

**JOINT MEETING OF THE
CITY OF BIG LAKE, BIG LAKE TOWNSHIP, ORROCK TOWNSHIP, BIG LAKE SCHOOL DISTRICT,
AND THE SHERBURNE COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

JANUARY 15, 2026

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Knier called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. ROLL CALL

Big Lake City Council Members present: Mayor Paul Knier, and Council Members Ken Geroux and Kim Noding.

Big Lake Township Board Members present: Supervisors Dean Brenteson, Laura Hayes and Mark Hedstrom.

Orrock Township Board Members present: Supervisor Peter Owen.

Big Lake School Board Members present: Chair Tonya Reasoner and Board Member Ashley Schabillion.

Sherburne County Commissioner present: Commissioner Raeanne Danielowski.

Staff present: City Administrator Hanna Klimmek, City Clerk Gina Wolbeck, City Engineer Layne Otteson, Acting Police Chief Sam Olson, Sherburne County Administrator Bruce Messelt, Big Lake Township Treasurer Ken Warneke and Clerk Brenda Kimberly-Maas, Big Lake School Superintendent Tim Truebenbach, Minda Anderson, Stephanie Hillman, and Terrence Zerwas.

4. PROPOSED AGENDA

Commissioner Danielowski motioned to adopt the proposed Agenda. Seconded by Council Member Noding, unanimous ayes, Agenda adopted.

5. BUSINESS

5A. Sherburne County Topics

Raeanne Danielowski discussed County activities and topics. Danielowski reviewed housing trends, transportation/land use, county road project schedules, the Sherco transition, and public and community health issues including cannabis regulations, THC edibles/drinks, tobacco/vaping products, and alcohol consumption. Bruce Messelt provided Solid Waste updates including a hard reset of all access cards in 2026. Messelt also discussed the upcoming election season, significant state and federal legislative sessions, the new economic development website/efforts, and the transition of Emergency Management/Communications.

Mayor Knier discussed costs are starting to come down and asked how someone qualifies for funds from the Local Housing Trust Fund. Danielowski responded applicants must go through the State program first and if you don't qualify that way, the County can consider gap funding that would be paid back through property tax payments. Knier acknowledged this would be a loan, not free money and Danielowski agreed it must be paid back. Messelt reviewed state funding through the Statewide Affordable Housing Act (SAHA), and noted the County has put half those funds into the trust fund and will continue to do so as funds are allocated by the State. Council Member Noding asked what the interest rate is on this type of loan, and Messelt responded he doesn't believe there is an interest rate on this type of loan.

Danielowski discussed transportation and land use, noting the Central Mississippi River Partnership (CMRP) community meeting is scheduled for March 17 at 11:30 a.m. at the Monticello Community Center. Danielowski also discussed the County's upcoming zoning ordinance review, and transportation projects on Highway 169/CR 4 in Zimmerman, and noted the number one County legislative priority is working on TH 10/CSAH 11. Bruce Messelt reviewed timelines for the TH 10/CSAH 11 project, and the river crossing project timelines, and discussed locally led MNDOT projects being considered.

Danielowski discussed the Sherco Transition, recapping Unit 2 was decommissioned in 2023, Unit 1 is expected to be decommissioned in 2026, and Unit 3 will be decommissioned in 2030. There are multiple phases of solar generation facilities, with Xcel Energy having one of the largest facilities utilizing approximately 2,500 acres of land. They are also doing a pilot project for a battery energy storage site at the Sherco site. Danielowski also discussed both Microsoft and Amazon have purchased land for potential data center sites, but those projects have been killed by the State Legislature so the land is going to probably just sit there. Danielowski also noted the County is pushing to repeal the Minnesota Nuclear Energy Moratorium as we need nuclear to complete the grid and have reliable access to energy. Messelt explained what has happened at the federal level,

is the federal administration change resulted in a not so positive look at renewables. Unfortunately Sherco is so far down the path that when they were asked to keep the plant open, it was determined it would take about \$10M to keep it as a coal plant. Messelt also noted federal solar credits are going away, which has slowed that down. At the State level, they have removed the incentive for data centers so there were about 30 projects across the state that no longer pencil out financially, explaining all four of the companies looking at Becker have walked away. Messelt also noted the issue with the nuclear energy moratorium is that the State of Minnesota has the most aggressive green energy goals in the United States, which is to be 100% carbon free by 2040, and we have the most restrictive moratorium.

Danielowski reviewed public and community health issues including cannabis, tobacco, vaping, THC edibles/drinks, and alcohol consumption. Messelt reviewed the State of Minnesota initially had said if local jurisdictions do our own regulations, they will share some of the revenue with them, and then the legislature backed out of that revenue sharing even though the County is doing all the work. We haven't had a lot of businesses come in wanting to sell cannabis yet, but we do expect it will pick up over time. The Board just finished working on tobacco ordinance updates that will address vaping products. They had a lot of their school partners approach them about issues they are finding in schools. Messelt noted the State has now said we need to take over THC edibles and drinks as well, just like they did with cannabis. Mayor Knier asked if these products will be outlawed per the Big Beautiful Bill language, and Messelt explained it will be at the federal level but is still allowed at the state level similar to marijuana. Danielowski discussed cannabis is a different product than back in the 1970's, such as in potency. Messelt also discussed the message they are getting on SNAP benefits is the feds are increasing work, but cutting back on funding, noting people will now need to be requalified twice a year instead of once a year. The feds are shifting more of the cost to counties and local agencies. The Act poses dramatic mandates with no state funding, and we are trying to get some remedy to this, but the way the Act is written it cannot be phased in and will start on January 1, 2027. The cost shifts on disability services, community corrections and courts are expected to be a \$10M next year, noting the state is trying to lower their costs by shifting the costs to local agencies.

5B. Big Lake Township Topics

Mark Hedstrom discussed the difference between a Township and a City, noting the Town Board makes a levy recommendation for township property taxes to the town residents. This recommendation is presented to the township residents at the Town Annual Meeting. It is at the Town Annual Meeting where the residents vote to set the Township's property tax levy and certify the levy amount to the County Auditor Treasurer. The electorate sets the levy, controls total spending and guides the board's budget decisions for the upcoming year. Hedstrom also discussed 2025 residential development and population statistics, reviewed the Township's 2025 estimated

net tax capacity, estimated taxable market value, and the certified 2026 levy. Hedstrom also reviewed 2025 road improvements, and right of way maintenance. Hedstrom reviewed the annual Dog Vaccination Clinic, Recycle Day, Food Shelf Food Distribution events, and the Household Hazardous Waste collection event.

Council Member Noding asked how the Township pays for their mill and overlay projects, asking if those costs come out of their levy. Hedstrom responded they budget every year and do a road tour to see which roads need to be done. Dean Brenteson discussed they budget annually for road project, and they don't do special assessments. Brenteson noted 54% of their budget is allocated for street maintenance. Mayor Knier asked if they get much push back from citizens, and Hedstrom responded the Township Board needs to justify where dollars are spent.

5C. Orrock Township Topics

Peter Owen discussed new residential construction in Orrock Township noting 14 new home building permits were issued in 2025, and their estimated population was 4,772 residents. Owen also reviewed the Township's 2026 estimated net tax capacity and taxable market value, reviewed road expenses, and the Annual Meeting Electorate where township residents approved and certified the 2026 levy in the amount of \$1,125,000. Owen also recapped activities at the annual Recycling Day event held in May.

5D. Big Lake School District Topics

Tim Truebenbach discussed the school's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30, noting they are in the middle of their fiscal year right now. Truebenbach provided an update on Big Lake Schools noting they have approximately 3,100 students housed in four different buildings. The school is the largest employer in the City of Big Lake with 246 licensed staff and 177 non-licensed staff. Truebenbach reviewed educational programming in the district noting the district's mission is challenge, educate, and inspire all students to reach their highest level of achievement in academics, athletics, and the arts. Truebenbach reviewed technology advances, noting they recently added cameras inside and outside, replaced wired and wireless networks, and provided refreshed I-pads to first and second graders. Truebenbach discussed the Community Education and Communications Departments and provided a facilities projects update.

Truebenbach noted the past couple of years they have held elections and unfortunately, they did not pass. From a financial perspective, they are in development of their budget right now and anticipating they will be looking at some budget reductions over the next two years. They have a policy they have to stay within which is 9% to 12% of their fund balance policy, and that means some class sizes will need to be increased as well as maybe looking at modifying and reducing

some course offerings. That is the reality of doing business, much like with all the other boards when they have budgetary issues, you have to make adjustments. With the operating levy not passing last fall, that is how they get funded, and that is how schools are a little different from other entities who have the authority to increase taxes. Truebenbach thanked all of the crews who take care of the road system which helps to keep kids safe and aids him to make thoughtful decisions on school closures due to inclement weather conditions.

Bruce Messelt asked what the secret is to passing operating and capital levies. Truebenbach responded it truly depends on the community and other entities. He understands, through no fault of a lot of people, that taxes are increasing all around, and sometimes people simply can't afford the increases. Truebenbach stated they are committed to doing what they can, and the best they can, for our students. They have gone two consecutive years of running an election and clearly, at this time, the community isn't ready for those pieces yet. They will regroup, look at their budgets, look at their needs, and will make it work as that is what they do at Big Lake Schools. Commissioner Danielowski noted she wishes people understood how complicated the schools financing is. They have many buckets of funds that have limits on what they can be used for. Truebenbach noted he has met with some community members and has spent hours talking about these kinds of things and it is really important for people to understand how school financing works. When you consider the unfunded mandates and the cost of doing business has increased, those things make it difficult. Mayor Knier asked how many referendums failed vs. succeeded across the state, and Truebenbach noted he would get that information out to the Boards. Knier noted he recalls many of them failed, and Truebenbach discussed a lot of our area schools went out. They are really active with the legislature, and School Board Member Ashley Schabilion has been active with various legislative groups. They have been down to the capital and testified a couple times last year.

Mayor Knier asked for more information on the 9% to 12% fund balance rule. Ashley Schabilion explained this rule requires the school to maintain a 9% to 12% unassigned fund balance, noting they can't spend down reserves any further than that. Knier also discussed there was a curriculum change a couple of years ago and asked if there is a way to see what kind of effect that change had. Minda Anderson discussed they do data presentations at board meeting at various times during the year, noting the school is seeing slow increases on the MCA's and standardized testing.

5E. City of Big Lake Topics

Hanna Klimmek presented the 2025 City of Big Lake Year in Review. Klimmek reviewed highlights from 2025 including strengthening existing partnerships and established new collaborations with Sherburne County, Big Lake Township, AmeriCorps Seniors RSVP program, CEDA, Marco Technologies, LLC and Main Street Family Services. The City added over \$66M in new valuation

from improvements and new construction, was called to testify in support of the Wastewater Treatment Facility Expansion project, hosted site visits for both the House and Senate Capital Investment Committees, successfully completed the 2025 Street and Utility Improvement project, and completed housekeeping amendments to the City Code. Klimmek also reviewed Lake Liquors continues to exceed budget requirement for the transfer of funds, Public Works added the Verizon mobile application to improve the City's park irrigation system and welcomed Adelyn Gosewisch as the City Council's Student Liaison. Klimmek also reviewed activities coming forward in 2026 including Captain Sam Olson assuming the role of Acting Chief of Police, the Big Lake Public Safety Facility project, redevelopment of the existing City Hall site and EDA owned building, the Wastewater Treatment Facility Expansion project, the extension of Minnesota Avenue, park redevelopment, enhanced communications/marketing, a new parking meter system at Lakeside Park, completion of the water meter exchange project, and a new Strategic Plan of the City Council. Klimmek reviewed the 2026 General Fund Budget, noting the levy was set at \$6,311,469, and the City Tax Rate is 41.06%. Klimmek noted the cost per day to provide City services based on our population estimate of 13,084 is \$1.63 per day.

Council Member Noding asked for an update on the possible relocation of the Big Lake Library. Klimmek responded the first step is for the City to request the Library to conduct a space needs study. Mark Hedstrom asked what will happen if the library doesn't move. Klimmek responded we still owe on their current building and will outright own it in full sometime next year. Bruce Messelt asked if the future redevelopment project includes the old school space, and Klimmek responded it does.

6. ADJOURN

Commissioner Danielowski motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m. Seconded by Supervisor Hedstrom, unanimous ayes, motion carried.

Gina Wolbeck
Clerk

02.18.26
Date Approved by the Big Lake City Council