

The Hartington City Council met in regular session on April 27, 2026, at City Hall, beginning at 5:00 p.m. Notice of the time and place of the meeting was given in advance by posting.

Present were Mayor Becker; Councilmembers Bartling, Christensen, Kathol, and Sudbeck; City Clerk-Treasurer Schulte; and Legal Counsel Nikki Brandt.

Mayor Becker called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Council then considered approval of the minutes of the April 13, 2026, meeting. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Councilman Kathol and seconded by Councilman Sudbeck. A roll call was taken: Bartling – yes, Christensen - yes, Kathol – yes, and Sudbeck – yes. Motion Carried.

Mayor Becker introduced two sign permits for HMR Roofing and Auto Hospital. A motion to approve both sign permits was made by Councilman Bartling and seconded by Councilman Christensen. A roll call vote was taken. Bartling – yes; Christensen – yes; Kathol – yes; Sudbeck – yes. Motion carried.

Mayor Becker introduced two building permit applications for Tory Opfer, one for a garage/storage building and one for a greenhouse. Opfer requested that the greenhouse permit be tabled at this time. A motion to approve the building permit for the garage/storage building was made by Councilman Bartling and seconded by Councilman Christensen. A roll call vote was taken. Bartling – yes; Christensen – yes; Kathol – yes; Sudbeck – yes. Motion carried. A motion to table the greenhouse permit was made by Councilman Bartling and seconded by Councilman Christensen. A roll call vote was taken. Bartling – yes; Christensen – yes; Kathol – yes; Sudbeck – yes. Motion carried.

Miranda Becker and Angie Peitz, representing the Hartington Creative District, presented a proposal for crosswalk murals at the intersection of Broadway and State. The group has secured grant funding and plans to paint crosswalk designs and stencil markings at sidewalk intersections throughout the district. They hope to complete the project prior to Memorial Day, with touch-ups performed throughout the summer as needed. A motion to approve the Creative District’s crosswalk mural proposal was made by Councilman Christensen and seconded by Councilman Kathol. A roll call vote was taken. Bartling – yes; Christensen – yes; Kathol – yes; Sudbeck – yes. Motion carried. Council members expressed strong support for the community improvement efforts.

Next, Richard Pedersen addressed the Council regarding concerns with the Skylon project expenses and requested a public forum to discuss the state auditor’s findings. Pedersen questioned whether a separate public forum would be held. Mayor Becker responded that the current meeting served as a public forum, as the item was included on the agenda. The Council defended its decision to proceed with the Skylon project, explaining that three options were considered: renovating the existing building, pursuing a new bond issue for a new facility, or foregoing a community center altogether. Council noted that a new \$3–4 million facility would have been unlikely to pass a public vote. The Mayor stated that community feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, estimating approximately 10-to-1 support for the project. Pedersen also questioned why the City assumed ownership of the Skylon prior to all contractual conditions being finalized. Council explained the decision was made in order to fulfill scheduled August wedding obligations and noted that the building met requirements from the State Fire Marshal, electrical inspectors, and insurance providers. Council further clarified that all expected work had been completed in accordance with the agreement.

Discussion then shifted to the recreational complex track renovation. Councilman Sudbeck provided cost estimates ranging from approximately \$160,000 for surface repairs to up to \$1,000,000 for

a full concrete replacement. The City had approached both the Hartington-Newcastle and Cedar Catholic School districts regarding cost-sharing or ownership; however, both declined. Mayor Becker noted the City's valuation of approximately \$132 million compared to the school district's \$1.6 billion valuation, making levy impacts minimal for the school but more significant for the City. Council further discussed that the track generates minimal revenue, with rental fees of approximately \$500 per event, which largely covers only cleanup and maintenance. It was noted that several City facilities operate at a loss, including the pool, the library, and the park system.

Pedersen also raised questions regarding the renovation process, suggesting the City may have completed a majority of the work rather than Roger Wortman. Council clarified that Wortman funded the renovation work through Green Gables Contracting and covered approximately \$120,000 in moving expenses. It was noted that change orders occurred during the renovation process, which is typical for projects of this nature. Funding for the Skylon project included approximately \$450,000 in City sales tax funds, ongoing annual sales tax revenue of approximately \$300,000, and private donations. The annual debt payment is approximately \$150,000 each December, representing roughly half of the City's annual sales tax revenue. The Skylon currently operates under a lease agreement in which the City shares 50% of rental revenue with the lessee, Corey Kramer, who also serves as City Superintendent. Six applicants applied for the lease, with Kramer being selected as the most qualified. Wedding rental rates are approximately \$2,000 per event, with 19 weddings and five additional events currently booked.

Department Reports were as follows:

Park – Councilman Kathol: Reported that pickleball court construction is scheduled for the following week, with an estimated 30–40 users expected. The shelter house residing project remains on hold pending a new contractor. Baseball field improvements are underway, including fencing and clay brick installation under home plate. A bid was received for electrical work at the storage unit (former restroom). A park walkthrough was completed to identify needed repairs; minimal items were noted for this year. The merry-go-round was identified as needing attention. A report and budget for improvements will be prepared for next year.

Pool – Councilman Bartling: Painting and sandblasting is pending suitable weather conditions. Paint has been ordered for the project.

Complex/Auditorium – Councilman Sudbeck: Reported multiple track meets at the complex and noted three contractors have expressed interest in the track renovation project, with a potential rubber recycling grant available to help offset costs. He concluded that all is going well at the Auditorium, which will close at the end of May.

Fire/Ambulance – Councilman Christensen: Nothing to report.

General – Mayor Becker: Nothing to report.

Legal Counsel – Nikki Brandt: Nothing to report.

Clerk – Schulte: Reported that during preparation of the lane mile report, it was determined that Wirth Drive is not currently recognized as City right-of-way. Wirth Drive will need to be dedicated as public right-of-way by Economic Development, followed by City acceptance through resolution, before it can be included in the lane mile report.

Mayor Becker opened the floor for Public Comments, stating a three-minute time limit and welcoming anyone who wished to address the Council.

Natalie Schaecher, 104 North Madison Avenue, Hartington, addressed the Council expressing concerns regarding City funds and taxpayer dollars related to the Skylon project. Schaecher questioned the justification for the \$1,000,000 payment to Roger Wortman, noting the building had been assessed at \$60,300 prior to relocation and valued at \$100,000 before title transfer. She asked whether any documentation or expense report had been provided by Wortman to support the payment amount. She further raised concerns that the City appeared to have completed a significant portion of the work and questioned whether the agreed purchase price should be reduced as a result. Council responded that Wortman was responsible for costs associated with Green Gables Contracting and paid approximately \$120,000 for moving expenses, and maintained that the City received fair value. Schaecher also noted total project costs appear to exceed previously reported estimates and requested consideration of providing a public report or communication outlining project expenses to improve transparency for taxpayers. She also requested clarification regarding whether Corey Kramer clocks out while managing Skylon events. Mayor Becker confirmed that Kramer has been properly clocking in and out.

Tory Opfer 608 N Broadway, Hartington, addressed the Council regarding the complex and inquired whether the City had considered selling the portion of property east of the road, including the track, to the school district. Council responded that discussions have taken place with both schools regarding the potential sale of the track and/or complex, noting that in many communities such facilities are owned by the school. However, the both schools declined. Council highlighted the difference in tax base, with the City at approximately \$132 million and the school district at approximately \$1.6 billion, stating the school would be better positioned to fund such facilities. Council encouraged residents to communicate with the school board regarding interest in pursuing ownership. It was also noted that naming rights or private contributions could be explored as a potential funding option for the track.

Tom Miller, 201 N. Aberley Avenue, Hartington, addressed the Council. He stated he had spoken with an architect and believed a community center could be constructed for less than \$3,000,000, questioning prior cost estimates. Miller also raised concerns regarding paving commitments and asbestos abatement requirements for the old city shop building and the Skylon. He noted that no abatement was conducted for either the Skylon building or for the old city shop building and questioned whether this complied with legal requirements. Council responded that a contractor was hired for demolition and no asbestos was identified. Miller concluded with general concerns regarding the handling and transparency of the Skylon project.

Rita Pedersen, 103 N. Aberley Avenue, addressed the Council and cited the audit's recommendations to ensure compliance with contractual requirements and LB840 provisions, including seeking legal guidance on potential recoupment of funds related to the Skylon renovation. She asked whether the Council intended to follow these recommendations. Mayor Becker responded that many questioned expenses were tied to change orders or items outside the original contract and stated the Council disagrees with portions of the audit and has consulted legal counsel on LB840 compliance. Pedersen then addressed public participation, stating that community members are not seeking extended time on meeting agendas, but rather opportunities for open dialogue with the Council. She expressed a desire for a public forum where ideas and concerns could be shared more freely without the formal structure of regular council meetings. Legal Counsel Brandt explained that, under Nebraska law, any gathering involving a quorum of Council members must be conducted as a public meeting, with proper notice and a published agenda. She noted that previous informational meetings were conducted in

compliance with these requirements. Pedersen acknowledged this, but expressed that she and others do not feel they have adequate opportunity to communicate their concerns and formally requested consideration of a quarterly town hall-style meeting to facilitate community discussion.

Mayor Becker stated that Council members serve voluntarily and make decisions in what they believe is the community's best interest. He acknowledged disagreement from some residents but emphasized the Council is not misusing public funds and that elections provide an avenue for accountability. He added that while some oppose recent actions, others support them, and the Council understands the concerns raised. Regarding the audit, Mayor Becker stated the Council believes it acted appropriately and does not plan additional action. He noted the audit is not legally binding and that the City will continue its annual audit process while completing the project. Legal Counsel Nikki Brandt stated the City consulted legal counsel throughout the LB840 process to ensure compliance. She acknowledged differing interpretations in the audit but confirmed the City will follow its policies moving forward and consider the audit findings in future decisions.

Jaime Arens, Norfolk, Nebraska, addressed the Council regarding whether the City intends to seek legal counsel to pursue recovery of municipal funds referenced in the audit report. Arens pressed for specific answers from the Council on whether legal action would be taken. Mayor Becker stated he would defer legal-related questions to Legal Counsel Nikki Brandt. Legal Counsel Brandt stated the matter involves potential litigation and remains under discussion between the Council and legal counsel. She indicated no final determination has been made regarding whether there is a viable avenue to pursue recovery of funds and declined to comment further at this time. Arens asked when a decision would be made, whether a timeline exists, and how the public would be notified. Legal Counsel Brandt responded that an update would be provided once a decision has been reached and noted that citizens may stay informed by attending City Council meetings or submitting public records requests. Arens also raised concerns regarding project costs, highlighting an approximate \$146,000 discrepancy between a concrete bid submitted by Doyle Stevens (\$288,000) and the total amount reportedly paid (\$434,000), and requested clarification on the difference.

The following bills were presented for payments:

General — Total: \$2,493.25

Krier Technologies, LLC \$350.00; Northeast Nebraska Economic Development District \$2,047.95; Security Shredding Services \$80.00; SpecSoft \$15.30

Streets — Total: \$1,246.75

Bomgaars \$245.11; Guardian \$13.60; Menards, Inc. \$724.59; Pomp's Tire Service, Inc. \$54.50; Pinkelman Sales, Inc. \$24.95; Plumbing & Electric \$155.00; Usable Life \$29.00

Water — Total: \$719.69

Nebraska Public Health Environmental Laboratory \$535.00; R & R Services LLC \$106.69; S. Thayer \$78.00

Sewer — Total: \$60.00

Olson's Pest Technicians \$60.00

Sanitation — Total: \$91.30

Guardian \$6.80; S. Thayer \$70.00; Usable Life \$14.50

Fire — Total: \$151.43

Bomgaars \$29.99; Dearborn Life Insurance Company \$121.44

Police — Total: \$14,220.04

Cedar County Sheriff \$14,220.04

Ambulance — Total: \$14.56

Faith Regional Health Services \$14.56

Parks — Total: \$31,466.65

Bomgaars \$340.80; Hartington Tree \$1,300.00; Leise Concrete \$27,449.45; Pomp's Tire Service, Inc. \$155.70; Plumbing & Electric \$235.70; Zimco Supply Company \$1,985.00

Complex — Total: \$394.78

Bomgaars \$5.39; Concrete Products Co. \$238.14; Plumbing & Electric \$151.25

Library — Total: \$1,943.43

Guardian \$13.60; Ingram Library Services \$870.86; Quill Corporation \$596.97; T. Anderson \$200.00; Usable Life \$29.00; X-Pert Lawn & Landscaping \$233.00

City Hall — Total: \$358.24

Bomgaars \$71.94; D. Fischer \$100.00; Guardian \$6.80; Premier Lawn & Landscaping \$165.00; Usable Life \$14.50

Auditorium — Total: \$79.10

Appeara \$79.10

Economic Development — Total: \$21.30

Guardian \$6.80; Usable Life \$14.50

Transfer Station — Total: \$80.00

Olson's Pest Technicians \$80.00

Skylon Event Center — Total: \$31,567.50

Doyle Stevens Construction, Inc. \$30,000.00; Plumbing & Electric \$1,567.50

Hi-Fi — Total: \$10,042.50

BOKF, NA \$10,042.50

April Payroll - \$37,578.25

A motion to pay the bills was made by Councilman Bartling and seconded by Councilman Kathol. A roll call was taken: Bartling – yes, Christensen – yes, Kathol – yes, and Sudbeck – yes. Motion Carried.

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilman Christensen and seconded by Councilman Bartling. A roll call was taken: Bartling – yes, Christensen – yes, Kathol – yes, and Sudbeck – yes. Motion Carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:42 p.m. The next scheduled meeting is May 11, 2026.

Respectfully submitted by, Casey Schulte, City Clerk-Treasurer

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Casey Schulte". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'C'.