

WORK SESSION OF THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

April 7, 2026

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in Work Session April 7, 2026 at 1:00 p.m. at the Government Center in Austin, Minnesota.

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

The meeting was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

The Board received an update on a potential Public Works Facilities Project (identified as a critical need in the master plan space study) from Danielle Reid (Klein McCarthy) and Travis' team, who presented cost estimates and comparisons for multiple site and building options. After extensive review of master planning needs, design considerations, construction logistics, and cost impacts, Options 2B and 5 emerged as the most feasible; however, Option 2B—an addition to the existing vehicle storage building on the current site—was identified as the preferred direction due to cost, land-acquisition concerns, usability, and timeline constraints. The project is targeting bid documents later this year, a bid opening near year-end, and a construction start in spring 2027, with an estimated project cost of about \$20.7 million to be financed through a 20-year bond without using levy funding.

Key Points

- *Multiple facility options were evaluated, with Options 2B and 5 reviewed in depth.*
- *Option 2B on the existing site is recommended due to feasibility, cost, and schedule advantages.*
- *Estimated project cost: approximately \$20.7 million including contingencies and equipment.*
- *Preferred bidding timeline: bid documents ready by fall; bids opened late 2026.*
- *Construction anticipated to begin spring 2027.*
- *20-year bond financing planned, using Highway Department revenue rather than levy funds.*
- *Additional work needed: environmental reviews, geotechnical testing, and property considerations where applicable.*
- *Board direction is needed next week to proceed with Option 2B and advance design and financing steps.*

County Engineer Mitch Wenum provided his monthly update, highlighting the need to refresh the County's Snow & Ice Policy to better reflect actual operations, including typical 5 a.m. plow start times, operator availability, and safety limits on maximum hours. He discussed current plow routes, staffing levels, equipment challenges, and proposed adjustments to route timing and operational flexibility. With 405 miles of roadway and varying conditions, he emphasized the importance of updating policies to align with real-world practices and resource constraints.

Wenum reviewed the challenges of servicing county roads located within city limits and suggested beginning discussions on entering a maintenance agreement for the County maintenance (such as snow removal) of certain city streets, particularly where traditional reasons (such as schools) no longer apply. He noted potential financial and state-aid impacts and emphasized that any agreement would come back to the Board. He also outlined plans to optimize plow routes using specialized routing software, which could improve efficiency by an estimated 5% and is available via a one-year subscription under \$25,000.

Wenum proposed a living snow fence pilot project along CSAH 14, where drifting frequently causes safety issues. Wenum described options for working with local farmers to leave rows of corn or explore permanent plantings, referencing MnDOT models and potential payment structures. Participation levels, costs, and coordination with SWCD would influence project scope. He will begin outreach to landowners, with the goal of testing effectiveness and possibly expanding to other corridors in the future.

Key Points

- *Snow & Ice Policy may need updating to reflect current operations, safety limits, and realistic start times.*
- *County maintains 405 miles of roadway; staffing and equipment availability affect storm response.*
- *Potential consideration of maintenance agreements with small cities; financial and state-aid implications to be reviewed.*
- *Proposal to use routing software to optimize plow routes; subscription under \$25,000.*
- *Living snow fence pilot on CSAH 14 being explored; may involve farmer agreements, payment options, and SWCD assistance.*
- *Wenum will begin outreach to cities on maintenance discussions and to landowners regarding snow fence participation.*

The Board received an update on the switch-gear project, noting that the building was closed at 3 p.m. Thursday and dispatch operations were smoothly transferred to Olmsted County with no downtown service interruption and utilizing protocols established during the cyber-crisis. Despite an unexpected mislabeled electrical panel that caused a two-hour service loss Thursday morning, IT successfully updated systems, maintained generator-supported radio operations, and had approximately 90% of platforms restored by Monday morning. Staff response was strong throughout the process, and thank-you letters will be sent to Olmsted County for their support.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2:17 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for April 14, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY: DAN SPARKS
Chairperson

Attest:
By: [Signature]
Clerk/Administrator