

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PAWNEE CITY, HELD ON MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026, AT 7:00 P.M. AT THE CORNERSTONE BUILDING, 601 G STREET, ALL IN PAWNEE CITY, PAWNEE COUNTY, NEBRASKA.

Notice of this special meeting was given in advance thereof by posting in four prominent places, a designated method for giving notice as shown by the Affidavit of Posting on file in the office of the City Clerk. Notice of this special meeting was given to the Mayor and City Council and a copy of their acknowledgment of receipt of the notice and the Agenda are on file in the office of the City Clerk. Availability of the agenda was communicated in the advance notice and in the notice to the Mayor and City Council of this meeting. All proceedings hereafter shown were taken while the convened meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

Present: Mayor Charlie Hatfield, Council Members Pat Hatfield, Donnie Fisher, Susan Eisenhower (present by phone) and Vickie Zelenka; Deputy City Clerk Kellie Wiers, City Clerk/Treasurer Tamela Curtis and Foreman Spencer Cumley. Absent: None.

Mayor Charlie Hatfield called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. informing all those present of the Poster stating the Open Meeting Law Changes on the West meeting room wall, next to the storage closet, accessible to the public. At this time, all those present stood to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Hatfield stated the purpose of this meeting is to discuss personnel matters. It is not a grievance hearing. This is an open meeting unless we want to go into Executive Session. The purpose of this meeting as I understand it is for all of us to figure out a way we can work forward and take care of the problems that may have come up in the past. Some people have stated the past is the past, let's move forward. Before we start, Council Member Zelenka would like to present a letter she has written:

“I would like to address the City Council, City Staff and guests. It is not my intent to cause tensions but to take a pause and reflect where as a City entity and their employees have reached a point of distress in the workplace which has taken us to a level that is affecting our day to day work, morals, and direction that we need to maintain the betterment of our responsibilities to our community of Pawnee City. Over the years with many various councils and staff members, we have worked hard to take Pawnee City from an almost broke entity to solid footing. This should not be thrown away because we fail to find solutions for unrest.

I have been with the City as a council member for almost five years now. I have watched and heard many individuals bring their talents and skills to the table for the betterment of this community. Currently, we have some of the best individuals working for the City to enhance our community. During my tenure I have dealt with issues that I did not always agree with, reflect my personal beliefs, or made me feel wanted or worthy. I did not give up but continued to bring what skills and talents to the table I had.

Tonight, what I bring to the table is 40 years in the educational setting and 25 years in leadership responsibilities. I have led from the front ground levels to administrative positions. I have been

supervisor to as many as 50 people at a time. I have never asked anyone to do something I was not willing to do myself. I have worked side by side with some of the best people in those industries. I have participated in far more morale development programs than I want to remember including as a conflict resolution facilitator for the Department of Corrections with over 5 years under my belt. This is not to sound like I am bragging but to help everyone to understand the issues we are looking at tonight are fixable if we have buy-in from everyone. These issues have not developed overnight though they may feel like it.

The City, from the mayor to the last person hired, must share some of the responsibilities of the current issues and make the decision to be part of the solution to put us back on solid ground. If we cannot do this then we will be like many other communities that will founder and not be responsible citizens for our community's wellbeing. We may not always agree with everything, but do we lose sight of the total picture to personal emotions, revenge or gains? We were a family-oriented operation, but we want to act like corporations. We like living in small communities because we are like family. We can still be like family, make rules that benefit all and still take care of business in a professional manner. If we like corporations, then we must like micromanagement.

We must understand our individuals' roles and responsibilities. We cannot state half-truths or individual gains over the cost of others. We have to be able to stand up for any of our individual actions. If we make mistakes, own it, fix it and move on or we will not grow for ourselves or a group.

We are not setting a good example for our children, our families or our community. It is not about attacking, it is about our own integrity.

I have always had a sign in my office stating: Every entity has issues, but you can choose to be part of the problem or part of the solution. I choose to be part of the solution. What is your CHOICE?

I stand here before you stating my heart-felt decision that I am choosing to be part of the solution to our entities' issues, good or bad. I will work with any or all and bring to the table all the skills and knowledge to make a difference. I hope and pray that this has not offended any, of which, or it has, I apologize in advance and take ownership of what needs to be done.

I learned a long time ago, from a wise supervisor who stated, "God gave us two eyes to see, two ears to hear and one mouth, use them all wisely." At this time, Council Member Zelenka gave a demonstration using a greeting card. She showed Council Member Hatfield one side and then showed City Atty Jennifer Stehlik-Ladman the other side. She then asked Council Member Hatfield what he saw and asked Jennifer what she saw. Zelenka explained that we all interpret things differently and we may have not heard everything correctly and we may let our emotions affect our judgement. Maybe if we can let all of those things calm down a bit then we can really see what is happening.

Mayor Hatfield asked if anyone had anything to discuss; as part of the purpose of this meeting is to open the gates and let the water in.

Council Member Hatfield stated that is exactly what this meeting is about. There are rules in place and we need to address the issues. Council Member Hatfield stated he feels this meeting is a waste of time if we cannot address the issues. Mayor Hatfield then asked what needs to be done to address the issues? Council Member Hatfield stated it looks like grievances will have to be filed in order to start the process to get this solved. We should have filed grievances. We should have read the grievance policy in the Employee Handbook. Council Member Hatfield stated he had talked with the Mayor and had also talked to Jennifer about this situation. Council Member Hatfield found out that they can't do anything without grievances. Where do we go from here? Council Member Zelenka asked Mayor Hatfield if there is another method that can be used to address the issues and then get back to Council? Mayor Hatfield stated that it is his opinion that the grievance policy should be followed but may need to be updated. It states in the grievance policy that the supervisor has no place to go with a grievance and it is his opinion that the supervisor should submit a handwritten letter to the Council then meet and discuss the grievance. Would that be the proper procedure? Jennifer stated yes if there is a particular complaint on work performance or violation of the employee handbook then you would have to follow the grievance process to take action against the employee whether it would be to assign training or take action, etc. Council Member Hatfield stated this meeting was called to get to the bottom of an issue. A council member is not supposed to be singled out so where is a supervisor supposed to go to resolve an issue? We are not supposed to single anyone out or point fingers in this meeting but you almost have to point fingers to get to the bottom of an issue to resolve it. Jennifer recommended not taking action in an open meeting that would be some sort of reprimand or discipline for a particular employee because that should go through the grievance process. If the purpose of this meeting was for team building then that could be discussed in an open meeting. Council Member Zelenka suggested appointing an individual or form a group to discover the issues and then work on solutions to the issues and ask the employees for solutions. Council Member Fisher suggested a mediator that could work with the team and then do some team building activities and get ideas from the team to fix the problem. It was discussed that this mediator should not be the mayor or a member of the City Council. Clerk Curtis stated if we come to this meeting with a problem then we should also have some solutions. Jennifer stated she feels the Council can identify specific problems without naming a particular employee but she realizes with a small number of employees it wouldn't be difficult to identify the employee. Council Member Fisher stated with a small team, if there are two people having a bad day it tends to affect the whole day and it's magnified since there is a small number of people. Council Member Zelenka gave an example of a situation she has dealt with and two people were unable to work together in the same area on the same shift so one person was moved to a different area and that solved the problem. Council Member Hatfield stated that employees need to respect their supervisors but it looks like the supervisor can't take care of an issue themselves, it has to come to Council if the situation doesn't improve. More discussion was had about designating a person to be the mediator and who should be the mediator. DC Wiers asked to speak and stated she felt the situation was becoming bigger than what it really needs to be. Also, it states in the grievance procedure "No disrespect to the Citizens of Pawnee City or other Employees of the City of Pawnee City." We all have different personalities. She gave an example that in the city office, the clerks will cover each other and wait on a customer that irritates a fellow clerk. The solution could be as simple as that and communication is the key issue. Clerk Curtis stated we are not supposed to talk with individual council members but she feels Council Member Zelenka would be the strongest mediator and suggests she be deemed the mediator with all of her

experience. Council Member Fisher stated he feels Zelenka would be a good mediator if she is willing since she is fair and honest and people recognize that about her. Mayor Hatfield commented "It feels like I'm raising my family over again." I had boys that banged heads. I have friends that had daughters that banged heads. They couldn't get along but then two days later it was like nothing happened. Everyone looks at things differently. I went into the office recently and the clerks thought I was mad but I wasn't mad. I had a lot of things on my mind. I walked into the office and walked right back out. Just because someone doesn't say things to you or doesn't want to participate in your conversation doesn't mean they are upset. It may mean they have no interest in what you are talking about. Council Member Eisenhower said she agreed 100%. Clerk Curtis stated Mayor Hatfield had shared with her that he had a lot of turmoil going on at his own work at the same time and his mind was busy. Mayor Hatfield stated he is semi-retired and he was dealing with things that should have been the manager's job but he had to take care of it. If the manager needs help, you step in and help. If the manager doesn't need help then if he says he has it under control, then leave it alone. Council Member Hatfield stated you should also respect your supervisor. Foreman Cumley stated without pointing fingers.... First off, I enjoy working with everyone in this room and I don't have issues with anyone. I don't want to see anyone be singled out or feel like they are in trouble. I have always tried to follow this stuff as closely as possible. We talked about grievance issues. When I read through the one that as to do with a supervisor having a problem with an employee, I followed that as closely as possible with issues up until the point where you have to have a written warning. I don't want to write somebody up especially when they are a good and quality employee and they can work efficiently and have no issues but when you get past that, my hands are tied. I don't know how to proceed after that without writing people up that you don't want to write up. You lose sleep and they lose sleep." Council Member Eisenhower asked Foreman Cumley if he didn't want to write people up is because you don't want them to be in trouble or you don't want it to go on their permanent record? Cumley answered "All of the above." Council Member Hatfield stated the problem with that is, if you don't write people up then they become complacent. Joe Norman was present in the audience. He stated complacency happens with everyone. Sometimes people have good days and sometimes they have bad days and when you are having a good day it is easy to look down on someone. This is a team. I understand you don't want someone to have something on their record but if you can't talk about something and if you can't get through, face-to-face, you have to write them up. As a supervisor, if you can't get things worked out with your employee, then you are left with nothing else. I'm not telling you to write someone else up, but you are going to have to do some soul searching and figure out where you are at because if it is affecting getting things done then something has to change. Maybe have meetings where you all just hang out for a while; develop some camaraderie. Council Member Zelenka stated if you don't talk about something then it swells and then all of a sudden we have two or three issues. Joe Norman stated he doesn't know what is going on but from what he hears, this is a team. That's my advice. Council Member Zelenka stated you have to talk about things. She gave an example of a situation where she worked with a male employee and he didn't like having a female supervisor. That was an easy fix. We can put a little common sense back into this. When a person is having difficulty at work and at home, they are entitled to a bad day but that doesn't mean they can take it out on their coworkers. We have to respect each other a little bit more. Mayor Hatfield stated when he was a store manager in Seneca, he had a problem with writing people up. The biggest problem was the fact that you work hard and you train employees. You get them to work the way you want them to work and then you start having a few hiccups and if

you don't know how to remove the hiccups then it causes more problems. But in the back of your mind, you hate to write them up because they have worked for you for two years and if that person leaves, then you have to hire someone else and it could take them 5 years to learn what the other person learned in 2 years. Clerk Curtis gave the example of a previous clerk that received a negative evaluation and Curtis worked with Council Member Zelenka on the issue. Curtis had explained to the employee what to do and how to complete the task a certain way but the employee didn't follow the direction. "The next morning, the employee resigned and then threw me under the bus" so she understands Cumley's hesitation. Council Member Hatfield stated "Maybe I'm just a little more hardass but if an employee messes up, then they need to be written up. There has been talk about being family oriented or like a corporation. You can be more in the middle but you can't be one side or the other. If you write someone up and then they decide to quit then that's on them. You have to write people up. You have to have documentation or this is what we deal with. We have been dealing with drama amongst this team for at least 5 to 6 months now. It's uncalled for. Stupid drama. I don't know how else to explain it." Council Member Fisher is a supervisor at Alpha. He has written people up and "the good employees will understand why you are doing it but you have to present it in a certain way. If you are decent about it, most people will understand where they made a mistake and will try to do better. The good ones are not going to hand in their resignation and quit. If someone did quit after a write up then maybe you are better without them, It can be a learning tool." Council Member Eisenhauer stated that "Tammy and Spencer are supervisors and we expect you to address serious issues with employees and you have to write them up if nothing changes. You try all you can before you write someone up but when you hit that wall, you go to your handbook and follow the grievance process and let the Council deal with it." Council Member Hatfield stated "you have to have respect between supervisors and employees." Council Member Fisher stated this is a small enough town. You would hope you would have mutual respect with each other. Clerk Curtis stated just because Spencer and I are supervisors doesn't mean we know everything and we rely on our employees to help keep the City running as a whole. It takes all of us to keep this City running. Communication is key. Joining in on conversations is key. We also have to ask each other questions and sometimes ask the same questions again. Council Member Hatfield stated even if you are having a bad day you still have to have respect. Even if someone is asking you the same question a hundred times, you still have to have respect. Clerk Curtis stated that the clerks in the office may not understand what the crew members are discussing so we may ask the same questions several times. We are human. The phone rings and some days we get pulled in several different directions so it's hard to stay on track. If we make mistakes in the office, it's not on purpose but it may also affect you. We are really not trying to cause issues. We get interrupted all the time and forget to ask the crew members questions when they are in the office so we will call them up but we try not to do that because we know they are busy and lately, they have been dealing with the sewer plant. We have to work together. Council Member Zelenka stated she has noticed the "Incident Report" has been listed on the council meeting agenda lately. She feels it needs to be used more often as a reporting tool versus write-ups. Did something happen because of an accident or was it something that couldn't be prevented or not paying attention? This way the incident reports can be reviewed to see if there is a trend happening that needs to be addressed. Council Member Hatfield asked what do you do if it's a personnel matter? Council Member Zelenka explained in previous employment if an incident happened and two people saw it then there were two incident reports. We read them and if there is a common thread between them and if it is something that warranted a write-up then that was done or it may have

required some training and an employee had to watch a video or take a class. Everything originated from incident reports and they were reviewed on a daily basis. It could be a simple solution but if something was continually happening then it would be addressed with the worker. Clerk Curtis asked, "Where do we go from here?" At this time, Council Member Zelenka asked the audience, which included Gary Droge, Jr., Lucas Barloon, Joe Norman, and Brandon Holthus, if they had any input. Clerk Curtis asked what if the employees got together with Council Member Zelenka? Will that be allowed even though a council member would be singled out? Team building and morale building ideas? Council Member Fisher stated he felt it would be a good idea if it would help the situation. Mayor Hatfield stated that everybody is sitting here that would like to say something but they are afraid to say something because they are afraid it will hurt somebody else a little more but he feels Donnie's suggestion would work best. It's the Mayor's opinion that an employee would feel more comfortable talking with Vickie one-on-one about what's going on and then Vickie can evaluate the information and tell the Council what the problem is with her suggestions and see if that takes care of the problem. If it doesn't take care of the problem then Council will take a look at it. Council Member Zelenka offered to meet with the City employees at the office, the shop or even on a job site. Council Member Hatfield stated he doesn't have a problem with it other than if not actually following the grievance policy. Clerk Curtis stated none of us right now want disciplinary action, we just want things to get better. Council Member Eisenhauer suggested "What am I doing that is pissing you off so I can change it?" This may need to be asked. Clerk Curtis states sometimes you are not even aware of a situation and could just be a miscommunication. Council Member Hatfield stated "you can call me corporate you can call me whatever you want to. It just sounds like a bunch more hoops to jump through, to get to an issue that we can just bring out bluntly and resolve it. Why are we going through all this? I get team building but we got one or maybe a few issues we could bring up front, get them on the table, resolve them and move on. Clerk Curtis stated we have to follow the rules as written. Council Member Zelenka said there is a fine line between bringing an issue up to the Council and then we have to vote on it but we need ideas on how to make things better. It was agreed the Council doesn't want to micromanage its employees but we need to resolve issues. Council Member Zelenka stated she doesn't want to put Spencer in a position where he has to feel like the bad guy all the time and the same for Tammy. There is black and white but there is also a lot of gray matter. Foreman Cumley stated he agrees with Council Member Hatfield "if we are not having a grievance and there is no reprimanding but we still can't talk specifically about the issues, what are we doing here right now? So, we can talk about it as long as nobody is getting reprimanded?" Council Member Eisenhauer stated if you want to talk about a specific person, then you will have to go into Executive Session. Council Member Hatfield stated none of this was intended as punishment, it was intended to get to the bottom of an issue and get it fixed without any harsh punishment or getting reprimanded. Joe Norman stated "Just your body language Spencer, you have something you need to get off your chest. If it's not here, it's got to be somewhere but you are carrying a lot right now." Council Member Hatfield asked to go into executive session. Jennifer stated if it is specific examples or identifying something, she recommended going into executive session." Council Member Hatfield looked at Foreman Cumley and stated "I don't want to speak for you so speak up." Foreman Cumley stated he just wants to talk about it and be done. Jennifer stated the Council can name who they want to remain in the executive session and it doesn't have to be just the Council. Mayor Hatfield asked if we are going into Executive Session to talk about the problem, are we pointing fingers or not pointing fingers? Jennifer stated you don't want the session to include name calling or putting

blame back and forth. You want it to be productive and address a specific issue with specific examples. Council Member Hatfield stated that he has one question for one individual but obviously, that individual has to be pointed out or it could maybe go to two questions. Council Member Zelenka stated that if we go into executive session, it doesn't go onto somebody's record because we are supposed to be moving forward from here and find solutions for that problem. I do not want this to become a yelling and screaming match because we are dealing with people's personal lives. Jennifer stated she agrees with that and if you go into executive session and address an issue, you cannot come out of Executive Session and then vote on an issue. Foreman Cumley stated I don't think we want to do that at all. We want to talk about the issue and get the whole story and then there is no "he said, she said" and everybody knows the correct information. Jennifer stated if you can resolve the issues right now then you don't need Executive Session. Mayor Hatfield stated it is his opinion that we have discussed all of this and we are all here. I don't see the need to go into Executive Session but what we can do as humans is adjourn and discuss it. Clerk Curtis and Jennifer agreed this cannot be done because there is a quorum present. Council Member Eisenhauer stated if this issue is handled in open session then it is part of the minutes and public record so it would be better to go into Executive Session so none of the information goes into the newspaper. Jennifer stated what is said in Executive Session would stay in Executive Session and if someone wants something to be discussed in open session, they can request it. It was agreed that if the Council goes into Executive Session it will be respectful. Council Member Eisenhauer moved to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting. Council Member Hatfield seconded the motion. Mayor Hatfield read: A motion has been made and seconded to go into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting, at 8:10 pm. Is there any discussion? The pending motion is to go into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting. Council agreed Joe Norman should stay in Executive Session as well as all the City Employees and City Attorney. Roll Call vote: Fisher: aye. Hatfield: aye. Zelenka: aye. Motion adopted. The Mayor continued: A motion to go into Closed Session for the purpose of discussing personnel matters to prevent needless injury to the reputation of a person and if such person has not requested a public meeting has been adopted. Council Member Eisenhauer moved that we come out of Executive Session @ 9:18 pm. Roll Call vote: Fisher: aye. Hatfield: aye. Zelenka: aye. Motion adopted. Council Member Zelenka moved to adjourn the meeting. Council Member Fisher seconded the motion. Roll Call vote indicated all in favor of the motion and meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

ATTEST: Kellie A. Wiers, Deputy City Clerk

Charlie Hatfield, Mayor