ALBERT LEA PORT AUTHORITY
MINUTES
Wednesday, February 4, 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, February 4, 2026 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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Bryan Skogheim

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT: Val Lockhart, Business Community Representative; Ian Rigg, City of Albert Lea Representative; Brad Edwin, Freeborn County Representative; Konrad Hawkinson, Tourism Representative;

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT: Janelle Koepke, Riverland Community College Representative; Melanie Aeschliman, Freeborn County Representative

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Phillip Johnson, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Projects; Noelle Viktora, Operations and Finance Director

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM JANUARY 7, 2025 REGULAR MEETING

The minutes from Wednesday, January 7th, regular meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Jansen 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 6 in favor; 0 opposed.

RESOLUTION PA-26-06 AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF CLAIMS

Commissioner Heinemann made a motion to accept the claims as presented in the amount of $141,503.61 seconded by Commissioner Dahl. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 6 in favor; 0 opposed.

STAFF REPORT

- **Child Care**

    - A child care survey is being discussed to better understand current gaps and future opportunities.
    - The goal is to identify realistic expansion or partnership options based on community needs and provider capacity.
- **Vortex Cold Storage / Project Cascade**
    - Justin is now serving as the site selector managing the project.
    - The scope of the project has significantly increased:
        - Phase 1 has grown from a $60 million investment to a $100 million investment.
        - Future phases (Phase 2 and 3) are projected at approximately $80 million.
    - The New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) application process is going very well, with an estimated $30–40 million in tax credits anticipated.
    - Phase 1 is projected to create approximately 220 jobs.
    - With Phase 2 expansion (adding four additional production lines), total employment could reach approximately 440 positions.
- **Conferences/Meetings to Note**
    - Regular monthly coordination meetings continue with Noelle, Rich, the City, Revocity, and other stakeholders.

EX-OFFICIO UPDATE

- **Freeborn County – Brad Edwin**
    - A public meeting regarding the rifle ordinance is scheduled for February 12 at 5:30 p.m. in the board room. Public input is being sought to determine whether to allow rifle use or maintain shotgun-only regulations. Neighboring counties have not yet made decisions.
- A legislative workshop was held with representatives including Peggy Bennett, Rep. Dornink, and Rep. Finstad. Topics included:
    - Juvenile attorney fees, currently averaging $10,000 per month.
    - Cannabis rollout and state implementation.
    - SHIP grants and allowable uses.
        - For example, playground equipment is not eligible, but benches are allowable.
- Unfunded state mandates have increased over the past year.
- Mental health concerns were discussed:
    - With state facility closures, county jails are increasingly housing individuals needing mental health care.
    - Representatives from Mayo Ambulance Service attended to provide insight.
    - Public health and human service contracts will be up for renewal after the first of the year.
- **City of Albert Lea – Ian Rigg**
    - The City is proceeding with construction of two new houses.
    - Working with Ehlers on TIF district planning.
    - Actively lobbying for policy changes, including improvements to revolving loan fund structures.
    - Planning efforts are underway for future industrial sites and a housing planned development.
    - The watershed/city sales tax was renewed:
        - Funds will support trail development, Miracle Field, Snyder Fields, and library projects.

        - Each project is estimated to receive approximately $20 million.
        - Senator Amy Klobuchar's office confirmed that the President signed a bill allocating $2.6 million for Blazing Star. The required local match is only 20%, making it a strong funding opportunity.
- **Chamber of Commerce – Val Lockhart**
    - The Worksite Wellness Committee is revamping its process to align with Blue Zones standards.
        - Assisting businesses in navigating SHIP grant applications.
        - Discussion included potential application for a SHIP grant.
        - Working with Kathy at the City regarding a contract.
    - Noelle was a guest on the first Chamber podcast.
    - ALEDA is Co-hosting the Leadership Group next Tuesday.
    - Big Freeze Medallion Hunt will return this year; clues begin next week.
    - Currently accepting nominations for the 2026 Farm Families recognition. Celebration scheduled during the Ag Luncheon on March 24.
- **Convention and Visitors Bureau – Konrad Hawkinson**
    - Exploring streaming advertising opportunities.
    - Working to restructure sponsorships so event organizers contribute financially.
    - Updated downtown map cards. Updating downtown kiosks with new maps and event information.
    - Reviewing options for updated exterior building signage.
    - Assisted the Big Island Rendezvous with a press release and donated merchandise for fundraising.
    - Partnering with the downtown retail group on a new March event.
    - Big Freeze event is next weekend, along with the Galentine's event.
    - Planning for the Shop, Sip & Stroll event in April.
- **Riverland Community College – Janelle Koepke**
    - No updates were provided.

COMMISSIONER/OTHER ITEMS

Candidate Review with DDA: Liza reported that nine candidates were invited to move forward, and two later withdrew, leaving seven finalists for board review. After discussion, the board identified four candidates to advance to the interview stage. Those candidates will complete an intellectual profile assessment and background checks, with materials provided to the board one week prior to interviews. The interview day will include board interviews, a stakeholder group session, and a private tour, all scheduled within one day. Travel expenses for candidates will be reimbursed in accordance with policy.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Jansen made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Dahl. The motion carried 6 in favor, 0 opposed. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 a.m.

Filed and attested February 4, 2026.

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President Secretary