

**MELROSE CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 21, 2026 – 6:00 P.M.**

1. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Melrose City Council met in a Regular Meeting on Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. at the Melrose City Center pursuant to due notice being given thereof. Present were Council Members Mark Niehoff, Joelene Wieling, Mayor Joe Finken, Police Chief and City Point of Contact Craig Maus, Community Development Director Sheila Hellermann, Finance Director Jackie Niehaus, City Engineer Dave Blommel, and Streets/Parks Supervisor Andrew Rousslange. City Council Members Tony Klasen and Travis Frieler were absent. Mayor Finken presided thereat.

The Council then recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling, seconded by Council Member Niehoff, and unanimously carried to approve the agenda.

3. PRESENTATION

3a. Melrose High School Knowledge Bowl State Champions Recognition

Congratulations to the Melrose High School Knowledge Bowl Team for their accomplishment as the 2026 Minnesota Class A State Knowledge Bowl Champions!

Members of the team include:

Eric Sundermann, Andru Stalboerger, Logan Kelzer, Ramona Lurken-Tvrdik, and Nina Prout.

Coach Bill Leraas gave a presentation to highlight the accomplishments of the team and individuals this season. The Melrose Knowledge Bowl Team has now advanced to the state tournament for 6 years in a row. They have also been the champions in 2023, 2025, and 2026. Four members of the championship team are seniors, and have contributed to multiple years of team success. Mr. Dave Hoyt is also present tonight, he serves as the assistant varsity coach and also runs the JV, middle school, and elementary Knowledge Bowl programs. Leraas stated this program cannot be done without a good group of people such as the support from Dave. The state Knowledge Bowl tournament took place on April 9 and 10. The first night, the team takes a test and they got a 47, which was the highest score of all the schools at the tournament, even though the teams compete in three divisions based on size. The team held their lead the whole next day, but were going into the final spoken round with a lead of only one point. This improved to a five-to-six-point lead by the end of the round and Melrose emerged with the championship. After the state tournament, the team also had the chance to compete in the National Knowledge

Bowl competition, which is an online competition with teams from Minnesota, Washington, and Colorado. Melrose placed second in this competition. Seven seniors will graduate from the program this year. Leraas thanked the Council for the recognition tonight and the Melrose emergency departments for their escort back into town after the tournament.

The Mayor and Council then provided certificates to the team and took a photo with the group.

3b. Melrose High School Speech State Tournament Qualifier and Champions Recognition

Congratulations to members of the Melrose High School Speech Team for their accomplishments advancing to the 2026 MSHSL State Speech Tournament, winning the team state championship, and the individual state champions!

Members of the team who earned individual state championships at the 2026 MSHSL State Speech Tournament include:

Esther Kapsner - Extemporaneous Reading
Teague Dusha - Great Speeches

Members of the team who advanced to the 2026 MSHSL State Speech Tournament include:

Ella Erdmann, Ava Wensmann, Aidan Kluempke, Lola Dusha, Emily Sand, Rebecca Welle, Ramona Lurken-Tvrdek, Hailey Hammond, Aria Hammond, Jada Rausch, Isaiah Gilk, Brinley Ritter, Stacy Timp, Brooke Ruoff, Annabelle Lester, and Zoe Hoeschen.

Coach Chloe Truebenbach and Team Captain Aidan Kluempke gave a presentation to highlight the accomplishments of the team and individuals this season. This is the third Speech state championship for Melrose, which is in a second-place tie for the most state Speech titles. There have been 13 individual state champions for Melrose since 2019, which includes 2 this year. The last time Melrose had two state champions was in 1998. Melrose has been the subsection champions consecutively since 2015 and the section champions consecutively since 2018. Before this, the last time Melrose was the section champion was in 1998. The team advanced 18 speakers to state, out of the 39 available spots in the section. At sections, they earned 153 points and the second-place team had 51.

There were 159 schools in Melrose's division this year, 94 schools that advanced to state, and 54 schools had speakers advance to finals. Brinley Ritter placed 8th in the state in Informative. Rebecca Welle placed 7th in Extemporaneous Reading in her ninth-grade year. Ramona Lurken-Tvrdek placed 7th in Extemporaneous Speaking. Ava Wensmann was 5th place in Creative, in only her second year in Speech. Isaiah Gilk placed 5th in Humorous Interpretation, Ella Erdmann placed 3rd in Creative, this is her third consecutive state medal, and she is in her junior year. If she secures another medal next year she will tie for second place for the most medals in state Speech history. Aidan Kluempke placed

3rd in Discussion, his second state medal. Jada Rausch placed 3rd in Humorous Interpretation, her second state medal. Lola Dusha placed 2nd in Dramatic Interpretation, which was her second state medal. Emily Sand placed 2nd in Extemporaneous Reading, her third state medal. Stacy Timp placed 2nd in Original Oratory. Esther Kapsner was the individual state champion in Extemporaneous Reading, this was her second state title in two years of Speech. She is the third person to be a state champion in two separate seasons for the Speech Team. And Teague Dusha was the individual state champion in Great Speeches, and this is his second state medal. The team earned their highest score ever, with the second highest score ever in state speech. Head Coach Mikayla Curry was not able to be in attendance tonight but she did provide a message as well. Curry stated that one of the best speech teams in the nation drove through Minnesota this year. She stated that their coach expressed her amazement with Melrose that we put kids in the arts up on a billboard for their accomplishment of winning state. Curry has had many coaches ask how the Melrose team gets so much support from their community. She said she feels bad telling them our team doesn't even have to ask to be recognized. We are so grateful to the city for your support of our team.

The Mayor and Council then provided certificates to the team and took a photo with the group.

3c. Braden Zimmer Eagle Scout Project Recognition

Congratulations to Braden Zimmer for completing his Eagle Scout Project for the Frisbee/Disc Golf Course at Sauk River Park! As part of the project, he has also collected excess funds that he has donated to the city for disc golf signage in the parks, which is reflected in Donation Resolution 2026-27 later on in the agenda. Thank you to Braden for his contributions to the community through his Eagle Scout Project and donation.

Zimmer gave a presentation on his Eagle Scout Project. He stated that one of the requirements for the Eagle Scout Project is to do something for the community. He and his friends enjoy playing disc golf. He noticed that the tee pads for the disc golf course at Sauk River Park were dirt and would get muddy after it rained. He thought it would be a good idea to lay down concrete tee pads to improve the playing experience. The concrete pads were completed last fall, and now he will have his Board review in July to decide if he officially becomes an Eagle Scout.

The Mayor and Council then recognized Mr. Zimmer for his work and took a photo with him.

4. OPEN FORUM

Mayor Finken then opened the floor to public comment. There were no members of the public who wished to comment.

5. CONSENT AGENDA

The following items were considered for approval under the consent agenda.

- a. Approval of the minutes from the Council's March 9, 2026 Special Joint Meeting with the Public Utilities Commission, the minutes from the Council's March 12, 2026 Special Joint Meeting with the Public Utilities Commission, the minutes from the Council's March 25, 2026 Special Joint Meeting with the Melrose Area Development Authority, the minutes from the Council's April 13, 2026 Special Joint Meeting with the Public Utilities Commission, the minutes from the Council's April 16, 2026 Local Board of Appeals and Equalization Meeting, the minutes from the Council's April 16, 2026 Regular Meeting, and the minutes from the Council's May 5, 2026 Special Joint Meeting with the Melrose Area Development Authority.
- b. Approval of Bills / Purchase Orders for the month of April
- c. Approval of Investments Report for the month of April
- d. Donation Resolution No. 2026-25 from American Legion Post 101 for \$1,000.00 for the Melrose Chamber of Commerce Riverfest
- e. Donation Resolution No. 2026-26 from Proliant Dairy Ingredients for \$500.00 for the Melrose Chamber of Commerce Riverfest
- f. Donation Resolution No. 2026-27 from Braden Zimmer for \$450.00 for his Eagle Scout Project in the Sauk River Park for the Frisbee/Disc Golf Course, for signage at the park

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling and seconded by Council Member Niehoff to approve the Consent Agenda. Mayor Finken and Council Member Niehoff voted in favor. Council Member Wieling also voted in favor but abstained from approving items d. and e. The motion was carried.

6. REPORTS

6a. Police Department Report

Police Chief and City Point of Contact Maus provided the following update. In April, the Police Department issued 17 citations, 62 verbal warnings, and no written warnings. There were 245 calls/requests for service for the month. Last year it was 350, so the Department is down over 100 calls/requests for service from April of last year. Overall, there have been 8 less calls/requests for service so far in 2026 than at this point in 2025. There were 15 agency assists, which was a slight increase. Now that school will be finishing soon, he encouraged residents to pay closer attention for kids on the road and driving, especially around the last few days of school. On May 29th there will be the parade following graduation. It usually starts around 8 to 8:15 and the route will be posted on social media.

If you have a golf cart or ATV, permits are required by the city for those vehicles. There is no cost to the permit, one just needs to be issued by state law. Dog and cat licenses are also due again soon. There are about 45 ordinance violations so far this year, which is slightly lower than 2025. The two new officers who were offered positions with the Police Department have both accepted and background checks have gone through, so they should start with the Department in June. Hopefully by September they should be trained in and working their regular schedules. Then the Police Department will be fully

staffed.

Council Member Niehoff asked what ordinance violations that the Police Department was looking for? Maus stated that junked vehicles and vehicles without tabs that are non-operational were a large part of the violations. They were also looking for appliances such as washers and dryers that are thrown out improperly and still sitting on a property rather than being removed, plus general debris. There were two ordinance violations that were going to be upgraded to a citation last year with a larger fine and those properties then came into compliance quickly.

6b. Community Development Director Report

Community Development Director Hellermann provided the following update. She has been working with businesses on the Commercial Rehab Loan Program to improve their exteriors and also residents to get them funding from the Stearns County Housing Trust Fund. It really makes a big difference to help get new siding or windows for a homeowner who needs them. We are still waiting on a decision for the Small Cities Development Grant. If the city gets funding from the grant this will allow for even more help for local residents in this manner. The Planning and Zoning Commission on Monday approved a plat between Centracare and Cura, so that will be coming to City Council soon, along with the variance that is on the agenda tonight. Next month, there will be a conditional use permit coming up for approval for the old Stearns Electric building that is being converted into the Merry Moose daycare. Next week Thursday, there will be a pre-construction meeting with Roach Development for their townhome project being built on Railroad Avenue. A shoutout to the Melrose Area Arts Council that they were awarded a grant for their mural project from the Central Minnesota Arts Board. The Sauk River Campground is almost completely full for this weekend. The Melrose Legion will going out to all the area cemeteries with their Honor Guard to commemorate Memorial Day.

6c. City Engineer Report

City Engineer Dave Blommel provided the following update. He and Streets/Parks Supervisor Rousslange drove around the city to get an overview of the condition of all the streets. They have not done this since 2024, so it has been a couple of years. He said that there was not great news to report, we have lost some ground on many streets over the years. As budget season approaches, he is going to see what numbers he can provide the Council for what it will take to catch up on street repairs, if possible. The Streets Projects for 2026 will be getting underway next week, doing the catch basins out on Daylight Court. The concrete crews will be out on June 8 through June 10. Survey crews were out today as well.

6d. City Point of Contact Report

Police Chief and City Point of Contact Maus provided the following update. For the Electric Department, there is an offer out for the Electric Line Supervisor, so we are hoping to get an acceptance back from the individual by next week. For the County Road 169 Project, the Electric Department was out there, doing underground work, and have that part

completed. They will now start removing the old overhead poles and lines. Thank you to anyone who was willing to take a pole, that makes things a lot easier for the Electric Department for hauling them away. Thank you for hanging flags for the weekend as well. The Streets/Parks Department put in the second pickleball court this week at Sauk River Park. The waste station for the campers is also being worked on. The Farmer's Market is setting up on June 3rd, that will be the first day that it is open for the season. For the Water/Wastewater Department, they are working towards a new Blower and Pump building at the Water/Wastewater Treatment Plant.

For the City Administrator hiring process, 31 applications were received. David Drown Associates will narrow things down to 8 to 10 candidates by June, and then on June 30th, interviews will be held in person with 4 to 6 candidates. An Ad Hoc Labor and Personnel Committee meeting was held this week, some of those items will be brought to the Council next month. A budget meeting or workshop day needs to be planned soon, as it is usually held in June. DDA would also like to set up a meeting around June 8th to evaluate the 8 to 10 candidates they would recommend to be selected from for the interviews on June 30th. PUC does have a regular meeting on June 8th, and DDA expects about a half day to evaluate candidates, so this meeting could go before the PUC meeting on that day. The Council decided to aim for 1:00 p.m. on Monday, June 8th to meet with the PUC and DDA.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7a. City of Melrose Quarterly Financial Report

Finance Director Jackie Niehaus presented. This is the Quarter 1 Financial Update for the city. Overall, the city remains in a stable financial position early in the year. Current activity reflects normal seasonal timing and spending patterns across departments. General Fund revenues are tracking at expected budgeted levels. Property tax revenues are typically distributed in June, July, and December, with a final settlement payment received in January. Local Government Aid is distributed in July and December. Individual expense categories continue to show both increases and decreases; however overall expenditure remains below the total budgeted level. Quarter-to-date net position is slightly below the prior year, primarily due to budgeted cost of living increases in wages, unplanned vehicle repairs, and higher snow removal costs resulting from a heavy winter season.

First quarter revenues total about 5.7% of the annual budget. Licenses and permits, fines and forfeitures, and miscellaneous revenues are performing ahead of prior year levels. Intergovernmental revenues and property tax settlements are expected later in the year. General Fund expenditures are tracking below budget across all departments through the first quarter. Quarter 1 net income is slightly lower than last year. Net position is expected to improve significantly as property tax settlements and Local Government Aid payments are received later in the year. Overall financial position remains strong despite timing of major revenue receipts.

Other fund highlights include the MADA Fund, which received a transfer from the General Fund, and has strong investment income. Fire Department charges revenue is at 16% of

budget for Quarter 1 of 2026, and Ambulance net income is consistent with the prior year, and revenues are at 29% of the budget.

As we look ahead, staff will be making sure expenditures align with 2026 strategic priorities, enhancing investment performance while maintaining liquidity, evaluating long-term public safety capital replacement needs, and supporting long-term financial planning.

7b. Pay Equity Discussion - Supervisors

Police Chief and City Point of Contact Maus presented. At the May 20, 2026, Ad Hoc Labor and Personnel Committee meeting, the Committee decided that a special meeting of the Public Utilities Commission would be held on May 27, 2026 at 6:30 A.M. to discuss on-call and callback compensation.

7c. City Administrator Bridge Plan

Police Chief and City Point of Contact Maus presented. Finance Director Jackie Niehaus has prepared proposed wage increases for employees for additional duties as part of the City Administrator Bridge Plan. At the May 20, 2026, Ad Hoc Labor and Personnel Committee meeting, the Committee decided that more details were needed before bringing any wage increases to a vote at a later meeting.

7d. MOU for Craig Maus

Police Chief and City Point of Contact Maus presented. Maus has been serving as the point of contact for the City since the City Administrator position became vacant on April 3, 2026. At their February 24, 2026 Special Joint Meeting, the City Council and PUC discussed a compensation structure for Maus for the additional duties the point of contact role would entail. A MOU has been prepared to provide additional compensation to Maus. At the May 20, 2026, Ad Hoc Labor and Personnel Committee meeting, the Committee decided that more details were needed before bringing this MOU to a vote at a later meeting. Council Member Niehoff asked whether if the Bridge Plan and MOU for Maus are approved, whether employees will be back paid? Mayor Finken responded that yes they would be back paid.

8. ACTION ITEMS

8a. 2026 Property Insurance Renewal

Finance Director Niehaus presented. The City received their annual quote for general liability, errors and omissions, auto, equipment, and property insurance through the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust (LMCIT) for the period of May 15, 2026 - May 15, 2027. The total quote is \$170,445, up from \$158,624 for the 2025-2026 coverage. The cost for the premium is shared between the General at 34% and Utility Funds at 66%.

Significant changes include an increase in the electric utility property and the increase in

vehicles on the auto schedule. The overall premium is up 7.45% from the prior year. According to the League underwriters, this is due to:

- A. Property coverage increased 8.17% mainly due to an increase for electric utility property.
- B. The mobile property premium is up 6.10% as this is tied to the manual premium for property.
- C. First Party Cyber and Municipal liability premium are up due to a 3.14% rate increase.
- D. Auto liability is down 3.95% and Auto Physical Damage is up 13.06% due to a change in the deductible credit and a decrease in experience mod.
- E. Our liability experience mod had an increase of 4.31% from last year.
- F. The auto experience mod had a 9.09% decrease from last year.

Council Member Niehoff asked whether the downtown Jennie-O property would increase the quote once that property is transferred to the city? Finance Director Niehaus said that she believes that would change things but she would need to get another quote once that happens.

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling, seconded by Council Member Niehoff, and unanimously carried to approve the insurance quote of \$170,445 to waive the monetary limits on municipal tort liability, to keep the deductible at \$5,000/\$15,000, and not purchase excess liability or equipment breakdown coverage.

8b. VAR 04-2026-101 Variance Request - 219 3rd Ave SW

Community Development Director Hellermann presented. The Melrose Planning and Zoning Commission acting as the Board of Adjustments and Appeals held a Public Hearing at 6 p.m. on Monday, April 27, 2026, for the purpose of giving consideration to a request on parcel # 66.36937.0007 (219 3rd Avenue SW). It granted the Variance would allow the use of metal siding with exposed fasteners on the accessory structure on the parcel. The existing Zoning Ordinance No. 1989-1-A as adopted with amendments in the Melrose Code of Ordinances in Section 211.06 (1) (1.4) and Section 604 outline the requirements for siding materials and accessory structures in residential districts.

The Affidavit of Publication of the Public Hearing Notice, which was published in the Star Post on April 15, 2026 along with the Affidavit of Posting of Notices of Public Hearing were presented at the hearing and are attached as supporting documentation. The planning report, as approved by the Commission, is attached.

Generally, you can use metal on roofs, not on sides. There were some circumstances with this property that are unique. The property was previously an industrial lot, and the shed preceded the house on this parcel. The Planning and Zoning Commission reviewed it. In our Zoning Ordinance, if there is a non-conforming structure, the property owner can maintain the structure, but they cannot replace it. So, if the shed were to be destroyed, it could not be rebuilt. Right now, the paint is peeling on the shed, and so the

property owners want to fix this and maintain the structure. The three standards to approve a variance request are reasonableness, unique circumstances, and neighborhood character. The Planning and Zoning Commission felt that this request satisfied each of these standards for approval, and so is recommending that the Council approve it.

A motion was made by Council Member Niehoff, seconded by Council Member Wieling, and unanimously carried to approve the variance request at 219 3rd Ave SW.

8c. Hiring of EMT

Ambulance Coordinator Gina Eggert is requesting approval to be given to the appointment of Adam Schmidt as an EMT to the Ambulance Department, starting at the Start Step on the 2026 wage schedule. Contingent upon successful completion of all NREMT licensing requirements.

A motion was made by Council Member Niehoff, seconded by Council Member Wieling, and unanimously carried to approve the hiring of Mr. Schmidt as an EMT as presented.

8d. Hiring of EMT

Ambulance Coordinator Gina Eggert is requesting approval to be given to the appointment of Ajay Amundson as an EMT to the Ambulance Department, starting at the Start Step on the 2026 wage schedule. Contingent upon successful completion of pre-employment physical with drug screen and a background check.

A motion was made by Council Member Niehoff, seconded by Council Member Wieling, and unanimously carried to approve the hiring of Mr. Amundson as an EMT as presented.

9. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

9a. The next City Council meeting will be held on Thursday, June 18, 2026, at 6:00 P.M.

Police Chief and City Point of Contact Maus stated that he would be on vacation that week, so he will need someone to step in for him at the meeting.

10. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling, seconded by Council Member Niehoff, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:46 P.M.



CONNOR KOCKLER – CITY CLERK