

COTTAGE GROVE CITY COUNCIL

12800 RAVINE PARKWAY SOUTH

COTTAGE GROVE, MN 55016

COUNCIL CHAMBER - 7:00 P.M

June 18, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

The City Council of the City of Cottage Grove, Washington County, Minnesota, held a regular meeting on June 18, 2025, at Cottage Grove City Hall, 12800 Ravine Parkway. Mayor Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. This meeting is being recorded by TruLens Community Media, you can view City meetings live and replay them on Cable Channel 799, and the meetings are also streamed live and archived on the City of Cottage Grove's YouTube channel.

The other thing I want to do before we get the meeting rolling, I think it's only fitting as out in the entryway you can see, if everybody were to look behind you, we've got a bunch of police officers here this evening, and we had a very unfortunate event this weekend where there were some shootings of some elected officials within the State of Minnesota. I thought it would be appropriate, first of all, to thank our officers out there, some of them may have been out searching for the perpetrator, but also the ones that were making sure that all of us were safe as electeds because who knew, right? We didn't have a list. But I did want to do a moment of silence, if you would join me in that, for Melissa and Mark Hortman, who obviously lost their lives, she was the Speaker of the House; and then John and Yvette Hoffman, who are still recovering, but thank goodness it appears that they're going to successfully recover from the multiple gunshot wounds that they had from this individual. So, if you would join me in a moment of silence where we remember these individuals. Thank you.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The audience, staff, and City Council Members stood and recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. ROLL CALL

Tammy Anderson, City Clerk, called the roll: Mayor Bailey-Here; Council Member Clausen-Here; Council Member Garza-Here; Council Member Olsen-Here; Council Member Thiede-Here.

Also present: Jennifer Levitt, City Administrator; Ryan Burfeind, Public Works Director; Zac Dockter, Parks and Recreation Director; Pete Koerner, Public Safety Director; Mike McCormick, Public Safety Sergeant; Korine Land, City Attorney-LeVander, Gillen & Miller, PA; Brenda Malinowski, Finance Director; Emily Schmitz, Community Development Director; Samantha Pierret, Senior Planner; Phil Jents, Communication Manager.

4. OPEN FORUM

Mayor Bailey opened the Open Forum. As no one wished to address the Council, Mayor Bailey closed Open Forum.

5. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Motion by Council Member Thiede to adopt the agenda; second by Council Member Garza. Motion carried: 5-0.

6. PRESENTATIONS

- A. Sergeant Promotion - Swearing In and Badge Pinning of Officer Matt Sorgaard
Staff Recommendation: Allow the Swearing In (Oath) and Badge Pinning of Matt Sorgaard to the position of sergeant.

Mayor Bailey said the first presentation is a very special one, the swearing in and badge pinning of Officer Matt Sorgaard, which is why we have so many police officers here. So, if all of you officers would like to come in, please do so. Council, we'll go down in front of the dais along with Jennifer, our City Administrator, who will be the swearing in, and I'll turn it over to Pete.

Director Koerner said Good Evening, Honorable Mayor and Council, this is an exciting night. I apologize, we have a lot of our S.W.A.T. people in from our practical, so there's a lot of sweat, it was a little warm out at our practical tonight. With that, this evening we will formally recognize Matt Sorgaard as we celebrate his promotion to Police Sergeant. Matt will serve as the front-line leader, directly engaging with our community and modeling our organizational Core Values of empathy, accountability, trust, and transparency, just to name a few. We're proud to promote Matt to the rank of sergeant, the leadership team supports this decision, and we are confident that his transition to the leadership team will be a valuable addition as we continue to grow and evolve as a progressive and resilient organization. In a moment, City Administrator Jennifer Levitt will administer Matt's oath. Prior to that, I'm going to read a short bio, I had Matt put it together, so bear with me; it's even stapled, Matt, but it's actually the font, I had to increase it, so I did kind of ad lib on this, Matt, just to warn you upfront.

Matt grew up in the area of Maplewood and Oakdale but now calls Cottage Grove his home. When I asked him to do his bio, what I thought was interesting was none of his career things were listed first; he honestly right away was quick to list his wife, Jessie, his two children, Hadley and Mason, his Chocolate Lab, Koda, and of course his K-9 partner, Odin. I don't know what the list was, it could have been Koda was number one, I don't know, but he listed his whole family as his priority. Matt had a life outside of law enforcement, he worked in the banking industry, so that's where he got a lot of his customer service. He has his Bachelor's Degree from Metropolitan State University, started his law enforcement career as a volunteer Reserve with the City of North St. Paul, I know that's when I first met you, Matt, when you were hanging out with some of those officers. We hired him nine years ago already with Cottage Grove, and in that time, Matt's been involved in a lot: He was an Explorer adviser, did compliance checks, both alcohol and tobacco, Drug Recognition Expert, S.W.A.T. team member, Field Training Officer, Use of Force Instructor, and his most current role is a K-9 handler to Odin, and he will still have Odin with him, so there won't be any changes to that. Outside of work, Matt and his wife do a lot of running of the kids to sports. He likes to find random projects; I agree, Jessie, those aren't necessary, he just does them to keep busy, right? And he has just a lot of excuses to get down to Menards and that's not bad. When he's not doing that, he likes to play softball with his friends, golfing, he does a lot of yard work, and enjoys training with Odin.

Pinning his badge in a moment will be his daughter, Hadley, with the supervision of his son, Mason. So, with that, I will turn it over to City Administrator Levitt.

Administrator Levitt asked Matt to please raise your right hand and repeat after me:

I, Matthew L. Sorgaard, do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and of the State of Minnesota, and faithfully discharge the duties of the position of Police Sergeant for the City of Cottage Grove, in the County of Washington, and State of Minnesota to the best of my judgment and ability so help me God.

Administrator Levitt congratulated Matt and shook his hand, and everyone applauded. Sergeant Sorgaard shook hands with Mayor Bailey and each of the Council Members.

Director Koerner said with that, we'll have Hadley come up with Mason. Hadley pinned her dad's badge and everyone applauded.

Photographs were taken of Sergeant Sorgaard, his family, all police officers, Mayor Bailey and the Council Members.

- B. Strawberry Festival Presentation
Staff Recommendation: Receive Strawberry Festival presentation.

Mayor Bailey said our Communications Manager, Phil Jents, is going to walk us through some of the festivities that are going to be happening as early as tomorrow.

Phil said Good Evening, my name is Phil Jents, the City's Communications Manager. That's a terribly tough act to follow, I will not succeed but I will do my best to follow that.

As you stated, Honorable Mayor, depending on when you're watching this or viewing this, Strawberry Fest does begin tomorrow, which is incredibly exciting. But first and foremost, I do want to thank the Strawberry Fest Volunteer Committee as untold hours of volunteer time goes into this incredible event, and we are thankful for everyone's contributions. Something like this does not happen on accident, it involves a lot of work, a lot of sweat, a lot of time, many of which are from volunteers. So, I just want to state that and thank them for that.

So, Strawberry Fest does start tomorrow and runs through Sunday. The main events are very exciting:

- New this year is the Drone Show, I believe Council Member Thiede may have an exciting update on that front, I won't go into details there, but nevertheless, the Drone Show on Friday night is very exciting.
- The parade is Saturday at 10:00 a.m., keep an eye out for our friend, renowned folk artist Eric Dowdle, he is joining us for Strawberry Fest and I believe will be joining Mayor Bailey in the parade, which is very exciting.
- The Mega Jump Motivational Experience is on Saturday, from noon to 3:00; as I understand it, it is a high energy mobile jump show, which if the pictures do it any justice, looks very fun to look at.
- Of course, the fireworks on Saturday evening at 10:30 p.m.
- The carnival will be open Thursday through Sunday.
- Then, of course the Strawberry Fest buttons are for sale: They are \$5 each, and I understand there's a lot of really great prizes this year. The drawing will take place on June 23, following the coronation, and I'm told that you do not need to be present to win that drawing. Buttons are for sale at the Cottage Grove Public Safety Department, Old National Bank in St. Paul Park, and from one of the 11 Ambassador Candidates.
- Any event with live music is A-okay in my book, so bands that are performing at Strawberry Fest throughout the weekend: Basic and Boring will be playing the Family Night on Thursday, and some may remember that band from last year's Food Truck Festival, so we're very excited to bring them back to Cottage Grove. On Friday, we have Double Down from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m.; closing it out on Friday night is Rough House. On Saturday, Jonah and the Whales and Them Pesky Kids are closing things out on Saturday night.
- Other events are on the screen before. There's very fun and great stuff happening throughout the rest of the festival. The long list of ongoing events has everything from a car and pet show to demonstrations from our very own Public Safety staff, just to name a couple. The full list of events is at cottagegrovestrawberryfest.com/events.
- Then last, and certainly not least, I would be remiss not to talk about *Discover Cottage Grove*; they'll have a booth at the Strawberry Fields Marketplace this year. As I mentioned, renowned folk artist Eric Dowdle, we launched a Bring a Friend campaign for Strawberry Fest this year just to encourage people who maybe haven't been to Strawberry Fest in a long time, people who live here who have some friends who want to come in from out of town to enjoy the festivities, so why not bring our own friend? So, we decided to bring Eric Dowdle back for Saturday; so, Saturday, June 21, he'll be there to sell puzzles, sign puzzles, take selfies, and meet folks at our booth. As I mentioned, he's also going to be in the parade on Saturday. We'll be showcasing all of our 115 coloring contest submissions, myself and our staff put together the coloring contest for Strawberry Fest this year. I would have been happy with 30, 40, or 50 submissions, and we got 115, almost all of which happened on the last day of the submission, which is pretty wild and fun. So, all of those will be on display in a binder, and four of the finalists/winners will also be prominently displayed there with Eric Dowdle.
- We'll be giving away freebies for folks who come by the *Discover Cottage Grove* booth; we'll have drawstring backpacks, Visitor Guides, *Discover Cottage Grove* beachballs, cups, and a flyer for the upcoming Food Truck Festival.

Phil said that's all I've got. Council Member Thiede, I don't know if I stole your thunder, so if I missed anything, please by all means fill in the blanks. Thank you.

Council Member Thiede replied no, I'm just going to enhance some of the things that you said: You know, one of the things that you had positioned in terms of the Drone Show, we got the whole design. They take that, they make this whole design, they've got it on the screen and so forth, and we found out it was going to be a 100-drone show, okay, but we found out that they went ahead and it's going to be 200 drones. So, that is at 10:30 on Saturday night, so if you've got to take a nap, take a nap so you can stay up and watch this because it's going to be really neat.

And some of the other things I'll mention is buttons, I forgot to wear mine tonight, but the mayor has his on, and one of the new things we're doing this year is that different food vendors are giving discounts if you have your button. So, people, go out and get your button, and you'll also, as was shown, there's a lot of different prizes with the button raffle and such, so that's fantastic.

The Strawberry Fields Marketplace, this year we had to start turning people away because we'd gotten to about 110 booths and we just have so much room that we can have them use out there. So, it's going to be fantastic. I was very involved in that 10, 15 years ago and everything, and it's actually just blossomed. Instead of calling it just a Business Expo, we changed it to Strawberry Fields Marketplace to really try to get to be more of a craft thing and things like that besides other informational booths, and that's been fantastic.

Also, again on Saturday night is the fireworks at 10:30. So, if you've got to take a nap, take a nap, but be out there for the fireworks.

It looks like the weather is going to be good, but it's going to be hot and muggy, so make sure you bring enough water to hydrate and everything else. It's going to be a fantastic time.

Let's see, what else was I going to mention? Oh, and tomorrow is actually the Family Night, and so there's other attractions and activities, you know, really kind of focused on families. We've got the pedal tractor pull again, which is always something that the kids really like. We've got woodshop crafts where you can come out there and the Lions Club will help you actually make a birdhouse and so forth, so that's going to be lots of fun. And food vendors, we had to turn away food vendors, too, because we had filled up. So, the parking lot is going to be full of food vendors, and what more can I say? It's just going to be a fantastic time, so be there or be square, that's for sure.

Mayor Bailey said I will say one more thing, just because I thought it was pretty awesome. I don't know if the public is aware, but we have our Ambassador Program here in Cottage Grove. There's a lot of communities, unfortunately, that their Ambassador Programs are going away or being suspended because there's nobody actually wanting to come out for those particular events; one that I heard of recently is Red Wing, they're not going to have an Ambassador Program where they represent the city. And I didn't remember the final number, what was the final number of people that we have this year? Eleven. So, we have 11 people vying to represent Cottage Grove over the next year and 2 young men this year for the first time, which is pretty amazing. So, I got a chance to meet them this last week during the kickoff dinner and auction that they did, which was absolutely fantastic. So, we've been well represented this past year by the current Ambassadors, and whoever gets it, I can tell you we're going to be very well represented as a community in the future. And they're all selling buttons right now, so if you need a button for the Strawberry Fest, go ahead and get them.

Mayor Bailey asked Council Member Thiede anything else or are we good? Council Member Thiede replied we're good.

Mayor Bailey said all right, thank you, Phil, for sharing that. I'll just say get out there, enjoy this great weekend, it's all about Cottage Grove, bring a friend. Come up to me or one of the Council Members, say hi when you're there, as we'd love to chat.

7. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Approve the May 21, 2025 City Council Special Meeting Minutes.

- B. Approve the May 21, 2025 City Council Regular Meeting Minutes.
- C. Approve the May 12, 2025 Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources Commission Meeting Minutes.
- D. Accept and place on file the minutes from the April 8, 2025 meeting of the Advisory Committee on Historic Preservation.
- E. Approve the November 26, 2024 Convention and Visitors Bureau Meeting Minutes.
- F. Approve the issuance of rental licenses to the properties listed in the attached table.
- G. Receive the 2025 Strategic Plan mid-year update.
- H. Approve the 2024 Convention and Visitors Bureau Annual Report.
- I. Approve the Reciprocal Fire Service Agreement with the Capital City Regional Firefighters Association.
- J. Authorize Public Safety to accept up to \$7,500 for a UASI Grant through the Washington County Department of Emergency Management to fund the purchase of water rescue equipment.
- K. 1) Approve Flock/LPR Camera Master Services Agreement. 2) Accept \$18,000 from the Automobile Theft Prevention Grant Award over 2 years.
- L. Approve the Professional Services Contract with HumeraTech for the City of Cottage Grove buildings in the amount of \$7,430.40.
- M. Adopt Resolution 2025-086 approving the final payment for the TG-P14 Pond Improvements Project to Northern Lines Contracting in the amount of \$90,492.33.
- N. Adopt Resolution 2025-085 accepting Braun Intertec's proposal to provide testing services for the Intermediate Zone Water Treatment Plant Project for the total amount of \$269,498.00.
- O. Approve Change Order #7 for the Utility and Engineering Building, which results in a reduction in project costs in the amount of \$6,981.60.
- P. Authorize Resolution 2025-087 naming the future neighborhood park at Robert's Lake "Roger & Myra Peterson Park."
- Q. Adopt Resolution 2025-090 approving the final payment in the amount of \$113,120.05 to SunRam Construction, Inc. for the Glacial Valley Park Improvements Project.
- R. Appoint John Stechmann to fill an unexpired term on the Planning Commission ending on February 27, 2027.

Council Member Olsen wished to pull Item R, Planning Commission Appointment (Stechmann), on the Consent Agenda for further discussion and/or approval.

Council Member Olsen said we had an opening on the Cottage Grove Planning Commission. As many of you know, we have several volunteer advisory commissions to the City Council that are staffed by volunteers from the community, who want to give back and provide advice to us as a Council, whether it's about Parks and Recreation, Historic Preservation, Planning, Public Services, and so on. It just so happens this year I am the liaison to the Planning Commission and we had an opportunity for a new member to potentially join. So, this last week I did interviews with two very good candidates, and I want to thank John Stechmann and Casey Thompson for putting their names forward as potential Planning Commissioners. It was a tough decision, but I selected John Stechmann for this appointment, and I would just ask that my Council colleagues take that under advisement. John has been a longtime resident of the City of Cottage Grove, he has a lot of good experience working with cities because he works for the City of St. Paul as an attorney. So, he's kind of seen the world from both sides, as a resident and somebody who works for a community. He's a very level-headed guy, very knowledgeable about the things that we've got going on in the community, and he's definitely got his finger on the pulse. So, I would ask for your consideration to appoint John to the open Planning Commission slot; and, certainly, we're going to continue to work with Casey to find a good spot for him, too, because both interviews were just wonderful. That's all I've got, mayor.

Motion by Council Member Olsen to approve the Consent Agenda; second by Council Member Clausen.

Motion carried: 5-0.

8. APPROVE DISBURSEMENTS

- A. Approve disbursements for the period of 5-30-2025 through 6-12-2025 in the amount of \$1,597,795.82.

Motion by Council Member Garza to approve disbursements; second by Council Member Thiede.
Motion carried: 5-0.

9. PUBLIC HEARINGS

- A. Mississippi Landing 1st Addition Easement Vacation
Staff Recommendation: 1) Hold the Public Hearing. 2) Adopt Resolution 2025-088 vacating, rescinding, terminating and releasing certain easements over Outlot I in Mississippi Landing 1st Addition.

Mayor Bailey said Emily Schmitz, our Community Development Director, is going to walk us through this fairly simple one.

Director Schmitz said great, Good Evening, Mayor, Council, it's a simple easement vacation. Typically, with our developments where we have several different additions, there's always an Outlot that's platted that is, for lack of a better word, held for that next addition when those lots are platted over that. So, Mississippi Landing 1st Addition was approved by you, Council, back on May 1, 2024, and now you have seen the 2nd Addition come before you, which you approved on April 2, 2025. However, a D&U Easement exists over Outlot I, which is a part of Phase 2 of the Mississippi Landing. In order to record those lots over that Outlot, we do need to vacate that Drainage and Utility Easement that allowed us to have access if we needed it for potential utilities or stormwater before those lots would have been platted. So, in an effort to allow that developer to record that plat this evening, the recommendation is to hold that Public Hearing and vacate that Drainage and Utility Easement that is existing over Outlot I. I will stand for any questions if you do have them.

Mayor Bailey asked Council if there were any questions, and there were none.

Mayor Bailey opened the Public Hearing. As no one wished to speak on this item, Mayor Bailey closed the Public Hearing.

Motion by Council Member Clausen to Adopt Resolution 2025-088 vacating, rescinding, terminating and releasing certain easements over Outlot I in Mississippi Landing 1st Addition; second by Council Member Thiede.

Motion carried: 5-0.

10. BID AWARDS

- A. Intermediate Zone Water Treatment Plant - Bid Award
Staff Recommendation: Adopt Resolution 2025-084 awarding the Intermediate Zone Water Treatment Plant Project for the Base Bid and Alternate 1 to Rice Lake Construction Group, in the total amount of \$90,135,600.00.

Mayor Bailey said Ryan Burfeind, our Public Works Director, is going to take us through this one.

Director Burfeind said Mayor, Members of the Council, so tonight, first we have the Intermediate Zone Water Treatment Plant bid award. We took bids on this a few weeks ago. This was a big day for the City, we've been

working on this plant, really at some levels since 2017 when the first kind of PFAS situation really boiled up in Cottage Grove. We started looking at Concept Planning, Long-Term Planning, and how to address this issue. Through the entire Conceptual Drinking Water Supply Plan from 2018 to 2021, we were working with the State on this, and then going all the way through design. So, this is almost eight years in the making from lots of staff at the City. So, it was a big effort and it's very exciting to take bids.

In terms of the bid results, we had really good bidding on the project. You can see all three bids are underneath our Engineer's Estimate. I will say these are interesting projects to look at and try to estimate. There is no one single plant that's going to match it. The processes are similar to our Low Zone Treatment Plant, but it's different; it's different in how it's going to treat the water and do its work. So, we hired our designer to do a really good, very thorough estimate. Obviously, the market's very volatile right now with tariffs and such, so there was a little bit of unknowns, and that's why our estimate was as you saw it. I think we were also helped by, there was a third bidder that came into that process pretty late due to some changes in a different large treatment plant project that didn't move ahead in a different community, so all of a sudden we had an additional bidder, who was very hungry for work. I think that made everyone else sharpen their pencils a little bit as well. I will say the low bidder, Rice Lake Construction Group, they did the Low Zone Water Treatment Plant and they also did several of our temporary treatment plants, so we've had very good luck with them. They have a long track record of delivering projects like this, so no concerns with their performance or them working on this project.

With that, the Recommendation is in front of you, and I will stand for questions.

Mayor Bailey asked Council if there were any questions on this one, and none were asked. Mayor Bailey said and the bids obviously is going to benefit the Settlement Money for other cities, so it's quite amazing to see that it came in as low as it did vs. the estimate from the Engineer.

Motion by Council Member Olsen to Adopt Resolution 2025-084 awarding the Intermediate Zone Water Treatment Plant Project for the Base Bid and Alternate 1 to Rice Lake Construction Group, in the total amount of \$90,135,600.00; second by Council Member Garza. Motion carried: 5-0.

B. 2025 Sewer Lining - Bid Award

Staff Recommendation: Adopt Resolution 2025-089 awarding the 2025 Sewer Lining Project to Hydro-Klean, LLC, for the Total Base Bid amount of \$779,748.90.

Mayor Bailey said Ryan will be taking this one, too.

Director Burfeind said that is correct. So, for this project, Mayor and Council, we took bids last week, and this project is a lining of a sewer that runs roughly from the intersection of Inwood Avenue and East Point Douglas Road and then through that commercial area; it actually goes through a City-controlled easement, a pretty large one, 50 feet wide, following the roadway down south to where the northern Jamaica roundabout is, under Jamaica Avenue, and then underneath Highway 61, ending in the dog park. So, it's a very critical piece of infrastructure, it's an 18-inch concrete pipe, it's actually basically an original to the City when we started having sewers, so its very old. We identified this as a key item several years ago to do a sewer lining, it really puts a whole new pipe inside of that concrete pipe. We couldn't do it with the Jamaica and East Point Douglas project for a variety of reasons, those impacts would not correlate, so we had to do it after. It's actually a project where typically you'd try to televise this pipe first to see the condition, but most of this cost is bypass pumping this pipe. So, it made no sense to do that work to see is it fine, can it get ten more years? I mean, we have a pipe that's approaching 60, 70 years old, so we're going to do that work and it'll have a whole new lifecycle for that pipe. So, that's why we're doing it all in one shot, the bypass pumping and installing it.

You can see the bids came in well, two bidders, and the low bidder was just under our Engineer's Estimate, so we're happy with that. Overall, I should mention it's not a very impactful project, that's why we were okay with doing it after two years worth of projects. It's really all underground work, the main thing is our access point for the manhole is in the driveway between Merchants Bank and Subway; so, we do have to close that driveway access for about three weeks or so while the project's done, but we have the legal right to do that. We have

worked with all the property owners, we notified them of what's going to happen, and that'll probably be late August into this fall when they'll do the work. There are two other ways into that development commercial area, so there's really no major impacts, everything else will be a variety of kind of drive-over ramps and things like that. So, it's pretty interesting where you'll actually see an 18-inch pipe on the ground that temporarily bypasses this work, and then we'll actually be directionally drilling it underneath the roundabout. So, we obviously didn't want to close the Jamaica roundabout to bypass pump sewage across it, so we're actually putting a temporary pump underground. It's a complicated project, but our team did a really good job of putting it together. I don't usually go into that level of detail, but I just want you to see it's so short and so quick, but it was a challenging project to design so we're excited to get it done.

With that, the Recommendation's in front of you, and I'll stand for questions.

Mayor Bailey asked Council if there were any questions for Ryan.

Council Member Clausen asked is this going to be a temporary pipe on top of the ground or underground?

Director Burfeind replied that's a good question, Council Member Clausen. So, it is above ground for the most part, and that is standard; it sounds a little frightening, but it's a fused pipe, its all one solid pipe. Other than where we cross driveway, for instance, it actually converts into a drive-over ramp, it's pretty interesting technology. The only place it'll be underground is under the roundabout; so, we're actually going to put in like a bigger carrier pipe under the roundabout. You'll see them dig pits on both sides and push that under the roundabout to carry it underground just right there.

Council Member Clausen said I've seen those before, and I just want everybody to know it's going to look ominous, it's going to look weird for a while, but it's needed.

Director Burfeind said it's all part of the plan; Council Member Clausen replied yep, thank you.

Motion by Council Member Garza to Adopt Resolution 2025-089 awarding the 2025 Sewer Lining Project to Hydro-Klean, LLC, for the Total Base Bid amount of \$779,748.90; second by Council Member Thiede. Motion carried: 5-0.

11. REGULAR AGENDA

A. Tobacco/THC Compliance Check Violation

Staff Recommendation: 1) Allow a business representative for Highnorth Dispensary an opportunity to respond to the City Council regarding the Cannabinoid & Low Potency THC Underage Sale Compliance Check Violation occurring May 21, 2025. 2) Impose the scheduled penalty, for the 2nd violation in a 24-month period, of \$1,000 fine plus a three-day suspension.

Mayor Bailey said I believe Sergeant Mike McCormick is going to open this one up for this.

Sergeant McCormick said okay, thank you for the opportunity here to tell you a little bit about our program, as far as the procedure and what happened with this particular event. As you know, our City does two compliance checks, both with alcohol and tobacco, and with the new laws governing THC, we've also incorporated that into our tobacco checks. Obviously, you're aware we believe hiring, training, and supervising responsible staff is essential in keeping compliance, as well as regulating tobacco and THC.

May 21, 2025 was one of the nights that we did a compliance check and this night was for tobacco. We used an underage buyer, and on the next slide I'll kind of cover the process and how we came across their buyer and whatnot. On this evening, though, there was one violation that was at Highnorth Dispensary at 8711 East Point Douglas Road. It should be noted this is their second violation in 24 months.

As I mentioned, our decoys are given instructions, and this is something that we've always done, this is Best Practice, this is what County does, and this is what other agencies do that do compliance checks. So, they arrive at the Police Department, they're not allowed to change their appearance, we want them to look like the picture on their driver's license as much as possible. We also take the picture right before the compliance check just so they

say well, they threw a hat on, or it's not somebody we recognized. They're instructed that if asked, they are to state their real age; at no time are they allowed to be deceitful, they have to be truthful. Our goal with our compliance checks has always been education, more than anything else. They're instructed to provide their Minnesota State-issued identification card or picture driver's license and make sure that it has their true identity and date of birth on it. We also make sure that we have that on file should something like this come up. They're provided with a monetary note, in this case it was a \$20 bill. Prior to that being given to our decoy, the officers also take pictures, front and back, to make sure that the serial number lines up with that monetary unit.

This is a few years old now, but it's really easy now to tell the difference between an Under 21 and Over 21 Minnesota driver's license. Everybody in this room has them this way, but if you turn it up on the side so the long end is facing up, you'll notice that that's the Under 21; it's also in big red letters, right under the picture it says Under 21, and then it will have their birthdate right there. So, anybody in the State is instructed and trained on how to look for those things, and I believe they have to sign off on their training to be a business here in the City as well.

So, this is the actual incident that took place on May 21. Our decoy was a 17-year-old male, he had followed all the instructions that we had asked. He first met with officers and then proceeded to go into the store and ask for Zyn pouches; those are tobacco, so they come in like a can or tin of chew, but if you open it up, they have little white packets that just contain tobacco. Our decoy asked if they had those Zyn pouches, and he was told that they do not; however, the employee said that he couldn't sell him that because they don't have it, but he offered to sell him THC gummies instead. The employee did ask for the driver's license, looked at it, and handed it back, and again that was an Under 21 driver's license. The interesting part is our decoy had a \$20 bill, and the total cost was \$20.67, and the clerk was really nice and said, "I'll cover the rest," and handed it to him, and out the door he went.

Officers met with the employee, he did admit to the sale and looked at the wrong date on the identification. I don't know if they delved more into that, but that was the response from the employee. He was advised that he would be receiving criminal charges.

I can tell you that I directly emailed the letter to the owner, inviting him to this Council Meeting, but I did not receive any emails or phone calls in response. I also had that letter hand delivered to the business the following day. So, I wanted to point that part out, but you have the recommendations in front of you, and I'll answer any questions you might have.

Mayor Bailey said thank you, Mike.

Council Member Clausen said sergeant, I just wanted to ask was that the only violation that night that you were doing was with this business, that's right?

Sergeant McCormick replied correct. I believe that was one of 14 businesses that were checked, and that was the one failure.

Council Member Clausen said okay, I just thought it's interesting that the employee tried to, for lack of a better word, upsell the product that they did not have to move onto something else. It just was interesting to me, thank you, that's all. Sergeant McCormick replied you're welcome.

Council Member Olsen said Sergeant McCormick, a couple things. First of all, thanks for the presentation and going into the detail that you did with regard to the process that's in place. I want to make sure I understand when our decoy goes to these businesses and attempts to make an underage purchase, they're traveling with a licensed police officer, correct?

Sergeant McCormick replied correct.

Council Member Olsen said and if the sale is made, as it was in this situation, there's an immediate response by the licensed police officer to say hey, look, this was a compliance check and you know, you didn't make it, is that right? Sergeant McCormick replied that's correct.

Council Member Olsen said okay, so there would be no reason why somebody from the business would not be made aware virtually immediately that they had a compliance check that they failed, and then you followed up with an email and then you also had a document delivered to the business. Sergeant McCormick replied correct.

Council Member Olsen said and they're not here. I find that very disappointing, especially since it's their second violation in a 24-month period. So, I see that the resolution that we're looking at recommends imposing the

scheduled penalty for this, which is a \$1,000 fine plus a three-day suspension. That three-day suspension, do we have purview over when that three days is? Do they get to choose, do we get to choose, how does that work?

Sergeant McCormick replied I guess I'm not sure how that process goes.

Kori Land, City Attorney, said Your Honor, Members of the Council, the way the resolution is worded it is in coordination with the police chief, so they will probably ask for specific days, and the police chief will review that, and if it's appropriate, then he would, but it has to be a mutual agreement.

Council Member Olsen said it has to be a mutual agreement. Attorney Land replied well, it has to be approved by the chief, so technically, we have the say.

Council Member Olsen said okay, the reason I asked the question is I might feel differently if the business operator was here to explain this is what occurred, this is what we've done to try to mitigate this from ever happening again, etc. But the fact that they chose not to do that makes me feel as though perhaps they haven't taken it as seriously as they need to, and so, I would encourage if we're going to look at a three-day suspension that we try to determine a three-day period where perhaps that'll send a message that they need to take this a little more seriously. I know we've done that in the past with failed alcohol compliance checks, and if you take a look at a weekend, as an example, that's a pretty prime selling period; you take that opportunity away for those three days, and I think it gets the message across. Interestingly, the business that we've done that to in the past hasn't had an issue since, it's funny how that works. So, I would just encourage our Police Department and our Public Safety Director to take that under advisement. That's all I had, thanks very much.

Council Member Garza said I as well find it pretty interesting that they upsold another product. In addition to covering the cost, so I know we haven't heard back from that business yet, but I think May 21, we're about a month in, and I'm really intrigued to find out what they really did with that employee. Because I almost feel as if, did he pocket the \$20? So, I would love to know, or will we follow up again with the business just to find out?

Sergeant McCormick replied typically, we won't, but we certainly could. I know that \$20 bill was returned to the officers that night, but I don't know what the intent was.

Council Member Garza asked and do they have a receipt, do they ring them out with a receipt? Sergeant McCormick replied yeah.

Council Member Garza said they did, okay, just wondering. Thank you, though.

Sergeant McCormick said the conversation with the clerk was also filmed via body camera with the officers once they made contact with him. Council Member Garza said thank you.

Council Member Thiede said I'll just mention, too, I agree with Council Member Olsen in terms of, you know it would be totally different if somebody had taken it seriously and was actually here to kind of explain, so.

Mayor Bailey said I don't know if I can ask, I don't know if it's going to be for Mike or Kori, if you can know this. So, this is the second violation in a 24-month period with a \$1,000 and three-day suspension. Should it happen again and it becomes the third, what's the, do you remember what the next?

Attorney Land replied Your Honor, I believe it's a 10-day suspension, I don't remember what the fine amount was, and just for the record, I wanted to note as the sergeant mentioned, we tend or try to educate with these compliance checks, and with their first violation, although they were given notice of it. We didn't actually bring it forward for a penalty, so there was no penalty imposed with their first violation.

Mayor Bailey said and that's been somewhat typical, whether it's tobacco or alcohol; Attorney Land said right. Mayor Bailey said I just was curious because I thought it was 10 days, but yeah, I guess, okay, we'll leave it at that.

Mayor Bailey said so, Council, they're obviously not here, so they're not going to speak, that's a moot subject.

Motion by Council Member Olsen to Approve Resolution 2025-093, imposing the scheduled penalty for the 2nd violation in a 24-month period of a \$1,000 fine plus a three-day suspension; second by Council Member Thiede. Motion carried: 5-0.

Mayor Bailey said thank you again, Mike, and I'll say congratulations to all those other businesses that successfully passed. I'm very happy that they did, sometimes we don't get to recognize the good ones, so we want to do that.

- B. Real Estate Equities - Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Rezoning, and Site Plan Review
Staff Recommendation: 1) Adopt Resolution 2025-082 approving an Amendment to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan to re-guide a 4.7-acre parcel from Medium Density Residential to High Density Residential, and authorize staff to submit the Amendment to the Metropolitan Council. 2) Adopt Ordinance No. 1101 approving a Zoning Amendment to change the zoning of the 4.7 acres from AG-2, Agriculture, to R-6, High Density Residential, contingent on the Metropolitan Council's approval of the associated Comprehensive Plan Amendment. 3) Adopt Resolution 2025-083 approving the Site Plan Review for a 164-unit, four-story, affordable-rate, multifamily apartment building on an approximate 4.7-acre parcel located on the north side of the 100th Street and Hadley Avenue intersection. 4) Adopt Resolution 2025-092 supporting local Affordable Housing aid.

Mayor Bailey said our Senior Planner, Samantha Pierret, is going to take us through this project.

Planner Pierret said all right, thank you, Mr. Mayor and Members of the Council, tonight it is my privilege to bring to you the Real Estate Equities project for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment, Rezoning, and Site Plan for a 164-unit affordable apartment building in the Preserve at Prairie Dunes plat at the Hamlet Avenue, Hadley Avenue, and 100th Street "X" there. Land Use: The property is currently guided as Medium Density Residential in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, and is proposed to re-guide the property to High Density Residential, using units from the former driving range at Mississippi Dunes Golf Course. The DNR purchased the former driving range in 2024, and that area thereby will be preserved from development, and the driving range was guided as Medium Density Residential in our 2040 Comprehensive Plan. So, to increase density on this Real Estate Equities property, some of that density proposed to be allocated is proposed to be transferred to the Real Estate Equities property and the DNR property to be guided Parks and Open Space in our 2050 plan when we adopt that. It's also of note that the Metropolitan Council is also required to review and approve Comprehensive Plan Amendments; however, our sector representative has verified this will be done administratively by the Met Council. Zoning: As mentioned before, the property is currently zoned AG-2 and a rezoning is also requested to rezone it to R-6, High Density Residential, in conformance with that Comprehensive Plan Amendment that is requested. Proposed Site Plan: So, Real Estate Equities is proposing a 164-unit affordable rate apartment building that will meet or exceed all of the City's standards. It would be under the maximum height at 47 feet, 10-3/4 inches, where the maximum height is 55 feet. All of our City setbacks, site coverage maximums, and parking requirements will be met or exceeded, as mentioned. Transportation: The property will be accessed off of Hamlet Avenue, and the developer will be responsible for reconstructing Hamlet Avenue into an urban street section, currently it's a rural section of street. There is an existing southbound turn lane from Hadley onto Hamlet, and the Right-of-Ways here are wide enough to accommodate any future expansion that may be needed; however, it's not anticipate to be needed at this time. Pedestrian Connections: Also, some trail corridors were put in with the Hadley and 100th Street realignment. This project will add an eight-foot-wide bituminous trail on the north side of Hamlet Avenue to facilitate a pedestrian connection from the apartment building to those trails on Hamlet and 100th, as well as pedestrian connections running along 100th Street. There will also be an internal sidewalk system there that contributes to a connection point there as well. Landscaping/Tree Mitigation: The applicants have proposed to meet all of our landscaping and tree mitigation standards. Architecture: They have also proposed to meet all of our architectural standards with at least 65% Class I or II materials, and they have already provided a material board to staff, which has been acceptable.

Recommendation: There are four separate action items for the Council to consider tonight, those are on the screen. I'll just also note the fourth one is supporting that local affordable housing aid dollars for the project as they go to State bonding, hopefully in July.

Representatives from Real Estate Equities are also here tonight if you should have any questions.

Mayor Bailey said all right, thank you, Samantha. He asked if Council had any questions:

Council Member Thiede said explain four again, refresh my memory, what aid? Is that coming from the City or the, what? Mayor Bailey asked are you talking about the housing aid? Council Member Thiede replied yeah, the local affordable housing aid.

Brenda Malinowski, Finance Director, replied Council Member Thiede, Members of the Council, great question. The Local Affordable Housing Aid, we call LAHA, the State implemented that back in October, 2023, ¼% of sales tax is dedicated to that in the metro, and so we get funds. We received our first amount back in 2024, and so this project is a good use of those funds. In the past, we would have done a TIF District for housing, and it would have been on our books for 25 years; and so, with these LAHA funds, we can dedicate three years of these funds to get this project up and going. Council Member Thiede said all right, thank you.

Council Member Clausen said this is probably for Samantha, thank you. There was some concern about the views from the neighbors on Hamlet, it was at one of the Planning Commission meetings. The berms and the trees that are on the north side of the new 100th and Hamlet Avenue, those are all going to remain, those aren't going to be taken down at all, from what I understand?

Planner Pierret replied correct. So, there are some existing trees on the site, some existing pine trees if you drive by today, all of those will be removed.

Council Member Clausen said those on the south side of Hamlet will be removed?

Pierret replied correct. However, the existing townhouses or condos across the street, they have some very nice screening. Staff drove by and checked that as well. Then as you see on the screen as well, they will be providing some landscaping where they're able to fit it in here, near that proposed garage entrance and exit point there, so on the south side of Hamlet Avenue.

Council Member Clausen replied thank you, I just wanted to make sure that the screening on the north side of Hamlet or 100th was going to stay there for them.

Planner Pierret replied yep; Council Member Clausen said thank you so much.

Council Member Thiede said so the other day I kind of came around Hadley and was kind of going through there, and you know, it turns out 100th Street is, let's see, what's the speed limit going to be on that? What's the speed limit on Hamlet, or on 100th Street?

Director Burfeind replied Mayor, Members of the Council, so it's 50 MPH until you get to the curve, and at the curve, it reduces to 40 MPH. It stays 40 MPH all the way down the hill, down to Grey Cloud Trail.

Council Member Thiede said all right, so, the one thing that I, because it's not a four-way stop, it's only a stop for Hamlet. Again, it's like I'm just thinking with the curve and everything, people if they're already going, I don't know how many are going to slow down for the curve, even though they see the sign. If there was a stop sign there, and I know it's a County Road, so that's going to make that more difficult, but just a little red flag. With the consideration also that those buildings, there's going to be two of them, and maybe another one, we don't know for sure, that are going to be relatively tall; just in terms of sight lines and safety, I'm just wanting to make sure, and I know that we're good at that, we're probably taking all that into consideration, but just to kind of make some mention of it or something like that.

Director Burfeind said Mayor and Members of the Council, I can maybe speak to a few points on that real quickly: So, in terms of the side-stop control, once you do an all-way stop, that's actually considered a form of full intersection control, and then there are standards we have to meet. It is still a City road, even though it's a future County Road, it is our roadway today, so we govern it, but we do really look to those MnDOT standards before we put in an all-way stop. That roadway with an 180-foot Right-of-Way and then the setbacks, it is fully designed to make sure we have the sight lines in excess of that 40 MPH; but it's certainly something we're always going to continue to watch and look at, and we want to make sure we have safe corridors for people to drive on. So, no concerns at this time with this building and such, but it's something we'll always continue to look at as we get more development in the area. Council Member Thiede replied all right, thanks.

Mayor Bailey asked the developer if they'd like to speak at all on this subject or the project, if there was anything they'd like to share, and they declined. Mayor Bailey asked if Council had any questions for the developer, and none were asked.

Motion by Council Member Olsen to Adopt Resolution 2025-082, approving an Amendment to the 2040 Comprehensive Plan to re-guide a 4.7-acre parcel from Medium Density Residential to High Density Residential, and authorize staff to submit the Amendment to the Metropolitan Council; second by Council Member Clausen. Motion carried: 5-0.

Motion by Council Member Thiede to Adopt Ordinance No. 1101 approving a Zoning Amendment to change the zoning of the 4.7 acres from AG-2, Agriculture, to R-6, High Density Residential, contingent on the Metropolitan Council's approval of the associated Comprehensive Plan Amendment; second by Council Member Garza. Motion carried: 5-0.

Motion by Council Member Garza to Adopt Resolution 2025-083 approving the Site Plan Review for a 164-unit, four-story, affordable-rate multifamily apartment building on an approximate 4.7-acre parcel located on the north side of the 100th Street and Hadley Avenue intersection; second by Council Member Thiede. Motion carried: 5-0.

Motion by Council Member Clausen to Adopt Resolution 2025-092 supporting Local Affordable Housing Aid; second by Council Member Olsen. Motion carried: 5-0.

12. COUNCIL COMMENTS AND REQUESTS

Council Member Clausen said I have no comments tonight, thank you, mayor.

Council Member Olsen said mayor, I'll just take a moment to first of all, thank all of the hundreds of State, Federal, and Local Law Enforcement personnel, who spent their Father's Day weekend in pursuit of a suspect in the brutal killings of Mark Hortman and his wife, Melissa, and the shootings of John and Yvette Hoffman. A lot of those folks worked really long days, and I know we even had some local members of our law enforcement community who were staged up to help out with different things. There were several S.W.A.T. teams that were out working really hard to apprehend this person, and thankfully, they were able to do so without incident before the weekend was out, which was a really nice outcome to a very tragic situation. That individual is now in custody and I'm sure the courts will do their work, but thank you to all of the law enforcement folks, first responders, all the support staff who took the time to do that.

I also want to say, you know, one of the things that really impacted me personally, as I got that first phone call at 5:00 a.m. on Saturday from a friend, saying, hey, are you watching the news? No, I'm in bed. You need to watch the news. As a country, as a State, as a community, it's important to remember that the things that you say have consequences. I know that one of the very founding principles of our Constitution is free speech, and I support that with every fiber of my being, but there's also a part of life where you can say yeah, I could do that, but should I? And I think that's where discipline and maturity and those kinds of things come in. We live in a time when people have so much access to social media and other forms of speech and communication that sometimes they take it for granted, and I'm going to speak for myself only. As a local elected official, it stuns me sometimes how the same people have a negative comment about virtually anything we do as a City or as a body; and while they're entitled to their opinions and they're entitled to make whatever comments they want, I think there's a time to consider is this helpful? Does this advance whatever argument I'm trying to make? Is this the appropriate venue to maybe say some of those things? What I find to be true oftentimes is people will put things out into their social media profiles or whatever the case might be, and then when you actually take the time to give them a phone call and say, hey, I saw your note, I wanted to talk to you about that, the tone changes pretty quickly. We need to understand that elected officials, public officials in any way, shape, or form, whether it's City staff, what have you, we're all people. We all have jobs and we all have kids and we all have hopes and dreams, and I know that this body works very hard to remain dispassionate and neutral. We don't engage very often on social media. When we do sometimes

attempt to engage on social media where somebody may say something, they're asking a question, and we try to give the information that they're looking for, it can turn into a feeding frenzy of misinformation, negative commentary, what have you, and that's just not the way to do things. That's not. We need to be able to communicate with each other with respect and with dignity because what happens is that negativity proliferates. We see it at the Federal level, we see it all over the place, there's going to be somebody out there who maybe isn't okay in the head, who's going to read what you have to say or perceive what you have to say differently than you intended it, and situations like what occurred over the weekend could be the end result. So, I just want to caution folks to take a beat, maybe wait a second before you type whatever it is you're going to type into your Facebook or your Twitter, or you name it, there's probably 17 other ones I don't even know about. You know, you've got your various neighbor pages and all those kinds of things. If you really, truly are curious and you want to know about how come you did something, how come this decision was made, just ask, we're happy to tell you. We'll sit down and have coffee with you, we'll explain it to the best of our ability, and we may end up walking away agreeing to disagree, but at least we've had a productive dialogue. And I think if we could all do that a little bit better, maybe the world would be a little less dangerous place. And with that, mayor, I'll turn it back to you.

Council Member Thiede said yeah, again, I've already talked about Strawberry Fest, so that's fantastic, it's going to be a great time.

I also have I guess the Movies with Mo, *The Wild Robot*, had to be changed because of rain and things like that. Council Member Garza said Friday it was raining. Council Member Olsen said you got rained out last year quite a bit, too, and Council Member Garza said we did, but we got four in, still, so cross my fingers. Council Member Thiede said so, I guess that's been rescheduled to this Friday night, in two days. Council Member Garza said but it's later, so it starts at 7:00, but the movie doesn't start until 9:30 or so, so people can enjoy Strawberry Fest first, and then come and watch the movie. Council Member Thiede said all right, so, I guess that is all I have right now.

Council Member Garza said well, I will mention, it sounds like Cottage Grove has some really fun camps that are happening this summer. So, if you go to our cottagegrovemn.gov website, we have a Safety Camp for kids ages 6 to 9, and that's coming up actually this weekend as well, but that's going to be a lot of fun at the old Cottage Grove Fire Station, and they'll learn a lot, especially surrounding safety. So, sign your kids up, it's not too late for that. And then we also have Beginning Archery Camp, that sounds really cool, and that will start in July. So, you can check out our website and find more about that, and that will be at the Pine Tree Pond.

Mayor Bailey said since we already talked about Strawberry Fest, I don't have anything else to add this evening, other than I hope to see everybody the next few nights and days over at Strawberry Fest.

Mayor Bailey said just so the public is aware, we do have two Workshops this evening. The first workshop, which is open to the public, is the National Community Survey Report, the Polco survey that we did earlier this year. Staff is going to provide it to us to review and comment. And then we do have a Workshop, which is closed to the public, and just so the public knows, that is a Closed Workshop pursuant to Minnesota Statute 13D.05, Subd. (3)a, to conduct a performance evaluation of City Administrator Jennifer Levitt.

So, with that, we won't be adjourning in here, we'll adjourn in the Training Room. Otherwise, everybody have a great weekend at Strawberry Fest!

13. WORKSHOPS - OPEN TO PUBLIC - TRAINING ROOM

A. National Community Survey Support - Polco

Staff Recommendation: Receive National Community Survey Report.

Mayor Bailey said all right, we'll go ahead and get started here on our Workshop, which is Open to the Public, and this is to review and comment on the National Community Survey Report. And, Phil, I believe you're going to walk us through this, correct?

Phil Jents, Communications Manager, replied yes. Thank you, Honorable Mayor and Members of the Council, I will do my best to be efficient with time in the interest and respect of everyone's time, but I have a lot of information to cover and a lot of data to go over. So, if you want to be thorough, maybe I should do the whole report, the results of the National Community Survey.

So, with that, I am happy to be here to present a summary of the findings for the Cottage Grove National Community Survey. The National Community Survey (NCS) is a standardized five-page comprehensive survey that allows municipalities to accept residents' opinions on their community and local government. The NCS focuses on the livability of Cottage Grove by categorizing survey questions in ten main facets of community livability, as shown here; as you can see, among others, there are things such as Parks and Recreation, Economy, Health and Wellness, Safety, Livability, and several others.

All households within Cottage Grove were eligible to participate in the survey. A list of all households within the survey in Cottage Grove was used, and then using the GIS boundary files provided by the City, addresses located outside of Cottage Grove boundaries were deleted from the list of potential households. From that list, 3,000 addresses were randomly selected to receive the survey. The 3,000 randomly-selected households received mailings beginning on March 20, 2025, and the survey remained open for 6 weeks. The first mailing was a postcard inviting the households to participate in the survey. The next mailing contained a cover letter with instructions, a five-page survey questionnaire, and a postage paid return envelope. Both the postcard and the cover letter used a web link to give residents the opportunity to respond to the survey online. All follow up mailings asked those who had not yet completed the survey to do so, and those who had already done so should not respond. The survey was available in English and Spanish, and all mailings contained paragraphs in both languages and instructions on how to complete the survey in their preferred language.

A total of 483 completed surveys were received from these efforts, providing a response rate of 16% and a margin of error of plus or minus 4%. I will note on that front, selfishly speaking, as a dedicated communications professional, I would have loved 3,000 surveys returned and filled out, but that's not realistic, that's not how the real world works. I am encouraged and cautiously optimistic that 16% does represent a higher than national average survey response rate. Apparently, nationally, survey fatigue is a very real thing and survey responses are down and actually below that 16% mark. And, so, you all probably, I can't speak for everyone in this room, but I'm sure you'd love to have 1,000 or 2,000 responses, that would be phenomenal. Nevertheless, I can see that Cottage Grove residents are above that national average, so we should be encouraged.

Polco then compared the demographic profile of survey respondents to that of adults in Cottage Grove using the most recent Census and American Community Survey data and then weighted the survey results. Weighting is a survey research Best Practice and helps to improve the representativeness of the survey results. In addition to the randomly-selected "probability sample" of households, a link to an online open-participation survey was publicized by the City. The open-participation survey was identical to the random-sample survey with two small updates: Asked a question to confirm a respondent was a resident of Cottage Grove, and also a question about where they heard about the survey. The open-participation survey was open to all City residents and became available on April 10, 2025 and remained open for three weeks. I will also note the full open-survey results are in the material before you.

There are a lot of different ways to get feedback from residents: Direct feedback is meetings like this, social media, phone calls, etc. One of the advantages utilizing Polco for this particular survey was the opportunity to compare ratings given by our residents to those from communities across the nation. This allows jurisdictions to compare ratings of services with ratings of similar services from other communities, and there are currently about 500 communities in the Polco database where we can compare against.

Overview of the Survey Results

In the survey, we had two questions that asked directly about those ten factors I mentioned earlier of Community Livability. The first asked residents to rate the quality of each, and you can see the resulting comparison to the national benchmark in the shading on the chart. The second question asks about the same Facets of Livability, but it's centered on how important residents think it is for the community to focus on each facet in the coming two years. So, we asked both about quality and importance of each of these facets and used those answers to create a Quality and Importance Gap Chart. So, Polco put those two data points together into this Gap Analysis Chart, which is used to help determine which areas of relatively higher importance and lower quality to residents, which

are in the chart here. It's just one of many ways to interpret the data and can be used to identify key findings and also determine which areas may need additional focus or resource allocation in the coming years and which others are performing well by comparison. There are just a couple standouts: The Economy, Utilities, Community Design, and a couple others you can see here in the chart that stand out.

Of the 122 survey items for which residents provided the value and its rating, 15 received ratings higher than national benchmarks, 99 received similar ratings, and 8 received lower ratings. So, just to kind of define that, ratings are considered similar if they are within 10 points of the national average, higher or lower, they are more than 10 points different than the average. There are many other lists, but a few examples of those that ranked higher are traffic flow on major streets, a variety of housing options, street repair, street cleaning, snow removal, crime, safety. Those that ranked lower in others were a variety of business or service establishments, which you'll see reflected in one of our open-ended questions; those responses are verbatim in your materials before you, and you'll definitely see a resounding theme there around differences in choice and those lines. Among others that ranked lower was drinking water, which we've been talking with my colleague over in Public Works. I would assume it would have to do with the long-term treatment of PFAS, and so the residents.

Key Findings Polco Delivered

Again, there's lots of additional data in the formal report before you, but the following slides will focus on those items:

1. Cottage Grove residents experience a high quality of life. Over 8 in 10 residents positively rated Cottage Grove as a place to live and were likely to recommend living in Cottage Grove, and also likely to remain in Cottage Grove for the next five years. Additionally, 80% of the residents gave excellent or good ratings for the overall quality of life in Cottage Grove.
2. Residents identified safety as both a priority and an asset. Residents tended to feel very safe in their community with nearly all respondents reporting feeling safe in their neighborhood during the day, about 9 in 10 said they feel safe from violent crime involving commercial areas during the day. High ratings were also given for feeling safe from fire, flood, natural disaster, and property crime. Moving on in the theme of safety, safety services also tended to be rated well with 9 in 10 residents rating both Fire services and Police services excellent or good. High marks were also given for ambulance or emergency medical services and crime prevention. Notably, both Police services and Crime Prevention scored higher than the national benchmark.
3. Residents placed a high focus on economic health. As we saw in the important slide earlier, 86% of residents emphasized the importance on focusing on the economy, ranking second under the ten facets. The overall economic health of Cottage Grove is rated positively by about 6 in 10 residents, as was the overall quality of business and service establishments. Cottage Grove as a place to work followed at 49%, ranking lower than the benchmark. Highlighting other potential areas of focus, ratings were also lower than the national benchmark for a variety of business and service establishments in Cottage Grove as a place to live. It's also worth mentioning here, I kind of alluded to this a second ago, but a custom question developed by the City, in consultation with all of you earlier this year, asked residents to share open feedback on anything they would like to see improved or added to their community. Those verbatim responses are in the report for you. One resounding, as I mentioned earlier, common theme among them is a desire for more options around restaurants, retail, and specifically locally-owned businesses; i.e., no more chains.
4. Housing variety and affordability may represent a deep strength for Cottage Grove. The overall facet of Community Design tended to rank similarly to the national benchmark with a few key outliers. Among the fact that ratings were highest for resident neighborhoods as places to live, with 89% of respondents giving favorable marks. Around 7 in 10 positively rated the overall appearance of Cottage Grove, and just under 6 in 10 did the same for the overall quality of new developments in the well-designed neighborhoods. While ratings for the preservation of the historical or cultural character of the community ranked lower than the benchmark, two keys ratings related to housing ultimately ranked higher than the national average: These included a variety of housing options, 53% positive, and the availability of affordable quality housing was 39%.

5. Mobility stands out as a key strength for the City. A large number of ratings related to mobility ranked higher than the national average, and these included ratings for ease of travel by car, public parking, traffic flow on major streets, ease of walking, and ease of travel by bicycle. Mobility-related services followed a similar trend with higher than average ratings for street cleaning, snow removal, sidewalks, and street repair. When asked about their opinion relating to taxes and services in Cottage Grove, about one-third, or 34%, said they are satisfied with the current level of taxes and services. A similar proportion, 32%, felt they paid too much for the services they receive. A few residents were willing to accept service reduction in exchange for lower taxes or to pay more taxes for enhanced services. A smaller share yet reported having no preference or having no opinion on this. For additional context, we also see here the ratings for one of the default survey questions, which asked residents to rate the value of services for the taxes paid to Cottage Grove. Results show that 9% of respondents rated this item as excellent, 44% as good, 27% as fair, and 20% as poor. For benchmark comparison purposes here, Polco combined the excellent and good ratings to represent an overall percent positive, in this case giving us a 53% positive rating, which ultimately ranked similar to other communities nationwide. An additional custom question sought insight into longer-term focus for the City. Among the options provided, residents placed the largest priority on focusing on: Utilities, Fire and EMS, Transportation, Police, and Economic Prosperity.

Summary: Cottage Grove residents experience a high quality of life. Residents identify Safety as both a priority and an asset. Residents place the highest focus on Economic Health. Housing variety and affordability may represent a needed strength in Cottage Grove. Finally, Mobility is a strength of the City.

Phil said with that, I'm happy to stand for questions and discussion.

Council Member Thiede asked so, in terms of the comparison U.S. benchmark, is that just a general, overall average of any of the cities and sizes and so forth? So, we shouldn't be too much, like when we look at education, arts, and culture, and opportunities to attend cultural music activities and so forth being much lower. Obviously, being a small community, I would expect some people being close to a metro area where some more of that stuff is available might raise it, it's so low. I can think as a City we wouldn't necessarily, we shouldn't get too bent out of shape about having something like that as much lower because it's probably typical of a City of our size and location.

Council Member Garza replied you know, with what you just said, because I'm reading a lot of the comments regarding that, and you know, Cottage Grove has grown quite a bit in the two years that I've been on Council. And diversity is a group, and I remember looking at the numbers on only 483 people that actually answered this, and they don't really request that, but we know that our City is getting more and more diversified. And, so, maybe, I'm not saying that we can put in all these cultural programs and stuff, but we need to hear that, and we need to listen because it's not one comment; it's a few comments that are saying I don't feel welcome and I feel like that's because I'm different, I'm not, I don't see things for me to do, I don't see things that are aimed towards our culture. So, you know, maybe paying a little more attention to that is something that we should do, especially because we are growing at such a significant rate, and we're bringing so many more families here, and they're going to be diverse, and so we should be mindful of that.

Council Member Thiede replied true, and I do see, though, that if I look at inclusivity and engagement numbers, I mean, Cottage Grove is, in terms of some of those numbers are actually quite high, similar to other places. But you know, just kind of looking at those, I would tend to think that we've got lots of good data on that.

Council Member Garza said we definitely do, I mean, even in this, in the results of this, they're very, they're very contradictory to what we want to know, right? Because on one side of the fence we've got many people saying we're growing too much, too much is happening, but then on the other side, everyone is saying there's not enough for us to do, we need more restaurants, we need this, we need that. So, we can't please our entire community with, you know, the one side or the other side. We're doing, to me, it seems a very responsible approach, and we're trying our best to bring more things into our community, but not turning into Woodbury, right? We want to keep that family-oriented place that we have, so this survey is, its actually, I was a little discouraged with it just because there's so much I want this or I want this. It's like we're trying the best that we can and it doesn't seem like to lower the taxes, if we look at the Washington County taxes, we are the second-lowest City in Washington

County. If we go any lower, we can't provide the things that we're providing. So, it's just interesting, and I think these results are very interesting. And Bonnie made a comment when we came in, and she said we should have maybe shared this with the rest of the community live, and I sort of agree. I know this would have been a long thing to do out there, but it is something, these conversations that we're having right now, the community should hear this. They should understand that we are trying, and we're listening, but we can only do so much, you know.

Phil said if I may on that last point, Council Member Garza, I think that is a point extraordinarily well taken. I, for one, my own professional values, I'm not going to stand here and talk about resident feedback and not incorporate that, that doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't align with my professional values, I wouldn't dare speak it to anyone else in this room, but the only thing that I would note is that just in the interest of time and deference to the Council, we received the full presentation from Polco I think last week; and so, we wanted to make sure we got this in front of you for your review, your digestion, your feedback, and then from there, you know, involve the community. Put it up on the website, social media, have a community event, if that's determined to be something that we need to look at, whatever it is, we need to of course make that happen, take that next step.

Council Member Garza said I think that's good.

Council Member Olsen said one of the things that I think is important to note, too, is we've done numerous community surveys of a similar nature in the last 10-to-15 years, using different methodologies, and one of the methodologies we used was phone surveys, right? I think we hired a professional outfit to do that. And we've had the community conversation surveys where we had the chalkboards all over town and, you know, let people make commentary at that point and then tried to bring all of that under one umbrella and interpret that. One of the benefits to this survey is there's a comparison to other communities across the nation, where we have the ability to benchmark; in the past, it was not quite as easy to benchmark, and I know obviously I have the benefit of seeing some of this on Tuesday, at the EDA Meeting. You know, 16% of the people that were surveyed responded. So, to me, that feels like a small number, but the real question with any survey is, is it statistically significant? And in this particular case, it is, according to Polco, and they're the experts. So, you've got to start thinking to yourself, okay, we've got a statistically significant number of respondents, the ratings that we're seeing are being benchmarked vs. other communities across the entire country, we actually look pretty good when you do those comparisons. I certainly would love to have seen more response, I'm sure everybody in the room feels the same way, but surveys like this are challenging to get those responses because its long, right, there's quite a bit to it. And there are some open-ended questions that we formulated on purpose that we wanted to get responses to, and what's going to happen invariably and it's just like any business; the people who are satisfied and have a great experience tend not to be the ones who are going to vocalize that, as often as people who may have a different experience or are unhappy about something. And, so, recognizing that that's part and parcel of this survey process, again, whether it's a community, whether it's a business, whatever the case might be, that's important. Because you can't get lost in a small percentage of voices who say certain commentary vs. the silent majority, and we have to recognize the silent majority. So, taking all of this data and putting it into kind of a hypothesis of okay, so, if we started doing this, would that change the outcome? The risk that you run there is you change what you're doing well because you're trying to appease a smaller percentage of people who may not feel as though you're doing something well; and then you tip the scales the other way, where the people who are generally satisfied say, wait a minute, what are you doing? Things are great. How come you're making those changes? So, it's really a fine line to walk.

I want to mention something of the diversity piece because I've been very passionate about the diversity of this community for as long as I've been in the role as a Council Member. This year for our Memorial Day event, which most of you attended, we did a salute to our Asian American-Pacific Islander veterans, and it was Asian American-Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and we brought in some guest speakers from the Hmong community who serve on the Asian American-Pacific Islander Veterans Association of Minnesota. The amount of feedback that we've gotten at Beyond the Yellow Ribbon for taking that approach this year and having the two guest speakers that we have from the Hmong community itself has been amazing. I've had dozens and dozens of emails, phone calls, text messages from my friends in the Hmong community saying we're so grateful that you did that, and I think as Council Member Garza talks about, ways in which we can perhaps acknowledge and involve other minority communities, those are the kinds of things that we need to continue to do. We're very sensitive to that on the Convention and Visitors Bureau. We make sure that our CVB guide, the one that we print, represents everybody in

this community, on purpose. We're very, very diligent about let's make sure the photo arrays represent people of all backgrounds, experiences, newer residents, longer-term residents because it's a fact our population diversity continues to grow as people continue to move into Cottage Grove. But let's not forget they're coming here because it's a great place to live, a great place to raise your family, good schools, they feel safe. Those are the key messages. The Public Safety message in this survey is unbelievable, it's ridiculous, it's great, and look, for as long as we've been a team, don't we always talk about how that's one of the core foundational elements of a great community is people need to feel safe. So, I think we're doing the right thing, and I think having this statistically relevant survey in our hands is a good thing, but we can't overreact, yet we can't underreact. We have to take the data for what it's worth, but recognize that is 16% of the people that responded. That's my take on it, based on some of the other surveys we've done in the past. By the way, I like this one a lot better because we can do it again in three years or whenever we choose to do it again, and we'll have statistically relevant benchmarks to look at, and it'll be consistent. Dave's been talking about that for as long as he's been on the Council, let's make sure we can compare and contrast apples to apples. This will give us that chance to do that.

Council Member Thiede said we might be able to improve our response rate. In this case, this was the full survey, we may choose to do a smaller one, maybe a little easier to finish and respond to, and then at different times take different portions of this, so you still have that comparability but at maybe a little bit higher response rate.

Council Member Olsen said yeah, but how many comments did you see, I want a Community Center, I want a Community Center, I want a Community Center? It's all over the place, right? We've gone to the voters three different times in my tenure on the Council, and they've never passed it. Again, you have to recognize, you know, where's the commentary coming from, and look, a lot of people want a pony, but they don't want to pay for it. So, we have to recognize, too, that there's this element of the services that you provide have a cost, and we do our very best to explain if we're going to do, I mean, the mayor spent hours and hours and hours and hours and hours about we're going to do this Community Center. You have to recognize that there's a cost associated with that, it's the same way with a school referendum, it's the same way with anything else. So, interpreting the data correctly I think is our biggest challenge. Gathering the data, we did a good job, now we've got to interpret everything.

Phil said and tonight that's one of the things that I want; Council Member Olsen said correct.

Council Member Garza asked on this online survey, do we not know who these comments came from?

Council Member Olsen replied yeah, I think it's anonymous, isn't it?

Phil replied the only thing we know is if they chose to respond in our demographic information, age range, you know.

Council Member Garza said I just get concerned about some of them; Phil replied no, we don't have, we don't anything, it was anonymous. Council Member Olsen said yeah, there were a couple pretty aggressive ones. Council Member Garza said yeah, well even just about governance and stuff.

Mayor Bailey said well, I commented to Council Member Olsen if you look at one of the comments, it's a comment on the top of Page 8. Council Member Garza said, I mean, we need to get them in here. Mayor Bailey said well, that person hasn't been on the Council for two years. Council Member Garza said yeah, I know about that. Mayor Bailey said on what they were commenting about, so, when I look at things like that, I think some of it is, it's great that Phil's standing up front here, I think it's communication, too. I think how do we share what we're doing better, you know, with that?

Council Member Olsen said it's been our challenge for as long as I can remember.

Mayor Bailey said our education, arts, and culture thing, it did not surprise me at all it's that small, and all I would say is, I mean, even if you go to the city to the south here, every weekend they've got something going on in their bandshell on the river and multiple times during the week. So, my guess is if they were to do this survey, that would be a very high thing for them because they've decided that's something they want to do. And I'm not saying that we have to do everything, like I said.

Council Member Olsen said and, by the way, their taxes are way higher than ours.

Mayor Bailey replied I know they are, but that's what I'm saying is I think part of it is are we good enough in how do we get that message out, right? So, when locally-grown theater is doing events or plays or whatever, is the City working to get that message out, as long as we can get it out far enough in advance with dates and things like that,

so maybe it's in our publications. Because your publications, I know that was mentioned here, some of the feedback has been people love how we're giving them the info.

Council Member Olsen said yeah, *Cottage Grove Reports*, people still love it, they read it.

Mayor Bailey replied yes, and there's a bunch on email, which is fine, but we can do both, all right? You can communicate both ways. There were a few things, like from a comment standpoint, though, I think it would be, and it's not something at this immediate moment, like I said, we just got the stuff to digest, right? But there are a few comments out there, it would be good for us when we do our next retreat, like next year, in January or whatever, to even take some of that information and figure out how do we react to it, how do we respond to it? And by the way, some of it, I'm just going to, as an example, some of it is not necessarily that the City has to pay for it, and I'm going to give an example. I saw a couple comments in there, and I do agree with them on these comments is cell phone access or accessibility is lacking in certain parts of our community, right? And I know one guy, right over there, because I hear it from people down in here, where he lives, and as we continue to grow, the fact of the matter is that is probably something we should address. And it isn't something maybe that we are going to go build a tower or whatever, but we need to communicate or figure out how do we get our partners out there that do cellular service to improve the cellular coverage within our community, as an example. We just recently did broadband, we just did all that; well, obviously, that message isn't out there yet, right? So, there's a lot of people that don't know what we just did to expand broadband coverage in Cottage Grove. So, that's fully understandable, it just means, guess what? They're going to realize we're already reacting to it, it just wasn't here at the time of the survey.

And then the last comment I'd mention is, you know, are there programs or something other cities are doing to help or support local businesses in the sense of like say hey, if we want a non-chain restaurant to come to Cottage Grove or a mom and pop name, whatever it is, what tools can we provide as a City that would help benefit them?

Council Member Garza said I think we had a couple of opportunities for businesses that are trying to; I know one for sure is, but they haven't found a place. And it's unfortunate because that was a really cool concept that was a good idea to come to the City, but mom, you know, a family business, but all of the comments because there's a lot of comments on it because it's like that's their focus. And the most common was that I just couldn't afford to go there. You know, bringing in these mom and pop restaurants or places, we have to keep that in mind as well because our community, you know, we're still.

Council Member Olsen said our community has to support local business in order for local business to thrive, and that is a responsibility that we don't necessarily bear, but we have to continually remind people of that, shop local, right? It's funny people say well, you've got all chain restaurants in town. No, we don't, we have several independently-owned and operated restaurants in town. Yeah, there's an Applebee's, there's an Applebee's in every city in the United States, for God's sake, but Junction 70 is not a chain, Carbone's is not a chain, per se, it's owned by local people who live in town, Tim and Janelle are great folks, right? So, sometimes perception and reality, there's a little blurry line there, you know? But again, you take the information you get, and you interpret it in a manner that helps you make better decisions.

Mayor Bailey said but my last comment was like when they talk about Community Design, or at least the benchmark picture we're looking at there, as we get into like I said further discussions in the future, maybe it might even be kind of like was commented here earlier, maybe on some of these questions we could do our own City self-survey. So, for example, if we were to ask people, knowing that we got a fairly significant gap in education, arts, and culture, what are people feeling that we're missing? When you talk about Community Design, I mean, I have my own opinions on what I think we're missing on Community Design, but it'd be more interesting to hear what other citizens think. So, when you see that and again, not reacting crazy to the number because it wasn't that bad, but do a deeper dive into some of these individual areas where we could actually figure out from talking to our own citizens, just to get them to give us feedback on what their perception is on Community Design. Because I have my own opinions on some of it, on some of the stuff that the City has done over the many, many years we've been in existence that I think was a mistake in how our retail areas are broken out, but now we have to live with it and now we have to redevelop.

Council Member Garza said I stopped at a local business earlier, and I went in and checked out their open house, and on my way out, I just happened to run into one of the owners, Carolyn, and it was interesting because

she got me because I had my badge on and we were talking and stuff. And they're from Germany, and she was just telling me a little bit of history of the business, and what was interesting and this I what I want to share; she said yeah, you know, we love Cottage Grove and we're really excited to be here, but they're staying at a Bloomington hotel, and that's where they put up all their people. She said it would really be nice to have a nice hotel in Cottage Grove.

Mayor Bailey said I was looking at Jennifer, I didn't even bother to tell you that because the C.E.O., when I talked to him there, that's what he said, they're all down at The Confluence, and God, it would be so nice to stay here in Cottage Grove. I said well, we're working on it, but I said I could probably get you the Tree House.

Council Member Garza said there's going to be a lot of people coming in the entire North America, including Canada. So, this opportunity, all of these people that are about to come in here and have to stay for weeks at a time to do this training. So, I told her, I said from my understanding, we have some stuff in the works, we're not announcing anything yet and we don't know this yet, but we are really working hard on bringing something here that is not a two-star hotel, and so she said she was very excited to hear that. So, I mean, for her to just say, it's like.

Council Member Olsen said so, the groundwork has been laid, and we're tracking it, so.

Council Member Clausen said I have one question. Is there a way to tell the difference from the invited guests to take the survey vs. the at-large people, and is there a way to track and compare those results? I mean, were there more negative responses from the people that did the open or the voluntary survey vs. the people that were invited? Or is that digging too deep into it and they didn't get that data?

Phil replied Council Member Clausen, that's an excellent question. And, one, you do have the full report of the open-participation survey responses in the materials before you, it's a lot, but you've got that. And then, number two, for better or worse, and maybe depending on the day, I might fall on different sides of the coin, but Polco doesn't code those responses the same way that they code the statistically-relevant responses. The down side being the point that you're probably alluding to, the upside being that your statistically-relevant responses remain statistically relevant; as opposed to the open-participation where it's not that this would happen, but in theory, I could fill out the random-sampling survey and then a week later fill out the open-participation survey and give wildly different answers. Again, probably not likely, but there is some merit to having them separated.

Council Member Clausen replied okay; Council Member Olsen said it's a good question, though.

Mayor Bailey said thank you to Phil. Council Member Olsen said great stuff, it's definitely going to be a lot to read through and chew on.

Mayor Bailey said all right, so Council, we're going into the Conference Room in a closed session.

14. WORKSHOPS - CLOSED TO PUBLIC - CONFERENCE ROOM

A. Performance Evaluation - Jennifer Levitt, City Administrator

Staff Recommendation: Close the meeting pursuant to MN Statute 13D.05, Subd. (3)a, to conduct a performance evaluation of City Administrator Jennifer Levitt.

15. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Council Member Olsen at 8:55 p.m. to close the meeting and second by Council Member Garza.

Motion by Council Member Olsen at 9:30 p.m. to open the meeting and seconded by Councilmember Thiede.

Motion by Council Member Olsen to adjourn the meeting at 9:30 p.m. and seconded by Council Member Thiede.

Motion carried: 5-0.

Minutes prepared by Judy Graf and reviewed by Tamara Anderson, City Clerk.