

MINUTES
BUHL CITY WORKING SESSION
CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
2/26/2026

Thursday, February 26, 2026,

6:00 P.M.

1. **CALLED TO ORDER** by Mayor Matthews at 6:00 p.m.

2. **ROLL CALL:**

Present were Mayor Matthews, and Councilors Kealy, Loeffler, Teska-Erickson, and Towner.

Also present were City Engineer Jamnick and Clerk-Treasurer Jaeger.

3. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA:**

Motion by Councilor Kealy to approve the agenda as presented.

Supported by Councilor Teska-Erickson.

Motion passes unanimously.

4. **DISCUSSION POINTS:**

A. Joint Buildings with Great Scott Township

Mayor Matthews gave a recap of the Building Committee meeting that was held on January 15, 2026, at 6:00pm at the Great Scott Township Hall. The meeting was chaired by Lisa Kvas and is made up of members from the City of Buhl, City of Kinney, and Great Scott Township. Lobbyist Gary Lamppa was also in attendance. For the first meeting it was productive. Gary Lamppa brought up talking points like timeline and does the board know exactly what they need for size of buildings and space needed. Great Scott is feeling an urgency to find a new Township location with the City of Kinney's eminent deadline of dissolution just around the corner. The timeline of the new buildings is 3-5 years until completion.

Commissioner Towner stated that the Buhl Fire Department and the Kinney/Great Scott Fire Department are in discussions about merging, so we know they will be a part of this joint building. One thing that the City of Buhl will need to discuss is whether we will move a few buildings or our entire Public Works Department to the joint building location, which at this point would probably be the most efficient. Also, do we want to join City Hall into the joint

buildings because we use a minimum amount of space in our current hall and could then share conference rooms and chambers with Great Scott Township. The city should write down what is needed for the City of Buhl in the joint building into sections of what is "needed" and "if there's money." Add a list of what buildings in the city should be included in moving. Priorities vs if there is money vs don't need to move. The Senior Center and Library wouldn't be buildings that would need to move to join the joint building.

Commissioner Teska-Erickson stated that the Ambulance Department would like to be part of the joint buildings also.

Clerk Jaeger mentioned that the more departments and entities that go together, the more funding options will be available.

Mayor Matthews asked how Essentia Health, since it is a business, how will that affect the cities eligibility? Councilor Towner stated that the City of Buhl still held the ambulance license and that it will have no effect on funding.

Mayor Matthews stated that if we are to move the city departments into a new joint building, we need to have a solid plan as to what we are doing with the old buildings. We don't want vacant buildings sitting around the city.

Councilor Teska-Erickson mentioned that some of the city's buildings are not in good condition and may need to be demolished. IRRR could probably help with grant funding to do that. Clerk Jaeger will talk with IRRR on grant options.

Mayor Matthews brought up that the Fire Departments will need to create a new fire district. Councilor Towner asked, for financing, when should the fire departments merge? Councilor Teska-Erickson stated that Lobbyist Gary Lamppa said that it would be better to combine before the beginning of the project.

The Building Committee has met once in January but plan to meet on the first Wednesday of the month. The next meeting is scheduled for April 1, 2026, at 6:00pm at the Great Scott Township Hall in Kinney, MN.

Councilor Towner recommended renting out office space in City Hall to help offset utility bills. Mayor Matthews mentioned that we would have space to offer to Great Scott Township if they needed to move out of their current hall before the new hall is built.

The council will schedule a Special Meeting in April with the city departments to see what their needs in the new building would be.

B. Stubler/Damian Addition

Clerk Jaeger updated the council that there are now six owners in the Stubler and Damian Additions that would like to convey their properties back to the city. There are still three owners who would like to build. Clerk Jaeger has been in

contact with all of the owners of the properties that are delinquent on their “build by” dates.

Mayor Matthews asked Clerk Jaeger what the process of conveyance is. Clerk Jaeger responded that the Attorney and her work on drafting the Quit Claim Deeds by filling out all of the information for the owners. Clerk Jaeger has communicated the steps for the process and what each individual needs to do to complete the process. A letter of instruction will be sent with each Quit Claim Deed as well as saying that the city will pay the Deed tax and filing fee.

Mayor Matthews brought up that he believes the next step with the Stubler and Damian lots is to get a real estate agent involved. The city would be able to receive a valuation on these lots for resale and would be able to sell them accordingly. Mayor Matthews was recommended by a realtor to sell the properties at reasonable market prices and collect the property taxes from those sites and whatever happens, happens. Councilor Kealy and Towner agree that a realtor is needed to help with the marketing and sale of the lots.

Mayor Matthews recommends adding the discussion of a realtor to value the lots on the next council meeting agenda.

Councilor Kealy wondered if the lots should be cleaned up before having a realtor look at them. She stated that the city should prioritize cleaning up those sites and what checklist items are left to complete that were not finished by Jola Sopp?

Councilor Loeffler recommended putting the remaining checklist items on the next agenda for discussion.

Cheryl Kievi from the audience asked the council if someone is able to purchase multiple lots. Councilor Kealy said that she hopes not because the city would only be getting property tax revenue for one dwelling on multiple lots instead of the opportunity to receive property tax revenue on multiple dwellings on those same lots. Councilor Towner stated that the city should get out of micromanaging these lots and manage with city ordinance and zoning laws.

Councilor Towner discussed the option of having the lot owners in the Damian and Stubler Additions to pay an annual fee of approximately \$1,500.00 until their residence is completed. Mayor Matthews wondered what City Attorney Kearney’s opinion on this would be.

Mayor Matthews brought up that the lots in the Stubler Addition were sold as two and a half lots per owner with two PINs. The mayor recommends changing the lots to one PIN instead of two.

Councilor Loeffler asked about the owners who still wanted to build on the lots that have surpassed their “build by” dates. What will they need to do? Councilor Towner listed the three options for the lots:

1. Leave the covenants for the lots in place
2. Have the property owners pay lost property tax revenue, "extension" fee
3. Set a higher price for sale of lots, collect property taxes, and not have a build deadline.

Councilor Loeffler would like to see a deadline for when the owners need to build or make progress towards building in 2026. Councilor Towner recommended negotiating with the current owners and having them pay an annual "extension" fee that will renew until they have built a dwelling on their lot.

Mayor Matthews recommends adding two topics to the next agenda meeting:

1. Agreement to seek the help of a professional real estate agent to price the properties of the city owned and properties that are in the process of conveyance to the city.
2. Address how to deal with the property owners who don't want to convey their properties back to the city.

Melody Stafforoni asked if the city has the ability to take back properties and what is involved. Mayor Matthews answered that it is not a great idea for the city financially to take these residents to court. Councilor Towner stated that the city wants to come to an agreement with both parties to avoid going to court.

Councilor Kealy points out that technically all the properties that are in default of their "build by" date should be reverted to the city.

Clerk Jaeger stated that when the original letter was sent to those property owners who were delinquent of the "build by" date, some of the wording was confusing. There was a part in the letter where it stated that on this day your property would be reverted to the city. So, some property owners took that literally and assumed they did not own the property any longer.

The council agreed that a deadline is needed for the people that still want to build in the Stubler and Damian Additions.

C. BEDA Enabling Resolution

Clerk Jaeger stated that she has found documents pointing to the enabling resolution for BEDA but cannot locate the original document.

Mayor Matthews recalls that the previous clerk had mentioned finding the original resolution but without evidence it may not have been found.

Councilor Towner stated that MN Statute allows amendments to be made to the enabling resolution. He recommends redrafting the document.

Clerk Jaeger stated that the City Attorney recommended the council approve an enabling resolution.

Councilor Towner recommends adding this to the second meeting on March's agenda to direct staff to establish an Enabling Resolution for BEDA.

Clerk Jaeger stated that she had found the public hearing minutes from when BEDA was being created and will print them for the city council to look over.

D. Engineering

Mayor Matthews stated that he has very serious concerns about the progress of the Water Tower Loop project. He stated that in 14 months no progress has been made and he is very disappointed because of this. The recent progress seems to be in the last three months of real engineering work. After the first bids went out the lowest bid to come back was almost \$1 million more than what the city was expecting. Then in November 2025 the city found out that bids would need to be sent out by USDA standards instead. The city also found out from the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPO) that an Architectural Study was going to be done. The mayor stated that the USDA bid process doesn't require the SHPO information and the SHPO Study shouldn't affect the outcome of the Water Tower Project. The city needs a water tower and there is a timeline that people need to understand and the responsiveness and the progress is painfully nonexistent.

Councilor Towner stated that the memo that the council was given at the beginning of the meeting answers some of the questions being asked.

Engineer Jamnick apologized for getting the memo to the council just now. He stated that originally when the Water Tower project was bid on the city was using PFA funding. In the end of December, the city found out that they would be using USDA funding and bidding requirements would need to be done to USDA standards. In January the city received a letter from SHPO on what they were expecting from the city. An Area of Potential Effect map (APE) was completed and submitted to SHPO, and they will review it and come back and tell the city exactly what they need for the survey.

Mayor Matthews asked Engineer Jamnick if he was saying that the bids cannot go out until the SHPO report is back.

Engineer Jamnick said yes because that is part of the Environmental Review (ER).

Clerk Jaeger stated that when she talked with Tyler Ray from the USDA the city needed to have the ER completed before moving forward.

Engineer Jamnick stated that the timeline for the ER is 3-4 months and is estimated to be completed by July 1, 2026.

Mayor Matthews thanked Jamnick for correcting him on the requirements of SHPO for the ER of the site. He also stated that SHPO needs to know that we have a water tower that is failing and there is a sense of urgency here. The city

needs JPJ Engineering to make SHPO more responsive and the survey report needs to be completed as soon as possible.

Engineer Jamnick stated to the council that the SHPO piece is the last part of the USDA requirements that need to be completed.

Clerk Jaeger said that when SHPO is doing their review, they not only look into the site but into the history of Buhl. SHPO noticed that the City Hall and the Library are both on the Historical Register and that is what started this process.

Engineer Jamnick stated that SHPO will be looking at the impact on the historical buildings with the removal of the water tower. He also stated that after they review of the APE they will let the city know exactly what they will need to do for the study. SHPO also supplied the city with two names of qualified Architectural Historians that will be able to complete the study. Engineer Jamnick assured the council that JPJ will stay on SHPO. Engineer Jamnick also stated that he keeps reminding SHPO that they want to build the water tower first and then take the old one down. The city also received the report on the ground storage tank and the recommendation is to build a new tank if the cost for rehab approaches the cost of a new tank. JPJ will put both costs in the PER for the USDA. JPJ is also working with a consulting engineering firm, AE2S, they will be helping out with pump house, controls, and electrical work. Engineer Jamnick also recommends finalizing the scope of work.

Engineer Jamnick's status report is below:

1. USDA Online application.
 - Most online forms have been completed by Tony to date. R/W certification document with land ownership to be completed.
 - With the submission of the PER, USDA engineers will review, provide comment and discuss the overall project budget with City and JPJ Engineers.
2. MnPFA.
 - MnPFA is waiting for commitment of funding to match the available \$2.0 M State funding.
 - Working with Peter Bradshaw at this time. No additional information is needed – with the exception of the project funding gap needs to be based on post bid budget.
3. Preliminary Engineering Report (PER).
 - Amendment to report being completed. The ground water storage evaluation report was received on February 5, 2026. Amending the PER that includes replacing the existing ground water storage tank with a new tank after discussion with Trent.
 - Updating and finalizing costs with the total scope of work. PER submittal date: March 3, 2026.

4. Environmental Review.
 - The initial Environmental Report was completed and is now being amended.
 - A state historical review, as required by USDA, was submitted.
 - The SHPO review letter was received on January 27, 2026.
 - The project is subject to a Section 106 review and SHPO requested an Area of Potential Effect (APE) map to be reviewed by SHPO to determine the potential to affect archeological resources.
 - SHPO recommended a Phase I/II Architectural History Survey be completed.
 - The anticipated schedule to complete the environmental documents is 3-4 months. This would be the last document needed to finalize the grant agreement.

Based on the above, the revised USDA final grant agreement date is estimated to be July 1, 2026.

5. Water Tower Improvement.
 - Re-Bid after final USDA grant agreement is completed. Resubmit plans to USDA with Federal front end document.
6. Water Ground Storage Tank.
 - The recommended plan based on the USG report and discussions with Trent is to construct a new ground storage tank to replace the existing tank.
 - Pump house renovations include piping modifications to connect to the new ground storage tank , control, valves, electrical, etc.
 - JPJ is subcontracting engineering services with the firm AE2S Engineering that will provide supporting subconsultant services for both the pump house and ground storage tank.
7. Water Main Looping- Buhl Business Park to Pennsylvania Avenue.
 - Design 100% complete.
 - Rebid same project with USDA front end documents after grant agreement complete.
8. Water Main Looping- Pennsylvania Avenue to Culver Avenue.
 - Design 20% complete.
 - Survey site- Spring of 2026 after snow is gone.
 - Bid project with USDA front end documents after grant agreement complete.
9. Buhl Business Park
 - Frontage Road from Morse Road to South Industrial Park Road near ODC site.

- Design 80% complete.
- Finish plan and bid project with USDA front end document after grant agreement is in place.

10. Sanitary sewer system in East End Development.

- Lift station and force main from Southeast corner of area and extend to existing sanitary sewer to alley South of Pennsylvania Avenue.
- Design 20% complete.
- Survey Site Spring of 2026.
- Bid project with USDA front end document after grant agreement is in place.

11. Miscellaneous Improvements.

- Grant Location Road Storm Sewer
- Jefferson Street Lift Station- I/I Improvements
- Survey Site Spring of 2026
- Develop project plans in Spring of 2026 after discussion with USDA and IRRRB based on total estimated project budget.

E. Cell phone for on-call weekend work

Due to water tower issues the council would like to discuss purchasing a cell phone plan for the on-call utility workers. This will create a consistent phone number that can be called in emergency situations.

Councilor Towner also recommended updating the process in who is called first, second, and so on in emergency situations and stated that the clerk would like to be notified in these situations as well.

Clerk Jaeger noted that in the last water tower emergency situation she had received a phone call from Councilor Towner, then was able to call Utility Foreman Pink and get an update on the situation. She was then able to spread the word to the remaining council members, staff, and the public. This seemed to negate an influx of 911 calls and personal calls or messages from the public.

Clerk Jaeger asked the council if the phone would be used as the department phone or for weekend work only. Pricing and service type would be based on use of the phone.

Councilor Towner noted that on the city website under utilities it does state to call 911 for utility emergencies but under contacts it states Utility Foreman Pinks personal cell phone. Councilor Towner recommends putting the same wording about calling 911 from the utilities page onto the contact page and to remove the Utility Foreman's personal number.

The process for emergencies would be to keep the order of the call list the same but add the on-call phone number as the first number called and to require the Utility workers to call the clerk in an emergency. The clerk will be able to then update the city and staff.

Councilor Towner asked whether this would affect Utility Foreman Trent's cell phone stipend. Councilor Kealy stated that the Utility Foreman will continue to get phone calls throughout the day where his cell phone stipend will still be needed. Clerk Jaeger stated that the utilities department does not have a phone in their office, so the Utility Foreman must use his personal cell phone for work related business.

Clerk Jaeger asked the council if the topic of the on-call cell phone should be discussed with the union if it is going to take away the workers opportunity for after hours OT due to phone calls. Councilor Loeffler stated that the employee carrying the on-call phone would still be entitled to the OT for calls.

Councilor Towner asked how a SCADA system would work with a cell phone. Councilor Kealy stated that a smartphone would be needed or a tablet to work with the SCADA system. Councilor Teska-Erickson stated that the use of the SCADA system would also reduce the number of calls because the utility workers would be notified immediately when there was a problem with the water system.

Councilor Kealy recommended putting a note on the bottom of the utility bills to remind residents to call 911 for any utility emergencies. Councilor Loeffler also recommended putting a reminder on the main page of the city website. Clerk Jaeger said she will make the changes.

Clerk Jaeger updated the council that she was looking at other government website services because of the update to a .gov domain and that may fit the city's needs better. The council will be informed of the details at a later date.

The council agreed to add this topic to an upcoming agenda item.

F. Community Center- who is responsible for cleaning before events and checking after.

Councilor Kealy stated that during event rentals complaints have been made about the cleanliness of the community center. When the Curling Club leaves at the end of March, the Community Center needs normal maintenance like dusting and cleaning of the bathrooms. Councilor Kealy also stated that the last wedding that came in had to be cleaned for a couple of hours just to get it presentable and that should not be the renters' responsibility. The supplies that are supposed to be supplied for these events are not stocked. In those instances, the Curling Club is usually called and they supply what they can from the Curling Clubs stock of supplies.

Mayor Matthews asked what the fee structure for renting the Community Center is. Clerk Jaeger stated that it is \$100 for renting the lobby area and kitchen, \$200 for renting the entire building, and there is a required \$200 damage deposit. Anyone, not only community members are able to rent the Community Center.

Councilor Towner recommended asking the cleaning agency that cleans City Hall if they would be willing to clean monthly and before events. Then the utility workers can check after an event if it has been cleaned or damaged and empty the garbage. Mayor Matthews asked if those duties were within the utility worker's contract. Councilor Towner was not sure.

Mayor Matthews asked how often the Community Center is rented out annually. Clerk Jaeger stated that it was approximately five times during the curling off season. Mayor Matthews stated that we should discuss hiring a cleaner during the curling off season.

The council recommended adding the Community Center, Senior Center, warming shack, and pavilions on the website for rental opportunities.

The council agrees that an ad could be put out to hire a cleaning person during the off season of curling and before and after events.

Councilor Towner recommended setting a window of time to set on how many days before an event someone would need to rent so that there is enough time to clean and stock before the event.

Clerk Jaeger stated that she wouldn't mind inspecting the Community Center before and after an event and making sure that all supplies are stocked.

Councilor Teska-Erickson also recommended keeping the city cleaning supplies locked up and separate from the supplies left for the event renters.

Councilor Kealy had mentioned that the Community Center has a mouse issue. Resident Cheryl Kievi from the audience asked if that is an issue that should be addressed. Councilor Kealy stated that another issue that should be addressed is the drop ceiling in the kitchen.

The council recommends adding hiring a cleaning service to the second meeting in March's agenda.

G. Campground- Winter Semi Parking

Councilor Kealy stated that since there is nowhere to legally park a semi-truck in city limits, the idea was to use the campground during the off season to park the trucks there. There could be electricity available for those who need to plug their trucks in, and it is still close to residential areas for walking distance.

Councilor Towner explained that the location near the school off Pennsylvania Ave was thought about, but there isn't electricity available on that side of the road. The semi-trucks during the winter need to be plugged in. Councilor Towner stated if we are already extending the campground, renting out the sites during the off season would help recoup funds.

Clerk Jaeger mentioned that the city Utility Workers have been cleaning up the tree damage in the campground and due to so many trees that have fallen, the sites are bigger than they were before.

Councilor Towner stated that he remembered Administrator Jeffries mention that he had spoken with IRRR about possible funding for the campground renovation. Clerk Jaeger said the IRRR has a mine reclamation grant that would probably fit the campground's needs.

Mayor Matthews asked how many semi-trucks in the city need parking space. Councilor Kealy stated that there are two. Councilor Towner stated that there are also at least two commercial vehicles that surpass the city's weight ordinance that would need parking also.

Councilor Kealy recommended the campground sites could be used for winter storage also.

Mayor Matthews stated that distance should be considered since some semi drivers don't have another vehicle.

Councilor Towner stated that there are websites link Camplife for truck stops that provide signage and booking services. He also believed that some sites provided liability insurance. With limited truck parking sites in Northern Minnesota the city could draw in more customers with this type of advertising.

Councilor Loeffler noted that the roads going down to the campground aren't the best to maneuver a semi-truck on.

Mayor Matthews suggested talking with Anderson Auto about possibly allowing the residents with semi-trucks to park there during the winter. This could add a side business to their already established business.

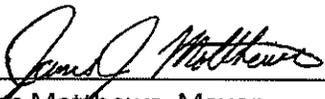
The council agreed to add direct staff to talk with Anderson Auto and local businesses about possible semi-parking to the second meeting in March's agenda.

5. ADJOURN:

Motion by Councilor Kealy to adjourn.

Supported by Councilor Teska-Erickson.

Motion carried on unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 8:21 p.m.


James Matthews, Mayor

ATTEST:


Rebecca Jaeger, City Clerk-Treasurer