

Meeting Opening

Mayor Diana Merdian called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 PM on Monday, June 15, 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 Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt, Finance Director Cindy Von Holten, Superintendent of Wastewater Cory Bradshaw, and City Clerk Teri Sathoff were also present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Communication from Visitors

Bradly Popejoy, 1206 E. 14th Street, Sterling, addressed the Council regarding a letter he received concerning tall weeds on his property. Mr. Popejoy stated that he believes he is being singled out, noting that there are other properties throughout the City with similar issues that also need to be addressed. He also expressed concern about individuals riding bicycles on the walking paths and asked that the matter be reviewed.

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. Junteenth Proclamation
- D. Dementia Friendly Sterling Initiative Proclamation

Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright.

Beth Sterk is the dementia navigator for CGH. She provided a background for the program. Mayor Merdian presented Sterk and her team with the Dementia Friendly Sterling Initiative Proclamation.

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

Items Removed from the Consent Agenda

No items were removed from the Consent Agenda

Recommended Personnel Action

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve the appointments and reappointments to boards and commissions; Seconded by Alderman Przysucha. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Presentations and Awards

Vishal Patel and Vaibhav Bhatt presented the Council with plans to film a feature movie in Sterling. Mr. Bhatt, a Sterling native who worked for the Discovery Channel for 20 years, explained that he and Mr. Patel have written a film entitled Tonight, Tonight, which centers on a graduating class from Sterling High School.

Mr. Bhatt stated that filming is expected to take approximately six weeks and estimated that the production could generate approximately \$1.5 million in economic impact for the local community. He also expressed a desire to involve local students by providing opportunities to assist with social media marketing efforts and gain experience working on the film set.

Mr. Bhatt and Mr. Patel requested that the City consider entering into a partnership to provide in-kind support for the project. Specifically, they asked for assistance with navigating the permitting process, coordinating logistics, and facilitating emergency services as needed during filming.

The proposed timeline calls for filming to begin during the summer of 2027.

Unfinished Business

There was no unfinished business.

Business Items

Alderman Baker made a motion to approve **Resolution No. R2026-06-24 Regarding the.02% Building and Maintenance Property Tax Levy for the Sterling Public Library**; Seconded by Alderman Wise. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Strabala-Bright made a motion to approve **Pay Request Number One to Blue Bird Construction in the amount of \$58,874.67 For the 3rd Street ADA Sidewalk Improvements**; Seconded by Alderman Johnson. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve **Pay Request #7 (final) to Martin & Company Excavating of Oregon, Illinois in the amount of \$3,000.12 for Street Reconstruction**; Seconded by Alderman Baker. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Wise made a motion to approve **Pay Request #5 (final) to Martin & Company Excavating of Oregon, Illinois in the amount of \$9,053.17 for Street Reconstruction**; Seconded by Alderman Elston. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Przysucha made a motion to approve **waiving the bid process for the purchase of a station alerting system for the Fire Department**; Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Johnson made a motion to **accept the quote from WESTNET LLC in the amount of \$89,908.01 for a station alerting system for the Fire Department**; Seconded by Alderman Przysucha. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve **waiving the bid process for the purchase of a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) fill station for the Fire Department**; Seconded by Alderman Baker. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Przysucha made a motion to **accept a quote from Air One Equipment in the amount of \$14,745 for a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) fill station for the Fire Department**; Seconded by Alderman Elston. 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 No. 2026-06-25 Road Closure For a Portion of Illinois Route 2 for Movies in the Park**; Seconded by Alderman Johnson. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Wise made a motion to approve **Ordinance 2026-06-14 Approving Petition of Rock River Stone RealEstate LLC and Daniel Raudonis as Owners of Parcels 11-22-211-004, 11-22-211-005, and 11-22-211-006 For Approval of Subdivision Plat**; Seconded by Alderman Baker. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Wise made a motion to approve **Resolution No. 2026-06-26 Transferring Jurisdiction and Control of Real Property to the Industrial Development Commission**; Seconded by Alderman Przysucha. Voting: Ayes – Retha Elston, Joe Strabala-Bright, Josh Johnson, Aida Baker, Allen Przysucha, Jim Wise. Nays – None.

Staff Reports

Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt reported that the summer intern is currently addressing weed and grass violations throughout the city. Properties with grass or weeds exceeding eight inches in height receive a notice requiring corrective action within five days. The City does not target residents; rather, complaints and enforcement are handled consistently. If a resident receives a notice and requires additional time to comply, staff will work with them whenever possible. If the violation is not corrected within the allotted timeframe, the City will mow the property in accordance with the ordinance.

Schmidt also noted an increase in vehicles being parked in yards. Residents are reminded that vehicles may only be parked on approved hard surfaces, as parking in grassy areas is prohibited.

In addition, interviews for the new Rental Inspector position are scheduled for this week, with eight candidates expected to participate in the interview process.

Superintendent of Wastewater Cory Bradshaw reported the sludge-reducing bacteria program has been started, and it seems to be working well; more will be known in a few weeks. Routine maintenance continues, and wet wells will be cleaned this week.

Chief Northcutt reported that the department responded to several calls for service during the recent storms; however, no significant incidents occurred.

He also announced that two firefighters recently graduated from the academy. They will spend one week assigned to the day shift before transitioning to their regular shift assignments. Following academy graduation, they will complete an additional three to six months of post-academy training before being released to full duty.

Chief Northcutt noted that the department's child safety seat check open house was well attended and successful. As a result of ongoing training efforts, the department now has six certified child safety seat technicians available to assist the community.

Training activities also continue at the 1st Avenue house.

City Clerk Teri Sathoff reported that the Movies in the Park event that was previously canceled has been rescheduled for August 7. She also reminded Council members that the Illinois Municipal League Conference will be held September 17–19 and asked anyone planning to attend to notify her so registration arrangements can be made.

Sathoff also announced that Chalk the Walk will take place on July 11 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. The event is free to attend and will feature food trucks and concession sales provided by the Kiwanis Club.

City Manager Scott Shumard reported that he met with the U.S. Department of Transportation to discuss invoicing procedures. An additional meeting will be scheduled to address environmental compliance requirements. He also met with the Jaycees to discuss the upcoming fireworks display and the use of the new riverfront area as a viewing location.

Shumard further reported that the Illinois Department of Transportation held the bid opening for the downtown resurfacing project, which is expected to begin this fall. In addition, lettering for Northwestern Steel and Wire Park is anticipated to be installed on the planters within the next few weeks.

Council Reports

Aldersperson Baker made a statement regarding the upcoming Flock Camera study session. She acknowledged that she understands the value and potential benefits of the camera system; however, she expressed concerns regarding the potential for abuse and governmental overreach. Aldersperson Baker stated that she is particularly concerned about how the technology could be used in ways that negatively impact legal immigrants, women seeking certain healthcare services, and transgender residents. She concluded by stating that she looks forward to the study session and the opportunity for further discussion on the matter.

Aldersperson Johnson reported that the grand opening of Northwestern Steel and Wire Park was held on Saturday and was very well attended. He noted that the park has been open and busy every day since its opening. Aldersperson Johnson thanked everyone involved in making the park a reality, stating that it is a tremendous addition to the community that will be enjoyed for many years to come.

Aldersperson Strabala-Bright reported that he has received several complaints regarding reckless driving in residential neighborhoods. He requested additional police patrols in the area of Lynn Boulevard and Thomas Park. He also asked residents to be mindful of where they park and to avoid blocking sidewalks.

Aldersperson Elston reported that the Big Boy Train event was a success and that she had the opportunity to speak with visitors from all over the region. She thanked City staff, Sterling Main Street, and the many volunteers whose efforts helped make the event possible. Aldersperson Elston also stated that she attended Cruise Night at Sterling Marketplace and thanked Sterling Main Street for hosting the event.

In addition, Aldersperson Elston thanked City Manager Shumard for the vision he had for the area that is now home to the riverfront park and congratulated everyone who played a role in the park's success. She concluded by reminding residents that the Municipal Band concert

would take place on Wednesday evening at Grandon Civic Center.

Aldersperson Wise agreed with Alderman Johnson about the park being something the community will be able to enjoy for years to come. Wise stated that it is a great way to memorialize the thousands of workers who worked on that ground when it was the wire mill.

Mayor Merdian thanked everyone who participated in the grand opening celebration for the riverfront park and expressed her appreciation to all who helped make the event a success. She also reminded residents that City Hall will be closed on July 3 in observance of the Independence Day holiday.

Mayor Merdian further thanked City staff for their efforts in accommodating Union Pacific during the Big Boy train stop. She noted that Union Pacific was very appreciative of the City's support and the safety measures that were implemented to ensure the event was conducted safely and successfully.

Mayor Merdian advised that Com-Ed will meet with the engineers regarding the pedestrian bridge.

Study Session

At 7:31 p.m., Mayor Merdian adjourned to the study session for Flock Cameras.

Chief Bartel provided a detailed overview of the City's license plate reader (LPR) camera program. He reported that 11 cameras are currently in operation. The Sterling Police Department has been approved for 18 cameras and has contracted for 12. The cameras are not located in residential areas; rather, they are positioned at locations where traffic enters and exits the City.

Chief Bartel explained that the original plan included 10 LPR cameras and two pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) cameras. One PTZ camera was intended for the downtown area and the other for East Lincolnway at 43rd Street. The downtown PTZ camera was later changed to an LPR camera, and the East Lincolnway PTZ camera has not yet been installed. He reiterated that all 11 cameras currently in operation are fixed LPR cameras and do not have PTZ capabilities.

Chief Bartel stated that the Sterling Police Department participates in data sharing with 1,551 local, state, and county law enforcement agencies. No federal agencies are permitted to access the data. Agencies requesting access must comply with Illinois data-sharing laws and provide a case number associated with a specific incident, crime, or investigation. In addition, each Flock user must acknowledge and agree to comply with Illinois data-sharing laws each time they log into the system.

Chief Bartel explained that the information captured by the City's Flock cameras consists only of an image of the vehicle, an image of the license plate, and the date and time the vehicle was

recorded. No personal information is attached to the images. Data is automatically purged after 30 days unless it is associated with a criminal investigation or event.

Chief Bartel further stated that the use of Flock cameras has been found constitutional by both Illinois courts and federal courts. Audits of system usage are conducted by personnel with administrative authority. Deputy Chief Bland and Chief Bartel are the only individuals with administrative access to the system.

Chief Bartel reported that in July 2025, the City of Sterling received a grant from the Illinois Attorney General's Office for the implementation of LPR cameras. He noted that the Attorney General serves as the State's chief legal officer, acts as an advocate for the people of Illinois, and represents the State in court.

Chief Bartel concluded by stating that LPR cameras are a legally permissible investigative tool that assists law enforcement in supporting crime victims and locating missing and endangered persons.

City Attorney Tim Zollinger stated that courts have said that LPRs are constitutional. In March 2025, Scholl vs. ISP indicated that LPRs are not a search under the 4th Amendment. The Court of Appeals in the 5th Circuit said that capturing license plate data is not a search, therefore it is legally constitutional. This discussion is about policies for the LPR, not constitutionality.

Alderman Strabala-Bright stated he does not have issues with the LPR cameras; he has concerns with the company Flock. He asked if there was an alternative company. He stated the Secretary of State's Office found that Flock was releasing data to unauthorized entities. Chief Bartel stated that Dixon utilizes Motorola for their LPRs, and they are more expensive, and doing it in-house would be very time-consuming for staff and extremely costly. Chief Bartel stated this project was taken on by former Chief Chavira. Flock has increased their security due to the incident that occurred. Flock has increased security to the Criminal Justice Information Service (CJIS) level. Bartel explained that this is the FBI security level. Bartel reminded the council that if a breach to the system did occur, the only information that could be gathered is vehicle description, license plate, and time and place.

Alderman Wise stated he has no issues with the use of the cameras. He asked if the Secretary of State's office had taken actions to correct these issues. Chief Bartel advised that the Secretary of State's office is now conducting audits of police departments, HOAs, and private companies that use Flock.

Alderman Przysucha asked who does the purge of the data after the retention period. Chief Bartel advised that Flock has an automatic retention period of 30 days, and all information is purged at that time unless there is an outstanding case. Przysucha stated he spoke to officers, and he thinks the cameras are a benefit to keep the public safe. Przysucha stated there was a concern about the cameras pointed at the park; he appreciated the pictures from those cameras that proved the park was not in view.

Alderman Strabala-Bright asked Attorney Zollinger if the State of Illinois could ban the use of LPRs, but the City of Sterling can ban the use of cameras by residents. Attorney Zollinger advised that the only decision that can be made by the municipality is with whom the City enters into the contract.

Mayor Merdian asked Chief Bartel what threshold level is used for alerts generated by the Flock cameras. Chief Bartel explained that Sterling's system is set at the highest threshold level. Officers receive alerts only for vehicles associated with felony activity, stolen vehicles, and missing or endangered persons. Alerts are not generated for expired registrations, suspended registrations, or suspended/revoked registered owners.

Jeff Gale, 1706 17th Avenue, Sterling — Mr. Gale stated this was the third time he had addressed the City Council regarding the Flock cameras. He asked how many Condor cameras were installed in the City of Sterling. Chief Bartel responded that there were no Condor cameras. Mr. Gale stated that he had photographed each camera and compared them to images of Condor cameras on Flock's website. Based on their appearance and the descriptions provided on the website, he believed the cameras could be Condor cameras.

Mr. Gale stated that, based on Flock Safety's patents, he considers the company to be a surveillance company. He said that approximately 80 communities had ended their relationships with Flock due to concerns regarding data protection and alleged misinformation. He referenced concerns raised in communities, including Denver, Colorado, and Verona, Wisconsin. Mr. Gale stated that he supports the use of cameras and has previously shared footage from his own cameras to assist the Sterling Police Department. He argued that referring to the devices as license plate readers understates their capabilities and expressed concerns that they create searchable profiles of individuals without using facial recognition. He stated that Flock advertises the cameras as a crime deterrent and argued that, if deterrence is a goal, the public should have been informed of their presence. Mr. Gale requested that the City terminate its contract with Flock to protect residents' privacy.

Quinn Staples, Whiteside County resident — Mr. Staples stated that freedom means different things to different people and that, in his opinion, freedom does not include surveillance of individuals who have not committed crimes. While expressing sympathy for crime victims, he stated that he believes the surveillance of innocent individuals outweighs the benefits of the camera program.

Rayce Yohn, 1103 East 16th Street, Sterling — Mr. Yohn stated that he opposes the City's contract with Flock. He expressed concerns regarding the company's trustworthiness and stated that he does not believe data is deleted after 30 days. He also expressed concerns about potential misuse of the system by law enforcement and stated that he believes Flock's primary interest is data collection rather than crime prevention. He requested that the City not renew its contract with Flock.

Hannah Goebig, 1810 Avenue K, Sterling — Ms. Goebig asked whether the Council valued safety or freedom more highly. She stated that, in her opinion, there had been sufficient public opposition to justify canceling the contract. She noted that no residents had attended the meeting to speak in favor of the cameras. Ms. Goebig stated that while smartphones collect data, individuals choose to use them, whereas cameras are installed by the government. She alleged that Flock is a data-selling company rather than a security company and stated that there have been reports of data being shared with federal immigration authorities. She encouraged the Council to explore alternative LPR vendors.

John Pickins Greene, 512 18th Avenue, Sterling — Mr. Greene stated that he works as a network security specialist for an international company responsible for protecting medical information. He expressed concerns regarding the security of Flock's data and equipment, stating that the cameras could be physically compromised. He further stated that cameras have been stolen in some communities and sold for scrap. Mr. Greene expressed concerns regarding the City's liability for damaged equipment and stated that he does not believe the cameras improve public safety.

Oliver Sweetser, no address provided — Mr. Sweetser distributed informational materials regarding LPR cameras to the Council. He stated that he believes the cameras are used to track individuals and expressed concerns that travel data could be used to identify where people live and work. Mr. Sweetser also expressed concerns regarding the security of the equipment and suggested that the City consider operating an in-house camera system rather than contracting with Flock. He stated that requiring users to acknowledge applicable laws does not prevent misuse of the data.

Kyle Morgan, Whiteside County resident — Mr. Morgan asked whether the acknowledgment box users must select serves as the primary compliance measure for the system. Chief Bartel responded that users are required to acknowledge Illinois law before accessing the system and that only legally permissible data is released.

Dale Goodall, 1810 Avenue K, Sterling — Mr. Goodall questioned why Flock was a less expensive alternative than other providers and stated that he believes the company profits by selling collected data.

Mayor Merdian asked about the two Condor cameras referenced in the City's contract. Chief Bartel stated that one Condor camera had been replaced with a Falcon LPR camera and that the second Condor camera had not been installed.

After further discussion, the Council requested Chief Bartel to research other vendors for LPRs.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 9:01 pm.

Teri Sathoff

City Clerk