

Galesburg City Council Regular Meeting
City Council Chambers
55 West Tompkins Street, Galesburg, Illinois
July 21, 2025
6:00 p.m.

Called to order by Mayor Schwartzman at 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call #1: Present: Mayor Peter Schwartzman, Council Members Bradley Hix, Wendel Hunigan, Evan Miller, Dwight White, Heather Acerra, Greg Saul, and Steve Cheesman, 8. City Manager Eric Hanson, City Attorney Dan Alcorn, and City Clerk Kelli Bennewitz.

Mayor Schwartzman declared a quorum present.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Bonnie Ericson gave the invocation.

Council Member Saul moved, seconded by Council Member White, to approve the minutes of the City Council's regular meeting from July 7, 2025.

Roll Call #2:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Saul, and Cheesman, 6.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Abstain: Council Member Acerra, 1.

Chairman declared the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Reverend Andrew Jowers addressed the Council and noted that he is with Greater Heights Worship Center and also president of Unity in the Community Alliance of Galesburg. He stated that during his initial thoughts on good governance with the new Council, he considered how the City operates and how residents engage with the government to improve our community as a place to raise children, retire, and live. He believes good governance involves participation in elections and transparency. He noted that he wanted to focus on accountability, specifically through the City's strategic plan. A key question posed during this process was: "If you left the city and the community for 10 to 15 years, what do you think or hope to see when you return?" Responses included economic vitality, progress, growth, and job creation.

Reverend Jowers stated that for economic development and vitality, the City needs to address literacy. He feels that illiteracy hinders growth, affects income and expenses, and prevents individuals from holding jobs and purchasing goods. He applauded the City for the housing study, which is positive; however, the presence of homeless individuals camping at the library is detrimental to the City's image and economic vitality.

Nicholas James addressed the Council and stated that he is the current owner of the property next to the Maple Street fire station. He and his wife have several concerns regarding the potential demolition of the building and the proximity of their house. He added that they are also concerned about the impact on their property value if it is demolished and then whatever plans the City has for the site. He stated that they purchased the home in 2017 and have two young children, but the current layout restricts their ability to easily change their rooms. The children frequently play outside, and the prospect of the demolition close to their backyard is terrifying due to safety concerns for their kids, property, and vehicles.

Mr. James also noted that the existing building serves as an important buffer against the pickleball court since they consistently experience problems with noise from the court, including loud screaming and individuals who are seemingly drunk late at night. His daughter's room is directly next to the building, and the constant noise and light are disruptive. They are also frequently confronted with players blocking their driveway. He understands that the building is in need of repair and they are willing to cooperate with anyone interested in repairing it.

Holly McDorman addressed the Council regarding the fire station next to Bateman Park. Her family visits Bateman Park almost daily, as it is the closest park to their home that doesn't require crossing a busy street. She asked her kids to write down their thoughts on what should be done with the building and believes it's essential to hear the perspectives of our youth.

Her 16-year-old feels the station should be fixed up and turned it into a historical place for Galesburg. It could also be a place where people hang out and are able to use a bathroom, which would be helpful for people who have long walks. Ms. McDorman's 18-year-old daughter would like the property turned into a pool, but deeper than the shallow pools the City has at other parks. The reasoning for a pool and not additional pickleball courts is that more people enjoy swimming and not loud noise from the pickleball courts. Her 12-year-old believes the City should not tear down the building and make more pickleball courts since there are enough through the community. Instead, the building could be turned into something for the park, like bathrooms.

Mindi Knapp told the Council that the public orchard on Cedar Street has cherries in bloom, and the plums have already been picked, and she has encouraged homeless individuals and people at the library to pick the fruit. She and Charlie Little, representing the Midwestern Humanitarian Center, are actively working on various initiatives while still organizing their group to help the public. Recently, they have encountered several homeless individuals who lack reading and writing skills and a representative from the Regional Board of Education expressed interest in establishing a foundation, hopefully in conjunction with the library, to offer something similar to a GED program. There are many homeless people and children who have left school without an education and are finding it difficult to move forward in life. Finally, she reiterated the need for more housing in Galesburg.

Sallee Wade addressed the Council and stated that she has heard a lot of what the community wants to get done, but if we don't treat our root system first, the economic system is not going

to follow. She added that she is also trying to help with the root causes of our problems here, which is the youth. The City doesn't have a community center yet, or Boys and Girls Club. The youth are out on the streets at all times of night, riding their bikes around because there's nothing to do. She feels that an investment in education, particularly adult literacy, is crucial. If individuals lack basic financial skills, such as writing a check or managing a checkbook, their future prospects are limited. Prioritizing external appearances to attract people without addressing underlying issues will not lead to lasting success. She urged the Council to consider shifting their focus from improving the road system, and instead concentrate on tackling the root causes of the challenges here in Galesburg.

Bruce Weik addressed the Council and believes tearing down the old fire station would be a missed opportunity for our community, and that the City has a history of demolishing historic buildings. This particular structure could be highly beneficial and he would envision it as a fire department museum where there is decorative space showcasing historic and some current fire department materials. Beyond a museum, it could serve as a venue for neighborhood meetings and other community uses. He acknowledged the cost involved, and he consulted a reputable preservationist contractor several three years ago who assessed the building's condition and believed it was sound and could be preserved. He feels preserving this building is a valuable opportunity, and its demolition would be a regrettable loss.

CONSENT AGENDA #2025-14

All matters listed under the Consent Agenda are considered routine by the City Council and will be enacted by one motion.

25-3029

Approve the bid rescission for the vacant lot at 782 East Berrien Street.

25-3030

Reapprove the bid for \$100 by Tuesday Spinks for the vacant lot formerly known as 782 East Berrien Street.

25-2021

Approve Resolution 25-18 accepting a grant in the amount of \$600,000 from the Illinois Housing Development Authority's Home Repair and Accessibility Program.

25-8013

Approve bills in the amount of \$1,383,362.00 and advance checks in the amount of \$415,406.86.

Council Member White moved, seconded by Council Member Cheesman, to approve Consent Agenda 2025-14.

Roll Call #3:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried by omnibus vote.

PASSAGE OF ORDINANCES AND RESOLUTIONS

25-1012

Council Member White moved, seconded by Council Member Hix, to amend the ordinance to reflect a setback of 200 square feet (9(c)(iii) instead of 100 square feet and 12 feet (9(b)(ii) instead of 15 feet.

Roll Call #4:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

City Manager Hanson clarified that staff supports the proposed amendments. He noted that the amendment requiring a variance process for structures exceeding 200 feet would not prohibit larger constructions. Instead, it allows for increased City Council and Planning Commission review, as well as neighbor participation. This ensures that individuals with multiple adjoining lots or large properties on the City's outskirts can still exceed the 200-foot limit, provided they go through the variance process.

Council Member White moved, seconded by Council Member Acerra, to approve Ordinance 25-3757 as amended on final reading amending Chapter 152 of the Galesburg Municipal Code relating to the regulation and development of solar energy systems within the City limits.

Roll Call #5:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

25-1013

Council Member Miller moved, seconded by Council Member Saul, to approve Ordinance 25-3758 on final reading amending Chapter 152 of the Galesburg Municipal Code relating to the regulation and development of wind energy systems within the City limits.

Roll Call #6:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

25-2022

Council Member Hunigan moved, seconded by Council Member Cheesman, to approve Resolution 25-19 authorizing the acceptance of right-of-way on North Seminary Street and Mayo Drive.

Roll Call #7:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

25-2023

Council Member Cheesman moved, seconded by Council Member Saul, to approve the purchase of 224 South Seminary Street in the amount of \$82,000, plus moving expenses of \$1,400 and attorney fees of \$1,000.

Roll Call #8:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

BIDS, PETITIONS, AND COMMUNICATIONS

Council Member Hunigan moved, seconded by Council Member Acerra, to remove agenda item 25-3023 from the table.

Roll Call #9:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 6.

Nays: Council Member White, 1.

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

City Manager Hanson stated that the recommendation for demolition from the RFP remains valid, with the bid good through early August. A second option involves the City retaining the property and seeking more precise estimates for rehabilitation. If used for a public purpose, the building would need to be brought up to code, including ADA compliance, and address other necessary items. It's estimated these costs would exceed half a million dollars, potentially closer to a million. While substantial, this doesn't preclude the option; it simply provides the Council with the financial realities.

He noted that a third option, which the Council has also received inquiries about, is for the City to sell the parcel. This parcel is currently part of the park and would need to be subdivided. Historically, the land was deeded to the City from the School District in the early 1900s. There could be additional steps required to clean up the deed, though he would assume the School District would cooperate since they likely don't want the building. The parcel would also need to be delineated from neighboring park property. Any sale would require an RFP process, as the City cannot directly sell property. A private purchaser would still need to bring the property up to code for a stated purpose, which would likely be less expensive than using government funds, but still substantial.

Council Member White moved, seconded by Council Member Acerra, to table agenda item 25-3023.

Community Development Director Steve Gugliotta stated that developing this property privately presents several hurdles, including that the current deed restricts its use to a public park or fire station unless the School District approves a change; building code compliance will limit window openings due to the proximity to property lines, and the sale process as surplus property is lengthy, potentially taking three to four months. He also noted that a change from its current firehouse designation to another use requires an architect to design new plans and the current institutional zoning would need an amendment for any private use.

Council Member Hix is aware of a highly skilled contractor who found that the cost of the necessary work is estimated between \$350,000 and \$400,000, and therefore not financially feasible. The City Manager stated that no other parties have provided estimates.

Council Member Cheesman expressed that he would like to explore options two and three. He anticipates that staff could investigate these options and gather community input. He emphasized the need for specific proposals rather than general ideas, while acknowledging demolition as a last resort. He urged a focus on realistic solutions or options under these options, whether from the City or private entities with serious interest. He would like to see concrete plans or ideas emerge from these explorations to ensure the best use of the building.

Council Member Acerra stated her appreciation for historic buildings, citing the extensive time and effort invested in restoring her own home. However, she agrees with Council Member Cheesman in seeking further exploration of alternatives for the station. She noted that she is unoptimistic given that experienced contractors have deemed it too expensive, especially with property line restrictions. She also cautioned against selling the property to a private owner without concrete plans, fearing it could lead to further deterioration. She also clarified that a privately owned fire station on Brooks Street is currently being preserved and restored with historical artifacts.

Council Member Acerra added that she welcomed the idea of contractors investigating how properties, such as the neglected LT Stone School, could be converted into housing, such as condominiums. She acknowledged that such projects require a special individual or entity to secure resources and grants, but she would support allocating more time to explore additional alternatives for the fire station.

Council Member White stated that he visited the building, during which the Fire Chief explained the issues and drawbacks of keeping the station. However, he knows a few people are seemingly interested despite the potential costs. He would also like to explore options two and three. This approach would offer an opportunity for potential buyers to purchase the building, providing them with cost estimates and full disclosure of the existing problems, while retaining the option for demolition.

City Manager Hanson suggested that the Council reconsider its decision regarding tabling the bid. He noted that the next closest bid is almost double the cost, meaning that if the current bid is rejected and no other viable option emerges, the City would likely spend significantly more tax dollars to demolish the building. To avoid this, he encouraged the Council to put the item back on the table. This would buy the City more time, as the current bid is valid until approximately August 24th, providing a month for further due diligence. He added that if the bid is voted down tonight, it becomes null and void, and the re-bidding process would almost certainly lead to higher costs for the City.

25-3023

Council Member Miller moved, seconded by Council Member Acerra, to defer agenda item 25-3023 to the August 18, 2025, City Council Meeting.

Roll Call #10:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

25-3031

Council Member White moved, seconded by Council Member Miller, to approve the bid from Hein Construction, in the amount of \$38,400 for the design and renovation of the multi-purpose meeting and breakroom, located on the lower level of City Hall.

Roll Call #11:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

City Manager Hanson extended his gratitude to all staff involved in the welcoming home ceremony for Corporal Hoots. He also acknowledged the excessive heat warnings projected for Wednesday and Thursday, with temperatures expected to exceed 110–115 degrees. Staff are taking additional precautions, and everyone is urged to remain safe and aware of the conditions. He stated that many individuals are expected to participate in the event, and Public Safety, Parks & Recreation, and Public Works staff are heavily involved in ensuring its success. He reminded everyone to be mindful of the weather forecast and prioritize safety. GHAS and City staff will have additional personnel on-site, but the extreme heat and humidity, exceeding a 110-degree heat index, present a dangerous situation. People are encouraged to remain vigilant.

MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS (AGREEMENTS, APPROVALS, ETC.)

Council Member Saul moved, seconded by Council Member Cheesman, to sit as the Town Board. The motion carried.

TOWN BUSINESS

25-9017

Trustee Miller moved, seconded by Trustee Cheesman, to approve Town bills and warrants to be drawn in payment of same.

Fund Title	Amount
Town Fund	\$6,820.70
General Assistance Fund	\$7,955.05
IMRF Fund	
Social Security/Medicare Fund	
Liability Fund	
Audit Fund	
Total	\$14,775.75

Roll Call #12:

Ayes: Trustees Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

25-9018

Trustee White moved, seconded by Trustee Saul, to approve the Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.

Roll Call #13:

Ayes: Trustees Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

Trustee Saul moved, seconded by Trustee Acerra, to resume as the City Council. The motion carried.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Council Member Miller left the meeting at 6:54 p.m.

Council Member White agrees with Reverend Jowers and Ms. Wade on the importance of nurturing our community's "roots," Just as a tree cannot flourish without strong roots, our City won't thrive if we neglect our young people. He feels it is crucial that the City invest in our youth through volunteering, mentoring, and open communication. He added that Council Member Cheesman and many others are already doing excellent work in this area. The youth are vital to Galesburg's future, and if they don't find a sense of belonging and positive experiences here, they will seek them elsewhere. He shared that his own return to Galesburg was driven by the memories he made here, inspired by individuals such as Mr. W.C. Jackson and

Ms. Willabel Williams. He believes we must unite to support youth in every possible way—whether through sports, literacy programs, or other initiatives that leverage our individual strengths.

Council Member Miller returned to the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

Council Member Acerra agrees with Council Member White and has a lot of experience working with youth, including being responsible for the state's Student Human Resources conference. She enjoys helping students explore career paths, whether at Knox College, Sandburg College, or elsewhere. She added that she recently had a business obligation, which is why she missed a meeting, but was also blessed to have her granddaughter arrive six weeks early. She noted that her mother-in-law passed away this Friday, so she would be heading to be with family.

Council Member Saul offered his condolences to Council Member Acerra. He also stated that he has been working with youth for the past 25 years with the Great Balloon Race, which is this weekend. Due to the heat, it's going to be tough on the pilots and visitors, but he hopes everybody comes out to see the balloons. He agrees that we need to get the community involved in events such as the Balloon Race.

Council Member Cheesman commended Council Member White for his excellent work with youth and emphasized the importance of acknowledging them and showing them care and respect. He highlighted the significant community ceremony this week for Corporal Hoots, an important event on Wednesday and Thursday with flags, to honor him. Additionally, he thanked Public Works Director Aaron Gavin and his staff, as well as the residents of Lincolnshire, for their collaborative public-private effort. The pillars marking the entrances to Lincolnshire from both the West and East were in disrepair and the neighborhood raised funds for their replacement. The new installations serve as a prime example of public and private sectors working together for the betterment of the community.

Council Member Hix expressed his condolences to Council Member Acerra and her husband, Mike, on the loss of their mother in law and mother respectfully. He also noted that he and his wife plan to volunteer for the Great Balloon Race again this year. He encouraged everyone to attend and stated visitors get to interact with the pilots, and if lucky, might even get a ride. If anyone is willing to volunteer, they can connect with Council Member Saul, and he'll help put individuals in touch with a pilot who needs assistance.

Council Member Hunigan expressed his thanks to Council Member Saul for the upcoming balloon experience this Saturday. He also highlighted the successful open house at the Maple Street Fire Station, noting the impressive turnout and community support for the building. He also announced the opening of a new family restaurant, Two Brothers Café, on Main Street in our City's gateway. The restaurant operates seven days a week, serving lunch and dinner, and features a special drive-thru window. He praised the restaurant for revitalizing an abandoned building from 1975, transforming it into a busy and valuable asset to the community.

Council Member Miller shared his positive experiences at the Balloon Race, having been up in a hot air balloon twice. He commended Council Member Saul for an outstanding event and thanked him for keeping the Galesburg Balloon Race going, acknowledging the hard work involved. He also noted that the previous weekend's farmers market had been rained out, but encouraged everyone to visit the market to buy their produce.

Mayor Schwartzman acknowledged the recent passing of two prominent Galesburg fathers: his own father on July 1st, and Craig Johnson on June 25th. Mr. Johnson, owner and operator of Galesburg Electric for over 50 years, was remembered for his contributions to the community, particularly to youth, and his basketball playing days. The Mayor reported on the victory of Lia Barraza Sloan, who was crowned Junior Miss Illinois 2025. He noted that modern pageants demand significant skill and practice, expressing gratitude for Galesburg's representation in the Miss Junior Illinois pageant.

The Mayor also highlighted the new \$1.8 million Ag Tech Incubator in downtown Galesburg, a vital addition made possible by Carl Sandburg College. Regarding the unhoused population, Mayor Schwartzman reported on a productive meeting held last week with about 30 organizations. He felt it was a strong opening to assess the current situation and plan for the future, promising a public statement on the topic within the next week. The conversation is ongoing, with the goal of bringing together those who can address the issue.

As noted by City Manager Hanson, he announced the return of US Army Corporal Paul Eugene Hoots' remains to Galesburg this week. Corporal Hoots was lost in South Korea in 1950, and his body will be honored 75 years later with this celebration.

There being no further business, Council Member Acerra moved, seconded by Council Member Miller, to adjourn the regular meeting at 7:09 p.m.

Roll Call #14:

Ayes: Council Members Hix, Hunigan, Miller, White, Acerra, Saul, and Cheesman, 7.

Nays: None

Absent: None

Chairman declared the motion carried.

Peter D. Mayor Schwartzman, Mayor

Kelli R. Bennewitz, City Clerk