

Meeting Opening

Mayor Diana Merdian called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 PM on Monday, March 16, 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, Fire Chief David Northcutt, Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader, Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt (Zoom), Finance Director Cindy Von Holten, and City Clerk Teri Sathoff were also present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Communication from Visitors

There was no public comment.

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
- C. Resolution 2026-03-06 Street Closure Request for Sterling Municipal Band
- D. Resolution 2026-03-07 Street Closure Request for Movies in the Park
- E. Approve MFT General Maintenance Bids
- F. Petition from Sterling Main Street for a temporary road closure of West 2nd Street between Avenues A and B on May 3, 2026, from 6:00 am to 4:00 pm
- G. Petition from Sterling Main Street for a temporary road closure of West 2nd Street between Avenues A and B on Fridays, June 5, July 3, August 7, and September 4 from 4:00 pm to 9:00 pm for Rally on the Rock Cruise Nights

Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – None. Nays – None.

Recommended Personnel Action

There was no recommended personnel action.

Presentations and Awards

Heather Sotelo of the Greater Sterling Development Corporation (GSDC) provided a report to the Council regarding the City of Sterling's annual \$106,000 contribution. She explained that \$53,000 is allocated for GSDC management and \$53,000 is designated for economic development efforts.

Sotelo also provided a historical overview of GSDC, noting that the Small Business Development Center is in its 40th year and has supported the launch of several hundred businesses through its incubator program.

Sotelo further reported that a manufacturing facility is planning to relocate to Illinois and establish operations in Sterling, with a formal announcement expected in the near future. She also shared that a local small business is projecting a 400% increase in revenue in the near term.

Alderman Johnson inquired about when the \$53,000 funding level was originally established. Sotelo responded that the amount has remained unchanged for a significant period. Johnson questioned whether the current funding level is sufficient to meet operational needs. Sotelo indicated that, for a community of Sterling's size, the contribution is comparatively low. Johnson suggested that an annual funding increase in the range of 5% to 10% be considered.

Alderman Wise expressed agreement with Johnson regarding the need for an annual increase. Alderman Strabala-Bright recommended revisiting the matter in four to six months, with additional information on potential outcomes associated with increased funding.

Alderman Przysucha requested that Sotelo provide comparative data on funding levels in other communities, as well as details regarding GSDC's overall operating budget.

Business Items

Alderman Przysucha made a motion to Approve Pay Request #10 to Sjostrom & Sons in the amount of \$47,604.35 for the riverfront park improvements phase I; Seconded by Alderman Elston. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Baker made a motion to approve the acceptance of the bid from Rock River Ready Mix for concrete for the City curb and sidewalks; Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. 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 been actively engaged in snow plowing operations and tree cleanup following recent weather events.

Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt reported that Matt Reglin has been working on the rental inspection program. Currently, over 1,000 rental units have been registered, and 15 inspections have been completed. Schmidt noted that other communities have reached out regarding Sterling's ordinance and have expressed appreciation for both the program and the assistance provided by Reglin.

Chief Bartel reported that nine applicants attended the recent orientation session. He also stated that the new squad car is scheduled for delivery this week. During the recent snow emergency, officers conducted door-to-door notifications and made phone calls to residents to request vehicle removal from restricted areas. A total of 31 citations were issued.

Chief Northcutt reported there were no calls for service related to the recent snow and ice events. Overall call volume has increased. He also shared that the two firefighters currently attending the academy are performing well. The Deputy Chief position is now open.

Council Reports

Aldersperson Baker asked for clarification on legal burns. She was advised that recreational fires are allowed if they are in an approved container with a lid and a spark arrester. The fire must be extinguished if there is a complaint.

Aldersperson Elston thanked the Police Department for assisting her and a friend who had a medical emergency. She thanked parking enforcement officer, Stevens, for doing a great job.

Aldersperson Przysucha reported that the couches at Greencastle were removed. A resident contacted him about the house at 608 West 6th Street being a nuisance property.

Aldersperson Wise thanked Chief Bartel and the Police Department for their dedication to duty in the area of Prophet Park.

Mayor Merdian thanked everyone who assisted in getting the congressional spending grant through the system. She reminded everyone that there is a Riverfront meeting on the March 25th at 1 pm.

Study Session

General Fund

Revenues were up \$588,517, 2.9% overall. The major increases are from:

- Interest Income \$144,000

- Blackhawk Area Task Force \$50,000
- Income Tax \$107,000
- Sales Tax \$233,000
- Utility Tax \$90,000

Underperforming funds include the "other" sales tax (Video, local use and cannabis).

The amended budget expenses were up \$600,000 due to a transfer of that much to the capital fund.

Plan Commission

\$8,000 over budget for the housing study that was not budgeted for.

26/27 Request is 3.4% over 25/26 for comp plan amendments, riverfront support, wayfinding designs.

Fire Police Commission

\$2,800 over budget due to increased testing.

26/27 Request is 14.6% over 25/26 for additional medical testing and a stipend for support staff.

Mayor Council

\$7,700 under budget due to not renewing the Pacer AI software

26/27 Request is 11.44% under 25/26 due to not renewing the Pacer AI software.

City Clerk

\$23,000 over budget due to a legal compliance check and agenda software changes.

26/27 Request is 4.3% over 25/26 due to software expenses.

Administration

\$2,300 under budget

26/27 Request is 4.6% over 25/26 for the ICMA Conference and wage adjustment for HR position.

Information Technology

\$9,500 over budget due to other contractual expenses.

26/27 Request is 26.7% over 25/26 for salaries and added servers.

Fire Administration

\$11,000 over budget due to the interim Chief Reeder's salary.

26/27 Request is 10.5% under 25/26 due to Chief Reeder's salary.

Fire Services

\$151,000 under budget due to salaries and turnover, and a memorial for Ramos that has not

been completed.

26/27 Request is 11.8% over 25/26 due to salaries, vehicle maintenance, and training.

Fire Prevention

\$54,000 under budget due to the delay in hiring a Deputy Chief (salary)

26/27 Request is 6.44% under 25/26 for Deputy Chief salary.

Police Administration

\$18,000 under budget due to retirements.

26/27 Request is 5.4% under 25/26

Police Services

\$35,000 under budget due to salaries and turnover.

26/27 Request is 0.84% under 25/26 due to salaries.

Police Investigative

\$33,000 under budget due to a temporary vacancy.

26/27 Request is 18.3% over 25/26 due to software, drone support, and salaries.

Police Support

\$425,000 under budget due to the Public Safety Tax funding the dispatch center.

26/27 Request is 35.6% under 25/26 due to a decrease in dispatch costs and an increase in equipment costs.

Blackhawk Area Task Force

This is an in-and-out account.

Public Works Administration

\$3,000 under budget

26/27 Request is 7.7% over 25/26 for software and time clock.

Public Works Street Maintenance

\$10,500 under budget

26/27 Request is 6.6% over 25/26 due to salaries, streetlights, utilities, and equipment.

Public Works Traffic Maintenance

\$30,000 under budget

26/27 Request is 4.2% over 25/26 for a new arrow board.

Public Works Park Maintenance

\$1,900 over budget

26/27 Request is 36.6% over 25/26 NWSW Park.

Building and Zoning

\$28,000 under budget
26/27 Request is 3.3% over 25/26

City Shop

\$4,400 over budget due to required equipment inspections.
26/27 Request is 27.6% over 25/26 for required inspections and equipment.

Rental Inspection

\$40,000 under budget due to not hiring a part-time administrative assistant.
26/27 Request is 39.5% over 25/26, adding an inspector and equipment.

Revenues exceed expenses by \$529,665. \$100,000 will be reserved for expense growth.
\$429,665 is available. A discussion was held on the best use of the funds. It was decided that the NWSW park maintenance employee and police evidence storage were the largest needs.

Capital Fund

Amended revenues are up 11.4%, and amended expenses are up .2%. The projected fund balance for 2026 is \$2,947,249, and for 2027 is \$2,274,595.

Library Fund

Amended revenues are up 22.8%, and amended expenses are up 20.3%. FY 26/27 Revenues are up 44.9%, and expenses are up 62.0%.

IMRF

Amended revenues are up 4.9%, and amended expenses are up 8.93%. FY 26/27 Revenues are down 6.19%, and expenses are up 35.2%.

Social Security

Amended revenues are up 4.0%, and amended expenses are down 1.2%. FY 26/27 Revenues are up 16.6%, and expenses are up 7.1%.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 8:52 pm.
Teri Sathoff

City Clerk