



CITY OF WINSTON

City Council Regular Meeting

Meeting Minutes

Meeting: Winston City Council Regular Meeting
Date: May 4, 2026
Time: Approximately 7:00 PM — Adjourned 7:30 PM
Location: City Hall, Winston
Presiding: Mayor Christie Knutson
Present: Councilors Dave Cunningham, Allen Hobson, Dorie White, and Nick Wiggins. City manager Thomas McIntosh.

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7 o'clock by Mayor Christie Knutson. There were no adjustments to the agenda.

2. Consent Agenda & Comments from the Audience

A motion to approve the minutes for April 20th was made by Cunningham, seconded by White, and passed unanimously. There were no comments from the audience.

3. Library Report

Presenter: Paula Fetzer, Library Director

Fetzer handed the council a quarterly financial statement. A recent STEAM event was not as well attended as hoped. Ingraham books carries children's books. The library is still a part of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.

4. Conference Report

Presenter: Councilor Cunningham

Councilor Cunningham delivered a report from a recently attended conference covering topics relevant to small municipalities including issues pertaining to Minnesota, Canada, and similar jurisdictions. The following key takeaways were shared:

a) Charter Health Check

- The League or similar body presented a "charter health check" — a review of city charters to identify provisions requiring updates.
- Strong caution was given regarding the use of single words in charter language, as specific terms carry definitive legal meanings. Cities that fail to observe this have found themselves in legal difficulty.

b) Grants & Funding — Sliding Scale for Small Cities

- A significant grant program update was presented: grants are being distributed on a sliding scale — smaller cities receive a higher propensity of grants and larger grant amounts; larger cities receive comparatively less.
- This policy has either already been codified ("context signature") or will be very shortly.
- Impact for Winston: Because Winston is under 6,000 in population, it is classified as a small rural community. This means Winston stands to receive the widest possible range of grant funding opportunities.

c) Use of Artificial Intelligence

- The conference discussed using AI tools to benefit city operations — particularly for drafting programs, ordinances, and other documents.
- Caution was emphasized: AI-generated content should not be taken as 100% accurate or consolidated directly into official city reports without thorough verification.
- Potential benefit: significant reduction in staff man-hours for routine documentation tasks.

d) Innovative Communication Strategies

- The conference featured a session on how cities can better communicate with their residents.
- One community hired a communications staff member who produced short in-house videos showcasing city activities — including public works crews repairing sewer lines and downtown parking projects — and published them on the city website.
- These videos were produced internally at minimal cost yet effectively broadcast city operations to the public.
- Councilor Cunningham recommended Winston consider a similar approach, possibly in conjunction with the city newsletter, to improve citizen engagement and transparency.
- Key theme of the conference: communication, communication, communication — improved communication with citizens leads to better civic engagement and results.

e) General Assessment

- Councilor Cunningham noted this was among the better conferences attended — topics were pertinent and actionable for a city the size of Winston.
- Notably, many of the best practices being proposed at the conference were already being implemented by Winston, which was viewed positively.
- Administration (Thomas) acknowledged receiving a full stack of conference materials and audio recordings, which staff plan to review for further actionable items.

2. Department Reports

Administration — Thomas, City Manager

- Budget for Council Training: Confirmed a line item of approximately \$7,000 is in the budget for council training expenses, allowing councilors to attend trainings and bring back relevant information.

Four ordinances were announced as forthcoming in the near future:

- **Ordinance 1 — Marijuana Dispensary Loophole (House Bill 4121 Compliance)**
 - Purpose: Bring city code into compliance with HB 4121, which limits recreational marijuana dispensaries based on population thresholds.
 - Current situation: The license threshold is set at 7,500 residents who are 21+. Winston's figure is approximately 4,000, placing the city above the threshold requiring concern.
 - Identified loophole: Existing licensees can close and relocate a store using an existing license, bypassing the population-based limit on additional licenses.
 - Goal: Close this loophole to prevent market saturation. Reference was made to Roseburg, which has eleven or more dispensaries and has experienced declining top-line revenue as a result of over-saturation.
- **Ordinance 2 — Park Board Restructuring**
 - Council has already been briefed on this matter.
 - Administration will prepare a shell/template document for council review in short order.
- **Ordinance 3 — Prohibition on Bleach Water / Burnout Activity During Events**
 - Context: During summer events such as "Summer Night Cruises," certain individuals throw bleach water on streets to create burnout conditions.
 - The ordinance will add enforcement teeth and citation options to deter this behavior.
 - Specific concern: The Abraham Street corridor was re-routed to its original path. The ordinance aims to protect that area from disruptive behavior.
 - Target timeline: Implementation and public notification planned before July, with an outreach campaign to inform the public of the changes.
- **Ordinance 4 — Park Exclusion Extension to Community Center**
 - Context: If the Police Department issues a 90-day exclusion ("86") of an individual from a park (specifically Community Park), the exclusion will also apply to the Community Center, as the facility is located within the park.
 - Current code is unclear on this extension; the ordinance will provide explicit, unambiguous language.

3. New Business

a) New Business Licenses

The following new business license applications were presented for council approval:

- Long's Heating, Air Conditioning, and Electric LLC — Applicant: Valerie DeBenedetti.
- Outskirts Landscaping LLC — Applicant: Michael Williamson

Motion to accept both licenses was made by Hobson, seconded by Wiggins, and passed unanimously (Ayes; no opposed).

b) Donation Request — Douglas High School Senior Graduation Celebration

Stephanie Dahlenburg, Valley Drug owner and volunteer coordinator for the Douglas High School Class of 2026, presented a donation request on behalf of the senior class to help fund their graduation celebration party.

Event Details:

- Event date: June 6, 2026 (graduation day).
- Graduation ceremony: 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM.
- Graduation party: 9:00 PM – 2:00 AM.
- Venue: Boys and Girls Club in Roseburg (secured at a favorable rate).
- Students will be bused from Douglas High School to the venue.
- Activities: food, games, prizes for students.

Fundraising Progress (approximately \$4,500 raised to date):

- Abby's fundraiser: \$500
- Cotton candy sales at Douglas High School Track Meet (held at UCC): ~\$500
- Student catering event at the fairgrounds: \$960
- Carlos's Restaurant (Manny): \$600 donation
- Bake sale: \$830

Available City Funding Sources (as presented by Thomas):

- Community Activities line item: \$1,500 currently available (of a \$2,000 annual budget); expected to be re-budgeted at \$2,000 for the next fiscal year.
- Transient Room Tax (discretionary element): Approximately \$5,000+ available of the \$6,000 discretionary total. Note: The transient room tax budget is being reduced from \$20,000 to approximately \$13,000 for the next fiscal year, due to revenue not reaching \$20,000 and a \$12,000 annual obligation to the Chamber of Commerce.

Council Decision:

A motion to authorize a donation of \$2,000 from the Community Activities line item to support the graduation celebration was made by Cunningham, seconded by Hobson and passed unanimously. The City of Winston is now the largest sponsor of the event. The council noted the high school's longstanding support of the community and welcomed this contribution. Discussion also occurred regarding the possibility of this becoming an annual event, with the expectation that a booster club may take over coordination in future years.

4. Non-Agenda / Budget Items

- Check copies and claims in excess of \$500 were noted.

5. Announcements

The following upcoming meetings and events were announced:

- Second Budget Committee Meeting — May 11, 2026 at 4:00 PM, Community Center
- Park Board Meeting — May 12, 2026 at 4:00 PM, City Hall
- Friends of the Winston Library — May 13, 2026 at 11:00 AM, Winston Library (subject to change; verify before attending)
- Economic Development Meeting — May 13, 2026, at noon, City Hall
- Winston Planning Commission — May 13, 2026 at 5:30 PM, City Hall
- Winston City Council Regular Meeting — May 18, 2026 at 7:00 PM, City Hall

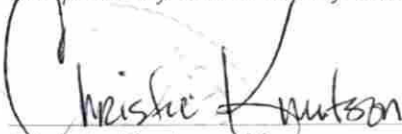
6. Executive Session

No executive session was held.

7. Adjournment

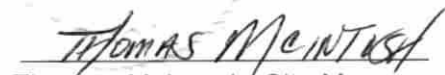
The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Cindy Sarti, Finance Clerk



Christie Knutson, Mayor

Attest:



Thomas McIntosh, City Manager