

ALBERT LEA PORT AUTHORITY
MINUTES

Wednesday, November 5, 2025 – 7:30 a.m.
Regular Meeting
132 N Broadway Ave

CALL TO ORDER & NOTATION OF ROLL

The Regular Meeting of the Albert Lea Port Authority was called to order on Wednesday, November 5, 2025 at 7:30 a.m. by President Murray. Roll was noted by the Board Secretary.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Mark Heinemann, Rich Murray, Sarah Nelson, Tricia Dahl, Larry Baker, Nate Jansen, Bryan Skogheim

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT: Val Lockhart, Business Community Representative; Janelle Koepke, Riverland Community College Representative; Ian Rigg, City of Albert Lea Representative; Konrad Hawkinson and Holly Babcock, Tourism Representatives; Brad Edwin, Freeborn County Representative;

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT: Melanie Aeschliman, Freeborn County Representative

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Phillip Johnson, Executive Director; Noelle Viktora, Assistant Executive Director

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 1, 2025 REGULAR MEETING

The minutes from Wednesday, October 1st, regular meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Heinemann made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Nelson. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 7 in favor; 0 opposed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM OCTOBER 14, 2025 SPECIAL MEETING

The minutes from Wednesday, October 14th, special meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Baker made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Heinemann. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 7 in favor; 0 opposed.

ALEDA MISSION STATEMENT

“To provide and promote services and resources to retain, expand, create and attract businesses, increase tax base and quality employment opportunities in Freeborn County.”

RESOLUTION PA-25-16 AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF CLAIMS

Commissioner Jansen made a motion to accept the claims as presented in the amount of \$33,416.18 seconded by Commissioner Dahl. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 7 in favor; 0 opposed.

BOARD DISCUSSION ON STAFFING CHANGES

The board reviewed the proposal from DDA and the contract for Executive Director Johnson's continued employment in 2026. Commissioner Baker motioned, and Commissioner Heinemann seconded, to approve the contract with DDA for the employee search and to approve the contract with Executive Director Johnson. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 7 in favor; 0 opposed.

DISCUSSION OF AVAILABLE PROPERTY FOR PURCHASE

The board discussed the possibility of pursuing the purchase of certain properties that may be transitioning ownership. Staff noted that an existing agreement for those parcels could potentially be reassigned, although there may be costs involved to facilitate that transfer. Additional clarity is needed regarding a prior obligation connected to one of the sites. Further review and negotiation will be required before any action is considered.

STAFF REPORT

Child Care

- Ongoing work related to the Great Start Grant and continued progress on our childcare grant initiative.

Vortex Cold Storage Phase 3

- Coordination continues on several components of the Phase 3 expansion.
- A new proposal from the company has required additional review and discussion.
- Working with the City to vacate a portion of roadway connected to the site.
- A purchase agreement will be finalized once all site approvals are in place.
- The company is evaluating additional land needs, including interest in the 11-acre parcel.
- Phase 3 construction is targeted to begin in April.
- An update on the related project is anticipated by year-end.

Ventura Foods

- Dock door improvements are underway and expected to be completed before winter.
- Lease amendment has been signed.

Conferences / Meetings to Note

- Participated in CVB Executive Director interviews.
- Attended the Chamber Annual Meeting.
- Continued coordination with HRA leadership; a joint meeting with representatives from the City, Housing partners, and County expected soon.

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- Ongoing discussions with the City regarding stormwater planning related to future development; a workable solution has been identified if modifications to the southern stormwater pond are ever required.
- Ongoing collaboration with SMIF to support small business lending needs.
- Coordination with WDS on upcoming ribbon cutting event and future project celebrations.

Ex-Officio Update

- **Freeborn County, Brad Edwin**
 - Encouraging participation in Green Light for Veterans in honor of Veterans Day.
 - Budget discussions are the primary focus; prelim levy was set at 15% due mostly to payroll, benefits, and a significant 43% insurance increase after a long-term contract expired.
 - Departments are working hard to reduce costs, and new leadership is bringing fresh perspectives to operations.
 - The County has over \$400,000 in opioid settlement funds — several proposals have come forward, including installing a community Narcan vending machine (location TBD).
 - The Cannabis Committee continues to work on ordinances; there is ongoing review regarding whether cultivation should be allowed in agricultural zones in addition to industrial areas.
 - Government Center and Environmental Services hours have changed to 8:00 AM–4:30 PM (Human Services remains 8:00 AM–5:00 PM; Highway Shop 7:00 AM–3:30 PM).
- **City of Albert Lea, Ian Rigg**
 - Budget work continues. Although spending increases are under 5%, several revenue adjustments (lower-than-expected franchise fees, reduced cannabis revenue, and cyclical permitting revenues) have resulted in a preliminary levy closer to 8%.
 - Continued coordination on housing efforts with the HRA and County, including development agreements for properties where demolition and infill construction are planned.
 - Modular housing is being pursued where cost efficiencies can be achieved — including projects where multiple homes can be installed at once to reduce crane setup costs.
 - Several infill projects are progressing — including homes replacing previously demolished or tax-forfeiture structures — with developers aiming to keep pricing near the \$200K range for attainable workforce housing.
 - Work continues on 300 Block redevelopment. The City expects updated cost estimates for a potential multi-story mixed-use project with parking, and will evaluate whether to move forward with Revocity or pivot to a new direction by December 15.
 - A bonding tour is being held for the wastewater treatment plant project. The City is pursuing multiple funding paths (including PCIG) to advance both Phase I and Phase II simultaneously and control escalating project costs.
- **Chamber of Commerce, Val Lockhart**
 - Newly in her role and currently assessing operations, membership needs, and opportunities for improvement.

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- Recently distributed a survey to members to gather feedback on what is working well and where changes may be needed.
- Collaborating with CVB and other partners to strengthen coordination and enhance joint efforts moving forward.
- Hosting a Paid Leave informational event on November 19, with both an in-person session at United Way and a virtual option, including legal and insurance experts to help businesses prepare for new requirements beginning January 1.
- Beginning outreach to better understand business challenges and identify future programming and support efforts.
- **Convention and Visitors Bureau, Konrad Hawkinson**
 - Recently appointed CVB Director and shared appreciation for partner support; emphasized commitment to strong collaboration moving forward.
 - Reported successful completion of multiple downtown visual enhancement projects, including the new mural in Alerus alley and wrapped utility boxes along Fountain Street and Central Park.
 - Launching a “Loving Lights” winter fundraising campaign, where community members can sponsor window displays with messages or memorials.
 - Soft-launched the new CVB website with ongoing improvements to itineraries and weekend visitor planning content.
 - Continued participation in partner events such as the Chamber Annual Meeting.
 - Working on holiday décor planning, including wreaths and sponsorship of downtown planters; interested groups may contact the CVB to adopt a planter.
 - Seeking a replacement platform for Placer due to cost and functionality challenges.
 - Reported strong participation and success of the Octoberween event, with plans to continue and expand in future years.
 - Encouraged support for upcoming retail and seasonal activities including Shop Small Saturday and the Holiday Bazaar.
 - Announced that hiring is underway for a new Events & Sponsorship Coordinator to help manage and sustain local events.
 - City partners noted that planning for the Eddie Cochran celebration is ramping up with expectations of a major community draw in the coming year.
- **Riverland Community College, Janelle Koepke**
 - Enrollment is up approximately 7% again this year, marking the third consecutive year of strong growth and reaching the highest enrollment levels in roughly 20 years.
 - Despite growth, the college continues to navigate budget pressures and anticipates the need for cost reductions in the coming years.
 - Planning to host a Cybersecurity Summit in early 2026, gathering local employers to discuss workforce needs and industry challenges.
 - a partnership with IBM to develop an advanced cybersecurity training environment on campus, simulating real-world cyber events.
 - Initiating a housing study with Maxfield Research to better understand student housing needs, including short-term accommodations for workforce trainees.
 - Collaborating with EDF Renewables on training programs that could benefit from expanded local housing options.

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- Riverland was featured at Harvard University last week as part of a national research study on successful community college partnerships, where staff presented on their collaborative work and program development.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Jansen made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Baker. The motion carried 7 in favor, 0 opposed. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 a.m.

Filed and attested November 5, 2025.

President

Secretary

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