

CITY COUNCIL MEETING
February 5, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ABILENE, TEXAS
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL

The City Council of the City of Abilene, Texas met in Special Session on February 5, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in the Council Chambers, 555 Walnut St. Mayor Weldon Hurt was present and presiding, along with Deputy Mayor Pro-tem Blaise Regan, and Councilmembers Shane Price, Lynn Beard, Miguel Espinoza and Travis Craver. Mayor Pro-tem Yates was absent. Also present were City Manager Emily Crawford, City Attorney Stanley Smith, and City Secretary Shawna Atkinson.

Mayor Weldon Hurt led the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and the State of Texas Flag.

This special called meeting was held for the purpose of holding a City Council retreat for strategic visioning purposes.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mayor Hurt opened the public comment period. The following addressed the City Council:

- Shawnte Flemming
- Tammy Fogle

With no other speakers coming forward, the public comment period was closed.

AGENDA ITEMS

2. City Council Strategic Vision Planning Session & Discussion
 - a. Welcome, Overview Cycle of Strategic Visioning, and 4th Dimension Leadership

City Manager Emily Crawford introduced Mike Mowery with Strategic Government Resources (SGR) who will facilitate today's retreat. Mr. Mowery introduced himself and went over his background and shared some insight on his strategic visioning process. He went over the differences between strategic visioning and strategic planning - visioning is the Council's responsibility and planning is about procedures, budgeting, personnel, etc., that is more the responsibility of staff. He presented a graph of the cycle of strategic visioning, that includes community input, staff input and plans, Council envisioning and affirming, staff executing and adjustments. The three questions council needs to answer in this process is 1) what good are we going to do, 2) who is going to benefit from it, and 3) at what cost?

Mr. Mowery asked for Council's thoughts on this visioning process he presented. Mayor Hurt talked about community input and how important it is. Mr. Mowery presented a diagram of leadership classes, including strategic, systematic, operational and relational leadership. He went over the definitions and differences between each type of leadership in detail. Strategic leadership is all about culture, and at the top of the diagram he presented.

Mr. Mowery split the Council, the City Management team, and Department Directors all up into small groups and asked them to talk about which leadership system they are best at and which they

need improvement on. After the small group discussion, Council presented their strengths and weaknesses they came up with in the discussion.

b. Reputational Drivers (What Do We Want to be Known For?)

Mr. Mowery talked about what reputational drivers are and asked what the council wants to be known for as the council, organizationally, and community-wise. What is true about them? Small groups discussed these topics for a few minutes then presented their two best reputational drivers out loud to the group. The items presented included clear visioning, taking care of each other, diverse unification, being responsive, common sense economic development policies, magnet for professionals, exceptional service, adaptability, fiscal responsibility, departments being in sync, being an attractive employer, high quality of life, reliability, faith and trust in each other, and high integrity.

Mayor Hurt recessed the meeting for a break from 10:07 a.m. to 10:17 a.m.

c. Pressing Issues Strategic Plan Must Address

Mr. Mowery split the Council and staff up into different groups to talk about pressing needs and what really matters. After returning to the larger group, everyone presented the needs they discussed. The needs presented were housing, water, legislative mandates passed down from the state, streets, the Firemen's Relief & Retirement fund, sustainable succession planning, clear visioning, eagerness for change and innovation, communications, cost of/lack of childcare, funding to sustain needs, and a five year capital program.

Mr. Mowery took each of the needs individually to discuss in depth. For housing, incentives for housing, zoning ordinances, free market response, types of housing and what we want the city to look like down the road in that regard, RV park sustainability, rental shortages, Dyess and the B21 changes that will affect us, and student housing for the universities were discussed.

Water was discussed next, including funding requests from the TWDB, the Cedar Creek Reservoir and the challenges that project has presented along the way, and responding to the needs of breakages in older infrastructures, which includes responding to the breakages versus replacing things ahead of the breakages.

The discussion on streets included the Street Maintenance Fee and the issue with it being a set fee and what inflation does to that, the Street Maintenance Advisory Board process and the input they receive from residents, which is a good funnel for projects, the pavement index report that was done in the past, and trying to replace streets faster than the declination occurs on that index.

The Firemen's Relief & Retirement Fund was discussed only briefly, as there are committees currently working on solving that problem.

The discussion on succession planning centered around not losing institutional knowledge, retaining quality employees, CDL drivers, and competing with private organizations for employees.

Funding challenges related to mandates were discussed next. The potential of the elimination of property tax without another replacement for that revenue was a major concern discussed, and no one wants to see a 22% sales tax because of the property tax going away or being reduced. No solution that works comes to mind, but everyone would love to see other options to replace that revenue. Ms. Crawford expressed her concerns about being able to continue to offer our exceptional service and all the things we provide with a more limited budget, and how that would

affect the organization as a whole.

A five-year capital improvement plan is something Council would like to see done, as they would prefer to fix things ahead of any breakages and not have to use unbudgeted funds to cover that when we didn't take care of minor maintenance level needs ahead of time. Councilmember Price shared his thoughts on that process and the importance of not getting in a hole in regard to buildings and infrastructure, and wants to see that process come back.

d. SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

Council and staff stayed in their small groups to talk about the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats the City is facing, then returned to the large group and discussed each separately afterwards.

For strengths, growth, Council's healthy team dynamic and communication, local economy momentum, stable staff, community support, support of military, police and fire, and geographic location were listed.

For weaknesses, competitive wages for staff, aging infrastructure, long-term CIP plan needs, agility in the changing times, deferred maintenance, retention of younger staff, uninformed populace, and resistance to change were listed.

For opportunities, Lake Fort Phantom and capitalizing that area, leveraging AI for cost comparisons, the current fast-paced growth occurring, educational growth, more opportunities for younger professionals seeking jobs here, economic growth and retaining that long-term, I-20 and Loop 322 developments, crowning jewels in quality of life potentials/amenities, what we can accomplish with additional revenue coming in, and Dyess Air Force Base and the AI data centers bringing in new things were listed.

For threats, cyber security, staff retention, water, cost escalation, state legislature, need for proper planning for the growth coming our way, safety and having a potential target on our back with our name being out in the world were all listed.

Mayor Hurt recessed the meeting for a break for lunch from 11:27 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

After the break, Mr. Mowery refreshed the top 10 drivers discussed so far:

1. Clear Vision
2. Care for one another
3. Diversified unification in Council
4. Responsive, reliable & adaptive
5. Common-sense economic development that allows infrastructure to keep pace
6. High quality of life with attractive amenities
7. Exceptional customer service
8. Operational Excellence & attractive employer
9. Fiscal responsibility
10. Impeccable integrity

e. Defining Success

Mr. Mowery broke the everyone up into groups again to discuss the question "What if we were more successful than we could possibly imagine – even in our wildest dreams?" and to come up with a headline news story about this would say. The groups discussed this together and wrote up

headlines they wanted to see. A spokesperson from each group presented their headlines. The takeaway from this exercise was that we genuinely have potential here in Abilene, and we need to collaborate to make big things happen. The threat is not dreaming too big but setting the bar too low and not trying to go above and beyond. Everyone wants Abilene to be a prosperous city and to thrive. Organizations become what you talk about, so it's important to talk about the things you want to see to then put things in motion to achieve them.

After discussion, Mr. Mowery asked everyone to pick the most strategic "headline" out of each group's answers. One group was obviously focused on Abilene but with energy being the top strategic item. The second group's top strategic item was quality of life, and secondary as tech partnerships. The third group's was a 15-year plan becoming a national model for mid-sized cities. And the last group's was relentless innovation and Dyess Air Force Base.

f. Strategic Priorities

Mr. Mowery gave each Councilmember five index cards and asked them to write one idea per card, listing their top five long-term, strategic priorities. He asked them to write them in a "verb + object" pattern, like "increase revenue". He then paired two Councilmembers together based on seniority to split up and narrow their combined ten cards down to five between them.

The three groups listed these as their top five priorities:

- 1) Strengthen Dyess, steward of resources, improved infrastructure, public safety, and diversify economy.
- 2) Community engagement, public safety, increase housing development, growth around Lake Fort Phantom, and address incentive.
- 3) Encourage development, increase amenities, competitive wages for City staff, increase housing, and improve the development around I20 and Business 80.

Improved infrastructure, public safety, housing, and economic development were all mentioned more than once and highlighted. These were all discussed at length, as well as which of the ones not highlighted that could fit under one of the highlighted categories, and which ones not highlighted should be. Some can be under economic development. Public safety and competitive wages for staff can be combined into one. Stewarding resources can go with economic development.

Mayor Hurt recessed the meeting for a break from 1:20 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.

g. Developing Objectives for Each of the Strategic Priorities

The group was split up again into three small groups to cover part of the strategic priorities above. One for community engagement, one for infrastructure, and one for resources for public safety and the organization. The objectives for each group were to identify milestones to ensure we are moving in the right direction on these priorities, as well as a "what do you mean by that?" for each one. Each group worked to come up with the answers individually and then came back together.

Group one was Infrastructure, and highlighted fund infrastructure development that exceeds asset deterioration, continue planning for Cedar Ridge Reservoir, prioritize proactive preventative maintenance over repair to extend life of assets, reestablish a rolling 5 year CIP informed by master plans, and ensure infrastructure does not impede economic development.

Group two was Public Safety and City Organization, and they highlighted a well-coordinated hiring plan across all departments, CIP for technology efficiency, proactive technology and

getting ahead of things, multi-year service level, and maintain a competitive workforce per national public safety standards.

Group three was Community Engagement, and they highlighted to need to be the preeminent source of municipal information, proactive public education initiatives, quality effective internal communications, and purposeful collaboration with voices from across the community.

After the first round, the remaining two priorities of Economic Development and Housing Stock were discussed in different groups with the same elements above.

Group one was Economic Development, and they highlighted incentivizing training and development of tradespeople, plan for infrastructure repairs after major construction initiatives (i.e. Dyess and AI Centers), increase investments in lifestyle amenities, and diversifying economic development funding sources.

Group two was Housing Stock, and they highlighted optimizing zoning and land development regulations, identify and promote infrastructure-ready areas for housing, create a neutral developer engagement process, and evaluate opportunities to modify floodplain and floodway constraints.

The group came back together after that discussion and Mr. Mowery spoke about what he will do next with the information gathered today. He will compile the data into a report that Council can then approve at a later meeting as their new strategic vision. After that is approved, staff can begin to develop a strategic work plan around that, and identify specific initiatives needed to support that plan.

Council spoke about the takeaways from this retreat, which included:

- highlighting staff and the interactions between them and Council for the day
- the communication between both groups
- the importance of taking a step back from the bigger picture so they can reevaluate things that they might not have considered previously
- how far the city has come in the last 10-15 years in a positive direction
- being deliberate about the applications of our resources
- the need for strategic visioning like this
- seeing each department's view of the City and what is important to them and their area of expertise
- the talent that each of the department directors displayed today.

Ms. Crawford thanked the Council for taking the risk and doing this type of retreat and being engaged through the whole process. Council and staff thanked Mr. Mowery for leading everyone through the process today and for a providing a successful visioning process.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:14 p.m.


Shawna Atkinson
City Secretary


Weldon Hurt
Mayor

Minutes approved on: February 12, 2026