

City of Eldridge Special Committee of the Whole Meeting Minutes

The City of Eldridge, Iowa, City Council met in an open Special Committee of the Whole City Council session at Eldridge Community Center at 7:00 pm on July 13, 2026.

Council Members Present: Brian Dockery, Jeff Ashcraft, Adrian Blackwell and Scott La Plante. Absent: Ryan Iossi.

Presiding: Mayor Scott Campbell

Also Present: Nevada Lemke, Jeff Martens, Tabbitha Kramer, Cpl. Jack Schwertman, Officer Travis Rountree, Erin Gentz, John Bain, Cheryl Meyer, Janelle Dickman, Dennis and Judy Dean Mike and Karen Martin, Judith Gilbert, Lucas Macklin, Ken Karker, Pat Howell, Larry Howell, Jacob Harkey, Emily Carolan, Melanie Schneckloth, Bryan Yanke, Riley Webster, DeWane, Darlys Dickman, Crista Ashcraft, Scott Dickman, Keith Schneckloth, Tim Reimers, Marilyn Reimers, Gwen Tombergs, Dave Wayne, Nancy Case, Scott Case, Dave Erch, Ben Leka, Adam Spainhohn, Theresa Stock, Nate Gainer, Cassandra Gainer, Beth Campbell, John Zogg, Andrew Doyle, Jared Mackie, Deanna Jensen-Valliere, Judy Kirby, Chris Lawrence, Meg Knight, Pat Gainer, Tim Martinek, Suzy Gainer, Matt Eickert, Kelly Engler, Lisa Engler

Motion by Dockery to approve the agenda. Second by Blackwell. Motion approved by unanimous voice vote.

Discussion of the future of the Fire Protection and EMS Services in the City of Eldridge

Mayor Campbell began by thanking the Fire Department for agreeing to a meeting. He thanked Patrick, Tim, Brian, Andrew and Dave for speaking on behalf of the Fire Department. He then summarized the last fourteen months of discussion between the City and the Fire Department emphasizing the volunteers' burnout and dwindling numbers. The Fire Department confirmed that was an accurate summary, noting the delay in progress from May to December.

Budget Discussion:

Mayor Campbell stated that because of budget discussions between the City and the Fire Department, by April 8, 2026, there was a \$50,000 gap between the City's certified budget, including the Fire District Number 3's contribution, and the Fire Department's budget. On June 12, the Fire Department notified the City that they had voted unanimously to stay independent. They then requested that the City increase its funding from \$364,000 to approximately \$766,000 a year. The Fire Department clarified that the \$400,000 increase was the addition of their capital expense budget to the operational expense budget. Despite being only \$50,000 apart in year one, they expressed concern for the significant gap in years two and three of a potential three-year service agreement. They stated the noted capital improvements are designed to specifically address the need for more volunteers by allowing people who reside outside of the city limits to serve, subsequently, those volunteers require outfitting at roughly \$6,000 each, resulting in increased expense. The Fire Department reminded the City that they need a minimum of three-year contract to operate successfully.

Mayor Campbell and City Administrator explained that a three-year service agreement was not possible because contracts cannot go outside of the term of the mayor and that vendors' capital expenses are not considered separately when contracting with vendors.

Capital Improvements and Volunteer Recruitment:

The Fire Department summarized the improvements in three measurable items: finishing the upstairs into living quarters to attract more volunteers, gradual replacement of aging rigs, and hiring a full-time person to manage the administrative responsibilities to combat burnout of the volunteers. They indicated that their hope is to nearly double the number of members, potentially for many years, just as Leclaire's numbers doubled when they built out their new station.

Councilman Dockery agreed that finishing the upstairs should be a priority, but suggested a hybrid, long-term situation and potentially hiring a part-time manager rather than a chief.

The Fire Department emphasized that they are concerned that the emergency response will start to diminish due to low membership and burnout.

Municipal Department Option or Independent:

The Fire Department warned the City that the membership could potentially be cut in half should the City absorb it. They also stated that the provided three-year budget is what is required to continue as an independent department. The idea of the hybrid-approach where the city would have administrative responsibility and the volunteer company operated it, would have to be discussed at length by the department. The Fire Department insisted that the need for a full-time chief or administrator would help to ease the burden on the volunteers. The Fire Department stated that whatever the plan is, it needs to happen quickly.

The City and the Fire Department agreed to continue communication and to figure out a plan to move forward.

Motion by Dockery to adjourn at 8:27 pm. Seconded by Blackwell. Motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tabbitha Kramer

Deputy City Clerk