

**MINUTES
CITY OF DEKALB
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
JULY 28, 2025**

The City Council of DeKalb, Illinois, convened for a Regular meeting on July 28, 2025, in the Yusunas Meeting Room of the DeKalb Public Library, 309 Oak Street, DeKalb, Illinois.

Prior to roll call, Mayor Barnes' reflected the community's deep sorrow following the tragic drowning of a 10-year-old girl in DeKalb on July 27, 2025, and asked for a moment of silence in her honor. He also praised City of DeKalb and surrounding community first responders for their efforts in trying to save the child, adding it's a heartbreaking reminder of how quickly tragedy can strike and how vital community support and emergency response are in such moments.

A. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Barnes called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

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

Others in attendance included City Manager Bill Nicklas, Assistant City Manager Bob Redel, City Attorney Matt Rose, Police Chief David Byrd, Acting Fire Chief Luke Howieson, Recording Secretary Ruth Scott, and Community Services Coordinator Jennifer Yochem.

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 Smith moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Alderman Verbic.

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

D. PRESENTATIONS

1. Proclamation: Recognizing Habitat for Humanity of DeKalb County.

Mayor Barnes read the proclamation in its entirety. He also noted that since there was no one present to accept the proclamation, it would be forwarded to the organization.

2. Opportunity DeKalb Breakthrough Community Business Academy (BCBA) Report.

Mayor Barnes introduced this item by reading the title only.

Jerry Smith, former City of DeKalb Mayor, commended Chad Glover, Executive Director of Opportunity DeKalb, for the success of the Breakthrough Community Business Academy (BCBA), a program that empowers people in the community to launch and grow their own businesses. Mr. Smith urged the City Council to consider continued financial support for Opportunity DeKalb in the upcoming FY2026 budget.

Malia Jones, founder of Breakthrough in Friends and Family Engagement Specialist for Birth to Five Illinois (Region 16), shared her personal connection to the Annie Glidden North (AGN) Revitalization Project and her family's longstanding ties to DeKalb. She emphasized that

programs like BCBA are not merely helpful but essential by rebuilding networks and empowering individuals to channel their skills, creativity, and determination into sustainable ventures.

Continuing, Ms. Jones highlighted her collaboration with Opportunity DeKalb on community events such as Uptown Sounds, Fun Jam in the Park, and Northern Illinois University's (NIU's) STEAM and Dream in Welsh Park, as well as local listening sessions, adding that these aren't just events, they're spaces of connection where families, students, and long-term residents come together to be seen, heard, and belong.

Ms. Jones concluded her comments by urging the Council to not only support BCBA but to champion, elevate, and fund it like our future depends on it, because it does.

Melissa Amadeo, Executive Director of the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC), echoed Ms. Jones' sentiments. She emphasized BCBA's direct impact on economic development, noting that entrepreneurship and small businesses are vital to building resilient communities, adding that BCBA equips individuals not just to start businesses, but to succeed with the tools, knowledge, and confidence they need.

Mayor Cohen Barnes praised Ms. Amadeo's leadership, calling her a "true champion" for DeKalb and DeKalb County. He noted her proactive engagement with state agencies and her efforts to spotlight local economic opportunities.

Kathleen Eaton, a graduate of BCBA's second cohort, shared her journey from retiring as a nurse at Northwestern Medicine to launching her own business, stating she had no idea how to run a business, but BCBA gave her confidence, direction, and a supportive network of fellow entrepreneurs. She added that even after graduation, she continues to receive guidance from Mr. Glover and Danita Sims, Opportunity DeKalb's Director of Programming and Community.

Mayor Barnes then introduced Glenn Roby, a prominent community leader involved in Greek life at NIU, president of the DeKalb Area Runners Association, president of the Opportunity DeKalb board, and a board member of BCBA. Mr. Roby voiced strong support for Opportunity DeKalb and praised Ms. Sims and Mr. Glover as instrumental to its success.

Mr. Glover provided a detailed history of Opportunity DeKalb, which was founded as a 501(c)(3) in response to the AGN Revitalization Project. He described the organization's partnerships with the DeKalb Park District, local residents, and the DeKalb Police Department to revitalize Welsh Park and host community events.

Mr. Glover shared that Opportunity DeKalb is one of only 18 communities nationwide to partner with Rising Tide Capital, a leading entrepreneurship organization. This partnership enabled the launch of BCBA last fall. He noted that the City of DeKalb's financial support also made it possible to bring Ms. Sims on board.

Looking ahead, Mr. Glover outlined plans to expand BCBA's offerings. These include:

- Idea to Income: A pre-academy program for aspiring entrepreneurs who haven't yet made a sale.
- Breakthrough Business Assistant Services: Post-graduation support for BCBA alumni.

Mr. Glover also spoke of current partnerships, including the DeKalb Chamber of Commerce, which offers discounted or free memberships to integrate graduates into the local business ecosystem, and Allies for Community Business Collaboration, one of Chicago's largest entrepreneurship support organizations and co-owner of The Hatchery, the nation's largest nonprofit food incubator.

Continuing, Mr. Glover stated that to date, BCBA has graduated 25 entrepreneurs – 20 from DeKalb, four from Sycamore, and one from Shabbona. Interest is growing across DeKalb County and neighboring regions, and he envisions BCBA becoming a regional entrepreneurship hub rooted in the AGN neighborhood, adding this could be a catalyst for long-term economic redevelopment. He emphasized the importance of securing sustainable funding, estimating an annual budget of \$300,000 and outlined potential funding sources, including local philanthropy with support from organizations like the DeKalb County Community Foundation, bank contributions through the Community Reinvestment Act, which encourages financial institutions to reinvest in the communities they serve, local government and expanded backing from county and regional governments, and state and federal grants once a stable local financial base is established.

Mr. Glover closed by expressing gratitude for the financial and in-kind support received so far and reaffirmed Opportunity DeKalb's commitment to empowering entrepreneurs and strengthening the community.

Gip Seaver expanded on the support Mr. Glover had previously mentioned, stating they aimed to be more specific about who has participated in this effort, noting that the information provided in the Council agenda packet includes a substantial list of individuals and organizations that have provided letters of support and in-kind contributions. Additionally, there's a category highlighting donors who have contributed more than \$20,000, either financially or through in-kind support. These figures reflect contributions made since March 2022, when the Opportunity DeKalb board tasked Mr. Glover with developing a cornerstone project in response to growing interest in entrepreneurship. These included:

- Mortenson – \$25,000;
- City of DeKalb – \$145,000 to date; and
- 168 Community LLC, of which Mr. Glover is the principal owner, with over \$235,000 in in-kind contributions.

Mr. Seaver then encouraged anyone interested in learning more about the program to explore the background materials linked in the agenda, as well as reaching out to Opportunity DeKalb directly with any questions.

Concluding his comments, Mr. Seaver stated a membership model for BCBA has been launched with annual contribution levels starting at \$5,000 and extending beyond \$20,000. Organizations contributing \$20,000 or more will be invited to join the board and help guide our future work. He thanked the City of DeKalb for their continued support, encouragement, and partnership.

Mayor Barnes recognized the BCBA graduates in attendance and thanked Opportunity DeKalb for allowing him to attend their meetings to offer input and share insights from the City Council's perspective. He also recognized Mr. Glover for his dedication and commitment to the AGN area.

E. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none.

F. APPOINTMENTS

Mayor Barnes read the following appointments by title only:

1. Appointing Katherine McGloughlin to the Airport Advisory Board for the Completion of a Four-Year Term through December 31, 2028.

2. Appointing Brian Ohlinger to the Finance Advisory Committee for the Completion of a Four-Year Term through December 31, 2028.
3. Appointing Tom Fellabaum to the Planning and Zoning Commission for the Completion of a Five-Year Term through December 31, 2029.

MOTION: Alderman Verbic moved to approve the appointments in omnibus form; seconded by Alderman Carlson.

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 roll call vote. Aye: Zasada, Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Walker. 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 July 14, 2025.
2. Accounts Payable and Payroll through July 28, 2025, in the Amount of \$4,438,982.88.
3. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Report – June 2025.
4. FY2025 Human Services Funding 2nd Quarter Report.

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

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

H. PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Public Hearing to Consider Repealing Ordinance 2022-070, Which Approved a Zoning Map Amendment from the “NC” Neighborhood Commercial District to the “PD-R” Planned Development Residential District and the Preliminary Development Plan for the Property at 145 Fisk Avenue.

Mayor Barnes opened the Public Hearing at 6:42 p.m. and read the above by title only.

Nancy Dougherty, who lives at 108 Fisk Avenue, stated her concern about the current state of this building is safety. She explained that on her way to church on March 30, 2025, she had to step over various pieces of plywood with white covering that had blown across the street and onto the sidewalk during a storm, of which she took photos and then contacted her alderman to suggest that City personnel inspect all of the windows because they appeared damaged from weather and wind. In April, she was advised that this unsafe situation was being looked at and monitored. At that time, it was her understanding that the owner would start renovations or construction sometime in May, but as of today's date, she has not observed any changes or development. Therefore, she's still concerned about debris from the deteriorating building falling off and blowing across the street, possibly hitting one of the many cars that travel on Fisk Avenue or those walking in the neighborhood.

Sharon Nicola, who also lives at 108 Fisk Avenue, stated she's spoken with many neighbors and longtime DeKalb residents who hold deep memories of St. Mary's. Some recall it as the place where their children or grandchildren were born, while others carry more somber associations. Regardless of the sentiment, there's a shared appreciation for the vital role St. Mary's once played in the community. St. Mary's Hospital faithfully served DeKalb from 1922 until its closure in 1965. Afterward, the building found new life as a dormitory and later as offices for the DeKalb School District. Its last meaningful contribution to the community was in

1992 – over three decades ago. Since then, the building has stood vacant and neglected. In 2022, a promising proposal to rehabilitate it for residential use was unanimously approved by the City Council, yet, despite that momentum, no progress followed.

Continuing, Ms. Nicola stated that if pandemic-related challenges are being cited as the reason for inaction, she'd like to offer a counterpoint: the Rise and Shine Restaurant on DeKalb Avenue opened its doors just as COVID-19 hit the hospitality industry hardest. This year, it proudly celebrated five successful years in business, therefore, there is no justifiable reason why the neighborhood should continue to bear the burden of this building's decay.

Concluding her comments, Ms. Nicola stated that blight is not passive, it spreads, and suggested that the City look to Detroit for a cautionary tale, adding that DeKalb is not Detroit, and we deserve better.

John Sauser, the owner of the subject property, apologized to the neighbors, City staff, and the community, stating he understands the concerns and frustrations. He further stated that he deeply regrets the delays that have impacted this project. He added that it was never his intention for things to take this long, and he appreciates the patience being given as he works through the challenges.

Mr. Sauser then stated that although he hasn't owned the property for the full 30 years it's been an issue, he recognizes the burden it has placed on the community and is doing his best to put himself in the neighbor's shoes and understand their perspective. He also thanked Ms. Dougherty and Ms. Nicola for their thoughtful comments, which have helped him reflect on how this affects everyone.

Mr. Sauser then addressed a few specific points:

- **Boarded Windows and Cleanup:** Earlier this year, some of the window coverings, which were installed by previous owners, began to deteriorate after winter and he responded quickly to clean up the debris. He noted that he did receive a municipal ticket from the City and understands the concern about whether or not the building is secure, adding it has always been secure, and they had temporarily removed some boards to allow light in and to take measurements for new windows.
- **Construction Delays:** Several factors contributed to the delay. The engineering firm being used underwent a sale, which disrupted workflow and communication. Then the lead engineer on the project retired, causing further setbacks. Since the firm doesn't handle lighting or landscape plans, more time was added to the process to coordinate with his architect, and he had to step in to train a new manager at one of his businesses, all while dealing with health issues.

Continuing, Mr. Sauser stated that despite these challenges, significant progress has been made. The landscape and lighting plans are ready for final review, and he's awaiting the final plat from the engineer, which should be completed within weeks. He's also secured the electrical permit, and the electrician has prepared the temporary panel to allow the installation of temporary lighting, which should help deter vandalism and improve safety around the site.

Concluding his comments, Mr. Sauser stated he understands the lack of visible progress has been frustrating, but things are moving forward, and he's committed to making the property an asset to the neighborhood and DeKalb. He added that City staff have been incredibly supportive, and he's grateful for everyone's continued patience and understanding.

Mayor Barnes asked Mr. Sauser to address the outstanding fines related to the lack of progress on the property.

Mr. Sauser responded that the fines were issued primarily due to the delaminating windows on the property. After receiving the notice, he appeared in municipal court where the City and

judge were understanding of the situation, adding that their intention wasn't to penalize him, but to encourage progress on the building. They made it clear that the goal was to see the property cleaned up and construction underway and that if meaningful progress was made, the fines could potentially be reduced or even waived. The administrative judge supported this approach and granted an extension until approximately September, which provides the necessary time to move forward, complete the required work, and bring the project back on track.

Robert Carlson also spoke to this topic, but prior to his comments, Mayor Barnes thanked him for donating land for the bike path on First Street, noting that the underpass underneath the bridge would not have been possible without the generous contribution of the Carlson family.

Robert Carlson, a longtime resident of DeKalb, provided a history of his real estate appraisal business from 1977 until his retirement in 2019, adding that over the course of 42 years, he conducted valuations on approximately 80% of DeKalb's multifamily housing stock, giving him an exceptional understanding of the local market and its evolution.

In 2008, Mr. Carlson, along with his wife and son, purchased Hillcrest Place Apartments. Since then, their portfolio has grown to include multiple residential complexes in both DeKalb and Sycamore. Today, they own and manage 320 apartment units, 30 of which are located within one block of the Fisk Avenue property, and another 144 units within a two- to three-block radius.

Drawing on his decades of professional experience and deep familiarity with the area, Mr. Carlson stated he strongly believes that the highest and best use for the Fisk Avenue site is residential multifamily housing and opposes any effort to revert the zoning to NC "Neighborhood Commercial, citing the street's characteristics and market realities and stating that Fisk Avenue is a one-way, secondary street, poorly suited for commercial development. He shared examples from his own experience when he operated his office on Oak Street, just two blocks south of Fisk Avenue. The property, then owned by Steve Milner, had its first-floor offices converted into apartments due to weak commercial demand. Similarly, Mason Properties owns a building on Oak Street that has remained vacant for three to four years, further underscoring the lack of viability for commercial use in secondary locations.

Throughout his appraisal career, Mr. Carlson evaluated multifamily properties owned by the Saucer family in DeKalb, Macomb, and Carbondale. In each of these communities, he observed strong support from City officials for the Saucers. He recalled that during his work in Carbondale, the assistant city manager expressed admiration for Ralph Anderson and Mr. Saucer, an endorsement that speaks to their reputation and reliability.

Mr. Carlson also emphasized his personal experience with Mr. Saucer, describing him as a prudent and responsible property owner in DeKalb, stating that Mr. Saucer possesses both the expertise and the capacity to successfully execute the proposed development. As the owner of adjacent properties at 417, 418, and 429 First Street – directly across from the site – Mr. Carlson voiced his full support for the project.

Concluding his comments, Mr. Carlson revisited a prior proposal that illustrates his longstanding opposition to commercial zoning at this location. When the site was previously zoned NC "Neighborhood Commercial", a developer expressed interest in building a hotel and lounge there. Mr. Carlson opposed the idea then and remains firmly against any attempt to return the property to commercial use.

Mayor Barnes thanked Mr. Carlson for his comments and closed the Public Hearing at 6:59 p.m.

I. CONSIDERATIONS

There were none.

J. RESOLUTIONS

1. Resolution 2025-072 Authorizing a Fund 400 Architectural Improvement Program Grant for 930 Pappas Drive in the Amount of \$19,665.59 (Big O's Barbeque).

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

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

Alderman Verbic expressed his support for the business, noting its positive impact on the community. He then read a statement from Alderman Walker, who was unable to attend the meeting due to a work commitment. In his note, Alderman Walker shared that he had met with the business owners and learned firsthand how the requested funds would be used. Despite the grant amount, the owners will still face a slight shortfall, but their commitment remains unwavering. Further, the business has already established itself as a vital presence in the Seventh Ward, recently organizing a backpack giveaway featuring food from their own establishment. Their dedication to supporting local youth and fellow businesses reflects the kind of community spirit that deserves encouragement. The requested funding has the potential to significantly strengthen the business, and it's the City's responsibility to help local enterprises flourish and this grant will not only benefit the business itself but also uplift the surrounding area and serve as a meaningful investment in DeKalb's broader business community.

Alderman Zasada echoed Alderman Walker's sentiments, stating she had the opportunity to walk through the business, see the work that they're doing, and learn more about their business model. She added that she's honored to have them next to the First Ward and thinks they're doing great things in the community.

Alderman Powell stated he also had the opportunity to meet with the business owners and Mr. Pappas, and he appreciates what they're doing in the community.

Mayor Barnes stated he supports the endeavor and appreciates the commitment the owners are showing to the neighborhood, as well as offering another type of food choice.

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

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

2. Resolution 2025-073 Granting an Easement to the Commonwealth Edison Company for the Property Located at 3001 Pleasant Street.

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

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

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

Alderman Larson asked what would become of the easement in the future if the solar farm was no longer there.

City Manager Nicklas replied that the easement would remain with the land.

Alderman Larson then asked if the easement would interfere with future development such as an airport expansion.

City Manager Nicklas replied that the solar farm had to be approved by the FAA before it could proceed, so it's already compatible with current airport plans. However, if the easement no longer served a purpose, the City would contact ComEd and initiate the necessary steps to remove it.

City Attorney Rose added that the easement agreement includes a clause stating it can be terminated with 180 days' notice once the facilities are removed, therefore it's tied directly to the solar project and can be ended if the project is decommissioned.

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

3. Resolution 2025-074 Authorizing Participation in the Illinois Public Works Mutual Aid Network.

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: Zasada, Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Walker. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

4. Resolution 2025-075 Supporting the Illinois American250 Commemoration.

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

MOTION: Alderman Verbic moved to approve the resolution; seconded by Alderman Zasada.

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

Mayor Barnes stated that the Citizens' Community Enhancement Commission (CCEC) will play a leading role in shaping the upcoming celebration, adding that he hopes local organizations and community members will get involved to create a collective effort. He also thanked City Manager Nicklas for being part of the conversation.

Brief discussion ensued.

Mayor Barnes stated he was recently in France and spent some time learning about their history, noting they were a key component during the American Revolution. He added that he wants to make the celebration special and celebrate the fact that we are citizens of the United States of America.

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

5. Resolution 2025-076 Approving Human Services Supplemental Assistance for Various Social Service Agencies Beginning August 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025, in an Amount Not to Exceed \$75,000.

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

MOTION: Alderman Zasada moved to approve the resolution; seconded by Alderman Powell.

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

Mayor Barnes stated he's had conversations with some of the aldermen regarding the City's potential to increase annual human services funding in response to the growing needs within the community. He also noted the importance of reviewing how the City's local contributions are being allocated to ensure funding is directly benefiting DeKalb residents. Therefore, he believes it's worth initiating discussion to consider whether or not the City's contributions could be more strategically targeted to prioritize services for the local population, adding that taking this step could encourage other municipalities across the county to reevaluate and potentially increase their own support. He noted that he's not suggesting other organizations aren't contributing, but a more equitable alignment of funding levels could strengthen the entire network of human services providers.

Mayor Barnes then asked City Manager Nicklas if this is something that could be explored during the current budget cycle, and if not, maybe the City could begin laying the groundwork for a more structured and comprehensive conversation in 2026.

City Manager Nicklas stated City staff could begin discussions with the human services organizations to better understand their funding sources and service distribution.

Alderman Smith stated the Voluntary Action Center currently has a waiting list for the Meals on Wheels program, with a majority of those on the list within the corporate limits of DeKalb.

Discussion ensued.

Alderman Larson stated it's important to open a dialogue with the human services agencies, adding that just because they're located in DeKalb doesn't mean they serve only DeKalb residents. She also raised concern about the possible lack of visibility into the full financial picture of the agencies. While the City is aware of its own contributions, she questioned whether it has access to information about other sources of funding, adding that while she's not looking to put undue pressure on the agencies, it's important that every community carries its weight.

Further discussion ensued.

Community Services Coordinator Yochem stated that the human services agencies submit a copy of their budget when they request funding.

Mayor Barnes addressed the City's role in addressing homelessness and noted that Hope Haven is the only homeless shelter in DeKalb County. He praised Hope Haven's commitment to the community, especially its policy of never turning anyone away during winter months, and its comprehensive services including substance abuse support, housing assistance, and workforce development.

Mayor Barnes then raised questions about the allocation of City funds to other organizations, such as churches that serve as warming shelters but do not offer the same level of support or enforce behavioral standards. He acknowledged the value of these efforts but expressed concern that some individuals may choose these alternatives to avoid the rules at Hope Haven. He also questioned whether formal certifications are required to operate as a homeless shelter and emphasized the need for clarity and consistency in funding decisions.

Community Services Coordinator Yochem stated there are certain factors they must qualify for based upon City ordinances and regulations.

Discussion ensued.

Alderman Verbic stated he thinks this would be good topic for future discussion and would like the chance to explore it further with other Council members and perhaps bring the topic forward formally in the future. He also stated that a broader review would help guide future decisions.

Additional discussion ensued regarding a church on Fourth Street, which provides a short-term warming shelter in the winter months and funding that was provided to them.

Mayor Barnes stated the funding provided to the church for use as a warming shelter could have been allocated to Hope Haven. He added that the City should be mindful of how it uses taxpayer dollars to avoid unnecessary duplication of services.

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

6. Resolution 2025-077 Approving the Regulation of Traffic for the Purpose of Holding the Northern Illinois University Homecoming Block Party on Illinois Route 38 (Lincoln Highway) Between First Street and Fourth Street on October 2, 2025, Beginning at 10:00 a.m. through October 3, 2025, at 6:00 a.m.

Mayor Barnes read the resolution by title only.

MOTION: Alderman Zasada moved to approve the resolution; seconded by Alderman Powell.

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

Mayor Barnes and Alderman Carlson both stated their support of the resolution, noting it's a great event that's very well attended.

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

K. ORDINANCES – SECOND READING

There were none.

L. ORDINANCES – FIRST READING

1. Ordinance 2025-034 Repealing Ordinance 2022-070, Which Approved a Zoning Map Amendment from the "NC" Neighborhood Commercial District to the "PD-R" Planned Development Residential District and the Preliminary Development Plan for the Property at 145 Fisk Avenue.

Mayor Barnes read the ordinance by title only.

MOTION 1: Alderman Larson moved to approve First Reading of the ordinance; seconded by Alderman Powell (no action taken; refer to Motion 3).

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

Mayor Barnes asked City Manager Nicklas if Mr. Sauser could come back to Council with an established plan in the future if the ordinance is rescinded.

City Manager Nicklas stated that the Council could decide not to rescind the ordinance and extend the deadline for Mr. Sauser to provide the required documents.

City Manager Nicklas then stated that a lot of time has been lost because there hasn't been any credible intent to develop this property and he feels that the City has been taken for fools.

Alderman Larson stated that while she's not happy about the delays, she'd prefer to leave the zoning as PD-R.

Discussion ensued regarding the fines that have been levied against the property and the lack of communication from Mr. Sauser with the City. It was noted that even if the zoning is returned to NC, Mr. Sauser would still own the property so the building could continue to sit there.

Alderman Verbic suggested postponing the decision until the first Council meeting in October. If by that time Mr. Sauser still hasn't complied, the ordinance could be rescinded.

Alderman Smith stated he feels enough extensions have already been given and he doesn't think the topic should be brought back to the Council for further discussion.

Further discussion ensued.

City Manager Nicklas stated that City staff have tried to cajole, plead, and work with Mr. Sauser on this project for the last two to three years. He recalled that in the early 1990s, the then seated Council decided not to do anything with the building because of its historical value but had no long term purpose for it. Now, decades later, the building is deteriorating, no longer fits into the neighborhood, and no longer serves a purpose. If the City wants to truly transform the neighborhood, it needs to think bigger than just getting along or going along.

Noting that there are good possibilities for the property, City Manager Nicklas stated conversations regarding the property's future could involve the neighbors.

Alderman Zasada stated she understands how frustrating this experience has been for the City Manager and City staff; however, Mr. Sauser will still own the property if the zoning is returned to NC and she doesn't feel that the Council is fully in support of rescinding the ordinance.

Alderman Powell stated he's received complaints about the property. Further, Mr. Sauser has not communicated with the City and has unpaid fines, therefore he doesn't support postponing the topic to a future date.

Alderman Larson asked Mr. Sauser why the Council should support the project at this point and why the fines haven't been paid.

Mr. Sauser stated he believes there's been some miscommunication, adding that when he went to Municipal Court and asked if the City would reduce the fines, he was told that the City would extend the time for the fines to be paid. He added that if it's an issue of patience worn thin, he will pay the fines tomorrow.

Continuing, Mr. Sauser stated he understands the eagerness to get this project going and again apologized for the delay. He believes this is a great project and it's ready to go, but he needs a little more time.

Alderman Carlson stated he would agree to give a little more time, but the City needs to see some momentum.

Discussion ensued.

Mayor Barnes stated that the City has extended the timeline on projects before, and some never came to fruition. The property in question is in poor condition and hasn't been maintained. Residents have voiced their concerns and City staff are reporting a lack of cooperation from the developer. While the Sauser name is respected within the community,

the City is trying to make real change in DeKalb and if it doesn't have reliable partners on key projects, it will need to reconsider its approach. He concluded his comments by stating that if the Council votes to keep the project in place, a firm deadline must be set and tolerance for delays will be zero.

MOTION 2: Alderman Larson moved to table this item to the next City Council meeting, adding that Mr. Sauser will need to show movement on the project; no one seconded the motion.

Discussion ensued regarding postponing this topic to a future City Council meeting with the condition that outstanding fines are paid and plans for the development of the property provided, if not, the Council will move forward with rescinding the ordinance.

City Attorney Rose noted that a motion to continue or postpone the decision needs to be made and seconded.

Further discussion ensued regarding the conditions Ms. Sauser will need to meet for the topic to be postponed, including payment of the outstanding fines.

Mayor Barnes told Mr. Sauser that he hopes he understands that the City has had past experiences where developers didn't follow through, which is why it's setting clear expectations now, and while he understands that this may be frustrating, in some ways, this situation is a result of Mr. Sauser's own actions.

Additional discussion ensued regarding the date this item will be returned to Council for further action.

MOTION 3: Alderman Zasada moved to postpone this item until the September 8, 2025, City Council meeting; seconded by Alderman Larson.

City Manager Nicklas stated that Assistant City Manager Redel will work with Mr. Sauser to ensure the fines are paid by the end of this week.

VOTE: Motion 3 carried by a 5-2-1 roll call vote. Aye: Zasada, Larson, Carlson, Verbic, Barnes. Nay: Smith, Powell. Absent: Walker. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed.

M. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

1. Council Member Reports.

Alderman Smith encouraged residents to slow down and be cautious when driving on streets that are currently torn up due to ongoing construction. He also noted that contractors are behind schedule on some of the streets due to the heat.

Alderman Verbic reported that the Drum Corps International event at Huskie Stadium on July 26 was a sold out show and he looks forward to their return in September, and hopefully again next year. He also thanked the volunteers for their hard work.

Alderman Carlson paid tribute to a long time neighbor and Fourth Ward resident, Elmer Brown. Mr. Brown lived in DeKalb for over 70 years and was known for keeping his neighbors accountable with yard upkeep and tree maintenance. He added that Mr. Brown will be remembered as a great man and a great neighbor and extended his condolences to his family.

Alderman Carlson also reported on a recent visit to the local Quickie Mart to discuss concerns regarding the sale of THC products and Kratom. He added that the business expressed willingness to cooperate with the City's new ordinance, which prohibits the sale of said products.

Continuing, Alderman Carlson stated he continues to receive calls from residents and business regarding garbage cans left on the curb after garbage is picked up.

Concluding his comments, Alderman Carlson stated he appreciates the engagement and feedback from the community he's getting.

Alderman Larson reported on her attendance at the recent walk to promote safer streets, peace, and lower gun violence, noting it was well attended even though the temperature for the evening was warm. She also reported that she and her husband (Norm) joined Mayor Barnes and his wife (Amy) at the season's final Fun Jam event.

Mayor Barnes agreed with Alderman Larson's comments regarding the Fun Jam event, stating it was a magical evening filled with energy and incredible community spirit. He shared that his wife baked approximately 200 Rice Krispie treats, while he personally handed out burgers to attendees. He noted that Mr. Larson grilled around 150 burgers while Alderman Larson managed logistics.

Mayor Barnes then extended his gratitude to Police Chief Byrd, commending his leadership and the dedication of the entire police department, which played a key role in the event's success. He encouraged all Aldermen to participate in next year's scheduled events. Mayor Barnes also highlighted Alderman Powell's consistent and enthusiastic involvement, noting that events like Fun Jam are powerful tools for strengthening community relationships, especially between residents and the police department.

Mayor Barnes then reported on his recent attendance at the Illinois Municipal League's (IML's) summer meeting in Champaign. He spoke highly of the city's African American Heritage Trail, praising the murals and sculptures that enrich their parks and reflect the city's deep cultural history. He added that while DeKalb is making strides with utility box wraps and murals, there's still room to grow and emphasized the importance of public art, noting that some cities have made it a priority and the results are evident. He stated that when he asked Champaign officials whether or not their murals had been vandalized, they responded that none had. Mayor Barnes added that art fosters emotional connection and can positively influence behavior and he hopes the Council will continue to support investment in the arts, adding that looking ahead to 2026, he would like to challenge everyone to build on the momentum DeKalb has started.

Continuing, Mayor Barnes also shared the value of networking with fellow municipal leaders during the IML event, including mayors from Rockford, Macomb, Carbondale, and Charleston, stating the collaboration and exchange of ideas were incredibly valuable. He thanked the Council for supporting DeKalb's participation in the IML, calling it a tremendous asset from both a relationship and knowledge standpoint. He praised the leadership of Executive Director Brad Cole, noting that the IML advocates effectively for municipalities at both the state and federal levels and the value DeKalb receives from its membership is clear, and the return on investment is significant.

Finally, Mayor Barnes touched on discussions surrounding the upcoming "Big Beautiful Bill", expressing concern about potential threats to the Ground Emergency Medical Transport (GEMT) program, adding that the details are still unfolding but this is something that will need to be monitored closely, as it could have serious implications for the municipality.

2. City Manager Report

City Manager Nicklas introduced Cameron Moore, an upcoming junior at DeKalb High School who is interested in American government and a career in public administration. Mr. Moore has a 4.0 unweighted GPA, and participates in various extracurriculars including speech, band, and orchestra. He added that he's glad that he asked Mr. Moore to attend this City Council meeting, noting he had an opportunity to see a very passionate meeting tonight, which he believes is a sign that we all care very much about this community and where we're going.

City Manager Nicklas stated he's delighted that Mr. Moore has shown an interest in City government and hopes to figure out a way for him to do some job shadowing over the next couple of weeks.

Continuing, City Manager Nicklas expressed his appreciation to Mayor Barnes for leading a moment of silence at the start of the meeting and for acknowledging both the fire and police departments, given the gravity of the recent events. He also thanked Acting Fire Chief Howieson for facing an incredibly difficult situation that lasted over five and a half hours and demanded extraordinary emotional strength and leadership. It was a deeply human and challenging event, and he's profoundly grateful for the way DeKalb and responding communities came together.

N. EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was none.

O. ADJOURNMENT

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

VOTE: Motion carried by a 7-0-1 voice vote. Aye: Zasada, Larson, Smith, Carlson, Powell, Verbic, Barnes. Nay: None. Absent: Walker. Mayor Barnes declared the motion passed and adjourned the meeting at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruth A. Scott, Recording Secretary

Minutes approved by the City Council on August 11, 2025.

Click [here](#) to view the agenda packet of the July 28, 2025, City Council meeting.

Click [here](#) to view the video recording of the July 28, 2025, City Council meeting.