



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE

GOVERNANCE AND PRIORITIES COMMITTEE REPORT

Monday, November 17, 2025 at 12:05 p.m.

Report of a meeting held on Monday, November 17, 2025 at 12:05 p.m. in the City Hall Council Chamber. The following Committee members were in attendance:

Chair: Mayor B. Hendriksen,
Councillor S. Arden-Smith,
Councillor G. Cochrane,
Councillor R. Fequet,
Councillor R. Foote,
Councillor C. McGurk,
Councillor T. McLennan,
Councillor S. Payne, and
Councillor R. Warburton.

The following members of Administration staff were in attendance:

S. Van Dine,
C. Caljouw,
D. Gillard,
C. Greencorn,
C. MacLean,
K. Pandoo,
K. Thistle,
C. White,
G. White, and
S. Jovic.

<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>
1.	(For Information Only) Mayor Hendriksen read the Opening Statement.
2.	(For Information Only) There were no disclosures of conflict of interest.



3. **Committee read a memorandum regarding whether to encourage development on vacant land and address underutilized lots and derelict buildings by:**
- (i) **Amending By-law No. 4207 to create a new tax class for vacant land; and**
 - (ii) **Bringing forward a by-law to regulate vacant and abandoned buildings**

Committee noted that in Yellowknife, the need for additional housing is growing, driven by population pressures and a constrained supply of developable land. The city's unique geography and limited land base make it especially important to ensure that all available lots are being used efficiently. Vacant and abandoned buildings not only represent missed opportunities for housing and commercial development, but also pose safety hazards, detract from the city's visual appeal, and hinder economic growth. These properties can become sites of vandalism and community concern.

With increasing demand for residential and commercial space, there is strong interest in incentivizing property owners to develop key locations. At the July 14, 2025, Governance and Priorities Committee (GPC) meeting, members inquired about the possibility of taxing vacant land at a higher rate to encourage development. As a result, Administration was tasked with exploring the feasibility of creating a new tax class for vacant and undeveloped land. Specifically, committee members asked Administration whether the City has the legal authority to introduce a new property class for vacant land and, if so, whether it can be limited to the downtown area.

Council Strategic Direction/Resolution/Policy include:

Strategic Direction #1:

Focus Area 1.2

People First

Housing for All

Doing our part to create the context for diverse housing and accommodation options.

Key Initiative 1.2.1

Setting the context and foundation for a fulsome continuum of housing options, from social to market to workforce accommodation.

Focus Area 1.3

Liveable Community

Supporting all residents to participate in the social fabric and physical space of our community.

Key Initiative 1.3.3

Supporting design standards that are multi-modal, including recognizing Yellowknife's advantages as a winter city.

Strategic Direction #3:

Focus Area 3.1

Sustainable Future

Resilient Future

Enhancing Yellowknife as a great place to live, visit, work and play now and into the future.



Focus Area 3.2	<u>Growth Readiness</u> Ensuring land development supports economic readiness and community priorities.
Key Initiative 3.2.2	Completing land development tools and strategies that support growth readiness.
Key Initiative 3.2.3	Modernizing development incentive options.
Focus Area 3.3	<u>Robust Economy</u> Doing our part to stimulate and amplify economic development opportunities.
Motion #0141-22	That Council direct Administration to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) utilize the Revitalization Initiative Fund toward the development of City owned lands within the Downtown by contributing to the Land Fund to facilitate:<ul style="list-style-type: none">a. selling Lots 8, 9, and 10, Block 31, Plan 65 (5016, 5018 and 5022 50th Street) for less than appraised value, pursuant to a Request for Proposal process; andb. selling Lot 34, Block 30 (50/50 Lot) for less than appraised values, pursuant to the Terms of Reference/Request for Proposal attached to and forming part of the memorandum to committee dated September 12, 2022.(ii) transfer \$2.275 million dollars from the Revitalization Initiative Fund to the Land Administration Fund to cover the land value of the properties listed above;(iii) transfer \$141,000 dollars from the Revitalization Initiative Fund to the Downtown Improvement Reserve to support Development Incentives; and(iii) to close the Revitalization Initiative Fund.

Applicable legislation, by-laws, studies, plans include:

1. *Cities, Towns and Villages Act S.N.W.T. 2003;*
2. *Property Assessment and Taxation Act S.N.W.T. 2023;*
3. Zoning By-law No. 5045, as amended;
4. Land Administration By-law No. 5078; as amended;



5. Development Incentive By-law No. 5097;
6. Tax Administration By-law No. 4207, as amended;
7. City of Yellowknife Vision for Downtown Revitalization;
8. Retail Revitalization Strategy;
9. City of Yellowknife Economic Development Strategy (2020-2024);
10. 2010 Smart Growth Development Plan; and
11. City of Yellowknife Housing Needs Assessment.

Legislation

Section 15 of the *Property Assessment and Taxation Act* gives municipalities the authority to establish two or more property classes by by-law.

15. (1) The council of a municipal taxing authority may, by bylaw, establish two or more classes of property and describe the kind of assessed property that is to comprise each class.
- (2) Where no bylaw is passed under subsection (1), the assessed property in the municipal taxation area is deemed to comprise one property class.
- (3) Subject to section 15.1, a bylaw or an amendment or repeal of a bylaw made under this section becomes effective on January 1 following its enactment. R.S.N.W.T. 1988, c.54(Supp.), s.2; S.N.W.T. 2010, c.16, Sch.A, s.31(3), (5).

City of Yellowknife Tax Administration By-law No. 4207 currently establishes the following six property classes:

- (1) Class 1 – Residential
- (2) Class 2 – Multi-Residential
- (3) Class 3 – Commercial and Industrial
- (4) Class 4 – Mining and Quarrying
- (5) Class 5 – High-density Parking
- (6) Class 6 – Agricultural

By-law No. 4207 would need to be amended to establish a new property class for vacant land. A by-law creating a new property class that is passed in 2026 will take effect in 2027.

Establishing New Property Classes

(i) Vacant Land

Vacancy taxes—also known as the underused housing tax, vacant home tax, or empty homes tax—are increasingly being adopted in cities across Canada. These policies aim to discourage property owners from holding vacant, unutilized residential properties that are neither occupied nor rented. The goal is to alleviate pressure on housing markets and reduce the number of unused dwellings.



However, with a residential vacancy rate of just 1.8% in Yellowknife in 2024¹, the issue of unoccupied or unrented residential properties is not currently a concern for the city. Rather, the more pressing challenge is the limited availability of developable land, which makes it imperative to ensure that all available lots are being used efficiently to meet growing housing demand.

As noted above, while vacancy taxes on residential dwellings are becoming more common across Canada, there are currently no known examples of similar taxes being applied to vacant residential land. This may be due to the scarcity of undeveloped land in larger urban centres. Yellowknife does have limited number of vacant and underutilized parcels, particularly within the urban core.

Although the legislative framework exists to establish additional property classes and tax rates, to ensure fairness and effectiveness, the creation of a new property class for vacant land would require clear definitions, criteria for vacancy, and mechanisms for exemptions (e.g., for properties undergoing active development or facing legitimate barriers such as environmental remediation).

(ii) *Contaminated Sites*

Within municipal boundaries, there are currently two properties comprising 13 lots identified as contaminated by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. These lots are vacant and could be considered for a higher mill rate through the creation of a new “Contaminated Vacant Lots” property classification.

While this approach could generate additional tax revenue, it is unlikely to incentivize development, as remediation of contaminated sites often involves complex and costly processes that prohibit development. The City has had development incentives to support clean-up of contaminated sites for over fifteen years but to date there have been no applicants.

(iii) *Low-Density (Surface) Parking*

Approximately 40% of the development footprint in Downtown Yellowknife is currently dedicated to surface parking, excluding on-street parking areas. Recent amendments to the Zoning By-law have reduced parking requirements for Downtown developments, aiming to shift this balance.

Council may wish to consider implementing an increased mill rate for low-density parking lots to encourage large property owners—including real estate investment trusts (REITs), the Government of the Northwest Territories, and the Government of Canada—to consolidate surface parking and pursue redevelopment opportunities.

¹ CMHC Rental Market Survey – Yellowknife 2024 Edition (<https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-data/data-tables/rental-market/rental-market-report-data-tables>)



While this may result in increased demand for on-street parking in the short term, it could also promote greater use of transit and active transportation options over the medium to long term, aligning with broader sustainability and urban densification goals.

Vacant and Abandoned Buildings

A vacant land tax would not apply to properties that contain buildings or dwellings, even if they are unoccupied and slated for future demolition. This could create a loophole, where owners retain derelict structures to avoid taxation, potentially delaying redevelopment and the creation of new housing or commercial space.

In Yellowknife, vacant and abandoned buildings pose safety hazards, detract from the city's visual appeal, and hinder economic development. These properties are subject to vandalism and are a source of concern for residents. With increasing demand for residential and commercial space, there is a growing interest in incentivizing property owners to redevelop key locations.

To address similar challenges, the City of Whitehorse adopted a Vacant and Abandoned Buildings By-law, which regulates, prohibits, and imposes requirements on vacant and abandoned buildings. The by-law mandates that owners secure and maintain such properties to prevent damage, unauthorized entry, and safety risks. It also requires a permit with a sliding fee scale, starting at \$1,500 in Year 1 and increasing to \$8,000 by Year 4.

Currently, Yellowknife has limited tools to address concerns related to abandoned, vacant, and boarded-up buildings. Given the public safety risks and the underutilization of valuable real estate, a similar by-law could provide a more effective regulatory framework. Such a measure could complement the Development Incentives By-law, supporting increased development activity while addressing the challenges posed by underutilized lots and derelict structures.

Committee noted that given the urgent need for more housing and the limited availability of land within city boundaries, it is increasingly important to ensure that all developable lots are being used to their full potential. Vacant and abandoned properties not only represent missed opportunities for development but also contribute to a range of urban challenges, including safety hazards, reduced property values and increased risk of vandalism. These issues hinder economic growth, discourage investment, and undermine the City's efforts to create vibrant, livable communities.

Together, a Vacant Land Tax and a Vacant and Abandoned Buildings By-law would form a comprehensive strategy to address underutilized properties in Yellowknife. These measures would support Council's goals for downtown revitalization, housing development, and economic growth, while promoting fairness and accountability among property owners.

In response to a question from Committee, Administration undertook to provide clarification on whether, when a property remains on the action list but is not sold, ownership automatically reverts to the City.



Committee recommended that for the purpose of encouraging development on vacant land and addressing underutilized lots and derelict buildings, that Council direct Administration to bring forward:

- 1. A by-law to amend Tax Administration By-law No. 4207, as amended, to create a definition and new tax class for vacant land; and**
- 2. A by-law to regulate vacant and abandoned buildings.**

MOVE APPROVAL

(For Information Only)

4. Committee accepted for information a memorandum regarding upcoming meetings of the Capital Area Committee in 2026 to review potential developments in the designated Capital Area.

Committee noted a Capital Area Development Scheme, By-law No. 3934 was adopted by City Council in 1996 following the construction of the Legislative Assembly Building. The intent of the original Scheme was to preserve the natural setting around the Legislative Assembly site; to ensure that the Capital Area was developed to a high standard of land use planning and design practices. The Committee was established to develop cooperative decisions between the City and Territorial governments for the development and management of the area.

The Capital Area is identified in orange in Figure 1 below. On July 26, 2017, Council adopted By-law No. 4940, a by-law to approve an updated Capital Area Development Plan. This by-law also formed the Capital Area Committee, for the purpose of Plan implementation as well as maintenance and initiatives within the “Governance Area.” Included in the Capital Area Development Plan was a vision that the Capital Area would be an evolving expression of the Northwest Territories and of Yellowknife; to support a diverse and vibrant Capital City. The updated Plan shifted the focus of the 1996 Scheme from the Legislative Assembly site-based on natural area preservation to a focus on people (residents and visitors alike), the environment, the city facilities and benefit to the Northwest Territories as a whole.

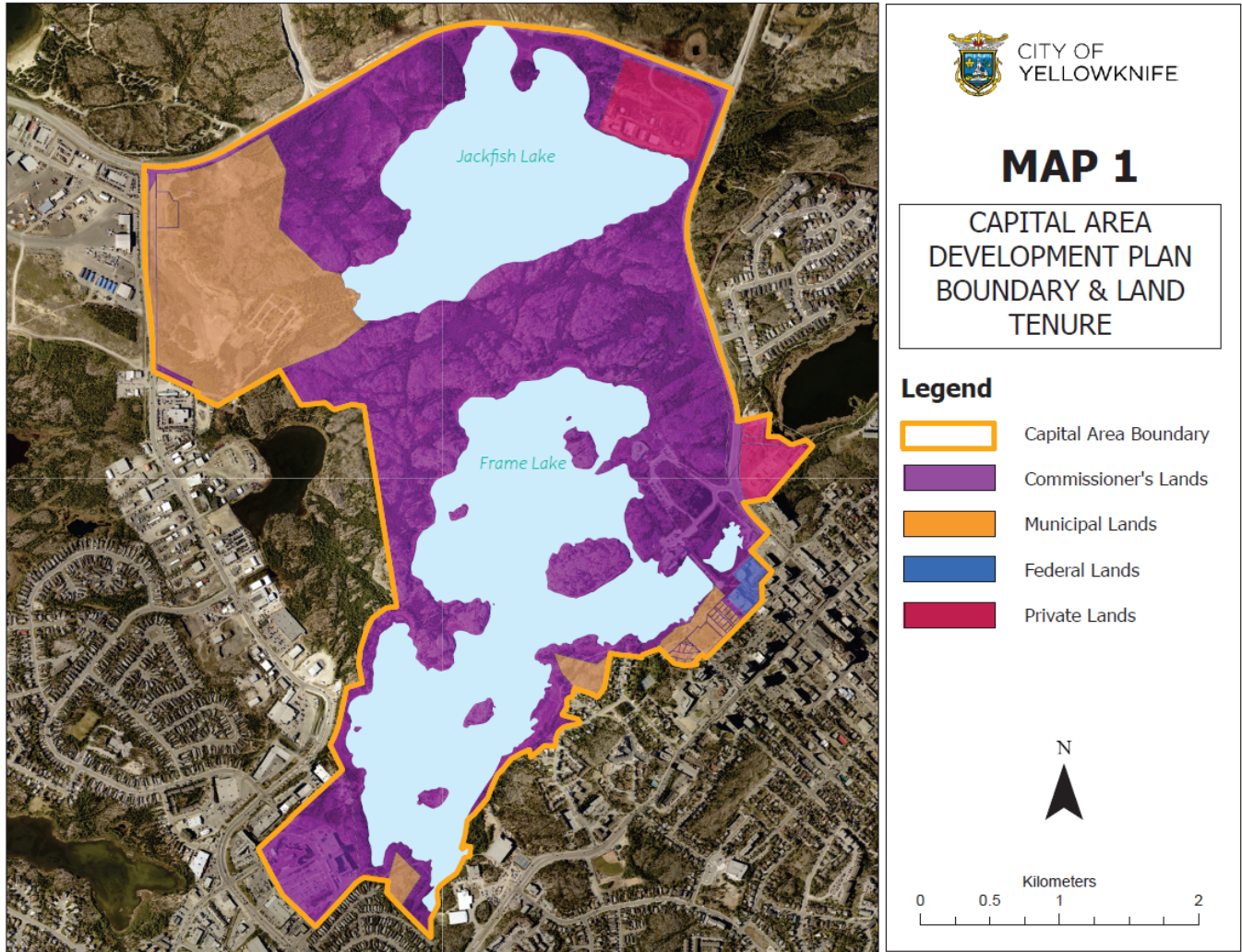
The Capital Area Committee approach combines various administrative roles for plan implementation. The Committee roles, as identified in the Plan are for land use, development, operations and maintenance planning, as well as implementation of the initiatives outlined in the Plan. The Committee Terms of Reference identify a structured reporting mechanism to elected officials which retains the administrative and operating aspect of the Committee. Each year members were to include \$50,000 in their budgets to support the plan; the City did so until 2024 when Council removed the allocation as no other member was committed to the contributions or committee meetings.

The need to hold meetings of the committee now arises from several proposals within the identified development area. Review by the Committee is required prior to moving forward to decisions by different agencies. Proposals include: the *Truth and Reconciliation*



Commission of Canada (TRC) IRS Survivors Monument; City request to obtain land adjacent to Frame Lake for development purposes and expansion of the Bristol lot for development.

Figure 1: Capital Area Development Plan Boundary and Land Tenure (updated 2025)



Council Strategic Direction/Resolution/Policy include:

Strategic Direction #1: People First

Focus Area 1.1

Reconciliation

Continuing to nurture positive and respectful relations with Indigenous governments, organizations and peoples.

Key Initiative 1.1.1

Continuing to strengthen relations with Indigenous governments and peoples.

Focus Area 1.2

Housing for All

Doing our part to create the context for diverse housing and accommodation options.



Focus Area 1.3	<u>Liveable Community</u> Supporting all residents to participate in the social fabric and physical space of our community.
Key Initiative 1.3.1	Providing affordable and diverse recreation and arts opportunities for residents.
Key Initiative 1.3.3	Supporting design standards that are multi-modal including recognizing Yellowknife's advantages as a winter city.
Strategic Direction #3:	Sustainable Future
Focus Area 3.1	<u>Resilient Future</u> Enhancing Yellowknife as a great place to live, visit, work and play now and into the future.
Focus Area 3.2	<u>Growth Readiness</u> Ensuring land development supports economic readiness and community priorities.
Key Initiative 3.2.1	Advocating for the transfer of vacant commissioner's land for growth.
Key Initiative 3.2.2	Completing land development tools and strategies that support growth readiness.
Key Initiative 3.2.3	Modernizing development incentive options.
Key Initiative 3.2.4	Sustaining infrastructure capacity for future growth.
Focus Area 3.3	<u>Robust Economy</u> Doing our part to stimulate and amplify economic development opportunities.
Key Initiative 3.3.1	Supporting all aspects of tourism and visitor services, including the accommodation levy and creation of the destination marketing organization.
Key Initiative 3.3.2	Implementing and renewing strategic economic diversification options.
Key Initiative 3.3.3	Aligning with regional and territorial economic opportunities.



Applicable legislation, by-laws, studies, plans include:

1. *Community Planning and Development Act S.N.W.T 2011,c.22;*
2. Community Plan By-law No. 5007, as amended;
3. Zoning By-law No. 5045, as amended;
4. Building By-law No. 5058;
5. Land Administration By-law No. 5078, as amended;
6. Capital Area Development Plan By-law No. 4940, as amended;
7. Smart Growth Development Plan, July 2010;
8. Reconciliation Framework (2021) & Action Plan (annual);
9. Accessibility Audit Report & Implementation Strategy (2018);
10. Arts and Culture Master Plan (2022);
11. 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness (2017);
12. Development & Design Standards (ongoing); and
13. Wayfinding Strategy & Implementation Plan (2019).

(For Information Only)

5. Councillor Arden-Smith left the meeting at 1:14 p.m.

(For Information Only)

6. Committee continued its discussion regarding a memorandum regarding upcoming meetings of the Capital Area Committee in 2026 to review potential developments in the designated Capital Area.

(For Information Only)

7. Committee accepted for information an update on Council's 2025 – 2026 Work Plan.

Committee noted that:

COUNCIL'S 2025 – 2026 WORK PLAN

- In June 2023, Council approved the 2023-2026 Strategic Directions for its term in office.
- Subsequently, Council approved an implementation action plan for their Strategic Directions (the "Work Plan"), which considered challenges arising from the tumultuous year that was 2023.
- In May 2024, Council reviewed a revised 2024-2026 Work Plan and, among other things, directed Administration to use the Work Plan to prioritize initiatives and tasks.
- In November 2024, Administration provided an update to Council on Work Plan accomplishments and looking ahead to 2025.



- On May 5, 2025, with less than two years left in Council's term of office, Committee heard a status update on the 2025 – 2026 Work Plan initiatives, Administration's prioritization of those initiatives, and how such work is advancing Council's Strategic Directions. Council subsequently approved a revised work plan on May 26, 2025.
- This update is intended to provide the latest status of Work Plan initiatives as of the end of October 2025 and to demonstrate Administration's new tool for organizing and tracking the Work Plan, Envisio. Administration will provide a further Work Plan update in late January 2026, following adjustments required after the adoption of Budget 2026.

ENVISIO

Development of a renewed performance measurement framework and dashboard is a Tier 1 initiative on Council's Work Plan. The intent of this initiative is to help guide work planning, resource management, establishment of priorities, and reporting. As part of this initiative, the City is employing a new cloud-based software called Envisio.

Envisio is a strategic planning and performance management software commonly used in the public sector. Administration can use Envisio to track and communicate progress on Council's priorities, goals, and Work Plan initiatives while eliminating the manual processes required for managing Word or Excel work planning documents. Examples of other Envisio Work Plan reports are attached to this memo.

Applicable legislation, by-laws, studies, plans include:
Council's Strategic Directions 2023 – 2026.

(For Information Only)

8. Committee recessed at 1:37 p.m. and reconvened at 1:47 p.m.

(For Information Only)

9. Councillor Payne left the meeting at 1:47 p.m.

(For Information Only)

10. Committee continued its discussion regarding Council's 2025 – 2026 Work Plan.
11. Councillor Cochrane moved,
Councillor Warbuton seconded,

That Committee move in camera at 1:47 p.m. to discuss a memorandum regarding whether to appoint someone to fill a vacant position on the Audit Committee and a legal matter.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY



(For Information Only)

12. Committee discussed a memorandum regarding whether to appoint someone to fill a vacant position on the Audit Committee.

(For Information Only)

13. Committee discussed a legal matter.

(For Information Only)

14. Councillor McGurk moved,
Councillor Warburton seconded,

That Committee return to an open meeting at 3:10 p.m.

MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

(Business Arising from in Camera Session)

15. **Committee read a memorandum regarding whether to appoint someone to fill a vacant position on the Audit Committee.**

Committee noted that there is a vacancy on the Audit Committee for an accountant.

It is the practice of the City to advertise all committee vacancies. The City advertised the vacancy, specifying that it be filled by an accountant on the City's website and social media sites.

Council Strategic Direction/Resolution/Policy include:

Council Goal #1 People First.

Motion #0459-96: "The following policy be adopted with respect to appointments to municipal boards and committees:

- i) The maximum consecutive years that an individual may serve on any one board or committee is six.
- ii) Individuals who have served the maximum six-year period on one municipal board or committee shall be eligible to be appointed to another board or committee.
- iii) No individual shall be precluded from serving concurrent terms on more than one municipal board or committee.
- iv) Notwithstanding that an individual appointee has served less than six years on a particular board or committee, Council may, after the expiration of the first or subsequent terms of that appointee, advertise for applicants to fill a vacancy on that board or committee.
- v) Notwithstanding clause (i.) of this policy, should the City receive no applications to fill a vacancy on any particular



board or committee, the six year maximum limitation may, at the discretion of City Council, be waived.

Applicable legislation, by-laws, studies, plans include:

1. *Cities, Towns and Villages Act*, and
2. Audit Committee By-law No. 4217, as amended.

Consistency

The Audit Committee has recommended staggered terms for Committee members.

Legislation

Audit Committee By-law No. 4127 requires outside members to reside in Yellowknife and be independent from City Council, management, auditors, legal counsel and major contractors. Section 4.a.ii(1) states that the currently vacant position must be filled by an accountant.

Procedural Considerations

The Audit Committee helps to enhance the auditor's real and perceived independence by providing an intermediary link between the auditor and Council. The Audit Committee limits the reliance Council must place on the technical expertise of the independent auditor.

Committee noted that the Audit Committee is intended to function with a full complement of six members. Having the term of a new member expire in three years will conform to the staggered term recommendation.

Committee recommended that Council appoint Edwin Shu, an accountant, pursuant to Audit Committee By-law No. 4127, to serve on the City of Yellowknife (City) Audit Committee for a three-year term commencing November 25, 2025 and ending November 24, 2028.

MOVE APPROVAL

16. The meeting adjourned at 3:11 p.m.