

**MINUTES  
CITY OF DEKALB  
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING  
JUNE 23, 2025**

The City Council of DeKalb, Illinois, convened for a Regular meeting on June 23, 2025, in the Yusunas Meeting Room of the DeKalb Public Library, 309 Oak Street, DeKalb, Illinois.

**A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

Mayor Barnes called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

City Clerk Brad Hoey called the roll, and the following members of the City Council were present: Alderman Barb Larson, Alderman Tracy Smith, Alderman Justin Carlson, Alderman Andre Powell, Alderman Mike Verbic, Alderman John Walker, and Mayor Cohen Barnes. Alderman Carolyn Zasada was absent.

Others in attendance included City Manager Bill Nicklas, Assistant City Manager Bob Redel, City Attorney Matt Rose, and Recording Secretary Ruth Scott.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Shadow Gentry led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**C. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Mayor Barnes asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

MOTION: Alderman Verbic moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Alderman Larson.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

**D. PRESENTATIONS**

**1. Honoring Fire Chief Mike Thomas for 30 Years of Service to the City of DeKalb.**

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of Fire Chief Thomas' achievements throughout his career with the City of DeKalb, which started in July of 1995, based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

Alderman Walker stated Fire Chief Thomas is a great man and thanked him for everything he's done for DeKalb.

Alderman Larson reminisced about meeting Fire Chief Thomas when she became an alderman and noted how lucky the City of DeKalb is to have had him here for so many years.

Alderman Verbic also reminisced about his history with Fire Chief Thomas and thanked him for everything he's done for the City of DeKalb.

Alderman Smith told Fire Chief Thomas it's been a pleasure working with him over the years.

Alderman Carlson thanked Fire Chief Thomas for keeping his family and friends safe.

Alderman Powell thanked Fire Chief Thomas for his service to the City of DeKalb.

Noting how important family is to those that serve the City of DeKalb, City Manager Nicklas introduced Fire Chief Thomas' wife, Jill.

Mayor Barnes congratulated Fire Chief Thomas on his career with the City of DeKalb, noting he will be leaving a lasting legacy for years to come.

Fire Chief Thomas thanked the City of DeKalb for providing him with a long and fulfilling career, of which he is very proud. He also thanked Mayor Barnes, the City Council, and City Manager Nicklas for their faith in him, and the Executive Team for being outstanding to work with.

Continuing, Fire Chief Thomas thanked the members of the Fire Department, including the administrative staff, for their support and hard work every day, which has made his job easier. He also thanked the DeKalb community for their support and gratitude over the years.

Concluding his comments, Fire Chief Thomas thanked his wife, Jill, and his family for their sacrifice and support during his career.

Fire Chief Thomas was then presented with a plaque commemorating his service to the City of DeKalb.

#### **E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was none.

#### **F. APPOINTMENTS**

Mayor Barnes read the appointment and reappointment by title only.

1. Appointing Justin Keck to the Citizen Police Review Board for the Completion of a Two-Year Term through December 31, 2026.
2. Reappointing Shaun Langley to the Citizens' Environmental Commission for the Completion of a Two-Year Term through December 31, 2026.

MOTION: Alderman Carlson moved to approve the appointments; seconded by Alderman Larson.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

#### **G. CONSENT AGENDA**

Mayor Barnes read the items on the Consent Agenda by title only.

1. Minutes of the Regular City Council Meeting of June 9, 2025.
2. Accounts Payable and Payroll through June 23, 2025, in the Amount of \$4,911,949.73.
3. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report – May 2025.

MOTION: Alderman Smith moved to approve the Consent Agenda; seconded by Alderman Powell.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

#### **H. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

1. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report ("CAPER") for Program Year 2024/2025 (April 1, 2024 - March 31, 2025).

Mayor Barnes opened the Public Hearing at 6:19 p.m.

No one from the public spoke to this item and there were no questions or comments from the Council.

Mayor Barnes closed the Public Hearing at 6:19 p.m.

## **I. CONSIDERATIONS**

There were none.

## **J. RESOLUTIONS**

1. Resolution 2025-069 Approving a Professional Services Agreement with Baxter & Woodman, Inc. for the Design, Permitting, and Bidding of a New Shallow Well in the Amount of \$221,900.

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

MOTION: Alderman Larson moved to approve the resolution; seconded by Alderman Carlson.

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of this item based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

There were no questions or comments from the Council.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

2. Resolution 2025-070 Authorizing an Agreement with DeKalb Corn Classic and Kishwaukee Sunrise Rotary Club for the 2025 DeKalb Corn Classic 5k/10k and Taste of DeKalb Events on September 28, 2025.

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

MOTION: Alderman Smith moved to approve the resolution; seconded by Alderman Carlson.

Mayor Barnes noted he would be recusing himself from this item due to a conflict of interest.

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of this item based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

Alderman Larson and Alderman Carlson both noted what a great event it is.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 6-0-1-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker. Nay: None. Recused: Barnes. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

3. Resolution 2025-071 Approving a Bar Liquor License with Supplemental Licensure for Video Gaming for Spahiu Gaming, LLC, d/b/a Chips, 122 E. Hillcrest Drive (Sandhill Gaming (Illinois) LLC).

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

MOTION: Alderman Larson moved to approve the resolution; seconded by Alderman Smith.

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of this item based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

There were no questions or comments from the Council.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

#### **K. ORDINANCES – SECOND READING**

There were none.

#### **L. ORDINANCES – FIRST READING**

1. Ordinance 2025-028 Amending the City of DeKalb Municipal Code by Adding a New Chapter 56 “Municipal Grocery Retailers’ Occupation Tax and Municipal Grocery Service Occupation Tax”.

Mayor Barnes read the ordinance by title only.

Dewayne Brown expressed his non-support of adopting the 1% grocery tax in DeKalb, stating it is considered regressive and disproportionately affects lower-income households. He also stated that not instituting the tax will provide financial relief to residents, stimulate the local economy, increase retail spending and benefit restaurants.

MOTION: Alderman Carlson moved to approve First Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Larson.

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of this item based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

Stating the City has until October to decide whether or not to institute the tax, Alderman Verbic suggested taking this topic to the Finance Advisory Committee for discussion to see if there’s anything the City can do to offer relief. He added he thinks this particular change should be a last resort instead of a first resort.

City Manager Nicklas stated this topic was put before the Council for consideration because in six weeks they’ll be reviewing the proposed 2026 budget. Between now and then, City staff will be meeting to discuss personnel, equipment, and operational needs, as well as attempting to find ways to save money.

Continuing, City Manager Nicklas stated that the City of DeKalb operates with one of the smallest administrative overhead of any city of its size, adding there are employees doing the job of two or more. Therefore, waiting until October isn’t an option because there’s no time for staff to develop two budgets (one with the 1% grocery tax and one without).

Mayor Barnes clarified that the proposed tax isn’t an additional tax and already exists.

Alderman Larson stated no one likes taxes but they’re necessary to continue to provide services the community expects, such as snowplowing, repairing streets, replacing lead water pipes, purchasing replacement vehicles for the Police, Fire and Public Works departments, some of which are over 20 years old, and giving to area social service agencies.

Alderman Verbic stated a few years ago the City’s fund balance was approximately \$20,000 and now it’s approximately \$35 million, so he finds it difficult to ask residents for money. He’s also concerned that eventually the tax will be increased and wondered if a policy could be put in place to prevent that.

Alderman Carlson stated he doesn’t want to see a stall in the progress the City has made.

Alderman Smith stated that while streets in the Third Ward are being repaired, there are many more to be done, including an alleyway that even garbage trucks struggle to drive on.

Continuing, Alderman Smith stated that the proposed tax could go a long way to continue the momentum, adding he'd like to see another \$4 million budgeted for street repair.

Alderman Powell stated he believes there is a tax burden in Illinois and DeKalb County, but the grocery tax isn't necessarily the problem nor the solution. He then noted his support for the proposed tax.

Mayor Barnes reiterated that the City isn't instituting a new tax, adding that the real burden will be trying to find the funds if the tax isn't instituted. He noted that \$800,000 is critical for City operations because lead water lines need to be replaced throughout the entire City, residents need and expect Police and Fire services, human services funding has been increased to help those in need, streets need repair, City vehicles need to be repaired or replaced, and watermain breaks need to be fixed.

Mayor Barnes then commended City Manager Nicklas and the administrative staff for doing everything they can to operate as lean as possible. He noted that if the City had \$800,000 to cut out of its budget, then the Council should have done it four years ago, but it wasn't because the needs of the community must be fulfilled.

Concluding his comments, Mayor Barnes stated this matter is before the Council because the governor implemented the removal of the grocery tax, which didn't affect the state budget, and put that burden on Illinois municipalities.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 5-2-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Barnes. Nay: Verbic, Walker. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

MOTION: Alderman Carlson moved to waive Second Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Larson.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 5-2-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Barnes. Nay: Verbic, Walker. Absent: Zasada.

2. Ordinance 2025-029 Amending Chapter 64 "Smoking Regulations", Section 64.17 "Vending Machines", to Prohibit the Sale of Smoking Products from Vending Machines.

Mayor Barnes read the ordinance by title only.

Nicole Malek stated her minor children have been purchasing tobacco products from Rocky's Mini Mart and the BP gas station on Seventh Street. She added that the fines these businesses are receiving are minimal and not enough to protect the health of not only her children, but all children. Ms. Malek further stated that the school district continuously deals with the problem of vaping in the schools, adding that teachers can't teach because they're monitoring students to keep them from vaping. She noted there are even vape monitors in school bathrooms.

Concluding her comments, Ms. Malek stated this issue is a bigger problem than anyone realizes and requested that Rocky's and the BP be shut down, adding she will do whatever it takes to make it happen.

MOTION: Alderman Smith moved to approve First Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Verbic.

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of this item based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

Alderman Larson stated that some think vaping is better for them than smoking but don't realize that vape cartridges contain chemicals that are just as harmful as cigarettes, if not more so.

Alderman Walker thanked Ms. Malek for bringing her concerns before the Council, adding that he's had the same issue within his household. He then stated he wishes all smoke shops could be eliminated.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

MOTION: Alderman Walker moved to waive Second Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Powell. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

3. Ordinance 2025-030 Amending Chapter 52 "Offenses Against Public Peace, Safety, and Morals", by Adding New Section 52.20 "Sale of Illicit THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) Products and Kratom" to Prohibit the Sale of Illicit THC Products and Kratom.

Mayor Barnes read the ordinance by title only.

Ahmed Elfaki stated while he understands Ms. Malek's concerns, children will get the products wherever they can, if not in stores then off the street, which should be an even bigger concern. He then stated that banning the products will force the closure of many of the stores that sell them.

Hatem Mohsin, the owner of Rocky's, stated he abides by the law and pays taxes, adding that banning the sale of these products will affect his livelihood.

Ahmed Zeyad stated that banning these products will take the only source of income from his store and those he employs. He added that people are complaining that stores are selling to minors, but they are not and then stated if a minor comes into his store and provides a fake ID, he will sell to them because otherwise they will purchase the product on the street and no one knows what that item could be made of.

Continuing, Mr. Zeyad stated he doesn't believe that banning these products will solve the problem and asked the Council not to ban them, adding that store owners will pay more taxes to support the city of DeKalb if necessary. However, if the Council does decide to prohibit the products, then he requests at least six months to a year to sell his inventory and move his shops to another city that does support it.

James Freestrom stated that taking these products away from small businesses won't solve anything and will hurt the community in the long run. He also stated he's surprised that the sale of alcohol isn't being included if the Council is really concerned for the public's peace and safety. Mr. Freestrom further stated that minors will purchase the products from the street if they can't get them from a well-established reputable business and respectable source. Also, if the products are banned, these businesses will close and open in other communities.

Concluding his comments, Mr. Freestrom stated the stores shouldn't be held responsible for the actions of those under the age of 18 and that parents should have better control of their children.

Mayor Barnes then called upon Christopher Deaney, who had completed a Speaker Request form, but wasn't present.

MOTION: Alderman Carlson moved to approve First Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Larson.

City Manager Nicklas gave an overview of this item based on the information provided in the agenda packet.

City Attorney Rose explained that Kratom is a plant from Southeast Asia that doesn't contain THC but does have psychoactive elements that create a similar type of an effect in symptomology and is not regulated by the FDA. In Illinois, the sale of Kratom to anyone under the age of 18 is prohibited, adding that Kratom was included in this ordinance because there's been an enormous abuse of it recently that's been consistent with the same abuse noted with THC products that come from hemp. Every Illinois municipality that has banned THC-type products from hemp, such as Rolling Meadows, Highland Park, Waukegan, Orland Park, Naperville, and others, have also included a Kratom ban. He noted that the text of the ordinance is very similar to other Illinois municipality bans of similar products.

Mayor Barnes commended City Attorney Rose for adding the ban of Kratom to the ordinance and provided two instances where he's aware of people's lives being destroyed or lost due to complications from Kratom and addiction. Therefore, he believes this is a substance that needs to be taken off the street completely.

Alderman Larson stated the Council has received a lot of feedback from people who claim that Kratom has helped them. However, these products are not for human consumption, nor are they regulated, plus, medical studies have shown physical consequences.

Alderman Larson concluded her comments by stating this isn't about small businesses, nor is it about who's a good parent and who's not. Those who want these products should be speaking to their state legislature about getting them regulated.

Alderman Walker thanked Alderman Larson for the information she provided, stating he didn't know that the products in question were not meant for human consumption. He added that he takes issue with someone questioning another's parenting and asked the business owners in attendance if they ever think about the lives of the children and families that are being ruined by these products or if they are just worried about their families and friends and what's going to happen to them.

Continuing his comments, Alderman Walker stated he doesn't want anyone to be put out of business, but DeKalb has cannabis dispensaries that operate within the law and knowledge of the products they're selling.

Alderman Walker then asked three of the business owners in attendance to come to the podium.

Mayor Barnes stated they could come to the podium for a couple of minutes only because there were others in attendance who wished to speak.

Speaking to the business owners, Alderman Walker stated the Council wants every business to prosper but the ones in question are selling to DeKalb's children.

Mayor Barnes reiterated that the discussion needed to move forward so others could speak.

One of the business owners stated he'll go along with anything the law says, but he's worried about his income. It has nothing to do with children.

Alderman Carlson stated he's 420 friendly and he looked forward to the State of Illinois and DeKalb having dispensaries, however, everything, including alcohol, must be regulated.

Continuing, Alderman Carlson stated he recently purchased THC products from Rocky's, but no one checked his identification, noting that should never happen. He concluded his comments by stating things must be done the right way, and while he's sorry for the small businesses, they can't sell whatever the hell they want.

Mayor Barnes agreed, stating it comes down to regulation. Cannabis and liquor are regulated, but the products in question are affecting people's lives, and quite frankly, if someone has to

go to Sycamore to buy it, he's okay with that. Get in your car, drive somewhere else, and get it, but in the city of DeKalb it won't be allowed anymore.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

MOTION: Alderman Smith moved to waive Second Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Walker.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

Mayor Barnes commented that this is now the law in DeKalb.

## **M. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS**

### **1. Council Member Reports.**

Alderman Smith reported on continued road work being done in the Third Ward. He also noted that the remodeling at Target is near completion, and Sketchers is now open.

Alderman Powell reported that he attended a recent Fun Jam in the Park event, noting it was a great experience and encouraged residents to get involved. He noted that he realizes there's been some trouble in the area (Welsh Park), but there are still good people and children there.

Mayor Barnes commented that Alderman Powell funded the reptile truck that came to the park during the recent Fun Jam event and the children loved it. Alderman Powell also purchased tacos and burritos from Burritoville for the children to eat.

Alderman Walker asked if fines for businesses selling tobacco products to minors could be raised, to which Mayor Barnes agreed.

City Manager Nicklas stated an amendment to Chapter 64 "Smoking Regulations" could be brought before the Council at a future meeting to amend the fine amounts for violating the code.

There was confirmation that both the cashier and the store receive fines if they're caught selling tobacco products to minors.

Alderman Verbic reported on a recent productive meeting he attended with the downtown merchants, noting he learned a lot about what's happening downtown and is looking forward to next steps on a number of initiatives.

Alderman Carlson stated DeKalb is the only city in a 40 to 50 mile radius with a university, so it's not just DeKalb families that are affected by the sale of regulated or unregulated products to minors. He added it shows parents who send their children to Northern Illinois University that the City of DeKalb is opposed to selling regulated or unregulated products to minors.

Alderman Carlson also reported that he attended Pride Fest for the first time on June 21, and while it was very hot, there were a lot of attendees and he had a great time. He also encouraged residents to check on their neighbors due to the heat. He further reported that he was a guest on T.D. Ryan's Unleashed podcast and then wished everyone a good Fourth of July.

Concluding his report, Alderman Carlson stated he will be scheduling a meet and greet for residents of the Fourth Ward in the near future, hopefully before Corn Fest.



Alderman Larson reported that she also attended Pride Fest and the recent Fun Jam at the Park event, noting the children in attendance had a great time.

Mayor Barnes reported on recent meetings and events he's attended, including the Juneteenth event at Hopkins Park and Pride Fest in downtown DeKalb. He commended the Egyptian Theatre for allowing attendees to cool off in their lobby due to the very hot weather. He also attended the recent Fun Jam in the Park event and commended Police Chief Byrd for hosting the events for local children and their parents, noting he thinks it does a lot for the community.

Continuing his report, Mayor Barnes stated that he also attended the Downtown Merchants meeting, which he likes to attend to help merchants address issues they have and discuss possible solutions. He also attended an event for the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau at Whiskey Acres, met with Northern Illinois University leadership with City Manager Nicklas, was a guest on T.D. Ryan's Unleashed podcast, and met with Pastor Mitchell of the New Hope Missionary Baptist Church to discuss de-escalation tactics within the community with regard to crime.

## 2. City Manager Report.

City Manager Nicklas stated that Deputy Chief Luke Howieson will become the Acting Fire Chief upon Fire Chief Thomas' departure. He added that Deputy Fire Chief Howieson has worked every job but one in the fire department, so DeKalb will be in good hands during the transition.

Continuing, City Manager Nicklas stated he thinks it's terrific that residents have embraced Fun Jam in the Park and believes it will only get better from here. He then commended Police Chief Byrd for bringing the concept and framework to DeKalb.

Mayor Barnes asked Deputy Fire Chief Howieson to ensure the Council is invited to Fire Chief Thomas' farewell on July 11.

## **N. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

There was none.

## **O. ADJOURNMENT**

MOTION: Alderman Powell moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Alderman Smith.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Walker, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Zasada. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passe and adjourned the meeting at 7:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

---

Ruth A. Scott, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved by the City Council on July 14, 2025.

Click [here](#) to view the agenda packet for the June 23, 2025, Regular City Council meeting.

Click [here](#) to view the video recording of the June 23, 2025, Regular City Council meeting.