ALBERT LEA PORT AUTHORITY
MINUTES
Wednesday, March 13, 2026 – 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 Friday, March 13, 2026 at 7:30 a.m. by President Murray. Roll was noted by the Board Secretary.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Mark Heinemann, Rich Murray, Tricia Dahl, Larry Baker, Nate Jansen

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Bryan Skogheim, Sarah Nelson

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT: Ian Rigg, City of Albert Lea Representative; Brad Edwin, Freeborn County Representative

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT: Val Lockhart, Business Community Representative; Janelle Koepke, Riverland Community College Representative; Melanie Aeschliman, Freeborn County Representative; Konrad Hawkinson, Tourism Representative

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM FEBRUARY 4, 2026 REGULAR MEETING

The minutes from Wednesday, February 4th, regular meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Baker made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Dahl. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 5 in favor; 0 opposed.

RESOLUTION PA-26-07 AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF CLAIMS

Commissioner Heinemann made a motion to accept the claims as presented in the amount of $74,625.46 seconded by Commissioner Baker. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 5 in favor; 0 opposed.

STAFF REPORT

- **Child Care**
  - A new provider grant was awarded to a provider located in Albert Lea.

    - Staff continues to consider a countywide childcare needs survey to better understand gaps and opportunities.
- **Vortex Cold Storage Phase 3 / Project Cascade**
    - Project Cascade has become the primary focus.
    - Staff reported a positive meeting with the State; funding through DEED may be available.
    - Funding must be utilized within the required timeline, with a projected groundbreaking in 2027 aligned with New Market Tax Credit requirements.
    - Staff is working on contracts with the goal of being ready to proceed by June.
    - Preliminary project estimates include approximately 200 jobs.
    - Phase 1 is estimated at a $100 million investment.
    - Staff is evaluating updates to the existing TIF structure to remove the two parcels associated with Project Cascade, as they will be purchased outside of the TIF district.
- **Conferences/Meetings to Note**
    - Ongoing discussions related to TIF and rehabilitation projects.
    - Land swap discussions with Green Acres:
        - The board expressed increased openness to the land swap.
        - The developer has requested earlier access to the land, noting it may strengthen their grant position.
        - Staff recommended maintaining a Port Authority claw-back provision in the agreement to ensure protection if the project does not move forward.
        - A public hearing is anticipated for potential approval at the April meeting.
        - Staff will follow up with the developer in the interim.

EX-OFFICIO UPDATE

Freeborn County – Brad Edwin

- The County Board decided not to take action on the rifle versus shotgun ordinance. By not acting, rifle use will be allowed. The decision was influenced by clarification that the DNR would not enforce a shotgun-only ordinance, leaving enforcement responsibility to the Sheriff's Office.
- The Board met with a representative from Tapestry regarding a request for additional funding support for the proposed 60-unit housing project.
    - The Board was generally receptive to the request.
    - Overall, there was support for the project if it aligns with workforce housing needs.

City of Albert Lea – Ian Rigg

- The City also met with Tapestry regarding the housing project, which is currently facing an approximate $400,000 funding gap.
    - Additional costs were incurred due to required archaeological review, as the site was identified as having potential for Native American remains or artifacts. This process is estimated to cost approximately $250,000.
    - These requirements have created some complications for the project site and nearby stakeholders, though DEED funding is still expected to proceed.

- The City is addressing plat corrections, including unresolved issues related to vacated streets and mixed Torrens/non-Torrens properties, in order to clean up legal descriptions.
- The City is working with GFY to finalize a purchase agreement and construction management agreement. The firm will oversee the project but will solicit bids from local contractors.
- Additional housing development efforts include:
    - Marketing City- and Port-owned lots, including two on Water Street, for single-family infill housing.
    - Offering incentives of a $5,000 utility hookup reduction and a $5,000 construction grant.
    - A new home at 610 4th Street is being marketed at approximately $250,000 (3-bedroom, 1-bath with garage).
    - This project demonstrates how incentives can support affordability and return vacant lots to the tax base, encouraging further development.
- Legislative efforts are underway to expand allowable uses of Economic Revolving Loan Funds, potentially including housing-related projects.
- Staff participated in lobbying efforts, including discussions on the local option sales tax referendum.
    - Feedback emphasized the importance of demonstrating countywide benefit, not just benefits to Albert Lea.
- Wastewater Treatment Plant funding was discussed with the bonding committee, with optimism for a bonding bill this session.
- The City continues to evaluate redevelopment options for the 300 block, including a modular apartment concept with ground-level parking.
    - Preliminary estimates place unit costs around $300,000, and additional incentives may be needed to make the project viable for developers.
- The HRA has approved funding support for the Tapestry project.

Chamber of Commerce – Val Lockhart

- No update provided.

Convention and Visitors Bureau – Konrad Hawkinson

- The draft 2026 budget includes approximately $19,000 in prior year carryover funds, which may be used to support enhanced marketing efforts and projects such as Art Walk improvements, beautification, and wayfinding.
- January lodging tax revenue totaled $11,286, with annual projections remaining between $255,000 and $260,000 based on recent trends.
- The draft budget includes an increase to employee health contributions from $300 to $400 per month, resulting in an approximate $2,400 annual increase.
- As a visitor guide will not be printed this year, funding will be reallocated toward streaming television and targeted social media advertising, while maintaining existing print and radio placements.
- Email marketing performance remains strong, with an average open rate of 36.5%, exceeding the national average of approximately 21%.

- Staff completed updates to downtown rack cards and kiosk maps and obtained quotes for replacement of outdated downtown building signage.
- Staff is exploring installation of a live downtown webcam facing Fountain Lake Park, which would stream on ExploreAlbertLea.com, with an estimated cost of approximately $800.
- Continued support of community partnerships included providing 50 welcome bags for the Women of the Moose Lodge Mid-Convention and donating items for local fundraisers and silent auctions.
- Recent events included Big Freeze and Galentine's Day on February 14. Upcoming events include Lucky Tap & Table Hop (March 16–21) and Shop, Sip & Stroll (April 11).
- Staff continues to meet with the Downtown Retailer Group and assist with planning for Eddie Cochran festival activities.
- The next CVB Board meeting is scheduled for March 24 at 12:00 p.m. at the CVB Office.

Riverland Community College – Janelle Koepke

- No updates were provided.

COMMISSIONER/OTHER ITEMS

The candidate was unavailable for the meeting due to vacation. President Murray reported that he had met with her previously and that she seemed enthusiastic about the opportunity. The board discussed moving forward with a formal offer, including benefits and relocation assistance. Commissioner Janson motioned to move forward with the offer as discussed, seconded by Commissioner Heinemann. President Murray asked for further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 5 in favor, 0 opposed. President Murray will extend the offer to her next week

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Dahl made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Heinemann. The motion carried 5 in favor, 0 opposed. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 a.m.

Filed and attested March 13, 2026.

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President Secretary