

**Minutes of a Regular Meeting of
The Committee of the Whole of the City of Highland Park**

MEETING DATE: October 6, 2025
MEETING LOCATION: City Hall - 1707 St Johns Avenue

I. Call to Order

At 5:30 PM, Mayor Rotering called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call:

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Director of Public Works Bannon, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Finance Director McCaulou, Fire Chief Schrage, Assistant City Manager Taub, Communications Manager Bennett, Commander Curran, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Deputy Corporation Counsel Passman

II. Approval of Minutes

A. Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole on September 25, 2025

B. Approval of the Minutes of the Closed Session of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole Held on September 25, 2025

Councilmember Lidawer moved to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole and the Minutes of the Closed Session of the Regular Meeting of the Committee of the Whole. Councilmember Center seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

MOVER:	Councilmember Lidawer
SECONDER:	Councilmember Center
AYES:	Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer
NAYS:	None
PRESENT:	Councilmember Blumberg

III. Scheduled Business

A. 445 Central Ave. Discussion Regarding Uses

City Manager Neukirch presented background information and the proposal provided by Mr. Scott Canel, owner of the property at 445 Central Avenue.

Mr. Canel provided historical information for the property and discussed his proposal.

The Council, Mr. Canel and staff discussed:

- Appreciation for the work that has taken place
- Concerns about the length of time the space has been vacant and lack of communication with the City on Mr. Canel's part
- Concerns with the request for an additional two years on top of the multiple years the space has been vacant
- Negative community perception
- The proposed use of the property and courtyard space
- Opportunities that have been reviewed to fill the space, including the current dermatologist
- More attention could have been given as to how the space was designed
- Request that the \$250K be provided to the City instead of at the end of two years
- The matter of trust based on past experience
- Lack of action by Mr. Canel
- Un-fulfillment of promises is a major issue
- More money can be spent that will not be recouped in order to fill the vacancies
- Impacts of COVID
- Ensure no precedent is set for future businesses in the same situation
- Mr. Canel's characterization of the \$250K funding as a gift
- Concerns if the spaces are not filled in the requested timeframe
- Negative impacts on surrounding business community
- Appreciation for the apology by Mr. Canel
- Property is an important part of Central Avenue, and it needs to be filled
- Process moving forward needs to be conducted in a way that protects everyone, especially the community
- Businesses will be created by Mr. Canel if the spaces are not leased within the proposed timeframe
- Continued concerns regarding issues presented by Mr. Canel

The Council was in consensus to move forward with what has been proposed with a condition that the \$250K is paid to the City upfront. They agreed that the dermatologist may open in the space and the remaining vacancies need to be filled by the end of 2027.

B. Place of Remembrance Design Firm Consultant Recommendation

City Manager Neukirch provided opening comments for the presentation. She explained that staff is looking for feedback as it relates to the designer for the project.

Assistant to the City Manager Taub presented information regarding the Place of Remembrance Design.

Mayor Rotering requested Councilmember Ross provide her insight regarding the recommendation based on her experience as an architect.

Councilmember Ross provided information on the research she conducted, the review of the interviews, and her excitement with the recommendation of SWA as it was a firm she would be in agreement with moving forward with.

The Council voiced their appreciation for the work that was completed on the staff report and the direct involvement of the community. They discussed the interviews that are available, the number of individuals from the proposed firm that would be working on the project, how the proposed firm understood what the community is asking for, and the connection between the two site locations. They noted the importance of providing information related to the budget for the project and the significance of timing in relation to the completion of the project. They agreed that the memorial pieces need to be in place and completed before July 4, 2027.

The Council was in consensus to move forward with staff's recommendation of SWA.

City Manager Neukirch noted that everyone who has been participating in the process will be notified of the next steps, including the drafting of an agreement with SWA.

At 6:59 PM, Mayor Rotering recessed the Committee of the Whole meeting.

At 10:04 PM, Mayor Rotering reconvened the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Commander Curran, Communications Manager Bennett, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Deputy Corporation Counsel Passman

C. Update Regarding Relocation of "Miss Nitro"

Communications Manager Bennett presented information on the relocation of "Miss Nitro".

The Council and staff discussed how Brown Park and Lincoln Place Park are both owned by the Park District and while the Park District is open to the relocation, no final considerations have been provided. They discussed how the property east of Library is owned by the City but there is a restrictive covenant on the property indicating that use would be for Park District purposes. They opined on The Preserve and the Park District's concerns with that natural preserve. They discussed site plans demonstrating where the sculpture would be located on the proposed properties.

A majority of the Council stated there was interest in relocating the sculpture to Brown Park followed by Lincoln Place Park.

IV. Closed Session

Councilmember Blumberg moved the Council to close its meeting to the public, pursuant to the following cited section of the Illinois Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120/2(c)), for the purposes of (i) pending litigation (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11)); (ii) purchase or lease of property (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(5)); and (iii) security (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(8)). Councilmember Lidawer seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

At 10:18 PM, the Council recessed the public portion of the meeting to meet in Closed Session.

At 10:19 PM, Mayor Rotering reconvened the open session of the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Deputy Corporation Counsel Passman

Councilmember Blumberg moved the Council to close its meeting to the public, pursuant to the following cited section of the Illinois Open Meetings Act (5 ILCS 120/2(c)), for the purposes of (i) potential litigation (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(11)); (ii) purchase or lease of property (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(5)); and (iii) security (5 ILCS 120/2(c)(8)). Councilmember Center seconded the motion. On a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

At 10:19 PM, the Council recessed the public portion of the meeting to meet in Closed Session.

At 10:52 PM, Mayor Rotering reconvened the open session of the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Present: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Center, Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg

Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Neukirch, Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska

Also Present: Deputy Corporation Counsel Passman

V. Adjournment

Councilmember Tapia moved to adjourn the Committee of the Whole meeting.

Councilmember Center seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned its meeting at 10:52 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Palbitska
Assistant to the City Manager/Deputy City Clerk