

### **Meeting Opening**

Mayor Diana Merdian called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 PM on Tuesday, February 17, 2026.

Present: Alderman Retha Elston, Alderman Joe Strabala-Bright, Alderman Josh Johnson, Alderman Aida Baker, Alderman Allen Przysucha, Alderman Jim Wise.

Absent: None

City Manager Scott Shumard, City Attorney Tim Zollinger, Police Chief E. Pat Bartel, Deputy Chief Shane Bland, Fire Chief David Northcutt, Deputy Chief Scott Melton, Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader, Finance Director Cindy Von Holten, and City Clerk Teri Sathoff were also present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Communication from Visitors**

Jeff Gale, a resident of Sterling, addressed the Council regarding the City's use of Flock cameras. Mr. Gale expressed concerns that the cameras may violate Fourth Amendment protections. He stated that he had submitted a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request seeking information related to the cameras and indicated that a portion of his request was denied. Mr. Gale characterized the cameras as governmental overreach and requested that the City cancel its contract with Flock Safety until a full public hearing is conducted.

### **Consent Agenda**

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve the following items on the consent agenda:

- A. Approval of Minutes
- B. Approval of Bills and Payroll

Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Jim Wise, and Allen Przysucha. Nays – None.

### **Recommended Personnel Action**

Chief Northcutt introduced firefighters Logan Griswold and Gaetano Tusa. City Clerk Sathoff swore in both firefighters.

### **Business Items**

Alderman Przysucha made a motion to approve **Resolution 2026-02-04 Supporting the Commemoration of Illinois America250**; Seconded by Alderman Elston. Alderman Wise asked whether the City would again provide financial support for the fireworks display this year. Scott Shumard advised that both the City of Sterling and the City of Rock Falls will be contributing an increased amount to the fireworks display in recognition of the upcoming 250th anniversary celebration. Alderman Strabala-Bright commented that patriotism means different things to different people and stated that patriotism does not equate to blind obedience. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve **Resolution 2026-02-05 Requesting Street Closure for Sterling Street Fest**; Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. The City Clerk stated the bands for Street Fest have been signed, and an announcement is forthcoming. Alderman Elston asked if IDOT would need to approve this road closure and the typical response time for that. Sathoff advised that she will be sending the request to IDOT, and they will respond once they receive the new certificate of insurance on May 1, 2026. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve **Ordinance 2026-02-04 Amending Chapter 6, Article I, Section 6-3(d)(6) to include aluminum containers**; Seconded by Alderman Przysucha. City Clerk Sathoff advised the Council that this was brought before the liquor commission on February 10, 2026, and this is a recommendation from that meeting. Sterling Main Street requested the change to include aluminum cans to cut down on the cost of purchasing plastic cups for special outdoor events. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Baker made a motion to **award the contract to Martin & Company for the reconstruction of portions of Griswold Avenue and Woodburn Avenue**; seconded by Alderman Wise. City Manager Shumard stated this project covers Griswold Avenue from 9th Street to LeFevre and Woodburn from 11th to LeFevre and the side streets in between the two. This will be a complete reconstruction to take place over 2 years. Alderman Wise thanked City Manager Shumard and the staff for getting this project started, as this has been a long time coming. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve the **Consulting Services Agreement with MRH Solutions, LLC**; Seconded by Alderman Baker. Alderman Strabala-Bright said that he does not always approve of lobbyists. However, he does understand this is a necessary service in this case. Alderman Wise stated that MRH Solutions is very good at their job. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Wise made a motion to approve an **agreement with SRF Consulting Group for Professional Services Related to Quiet Zone Implementation**; Seconded by Alderman Przysucha. City Manager Shumard stated that the City worked with SRF Consulting for the first steps in the quiet zone. The next step is the construction design. This will be bid out later this year with a possible start date of fall 2026 or spring 2027. This company will navigate the regulatory hurdles. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

### **Staff Reports**

Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader reported that crews have taken advantage of the warm weather by trimming trees, cleaning ditches, filling potholes, and installing site furnishings at the riverfront.

Chief Bartel reported that the replacement squad vehicle is ready to be upfitted and is expected to be ready for patrol within three weeks. He presented a video of the department's drone training. Five officers are licensed to operate the drone, and the necessary FAA waivers have been received. During a recent training exercise, an actual emergency occurred involving a victim who had been battered and threatened with a firearm. The suspect fled the scene; however, the drone was deployed, successfully tracked the suspect, and assisted officers in apprehending the individual.

Chief Northcutt reported that surplus equipment has been distributed. The exhaust mitigation project is ongoing, with work anticipated to begin within the next month. The Mayor and department members were invited to the Rock Falls Fire Department to receive funds from Representative Sorenson for the training tower project. The Senior Living Center on LeFevre is expected to open soon. The facility recently experienced a significant water leak that required the evacuation of residents. One firefighter has resigned, and testing will begin again to fill the vacancy. The firefighters sworn in this evening have been working for one week and are actively participating in training. Chief Northcutt expressed appreciation to the IT Department, specifically Hunter and Andrew, for going above and beyond to address several departmental needs.

City Clerk Teri Sathoff reported that the Frosty Fun Event will be held this Saturday at the Northland Mall.

City Attorney Zollinger reminded the Council that substantial information will be forthcoming from the Illinois Municipal League regarding pending matters. Council members were encouraged to contact their elected officials with any questions or concerns.

City Manager Scott Shumard reported that Stratus has begun boring for fiber installation at the riverfront. The Coliseum will be receiving a new phone network. The Safe Streets for All grant remains under review. He will be contacting the relator for US Bank again regarding the vacant lot. The Whiteside County GIS Department provided significant assistance to the City with the

RiverEdge application, and a letter of appreciation has been sent to the County. The property located at 701 1st Avenue will revert to the City due to the foundation being beyond repair. A parking meeting was held to discuss downtown parking, and a survey will be distributed to downtown business owners and the public.

### **Council Reports**

Alderman Johnson thanked the Mayor for putting the Parking Committee together. He asked that the Council be open-minded when the recommendation comes to the Council.

Alderman Elston said she hoped everyone enjoyed the parks over the weekend. Elston thanked Teri and the employees for working on all the family events.

Alderman Przysucha congratulated the Sterling and Rock Falls Fire Departments on the training tower funding. He received a message about Oak Grove Avenue in the area of Strawberry Fields, the area that had been patched with gravel. Superintendent Schrader stated that Martin and Company would have that work completed by May 1st.

Alderman Wise asked about yard waste; residents have been blowing the waste into the streets. Schrader advised that residents are allowed to bring the yard waste to Public Works. City Clerk Sathoff advised that if there is an issue, it can be reported to code enforcement, and they will handle it. Sathoff will put out a statement on social media reminding residents not to place yard waste in the streets.

Mayor Merdian reminded the Council to return the City Manager evaluations as soon as possible. She thanked the Fire Department for welcoming Representative Sorenson to the area.

### **Study Session**

Lincoln Highway BDD - This is the Sterling Crossing area and was established in 2022. As the money comes in, 95% of it goes back to the developer. This works like an in-and-out fund; a small amount is retained for legal fees.

Northland Mall BDD - This is the Northland Mall property and was established in 2025. As the money comes in, 95% of it goes back to the developer. This works like an in-and-out fund; a small amount is retained for legal fees.

Northland Mall TIF - This is a pay-as-you-go TIF; it was created in 2025. The expenses for this fund include the eligibility study, redevelopment plan, and legal fees. The future of this depends on the new assessment.

Lincolnway-Lynn TIF - This is the Kohl's / Pet Smart property. It was created in 2010. The base EAV is \$470,548; the EAV in 2023 was \$1,666,827. The bond pay off date is 5/1/2031, the principal balance is \$2.4 million the projected ending fund balance is \$385,000.

Rock River TIF - This TIF was extended this year and will expire in 2038. There will be a negative fund balance; the bonds have been paid off.

CBD East TIF - This was formed for the Lawrence Lofts project. This is a pay-as-you-go TIF. We have redevelopment agreements with 302 1st Avenue and 311 1st Avenue. This has a fund balance of \$85,000.

Lincoln Highway TIF - This was established in 2021. It is a pay-as-you-go TIF. The projected 2027 fund balance is \$16,500.

2021B CGH Bonds - this operates as an in-and-out fund. CGH sends the City the funds required to make the annual payment.

Sewer- \$1 million will be set aside for the new plant; \$975,000 was set aside last year. The new plant is planned for 2031. There will be an increase of \$1 on the base rate as well as an increase of \$0.50 to the user rate; these are the same as last year. Our rates are comparable to the surrounding communities.

Solid Waste - This fund pays for residential trash collection, recycling collection, yard waste collection, E-waste collection, etc. The City is still looking for a site for clean fill; there is a \$50,000 budgeted for the purchase of the property. Last year, there was a 75-cent increase in the collection fee; this year, there will be a recommendation of a 50-cent increase in the collection fee. The trash collection contract expires in June of 2028.

### **Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm.

Teri Sathoff

City Clerk