

**MELROSE CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING
THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 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, March 19, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. at the Melrose City Center pursuant to due notice being given thereof. Present were Council Members Mark Niehoff, Travis Frieler, Joelene Wieling, Tony Klasen, Mayor Joe Finken, City Administrator Colleen Winter, Community Development Director Sheila Hellermann, Police Chief Craig Maus, Finance Director Jackie Niehaus, City Engineer Dave Blommel, and Streets/Parks Supervisor Andrew Rousslange. Mayor Finken presided thereat.

The Council recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

3. OPEN FORUM

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

4. CONSENT AGENDA

4. The following items were considered for approval under the Consent Agenda.
 - a. Approval of Minutes
 - b. Approval of Bills/Purchase Orders
 - c. Approval of Investments
 - d. Step Increase for Lisa Braun

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

5. PUBLIC HEARING

- 5a. TB#2 LLC DBA True North Marketplace On Sale and Sunday On Sale Liquor License Application

The Melrose City Council held a public hearing to consider the request for an On-Sale and Sunday On Sale Liquor License made by TB#2 DBA True North Marketplace. A public hearing is required because of City Code Chapter 113 Liquor Regulations. The regulations require a public hearing before granting a new license or transfer of a license.

City Administrator Winter presented the Affidavit of Publication of the hearing notice which was published in the Star Post on March 11, 2026.

Mayor Finken then opened the floor to public comment and explained that this would be the time for anyone to present any comments or concerns about the proposed license. There were no members of the public who wished to comment.

5b. Drainage and Utility Easement Vacation – KL Plat No. 1

The Melrose City Council held a public hearing to consider a request by Leon and Mary Klaphake to vacate drainage and utility easements that will not be needed between Lot 3 and Lot 4, Block 2, of KL Plat No. 1. The Melrose Public Utilities Commission at its March 9, 2026, meeting reviewed the request and has no issue with the Council approving the vacation of the easements.

Community Development Director Hellermann presented the Affidavit of Publication of the hearing notice which was published in the Star Post on March 4th and March 11th. She also presented the Affidavit of Mailing and Posting of Notice of Hearing, which was posted and mailed on February 26, 2026 to all property owners within 350 feet of the easement area.

The owners of the lots would like to start construction of a new home this spring. They would like to build across the existing lot lines. All services to these lots were run in the front (city water, sewer and electric & Centerpoint) and in the back (Charter). There are no utility services running in between the lots at this time. Jeremy Schrantz, Water & Wastewater Supervisor and Justin Lundblad, Electric Line Lead, reviewed the request and had no concerns.

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

5c. Small Cities Development Program (SCDP) Application Public Hearing

Community Development Director Hellermann presented. As the City moves forward with the second, and final stage of applying for Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Small Cities Development Program funds, it needs to hold a Public Hearing on its intent to apply. The public is invited to speak and ask questions in accordance with the Citizen Participation Plan. The Affidavit of Publication of the hearing notice was published in the Star Post on March 4th and March 11th.

The city's application will be to rehab 20 units of single-family owner-occupied or rental housing within the City of Melrose. The total request is for \$575,000 of which \$500,000 will be used to rehabilitate 20 homes, and \$75,000 will be used for the administration of the grant funds. The Stearns County Housing & Redevelopment Authority has agreed to administer the program if the application is successful. The previous SCDP award to the City of Melrose was limited in its success, because of the narrow area it applied to and the low-income limits. This round the entire city is eligible, and income limits include low-

and moderate-income households.

The city has been doing bilingual messaging, 400 surveys were delivered to houses on Saturday. There was good participation and return of the surveys. Landlords have been interested in this program and have returned their surveys as well. Commercial and public facilities can also be eligible for this program, but there are additional requirements, so the city's application will just focus on owner-occupied and rental single-family homes.

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

6. REPORTS

6a. Police Department Report

Police Chief Maus provided the following update. In March the Police Department issued 16 citations, 79 verbal warnings, and 14 written warnings. In 2026, there was 325 calls or requests for service, there were 201 in 2025. This increase is largely due to rental inspections in February. There were 11 agency assists. There is a new officer in the background process right now. The hiring process for the 6th and final officer position to be filled will be starting soon, potentially in the next few weeks. As of the start of this meeting, all of the squad cars are complete and road ready. He spoke with the Electric Department and DSC Communications about moving an old emergency siren to a new pole as discussed at the January City Council meeting. The idea was to move an older siren that is being replaced this year to a new pole and so increase the number of operating emergency sirens in the city from 4 to 5. This would cost about \$15,000, and installing another new siren would cost around \$23,000. DSC was concerned about programming the old siren, and so they are not recommending this course of action. The new siren that will be installed this year has arrived and is awaiting installation.

There are some current ordinances that are not used ever or not used often. Police Chief Maus asked whether the Council was willing to remove some old ordinances. For example, there is an ordinance that sidewalks abutting private property should be cleared by property owners within 24 hours of snowfall. This is not something that has been enforced. He stated that it would likely require a public hearing to remove these ordinances.

Council Member Klasen said he would be in favor of removing ordinances from the books that are not needed, so there are not so many rules for everything. He stated that in this case it is a tough decision, as the people who can remove snow are doing so, and there may be people cleaning the snow because of the ordinance language. Removing the ordinance could potentially reduce the number of people who are clearing snow. There was further discussion about the ordinance and snow clearing during the winter.

City Administrator Winter stated that codification and updating of ordinances is something that has been allocated in the budget for 2026, this has not been done for several years now. As part of that process, she recommends that a committee be formed to go through

the ordinances and clean them up.

Council Member Wieling stated that sometimes people do not realize that they are responsible for certain areas. She said that providing further education to residents about ordinances and responsibilities would be a good move.

6b. Community Development Director Report

Community Development Director Hellermann provided the following update. Work continues on the downtown Jennie-O redevelopment project. A real estate closing is almost finished for that, and an item is on the agenda at the meeting tonight. This is the time of year when decisions are coming in on grant applications. DEED has awarded the city \$669,770 for the demolition of the downtown Jennie-O building, which is great news.

March 13 was the deadline to apply for a childcare facility grant. Work has been ongoing on this front for some time now. Last year, a coalition of partners started discussions on the daycare problem in the city and the lack of daycare spots. Meetings were held with major employers and schools in the area to gauge their interest. Stearns Electric announced at the Chamber of Commerce meeting that in partnership with the city, they have submitted a childcare grant to create a childcare facility at 900 Kraft Drive, the former Stearns Electric location. By the time this grant application was submitted, there were 12 community partners who submitted letters of support for the project.

Homeowners who are looking to add to their properties should remember to get permits from the city. They can email or stop by the City Center. This includes decks, porches, driveway expansions, and sheds. It is easy to forget but permits are needed for smaller things too.

6c. City Engineer Report

City Engineer Blommel provided the following update. Soil borings were completed ahead of the 2026 Streets Projects work commencing. The borings came back good so that should help with our bids compared to issues that were encountered for projects last year after the borings. A patch at 11th Avenue NE (Daylight Court) will also be looked at.

6d. City Administrator Report

City Administrator Winter provided the following update. Though she would usually give a regular report here, since it is her last report before moving on to a new position she stated she wanted to share what being City Administrator of Melrose has meant to her. She said that it has been the most demanding and rewarding chapter of her career. In this role one is the city administrator and utilities manager at the same time. Her goal when starting was not just to manage the day to day, but to leave the city better prepared for the future than how she found it.

When she first started as City Administrator, the city was working with the DNR on potentially replacing the fixed dam with an arch rock rapids. It was a controversial

proposal and it had the potential to affect all the homeowners living along the Sauk River. She remembers going to the state legislature and turning down the funding for the rapids, but from the same funding source, the current Sauk River Park plan was able to be completed. The whole process took about 22 months to complete and reroute the river and put in a new bridge, and complete the new park. The wastewater plant project was being worked on at this time as well, and the city was able to secure very favorable interest rates on financing to get that project done.

In 2020, the city convened a retreat and identified housing as an important goal for future development. That goal has succeeded as well. 102 multi-family units and 21 single family houses have been built in the city in the last six years. There are 32 new units that are also being built now on the west side of the city. This development also includes mixed-used buildings, such as the apartment building next to the city center with commercial space which is being rented out. There are also many more exciting development opportunities taking place in the city right now, such as the downtown Jennie-O redevelopment and the childcare center.

These achievements are never just the work of one person. It is the result of a city council who is willing to support projects and the tireless work of staff and consultants who work on getting these projects done. The best measure of our success is that there has been \$89 million of private investment in our community in the last six years. That equates to jobs and people living in the city. As a city and utility, \$32 million has been invested in our community as well from sources including legislation, grants, state and federal programs and taxes. The public does not always see the sheer amount of work that it takes to get projects over the line and completed.

To the city staff, she stated that they are the heartbeat of the community. People on this team have stayed late to double check numbers, they've made sure to get questions answered that people have. They have knocked on doors to check on people, and plowed streets longer than they had to, ensuring that the job would be done and roads would be safe. She stated that city staff have helped her to do a better job and challenged and supported her. We've never lost sight of why we are here, to serve Melrose. Her biggest pride is the culture of excellence and the friendships that she has built here. Thank you for the trust you have placed in her. It has been the privilege of her career to work with everyone here.

Mayor Finken stated his appreciation for City Administrator Winter's dedication and that she is not afraid to tell him and the Council what she really thinks. We have accomplished a lot here because we can work together on things and be honest.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7a. Melrose Prosecution Contract Report 2025 – Stearns County Attorney's Office

Police Chief Maus presented. The Stearns County Attorney's Office has provided their report on diversion, juvenile, and criminal cases handled for the City of Melrose in 2025. He stated that the numbers for 2025 look consistent compared to what we have seen in

past years. One adult and one juvenile qualified for diversion programs in the city last year. The juvenile successfully completed the diversion program, but the adult chose court rather than the diversion program. There were 100 total adult and juvenile prosecutions for crimes committed in the City of Melrose in 2025. This included 22 felonies, 13 gross misdemeanors, and 65 misdemeanors. Within those 100 prosecutions, 51 were city contract cases, including 8 gross misdemeanors and 43 misdemeanors. He stated that Stearns County Attorney Janelle Kendall has offered to come out to Melrose to talk about this report further as well.

7b. Bench Program

Community Development Director Hellermann presented. The Park Board and city staff have been offering the bench program for several years. The cost of the benches now exceed sponsorship, however, the Park Board has recognized the value of the program, including the bench program in its 2026 budget. Currently individuals pay \$750 and receive a plaque on the bench and work with the Streets/Parks Department on a mutually agreed upon location. This has been well received around the city and the benches are being used.

Last year, at their 50th reunion, the Class of 1975 agreed to sponsor a bench. In looking around the community, they requested the bench be placed along the new County Road 168 sidewalk near the school. This is school property. Staff is looking for council approval to work with the school on placement up there. School leadership has no objection. This would be viewed as a donation on the part of the city. Thus far other benches have all been placed on city property.

Mayor Finken stated that he believes this is a wonderful program and he has no problem with having benches placed on school property as well as part of this program.

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling, seconded by Council Member Niehoff, and unanimously carried to affirm staff working with ISD #740 on city bench placement on school property.

8. ACTION ITEMS

8a. On Sale and Sunday On Sale Liquor License Application - TB#2 LLC DBA True North Marketplace

Earlier this evening, the Council held a public hearing regarding the application by TB#2 LLC DBA True North Marketplace for a On Sale and Sunday On Sale liquor license in the city. The Council gave consideration to this request. A background investigation by the Melrose Police Department has been completed and no records have been found. The City Clerk received all of the required documentation for these applications.

A motion was made by Council Member Frieler, seconded by Council Member Klasen, and unanimously carried to approve the liquor licenses as requested by TB#2 LLC DBA True North Marketplace.

8b. Tobacco License Application – Elia 1 DBA Melrose Tobacco

The Council gave consideration to an application by Elia 1 DBA Melrose Tobacco for a tobacco license in the City. A background investigation by the Melrose Police Department has been completed and no records have been found. The City Clerk received all of the required documentation for this application.

A motion was made by Council Member Niehoff, seconded by Council Member Wieling, and unanimously carried to approve the tobacco license as requested by Elia 1 DBA Melrose Tobacco.

8c. Easement Vacation / Resolution No. 2026-16 Resolution Vacating Easement

Earlier this evening the Council held a public hearing to consider vacating drainage and utility easements between Lot 3 and Lot 4, Block 2 of KL Plat No. 1, located on Highlands Blvd NE. This process is pursuant to Minnesota Statute §412.851. Notice was published in the Star Post on March 4th and March 11th, 2026. Notice of the hearing was posted and mailed to property owners within 350 feet on February 26, 2026. A proposed resolution is attached, vacating the easement and, if approved, staff will record necessary documentation with the Stearns County Recorder.

A motion was made by Council Member Frieler, seconded by Council Member Klasen, and unanimously carried to adopt Resolution 2026-16 Resolution Vacating an Easement, vacating the drainage and utility easements.

8d. Resolution 2026-17 - Resolution Supporting Small Cities Development Program Grant Full Application

Earlier this evening the Council held a public hearing to review its application for the Small Cities Development program, including the city's goals in applying for the funds. The full application is due April 15, 2026. Last fall the council passed a resolution supporting the preliminary application. DEED, after reviewing the preliminary application, invited us to move forward with this application.

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling, seconded by Council Member Niehoff, and unanimously carried to adopt Resolution 2026-17 Resolution Supporting Small Cities Full Application, supporting a full application for Small Cities Development program funds for owner-occupied and rental single-family home rehabilitation.

8e. Restroom – Railroad West Park

Streets/Parks Supervisor Rousslange presented. The Park Board, at its February 4, 2026, meeting reviewed the plans and specifications for the Railroad West restroom. Two estimates have been received. At the February 26, 2026 Council meeting we delayed this action item while staff made sure both estimates included all the things we were looking for. Staff are recommending we go with the lowest bidder, which is Kraemer Lumber.

A motion was made by Council Member Wieling, seconded by Council Member Niehoff, and unanimously carried to authorize the construction of a restroom at Railroad West Park and select Kraemer Lumber as the contractor.

9. OLD BUSINESS

9a. Jennie-O Turkey Store Updated Agreement

Community Development Director Hellermann presented. At the Council's January 15, 2026 meeting it approved the donation agreement with Jennie-O. Some changes have been presented by the JOTS's legal team. The changes have been reviewed by City Attorney Joe Krueger. The changes mainly deal with re-affirming the environmental discussions which have taken place. In discussing it with Attorney Krueger, we felt it should be brought back to the council to confirm.

Council Member Klasen asked whether the meeting could be closed to talk about the agreement before approving it. He stated his concerns about the cost of the redevelopment. Community Development Director Hellermann stated that she did receive a separate proposed agreement for the Leedstone property as well, so that needs to be discussed at a separate meeting as well. This could be tabled and both agreements could be discussed at a separate meeting.

A motion was made by Council Member Niehoff, seconded by Council Member Klasen, and unanimously carried to table approval of the JOTS Updated Agreement until a later meeting could be scheduled for discussion.

9b. 2026 Street Improvements – Additional Services Supplemental Letter Agreement

City Engineer Dave Blommel presented. SEH has provided a Supplemental Letter Agreement for additional services as discussed at the last City Council meeting on February 26, 2026. This is to add some survey and design work and a bid package for the Main Street sidewalk replacement. The cost has gone up enough to necessitate bids being required versus getting quotes.

A motion was made by Council Member Frieler, seconded by Council Wieling, and unanimously carried to approve the Supplemental Letter Agreement for the 2026 Streets Project – Additional Services.

10. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

10a. Stearns County Commission Meeting in Melrose, Tuesday, April 7, 2026 at 6:00 P.M.

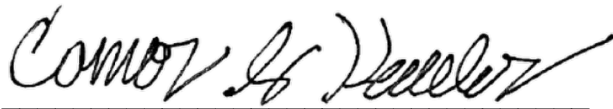
Steve Notch, the Stearns County Commissioner for our area is the new Board chair. Last

year the county commissioners decided to hold one board meeting a year outside of St. Cloud, in an evening, to encourage residents to attend. At the invitation of the mayor and staff, the county commissioners will be holding their April meeting in Melrose. The date is Tuesday, April 7th, 2026 @ 6:00 P.M. here in our council chambers. This is an opportunity for Melrose residents and residents throughout the western side of Stearns County to attend a Stearns County Board of Commissioners meeting.

10b. The next City Council meeting will be held on Thursday, April 16 at 6:00 P.M.

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Council Member Frieler, seconded by Council Member Wieling, and unanimously carried to adjourn the meeting at 6:45 P.M.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Connor Kockler", written over a horizontal line.

CONNOR KOCKLER – CITY CLERK