calendar**

Mayor Carnahan read the standard notice to the public regarding the consent calendar. Prior to the vote, Council Member Zahn raised a question regarding the Parks and Recreation Department report's reference to sweeping the Gull Lake Trail. Parks and Recreation staff confirmed that sweeping the trail is a routine seasonal maintenance activity, performed multiple times throughout the season depending on weather events. It was also noted that the final section of the trail remains incomplete and is therefore not swept.

**Motion to approve the Consent Calendar as presented was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

**D. Open Forum**

1. Central MN Council Scouting America

Mayor Carnahan introduced Isaiah Anderson, District Executive for the Pine Tree District of the Central Minnesota Council, Scouting America, whom she had met the previous week at the Lakes Area Leadership Breakfast. Mr. Anderson addressed the Council and provided an overview of the organization's reach, noting that the Pine Tree District covers Crow Wing, Aitken, Morrison, and Cass Counties. He highlighted Parker Scout Reservation, located in Nisswa, and noted the presence of Miller Castle as a prominent local attraction. Mr. Anderson shared national statistics, including one million youth served, 175,000 girls and young women participating, 30,000 Eagle Scouts earned in the prior year—including himself in 2019—and over 7.1 million hours of community service donated. He invited the city to engage scouts for local events such as parades and directed interested parties to www.scoutingcmc.org for more information or to donate.

2. Public Comment

Fire Chief Bailey addressed the Council to refute several rumors circulating on social media regarding the fire department. He clarified that the department had never requested the city construct a water tower to fill water tenders, that no $30 million fire hall had been requested, and that the department's current parking lot serves as its helipad—no dedicated helipad structure had been requested. Chief Bailey expressed frustration with misinformation being spread and stated his intent to issue a formal response on social media unless directed otherwise. He encouraged residents to reach out to staff for clarification on any questions.

No other members of the public came forward during the public comment period.

**E. Reports**

1. City Attorney

City Attorney Pearson reported no items at that time, noting he would speak to specific agenda items as they arose.

2. City Engineer

City Engineer Reese reported that work is continuing on 2026 city street improvements, and that the Gull Lake Trail project from the prior year—along with an added bathroom project—is being wrapped up.

**F. Public Hearing**

1. EDA Resolution

City Attorney Pearson provided background on the Enabling Resolution required by statute to formally establish an Economic Development Authority (EDA) for the City of Nisswa. He noted that since the March meeting, the draft resolution had been revised with minor statutory changes and language acknowledging that an EDA may have previously existed in the city, with the new resolution intended to supersede any prior enabling action or disbandment.

Prior to opening the public hearing, the Council discussed proposed amendments to the resolution. Council Member Zahn raised the question of expanding the governing board from five commissioners to seven, in order to allow for greater public participation. Council Members Froehle, Hall, and Mayor Carnahan all expressed agreement, citing the value of broader community involvement and diverse perspectives. The Council also discussed Section N of the resolution, which as drafted stated that the EDA "shall not provide business assistance." City Attorney Pearson suggested revised language reading that "the EDA shall assist the city Council in considerations of business assistance," which would preserve Council oversight while leaving the door open for future involvement in matters such as tax increment financing or gap financing.

**Motion to open the public hearing regarding the EDA Resolution was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

During the public hearing, community member Bruce Imholte (25628 Wooddale Road, Nisswa), who noted twelve years of prior service on an economic development authority, spoke in support of expanding the board to seven members. He expressed concern about the "shall not provide business assistance" language and strongly recommended it be amended, explaining that business assistance—such as low-interest gap financing to attract or expand businesses—is a core function of an EDA. He cited the ability to borrow at low rates and re-lend to businesses as a way to grow the EDA's financial capacity over time.

City Attorney Pearson responded that the proposed middle-ground language—"the EDA shall assist the city Council in considerations of business assistance"—would address the concern while keeping tighter Council oversight during the EDA's early formation, with the option to expand the EDA's authority through an amended enabling resolution in the future.

**Motion to close the public hearing regarding the EDA Resolution was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

Following the close of the public hearing, the Council confirmed the revised language for Section N as read by City Attorney Pearson.

**Motion to amend the proposed Enabling Resolution establishing an Economic Development Authority for the City of Nisswa to increase the governing board from five (5) commissioners to seven (7), and to modify Section N to state that "the EDA shall assist the city Council in consideration for providing business assistance," was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

2. EDA Organizational Resolution

City Attorney Pearson advised that the Organizational Resolution—which will set commissioner terms, officer positions, and other structural details—was not yet ready for formal action, as the Council first needed to establish a process for recruiting and appointing EDA members. No public hearing is required for this resolution.

Mayor Carnahan shared that she had consulted with Tyler Glenn, Executive Director of BLADEC, who has experience assisting neighboring cities with EDA formation. Mr. Glenn recommended that officer positions (president, vice president, treasurer, etc.) be nominated and selected within the EDA board itself at its first meeting, following the practice of Brainerd, Crosslake, and other area cities. He also offered a sample application form that could be posted on the city's website.

The Council discussed the application and appointment process. Council Member Zahn proposed opening the five non-Council seats to public applicants, with a two-week application window from Wednesday, April 29 through Wednesday, May 13. City staff noted that, given packet deadlines, a special meeting following the close of the application window may be more practical than incorporating appointments into the May 19 regular meeting. The Council agreed with this approach.

Regarding outreach, staff indicated the application would be posted on the city website, sent via the e-notify subscription service, potentially shared through the Nisswa Chamber newsletter, and submitted to the local newspaper for a possible article. Word-of-mouth was also encouraged given the substantial public attendance at the meeting.

(Note: No formal motion was required for the EDA Organizational Resolution itself at this meeting, as appointments have not yet been made.)

**G. Old Business**

1. Spirits Expansion Recommendation

Michael and Flora of Delaney Consulting participated via Zoom to present findings from their engagement, in which they were tasked with providing due diligence and decision support regarding a potential expansion of the Spirits of Nisswa municipal liquor store into additional leased space in the Schaefer development adjacent to the current location.

Michael summarized that after seven weeks of work, including analysis of five years of financial performance data, the conclusion was that expansion is not financially justified under current

operating conditions. Mayor Carnahan summarized the key findings for the benefit of those in attendance: net operating profit at Spirits had declined approximately 40% over five years, from roughly $489,000 in 2021 to approximately $282,000 in 2025. Michael elaborated that either of the two square footage expansion scenarios presented would require the business to generate between $507,000 and $764,000 in additional annual sales with no identifiable strategy to accomplish that. Flora further noted that inventory turnover data indicated the store has adequate space to support its current and projected revenue, and that adding fixed costs to a declining business would not be in the best interest of city constituents.

Council Member Hall raised the issue of an outside storage unit that had been in use and was lost due to the expansion construction, and whether the loss of volume-buying discounts would further affect profitability. Flora responded that making money through higher-volume purchasing would not offset the benefits of faster inventory turns, and that capital tied up in excess inventory reduces the efficiency of the store's returns.

The Council also addressed the fact that property owner Andy Schaefer had not been invited to the prior liquor committee meeting where preliminary findings were discussed, despite a prior Council motion to that effect. Council Members Zahn and Hall acknowledged the oversight and apologized. Mayor Carnahan expressed that she believed more transparency and earlier communication of the findings to Mr. Schaefer would have been appropriate. City Attorney Pearson clarified that the prior liquor committee meeting was not an illegal meeting, characterizing it as a preliminary discussion of findings, but acknowledged that there remain further operational discussions to be had with Mr. Schaefer.

Mr. Schaefer addressed the Council, questioning why he had not been included and expressing frustration that the city had been slow to communicate with him throughout the process, particularly given the construction impacts on parking, the loading dock, and other operational elements of the adjacent Spirits store. He stated he was unwilling to bear further engineering or contractor costs related to city-driven requests.

Regarding the third amended lease agreement, the liquor committee had unanimously recommended no change to the current lease, and no Council Member moved to pursue an amendment.

**Motion to make no changes to the Spirits of Nisswa third amended lease as proposed by the Schaefers was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

Regarding the parking lot island, discussion arose about a landscaping island in the Schaefer parking lot that had been required under a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) and a variance approval, and which Spirits staff had expressed interest in removing to improve traffic flow. Mr. Schaefer stated he was unwilling to pay additional contractor or engineering fees to address this matter. Planning & Zoning Director Steven Timblin confirmed that removal could potentially be handled through an amendment to the CUP rather than a full variance process, and City Engineer Reese indicated WSN could coordinate with the applicant's contractor. City Attorney Pearson

suggested the Council could act directly given the unusual circumstance of the city effectively requesting departure from its own ordinance requirement.

**Motion to authorize WSN to reach out to the Schaefer contractor to assess what changes are needed regarding the parking lot island and to report back, with the city to pay WSN's costs to complete that work, was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Motion to amend the Conditional Use Permit to remove the landscaping island coverage requirement and allow paving of the parking lot was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Motion that any fees associated with this modification be paid from the liquor fund was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

Staff confirmed that a liquor committee meeting would be scheduled for the following week (targeting Wednesday, April 29) with Mayor Carnahan, the city attorney, and the engineer present to address all remaining outstanding operational items related to the Schaefer expansion.

2. Spirits/Pickle – Consultant Services

Flora and Michael of Delaney Consulting provided a brief update on the broader scope of their engagement. They reported that they are transitioning from the discovery phase to the analysis phase, having completed two market visits to Nisswa with two more scheduled. Work includes POS data analysis, competitive store visits, and interviews with team members. The consultants confirmed they remain on schedule to deliver final recommendations to the city prior to the June city Council meeting.

3. Organization Structure Admin/Clerk/Finance Department

**Motion to table the Organization Structure Admin/Clerk/Finance Department discussion until the May regular Council meeting was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

Council Member Froehle noted a typographical error in the agenda materials ("serve at" should read "serve as") which staff noted for correction.

4. Administrator/City Clerk Position (SCSC)

Wendell Sande of SCSC (Strategic Compensation Solutions Consulting) participated via Zoom and recommended restarting the administrator/clerk search after the summer season, citing the difficulty of recruiting during summer vacations and the high activity level in Nisswa during that time. However, the Council expressed a clear consensus that the search should proceed as soon as possible given the urgency of filling the role and the significant burden currently carried by interim staff.

Council Members Hall and Zahn noted that with a realistic hiring timeline, interviews could occur mid-summer and an offer could potentially be extended in time for a start date before the fall school year. Wendell agreed to prepare an updated timeline and advertising schedule for Council review by the following week. Council Member Zahn noted that once the timeline is in hand, the Council should be prepared to act unanimously and expeditiously.

**Motion to authorize SCSC to proceed with the City Administrator/Clerk job search as soon as possible was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

5. PW – Add Joe Hall as Second Liaison and advertise for open seat

Council Member Zahn reported that he had spoken with three members of the Public Works Committee—Tom, Dill, and Galen—all of whom were unanimous in the view that a second Council liaison was not necessary. Their suggestion was instead to open an additional public seat on the committee. Council Member Zahn also noted that Public Works Director Tom Blomer was absent due to the recent loss of his father, and extended condolences on behalf of the Council.

**Motion to advertise for an open Public Works Committee seat to add a public member to the board was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

6. PW – Hills Crossing Street Lights & Street Light Policy Discussion

Mayor Carnahan reported that the executive director of Hills Crossing had requested a discussion regarding adding a streetlight near the facility. Both the executive director and Public Works Director Blomer were unable to attend due to personal emergencies.

**Motion to table the Hills Crossing Street Lights item to the May regular Council meeting was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

H. New Business

1. Katie Ellsworth – Pedestrian Safety Project Request

Community member Katie Ellsworth presented a research-based proposal requesting the Council investigate the feasibility of an above- or below-grade pedestrian crossing at the intersection of Highway 371 and Upper Roy Lake Road. Ms. Ellsworth described the safety concerns at the four-lane highway crossing, noting that a 2-mile radius around the intersection encompasses 190 or more residents, six lakes, and three hospitality businesses. She documented that residents along the route would be within a quarter mile to two and a quarter miles of the Paul Bunyan State Trail if a safe crossing existed.

Ms. Ellsworth referenced two Minnesota case studies—the Itasca Heartland Connection tunnel and the Crosby Highway 6 tunnel—both of which involved comparable communities and

received over 90% of their funding through state and federal grants. She included a list of potential funding programs and estimated project costs of approximately $4 million for a four-lane crossing, noting that similar projects in smaller communities have shown significant economic and public health returns. She reported that of the homes she was able to visit in her neighborhood, 20 out of 21 households expressed strong interest in the project.

Council Member Froehle, drawing on his direct experience with the Itasca tunnel project, noted that this type of infrastructure requires MnDOT involvement and is ultimately a state decision. He indicated the Itasca project took approximately 26 years in total but moved quickly once a citizen committee was organized. He encouraged a grassroots approach involving local citizens, the county commissioner, and state legislators. Council Members London and Zahn expressed strong support, with Council Member Zahn suggesting the Parks Committee or Public Works Committee could help advance the effort. Mayor Carnahan commended Ms. Ellsworth for the depth of her research and advocacy. No formal motion was required, as Council consensus was to support moving forward through committee engagement and outreach to state and county partners.

2. 2026 Nisswa Chamber Event Summary

Chamber President Kalie presented the annual bulk summary of 2026 Nisswa Chamber events in lieu of individual special event permit applications.

Motion to accept the 2026 Nisswa Chamber Calendar of Events as presented was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member Zahn. The motion carried unanimously.

3. PZ – Chapter 20 Ordinance Amendments Public Hearing

Planning & Zoning Director Steven Timblin reported that the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment have completed extensive review of proposed revisions to Chapter 20 over the past two months and have forwarded a recommendation to schedule the public hearing for their next regular meeting of May 5, 2026. Council Member Zahn requested that a Council workshop be held to review the 146-page document, and Council Member Hall provided background on the multi-year process of updating the ordinance to align with the city's comprehensive plan, noting that contradictions and outdated provisions had been identified throughout. Mayor Carnahan agreed a workshop would be beneficial.

**Motion to proceed with the Chapter 20 Ordinance Amendments Public Hearing as presented was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

4. PZ – Zoning Map Amendment

Planning & Zoning Director Timblin reported that the Planning Commission is forwarding a recommendation to approve a zoning map amendment for two parcels on West Linden (parcel numbers 28220715 and 28220716), reclassifying them from Open Space Residential to Shoreland Residential.

**Motion to approve the zoning map amendment was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Motion to publish the summary of the zoning map amendment was made by Council Member Froehle and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

5. PZ – Driveway Access – Curtiss

Planning & Zoning Director Timblin explained that an applicant (the Curtiss family) is seeking access to landlocked parcels via a 40-foot unimproved platted right-of-way known as Wild Rice Landing within the plat of Gull Lake Shores. City staff and the city attorney have met with the applicant and identified seven potential conditions to protect the city while allowing development of a private driveway across the corridor. City Attorney Pearson clarified that no formal road construction is planned; rather, the city would issue a license agreement authorizing the driveway. He requested Council authorization for staff and the attorney to draft and execute the license agreement without returning for a separate motion.

**Motion to authorize staff and the city attorney to proceed with drafting and executing the driveway license agreement for the Curtiss parcels was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

6. PZ – Driveway Access Agreement

City Attorney Pearson confirmed this item is part and parcel of the preceding item. No separate action was required.

7. PZ – Zoning Violation Complaint

City Attorney Pearson summarized that a zoning violation complaint had been filed involving a Council Member, creating an awkward situation for Planning & Zoning Director Timblin to both investigate and potentially enforce the complaint against a sitting elected official. Attorney Pearson had obtained a quote for a third-party independent contractor to perform the investigation at a flat fee of $5,500 and brought this option to the Council.

The Council discussed whether it would be appropriate to first have Director Timblin conduct a preliminary probable cause review before committing to the outside expenditure. Director Timblin indicated he would be comfortable performing an objective review. A member of the public, Shawn Hansen, addressed the Council expressing concern that the complaint appeared to be a politically motivated effort against a Council Member, referencing social media posts driving the matter, and urged the Council to be cautious. Council Members London and Froehle acknowledged this concern and expressed discomfort with the social media context, with Council Member Froehle noting that the outside perspective made him more inclined toward a third-party review. The Council Member implicated in the complaint stated he would abstain from all discussion and voting on this item.

The Council ultimately opted to direct Director Timblin to first conduct a preliminary probable cause assessment and bring his findings to the May meeting, at which point the Council would determine whether to engage the third-party investigator.

**Motion to direct Planning & Zoning Director Timblin to conduct a preliminary probable cause assessment of the zoning violation complaint and report back to the Council at the May meeting was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried, with the implicated Council Member Hall abstaining.**

8. Parks – Nisswa Lake Park Restroom Facility Step Station Easement

Parks and Recreation staff (Amber Moon Peterson) reported that construction on the Nisswa Lake Park bathroom addition—part of the Gull Lake Trail project—has commenced, and advised the public to use caution when visiting the park. This item was an internal easement from the city to itself for utility purposes to facilitate state plan approval.

**Motion to accept the Nisswa Lake Park Restroom Facility Step Station Easement as presented was made by Council Member Froehle and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

9. Parks – Nisswa Lake Park Restroom Facility Construction Observation Proposal

Staff presented a construction observation proposal for the Nisswa Lake Park restroom facility. Moon Peterson noted the project has a tight timeline, with toilet delivery expected shortly after Memorial Day and a grant deadline of June 30. She also flagged that construction observation costs may partially fall outside grant coverage due to the 20% cap on eligible costs across the two concurrent projects.

**Motion to approve the Nisswa Lake Park Restroom Facility Construction Observation Proposal as presented was made by Council Member Froehle and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

10. Pickle – New Chairs for Bar

Pickle Factory Manager Terry Wallin presented bids for new bar chairs from a local vendor who had demonstrated responsiveness when a sample chair broke. A $10,000 donation from the Nisswa Lions had been received toward this purchase but cannot be applied to gaming-related expenses, making the purchase a capital budget item. Council Member Zahn suggested tabling the decision until the June meeting to await Delaney Consulting's full report on the Pickle's operations before committing capital expenditure.

**Motion to table the Pickle new bar chairs item to the June regular Council meeting was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

11. Pickle – Walk-in Cooler Repairs

Manager Wallin reported that the Pickle's walk-in cooler, which dates to 1971, has required repeated repairs at approximately $1,200 per visit and now needs interior relining with FRP (fiberglass reinforced panel) material to meet health department standards. Council Member Zahn again suggested tabling this expenditure until the Delaney report is available, and Manager Wallin confirmed the cooler had been sufficiently repaired for the immediate term.

**Motion to table the Pickle walk-in cooler repairs item to the June regular Council meeting was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

12. PW – 2026 Road Crack Sealing

In the absence of Public Works Director Blomer, Council Member Zahn summarized the item. The city received two proposals for road crack sealing services, with Lakes Pavement Maintenance submitting the lowest price by approximately $10,000. This is a routine annual preventative maintenance contract.

**Motion to approve the 2026 Road Crack Sealing proposal from Lakes Pavement Maintenance as presented was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried unanimously.**

13. PW – Joint City/Nisswa School Design Agreement

City Engineer Reese reported that the final design proposal for a joint project with Nisswa Elementary School on Lakers Lane would not be brought forward tonight. Staff is recommending combining this project with the planned 2027 Church Street improvements to avoid subjecting businesses on Lakers Lane to construction disruption in consecutive summers. No Council action was required.

14. Admin – Labor Attorney

Interim City Administrator Wentler reported that three firms responded to the city's RFP for labor attorney services. Staff, including interim administrator Wentler, Council Member Hall, and Council Member Froehle reviewed all proposals and recommended continuing with the current firm, Flaherty and Hood, for the next year due to continuity of service and a positive working relationship.

**Motion to approve Flaherty and Hood to assume 2026 labor attorney duties was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

15. Admin – Temporary Compensation Adjustment for Interim City Admin.

Interim City Administrator/Clerk Wentler presented a request for a temporary compensation adjustment to reflect the sustained additional workload she has carried in the absence of a city administrator—a situation that has now extended for approximately one year. She noted that the proposed rate is within the existing pay grade for the city administrator position and that she continues to be responsible for the work of multiple positions, including performing duties she had not previously undertaken such as payroll processing.

Mayor Carnahan acknowledged the significant burden being carried and noted that the Council has an obligation to find solutions—whether through hiring a city clerk, bringing in a temporary retired clerk, or other means—to alleviate the strain on staff. Council Member London expressed strong support for both additional compensation and additional help. Council Member Zahn spoke empathetically about the toll on Wentler personally and asked directly whether she had the capacity to sustain her current workload through a realistic hiring timeline. Ms. Wentler indicated she was in "triage mode every single day" and had canceled vacation and missed personal obligations due to city demands. Council Member Hall moved to approve a compensation adjustment to $70.00 per hour, slightly rounding up from the requested Step 20 rate of $66.80 per hour.

**Motion to approve a temporary compensation adjustment for the Interim City Administrator to $70.00 per hour was made by Council Member Hall and seconded by Council Member London. The motion carried, with one nay vote.**

16. Cannabis (Low-Potency) License – Schaefer's Foods

**Motion to approve the Cannabis Low-Potency License for Schaefer's Foods as presented, pending background check, was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

17. Cannabis (Low-Potency) License – Pickle Factory

**Motion to approve the Cannabis Low-Potency License for the Pickle Factory as presented was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

18. Cannabis (Low-Potency) License – Spirits of Nisswa

**Motion to approve the Cannabis Low-Potency License for Spirits of Nisswa as presented was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

19. Cannabis (Low-Potency) License – Big Axe

**Motion to approve the Cannabis Low-Potency License for Big Axe Brewery as presented, pending background check on Chris French, was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Froehle. The motion carried unanimously.**

20. Recommendation to move to Closed Session pursuant to MN Statute 13D.03 for Union Negotiations

**Motion to move to closed session pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.03 for union negotiations was made by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall. The motion carried unanimously.**

The meeting moved to closed session at 8:29 PM and the public was asked to vacate the chambers.

Closed meeting was adjourned at 9:10 PM and the Regular Meeting was reconvened with all City Council Members and Interim City Administrator present. No one was present in the audience.

## I. Council/Liaison Reports

### 1. Mayor

The Mayor raised several items for discussion.

**Town Hall Date.** The Mayor noted that a town hall date had not yet been finalized. Two candidate dates had been discussed at the previous council meeting: June 9 and June 23. The Mayor expressed that June 23 was getting close to the Fourth of July holiday and suggested June 9. Council Members indicated agreement, and June 9 was confirmed as the town hall date, with the same 5:00–7:00 PM timeframe as previously contemplated.

**Property Tax Information Meeting.** The Mayor referenced a prior meeting at which Crow Wing County had presented on property tax information, noting it had drawn approximately 40 attendees. The Mayor suggested that staff — specifically referencing Maggi — coordinate with Crow Wing County to schedule a similar meeting in June. Council Members agreed.

**Newsletter.** The Mayor raised the question of whether the Council wished to produce a City newsletter, noting that the previous year's effort had been capped at $5,000 for printing and mailing. The Mayor observed that the email-based newsletter had limited reach due to insufficient subscriber sign-ups. A Council Member noted that the current staff capacity made producing a newsletter impractical at this time. After brief discussion, the Council reached consensus not to proceed with a newsletter.

**Administrative Team Support.** The Mayor indicated a need to address support for the city's administrative team, specifically noting the workload facing the interim city administrator. A Council Member spoke with evident concern, stating that getting staff help and relief needed to be a higher priority and needed to happen quickly. The Council Member suggested that the administrator be asked to compile a comprehensive list of her current activities so that the Council could identify tasks that could be deferred or paused. The Council Member noted that burnout was "real," and referenced that the administrator had been working weekends.

Discussion turned to the potential of engaging a temporary employee through Sourcewell to provide full-time support — not one, two, or three days per week, but five days per week — given that the busy summer season and the upcoming budget process would only add to the workload. The Council reached general agreement to move forward with asking staff to reach out to Sourcewell immediately to explore temporary staffing options. Council Members also agreed to schedule a meeting the week of May 4 to develop a more comprehensive plan for administrative support.

**Collaboration Session / Council Cohesion.** The Mayor raised the question of whether the Council wished to schedule a council leadership or collaboration session, noting that the high season was approaching and members' personal and professional schedules were becoming constrained. A Council Member reflected on the tone of the evening's meeting and suggested that if the Council could continue operating in the constructive manner demonstrated that night, a formal off-site session might not be necessary.

The conversation turned substantive and candid, with Council Members openly addressing community tensions and negative social media activity directed at the Council. One Council Member stated that recent characterizations of the Council circulating on community platforms — including accusations of being misogynistic, sexist, racist, and homophobic — were deeply troubling and untrue. The Council Member urged colleagues to speak directly to individuals they knew who were posting such content and ask them to stop. The Council Member also reiterated a prior position of not discussing voting intentions with colleagues in advance of meetings, and stated plainly that if a future meeting descended to the level of conduct seen the prior month, he would walk out. "We have business that needs to be done for the people," he said. "Let's get it done."

Another Council Member agreed that the divide in the community was exhausting and said that he had not joined the Council to deal with negativity. He expressed that he wanted to come to meetings and leave having enjoyed the work. He noted he had received multiple calls that day from concerned residents about content appearing on a community app and had attempted to reassure callers. He referenced a comment made by a community member, Shawn Hansen, characterizing certain community activity as a "witch hunt," and expressed agreement with that sentiment, emphasizing that the people on the Council were dedicated, long-standing members of the community.

A Council Member noted the persistent "overwhelming sense of fear in the community" and described a lengthy phone conversation with a community member, Bonnie Johnson, who raised concerns and questions about city matters — including the land acquisition — that the Council Member felt had been discussed repeatedly at public meetings. The Council Member expressed frustration that misinformation was being circulated, specifically calling out the appearance of a figure of $30 million for a fire hall, which he said had never been part of any city conversation. He also described repeated attempts to meet directly with a particular vocal community critic, stating those overtures had been declined. He expressed that he appreciated the passion of engaged residents but was disappointed that they were not speaking truthfully about the facts.

The Mayor reflected that much of the tension in the community could be traced to the city's land acquisition, a topic she noted had been in discussion for over twenty years. She also raised the information-sharing dynamic within the Council itself, expressing that she frequently felt left in the dark about city matters and that the liaison system, while perhaps well-intentioned, created unequal access to information among elected officials. She stated: "We are all equally five individual, equally elected people. We all deserve the same information at the same time." She suggested that staff should default to copying the full council on significant updates rather than routing information through individual liaisons, and noted that a weekly council update — similar to what had existed in a prior administration — would help. She acknowledged the current staff shortage as a mitigating factor.

A Council Member offered a different perspective on the information question, expressing that knowing every operational detail in real time was not, in his view, the appropriate role of a Council Member and that different philosophical views on local governance were legitimate. He cautioned that mismatched expectations between Council Members and staff could itself become a source of tension. However, the discussion reflected broad agreement that some improvement in the consistency and equity of information-sharing was warranted.

The Mayor also observed that the city's search for a city administrator had been hampered by public perceptions of dysfunction, and expressed optimism that recent collaborative meeting conduct would, over time, begin to shift that perception and attract qualified candidates. Multiple Council Members expressed commitment to moving forward in a unified and positive direction, with one Council Member stating: "We're elected leaders. Everybody's watching us from young to old, and we're here to represent it." The same Council Member also offered a personal apology for his role in the contentious prior month's meeting and reaffirmed a commitment to constructive leadership both inside and outside council chambers.

The conversation concluded with broad agreement that the Council's collective outreach into the community — given that among the five members, nearly the entire population of Nisswa was within their personal networks — could be an important tool for rebuilding community trust and tamping down harmful misinformation. The Mayor also briefly flagged a desire for a cleaner process around the EDA and the highway frontage property, noting the importance of articulating a clear vision for the acquired land so that the community could understand the long-term rationale for the investment.

**2. Council Members**

No additional formal Council Member reports were noted beyond the discussion conducted under the Mayor's report above.

**J. Announcements & Upcoming Meeting Dates**

The following upcoming meetings were noted:

1. **April 29, 2026** — Public Works Committee Meeting, 5:00 PM
2. **May 5, 2026** — Planning Commission Meeting, 5:00 PM

3. **May 7, 2026** — Parks Commission Meeting, 5:00 PM
4. **May 19, 2026** — Regular City Council Meeting, 6:00 PM
5. **May 27, 2026** — Public Works Committee Meeting, 5:00 PM

**K. Adjourn**

**Motion by Council Member Zahn and seconded by Council Member Hall to adjourn the meeting. Motion approved unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 9:16 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Carnahan, Mayor

Maggi Wentler, Interim City Administrator