

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL CALLED MEETING

BENTON CITY COUNCIL

Friday, June 26, 2026 – 2:30 p.m.

A special called meeting of the Benton City Council was held on Friday, June 26, 2026, at 2:30 p.m. in the Council Room of Benton City Hall, located in the basement of the Campbell Building, 901 Public Square, Benton, Illinois.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Messersmith called the meeting to order and directed City Clerk Brook Craig to call the roll.

ROLL CALL

Present: Commissioner Storey, Commissioner Cockrum, Commissioner Garavalia, Commissioner Kays, and Mayor Messersmith. None absent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mayor Messersmith reminded those present that, per ordinance, public comment is limited to five minutes per speaker and that the Council is not obligated to respond to questions or comments raised.

Tom Carter

Mr. Carter raised concerns regarding the qualifications of City wastewater treatment operators to perform electrical troubleshooting and repair, referencing a FOIA request he had submitted on the subject and the City's response. He questioned the City's use of an outside electrical contractor from Jefferson County rather than a local contractor. He stated his view that the meeting was called to bring disciplinary pressure on a City department head, and indicated he believes legal action against the Council may be warranted.

Rocky Morris

Mr. Morris asked whether an investigation had been conducted in connection with the matter before the Council, including who conducted it and under what authority, and stated that any related records would be subject to FOIA. He raised concerns regarding due process for the employee involved.

John Owens

Mr. Owens asked whether a laptop used by Commissioner Kays for City business was personal or City property, and whether it provided access to confidential City employee records, stating he intended to submit a FOIA request on the matter. He also spoke in support of the Fire Chief.

Commissioner Garavalia – Comments on Meeting Notice

Commissioner Garavalia stated that the Council had held a regularly scheduled meeting the preceding Monday, at which the Council held an executive session and took no action upon returning to open session, and questioned the need for a subsequent special meeting on the same matter. She stated that she had not been contacted in advance to confirm her availability for the special meeting, as is customary practice, and that Commissioner Storey confirmed he likewise had not been contacted. She stated that the meeting notice was posted at 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday but that she did not receive notification of the meeting until 5:01 p.m. that day. She also raised concern

that the City's legal counsel was not present in person and instead participated by telephone for a matter of this significance.

Gina Williams

Ms. Williams spoke in support of her father, Commissioner Cockrum, and stated her objection to public commentary about City Council matters on social media, including messages she stated had been directed at her father referencing his deceased father.

Dylan Deforest

Mr. Deforest spoke in support of the Fire Chief and the Fire Department, characterizing the proceedings as a "witch hunt," and requested a vote of no confidence in the Council and the Council's resignation.

Additional Council Comments

Following public comment, Commissioner Garavalia and Commissioner Storey spoke regarding declining morale within the Fire Department and expressed support for the reputation of the Fire Department and Police Department. Commissioner Garavalia asked Mayor Messersmith to take a leadership role in resolving the matter.

DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE APPROVAL OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION AGAINST AN EMPLOYEE

Mayor Messersmith stated that the next item was discussion and approval of possible disciplinary action against an employee. Commissioner Cockrum made a motion to take no action.

Commissioner Storey seconded the motion. A vote was taken: Yeas: 3 – Commissioner Storey, Commissioner Cockrum, Commissioner Garavalia. Nays: 1 – Commissioner Kays. Abstain: 1 – Mayor Messersmith. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Cockrum made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Storey seconded the motion. A vote was taken: Yeas: 4 – Commissioner Storey, Commissioner Cockrum, Commissioner Garavalia, Mayor Messersmith. Nays: 1 – Commissioner Kays. Motion carried.

Mayor Messersmith, Mayor

City Clerk