



City Council

Workshop Meeting

~ Minutes ~

1408 Lake Street South
Forest Lake, MN 55025
www.ci.forest-lake.mn.us

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

6:00 PM

City Center - Council Chamber

[City of Forest Lake - Livestream and Recorded Meetings](#)

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Blake Roberts	Mayor	Present	
Jeff Larson	Councilmember	Present	
Hanna Valento	Councilmember	Absent	
Leif Erickson	Councilmember	Present	
Kevin Miller	Councilmember	Absent	

3. Pledge of Allegiance

4. Open Forum – Citizen Petitions, Requests, and Concerns

The Open Forum is available for residents to express personal opinions for any item of business. Please limit your comments to three (3) minutes.

Comments: None.

5. Discussion Items

a) Local Option Sales Tax – Elle Larkin

Finance Director Larkin reviewed the study completed to estimate the financial impact of a proposed 0.5 percent local option sales tax on Forest Lake residents compared to non-residents. Director Larkin presented additional information on the tax study, including how tax trends were predicted to increase as the City continues to generate revenue.

Administrator Statz explained to the Mayor and the Council that the City is planning for a new Public Works facility in 2027, but the cost was more exponential than planned in the Capital Improvement Plan. He said that it was not an option to delay the construction of the facility, but they want to pay for the improvements in a responsible manner. He said an advantage of a local options sales tax is that a majority of the revenue would come from those not paying property taxes in Forest Lake, so it would reduce the burden on Forest Lake taxpayers.

Finance Director Larkin clarified that the referendum vote would be for a specific timeline and project.

City Administrator Statz recommended that they focus on the size and scope of the facility alone for the referendum.

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Finance Director Larkin also stated that they could break down the levy at the City Council meeting next week. Mayor Roberts thought residents would be in a favorable position to support the local options sales tax if they understood how the burden was shared with non-residents.

Finance Director Larkin presented the impact of taking \$2 million off the levy. She explained if they had an additional \$2 million each year, they could decrease the levy by 1.80% each year. She offered to provide additional math in the City Council packet for the next meeting.

City Administrator Statz stated they received this information from the University of Minnesota last week, and he anticipated many cities would request a local option sales tax from the legislature this year. He said that there was a January 31 deadline.

b) Strategic Plan – Mark Statz

City Administrator Statz reviewed the strategic plan he put together based on the City Council discussion. He reviewed the strengths of the strategic priorities and discussed opportunities and action strategies to achieve them.

Councilmember Erickson said he agreed with all five aspects of the strategic plan.

Mayor Roberts expressed appreciation for enhancing community pride and including community groups. He said he could go either way on the township information.

Councilmember Larson asked how much time was spent on the plan and asked if it would be realistic to complete the lists. City Administrator Statz said he was able to redistribute some of the bullet points after the staff meeting. He also stated that they would like to adopt the plan by the end of Quarter One.

Mayor Roberts and City Administrator Statz agreed that the City could benefit from a responsible tax structure.

Assistant City Administrator Chaika suggested that they could implement a financial stability strategic plan component, since it is an important topic that they spend a lot of time discussing. Often, they make massive moves from where the levy starts to where it is approved.

Councilmember Erickson made the point that the last three years, budget exercises have been time-consuming. Assistant City Administrator Chaika said that the staff could consider how to incorporate the information better.

Mayor Roberts said that the City Council could set more realistic expectations on what they want for the budget earlier on. City Administrator Statz said that they discussed moving up the building blocks of the budget discussion earlier to help refocus the budget items.



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City Administrator Statz reiterated the importance of reviewing the strategic plan and providing feedback since some of the items were big asks, so they need to determine the priorities for Forest Lake.

c) Police Chief Interview Process – Mark Statz

City Administrator Statz reviewed the police chief process as proposed by the Personnel Committee. He said that if the City Council decided to move forward with internal candidates, they would have a number of individuals who would be qualified. He encouraged the City Council to review the job description, preferred qualifications, and internal versus external candidates. He summarized the suggested interview panels and timeline but noted that the proposals were up for consideration.

Councilmember Larson said that they had candidates at the Police Department who met all of the qualifications in the job description. He discussed the potential for personality conflict if they open the position to external candidates. He said the Personnel Committee recommended opening the position for internal candidates.

Councilmember Erickson asked if there was anything in the position that discussed the close working relationship with the Police Chief and the Fire Chief. City Administrator Statz said that the information was not included.

The City staff and Council discussed how the duties of Emergency Management were allocated. Police Chief Peterson stated that the duties were not specific to the Chief of Police, but rather a collaboration between the Chief and the Captain together.

Mayor Roberts asked for clarification that the position was Chief of Police, not public safety. Police Chief Peterson confirmed.

Assistant City Administrator Chaika said that it could be beneficial to expedite the timeline so that the Captain's position can also be filled. She expressed concerns about the domino effect of other vacancies that would be created. She stated that she did not think they needed a week to review the applications, and she thought they could bump the timeline up a month to address concerns and the domino effect.

City Administrator Statz asked how they would proceed if a new Chief was selected before April. He discussed the different potentials.

Mayor Roberts asked about transparency for the public view. He said he wanted to make sure that someone who was not a part of the City staff was a part of the process.

Community Development Director Wittman discussed that it was common to pull in representatives from the community.



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City Administrator Statz asked if they would like a third panel or an enhanced second panel. He clarified that they would like to see no more than two panels and that they would like to see the timeline restricted.

d) Committee Liaison – Jolleen Chaika

Assistant City Administrator Chaika reviewed the current appointments for the council liaisons to the various commissions, committees, and boards within the City.

Councilmember Larson discussed a potential liaison who would serve with the Police Chief or Public Safety.

Assistant City Administrator Chaika suggested being cognizant of the time the appointments would take for the City Council members.

6. Adjourn

Mayor Roberts adjourned the regularly scheduled City Council workshop at 7:42 p.m.