Minutes of September 15, 2026, Regular City Council Meeting at Heritage Hall, 6:00 PM.

The Merkel City Council met for a Regular City Council Meeting on September 15, 2026, at Heritage Hall, 6:00 PM. Councilman Jacobs called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and announced a quorum present. Council members present were Elaine Chaney, Tyler Newberry, Lexi Smith, Collin Jacobs and Matthew Riggan.

Mayor Cobb led the Pledge of Allegiance and Texas Pledge.

Prayer was led by Collin Jacobs.

Citizens were given an opportunity to comment.

Police Chief Trevor Barnes, Clyde Police Department, presented Chief Conklin with the Law Enforcement Command Officer Professional (LECOP #208) Award from the Texas Police Chiefs Association.

Collin Jacobs motioned to approve Consent Agenda and was seconded by Elaine Chaney. Approved 5-0.

Chief Conklin gave the Police report for August, explaining the contact vs citations for the month and talked about the vacant positions still within the department. Chief Harris gave the August Fire report, stating that the heat is keeping them busy with fires. Harris stated that he was looking into the coding unknown on the report. Public Works Director Russell gave the August report, stating that would be starting street patching this month, 5 Atmos crews in town at this time, and busy repairing water leaks. City Manager Hitt gave the August Water report and the Municipal Court report.

Introduction of Safebuild inspector, Rey Salinas. Mr. Salinas spoke on his qualifications and experience.

Mayor Cobb opened a Public Hearing to allow for public input regarding the FY2026 - 2027 Budget at 6:35 PM.

Public Hearing closed at 6:36 PM.

Matthew Riggan moved to approve the budget as presented. Elaine Chaney seconded the motion. Approved 5-0 with Councilmembers Riggan, Chaney, Jacobs, Smith and Newberry with all voting yes.

Matthew Riggan motioned to ratify the property tax increase reflected in the budget. Lexi Smith seconded the motion. Approved 5-0.

Mayor Cobb opened a Public Hearing to allow for public input regarding the proposed tax rate of $0.63 per one hundred dollars ($100.00) valuation for the 2026 - 2027 Fiscal Year at 6:38 PM.

Public Hearing closed at 6:39 PM.

Collin Jacobs moved that the property tax rate be increased by the adoption of a tax rate of $0.63 which is effectively a 13.37% percent increase in the tax rate. Elaine Chaney seconded the motion. Approved 5-0.

David Ratliff, Director of Business Development, from County Waste Services was in attendance to go over the contract extension for the City of Merkel. Along with the cost freeze for FY2027, County Waste Service will provide monthly bulk pickup.

The Council discussed the city comprehensive plan and water/sewer rates. City Manager Hitt also stated that the survey results from 304 participants showed that the water improvements were number 1, long term goals were more housing, and that the water line replacement showed 57% supporting it. Hitt also went through the Townhall handout with the council going over the water rate increase and study. The council discussed the TIRZ, water line replacement cost and longevity, an increase in population to help with cost of replacements and how it aligned with identified needs from the survey for the Comp Plan.

City Manager Hitt went over the Alternative Water Supply Feasibility Study with the council. It gave a detailed summary of the different alternatives available if it were affordable. Current water supply is still the cheapest for the city, the next would be partnering with other municipalities to build new direct line to water source or drilling new wells with water treatment plant.

Mayor Cobb opened a Public Hearing to allow for public input regarding the FY2026 - 2027 utility rate increase at 7:12 PM. Citizen asked about the outside city limits water meter policy.

Public Hearing closed at 7:15 PM.

The Council discussed the water rate increases and the differences of percentages if outside city limits. Councilman Newberry stated the studies show that the city needs to raise the rates, citizens want good clean water, yet he stated he doesn't agree with charging outside city limit customers more. The council discussed the difference in the cost to replace lines outside city limits and project costs if percentage was across the board. Tyler Newberry motioned to amend Ordinance No. 09152026-2 to 23% cost increase. No second on motion. Matthew Riggan motioned to approve Ordinance No. 09152026-2 amending Ordinance No. 08192025 providing for an increase in water and sewer utility rates. Elaine Chaney seconded the motion. Approved 4-1, Newberry apposed.

The Council discussed whether to retain the Merkel Connect app, which had only 74 active users. Elaine Chaney moved to continue the app, and Matthew Riggan seconded the motion. The motion passed 5-0.

Motion to approve the Special Event Permits for the Homecoming Parade and Downtown Bash was made by Collin Jacobs and seconded by Lexi Smith. Approved 5-0.

City Manager Hitt gave an update on Retail Coach prospects, stating 2 businesses have reached out. Councilman Jacobs asked to have Retail Coach attend a meeting.

The council discussed the 2025 excavator that public works would like to purchase. Motion was made by Tyler Newberry to approve the purchase of 2025 John Deere Excavator for $60,000.00 and was seconded by Collin Jacobs. Approved 5-0.

The Council discussed the street sign design and quotes provided. The signs were in the budget from the unspent funds from the previous year. Motion to approve the customer requested design and purchase from CPC sign company was made by Collin Jacobs and seconded by Tyler Newberry. Approved 5-0.

Discussion was brought before the council for the Manhole relining project with quotes provided. Project was in this budget from unspent funds from the previous yeas and is continued in 2027 budget. Motion to approve quote from Hudman Plumbing for Manhole relining project was made by Elaine Chaney. Motion was seconded by Matthew Riggan. Approved 5-0.

Lexi Smith motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Matthew Riggan. Approved 5-0.

Meeting Adjourned at 7:50 PM.

Evelyn Morse, City Secretary

Ray Cobb, Mayor