

**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF
THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF THE CITY OF HIGHLAND PARK**

MEETING DATE: Monday, May 18, 2026
MEETING LOCATION: City of Highland Park Senior Center
1201 Park Avenue West, Highland Park, IL 60035

CALL TO ORDER

At 12:08 PM, Mayor Rotering called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call:

PRESENT: Mayor Rotering, Councilmembers Bruckman, Ross, Tapia, Lidawer, Blumberg

ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: City Manager Neukirch, Public Works Director Bannon, Community Development Director Fontane, Assistant City Manager Jason, Police Chief Jogmen, Finance Director McCaulou, Fire Chief Schrage, Assistant City Manager Taub, Communications Manager Bennett

Councilmember Tapia joined the meeting at 12:13 PM

Councilmember Center joined the meeting at 12:18 PM

SCHEDULED BUSINESS

The Mayor welcomed attendees and provided the history of these special workshops.

City Manager Neukirch reviewed the agenda for the workshop and indicated that a PowerPoint was prepared to guide the discussion covering a myriad of topics. Committee feedback was requested on the various proposals and initiatives as it pertains to Fiscal Year 2027 planning.

1. Mission & Priorities

City Manager Neukirch reviewed the City's mission and priorities.

The Council reviewed the 2026 priorities (Fiscal Stability, Public Safety, Infrastructure Investment, Economic Development, Environmental Sustainability, Vibrancy).

The Council discussed the mission for FY2026 as follows:

The mission of the City of Highland Park, Illinois is to provide high-quality municipal services in an efficient and fiscally responsible manner through effective, transparent, collaborative, and inclusive governance.

The Council discussed the priority of Vibrancy and changing Public Safety to Community Safety.

After much Council discussion, the majority of Councilmembers agreed to the following:

- Retain the mission as-is

- Replace Infrastructure Investment with Infrastructure

2. City of Highland Park Values Statement

Each year the City Council reviews its Values statement. As requested by the Council several months ago, the Human Relations Advisory Group most recently reviewed the City's Statement Against Hate and Values statement. A report and recommendation will be forthcoming to the Council at a Committee of the Whole meeting for Council discussion and approval.

3. Multi-Year Major Project Work Plan Brainstorming Session

The Council provided input on strengths of the City, where we are constrained or underperforming, and opportunities. The information will be compiled with initiatives supported by the Council to be added to a future multi-year work plan.

4. Review of Select Initiatives

Helistop Private Rental

An overview of the use of the City's helistop was provided. The helistop is only used for EMS purposes to transport critically ill patients in coordination with HP Hospital and Lake Forest Hospital. The Council was supportive exploring private rental of the helipad subject to limitations. A follow-up formal report and recommendation will be provided at a future meeting.

IGA between the City of Highwood and Highland Park re: Fire/EMS Service

An update was provided to the Council on the termination that Highland Park provided Highwood pursuant to our IGA. It was noted that the City will provide a reminder about termination each year. The Council recommended including information to the effect of, "Each year Highwood delays the decision to duly compensate Highland Park as previously community, the proposed rate will increase to cover the shortfall over this five-year period".

Ravinia District TIF Update

Staff recommended use of the remaining and anticipated incremental TIF funds for the balance of the term for the following:

- Water/sewer/curb/gutter/crosswalks
- Bollards for public safety
- Parking along Burton (29 spaces)
- Bump outs along Roger Williams

Council supported the recommendation as well as consideration of the following:

- Sidewalk consideration along Jens Jensen Park
- Gateway lighting

There was an interest in murals, although staff indicated that based on past feedback, the businesses were entertaining advancing with murals on their properties on their own.

5. State of City Finances and Financial Plans

City Manager Neukirch and Director McCaulou presented a number of recommendations and information pertaining to the following financial plans and policies. The Council was supportive of the policies and recommended action items, unless otherwise noted.

- Budget FY 2027 calendar
- Total Long-Term Liability Trend and Financial Indicators
- 10-Year CIP & Debt Planning Efforts
- Pension & OPEB Contribution Strategy
 - Council supported the recommendations as drafted; \$.6M for IMRF; \$9.5M for public safety pensions and \$.6M for OPEB.
- Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF)
 - The Governor has proposed a reduction in contributions from 6.47% to 6.28%. In 2025, the City collected \$5.4M. Staff indicated a flat revenue projection in terms of dollars.
- Insurance Costs
 - The City, consistent with other municipalities, will experience significant increases in 2027 renewal rates. The increase is estimated to be 19.8% for PPO and 18.2% in HMO which equates to an approximate \$1.083 increase.
 - Staff has initiated an insurance committee to brainstorm opportunities to help offset financial impacts to the City.
- The Council affirmed the following policies, which were recommended for approval with no changes from the prior year.
 - Budget Policy
 - Fund Reserve Policy
 - Investment Policy
 - Purchasing Policy
- Policy Considerations Impacting Revenue
 - Tax Levy – The City Council affirmed the proposed tax levy as part of the 10-year tax levy plan.
 - Inquiry about the tax rate and what it equates to in dollars.
 - Water and Sewer Rates – The Council affirmed the five-year rate plans for the 2027 budget process. Benchmarks were also shared with the Council.
 - Select Municipal Taxes such as grocery tax, F&B tax, auto rental, motor fuel, natural gas and others. The council affirmed the tax rates.

- Staff conducted preliminary research on a variety of taxes and fees and presented recommendations for the following topics. Recommendations were approved unless otherwise noted:
 - Possible increase home rule sales tax – Support for .5% increase with sunset after 5 years to be dedicated for capital.
 - Streaming tax – no support to advance.
 - Voluntary Sewer Lateral Cost Share Program
 - Lab Analysis Fee
 - Push Carts and Animal Drawn Vehicles Minimum Fine
 - Auction Sale Special Permit
 - Non-Refundable Charitable Games Application Fee
 - Failure to obtain a business registration
 - Auctions and Auctioneers License
 - Food & Drink Sales Permit Fines
 - Regulated Rental Dwelling Registration Fee
 - Building Code
 - Alarm Systems – Recommendation to increase fine to \$500 for penalty for 6th false alarms per year or more.
 - Dogs, Cats and Other Animals

Councilmembers Bruckman and Center departed at 4:35 PM.

OTHER BUSINESS

The Council also discussed vendor fees and agreed to provide a discount on vendor fees for businesses who participate as a vendor at a festival within a short distance (to be defined) from their permanent place of business. A discount for Highland Park business is also encouraged. A follow-up staff report and recommendation will be drafted for formal Council consideration.

Mayor Rotering requested the City continue to focus on accessibility, and requested consideration of the short term rental program. It was noted that an ADA transition plan is underway and STR will be discussed at an upcoming Committee meeting.

Upon request, staff provided a brief update about Miss Nitro's location; Council provided additional locations for staff consideration. This policy discussion is scheduled for the June 29, 2026 Committee meeting.

An inquiry was expressed about the timing for revisiting the restaurant/business grants. The topic is tentatively scheduled for the October 13, 2026 Committee of the Whole meeting.

A request was made to add gateway signage in the downtown district.

An inquiry was made about the number of mural applications made to date. The City has received two applications to date.

Information was discussed about the City's transit program.

Information was discussed about the rationale to remove the Ravinia Festival bus stop from the Ravinia District. It was agreed that public engagement will be conducted this year to residents and businesses, the City will coordinate with Ravinia Festival and consider an adjustment to the bus schedule for the 2027 year.

Appreciation was expressed for the Council and Staff.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilmember Blumberg moved to adjourn. Councilmember Lidawer seconded the motion. Upon a roll call vote, the Mayor declared the motion passed unanimously.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned its meeting at 5:03 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ghida S. Neukirch
City Manager