



**Fire Contract City Council Meeting
June 23, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.
Sturgeon Lake City Hall**

The following council members were present at the hall: Mayor Scott Helfman, Councilmember Todd Booker, Councilmember Nick Dagel, and Councilmember Ken Grey

The following Councilmembers were absent: Councilmember Mark Noyes

The following city employees were present at the hall: Fire Chief Al Cekalla and City Clerk/Treasurer Sandra Osterdyk

The following city members were absent: none

Members of the public who were present: Mark Seger, Pam Larson, and Veryl Zellmer

Fire Contract City Council Meeting

Call to order: Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, Mayor Helfman called the Regular City Council Meeting to order at 6:02 pm, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Special Guests and Visitor Comments

The Fire Chief presented the 2027 Fire Contracts for review. It was explained that the contracts include a 6% rate increase for the year, based on the standard inflation rate and the higher cost-of-living rate. Mark Seger from Birch Creek asked for a status update on the new fire hall. Fire Chief Cekalla informed him that there is no plan for a new fire hall at this time due to costs. There has been discussion about a heated pole barn building. He asked whether there is a special fund for the new hall or whether this will affect the jurisdictions' annual rate increase. Fire Chief Cekalla explained that part of the fire budget will go toward paying for utilities and the new hall. They might use some of the funds to pay for construction, depending on what they receive in grants. It will depend on where they get their funding. Mark Seger asked for his plan for how many years they need to look ahead, so that the rate could continue to increase, maybe to 10%, to cover these costs. The Fire Chief explained that the fee for the townships and cities on the fire contract is raised based on the inflation rate. Right now, it's 4.2%. If we go with a 4.5% increase, we're only treading water. At 5%, that's only half a percent and a half on top of our budget. We are not raising funds to build a pole shed or a fire hall. That's not what the fund is designed for. Our labor costs just for the department are around 25 to 30. That's just for making calls, our fire calls, our medical calls, and in-house training. We quit paying our members outside training hours. If anyone goes to Pine Tech for a class or to Duluth for an electric vehicle class, we're not paying our firefighters for those training hours because we can't afford to. Our understanding under our bylaws is that only in-house training hours, our in-house meetings, and our calls are paid for. We have 22 members right now, and a good number are solid full-time members who make our meetings. There is a lot of cost involved there. The turnout gear has to be turned over every 10 years; that's the NFPA (National Fire Protection Association) rule. Might seem unfair for a fair department of our size, or maybe in Pine County. For the cities, yes. But that's the rule. Probably half of our members are wearing gear over 10 years old. A new set of turnout gear for a new member is around \$5,000. That's your jacket, pants, boots, helmet, gloves, flashlight, and everything you need. SCBA's, luckily, we just got those replaced two years ago from a grant received from FEMA. The grant was approximately \$120,000 and it cost \$135,000 to replace everything, and that's every 14 years. Now we have radios, and over the next two or three years. Right now, they are starting to drop, or they just stop working. Working to get grants, but we have tried and haven't been funded. If we don't, that will come out of our budget. That's about \$6,500 per handheld. We have nine handhelds. For truck radios, we have five that cost about \$8,000 each. We don't even have a base radio; they run for about \$10,000. There are a lot of expenses coming. We just try to save and spend wisely. We don't spend money on things we don't need, and we save and invest. We understand the complexity of securing grants. They're not easy, and they're not out there right now. There were no further questions from the guests

present at this time. Mayor Helfman thanked the Fire Chief for clarifying everything. Councilmember T. Booker stated he thinks 6% is reasonable.

Jurisdiction	2026 Contract	2027 Increase	2027 Contract Amount
Birch Creek Twp.	\$ 18,051.31	\$ 1,083.08	\$ 19,134.39
Denham City	\$ 2,798.06	\$ 167.88	\$ 2,965.94
Sturgeon Lake City	\$ 25,721.46	\$ 1,543.29	\$ 27,264.75
Sturgeon Lake Twp.	\$ 31,025.43	\$ 1,861.53	\$ 32,886.96
TOTALS:	\$ 77,596.27	\$ 4,655.78	\$ 82,252.04

Councilmember T. Booker moved to accept the 6% for the 2027 Fire Contract rate increase, seconded by Councilmember N. Dagel. The motion carried by a roll call vote, with all members present voting in favor, M. Noyes absent.

All Fire Council Jurisdictions 2027 Fire Contract will be updated with the new rate and sent to the local jurisdictions for signatures. The City of Sturgeon Lake website will be updated to include Fire Chief Cekalla's contact information so everyone can contact him directly going forward.

New Business

Unfinished Business

Councilmember K. Grey shared that he received the May 13, 2026, DNR Incident Report from the Data Request he completed regarding the property at 28350 Moose Horn Lane. This report was also forwarded to the council by the City Clerk for their review.

Councilmember K. Grey reached out to Pine County regarding camping ordinances and learned that the county will not step in. Mayor Helfman will contact Councilmember K. Grey to get additional information.

Zero Turn new tires are working good. There will be letters going out to residents regarding the road right of way.

Announcements

The next Regular City Council Meeting will be on Tuesday, July 14, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.
The 2027 Budget Meeting will be on Tuesday, July 21, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.
National Night Out is Tuesday, August 4, 2026.

Adjournment

Councilmember K. Grey made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Councilmember N. Dagel. The motion carried, with all members present voting in favor; Councilmember M. Noyes absent. The meeting adjourns at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Scott Helfman

Sturgeon Lake Mayor



Sandra Osterdyk

Sturgeon Lake City Clerk/Treasurer