WATAUGA
TEXAS
"A GREAT PLACE TO LIVE"

MINUTES
WATAUGA CITY COUNCIL
WORKSHOP STRATGIC PLANNING SESSION
WATAUGA FIRE DEPARTMENT
5909 HIGHTOWER DRIVE,
MONDAY, February 21, 2026
8:30 AM

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Arthur Miner called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.

ROLL CALL

The meeting was convened with the following members present:

Arthur L. Miner	Mayor
Cris Blackburn	Mayor Pro Tem Place 2
Pat Shelbourne	Council Member Place 1
Lovie Downey	Council Member Place 3
Andrew Neal	Council Member Place 4
Vacant	Council Member Place 5
Mark Taylor	Council Member Place 6
Jan Hill	Council Member Place 7

and

Sandra Gibson	City Manager
Linda Proskey	City Secretary
Paul Hackleman	Director of Public Works
Randy Richards	Assistant Director of Public Works
Randy Barley	Fire Chief
Timothy Hamilton	Director of Parks and Community Services
Kevin Mead	Assistant Police Chief

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no request for public comment

PUBLIC TESTIMONY FOR ACTION ITEMS

There was no request for public testimony

ACTION ITEMS

1. Discuss the City's strategic initiatives, priorities, and future direction

Sandra Gibson, City Manager, presented a packet including the strategic plan presentation, proposed refinements for Council discussion, Human Resources statistics, and a citizen survey analysis. She noted that the budget kickoff is scheduled for March 2 or 3 and highlighted upcoming discussion items, including Arts in the Park, senior transportation, the Bond Action Plan, and the formation of a bond and legislative committee. She also shared a video showcasing the City's accomplishments over the past year.

The session focused on refreshing and refining the Strategic Plan, clarifying Council's policy direction, and improving alignment between the Strategic Plan, budget decisions, the CIP, and departmental activities. The last major rework of the plan was in 2019, with revisions in 2020 and 2021 following COVID. Proposed changes include separating Council's policy goals from departmental action plans, with the city manager and staff developing one- to two-year work plans aligned with Council priorities and providing public progress reporting via performance indicators and a community scorecard.

The revised framework reduces the previous eight goals to five strategic priorities to promote clearer, more aligned decision-making: Fiscal Sustainability and Infrastructure Stewardship; Safe, Healthy, and Connected Community; Strengthen Economic Vitality and Community Image; Organizational and Workforce Excellence, including technology; and Promote Community Engagement and Transparency. The plan addresses aging facilities and infrastructure, fiscal and workforce constraints, community expectations, and alignment between priorities and budgets. Community amenities, including parks, the library, and the community center, have been elevated within these priorities. Core values remain unchanged, though the commitment to service delivery continues to evolve. No funding decisions have been made at this time.

Strategic Priority Two was broadened to encompass community safety, health, and amenities, including long-term facility needs and modernization with an emphasis on safety, accessibility, and inclusivity. Implementation of the ADA Title II plan is mandated and will require prioritization of improvements across facilities and parks. While full compliance is not required immediately, a formal plan must be in place by the April deadline, and any approved facility upgrades must meet current ADA standards, which may impact project timing and budgets.

Council also discussed whether the five strategic priorities provide the desired policy and budget guidance. The current Parks Master Plan expires in 2027, and hiring a consultant to update the plan is estimated at $100,000 or more. Updating the plan with a consultant will allow for eligibility for grant opportunities, including those through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Fire Chief and Assistant City Manager Randy Barkley, along with Police Assistant Chief Mead, provided an update on the city's active shooter training initiatives. A town hall on active shooter preparedness is planned, and on March 18, training will be conducted in partnership with the Fire Department at a local school. A meeting with the school district is also scheduled to outline expectations for parents and staff during an active shooter situation. The city plans additional training for departments, organized by focus, including PTA-style sessions and department-specific drills for different facilities. NRH, along with Richland, Haltom City, and Tarrant County, will participate, and BISD training will involve North Hills and other agencies to ensure coordination. Operational control is a key focus, aiming to avoid conflicting responses from different agencies and ensure that external responders defer to the on-scene authority. Active shooter training is standardized through mandated 16-hour sessions.

The city is taking a "crawl, walk, run" approach to training, starting with incremental steps and building up to larger drills. A drill was conducted last fall at a church in Watauga, with additional multi-agency drills planned. Training will also include Richland Hills and Haltom City, where first responders are likely to arrive first. Internal policies are being developed and aligned with partner departments, and several officers are training to become Alert instructors to strengthen the team.

Parent concerns during incidents were highlighted, including the risk of interfering with law enforcement and first responders. Parents may not know where to go, potentially complicating response efforts. Training will address PIO messaging and reunification procedures, emphasizing that parents should avoid going to the incident location. BISD is developing a comprehensive action plan that includes reunification and incident command locations, which will be shared with other agencies to ensure consistent and accurate information.

The Public Safety Academy is planned again for next year with potential format changes. Previously, the academy met two nights a week for nine weeks, which was a significant time commitment. The new format will split the academy into a Fire session in the fall and a Police session in the spring, concluding with a joint exercise and graduation. Plans are being developed to keep academy graduates engaged in city events and volunteer work, including participation as actors in training exercises. The goal is to foster community engagement and utilize volunteers for various activities. Past programs, such as VIPS, are being rebuilt, and academy attendees have been invited to assist with events like Cookies with Santa and Kids' Camp. Some participants have also used the academy to explore career opportunities in fire and police services.

Strategic Priority Three focuses on strengthening the city's economic vitality by combining city branding with economic development goals. Efforts to improve the city brand include a coordinated marketing strategy, enhanced communications from the IT department, and economic development initiatives. Social media engagement has increased, with more positive content being shared, and a long-term community communications strategy is in draft form, outlining goals for business spotlights and other initiatives. Concerns were raised regarding business closures, such as Walgreens, which impact economic vitality.

To better understand local business needs, the city is developing a business survey and is considering incentivizing businesses to enhance the appearance of commercial corridors, drawing inspiration from North Richland Hills' approach. Code enforcement may be leveraged to address cosmetic issues and encourage participation in the EDC grant program; however, some out-ofstate business owners remain unresponsive, prioritizing rent collection over improvements. The city may need to rely more on code enforcement, particularly in light of upcoming 2027 legislation affecting sales tax.

The 2026 World Cup is expected to have a significant impact on the city, with short-term rentals presenting a major concern. Additional challenges include traffic congestion, potential increases in crime, and strains on infrastructure. Emergency management, police, and fire departments are collaborating to prepare for the event. While short-term rental ordinances exist, enforcement and registration compliance remain ongoing challenges. Identifying unregistered rentals currently relies on citizen reports and monitoring discrepancies.

RECESSED

Mayor Miner recessed the meeting for a break at 9:45 am.

RECONVENED

Mayor Miner reconvened it at 9:57 a.m.

Strategic Priority Four, Organizational and Workforce Excellence, combines the former Goals Seven and Eight and incorporates investments in technology and cybersecurity improvements. Key strategic initiatives include conducting a biannual employee survey, enhancing succession planning, strengthening training and leadership programs, and implementing AMI technology. Brad Fraley, IT Director is developing a policy for AI and reviewing other IT policies this year to support these initiatives.

Strategic Priority Five focuses on Community Engagement, with the goal of enhancing educational and civic involvement. Departments have reviewed ordinances, policies, and long-range plans, and will present recommendations for wording clarifications and improvements over the next six months. Last year's citizen survey was provided as a reference document. Brad Fraley, IT Director, and his team are developing and implementing a communications strategy plan. Efforts to engage citizens through focus groups have faced challenges, including low attendance at the last meeting, prompting consideration of changes in timing, location, or format. Other engagement ideas under consideration include quarterly meetings, "garage scan" events similar to those held in Saginaw, and community activities such as "Coffee with a Cop," "Coffee with the Fire Department," park meet-and-greets, open house events, recreation-on-wheels programs, and neighborhood visits by Council and staff on Saturdays. Previously Police Chief Lewis organized a town hall-style event, and Timothy Hamilton, Parks and Community Service Director, conducted cookouts at various parks.

The city emphasized providing consistent opportunities for citizens to voice their concerns, noting that while participation is voluntary, opportunities must be readily available. Quarterly meetings involving Council, department heads, the Mayor, the City Manager, and Public Safety staff were suggested to maintain engagement. Consideration was given to ensuring equitable access to events across neighborhoods to avoid the perception that some areas are overlooked. A "roving" initiative was proposed, inspired by staff walking through neighborhoods last year to distribute information about parks. The initiative branding ideas were "COW" (Communication on Wheels) or "WOW" (Watauga on Wheels) to enhance visibility and community participation.

The discussion on Vision and Mission statements focused on revising the current vision to better reflect the City's future aspirations. A suggested vision statement was "Our vision is to be the best little city in the metroplex," with alternative options including "Inclusive, thriving community" and "A welcoming place to live, work, and gather." After discussion, Council agreed on the final vision statement: "Watauga is a thriving, safe, connected, and inclusive community." For the mission statement, concern was raised that the current version does not address basic municipal services. Options presented emphasized transparency, accountability, public safety, economic growth, and delivery of quality services. After discussion The Council decided on option number 1, The City of Watauga provides high-quality municipal services, invests in community amenities, supports responsible economic growth, and stewards public resources with integrity, transparency, and accountability.

The work plan will through the budget process with department directors before formal adoption. Personnel updates were provided in Julie's absence, noting that employees are the City's greatest asset and efforts are underway to reduce turnover. The city aims to maintain turnover below 10%, ensure employees feel valued, and offer competitive compensation and benefits. A compensation study is in progress, with initial results expected in May or June, and certification pay is being considered to recognize employees' professional achievements. Turnover analysis showed a decrease from 28% in 2024 to 19% in 2025, with Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) ratios used to accurately reflect staffing changes. Employee retention efforts include gestures of appreciation, such as thank-you notes, "wild grams," themed recognition, and quarterly appreciation lunches to foster team morale.

Currently, there are seven vacancies, with some positions on hold, and position justification forms are being used to reevaluate staffing needs. Departments are exploring restructuring, contract labor, and employee development through training. Stay interviews are being implemented to gather feedback and improve retention. The creation of an additional mental health peace officer position is being considered to address both police and community needs, including engagement with homeless individuals and follow-up with repeat cases. Additionally, a new maintenance police officer position is being added, as a previously funded position went unfilled due to staffing shortages. The County is also advocating for mental health initiatives.

Homelessness continues to fluctuate, with occasional spikes monitored by the city. Fort Worth's enforcement actions have displaced some individuals to neighboring cities, and there are routine homeless individuals in Watauga, some with mental health or substance use challenges. Budget updates include requests for barrier removals, civil service appeal costs, and anticipated increases in insurance due to market conditions and high claims. Employee engagement and morale initiatives include additional training, and compensation worksheets are now available on request rather than annually.

Discussion on Art in the Park began with a meeting with the Mayor to explore ideas, including murals on existing buildings such as the restroom at Pavilion 1, artistic installations using recycled wind turbine parts, and vinyl wraps on traffic control boxes. A cultural tourism community assessment survey is available to gather input on Watauga's unique features. Opportunities were identified to incorporate art into the developing food truck park off Hightower, including the restroom/concession building and maintenance of the veteran's memorial. Suggestions included adding a small stage for music performances, pop-up art events, and community involvement in decorating AT&T boxes, though concerns were raised regarding approvals and control over the final results. Public-private partnerships and grants were discussed as potential funding sources, emphasizing starting small, integrating art into park design, and gradually expanding initiatives. Mr. Hemp suggested incorporating Art in the Park into the Parks Master Plan to support economic growth and grant applications, while recognizing that building a financial "war chest" is necessary to implement projects.

Following the bond election, staff are reviewing facility needs and meeting with a financial advisor to explore future bond opportunities. The formation of a bond committee with citizen participation was discussed as a way to educate members on facility needs, financing, tax impacts, and provide recommendations to Council. While committees may slow progress, they can also enhance citizen engagement. Suggested committee sizes ranged from 15 to 30 members, and Council emphasized involving citizens to ensure community ownership of the process. A legislative committee was also proposed to engage citizens in tracking and communicating legislative matters impacting the city.

Senior transportation was discussed as a continuing service for residents with limited mobility, including ADA considerations. Timothy Hamilton, Parks and Community Service Director, was tasked with evaluating options, costs, and scope. Historically, the service transported 8–10 seniors to the senior center, with past trips extending to bowling leagues or regional destinations. Replacement of the old passenger van is estimated at $70,000 or more, while private options such as Catholic Charities charge $25 per trip and Uber vouchers cost about $6 per ride within the city. Council emphasized defining the purpose and scope of transportation, focusing on senior access to the senior center and activities, while noting liability, insurance, and potential misuse concerns. Alternative solutions discussed included compiling available transportation resources, quarterly bus rentals for senior events, and low-cost Uber programs. Council directed staff to return with a recommendation after gathering more data, with the understanding that transportation is a service, not an entitlement.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Miner adjourned the meeting at 11:58 am

Approved: this 13 day of April, 2026

Signed: this 14 day of April, 2026

CITY OF WATAUGA, TEXAS

APPROVED:

/s/ Arthur L. Miner

Arthur L. Miner, Mayor

ATTEST:

/s/ Linda Proskey

Linda Proskey, City Secretary