

CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

St. Louis, Michigan
March 4, 2025

The regular meeting of the Saint Louis City Council was called to order by Mayor Ralph R. Echtenaw on Tuesday March 4, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chambers.

Council Members Present: Mayor Ralph R. Echtenaw, Fares E. Azzam, Mayor Pro Tem William R. Leonard, Elizabeth A. Upton.

Council Members Absent: Member Kevin D. Palmer joined the meeting at 6:01 p.m.

City Manager: Kurt Giles
City Clerk: Jamie Long
Police Chief: Richard Ramereiz

Others in Attendance: Brian Buysse-resident, Keith Risdon- Utilities Director, Dori Foster-Code Enforcement.

Mayor Echtenaw led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda.

Moved by Azzam, supported by Leonard to approve the agenda for March 4, 2025 with the addition of 11F-Resolution 2025-5-Poverty Exemption. All ayes carried the motion.

City Council Minutes.

Moved by Upton, supported by Palmer, to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting held on February 18, 2025. All ayes carried the motion.

Claims & Accounts.

City Council discussed the Claims & Accounts.

Moved by Azzam, supported by Leonard, to approve the Claims & Accounts in the amount of \$461,739.99. All ayes carried the motion.

Monthly Board Minutes.

City Council discussed the February 2025 Monthly Board Minutes.

Moved by Palmer, supported by Azzam, to receive the February 2025 Monthly Board Minutes and place on file. All ayes carried the motion.

Audience Recognition.

There were no comments.

Consent Agenda.

Mayor Echinaw requested approval/receipt of Consent Agenda item “a” through “c” as shown below:

- a. Payment to Malley Construction, Inc. for DWSRF Project.
- b. Payment to OHM for professional services for the DWSRF Project II, Phase I.
- c. Payment to Schults Equipment, LLC. for a salt spreader for truck #24.

Moved by Azzam, supported by Upton, to approve Consent Agenda items “a” through “c”. All ayes carried the motion.

Quotes for Lions Park Playground Project.

Manager Giles requested members to approve the quotes from Sinclair Recreation and Rite-Way Asphalt for a total of \$90,489.26, with \$39,061.31 being reimbursed by a grant from Gratiot County Parks and Recreation.

Discussion was held. Member Upton expressed concern with the surface material that was going to be used in the park and stated she would not approve the quote with that material, as she has found studies to show that the rubber material is toxic. Keith Risdon will do some more investigations on the materials and the material that was used in Penny Park and get back to council on the matter. Members of the council agreed to go forward with the rest of the project, removing the playground safety surface material portion temporarily.

Moved by Azzam, supported by Leonard, to approve the quotes from Sinclair Recreation and Rite-Way Asphalt with the exception of the playground surface material for a total of \$65,465.17, with \$39,061.31 being reimbursed by a grant from Gratiot County Parks and Recreation. All ayes carried the motion.

2025 Sanitary Manhole Rehabilitation.

Manager Giles requested members to approve the quote from Advanced Rehabilitation Technology for 42 linear feet of sanitary sewer manhole linings in the amount of \$11,550.

Discussion was held.

Moved by Azzam, supported by Palmer to approve the quote from Advanced Rehabilitation Technology for 42 linear feet of sanitary sewer manhole linings in the amount of \$11,550. All ayes carried the motion.

Ordinance 10-1 Prohibition Against Keeping Certain Animals Discussion.

Manager Giles opened a discussion on amending the ordinance and allowing chickens to be raised within the city.

Member Upton stated she would raise chickens if they were allowed in the city, especially with the rising cost of eggs. Upton would like to see the ordinance amended.

Member Leonard was not opposed to the idea, however had concerns as to where to start and stop with regulations.

Mayor Echtenaw stated it would make a lot more work for Code Enforcement.

Member Azzam stated that the council should put a comprehensive plan together.

Member Palmer does not want chickens in the city.

Code Enforcer, Dori Foster explained the many issues that can come along if the council does allow these animals to be in the city. Foster has done some research and keeping residents in compliance seems to be a serious concern.

Brian Buysse, a resident, commented that changing the ordinance to allow chickens is a slippery slope and once you allow this it opens the door for more types of animals to be allowed.

Member Azzam and Member Upton will do more research and report back to the council at a later date.

Guard Rail for Prospect-West of Penny Park Discussion.

Manager Giles reported that there has been a request to install a guard rail on Prospect, west of Penny Park. Giles' findings were that approximately 700 feet would be needed, and project costs could be over \$100,000. Giles reported that more information would need to be gathered.

Discussion was held with no further action to be taken.

Owner's Work Directive.

Manager Giles recommended members approve the Work Directive #3 from The Spicer Group for the Main Street Bridge Project.

Discussion was held.

Moved by Palmer supported by Upton, to approve the Work Directive #3 from The Spicer Group for the Main Street Bridge Project. All ayes carried the motion.

Addition to Agenda-Resolution 2025-05-Poverty Exemption.

At a regular meeting of the City of Saint Louis, Gratiot County, Michigan, held in the Council Chambers of said City on the 4th day of February 2025, the following preamble and resolution was offered by Upton as supported by Council Member Leonard.

WHEREAS, the adoption of guidelines for poverty exemptions is required of the City of St. Louis Council; and

WHEREAS, the principal residence of persons, who the Board of Review determines by reason of poverty to be unable to contribute to the public charge, is eligible for exemption in whole or in part from taxation under Public Act 390 of 1994 (MCL 211.7u); and

WHEREAS, pursuant to PA 390 of 1994, the City of Saint Louis, Gratiot County adopts the following guidelines for the Board of Review to implement. The guidelines shall include but not be limited to the specific income and asset levels of the claimant and all persons residing in the household, including any property tax credit returns, filed in the current or immediately preceding year;

To be eligible, all the following conditions must be met:

- 1) An applicant must own and occupy, as a homestead property, for which an exemption is requested.
- 2) An applicant must file Form 5737 Application for MCL 211.7u Poverty Exemption.
- 3) An applicant must file Form 5739 Affirmation of Ownership and Occupancy to Remain Exempt by Reason of Poverty.
- 4) An applicant must file all required additional documentation (such as federal/state income tax returns, including any property tax credit returns filed in the immediately preceding year or in the current year, with the assessor or board of review, or a signed *State Tax Commission form 4988, Poverty Exemption Affidavit*).
- 5) An applicant must produce a valid driver's license or other form of identification if requested.
- 6) An applicant must produce a deed, land contract, or other evidence of ownership of the property for which an exemption is requested, if requested.
- 7) An applicant must meet the federal poverty income guidelines as defined annually by the United States Office of Management and Budget.
- 8) An applicant must file an application for an exemption after January 1, but before the day prior to the last day of the board of review meeting.
- 9) If the property in question contains enough acreage that at least one or more buildable lots could be split from the main parcel under the land division act, the city will count the value of any additional parcel that could be split when calculating the applicant's total assets and that combined value shall not exceed the maximum total assets.
- 10) An applicant's total assets shall not be more than \$2,000. Please refer to MCL 211.7u for Income and Asset Test.
- 11) Fixed assets shall be limited to one house and one vehicle for the claimant and no house and one vehicle for each adult person residing with the claimant.

The following are the 2025 federal poverty income guidelines which are updated annually by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The annual allowable income includes income for all persons residing in the principal residence.

Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2025 Assessments

Size of Family Unit	Poverty Guidelines
1	\$15,060
2	\$20,440
3	\$25,820
4	\$31,200
5	\$36,580
6	\$41,960
7	\$47,340
8	\$52,720
For each additional person	\$5,380

The City of St. Louis will only grant full poverty exemptions.

PA 191 of 2023 amends the poverty exemption to allow local units to grant a 75% partial exemption, in addition to the previously allowed 100%, 50%, and 25%, without prior approval by the State Tax Commission.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED that the assessor and Board of Review shall follow the above stated policy and federal guidelines in granting or denying an exemption.

Ayes: Upton, Leonard, Azzam, Palmer, Echtenaw

Nays: None

Absent: None

Resolution declared adopted.

City Manager Report.

Manager Giles reported that the excavator with the forestry head has gotten all of the vegetation that it could reach, and the riverbank project is complete. An incident did occur where the equipment did slide down the river bank and a wrecker service had to be called to remove it, but no damage was done.

City Clerk Report.

Nothing to report.

Police Chief Report.

Nothing to report.

Council Comments.

Member Azzam reported that Wilson Boulevard is in poor condition and seems to have dips in the street. Manager Gilles will further investigate.

Public Comments.

Brian Buysse, resident, again spoke on amending the livestock ordinance, stating that doing this will require a lot of man power and efforts and the city's time would be better spent enforcing the ordinances we already have in place.

Adjournment.

Moved by Leonard supported by Azzam, to adjourn at 7:13 p.m. All ayes carried the motion.

Jamie Long, City Clerk