

**CHISHOLM CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING – FEBRUARY 25, 2026**

Mayor Adam Lantz called the Regular Meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Councilors Jim Varda, April Fountain, Travis Vake, Jed Holewa, Marty Halverson, and Mayor Adam Lantz

Absent: None

Also Present: Administrator Stephanie Skraba, Clerk-Treasurer Devin Ceglar, Police Chief James Vukad, Consultant Engineer Jim Johnson, Parks/Trails/Recreation Director Collin Luke, Library Supervisor Katie Christenson, Attorney Bryan Lindsay, and Mesabi Community TV.

ADOPT THE AGENDA

When presenting to council to adopt the agenda with additions: 1) Add Public Works Garage to the Working Session under Mayor Lantz 2) Councilor Varda to add under himself: that people can only belong to one entity either the ambulance or the fire department and it would be effective immediately. Councilor Varda would be letter D, Clerk-Treasurer Ceglar would be E, Administrator Skraba would be letter F, Attorney Lindsay would be letter H.

Councilor Holewa motioned to amend, to go through the agenda as presented without Councilor Varda's amendment to the agenda due to information and department heads not present.

No support.

Motioned Failed

Moved by Councilor Vake and supported by Councilor Halverson to adopt the agenda with Councilor Varda's item.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, and Halverson

Voting Nay: Councilor Holewa and Mayor Lantz

Absent: None

Motion Carried

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Jennifer Crotteau, senior class advisor and Senior Class President Ciri Thompson and Senior Joseph Lindsay discussed with council the possibility to have pole hangers for the senior banners placed in the city. Last year they were unable to hang the banners, this year they will be made by Emily Law and will have pockets on them so that they can be hung where the city deems they should be hung. They would need 43 for the graduating students this year and the estimated 60 that will graduate next year. They would like the city to buy the brackets and to hang them in the city, and if possible, to be located on main street. They have a fund raiser coming up on the 5th, and have asked local businesses for sponsorship so that all seniors have a banner even if it is cost prohibited, but the banners are proving to be expensive. If they do not have a sponsor for the brackets, they would not be able to hang the banners. They hope that all seniors will have a banner for years to come. Councilor Vake and Public Works Supervisor Folstad had explored the brackets previously at "Signworld". The brackets can come one or two to a pole. If we went two to a pole set, we would need roughly six sets, approximately \$2100-\$2400. Joseph Lindsay commented that he believes they would be a good idea because they could also be used for all the coming years.

Phil Olsen from Chisholm Ambulance read a letter addressed to the council on behalf of his son Erick Olsen who is also a member of the Chisholm Ambulance serving as an EMT.

"My name is Erick Olsen. I am a Nationally Registered EMT serving with Chisholm Ambulance, and I previously served as a volunteer firefighter for the City of Chisholm. I am here tonight to strongly oppose the proposal to eliminate dual-role EMTs and firefighters. This is not an internal staffing preference.

This is a public safety decision. In a community the size of Chisholm, cross-trained responders are not a luxury - they are a force multiplier. Dual-role members increase flexibility when calls overlap, when staffing is thin, or when mutual aid is delayed. They expand capability without expanding cost.

If this proposal moves forward, current dual-role members will be forced to choose between EMS and fire. In today's environment, forcing that choice risks losing trained personnel entirely -and recruitment and retention in rural emergency services is already a serious challenge. Before making a structural change like this, I believe three areas require clear, documented analysis:

If there are concerns about supervision, chain of command, or role clarity, those are policy matters. They can be addressed through written SOPs, clarified reporting structures, and leadership development.

Structural elimination is a drastic response to issues that may be administrative in nature.

I also want to address something carefully.

When structural changes are proposed at the same time members raise operational or leadership concerns, it can create the appearance of retaliation - whether that is the intent or not.

Public safety professionals must be able to raise concerns about training standards, operational procedures, and compliance issues without fear of losing their opportunity to serve.

If members are forced to choose between roles after voicing concerns, that sends a chilling message -not just to the individuals involved - but to anyone in the future who sees something that needs improvement.

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Healthy departments encourage accountability. Strong leadership welcomes review. If there are disagreements about standards or practices, the appropriate response is independent evaluation, policy clarification, and transparent oversight - not reducing participation by those asking questions. The citizens of Chisholm deserve emergency services that are professional, collaborative, and open to continuous improvement. First -Staffing Impact, what will this do to: EMS response times? Fire response times? Daytime coverage? Overtime usage? Mutual aid reliance?

A decision that reduces flexibility should only follow a transparent operational impact review. Second -Financial Impact. Cross-trained personnel are cost-effective. They reduce duplication of staffing and training. If we lose members and must rely more heavily on overtime or mutual aid, that has financial consequences. Those numbers should be presented publicly before any vote.

Third -Operational Effectiveness. Dual-role members improve coordination on scene. They understand both EMS and fire operations. That cross-training enhances communication, patient care, and safety in high-stress environments. Removing that bridge risks siloing departments rather than strengthening collaboration. So, before you vote on this, I ask you one simple question: Will this decision make emergency response in Chisholm stronger tomorrow than it is today? If the answer is not clearly yes - supported by data, staffing analysis, and financial review - then this proposal should not move forward. We should be expanding flexibility in public safety, not restricting it. Our citizens do not care what patch is on our shoulder when we show up. They care that we show up - quickly, competently, and fully staffed. I respectfully ask this council to table this proposal, request a formal operational and financial impact review, and ensure that any decision made strengthens - rather than weakens - emergency services in this community. Thank you for your time. He further commented that although he cannot improve on the letter from his son Erick, he added that it appears to be a sense of urgency, that it needs to be handled immediately, and effective immediately, screams of impropriety. And the fact that it is being run through when the Director of the Ambulance Service and Emergency Management can't be here to have input in it, that is wrong. He has worked 46 years in emergency services (police, fire, EMS), in suburban, small urban."

Linda Palcich-Wald read her letter to the City council.

"Good evening, Mayor and Council Members,

My name is Linda Palcich-Wald. I am a Paramedic on Chisholm Ambulance, a resident of this community, and someone who has previously served in a fire/medic role. I am here tonight to respectfully oppose the agenda item that would prohibit individuals from serving on both the ambulance and fire department.

I want to begin by saying this clearly: this should not be about one department versus another. It should not be about identity, authority, or control. It is about how we, as a community, build the strongest emergency response system possible with the resources we have.

As someone who has worked in a dual-role fire EMS system, I can tell you firsthand that it fosters stronger scene leadership, better patient outcomes, and more cohesive emergency operations. It builds responders who see the big picture -life safety, fire control, rescue, and medical care. Every emergency response is a team effort. Structure fires require coordinated suppression, ventilation, scene management, medical monitoring, and transport planning.

Medical emergencies require scene safety, proper medical care, lifting assistance, and sometimes technical rescue, or landing zone support. The more we understand each other's roles, the more seamlessly we work. When individuals serve on both departments, they understand both operational perspectives and expectations. Dual roles foster stronger scene leadership and well-rounded team members.

This agenda does not appear to be driven with the best interests of public safety in mind. We are all part of small communities up here. Rural departments often struggle with recruitment and retention. Prohibiting dual-role participation shrinks an already limited pool of qualified responders. We should be working together, not trying to cause division and further strain between departments, that rely so heavily on communication and collaboration.

We are not just employees. We are neighbors. Our children attend school here. We see the people we respond to at local businesses. Many of us choose to serve in multiple roles because we are committed to this community-not because we are seeking titles, but because we know the need is real.

I'd like to request that we look for solutions that better support a model that prioritizes leadership collaboration, flexibility, and community-centered service. Thank you for your time and commitment to our community's safety."

REPORTS

Councilor Varda reported that he was at the Minnesota Museum of Mining meeting last week, at Valentini's as they do not go to the castle in the winter. The Chief of Police informed him today that there is interviews for new police officers.

Councilor Fountain reported that she attended a working session and a regular council meeting.

Councilor Vake reported that there is a dart tournament this weekend, renamed in honor of Dylan who passed away, he was the owner of Sidelines, the family and Sidelines has graciously dedicated the funds that they raise at the event to the fireworks and street dance that is being brought back to Doc Graham Days. Thank you to them. If you are a dart player, please consider signing up with Sidelines where they will have raffles and a bunch of other stuff there as well. He gave a plug to everyone that bought a raffle ticket for the first fireworks frenzy fundraiser they did, it was very successful and were on our way to bringing back fireworks and a street dance.

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Councilor Holewa reported that he met with the Safety Committee today.

Councilor Halverson reported that he attended a Redhead committee meeting and met with the Fire Department last week. When asked if he met with the whole Fire Department, he commented yes, he met with the Fire Department.

Mayor Lantz reported that “For nine years I have been an active, engaged, and proud member of the Chisholm Fire department. I have been an advocate for growth, progress, transparency, communication, and training. The status quo has never been an acceptable position for myself. A phrase commonly used in parts of society who want to see improvement but specifically endeared in the fire service is that we are here to leave it better than we found it. Meaning we should strive to be better today than we were yesterday. Be better equipped, prepared, and trained for those around us and those who depend on us.

When a subordinate brings forward concerns of performance, complacency or training it is in hopes that it leads to change, evaluation and awareness that there could be room for improvement.

Unfortunately, in some cases it can lead to defensive or dismissive behavior and then those concerns go unevaluated. There are instances when an employee is disgruntled, they air their issues in private settings, private text groups, sitting in a bar, or garage, behind the backs of those around them. Those should be considered unacceptable outlets. As an employee I have brought my concerns forward in person to our department leadership and staff as a whole during our public business meetings, where they belong.

For the better part of a year, councilor Varda as the liaison to the fire department has heard me bring forward items for discussion at our fire department business meetings regarding, attendance, participation, complacency, training, and leadership. These conversations are never easy, nor are they comfortable or convenient and unfortunately have led to lost friendships. All city employees, especially those in Emergency services should be open to and expected to be evaluated and assessed on our performance and training. As a member of our Fire Department, if I were to ignore my concerns because it creates an uncomfortable environment, or lost friendships I wouldn't be doing my job and I wouldn't be performing my duties to the fire service for the right reasons. I would be doing a disservice to my fellow members, future members, and members of our community. I will continue to advocate for a higher level of training and a stringent review process of those in leadership positions.

I have rarely crossed my position from the city council into the fire department and vice versa.

However, I expressed some of these concerns at our last working session as it pertained to job descriptions and soon to come SOG's. I was hesitant moving these forward without sharing my concerns with my fellow councilors. I had hoped it would open the door for more conversation and time for questions to be asked and hopefully the request of input from an outside agency or consultant specializing in Fire Department policy and protocol.

I am extremely disheartened and disappointed that any councilor's reaction to an employee and/or city official advocating for procedural reviews and requests for accountability would be to express this kind of effort to make sure that things are left the way they are and to make a policy change to enforce the removal of said employee or to inhibit their ability to give back to the community, while offering no justification or reasoning behind such a change.

I am extremely disheartened and disappointed that any councilor's reaction to an employee and or city official advocating for procedural reviews, request for accountability, would be to express this kind of effort to make sure things are left the way they are and make a policy change to enforce the removal of said employee or inhibit their ability to give back to the community while offering no justification or reason behind such change.”

Ambulance Director Larson was absent.

Interim Fire Chief Worlie was absent.

Police Chief Vukad thanked the Public Works Department this last Saturday, as many of you know the Chamber sponsored a boot hockey event for Polar Bear Days, so they had an opportunity to engage in a great fun game with them at boot hockey. It was fun, it was energetic to say the least, and jokingly commented that several of them needed oxygen by the time it was done. He was surprised he wasn't sore at the end of the day and get out of bed the next day. He greatly appreciates the Chamber for putting that event on. In hopes of next year, they were allowed to end at a tie. He also took the opportunity to address Councilor Varda's agenda item based on his experience and in public safety as a leader. He said it is not a personal critic of Councilor Varda or his intentions or his agenda item.

They have worked together and known each other for years, and Chief Vukad respects that working relationship and Councilor Varda's past service with the Fire Department as a retired firefighter. I understand where the concern is coming from, and I appreciate that it's rooted in wanting what's best for the city. Chief Vukad's experience in the public safety sector, as a Police Chief, years of law enforcement experience, and also worked at US Steel overseeing their emergency services department for several years. He oversaw the fire department, security and EMS. There were a lot of benefits. a lot of the employees were cross trained on several different things; EMS, fire, security, where there were a lot of benefit and huge cost savings to that organization based on that structure. That said, from a business standpoint and as a taxpayer and a leader of another public safety department within this city I respectfully disagree with limiting employees to only one public safety role. This isn't about convenience for employees.

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It's about smart staffing, fiscal responsibility, and maintaining reliable emergency response. First, taxpayer value. When the city invests in training, certifications, and experience, allowing an employee to serve in more than one capacity simply makes good business sense. We maximize that investment without increasing headcount, benefits, or duplicating training costs. Second, staffing reality. Our paid-on-call fire department is not full-time staffed. Shortages happen, and they happen regularly.

Cross-trained ambulance staff help fill those gaps. Restricting employees to a single entity would reduce our available response, not improve it. Third, operational flexibility on emergency scenes. Emergencies don't always fit neatly into one category. They evolve quickly. Having personnel who can transition and assist where the need is greatest strengthens our overall response, without additional cost to the city. I'd also like to speak from direct experience. As the Police Chief, I know firsthand how difficult it is to fill vacancies, especially in the times we're in right now. We struggle to get enough applicants to fill one open position, let alone the three vacancies we currently have. Public safety is a true calling. The people who choose this line of work are few and far between. If you asked ten people on the street whether they would ever want to do what a police officer, firefighter, or EMS responder does, eight out of ten would tell you, "*Absolutely not. I wouldn't want to see or deal with what you deal with.*" That reality matters. Because of it, it's essential that we hire wisely, retain the people we have and cross-train them whenever possible to strengthen our departments. At this point, I'd ask us all to take a step back and think a little outside the box. Why are we having this conversation in the first place? What is the root of the issue we're trying to solve? Is it staffing challenges? Is it burnout? Is it response reliability? Or is it concern for employee safety and workload? Those are the questions worth focusing on. I don't believe the intent here is, or should be, to create a personal battle between individuals or a divide between departments. That doesn't make our organizations stronger. Our shared goal is to improve public safety, protect our employees, and make our organizations more effective, more engaged, and more sustainable. From that perspective, allowing cross-trained personnel to serve where they are needed most isn't a problem, it's part of the solution. I would also respectfully suggest that a decision of this impact would benefit from having all key stakeholders at the table. This affects EMS, fire, administration, and staffing across departments. And tonight, the Ambulance Director and Acting Fire Chief were not able to be here to provide input. Not because this issue isn't important, it is. But because it is important, I believe it's the right thing to do to slow this down and have a collaborative discussion before a final decision is made. Including all key players allows us to identify the real problem, explore solutions, and avoid unintended consequences. At the end of the day, this isn't about disagreement on intent. It's simply a difference in perspective on what best serves the city operationally, financially, and from a public safety standpoint. For those reasons, I believe allowing ambulance staff to also serve on the paid-on-call fire department, and continuing this conversation with all involved, is in the best interest of our community.

Building Official Galli was absent.

City Consultant Engineer Johnson did not have a report.

Public Works Supervisor Folstad was absent.

Parks/Trails/Recreation Director Luke reported that the Youth Chisholm Soccer registration is live on our city website, the deadline to register is March 22nd. Reach out to Director Luke with any questions. The Grand Opening at the trailhead at Redhead is scheduled for Friday, May 29th at noon. More information about the curriculum will be coming.

Library Supervisor Christenson reported that they are currently in week four of the winter reading program. The theme is "Track Down a Good Book". There is two weeks to go for the six-week program. There are currently 136 participants, if you are interested there is still enough time to sign up. They are in the mist of tax season. They have Federal 1040 forms with instruction booklets available if anyone is looking for those. In addition,

Attorney Bryan Lindsay did not have a report.

Clerk-Treasurer Ceglar did not have a report.

Administrator Skraba did not have a report.

APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA

Moved by Councilor Holewa and supported by Councilor Vake to Approve the Consent Agenda including the List of Bills, Communications, payroll, February 4, 2026 Working Session Meeting Minutes, February 9, 2026 Working Session Meeting Minutes, February 11, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes, and Resignations and Retirements.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

**RESOLUTION NUMBER 0226-22 AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR WENTON ADDITION SITE
UTILITY & STREET CONSTRUCTION**

Moved by Councilor Holewa and supported by Councilor Varda to adopt Resolution Number 0206-22 Award of Contract for Wenton Addition Site Utility & Street Construction.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

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SEH PROPOSAL FOR CONSTRUCTION SERVICES FOR WENTON ADDITION DEVELOPMENT

Moved by Councilor Fountain and supported by Councilor Vake to approve the SEH Proposal for Construction Services for Wenton Addition Development in the amount of \$254,000.00.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

CTC CONTRACT FOR WENTON ADDITION

Moved by Councilor Varda and supported by Councilor Holewa to approve the CTC Contract for Wenton Addition in the amount of \$238,454.03.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

ENTER INTO CONTRACT WITH AMERICAN RAMP FOR LONG YEAR PARK PUMP TRACK

Moved by Councilor Halverson and supported by Councilor Holewa to Enter into contract with American Ramp for Long Year Park Pump Track in the amount of \$175,000.00 funded by IRRR Connectivity Grant.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

POST AND HIRE A LIBRARY INTERN

Moved by Councilor Fountain and supported by Councilor Varda to approve the Post and to hire a Library intern.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

RESOLUTION NUMBER 0226-23 ACCEPTING DONATION TO THE CITY OF CHISHOLM

Moved by Councilor Fountain and supported by Councilor Vake to adopt Resolution number 0226-23 Accepting Donation to the City of Chisholm from Cheryl & Larry Killien in the amount of \$500.00.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

REMOVING DUAL ROLES BETWEEN CHISHOLM AMBULANCE AND CHISHOLM FIRE DEPARTMENT

Moved by Councilor Holewa to table the removal of dual roles between the Chisholm Ambulance and Chisholm Fire Department. There was not support of the Motion.

Motion Failed.

Moved by Councilor Halverson and supported by Councilor Varda to vote on setting policy where individuals can belong to only one role, either the Chisholm Ambulance or the Chisholm Fire Department effective by close of business day Monday.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, and Halverson

Voting Nay: Councilors Fountain and Vake

Abstaining: Councilor Holewa and Mayor Lantz

Absent: None

Motion Failed

Moved by Councilor Vake and supported by Councilor Holewa to have it added to the working session about to be scheduled at this meeting and to ask for all of the Fire Department, Ambulance, Leadership, and the Council to be there.

Voting Aye: Councilors Vake, Holewa, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: Councilors Varda, Fountain, and Halverson

Absent: None

Motion Failed

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HRA LOAN DEBT FORGIVENESS

Moved by Councilor Fountain to do nothing and keep the loans on the books so that the City and the HRA until the \$2,300,000.00 bonds are paid off or the City takes some other formal action. There was not support of the Motion. Motion Failed.

Moved by Councilor Holewa and supported by Councilor Halverson to direct the City would draft documentation that if the HRA does anything with that property or cease to run it in regards to operating beneficiary to the City, prior to 2047 the HRA would have to pay back \$298,566.00. If the HRA is still running it in 2047 the debt is wiped.

Voting Aye: Councilors Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: Councilors Varda and Fountain,

Absent: None

Motion Carried

**RESOLUTION NUMBER 0226-24 LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION SPECIAL
APPROPRIATIONS APPLICATION**

Moved by Councilor Holewa and supported by Councilor Vake to adopt Resolution Number 0226-24 Local Government Resolution Special Appropriations Application approving of funds for the 2,040,000.00.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

UNITED WAY OF NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTA DAY OF ACTION REQUEST

Moved by Councilor Varda and supported by Councilor Halverson to approve the request for coordination for the Day of Action on June 26, 2026 and to invest \$5000.00 from the Gambling Fund to assist with the purchase of materials, volunteer meals and aid, and potential scholarships for homeowners who cannot afford to contribute to their request.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Abstaining: Councilor Fountain

Absent: None

Motion Carried

SCHEDULE A WORKING SESSION

Moved by Councilor Holewa and supported by Councilor Vake to schedule a Working Session to discuss Media Com, Public Works Garage, HR Process, Wenton Addition lot sales on Wednesday, March 11, 2026 after the Regular Meeting.

Voting Aye: Councilors Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: Councilor Varda

Absent: None

Motion Carried

RECESS TO CLOSED SESSION

Moved by Councilor Halverson and supported by Councilor Vake to recess to a closed session at 7:45 pm.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

ADJOURN CLOSED SESSION

Moved by Councilor Varda and supported by Holewa to adjourned the Closed Session at 8:09 pm.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

ADJOURN REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING

Moved by Councilor Vake and supported by Halverson to adjourned the regular meeting at 8:10 pm.

Voting Aye: Councilors Varda, Fountain, Vake, Holewa, Halverson, and Mayor Lantz

Voting Nay: None

Absent: None

Motion Carried

Attest:

/s/ Adam Lantz, Mayor

/s/ Stephanie Skraba, Administrator