

WORK SESSION OF THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

August 4, 2026

The Mower County Board of Commissioners in and for the County of Mower, Minnesota, met in Work Session August 4, 2026 at 9:00 a.m. at the Government Center in Austin, Minnesota.

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

The session was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Discover Austin – 2027 Budget Proposal

Discover Austin Executive Director Nancy Schnable reviewed the 2025 Annual Report, noting strong tourism activity, including 700 local tourism jobs, \$55.2 million in visitor spending, and over 100 motorcoach tours. Discover Austin continues to feature major attractions and expand community engagement, including film projects and countywide event promotion.

Representatives from Yodel presented event-aggregation software that would streamline Discover Austin's labor-intensive event management and improve online visibility. The platform would allow inclusion of all county events and has shown positive traffic results elsewhere. The budget request is \$1,300 for implementation and \$2,400 for an annual subscription.

SELCO – 2027 Budget Proposal

Library Directors Julie Clinefelter (Austin), Deb Smith (Brownsdale), and Brenda Kiefer (LeRoy) presented updates on library operations and funding needs. SELCO libraries reported a 28% increase in cardholders over 2023, higher program participation, continued use of public computers, and an estimated ROI of \$4 returned to the community for every \$1 invested. To maintain a \$0 budget increase for 2027, libraries noted that services will be reduced from their originally requested \$25,000 increase. Libraries highlighted current grants, city-county cost-sharing arrangements, and ongoing efforts to seek additional funding sources. Directors shared staffing levels, weekly open hours, and recent program successes, including record summer reading participation. They requested that the County add links to library websites and invited commissioners for library tours.

Facilities Department Update

Facilities Director Peyton Reese reported on the proposed relocation of Extension offices to remodeled space within the 4-H building, with an estimated cost of \$65,000 funded from reserves. The project involves repurposing part of the dining hall, maintaining existing furniture, and addressing minor building updates, with construction planned before winter pending board approval. Additional updates included progress on the Adams outshop

demolition, ongoing mechanical planning at the Government Center, strong performance from new facility staff, and near-completion of the switchgear project.

Engineering / Highway Department Update

Denny Zwiener presented on behalf of County Engineer Mitch Wenum. The Board reviewed options for addressing cold-storage needs, including: demolishing two existing sheds (\$25,000) and relocating a 130×40 storage building (\$295,000) OR constructing a new storage building (\$380,000). Discussion centered on long-term efficiency, with several commissioners expressing support for returning to the original plan for a properly sized facility (estimated at \$980,000) to avoid future space issues. Staff noted potential site constraints, cleanup considerations, and the need for a bid process and public hearing. The goal is to begin construction in spring 2027. Additional updates included near-completion of CIR and overlay projects, box-culvert work underway, ongoing seal coating by maintenance crews, and significant flood-related cleanup at roughly 240 affected sites. The department is coordinating with HSEM for reimbursement and may contract out portions of the debris-removal work.

2027 Budget Discussion

The Board reviewed agency budget requests and discussed funding options within overall levy constraints. Administration presented the budget timeline and noted that departments were directed to submit \$0 increase budgets for 2027. Several outside agencies, including Discover Austin and SELCO libraries, requested additional funding, but commissioners emphasized the need for restraint given economic pressures.

Staff summarized departmental FTE requests and recommended limiting new positions and evaluating vacancies before refilling. The County Attorney indicated the attorney position that was approved at the last meeting will actually be an associate attorney which will cost less than the budget figures indicated. Commissioners discussed focusing resources on mandated services, reducing or deferring non-mandated activities where feasible, and identifying efficiencies across departments. The Board agreed to continue evaluating service levels, staffing needs, and funding allocations, with additional information on library budgets and other outside agencies to be brought to a future work session.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 11:18 a.m. The next meeting is scheduled for August 11, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

THE MOWER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

BY: DAN SPARKS
Chairperson

Attest:

By: Mitch Wenum
Clerk/Administrator