

**CITY OF HERMANTOWN
HERMANTOWN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

Thursday, February 19, 2026 at 5:34 PM Central

Council Chambers, City Hall – Hermantown Governmental Services Building

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Present
Councilor John Geissler: Present
Councilor Andy Hjelle: Present
Councilor Joe Peterson: Present
Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Present
Karen Pionk: Present
Rob Unzen: Present

CITY STAFF: Chad Ronchetti, Executive Director; Christopher Virta, HEDA Attorney;
Eric Johnson, Community Development Director

1. **ROLL CALL**

2. **MINUTES**

2.1 Approve December 18th, 2025 HEDA Minutes

Motion to approve minutes as presented. This motion, made by, Hjelle and seconded by Peterson, Carried.

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea
Councilor John Geissler: Yea
Councilor Andy Hjelle: Yea
Councilor Joe Peterson: Yea
Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea
Karen Pionk: Yea
Rob Unzen: Yea

Yea: 7, Nay: 0, Absent: 0

3. **MOTIONS**

3.1 Election of Officers

Motion to elect Mayor Boucher as President, Commissioner Geissler as Vice President, Commissioner LeBlanc as Secretary & Treasurer, and Executive Director Ronchetti as Assistant Treasurer. This motion, made by Peterson and seconded by Pionk, Carried.

Mayor Wayne Boucher: Yea
Councilor John Geissler: Yea
Councilor Andy Hjelle: Yea
Councilor Joe Peterson: Yea
Councilor Brian LeBlanc: Yea
Karen Pionk: Yea
Rob Unzen: Yea

Yea: 7, Nay: 0, Absent: 0

4. **PUBLIC HEARING**

5. **RESOLUTIONS**

6. **WORK SESSION**

6.1 Great Northern Sports Dome Update

A Presentation on the Great Northern Sports Dome Update was given by DJ Lahti & Jamie Foreman to inform the Commission on the projects progress and provide a high-level overview of the project. The high-level overview included information on Great Northern Sports Dome's general layout, future uses, interested parties, and financial needs. A big update is that the College of Saint Scholastica is significantly interested as a sponsor and investor for the project. The College of Saint Scholastica has requested naming rights at a cost to the college and are supportive of the finances of the project. Jamie Foreman explained with the College's use of the facility there are no conflicts to the former deals agreements that have been made with the Hermantown Youth Soccer Association (HYSA).

DJ Lahti presents that they have been working with Mark Westfall, who is a part of their ownership group, to bring an expertise on finances as the Great Northern Sports Dome is about a 10-million-dollar project. DJ Lahti explains that they have a down payment amount ready to go and Mark Westfall has been working with financial institutions to see if there is a bank that is willing to take on the risk of a project this size.

President Boucher reflected on the Golf Skydome and lessons learned regarding building and fabric code, as well as heating costs. DJ Lahti explained that the Great Northern Sports Dome has a different cash flow structure, 20-year life span on the skin of the Dome, would adhere to stricter occupancy caps, and temperature control already being accounted for.

Commissioner Geissler wanted to know more about how it works with the land involved. Executive Director Ronchetti acknowledged the concerns with future Uptown and HYSA, but highlighted the economic impact of the potential location. Executive Director Ronchetti suggested solutions to prioritize protecting the cities land as an asset while supporting the financing of the project.

Commissioner Pionk expressed concerns on the potential location of the Great Northern Sports Dome being counter intuitive to Uptown regarding economic impacts, housing density, and designs. Executive Director Ronchetti stated that there is still opportunity for greater density in terms of housing and mixed-use districts, and that staff discussed that this project can drive participation. Executive Director Ronchetti also acknowledged that they were approached about the Dome again after the start of Uptown, and staff have had discussions about how the Great Northern Sports Dome can fit into Uptown, highlighting benefits of this projects economic drivers to bring retail to Uptown. Community Development Director Eric Johnson also added that Uptown project and the Dome have different ways to meld together in regards to finding a plan that will work between the projects.

Commissioners had discussion and questions regarding the location of the Great Northern Sports Dome. DJ Lahti shared in his experience of visiting to other sports domes that the benefit of having a dome in a city center attracts buildings and businesses. DJ Lahti additionally stated a dome doesn't need to be in proximity to other complexes because when it is nice enough for outdoor facilities to be used the dome use would be in a low point of the season. Commissioner LeBlanc asked how tall the facility will be with a concern of a housing development being close by. DJ Lahti answered with 75 feet, which Executive Director Ronchetti confirmed that the maximum allowable height is 80 feet. Commissioners briefly discussed using the land of the old football fields. Commissioner Geissler stated support for the idea of the Great Northern Sports Dome's proximity to Uptown and that the projects could work together. Commissioner LeBlanc also expressed support and President Boucher stated that the clinic would have better traffic and be easier to get to if in the proposed location.

6.2 Birch Hills Discussion

Executive Director Ronchetti gave a presentation to update the Commission on Birch Hills project. The presentation revisited the original intent of the project, overview of updated design plans, and discussed where the proforma stands. In the presentation the intentions for the Birch Hills project was Comp Plan alignment on housing strategy and goals. Executive Director Ronchetti went through a rough 40% design layout, showing lot types, density, grade models, and a trail extension. An update on financials included up to date expenditures, soft costs, hard costs, overview of total funds, and options on how the project would get paid over time. Commissioner Geissler left at 6:40pm.

Commissioner Hjelle was curious about what income range the project was geared towards. Executive Director Ronchetti explained that the five designated homes in the projects development would not sell for more than 115% Annual Median Income (AMI) while having a goal to work with a developer that would sell them below 115% AMI. Commissioner LeBlanc expressed concerns about the Cities portion of costs. Executive Director Ronchetti explained that the City will not have a cost in the homes and only cost would be to produce the lots as their contribution to the project. Community Development Director Johnson highlighted use of grants through the county for infrastructure, that hadn't been in the proforma.

Commissioners LeBlanc asked questions regarding AMI for the area and selection process for individuals who would qualify. Executive Director Ronchetti explained the potential selection process as an application process with income verification and ways to structure deeds to avoid turn around, and that this could be done through a contracted third party. Executive Director Ronchetti informed the commission that the AMI of Hermantown in 2022 was 100,000 dollars, reasons as to why these households are struggling to buy housing.

The Commission as a whole discussed what a Cities role in developing housing should look like, increasing housing density, and lack of single-family housing development in Hermantown. Commissioner Pionk noted that business models have changed so large corporations are no longer buying housing for workers. President Boucher noted that if

they can't find the right builder they could still sell the five lots at market but showed support for developing the land for housing. Commissioner Unzen left at 7:08pm. Commissioner Peterson suggested giving the land away under a land conveyance with development requirements so the city would not be responsible for infrastructure. The Commission concluded that there is not full support and directed staff to instead evaluate other options for other versions of public private partnerships, potential land conveyance for more control over whole development instead of five lots, and wait see what market does.

7. **RECESS**

Motion to recess at 7:36 p.m. This motion, made by Hjelle and seconded by Pionk, Carried.

Mayor Wayne Boucher:	Yea
Councilor John Geissler:	Absent
Councilor Andy Hjelle:	Yea
Councilor Joe Peterson:	Yea
Councilor Brian LeBlanc:	Yea
Karen Pionk:	Yea
Rob Unzen:	Absent

Yea: 5, Nay: 0, Absent: 2

Recorded by:

Chad Ronchetti, Executive Director