

WORK SESSION OF THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

December 2, 2025

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in Work Session December 2, 2025 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center in Austin, Minnesota.

All members present, viz: Chair Polly Glynn, Vice-Chair Dan Sparks, Jerry Reinartz, Mike Ankeny and John Mueller. Also in attendance were County Administrator Matthew Verdick and County Attorney Kristen Nelsen.

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

SMART Transit Update

Transit Operations Manager Christine Thompson reported that Southern Minnesota Area Rural Transit (SMART) has provided over 93,000 rides so far in 2025 and currently serves approximately 250 students from PreK through high school in Austin for the 2025–2026 school term, along with 20 adult learners through Adult Basic Education. She highlighted the importance of transportation for educational access and shared examples of service for medical appointments and rural residents. SMART operates 14 buses, including six preschool routes, and offers free transportation for students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The service continues to meet community needs through demand-response routes and partnerships with organizations such as the Hormel Foundation and United Way.

SMART Transit Manager Kirk Kuchera discussed broader operational challenges and future plans, including a facility project in Waseca pending FTA approval and anticipated for 2026. He noted significant cost increases for buses, rising from \$89,000 in 2021 to \$200,000 currently, with state-mandated local share contributions projected to increase by 330% over five years. SMART remains committed to serving rural areas to help residents access medical care and maintain independence, with MnDOT reviewing options such as van service for greater flexibility. Additional updates included shuttle services between Austin, Albert Lea, and Waseca, driver staffing stability, and ongoing efforts to adapt to budget constraints while continuing to provide reliable public transportation.

Discussion on Nuclear Moratorium Resolution

The board discussed a proposed resolution supporting the Minnesota Rural Electric Association and the Minnesota Nuclear Energy Alliance in their efforts to repeal Minnesota's moratorium on new nuclear power generation facilities. Valerie Sheedy noted that Sherburn County is taking the lead on this initiative and emphasized the growing demand for power and the benefits of nuclear energy as a non-carbon, efficient source. Concerns were raised regarding the storage of spent fuel and safety considerations, as well as the historical context of the moratorium, which has been in place since 1994.

The board reviewed the draft resolution included in the packet and discussed timing, noting that the matter may be considered after the AMC conference, potentially at the December 16 meeting. It was reported that AMC supports the repeal, and other counties have begun passing similar resolutions. Questions were raised about potential opposition from developers, cost implications, and regulatory requirements. The board agreed to gather additional information at the upcoming conference before taking formal action.

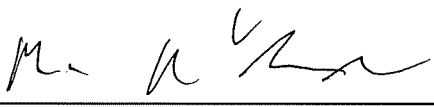
Discussion on Firearm Use and Public Hearing Procedures

The board discussed the timeline and process for considering potential changes to hunting regulations related to the use of shotguns versus rifles for deer hunting. Valerie Sheedy noted that a decision would likely be needed by March, with mapping of possible setbacks underway. The discussion included safety concerns, historical context for the current shotgun-only rule, and examples from other counties such as Albert Lea. The board agreed to gather additional information at the upcoming conference before proceeding.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:11 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for December 16, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY:  Chairperson

Attest: 
By: _____
Clerk/Administrator