



**Vestavia Hills  
City Council Minutes  
February 24, 2026  
7:30 AM**

**1. Call to Order**

**2026 Priority Items for Detailed Review and Discussion (continued)**

**2. Breakfast and Recognition of Employee Milestones - Jeff Downes and Cinnamon McCulley**

Downes opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. He recognized employees reaching key service milestones and highlighted their contributions to city operations. The City stresses employee benefits and morale to maintain high-quality services, and retain the best employees.

**3. Vestavia Hills City Schools Briefing - Todd Freeman**

Superintendent Todd Freeman briefed Council on the school system's secure but constrained financial position. Our system employs a high number of teachers above what state funds cover. These additional teachers are paid for entirely by local revenue, so when the state mandates pay and benefit increases, this means rising operating costs. VHCS makes small class sizes a priority. At this time, classroom capacity is sufficient. The primary challenge is aging facilities and infrastructure rather than growth. Declining State supplemental funds and ongoing capital needs make the City's partnership on shared spaces increasingly important.

**4. Legislative Risks and Opportunities**

- **Entertainment Districts – Jeff Downes**
- **Update of Session - Dax Swatek**
- **THC/Edible Products Regulation - Umang Patel**

Legislative Risks and Opportunities – Jeff Downes:

Mr. Downes outlined state-level risks and opportunities affecting Vestavia Hills, focusing on municipal authority, revenues, and regulatory changes. Local bills such as those to expand the number of entertainment districts, funding opportunities, and emerging issues like THC-edibles as areas where the city must stay engaged. A proactive legislative strategy and coordination with the city's lobbying team are essential to protect local interests.

Entertainment Districts – Jeff Downes:

Mr. Downes provided an overview of the City's use of entertainment districts as an economic development tool and described how State law limits the number of districts. Jim Carns successfully carried a local bill to allow the City to add an entertainment district in the burgeoning business district of Liberty Park, which will aid economic growth.

Update of Session – Dax Swatek:

Lobbyist Dax Swatek summarized the current session's progress, key deadlines, and political dynamics. He highlighted bills with direct municipal impact, including those tied to local revenues, public safety, and development tools.

THC/Edible Products Regulation – Umang Patel

Mr. Patel briefed Council on regulatory gaps and law enforcement challenges related to THC and edible products. He outlined public safety and youth access concerns and explained how the current law requires local approval of licenses. He identified potential local policy options and emphasized the need for clear rules and coordinated enforcement. Mrs. Cook expressed concern for the safety of these products and discussion ensued.

#### **5. Pedestrian Connectivity and Community Enhancements - Lori Beth Kearley**

Mrs. Kearley provided a high-level overview of efforts to improve pedestrian connectivity and community enhancements. Sidewalks, trails, pedestrian bridges, and crosswalk projects link neighborhoods to schools, parks, civic spaces, and businesses, and support safety and quality of life. Priorities, coordination with other infrastructure work, and available funding will drive phasing.

#### **6. Building Safety Briefing - Keith Blanton**

Mr. Blanton reported on the City's overall building safety posture with a focus on active code enforcement. He noted trends in numbers of permits and inspections, and highlighted efforts to maintain life safety and structural standards in both new and existing development. He stressed that consistent enforcement and education help reduce risk over time.

#### **7. IT Briefing – Jeff Downes**

In the absence of Darrin Estes, Information Technology Director, Mr. Downes summarized the city's technology environment and key priorities. The City focuses on cybersecurity, system reliability, and support for core operations. Ongoing upgrades and strategic investments are necessary to keep pace with operational demands and security threats.

#### **8. Municipal Court Briefing - Tamara Forbes**

Acting Court Director Forbes gave a brief overview of court operations and caseload trends, with a focus on streamlined processes, improved customer access, and better coordination with public safety. Maintaining adequate resources to provide efficient services and adapting to legal changes remain ongoing needs.

#### **9. Human Resources Function: Goals and Accomplishments - James Randall**

Mr. Randall reported on workforce priorities: recruitment, retention, and employee development. He highlighted recent improvements in HR management and employee support. Competitive pay and benefits, and good employee supports are critical to providing exceptional customer service that our citizens expect.

#### **10. City Clerk/Admin and Innovation Briefing - Umang Patel**

Mr. Patel outlined how his new role of City Clerk and Director of Administration and Innovation will support Council, manage records, and drive process improvements. He highlighted recent actions to increase transparency, streamline internal workflows, and use technology to improve customer service. Innovation is a core tool for gaining efficiency without adding cost.

**11. Parks and Leisure Services - Jamie Lee**

Mr. Lee provided a broad update on park facilities, programs, and usage. Parks and recreation programs support community health, engagement, and add to overall quality of life. Keeping pace with resident expectations requires continued investment in facilities and programming.

**12. Public Works: In-house Capabilities and Cartegraph - Lori Beth Kearley and Ethan Fisher**

Ms. Kearley and Mr. Fisher summarized Public Works' efforts to train and develop in-house service capabilities and use of the Cartegraph asset management system. Tracking assets and maintenance actions helps prioritize work, anticipate failures, manage costs, and extend infrastructure life.

**13. City Council Priority Discussion and Ranking: Open Discussion on Items of Most Interest. Discuss High Level Strategic Plan Amendments. Prioritize 2026 Actions & Plans Using In-Meeting Poll**

Mr. Downes led a Council priority discussion using an in-meeting poll. Results showed the Council placed the highest priority on collaborating with city schools on a performing arts and wrestling facility, with a continued investment in core infrastructure. Liberty Park and East Side park and library/community building projects also received strong support. Council asked for options to strongly regulate THC-edible products and driveway spanners.

The City Manager will draft a 2026 strategic plan and budgets to align with these priorities.

At 12:56 PM, there being no further business, the Mayor adjourned the work session.

  
Ashley C. Curry, Mayor

ATTESTED BY:

  
Umang Patel, City Clerk