

**MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF
HIGHLAND PARK**

MEETING DATE: February 9, 2026

MEETING LOCATION: City Hall, 1707 St Johns Avenue, Highland Park, IL 60035

I. Call to Order

At 7:31 PM, Mayor Rotering called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call:

II. Roll Call

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

Absent: Councilmembers Ross, Blumberg

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

Also Present: Corporation Counsel Elrod, Assistant Corporation Counsel Martinez, The Habitat Company (Zack Zalar, Thomas Black)

III. Pledge of Allegiance

IV. Approval of Minutes

A. Approval of the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the City Council Held on January 26, 2026

Councilmember Lidawer moved to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the City Council Held on January 26, 2026. Councilmember Center seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the Mayor declared the motion Passed (5 - 0).

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

V. Approval of Warrant List

- A. Warrant List and Wire Transfers from January 16, 2026 to January 30, 2026.
Councilmember Tapia moved to approve the Warrant List. Councilmember Bruckman seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion Passed (5 - 0).

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

VI. Report of Mayor

- A. *Appointments*

Appointment to Fill a Vacancy on the Library Board of Trustees

Mayor Rotering noted that Stephen Schutt is being recommended to the Library Board of Trustees and sought consensus from the Council.

The Council was in consensus regarding the appointment.

- B. *Proclamations*

In Recognition of Black History Month 2026, "Celebrating 100 Years: Black History, Black Presence, and Black Futures"

Mayor Rotering proclaimed February as Black History Month. She noted that Black History Month is an opportunity to celebrate the history, culture, and achievements of Black Americans, and amplify Black voices.

Human Relations Advisory Group Vice Chair David Buzard accepted the proclamation and provided comments.

Councilmember Lidawer voiced her appreciation for the investment the Human Relations Group has taken on this topic and similar topics.

In Special Recognition of 211 Day on February 11, 2026

Mayor Rotering proclaimed February 11th as 2-1-1 Day. She noted 2-1-1 Day is an opportunity to celebrate the impact of United Way of Lake County's 211 Lake County program. 211 provides a 24/7, multilingual connection to essential services throughout Lake County, whether that's mental health and counseling services, emergency financial assistance, help navigating healthcare resources and more.

Yeshwant Sanzgiri, 211 Advisory Council Chair and Board of Directors' Member accepted the proclamation and provided comments.

C. *Other Business*

State of the City

Mayor Rotering reported on the State of the City.

VII. Business from the Council

There was none.

VIII. Business from City Staff

City Manager Neukirch highlighted items on the omnibus vote agenda.

IX. Business from the Public (Individuals wishing to be heard regarding items not listed on this agenda)

Assistant to the City Manager Palbitska provided comments as it relates to Business from the Public.

There were none.

X. Omnibus

Councilmember Lidawer and City Manager Neukirch discussed items 6 and 7.

Councilmember Tapia moved to approve items 1-10 by omnibus vote consideration. Councilmember Lidawer seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion Passed (5 - 0).

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

Administration

1. Adoption of a Resolution (R15-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution to Approve a Market License Agreement with Bensidoun USA, Inc. for Food Truck Thursdays for a three-year term (2026-2028)”.
2. Adoption of a Resolution (R16-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving the Sales Tax Rebate Agreement for WKN Automotive Inc. d/b/a McGrath Kia (250 Skokie Valley Road)”.

3. Adoption of an Ordinance (O7-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “An Ordinance Amending Section 93.306 of "The Highland Park Code of 1968," as Amended Regarding Outdoor Dining Within City Rights-of-Way”.
4. Adoption of a Resolution (R17-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving an Agreement with Thornton Tomasetti, Inc., of New York, New York, for Illinois Energy Stretch Code Engineering Services”.

Finance

5. Adoption of an Ordinance (O8-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “An Ordinance Providing for the Issuance of Not to Exceed \$4,100,000 General Obligation Bonds, Series 2026, of the City of Highland Park, Lake County, Illinois, for the Purpose of Financing Various Capital Improvements, Providing for the Levy and Collection of a Direct Annual Tax Sufficient to Pay the Principal and Interest on said Bonds, and Authorizing the Sale of said Bonds to the Purchaser Thereof”.

Public Works

6. Adoption of a Resolution (R18-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving Award of the 2026 Unit Price Flower Planting Contract with Guy Scopelliti Landscape Co., Inc., Highland Park, Illinois”.
7. Adoption of a Resolution (R19-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving Award of the 2026 Holiday Lighting Program Contract to Moreno Landscape & Hardscape LLC., of Highland Park, Illinois”.
8. Adoption of a Resolution (R20-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving Award of the 2026 Unit Price Tree Purchasing Program Contracts to Multiple Vendors”.
9. Adoption of a Resolution (R21-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving a Bill of Sale with McNaughton Development, LLC for Acceptance of Public Improvements”.

Community Development

10. Adoption of an Ordinance (O9-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “An Ordinance Designating the Property at 3135 Priscilla Avenue a Local Landmark”.

XI. Other Business (all items adopted by omnibus vote consideration)

- A. Adoption of an Ordinance (O10-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “An Ordinance Rezoning Property from the I Light Industrial District to the RM1 Medium-To-High Density Residential District and the R7 Single- and Two-Family Residential District (1660 and 1700 Old Deerfield Road)”.
- B. Adoption of a Resolution (R22-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving a Final Plat of Re-Subdivision (1660 and 1700 Old Deerfield Road)”.

- C. Adoption of an Ordinance, as amended (O11-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “An Ordinance Granting a Special Use Permit for a Planned Development and for an Off-Street Parking Lot (1660 and 1700 Old Deerfield Road)”.
- D. Adoption of a Resolution, as amended (R23-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “A Resolution Approving a Development Agreement (1660 and 1700 Old Deerfield Road)”.
- E. Adoption of an Ordinance (O12-2026) by omnibus vote consideration titled, “An Ordinance Approving a Plat of Dedication for City-owned Property as Public Right-of-Way (1677 Old Deerfield Road)”.

Mayor Rotering introduced items A-E for discussion.

Community Development Director Fontane presented information regarding the changes that have been made since the discussion and approval of the preliminary proposal for 1660 & 1700 Old Deerfield Road.

Councilmember Lidawer shared comments and questions prepared from Councilmember Ross who was unable to attend the Council meeting this evening.

The Council, Corporation Counsel, The Habitat Company and staff discussed:

- Traffic management plan and timing of the review of traffic impacts to the area
- Concerns regarding the area around the railroad
- The NFR letter will be pursued using best practices and will be issued at the appropriate time during the development
- Stormwater Management Commission review of the property
- Required reports have not been received at this time but the components of the reports have been discussed
- Previous request for an emergency access easement
- Parking space use for both the Police Department, businesses and the public
- Importance of maintaining protection around the heritage trees that are on the property
- Request to increase the landscaped strip between Bluegrass and the parking lot for the development
- Consideration of rezoning the entire property to R7 instead of mixed zoning and how that consideration was rejected by a majority of the Council at the previous meeting
- Consider R7 zoning to be studied as part of the Comprehensive Plan Update
- The recourse and penalties that would occur if the development agreement was not complied with

Sandy Lurie, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns about the new crosswalk that was proposed by Habitat. She believed it to be dangerous, a bad idea and not truly a public benefit. She noted that she believed the Council and Habitat are not listening to the neighbors.

Jim Lederer, owner of Bluegrass, noted the importance of having the right fixtures in place. He stated that due to the fact that there is no architect on the Plan and Design Commission (“PDC”), the project is not the best and could have been better; the future needs to be set properly for the next generation. He stated that it would be a good project, but it could have been better.

Rick Ballnic, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns about the proposed crosswalk. He explained that he rides his bike south on Ridge Road and when he rides back, he notices that cars go really fast in that area. He noted that south of the proposed crosswalk, there is a curve and there would not be enough time for drivers to realize that they are approaching a crosswalk.

Lindsay Lurie, Highland Park resident, voiced concerns about the crosswalk. She believed that thoughtful planning needs to come first. She recommended having the crosswalk moved in order to provide safety. She noted that a sidewalk on the east side of Ridge Road would provide a clearer public benefit without introducing risk. She stated that thoughtful choices now will prevent regret later.

The Mayor, Mr. Zalar and Highland Park residents discussed where a proposed sidewalk could be placed instead of the proposed crosswalk. They discussed how the crosswalk was requested through testimony during the PDC meeting and by the Park District.

Mr. Zalar noted that as part of the traffic study that was required, the crosswalk would be reviewed. He supported not moving forward with the crosswalk. He stated that if it was not part of the package at tonight’s meeting, then it could be reviewed at a later date during construction of the development.

The Council, Corporation Counsel Elrod, Habitat and staff discussed not approving the crosswalk as part of the package tonight and how it can be addressed during the traffic study. They determined that it can be reviewed once the property is at 90% capacity, as well as when there are other activities taking place on the property during development.

Laurie, a Highland Park resident discussed the easement and the possibility for a road to be built on the easement when the development is sold to another entity. She stated that the Council’s preliminary vote was to include and requested that it not be included in the final approval tonight.

City Manager Neukirch explained that it is not a road but an easement. She noted that the Police Department and Fire Department evaluated the use of the easement for emergency services and both departments noted that it would not be necessary at this time. She explained that any consideration for a change would be evaluated by staff and then a recommendation presented to the City Council for formal approval if an emergency access road was constructed on the easement. She compared it to the emergency access road at Edgewood Middle School where an emergency access road exists on the north side of the property adjacent to a residential area.

Julie Yureff, Highland Park resident, voiced appreciation for the development and

what is going to be coming to the community. She appreciated public input and noted that public sentiment has been diverse and several of her neighbors do not want a sidewalk. She stated that she would be against a sidewalk along Ridge, leading up to Grove; it would not be necessary to come from the development and go onto Devonshire. She noted that it could be a safety hazard and may cause more traffic around her house.

Anne Flannigan Bassi, Highland Park resident, voiced her appreciation for the development, thoughtful conversations by the community and the Council and all of the input that has been provided. She opined on how land uses issues are challenging; the Council and staff have done a lot of heavy lifting.

Janet Swartz, Highland Park resident, voiced her appreciation and how impressed she has been with the PDC and the Council as it relates to the detail that has been taken with this project. She noted how there has been an uncommon amount of care and attention taken for this type of development and she is impressed. She explained that she is grateful for the downgrade in density but it did take a lot of thought and consideration. She opined on the number of meetings this has taken, things get heated, but it has all been worth it. She noted that there is a trend going on in Lake County, especially in Highland Park, where older individuals are staying in place; there needs to be a place for everyone to be able to be in this community. She noted that there is shortage of workforce housing and that is not easy for Highland Park to manage because it is mostly built out. She explained that the Solo-Cup property is one of the last, largest parcels in the City and she is glad that room is being made for those that make Highland Park a great place to live.

Tom Decker, Highland Park resident, expressed how grateful he is for the opportunity to speak and be a part of the conversation. He voiced his appreciation for the hard work that has been done to complete this project into something that is not a truck depot. He believes it will be good for the community and that he doesn't want one more thing, like the crosswalk, to be the thing that does not get the project approved.

William Dixon, Highland Park resident, stated that there will be a lot more traffic on Ridge Road and there will be a tot lot that will have a lot more kids present in the area. He noted that the crosswalk is proposed to be right on the curve and when drivers from the south come north, there is a wooded area where people potentially may pop out of that could cause issues. He believes that a sign will not be helpful and requested that the crosswalk be considered at a later time.

Councilmember Tapia noted that he had three issues of concern at the beginning of the conversation, but two have already been addressed in a meaningful way through discussion and planning. He voiced his concerns about the setback on the north side of the property and the impact on Bluegrass. He requested that the owner's concerns should continue to be considered as he is a successful business person and his business is an anchor in the area.

Mr. Zalar explained that the easement holder of the 28 parking spaces in the lot next to Bluegrass has easement rights and those rights need to be maintained. He noted that Bluegrass will have an additional 14 spaces available to his business after 5PM,

Monday through Friday and all day on weekends. He discussed how there is no irrigation in place as of right now, but it will be put in later and the developers will continue to protect the landscaping in the area.

Councilmember Bruckman stated that perfect is the enemy of good but this project is good for the community. She thanked PDC and staff for their hard work and dedication to the project. She stated that she has heard from the neighbors and understands their concerns regarding the safety of the crosswalk and intersections, but this will all be addressed through the traffic study. She voiced her appreciation for improving bike safety and the creation of an ADA-compliant path that was vetted by the City's Forester to ensure no harm will be brought to the landscape and trees. She reiterated that there have been letters of support and concern and the City has responded to enforceable conditions through the development agreement. She stated that she would be voting in favor of the project.

Councilmember Center noted that he has heard the concerns from Bluegrass and requested more review be completed to see if there is anything better than can be provided than what is there. He echoed Councilmember Bruckman's comments and voiced his appreciation for all the work. He stated that he is excited about this project, and it is fantastic on so many levels.

Councilmember Lidawer voiced her appreciation for everyone's efforts on this project and thanked the developer for the \$25,000 public benefit to be held in escrow. She noted that she is in support of the project and that it will bring much needed housing and affordable units for the community. She explained that the development has received a number of significant variances and noted that a better public benefit could be provided based on these decisions. She fought for R7 zoning instead of mixed zoning, but due to the timing needed to approve the project, she will be voting in favor but would like to ensure that the zoning be reviewed during the updating of the City's Comprehensive Plan. She requested that the crosswalk and any other similar items be considered during the traffic study and not implemented at this time. She discussed the need to reconsider the buffer area between Bluegrass and the parking lot for the development.

Mr. Zalar noted that the easement holder may have an opinion as it relates to the buffer but he agreed that this can be looked into further.

Corporation Counsel Elrod stated that this can be added as a requirement to be met but only if the easement holder allows it; if the easement holder does not agree to it, then the requirement would be voided.

Councilmember Lidawer moved to approve, by omnibus consideration, items A, B, E as written and items C & D as amended with the requirement that: 1) the crosswalk would be determined and reviewed at 90% capacity; and 2) Exhibit G of the Development Agreement would increase the buffer between Bluegrass and the parking lot only if allowed by the owner of the easement but if the owner does not agree, then the area will stay the same. Councilmember Tapia seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

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

XII. Adjournment

Councilmember Center moved to adjourn the City Council meeting. Councilmember Tapia seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, Mayor Rotering declared the motion passed unanimously.

The City Council adjourned its meeting at 9:19 PM

Respectfully Submitted,

Ashley Palbitska
Assistant to the City Manager/Deputy City Clerk