INDEPENDENCE
MISSOURI

A GREAT AMERICAN STORY

City Council Study Session Minutes

February 9, 2026 6:00 PM

Council Chambers - 111 E. Maple Ave.

COUNCIL SPONSORED ITEMS

1. An ordinance amending Chapter 12 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Independence, Missouri, by adding a new article, Prohibiting the Sale of Certain Intoxicating Kratom Derivatives. *(Sponsored by Mayor Rowland)*

This ordinance is sponsored by Mayor Rowland. The goal is to ban the sale of synthetic kratom, also known as 7OH, but allowing the sale of kratom in its natural state. This ordinance will be placed on the March 2nd agenda for a first reading.

CITIZEN REQUESTS

1. Citizen Requests - Per Council Rules, Sec. 6.4 only "Council Sponsored Items" are eligible

Councilmember McCandless made a motion to suspend the rules to allow a non-resident to speak. This was seconded by Councilmember Fears.
AYES: CM Fears, CM Perkins, CM McCandless, CM Wiley, CM Vaught, Mayor Rowland
NAYS: None
Absent: CM Stewart

Todd Underwood spoke on this item.

PRESENTATIONS

1. Parks and Recreation Master Plan Final Report

Morris Heide, Director of Parks and Recreation, turned this presentation over to Leon Younger with Pros Consulting.

MASTER PLAN PURPOSE
A FIVE-YEAR STRATEGY FOR REVITALIZATION AND STRATEGIC INVESTMENT
• This plan provides a clear roadmap for stabilizing, modernizing, and elevating parks and recreation in Independence.
• The plan focuses on realistic implementation strategies.
• The plan provides guidance on funding, staffing, and policy decisions.

Project Team
Pros 30 Consulting
Confluence
TGAV Planners
ETC Intstitute

Why this plan matters now:
A crucial point for the park system

- Independence has strong potential

but is limited by aging infrastructure and current organizational capacity.
• Deferred investment is increasing long-term costs and limiting service quality and image of the City.
• Community expectations are changing and demographics are shifting.

COMMUNITY VOICE
What residents told us
• Parks should be safe, welcoming, and well-maintained
• Programs need to be accessible, fun and relevant
• Demonstrate visible improvement and provide more consistent communication on project planning efforts as it applies to parks and recreation facilities and services.

PILLAR 1: PARK ASSET REVITALIZATION & STEWARDSHIP
PROTECTING PUBLIC INVESTMENT FIRST
• Intentional focus on maintaining and modernizing existing parks and facilities before expanding the system
• Shift from reactive repairs to planned, lifecycle-based reinvestment

• Prioritize underutilized spaces for reinvestment

GENERAL PARK RECOMMENDATIONS
Parks Life Cycle - (Equipment and Infrastructure)
- - Parking / Trails / Sidewalks (15 years)
- - Playgrounds (20 years)
- - Restrooms (20 years)
- - Furniture (20 years)

Furniture Standards - (Re-furbish and Replacement)

- - Benches
- - Trash
- - Grills
- - Lighting
- - Drinking fountains
- - Security Lighting

ADA Standards for all Incoming Projects/Retrofits

- Sidewalk and trail material and widths

Create Signage Standards (Re-furbish Signage)

- Color Scheme for Parks

SUSTAINABLE PROJECTS
Priority To Address – (Baseline
Maintenance + Upkeep Projects)
- Surfacing
- Trails
- Playgrounds
- Amenities

Upkeep and Renovations
Totaling = $10,180,000

Sustainable Projects

- Walkways and basketball courts in aging condition
- Playground structure
- Aging ball diamond bleachers and fencing

EXPANDED SERVICES
Improving What We Have – (What
residents desire adding to parks +
National Parks and Recreation Trends)
- Fields

 Courts
 Shelters
Renovations & Amenities / Infrastructure
Totaling = $8,725,000

Expanded Services
Outdoor workout equipment with artificial turf surfacing
Splash pad area

VISIONARY PROJECTS
Developing New Opportunities –
(Regional Draw and
Transformative Projects)
 Recreation Center
 Aquatics Facility
 Sports Complex
 Splash Pads and Playgrounds
New Amenities / Infrastructure
Totaling = $88,500,000

Independence Athletic Complex
Central Mission Community of Christ Property

PILLAR 2: PROGRAMS THAT REFLECT TODAY'S INDEPENDENCE

- Focus on core community needs, including youth, active adults, families, and underserved populations.
- Emphasize quality and access rather than program volume.
- Avoid duplicating services offered by other sectors by prioritizing instructional, inclusive, and life-skills programming particularly for youth and seniors.

PILLAR 3: CONNECTIVITY, ACCESS & SAFE PUBLIC SPACES

CREATE SAFE AND WELCOMING DESTINATIONS

- Prioritize investments in underserved neighborhoods, particularly the east side of Independence.
- Improve safety, visibility, and comfort in parks

Service Levels
Support strategic investment decisions for parks, facilities and amenities

PILLAR 4: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY & OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE
ALIGNING RESOURCES WITH EXPECTATIONS
• Modernize internal systems, policies, and staffing alignment
• Ensure the department has the capacity to deliver what the community expects
• Shift from informal practices to standardized operations for increased accountability and improved performance
• Continuously monitor the implementation of master plan strategies
• Build core services – Active Adults, Aquatics, Arts & Culture, Community & Special Events, Fitness & Wellness, Nature Education & Outdoor Adventure, Sports, Youth & Family Out-of-school Enrichment

PILLAR 5: ECONOMIC VITALITY, FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY & STRATEGIC INVESTMENT
RESPONSIBLE GROWTH AND LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY
• Manage parks and recreation with a business-minded framework
• Increase earned revenue to offset more operational expenses from additional services
• Clearly communicate the value and cost of services to the public
• Reinvest an appropriate portion of economic gains back into the park system
• Align park improvements with future redevelopment efforts in key areas of the City that match future resident needs

FUNDING REALITY
REVITALIZATION REQUIRES INVESTMENT
• This plan cannot be implemented without increased funding.
• Continued underinvestment limits progress and increases risk.
• Strategic re-investment minimizes long-term costs.
• Funding decisions should be phased and deliberate

5-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION
MEASURING SUCCESS
• Performance metrics should be tied to each pillar
• Transparent communication on funding and outcomes
• Actively manage the plan
• Regular reporting on progress to the Park Commission and Council (Semi-annual/Annual)
• Monitor public use and satisfaction with the system regularly

PHASED IMPLEMENTATION
STRATEGIES
SHORT-TERM (1-2 YEARS):
Establish foundational policies, begin planning for long term enhancements, introduce priority programs and services, and accomplish early visible improvements.
MID-TERM (3-5 YEARS):
Scale priority programs to public demand, reinvest in key facilities through additional community engagement and data-driven planning practices, and strengthen partnerships for additional capacity.
LONG-TERM (5+ YEARS):
Sustain improvements, adapt to growth, and position the system for future investment.

2. Mid-year Financial Update

Alex Morgan, the Budget Manager for the city, presented this item.

OVERVIEW
General Financial Update
Fund Balance
Budget Pressures

ADOPTED BUDGET
Mid-Year Financial Highlights
• Sales tax growth remains flat
• Use tax growth steady around 6-7%
• Strong start to the year for building permit activity. Revenue receipts currently at 85% of budget.
• Faced with large unbudgeted expenditures early in the fiscal year

Refresher - FY 25-26 Budget
• Total Budget $454,403,557
• General Fund $84,882,323
• General Fund Shortfall $6.3M

• 3.25% increase for non-rep employees

Economic Forecast
State of Missouri
The State of Missouri expects moderate growth in 2026, and slower, but steady, growth in 2027.

Employment growth is expected to continue slowing while the unemployment rate is forecasted to increase as the labor market continues to cool. Consumption expected to slow slightly in 2026.

Risks: Geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine; potential tariffs risk elevating inflation.

Sales Tax
12 Month Performance
• Inflation remained persistent around the 2%- 3% range
• Retail growth mostly flat or shrinking during this period
• Budget implication: cost pressures may continue to increase faster than the underlying economic growth and revenue base.

Use Tax
12 Month Performance
• After a peak in late 2024, growth moderated to a steady 6-7% increase
• Online retail use tax growth remains above inflation
• Budget implication: Good contributor to revenue growth, but overall amount/impact is smaller than other revenue sources

FUND BALANCE
General Fund Forecast
FY 2025-26
• Revenues tracking closely with budgeted amounts at this point in the year.
• Positive news: some revenues appear to be coming in slightly over
• Total GF projected revenues for FY25-26 are $84.9M.
• Continued concerns pertaining to Jackson County Property taxes and state plans for sales tax in future years.

General Fund Balance
Beginning Balance: for 2026 Budget $15,345,397 2025-26 Mid-Year Projections $15,064,233
Total Operating Revenues: 2025-26 Budget $84,882,323 20256-26 Mid-Year Projections $84,976,993
Total Expenses: 2025-26 Budget $85,562,322 2025-26 Mid-Year Projections $86,350,518
Reduction of Fund Balance ($1,373,525)

General Fund
Expenditure and Revenue Growth Forecast

• Conservative Financial Planning – forecast with no modification of current spending patterns and no new revenue sources*
• *FY26-27 does include a large increase in contingencies based on potential revenue from Nebius project. This shows as an expenditure but would have a revenue offset if realized.
• 10% annual health increases
• 1% LAGERS increases annually
• Reduction in Franchise Fees (revenue base erosion)
• Does not reduce property tax despite concerns over Jackson County credits. Maintenance of revenue levels contingent upon recoupment.
• Roughly $1.4M projected funding gap in FY25-26 once contingencies are removed if no other revenue is realized.

Budget Pressures
Grants
• The Grants environment is not as volatile as it was this time last year, but uncertainty persists.
• Departments that frequently receive grant funding: Police, Health and Animal Services, Emergency Preparedness, Community Development.

Personnel
Major cost driver: Personnel costs (salary and benefits) account for 30% of the City's budget. City must take a balanced approach to compensation.

Healthcare
Factors for consideration:
• Impact of ACA subsidy expiration
• "Silver Tsunami" – number of Americans ages 65 and older is projected to increase from 58 million in 2022 to 82 million by 2050
• Kaiser Family Foundation poll (2026) – "Americans are more worried about affording health care than any other household necessity".

Healthcare
FY26-27
Pre 65 $4,178,480
Post 65 $3,748,886
Total $7,927.365

Unbudgeted Expenditures
Examples:
Damage to City Facilities
Primary Election - $300k
Personnel changes + City Manager recruitment
Demolition of City Hall
Retiree Health increase $249k

-Budget Community Survey is live :City Budget Community Survey | City of Independence

Meeting adjourned at 7:40 PM

3. Historic Sites

This item was postponed indefinitely.

INFORMATION ONLY

1. Board and Commission Report

2. **Please Note**: In accordance with RSMo. 610.021, the City Council may convene in a Closed Executive Session during or after the meeting, on matters of litigation, legal action, and/or attorney client communications, as permitted by Sec. 610.021(1), on matters of personnel, as permitted by Sec. 610.021(3) and personnel records, as permitted by 610.021(13), on matters of contracts, as permitted by 610.021(12), on matters of real estate, as permitted by 610.021(2) and/or matters of labor negotiations, as permitted by 610.021(9).