

Meeting Opening

Mayor Diana Merdian called the Sterling City Council to order at 6:30 PM on Monday, December 15, 2025.

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

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, 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

Scott Toomsen, 201 3rd Avenue, Sterling, addressed the Council with concerns related to trash picked up by Republic Services. Mr. Toomsen stated he has had issues with trash getting picked up for the last five years. He pays his bill in advance when he is on vacation. Toomsen is the only resident in this alley and believes this may be the issue with pick-up. He has contacted Republic Services several times, and he is still having issues getting his trash picked up. Clerk Sathoff took Mr. Toomsen's phone number to have someone contact him. He does put his trash out on an average of once a month.

Daryl Dieterle, 1718 Freeport Road, Sterling, addressed the Council with concerns related to the driveway he has installed on his new home. Mr. Dieterle has requested to have a ten-foot apron on his driveway. He would also like to use an existing driveway for a circular driveway. He has requested a revision for this. Attorney Zollinger stated that he did speak to Mr. Dieterle on Thursday, and there will be a meeting scheduled with him to discuss the issue. Currently, there is nothing in the code that will allow for what he would like to do.

Consent Agenda

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

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve items A and B on the Consent agenda, seconded by

Alderman Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – Aldermen Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Baker, Przysucha, and Wise. Nays – None.

Items Removed from the Consent Agenda

None

Recommended Personnel Action

Chief Northcutt introduced Firefighter Spencer Scott to the Council. Scott is originally from Polo, IL. Scott will be attending the Fire Academy in Rockford in March 2026. Firefighter Scott was given the oath of office by City Clerk Sathoff.

Chief Northcutt recognized Firefighter Gerry Williamson. Williamson is retiring after 26 years as a paid-on-call firefighter. Before that, Williamson dedicated 30 years of full-time service to the Sterling Fire Department. Northcutt recalled commanding a scene and having Gerry and his two sons, Ryan and Jason, on the same hose line. Williamson expressed gratitude to be able to serve the City of Sterling and its citizens. Gerry commended the current fire department and their professionalism and dedication to training.

Presentations and Awards

Chief Northcutt introduced firefighter Kody Simmons. Simmons is being recognized for his life-saving efforts while off duty. While shopping at Walmart, Simmons provided CPR and used an AED on a young female patient. The patient was transferred to CGH and then flown to a children's hospital. The family of the patient was present at the Council meeting and thanked him for saving their daughter's life. Firefighter Simmons was given the life-saving award for his actions.

Unfinished Business

None

Business Items

Alderman Strabala-Bright made a motion to approve **Tax Levy Ordinance No. 2025-12-43 in the amount of \$6,354,947**; Seconded by Wise.

City Manager Shumard stated there are no changes from the estimate. This is an increase of \$213,993 or 3.48% in projected collections. The actual tax rate is projected to decrease from 2.9141 to 2.8761. The growth in tax collections despite the reduction in tax rate results from an overall larger assessed valuation of properties within the City. The staff considers several factors when recommending a tax levy, including property tax rates for businesses and citizens, adequate funding of operations, and increasing funding ratios to the pension funds to increase their stability and meet the actuarial requirements.

Voting: Ayes - Alderman Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Baker, Przysucha, and Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Przysucha made a motion to approve **Pay Request #8 to Sjostrom & Sons in the amount of \$206,684.38 for the Riverfront Park Improvements – Phase I**; Seconded by Alderman Elston. Voting: Ayes Aldermen Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Baker, Przysucha, and Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Elston made a motion to approve **Pay Request #5 to Martin & Company Excavating of Oregon, Illinois in the amount of \$126,196.08 for Street Reconstruction**; Seconded by Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – Alderman Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Baker, Przysucha, and Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Baker made a motion to approve **Pay Request #3 to Martin & Company Excavating of Oregon, Illinois in the amount of \$42,088.20 for Street Reconstruction**; Seconded by Elson. Voting: Ayes – Alderman Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Baker, Przysucha, and Wise. Nays – None.

Alderman Wise made a motion to approve **Ordinance No 2025-12-44 Amending the Rock River Redevelopment and Project Area (TIF) to Extend the Expiration Date**; Seconded by Alderman Strabala-Bright. Voting: Ayes – Alderman Elston, Strabala-Bright, Johnson, Baker, Przysucha, and Wise. Nays – None.

Staff Reports

Superintendent of Public Works Brad Schrader reported his crews have been filling potholes, conducting JULIE locates, training on JULIE, and plowing snow.

Superintendent of Waste Water Cory Bradshaw reported they have been maintaining the heaters in the lift stations, working on maintenance inside, and cleaning up two downed trees.

Superintendent of Building and Zoning Amanda Schmidt reported two open houses were held for the Rental Inspection Program on December 3rd. They were successful and very well attended. There were 123 registrations. Those registrations accounted for 1,052 rental units and 42 exemptions. Some of the exemptions are vacant and in the process of being remodeled. Yard waste was missed the day after Thanksgiving due to the snowstorm. They were going to pick it up the following Friday, but most everything was frozen to the ground. They will be making the rounds to pick up what has been missed. Kori Elston is keeping a spreadsheet of all that has been missed and sending it to Republic Services.

Finance Director Cindy VonHolten reported that budget worksheets have been distributed to the departments. Budget study sessions will begin in February. HR Manager Christina Rodriguez sent an email out on the employee portal for the paperless pay.

Chief Pat Bartel reported that Shop with a Cop was held on December 14th at Walmart in Sterling. Sixteen kids were able to shop for themselves and their family members. Three new police officers started on the 15th of December, and they will attend the academy on January 4th. Two police officers have just completed the FTO program and are now on their own. One police officer will graduate from the academy on Thursday, the 18th. This will make the Police Department fully staffed. Chief Bartel advised that five officers received commendations for their role in a recent fire. Chief Bartel thanked Chief Northcutt for nominating the officers for their contributions to the fire scene.

Chief David Northcutt reported that the newest paid-on-call firefighter is number one on the list. This will make the Fire Department fully staffed. The department received five more quotes for the exhaust mitigation grant. An \$800 grant was received from Illinois American Water for gate valves. The transition to Lexipol for the Standard Operating Procedures started today. The City and the Fire Department entered into an MOU regarding scheduling. Starting the first of the year, firefighters will work 48 hours on and 96 hours off. Extensive research has been done showing that this is better for the firefighter's health and well-being. This will be done on a trial basis.

City Clerk Teri Sathoff thanked the Council and the City staff for their patience with the change in software for the agendas. It is a learning process, and there are some bugs that will need to be worked out. The winners of the Sleigh What Christmas decorating contest were announced today. The competition was extremely tough, and the contestants and the judges did a great job. She thanked the City staff for volunteering for Sights and Sounds and thanked the Chamber and Sterling Main Street for working hard to make the event a success. Sathoff reported that Assistant City Clerk Monique Castillo took on the role of coordinator for Toys for Tots in Whiteside County. Sathoff commended Castillo for taking this challenge on and doing a wonderful job. Sathoff stated she is very proud of Monique and the staff who assisted her.

City Attorney Zollinger reported that he has been working with the Building Department on a property that is in poor shape. This property is a good example of why the rental inspection program was needed. Zollinger stated this property involves the Police and Fire Departments as well as the Building Department, and it was hard on the front-line workers who responded to it.

City Manager Shumard stated that work continues on the Safe Streets for All grant and the language in it. It should be resolved soon. The phase II contract should be completed for the quiet zone by the end of the year.

Council Reports

Alderman Baker thanked Christina Rodriguez for her efforts in getting the paperless paychecks completed. Baker wished everyone a safe and happy holiday season.

Alderman Johnson — No report.

Alderman Strabala-Bright stated Sights and Sounds was fantastic. He thanked the City staff and everyone who has worked hard to make the holidays special for our community. He wished everyone a Merry Christmas and, Happy New Year.

Alderman Elston thanked everyone for their work on Sights and Sounds. She thanked Public Works for working hard to get the City ready for the holidays. Elston congratulated Alderman Wise on his recent marriage. Elston asked about the complaints she had received regarding the odors from the farmer north of Menards. City Manager Shumard advised that the complaints should be forwarded to the Illinois EPA. Elston reminded that the helping hands program for the utility billing is still available. Elston wished everyone a Happy Holiday.

Alderman Przysucha congratulated the Superintendent of Building and Zoning on the great turnout for the rental inspection open house. Przysucha stated Sights and Sounds was fun, and he enjoyed it. He congratulated Monique Castillo on her efforts with Toys for Tots. Przysucha asked about the lack of yard waste pick-up on Friday. He asked if there were options or recourse that the City could pursue. Schmidt advised that we can implement fines for repeated missed pick-ups. The yard waste pick-up was a one-off due to the weather.

Alderman Wise congratulated the Superintendent of Building and Zoning on the rental inspection open house.

Mayor Merdian congratulated Alderman Wise on his recent wedding. She stated she has had a lot of communities reach out about the rental inspection program. It has taken a lot of hard work and dedication from the Building Department staff. She thanked Main Street and the Chamber for Sights and Sounds. The parking subcommittee meeting was held, and the next one will be after the first of the year. Wednesday is the City Christmas lunch, everyone on council and the staff is invited. The Mayor's Innovation Project conference will be at the end of January in Washington, DC. She wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Teri J. Sathoff

City Clerk