Birmingham City Commission Minutes
Public Hearing on the 2025-2026 Recommended Budget
April 26, 2025
8:30 a.m.
Municipal Building, 151 Martin
Video Link: https://vimeo.com/1077465200

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Therese Longe, Mayor, opened the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

II. ROLL CALL

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk, called the roll.

Present: Mayor Longe
MPT Baller
Commissioner Emerine
Commissioner Haig
Commissioner Host
Commissioner Long
Commissioner Schafer

Absent: None

Staff: City Manager Ecker; Assistant Fire Chief Bartalino, Birmingham Shopping District Director Bassett, City Clerk Bingham, Information Technology Manager Brunk, Finance Director Chavez, Human Resources Manager Ciluffo, Assistant City Manager Clemence, City Engineer Coatta, Baldwin Library Director Craft, Planning Director Dupuis, Assistant City Manager Fairbairn, Parking Systems Manager Ford, Building Maintenance Superintendent Galik, Police Chief Grewe, City Attorney Kucharek, Museum Director Pielack, Police Captain Wald, Fire Chief Wells, Department of Public Services Director Zielinski, Building Official Zielke

III. PUBLIC HEARING – 2025-2026 RECOMMENDED BUDGET

Mayor Longe and CM Ecker provided introductory comments. FD Chavez presented the budget overview and staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

There was no public comment regarding the introductory comments or the budget overview.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The cost of water is set, and the maintenance cost reflects Birmingham's investment in upgrading and repairing its sewer and water infrastructure.
- The City decided to stop having property taxes support the cost of water, in part as the result of a number of lawsuits across the State regarding that topic.
- The increase in water and sewer costs next year will not be as high. The increases are presently high because Birmingham chose to accelerate its transition from subsidizing the system with property taxes.
- It would be helpful to understand why the swings in water consumption occur and why the cost of water and sewage disposal increases year-to-year.

For the General Fund, ACM Fairbairn presented the Commission and the Manager's Office budgets, BMS Galik presented the City Hall & Grounds and the Property Maintenance-Library budgets, HRM Ciluffo presented the Human Resources budget, CC Bingham presented the Clerk's Office budget, and FD Chavez and CM Ecker presented the Finance Department, Legal, and General Administration budgets.

There was no public comment regarding the General Fund. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The cost of assessing reflected in this packet will be going up by 46% if the City continues to use Oakland County's assessing services.
- The City Clerk earned thanks for her work on the planned software upgrades.

FD Chavez presented the Judicial budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Judicial budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

For Public Safety, PC Grewe presented the Police and Dispatch budgets, FC Wells presented the Fire and Emergency Management budgets, and BO Zielke presented the Building budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Public Safety budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- Given that patrol vehicles must remain running, patrol vehicles accumulate high miles relatively quickly.

For Public Works, CE Coatta presented the Engineering budget and DPSD Zielinski presented the Public Services budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Public Works budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- It would be helpful if all of the road infrastructure related funds were presented at one time so that a discussion of the funds could occur at one time.
- Expenses and revenues should be presented together.

The Commission took a brief recess, and returned from recess.

FD Chavez presented the Health and Welfare budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Health and Welfare budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The significant notes referencing this section should clarify how the funds for the Next Senior Services Center were budgeted.
- It would be worth looking into having a full-time mental health co-responder for Birmingham in the future. The return on investment for this service has been significant.
- Working with OCHN on the co-responder team allows Birmingham to access more resources, of a higher quality, than the City could otherwise on its own.
- The City should consider whether the mental health mobile application presently available to the Police Department should be offered to other City employees as well.
- The Police Department should inform the Commission if 24-hour coverage for the co-responders would be beneficial.

PD Dupuis presented the Community and Economic Development budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Community and Economic Development budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The 2040 Plan is a hugely important document to the City. The Michigan Planning and Enabling Act requires that master plans be updated every five years. The City is two years into the adoption of the 2040 Plan and has not yet taken significant steps towards implementing it. The City cannot delay updating the Zoning Ordinance, which would be the first significant step towards implementing the 2040 Plan. The Planning Department deserves the Commission’s support in this effort.
- The data provided about civic and built environment improvements in the Planning Department's section of the budget was helpful.
- A workshop on how the Commission might fund its wayfinding and branding goals would be appropriate.

For Recreation and Culture, DPSD Zielinski presented the Parks & Recreation, Ice Arena, and Community Activities budgets. MD Pielack presented the Birmingham Historical Museum budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Recreation and Culture budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- MD Pielack was commended again for her appointment to the Michigan Historical Commission.

FD Chavez presented the Transfers Out budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Transfers Out budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The City is planning an approximately 50% increase in total spending on road repairs and improvements for FY 2026. Each following fiscal year presently budgeted also plans for increased road repair and improvements.
- The budget seems to indicate that ending fund balances are decreasing every year. The Commission may need to discuss this topic.
- Page 37 offers a good indication of the total of all funds, less depreciation. After that page, it would be helpful to see the ending fund balances for each individual unit.
- It might be possible to reallocate funds to allow for further road repairs and improvements. The Commission could explore increasing the budget for the resurfacing program.
- The State designates 'major' streets. The Commission should evaluate how major streets are assessed within the City, and the City should also advocate for State support for repairs to major streets.
- The surfaces of Cole and Lincoln have caused much consternation among residents. They are streets with high volumes of traffic. It might be possible to resurface Cole when Eton is being done.
- The City should poll a statistically significant number of residents to determine City investment priorities. It would be important for City staff to have input on the poll. The poll should also be designed to account for the importance of some priorities that might not reach the level of public awareness, such as water and sewer infrastructure.

FD Chavez introduced the Special Revenue Funds budget. CE Coatta presented the Major and Local Streets budgets, DPSD Zielinski presented the Solid Waste Disposal budget, CM Ecker presented the Sustainability and Climate Action Fund and the Senior Services Fund budget, and FD Chavez presented the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission, the Law & Drug Enforcement Fund, the Opioid Settlement Fund, and the Community Development Block Grant budgets.

There was no public comment regarding the Special Revenue Funds budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The City has a millage for refuse collection.
- Fund budgets are categorized in a number of different ways within the budget.
- The senior services funds can be accrued until the appropriate use is available. It does not have to be spent immediately upon receipt.

For Enterprise Funds, PSM Ford presented the Automobile Parking System budget, CE Coatta and DPSD Zielinski presented the Water Supply System and the Sewage Disposal budgets, and DPSD Zielinski presented both of the Golf Course budgets.

There was no public comment regarding the Enterprise Funds budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The Parking Enterprise fund should be approached as a business. The Commission should provide the Parking Department with direction on what it would like to see within a five-year plan.
- The APC should study appropriate ways of increasing parking revenue. The parking system is heavily utilized by non-residents who use City services and infrastructure while within the City. The parking system should have better ways of recouping some of those costs from non-residents.
- A congestion tax is one option that could be explored. Detroit is considering an entertainment tax like Chicago has. If these taxes are levied, the APC and other City bodies should study how those taxes should then be allocated to different funds.
- The City also needs to balance its desire to generate more revenue from parking with its desire to continue attracting visitors to its downtown.
- It does make sense not to increase monthly permit parking costs for each garage until the repairs on that garage are complete.
- Complaints about parking in the City are likely more due to wayfinding and perception issues than an actual lack of parking spaces. The City has almost 5,000 parking spaces. It is also normal within walkable cities that one may not be able to find parking directly in front of the business being

visited.
- Sewer rates are based on which sewage district a property is in. Birmingham does not determine sewer rates for properties.
- It would be useful to understand why these rates are being increased.
- The rates tend to be higher than other states that do not have access to as much fresh water as Michigan does.
- The higher rates reflect the challenges of old infrastructure.
- Municipalities have representation in the rate setting process.
- Residents remain concerned about flooding backups into basements.
- Residents can install a backflow preventer in order to address the issue. The City should invest more into publicizing backflow preventers, advising how it is installed, and advising the approximate costs.
- It must also be noted that installing a backflow preventer could impact the likelihood of a neighbor's basement flooding.
- The City is working to separate storm and sewer with the aim of reducing backflow issues.
- Oakland County and Birmingham require large commercial projects to do onsite water detention.
- Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner Jim Nash offered to do a presentation for Birmingham on some of these topics. The City should pursue that opportunity.
- Mr. Nash will also be offering a presentation for elected officials on May 8, 2025, on these topics. Commissioner Emerine plans to be in attendance.
- Birmingham's water and sewer infrastructure flows into infrastructure located in neighboring municipalities. Since Birmingham cannot directly control that infrastructure, anything the City can do within its boundaries to decrease or slow flow into the water and sewer systems will be beneficial. As a result, options like rain gardens and retention ponds are important.
- Springdale Golf Course shows revenue under expenses and Lincoln Hills Golf Course shows revenue above expenses.
- The golf course enterprise fund is not losing money. The Lincoln Hills clubhouse expenditure is still being reimbursed to the City's General Fund. The golf courses pay for their portion of DPS services.
- The City manages any issues that arise with parties showing up late to their tee times.
- The golf courses are valuable. They are also expensive to maintain and serve a relatively small group, including a number of non-residents.
- When there is an emergency expense allocation, the City does not amend the budget book for that year.
- The City will be pursuing grant opportunities for streambank stabilization.

ITM Brunk presented the Information Technology budget.

There was no public comment regarding the Information Technology budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:
- Artificial intelligence should continue to be evaluated for uses within the City.

The Commission took a brief recess, and returned from recess.

For Component Units, BSDD Bassett presented the Principal Shopping District budget, LD Craft and CM Ecker presented the Baldwin Public Library budget, and FD Chavez presented the Brownfield Redevelopment Authority and the Triangle District Corridor Improvement Authority (TDCIA) budgets.

There was no public comment regarding the Component Units budget. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:
- The Library budget does not reflect potential future funding reductions at the State level.
- Birmingham schools presently have generators. It might be more practical to use the schools as resiliency centers since they presently have generators than it would be to install a generator at the library.
- It might also be possible to increase the number of solar panels planned for the library, and to use solar battery backups instead of using a traditional generator in the event of a power outage.
- The library should solicit another quote for solar panels because economic conditions and prices are changing.

FD Chavez presented the Debt Service Fund and the Greenwood Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund budgets.

There was no public comment regarding the Debt Service Fund or the Greenwood Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund budgets. Staff answered informational questions from the Commission.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The City is well below its allowed debt service limit.

At the request of the Mayor, CM Ecker and FD Chavez discussed the Capital Improvement Plan.

Commissioners raised the following points during discussion:

- The City should better narrativize its investments and increases in capital improvements for the public. It would be helpful if some specific projects and the investment of tax dollars was highlighted.
- Residents are also often confused about where the City's increased taxable value revenue is invested.
- The budget also indicates where increased revenue is invested throughout the City. It pays for capital improvements, new projects, capital equipment, repairs, vehicles, wages, and other necessary expenses.
- Increased taxable value revenue in part allows the City to weather potential adverse macroeconomic conditions.
- The City is lucky that its taxable value continues to increase so that it does not have to access its emergency fund balance.
- The dollar bill graphic of where the millages go could be improved with a bit more granularity and further publicized for residents.
- A stacked bar chart showing where money was invested in past fiscal years and where it will be invested in future fiscal years could be useful. The vertical axis should be dollars instead of a percentage in order to communicate more impactfully.
- Pages 317-321 were very helpful.
- In its efforts at fiscal responsibility, the City decided previously not to improve road surfaces without improvements to the underlying infrastructure. The Commission should evaluate whether there are conditions where the road surface might be so deteriorated that it would be appropriate to carry out road resurfacing without improving the underlying infrastructure.
- The Commission should also evaluate whether it would like to increase its wayfinding budget.
- Polling residents for their priorities could be discussed at a future meeting.
- Oak, west of Woodward, is a very difficult road surface to drive on.
- Ranking the streets based on overall repair needs is appropriate.
- Isolating the road surface criterion and using it to choose and conduct some extra road surface repairs per year could be beneficial.
- Residents remain concerned about the road surfaces and the driving experience. The City should allow for some flexibility of road repairs because some of the road surfaces are so deteriorated.
- Extra payments into the retiree healthcare fund could be reduced, and that reduction could be used for emergency road repairs.
- City expenditures overall should be evaluated based on discretionary and non-discretionary spending, and based on the best long-term use.
- The City could re-balance its spending on some aspects of discretionary projects in order to moderately increase its spending on non-discretionary ones.
- The City experienced a prior period of under-investment in infrastructure. This Commission has been diligent in increasing the amount of infrastructure investment.
- The City's road repair metric could include other criteria as well, including funding sources, flow of water and sewage, patterns of commercial, residential, and non-residential usage, and other aspects.
- It might be appropriate to explore the legality of funding road repairs for streets with increased non-residential usage differently from streets with primarily residential usage.
- Some of the discretionary mast arm replacements could be postponed, and those funds could be redirected to wayfinding.
- Staff should identify prior commission-directed expenditures that do not align with current priorities and propose reallocating those funds by June 2025.
- There is an opportunity to learn how to improve resident communication based on the recent experience with Wimbleton. For example, Abbey Street has planned repairs divided over a number of fiscal years. To improve resident understanding of this and similar multi-year road repair projects, proactively communicating project timelines and the rationale for phasing the work is crucial. The City can also use charrettes and community feedback meetings for communicating about these and similar projects.
- It might be appropriate to have a workshop on improving project-related communications.

The Mayor thanked all the staff involved in the budget process.

IV. ADJOURN

The Commission adjourned at 1:36 p.m.

Alexandria Bingham, City Clerk

Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist