City of Pekin

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PEKIN, ILLINOIS,
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS OF CITY HALL
111 S. CAPITOL ST
ON MONDAY, APRIL 21, 2025 AT 5:00 PM
MAYOR MARY J. BURRESS PRESIDING

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Council Member Onken.

Call to Order

Mayor Burress confirmed that all Council Members were physically present and logged on except Council Member Hilst who was absent.

Attendee Name	Organization	Title	Status	Arrived
Rick Hilst	City of Pekin	Council Member	Absent	-:-- PM
Karen Hohimer	City of Pekin	Mayor Pro Tem	Present	5:30 PM
Dave Nutter	City of Pekin	Council Member	Present	5:30 PM
Mary Burress	City of Pekin	Mayor	Present	5:30 PM
Lloyd Orrick	City of Pekin	Council Member	Present	5:30 PM
John P Abel	City of Pekin	Council Member	Present	5:30 PM
Chris Onken	City of Pekin	Council Member	Present	5:30 PM

Mayor Burress emphasized the importance of maintaining decorum during public comment by stating that the use of foul language or calling staff names would not be tolerated. Mayor Burress noted the urgency of the meeting, which was convened to pass the budget. A council member suggested holding an additional meeting on the 24th; however, the consensus was to move the meeting up to ensure timely action. Mayor Burress affirmed that the Council is performing its due diligence in the budget process.

Approve Agenda

RESULT:	**PASSED (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER:	Council Member Lloyd Orrick
SECONDER:	Council Member Dave Nutter
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council

	Member Onken
ABSENT:	Council Member Rick Hilst

Public Input

Mr. John McNish expressed strong concerns about several agenda items. He began by asserting his First Amendment rights and objected to Item 5.1, the COLA increase, arguing that many Pekin residents are struggling more than non-union employees and that now is not the time for such adjustments. He also criticized the implementation plan for the COLA, stating it needs correction. Regarding Item 5.2, Mr. McNish acknowledged the potential of the iWorQ system, noting it could help eliminate deniability of issues but warned that within six months, the backlog could become unmanageable. On Item 5.4, he strongly opposed the utility tax, calling it flawed from the outset and urging that it be repealed entirely. For Item 5.5, the budget, he described it as horrendous and inflated, recommending it be voted down again. He voiced frustration over the Veterans Drive extension project, criticizing the trade of Veterans Drive to the state in exchange for Court Street and $2.6 million, and raised concerns about the cost of maintaining those roadways, questioning whether Pekin taxpayers would bear the burden. He urged Council Members who previously voted no on the budget to do so again.

Elaine Ritchie also addressed the Council, expressing opposition to the utility tax. She emphasized the financial hardship it poses on families, especially single parents and younger residents struggling with high costs of living, including rent and utilities. While acknowledging her own financial stability in retirement, she advocated on behalf of others less fortunate. Ms. Ritchie also voiced skepticism regarding the annual budget, calling for a return to the drawing board and expressing doubt about the integrity and completeness of the current proposal. She concluded by noting a common sentiment among residents that the budget would likely be approved regardless of public opposition.

New Business

5.1. Resolution No. 264-24/25 Approving a Cost of Living Adjustment for Non-Union Employees in the FY26 Budget

RESULT:	**PASSED (5 TO 1)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem Karen Hohimer
SECONDER:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem John Abel
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
NAYS:	Council Member Orrick
ABSENT:	Council Member Hilst

City Manager John Dossey presented Resolution No. 264-2425, approving a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for non-union employees in the Fiscal Year

2024–2025 budget. Mr. Dossey noted that this was a carryover from the prior meeting and included the same 3% COLA originally proposed. He added that the item failed previously due to a tie vote without council direction and was therefore being brought back for reconsideration.

Council Member Hohimer expressed strong support, stating that non-union employees deserve the same COLA that union employees received, especially given the rising cost of living.

Council Member Orrick opposed the resolution, arguing that raises should be merit-based rather than automatic and citing stagnant median income growth in the community. Mayor Burress clarified that a merit-based raise system is not currently in place but is being explored. Council Member Orrick suggested postponing the vote until a merit system is ready, expressing frustration that such a program was not developed earlier.

City Manager Dossey and HR staff explained the complexity of developing a merit-based system, including the need for detailed job descriptions, consistent evaluations, and council-defined performance criteria. He emphasized that the current policy, passed by the Council in recent years, relies on COLA adjustments and that transitioning to a merit-based approach would require considerable time and planning.

Council Member Nutter shared that his previous “no” vote was based on incomplete understanding of how past COLAs had been applied. After reviewing additional data, he learned that COLAs had not been uniformly distributed, with some staff receiving increases beyond the standard percentage. He advocated for revisiting and clarifying the resolution that governs these adjustments to ensure future transparency and consistency. He indicated his support for the COLA this time, provided the ordinance is reviewed and revised.

Council Members continued to discuss the need for establishing a comprehensive merit-based evaluation system, with several members supporting the idea as a goal for future council and staff action.

Council Member Abel added that while merit evaluation is being promoted, some council members had failed to complete their required annual evaluation of the City Manager, highlighting inconsistency in applying accountability standards.

Human Resources Director Shelly Costa reported that work is already underway on job descriptions, which are foundational to any effective evaluation process. She explained that the process includes aligning employee duties with management expectations and facilitating ongoing performance discussions.

Mayor Burress and several council members acknowledged the hard work of staff and affirmed that while progress toward a merit system is in motion, the current ordinance remains the guiding policy.

5.2. Resolution No. 271-24/25 Approving an Agreement with iWorQ Systems, Inc. for TextMyGov and Fleet Management Applications

RESULT:	**PASSED (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem Karen Hohimer
SECONDER:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem John Abel
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
ABSENT:	Council Member Rick Hilst

Council discussed Resolution No. 271-24/25, authorizing an agreement with iWorQ Systems, Inc. for the implementation of TextMyGov and fleet management modules. City Manager Dossey explained that the addition of TextMyGov will allow residents to text in concerns such as potholes or garbage issues and receive a case number for tracking, thus improving communication and transparency. The system integrates with the city's existing iWorQ system and supports public alerts via FEMA's IPAWS, with Fire Chief Reese handling certification compliance. Additionally, the fleet management module will provide more robust vehicle data and integrate with the city's fuel tracking software. Mr. Dossey noted the cost of the upgrade is approximately $4,600 more annually but consolidates and replaces other services.

Council Member Orrick raised questions about accessibility and communication to the public, which Mr. Dossey addressed by noting public-facing tools such as QR codes, signage, and website widgets.

Council Member Onken inquired about emergency alert functions, which will utilize Nixle and geofencing.

Council Member Nutter asked for clarification on the contract's termination clause, which City Attorney Jim Vasalli explained allows for standard remedies under Illinois law in cases of breach, with 60-day notice required for non-breach terminations.

Council Member Nutter also asked about testing, to which Mr. Dossey confirmed the system had been successfully tested and would be tested again before full rollout.

Council Member Abel asked if the system was similar to Peoria's; Mr. Dossey was unsure but mentioned Morton uses something similar with good results.

5.3. Resolution No. 272-24/25 Approving an Increase in the City Manager's Base Salary Effective Retroactively to May 1, 2024

RESULT:	**PASSED (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem John Abel
SECONDER:	Mayor Pro Tem Karen Hohimer
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
ABSENT:	Council Member Rick Hilst

Council discussed Resolution No. 272-24/25, authorizing an increase in the City Manager's base salary, retroactive to May 1, 2024. The item was introduced and then explained by City Attorney Jim Vasselli, who stated the raise was contractually required and represents a routine execution of negotiated terms.Council Member Hohimer affirmed the City Manager had undergone an evaluation and expressed support for the raise. City Attorney Vasselli emphasized both parties' obligation to perform under the contract and clarified that this action fulfills those responsibilities.

Council Member Onken questioned the timing, asking why the increase was delayed. The HR Director, Shelly Costa, clarified that the evaluation period covered FY24 (May 1, 2023 to April 30, 2024), but the item was delayed due to scheduling and logistics, despite the City Manager submitting his self-evaluation well in advance.

Council Member Nutter raised concerns about the timing and structure of the evaluation relative to the November 6, 2023 contract date, noting the evaluation process seemed to be based on the fiscal year rather than the contract year. He recommended that the contract be revised to address these timing inconsistencies. Attorney Vasselli and Ms. Costa acknowledged the delays and noted efforts are underway to improve timeline adherence moving forward. Finance Director Dubrowski added that aligning evaluations with the fiscal year supports strategic and budgetary planning, although financial adjustments can be made mid-year as needed.

Council Member Nutter reiterated that his concern was not with the 2.5% increase but with the inefficiency of the process. Council Member Nutter also asked for clarification on the total retroactive pay amount, which was confirmed to be $4,378 and already incorporated into the upcoming fiscal year's budget.

5.4. Ordinance No. 4290-24/25 Amending Pekin City Code Chapter 7 Taxation, to Modify the Utility Tax Provisions for Natural Gas per Ameren's Request

RESULT:	**PASSED (4 TO 2)**

MOVER:	Council Member Dave Nutter
SECONDER:	Council Member Lloyd Orrick
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
NAYS:	Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick
ABSENT:	Council Member Hilst

Council discussed Ordinance No. 4290-24/25, amending Chapter 7 of the Pekin City Code to revise the utility tax provisions for natural gas, per a request from Ameren. City Manager John Dossey clarified this was not a new tax, but rather a language amendment to broaden the ordinance's applicability, particularly to cover entities sourcing natural gas through non-Ameren suppliers, including those out of state. He noted this change avoids potential legal conflict with Ameren over interpretation.

Economic Development Director Josh Wray added that while the City disagrees with Ameren's legal stance, amending the ordinance is the more efficient and cost-effective path forward, as other municipalities have already done.

Council Member Onken questioned the consequences of not amending the ordinance, and Mr. Wray estimated the City could lose $250,000 annually in tax revenue and incur at least $50,000 in legal costs.

Council Member Nutter inquired about the timeline of the tax's implementation, which began after approval in April and first appeared on May bills. He also asked whether any high-usage customers had requested reimbursement and about the origin of 116 customers cited by Ameren as receiving gas from non-Ameren sources. Mr. Wray explained these were based on Ameren's internal data, and the City cannot identify them individually.

Council Member Nutter also asked about audit practices to ensure accurate revenue collection. Finance Director Eric Dubrowski confirmed the City has access to taxed addresses but hasn't conducted a full audit, though such reviews are recommended periodically. The City is projected to collect approximately $3.5 million of the $4 million budgeted, due to the delayed implementation and missing revenue from non-Ameren customers.

Council Member Orrick raised questions about the $250,000 annual cap on payments from high-usage customers and how businesses are informed. Mr. Wray acknowledged there was no direct notification but suggested outreach through the Chamber of Commerce and mentioned that the rebate mechanism is built into the FY26 budget. The final projected tax collection for the year is approximately 88% of budgeted revenue.

5.5. Ordinance No. 4291-24/25 Approving the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Annual Budget

RESULT:	**PASSED (4 TO 2)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem Karen Hohimer
SECONDER:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem John Abel
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
NAYS:	Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick
ABSENT:	Council Member Hilst

Council discussed Ordinance No. 4291-24/25, adopting the Fiscal Year 2025–2026 annual budget. City Manager John Dossey expressed his enthusiasm and gratitude for the effort put forth by Council and staff, highlighting the work done since the prior meeting to refine the budget.

Finance Director Eric Dubrowski reviewed the key figures, noting a general fund surplus of $84,557, with total general fund revenues of approximately $52.9 million and expenditures just under that amount. City-wide, the budget includes $119.5 million in revenue and $121.7 million in expenditures, with the net shortfall primarily due to capital projects within TIF and BDD funds.

Mr. Dubrowski also detailed updates made since the previous meeting, including adjustments to the insurance fund, foreclosed registry fees, and a $500,000 increase to two TIF funds due to higher-than-expected Court Street project bids.

Mayor Burress praised the new budget format and commended the collaborative efforts of Council and staff, particularly the $5 million in cuts achieved.
Council Member Abel acknowledged the positive financial outlook but reminded the group that the budget cuts included five staff layoffs and reductions to department resources, which may impact service delivery.

Council Member Orrick appreciated the readability of the new format despite her self-professed discomfort with numbers.

Council Member Nutter expressed mixed support, applauding the improved general fund balance but raising concerns about structural budget issues, specifically the use of Motor Fuel Tax funds for street department personnel and the absence of a dedicated road maintenance plan. He noted some areas, particularly in his neighborhood, are still in poor condition.

Council Member Nutter also emphasized the need for follow-through on ongoing concerns raised in previous years, forecasting that significant mid-year budget adjustments may be necessary under the new Council's oversight.

Mayor Burress concluded by reinforcing that a municipal budget is a “moving target,” subject to fluctuations in both revenue and expenditure, and expressed confidence in the team’s ability to manage it effectively.

5.6. Ordinance No. 4293-24/25 Approving a Pekin Court Street Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District Redevelopment Agreement with Dennis and Shari Ragland

RESULT:	**PASSED (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem Karen Hohimer
SECONDER:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem John Abel
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
ABSENT:	Council Member Rick Hilst

Council discussed Ordinance No. 4293-24/25, authorizing a redevelopment agreement within the Court Street Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District with Dennis and Sherry Ragland. City Manager John Dossey explained that the Raglands recently purchased property at 3723 Grandview Court and are constructing a new home valued at over $500,000, with approximately $75,000 in TIF-eligible expenses. In alignment with the City's residential TIF policy, the project qualifies for an incentive of up to $70,000 in property tax increment rebates, distributed over a period not to exceed 10 years. The final incentive amount will be based on actual eligible costs and the post-construction property assessment.

Economic Development Director Josh Wray emphasized that the incentive will be fully funded by new tax revenue generated by the project, not from existing City funds.

Council Member Nutter expressed appreciation for the Raglands’ investment in Pekin and sought clarification on the property configuration, noting that the home spans two lots—Lots 16 and 17. Mr. Wray confirmed the lots have already been combined into one parcel and a new property identification number has been issued, although the GIS system may not yet reflect the update.

Any Other Business To Come Before The Council

Council Member Abel thanked City staff for making the budget easier to understand, particularly for those without a financial background.

Council Member Hohimer echoed her appreciation for the hard work of all City personnel.

Council Member Nutter announced a downtown pub crawl taking place on Saturday the 26th from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. across five establishments, with entertainment beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Whiskey Taco. He noted the streets will be blocked off and golf cart transportation will be available for those needing assistance.

Council Member Orrick expressed thanks to the staff for their continued improvement in budget presentation and content.

Council Member Onken also praised staff, mentioning he was able to understand the budget and promoted Pekin High School's upcoming production of *Little Women*, showing Friday and Saturday at 7:00 p.m. and Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

Mayor Burress added that the City's event calendar will be updated to reflect the many happenings downtown, and encouraged it be posted to the website. She shared that Pekin was featured on the front page of the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council's quarterly report for the EPIC project and recounted positive feedback from regional mayors about Pekin's recent activity. She highlighted EPIC's projected 100 new jobs and emphasized the city's growing need for housing. She also celebrated receiving a supportive card from a local pastor who prays for the Council daily. The Mayor concluded by promoting her upcoming Coffee Meet & Greet at Coffee Connection on Friday from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m., focused on the City's land purchase near Veterans Drive and I-474, and announced plans for regular town hall meetings to increase public engagement and transparency.

Executive Session 5 ILCS 120/2 (c) 1. The Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance, or Dismissal of Specific Employees of the Public Body

A motion was made by Council Member Onken seconded by Council Member Orrick to move into Executive Session to discuss 5 ILCS 120/2 (c) 1. The Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, Performance or Dismissal of Specific Employees of the Public Body at 6:25 PM.

RESULT:	**PASSED (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER:	Council Member Chris Onken
SECONDER:	Council Member Lloyd Orrick
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
ABSENT:	Council Member Rick Hilst

Council returned to open session at 7:40 PM.

Adjourn

There being no further business to come to the Council a motion was made by Council Member Onken seconded by Council Member Orrick to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried viva voce vote. Mayor Burress adjourned the meeting at 7:40 PM.

RESULT:	**PASSED (UNANIMOUS)**
MOVER:	None
SECONDER:	None
AYES:	1st Alternate Mayor Pro Tem Abel, Mayor Burress, Council Member Nutter, Council Member Orrick, Mayor Pro Tem Hohimer, Council Member Onken
ABSENT:	Council Member Rick Hilst