MEETING MINUTES
City of Polk City
Work Session

5:00 p.m., January 12, 2026
City Hall Council Chambers

A City Council Work Session was held on January 12, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. at the City Hall Council Chambers in Polk City, Iowa. Mayor Karsjen and City Council Members, Rob Sarchet, Jeff Savage, Dave Dvorak, James Hill, and Nick Otis were present.

Minutes

Discussion of Four Seasons Festival

City Manager Chelsea Huisman provided background, noting that Go Polk City informed the City in Fall 2025 that they would no longer manage the festival. She reviewed the 2025 financials, which showed approximately $55,000 in revenue and $62,000 in expenses, resulting in a $7,000 deficit. Major revenue sources included sponsorships, beer garden, and the run, while expenses were driven by entertainment, rentals, and security.

Huisman presented a preliminary 2026 budget estimating costs between $42,000 and $50,000 and projected revenue of about $22,000. She highlighted concerns about liability for a city-run beer garden and suggested alternatives such as local businesses or the chamber hosting it. Two options were discussed: Option A, a city-led event requiring significant staff time and possibly staffing; and Option B, a committee-led event requiring immediate formation and legal setup, which may not be feasible for 2026 given the timeline.

Parks & Recreation Director Jason Thraen presented research on how other communities organize their festivals. He reviewed 24 examples from surrounding cities, noting that 10 are chamber-led, eight are volunteer-led, three are city-led, and three use a hybrid approach. Successful volunteer-led festivals often have long-standing committees with structured leadership, tax identification numbers, and bank accounts, which provide continuity and stability. Thraen emphasized that while volunteer models can work well, they require significant time to establish and maintain. He also noted that some cities have transitioned from volunteer-led to city-led events due to declining volunteerism, while others have moved in the opposite direction. His analysis highlighted that there is no one-size-fits-all model, and each community must choose an approach that fits its resources and culture.

Council members expressed preference for transitioning to a volunteer committee model long-term but agreed that for 2026, the City should lead the event with volunteer support and begin laying the groundwork for a committee to take over in 2027. Additional considerations included continuity of the farmers market, leveraging existing groups like the Arts and Culture Committee, and addressing staffing needs. Council requested cost estimates for staff. Staff will refine recommendations and return with an updated plan at the January 26 meeting.

Adjournment

Motion was made by Otis and seconded by Dvorak to adjourn at 5:56 p.m.
Motion carried unanimously.

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Steve Karsjen, Mayor

Attest

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Susan Lawton, City Clerk