

City of Northfield

*City Hall
801 Washington Street
Northfield, MN 55057
northfieldmn.gov*



Meeting Agenda

Tuesday, February 10, 2026

6:00 PM

Work Session

Will Follow the Regular City Council Meeting

Council Chambers

City Council

6:00 PM - CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION AGENDA**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor: Zweifel

Councilmembers: Beumer, Dahlen, Holmes, Ness, Peterson White, Sokup

REGULAR AGENDA

1. [26-073](#) Discussion of Financial Review Areas of Focus, Process, and Representation.

ADJOURN

Note: *The City Council may take a five minute break during the meeting. All regular City Council meetings end at 9:00 pm unless a simple (4/7) majority of the City Council vote to extend the time.*

SPECIAL NEEDS: *If you require special services to attend or participate in a public meeting, please call the City's Administration Office at (507) 645-3001 or e-mail Lynette Peterson, City Clerk, at lynette.peterson@northfieldmn.gov. TDD users can call (507) 645-3030. Please call at least 24 hours before the meeting, if possible.*



Legislation Text

File #: 26-073, Version: 1

City Council Meeting Date: February 10, 2026

To: Mayor and Members of Council

From: Ben Martig, City Administrator

Discussion of Financial Review Areas of Focus, Process, and Representation.

Action Requested:

Discussion only.

Summary Report:

Councilor Dahlen has proposed the following motion to be considered by the City Council:

Move that the City Council form a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) to advise the Council on the revenue and spending decisions (operating expenses, CIP, CEP, etc.) before the Council. The CAG shall consist of minimum of 5 and a maximum of 7 members who are Northfield residents or commercial taxpayers in Northfield and chosen by the Council from nominations put forth by the nominee or others supportive of the nominee. The CAG shall elect its own chair who convenes all meetings and is the CAG's chief spokesperson. Service by the CAG members shall be uncompensated and last no more than two years, subject to any extension by vote of the Council.

This memo introduces the proposal by Councilmember Dahlen to explore the formation of a Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) that would provide structured citizen feedback on major city revenue and spending decisions-including operating budget, capital improvement program (CIP) and other financial policy matters-prior to Council action. This worksession is a non-voting opportunity for an initial Council discussion related to interest in the concept, clarify goals, and to frame possible options for design and implementation.

Historically, the City has relied on traditional public engagement mechanisms such as public hearings, comment periods, open forums. Additionally, there had previously been a Council Policy Committee comprised of three Councilmembers tasked with reviewing financial policies and advising on updates. The Council disbanded this group due to other priorities of the Council. Alternatively, staff was suggested to bring any policy review or amendments proposed to the full council for discussion and potential action.

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) identifies effective public engagement as a means to increase accountability, responsiveness, and transparency in budgeting and financial decision-making. GFOA guidance emphasizes:

- Defining clear purpose for engagement efforts before implementation;
- Involving the public early enough to *meaningfully influence* decisions;
- Providing information in accessible formats so participants can understand trade-offs and priorities; and
- Designing engagement that matches the scope and timing of the topic.

This suggests that if Council pursues a CAG, clear parameters around scope, timing, and what decisions or policies the group would meaningfully inform are essential to avoid superficial or poorly designed efforts that could erode trust rather than build it.

Alignment with Council Priorities and Work Schedule

Council's recently adopted priorities include implementing a two-year budget plan and a five-year financial plan. A citizen advisory mechanism could possibly align with these frameworks by providing structured feedback during key phases-such as revenue forecasting, expenditure trade-offs, and CIP prioritization-without duplicating staff or Council deliberations. It is also timely to consider how the CAG might converge with ongoing planning efforts (e.g., liquidity/cash-management practices, financial policy updates) rather than create parallel processes.

Examples and Potential Uses:

Councilmembers and the Mayor have discussed scenarios where an advisory body could add value, such as:

- Providing a deliberative review before Council considers a "go/no-go" recommendation on projects like the new liquor store once there is a detailed pro forma ready to go (we are not at that phase now);
- Offering input on cash management practices or other financial policies with public interest.

There may be other potential purposes that could be beneficial such as supporting outreach on sizeable capital or service trade-offs to improve transparency and resident understanding. However, staff would suggest further research to explore how this could be productive. It will be important to weigh these benefits against cautions about inadvertently creating another layer of bureaucracy or slowing decision timelines.

Discussion Questions for Worksession Related to Councilor Dahlen's request

1. *Purpose and Scope:* What types of decisions or policies are most appropriate for CAG input (e.g., broad budget priorities, specific CIP projects, policy matters)?
2. *Design and Timing:* How should the CAG be structured to align with the City's budget calendar and strategic planning processes?
3. *Expectations and Impact:* What are realistic expectations for the group's influence, and how can Council ensure its work is substantive and actionable?
4. *Alternative Models:* Are there other engagement mechanisms Council prefers (surveys, focus groups, ad hoc task forces, deliberative panels) that might achieve similar goals without formal committee structures?

This worksession is intended to explore initial interest and options regarding a CAG as proposed by Councilor Dahlen. He will be provided with an opportunity to present this idea in more detail at the meeting.

Consistent with best practices in public budgeting and engagement, any approach should clearly define goals, align with Council's established priorities and work schedule, and be designed to produce useful, transparent input without duplicative effort.

City Plans & Policies Relevance:

Not applicable.

Alternative Options:

Not applicable.

Financial Impacts:

Not applicable.

Tentative Timelines:

Staff is planning on an initial budget worksession starting in March to begin looking at the 2027-2028 budget calendar including public information and engagement. Additionally, plans are underway to present some initial draft 5-year financial plans. Staff suggests that feedback on this topic from this worksession could be given to staff to come back with suggestions at the March worksession along with the other budget information.

Alternatively, the Council could request a motion at an upcoming Council meeting such as Councilor Dahlen's motion or some other amended version. The next regular meeting is February 17th.