# ALBERT LEA PORT AUTHORITY

## MINUTES

**Wednesday, October 7, 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 Wednesday, October 7, 2026 at 7:30 a.m. by President Murray. Roll was noted by Kendall Johnson.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Rich Murray, Nate Jansen, Tricia Dahl, Larry Baker, Merrit Becker, Jim Krueger.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Mark Heinemann.

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

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

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: Phillip Johnson, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Projects; Kendall Johnson, Assistant Executive Director.

STAFF MEMBERS ABSENT: Noelle Viktora, Operations and Finance Director.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM SEPTEMBER 2, 2026 REGULAR MEETING

The minutes from Wednesday, September 2nd, regular meeting were reviewed. Commissioner Baker made a motion to approve the minutes as presented, seconded by Commissioner Jansen. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 6 in favor; 0 opposed.

RESOLUTION PA-26-17 AUTHORIZING PAYMENT OF CLAIMS

Commissioner Jansen made a motion to accept the claims as presented in the amount of $143,931.95, seconded by Commissioner Dahl. President Murray asked for any further discussion and hearing none, the motion carried 6 in favor; 0 opposed.

President Murray welcomed Commissioner Becker to the board and shared that he was looking forward to working together to grow Albert Lea. Commissioner Becker appreciated the welcome and shared his excitement to be a part of the board.

President Murray invited 3 students from the Freeborn County CEO program to share about their experience. Angela Buansombat, Devin Friehl, and Levi Hughes explained that the program met 5 days per week outside of their school setting to grow entrepreneurial skills, foster young leaders, and help them start their own small business. The Freeborn County CEO program also includes mentorship from local business leaders. Currently, the program is available to students at Albert Lea High School and Glenville-Emmons High School but will be expanding to Alden-Conger High School next year.

STAFF REPORT

**Child Care**

- Staff continue to investigate new, financially feasible solutions that ALEDA can provide for the community. One of the biggest barriers is retaining the workforce needed to provide childcare.
- Kendall will be attending a state webinar on new childcare solutions later this month.
- Noelle will look to spearhead this project when she returns from maternity leave.

**Project Cascade**

- Staff met with the MFF group last week, and state dollars should be finalized at the end of the month. The state is currently waiting for additional paperwork from Cascade.
- Once state money is approved, Vortex will work with the city to decertify those parcels from the existing TIF district.

**Kendall's Project Updates**

- Kendall completed the ALEDA and Commercial property directories, but they will take ongoing updates. Downtown Directory is nearly finished.
- Kendall updated an available housing document that will be distributed soon.
- Kendall helped plan and attend the State Line School of Barbering Ribbon Cutting.
- Kendall finished the Green Acres Milling Letter of Support.
- Kendall will continue to work on the directories, as well as take over the ALEDA Website Updates project.
- Kendall attended a variety of local meetings and the Basics of Economic Development Course (BEDC) in Duluth.

**Conferences/Meetings to Note**

- Staff are looking to integrate commercial and available housing directories and make available on our new website.
- Phillip will begin to analyze the downtown directory and certain strategies to help grow and maintain downtown once finished.
- Began monthly meetings between the city, HRA, and ALEDA
- Staff are still waiting on quotes for borings of the new industrial park land. Should receive PA by the end of the week.
- Phillip met with the school district on a potential tax abatement for a project.
- Phillip followed up on Opportunity Zones, and we will only be able to utilize the two options that were given. Staff favor the less residential site.

EX-OFFICIO UPDATES

**Freeborn County – Brad Edwin**

- October has been declared Domestic Violence Awareness Month by Freeborn County.
- The county set their preliminary levy at 16.8%, and department heads continue to look at a variety of solutions to lower this percentage.
- The Truth in Taxation meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 2nd at 6pm. Department heads will also be present to hear concerns.
- A joint resolution with the City of Albert Lea and the City of Hayward was passed urging the DNR to complete the Blazing Star Trail.
- The county has updated policies on public and private data requests to follow state requirements in a more efficient manner.
- Recently attended the Association of Minnesota Counties' Fall Policy Conference to set priorities for the next state legislative session.

**City of Albert Lea – Ian Rigg**:

- The city will again be lobbying for a local sales tax option.
- Union negotiations have been occurring in preparation for 2027.
- Staff are continuing to work on the budget after the preliminary levy of 7.87% was set. Noted some difficulties with budgeting for Paid Family Medical Leave.

**Albert Lea-Freeborn County Chamber of Commerce – Val Lockhart**

- A local voter guide will be released in the Tribune on Saturday, as well as on the Chamber's website. This will include information about school board candidates too.
- Two candidate forum events will be happening in October – the city candidate forum on October 15th and the state candidate forum on October 19th. Both will be at 7pm and livestreamed on the Chamber's YouTube channel.
- The Chamber Annual Meeting will be on October 27th from 6-8pm at Wedgewood Cove.
- In collaboration with the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, they are collecting feedback on the state's Paid Family Medical Leave program to share with lawmakers.

**Albert Lea Convention and Visitors Bureau – Konrad Hawkinson**

- Albert Lea Art Center mural is nearly finished.
- The art walk will receive a few additions, and the duck near Fountain Lake will be repaired.
- Garage Sale weekend will happen this weekend, October 8-10th.
- Halloween Spooktacular will occur on October 29th.
- Continuing preparation for Octoberween, which will take place the last two weekends of October.
- Planning for upcoming events like Big Buck Hunt, Cookie Crawl, and the People's Tree.

**Riverland Community College – Janelle Koepke**

- The Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system has been experiencing some financial challenges due to enrollment declines, so conversations will be taking place on mergers and closures of certain branches.
- Riverland remains in good financial standing and has had an overall enrollment growth rate of 22% since 2023. Relevant, successful programs and the community scholarship have been a part of this growth.

COMMISSIONER/OTHER ITEMS

Commissioner Baker provided an update on the HRA house on Gene Ave. On October 2nd, the house was transported and set on the foundation in a quick, impressive manner. After speaking with Brian, they believe the house will be ready for market in late October or early November.

President Murray provided an update on his recent work. He toured Green Acres Milling with Sen. Klobuchar last week and attended the Crime Victim Walk on October 6th.

President Murray has been in communication with other board members and Director of Strategic Initiatives and Projects Phillip Johnson about a potential contract extension. He has already been in contact with the legal team to draft an extension from January 1st, 2027 until June 30th, 2027, with the new salary to be half of his current year-long contract. Commissioner Krueger motioned to move forward with this contract extension, seconded by Commissioner Jansen. President Murray asked for further discussion and hearing none; the motion carried 6 in favor, 0 opposed. President Murray will continue to work with the legal team to get this contract finalized.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Dahl made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Jansen. The motion carried 6 in favor, 0 opposed. The meeting adjourned at 8:28 a.m.

Filed and attested October 7, 2026.

_____ President

_____ Secretary