A regular meeting of the Kalamazoo City Commission was held on Monday, February 3, 2025 at 7:01 p.m. in the City Commission Chambers at City Hall.

Roll Call

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:	Mayor David Anderson Vice Mayor Jeanne Hess Don Cooney Qianna Decker Stephanie Hoffman Chris Praedel
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:	Alonzo Wilson

Also present were City Manager Jim Ritsema, City Attorney Aaron Leal, and City Clerk Scott Borling.

Commissioner Excused

Vice Mayor Hess, seconded by Commissioner Decker, moved to excuse the absence of Commissioner Wilson. With a voice vote the motion passed.

Invocation

The invocation, given by Father Robert Creagan, St. Augustine Cathedral, was followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Proclamations
2025-06-01

Commissioner Hoffman proclaimed February 11, 2025 *National 2-1-1 Day* in the City of Kalamazoo. A representative from Gryphon Place received the proclamation.

2025-06-02

Vice Mayor Hess proclaimed February 7, 2025 *Wear Red Day* in the City of Kalamazoo. Caleb Porter from the American Heart Association received the proclamation.

Adoption of the Agenda

By unanimous consent the City Commission adopted its meeting agenda as presented.

Public Comments

Next, when an opportunity was given for general public comments, the following people addressed the City Commission:

Ryan Smith, City resident, spoke about a mutual aid group that helped the homeless. Mr. Smith thanked the City for providing shelter for the unhoused during the recent cold spell, and he urged the City to continue funding programs and providing resources for the unhoused.

Angela stated she was unhoused and spoke about the challenges facing people without housing. Angela expressed concern about how funding for the homeless was being used, and she stated there were gaps between the unhoused and services for the unhoused that needed to be closed.

An anonymous speaker offered remarks on safety issues facing the unhoused and urged the City to allow them to use electrical outlets on public property to charge their phones. The speaker expressed appreciation for the City's efforts to help the unhoused.

Shona Espinoza, City resident, spoke about the need for a 24-hour shelter and asked the City to stand up to the current federal administration to ensure the needs of the unhoused were addressed. Ms. Espinoza stated Commissioners needed to be held accountable for the things that needed to be done.

Public Comments (cont'd)

Jeremy Herman asked the City to listen to the unhoused and consider how to meet their needs. Mr. Herman stated the City needed to protect residents from the current federal administration, and he said the City was not acting fast enough to address needs.

Jeff Messer, City resident, reported Housing Resources, Inc. was opening a pilot warming center on Maple Street in one week. Mr. Messer stated the warming center would be open on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1-4 p.m.

Tina, a City resident, asked the City to save the green space in her neighborhood. Tina distributed pictures of flooding in her neighborhood on January 31st, and she asked that the City Commission resume call-in public comments. Tina observed that some people froze to death during the recent span of cold weather.

Drew Duncan, City resident, stated the City lacked imagination regarding solutions to the housing crisis, and he described the Motels for Now initiative in South Bend, Indiana. Mr. Duncan expressed concern about the 1,800 KPS students who were unhoused. Mr. Duncan invited Commissioners to visit South Bend with him, and he urged them to not open a shelter in Kalamazoo before looking at the South Bend model and their best practices.

Consent Agenda

Consent Agenda items were presented as follows with a recommendation to approve the items and authorize the City Manager to sign all related documents on behalf of the city:

- approval of a contract with Santiago Services for mowing and trimming of City parks and greenspaces in the amount of $175,280. **2025-06-03**

- approval of a budget allocation from the City Commission Initiatives Fund in the amount of $49,475 for water affordability advertising; and approval of a budget amendment to carry forward funds from 2024 to 2025 for this allocation. **2025-06-04**

- authorization for the City Attorney to settle a sewer backup claim with Iglesia Evangelica Misionera related to the property at 551 Phelps Avenue in the amount of $34,810.85. **2025-06-05**

Commissioner Hoffman, seconded by Commissioner Decker, moved to approve the consent agenda requests and authorize the City Manager to sign all related documents on behalf of the City.

With a roll call vote this motion passed.

AYES: Commissioners Cooney, Decker, Hoffman, Praedel, Vice Mayor Hess, Mayor Anderson

NAYS: None

Regular Agenda

Regular Agenda items were considered next.

2025-06-06
Engineering Contract for the Sustainable Biosolids Alternatives Project

Public Services Director James Baker delivered a presentation entitled *Kalamazoo Residual Biosolids Sustainable Alternatives: The Future of Solids Handling at KWRP. Presentation to the City Commission, 2-3-2025*. A copy of the slides from this presentation was filed with the papers for this meeting.

In response to questions and comments from City Commissioners, Director Baker provided the following information:

- the preferred biosolids handling process (Dryer and Energy Recovery System - ERS) would include a process for after-emissions treatment, and that emissions treatment process would be permitted through the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). Staff were consulting with experts in emissions, and that treatment process would employ technology similar to the catalytic converter on a car. There will be no emissions into the community.

- 200 tons of biosolids, which were 23% dry, are being hauled from the Kalamazoo Water Reclamation Plant (KWRP) each day. The preferred solution would improve those numbers to 6 tons per day that are 98% dry, which would greatly reduce the volume of sludge being hauled through the City.

- if the project goes according to plan, construction will take place from 2026-2030, with the system going online in 2030 or 2031.

- the preferred solution would require construction of a new facility at the Kalamazoo Water Reclamation Plant (KWRP), just north of the current administration building.

- the City's biosolids were not used in field applications for several reasons: 1) there are grow restrictions around fields where biosolids have been applied; 2) the City does not do the testing required for field application; and 3) the standards change – what is acceptable today might not be acceptable tomorrow.

- currently the City spends $13.5 million per year to haul and dispose of biosolids. The project will not be complete before the current hauling contract expires; the City will need to renew that contract or go out to bid before the new system comes online.

- the total estimated cost for the project is between $130,000,000 and $150,000,000. This estimate includes construction plus the engineering work being recommended for approval tonight.

- the engineers are looking at ways to improve the reliability of the system, including the possibility of installing additional units to spread the workload. Staff are trying to be proactive with a plan for preventative, predictive, and planned maintenance.

- regarding efficiency, the preferred solution is a higher technology and not comparable to the City's current processes. The new process will include added steps, which will require additional staffing, but even with the cost for additional staffing the projected cost for the preferred solution is

2025-06-06
Engineering Contract for the Sustainable Biosolids Alternatives Project (cont'd)

approximately half the projected cost of continuing with the current solids handling process.

- grant/outside funding opportunities include the Clean Water State Revolving Fund, other state funds, federal funds, and direct legislative funding. Jones-Henry has a subject matter expert on staff that will help the City pursue funding opportunities.

- the current biosolids handling process is the largest source of odors at the KWRP. The Dryer/ERS solution is a closed system and will greatly reduce the potential for odors.

- there are other plants that use the Dryer/ERS system, including one in Wisconsin that staff have visited, and one that is currently being constructed in Warren, MI. Wyandot has constructed the dryer part of the system and is partnering with Warren for the other components of the process.

- the return on investment/payback period was hard to determine. Staff is estimating 10 years or less, but the actual figure will depend on the future growth of hauling and construction costs.

City Manager Ritsema thanked Director Baker for involving stakeholders in the solution evaluation and selection process. City Manager Ritsema compared this situation to the retiree healthcare situation where the City bonded to cover the costs for Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB), thereby exchanging an uncertain and escalating operational cost for a fixed debt service payment.

An opportunity was given for public comments on this item, but no comments were offered.

Commissioner Praedel, seconded by Commissioner Decker, moved to approve a professional service agreement with Jones & Henry Engineers LTD for the Kalamazoo Sustainable Biosolids Alternatives Phase 3 project in the amount of $12,375,000.

Prior to a vote on the motion, Commissioner Praedel observed that the high near-term cost for the project would be offset by long term operational cost savings. Commissioner Praedel stated it made him feel better that other water reclamation plants were using the proposed technology. Commissioner Praedel noted there was a high likelihood that sludge hauling costs would continue to increase. Commissioner Praedel expressed support for the motion.

Vice Mayor Hess noted landfills had end dates, which would force the City to find an alternative at some point in the future, and she stated it would be environmentally irresponsible to continue filling up a landfill with sludge. Vice Mayor Hess expressed support for the motion.

With a roll call vote this motion passed 6-0.

AYES: Commissioners Cooney, Decker, Hoffman, Praedel, Vice Mayor Hess, Mayor Anderson

NAYS: None

City Manager's Report

City Manager Ritsema provided the following reports and updates:

- *Happy Cities* author Charles Montgomery was here last week; 300 people attended the community meeting with him on Friday.

- Tawuan Chestnut was promoted to Junior System Administrator in the Information Technology Department; Sergeant Justin Wolbrink was promoted to Emergency Preparedness & Resource Coordinator; Lieutenant Charles Mason was promoted to Executive Lieutenant in the Office of Professional Standards; and Lieutenant David Moren was transferred to the Office of Professional Standards.

Policy Items

Policy Items were considered next.

2025-06-07
Amendments to the Purchasing Policy

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Steve Vicenzi provided an overview of proposed changes to City Commission Policy 70.5, the *Purchasing Policy*.

In response to questions and comments from City Commissioners, CFO Vicenzi provided the following information:

- if there was a drastic cost increase, a purchase could be considered routine if the extra cost was anticipated in the budget. If the cost was not anticipated, there would need to be contract supplementals, which would come to the City Commission for approval.

- a contract with a new vendor would not receive special consideration, but if the contract was for a new service or product, it would be put forward to the City Commission for approval, as it would not yet be a routine item.

- a report on contracts approved by the City Manager under the new policy would be included in the agenda packet under the City Manager's Report.

- the current threshold for City Commission approval is $100,000; the proposed change would allow the City Manager to approve purchases over $100,000 that meet certain criteria, with no upper dollar limit.

- on tonight's meeting agenda, only the mowing contract would qualify for City Manager approval under the proposed policy.

Mayor Anderson suggested there should be an upper dollar limit to the City Manager's authority. Mayor Anderson expressed concern that the language of the proposed policy left the definition of key terms like "routine" and "operational" up to interpretation.

Commissioner Praedel expressed support for efficiency, but he suggested Commissioners expand this discussion beyond the proposed Purchasing Policy to the parameters for the Consent Agenda in general. Commissioner Praedel asked whether there was any interest in forming a smaller group to have this discussion.

Commissioner Cooney indicated he was uncomfortable with the proposed policy. Commissioner Cooney stated the new process might be more efficient, but it would be less transparent.

2025-06-07
Amendments to the Purchasing Policy (cont'd)

Commissioner Decker stated she liked having purchasing items on the Consent Agenda so she could see how the City was spending money, and she expressed concern that the proposed policy would eliminate the ability of the community to ask Commissioners questions about purchases. Commissioner Decker stated she was willing to serve on a subcommittee to discuss the Consent Agenda. Commissioner Decker suggested that Committee of the Whole meetings be used to discuss Consent items, especially now that the public was unable to move items from the Consent Agenda to the Regular Agenda.

Mayor Anderson pointed out the Public Comment portion of a business meeting came before the Consent Agenda; members of the public had an opportunity to speak to items on the agenda at that time.

Commissioner Praedel stated the Consent Agenda was for items that were non-controversial and did not require discussion, but there had been occasions when the Consent Agenda included items that became controversial or required discussion. Commissioner Praedel also noted there had been times when an item on the Consent Agenda was extraordinary, new, or a special initiative, and he thought it should have been on the Regular Agenda. Commissioner Praedel stated his consideration of the proposed Purchasing Policy made him think about evaluating the Consent Agenda and establishing clear parameters for the future. Commissioner Praedel stated he had talked with City Manager Ritsema, and there was no urgency for the Purchasing Policy amendments. Commissioner Praedel questioned whether the City Administration and City Commission would be open to further studying these topics and indicated he would appreciate the opportunity to be part of the discussions.

Establishment of a Purchasing/Consent Agenda Subcommittee

Mayor Anderson expressed support for creating a subcommittee, and he confirmed Commissioners Praedel and Decker as members. Mayor Anderson stated he would invite Commissioner Wilson to serve on the subcommittee, but he would serve if Commissioner Wilson was not able to do so. Mayor Anderson indicated members of the City Administration would be part of the discussions. There were no objections.

City Manager Ritsema requested clarification on the work of the subcommittee and observed that Commissioners had mentioned the Consent Agenda, the Purchasing Policy, and Committee of the Whole meetings as discussion topics.

Commissioner Decker suggested the subcommittee consider the following: 1) the definition of "ordinary" and "routine" business; 2) guidance around what should, and should not, go on the Consent Agenda; 3) the purpose and content of Committee of the Whole meetings and how those meetings could be used in connection with the Consent Agenda.

When an opportunity was given for public comments on this item, the following people addressed the City Commission:

> Jeff Messer, City resident, reported that until February 2019 the City Commission agenda packets included a written report of administratively approved purchases as part of the City Manager's Report. Mr. Messer suggested the amended Purchasing Policy explicitly say the report of purchases approved by the City Manager be a written report included in City Commission meeting packets.

Commissioner Comments	Next, an opportunity was given for miscellaneous comments from City Commissioners. Vice Mayor Hess explained the partnership with the author of *Happy Cities* was related to the Imagine Kalamazoo planning process and was not a statement that there were no problems in Kalamazoo. Vice Mayor Hess noted Cory Sellers spoke at a recent Martin Luther King Jr. Day event, and she remarked that people needed to choose community over chaos. Commissioner Cooney spoke about the importance of a supportive environment for the success of young people. Commissioner Cooney stated there were members of the community who were afraid and concerned about losing their supports, and he urged people to care for them. Mayor Anderson stated Commissioners and staff cared about flooding, but the City had low, swampy areas, and the solutions were very, very expensive. Mayor Anderson remarked that the City Commission continued to have housing as a focus area, and he noted there was no other entity in Kalamazoo County whose investment in affordable housing came close to the support provided by the City of Kalamazoo. Mayor Anderson clarified there were 1,800 unhoused students countywide across nine school districts, not just in the City of Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo Public Schools. Mayor Anderson suggested people also visit other jurisdictions in the county and advocate for affordable housing.
Adjournment	The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m. Scott A. Borling City Clerk Approved by the City Commission on: ____________________________

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