



CITY OF SOUTH ST. PAUL MEETING AGENDA

WORK SESSION

Kaposia Education Center -
Auditorium
1225 1st Avenue South
South St. Paul, MN 55075

Thursday, February 12, 2026

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. DISCUSSION ITEMS**
 - A. Federal Immigration Activity Update
- 3. ADJOURNMENT**



WORK SESSION AGENDA REPORT

DATE: February 12, 2026
DEPARTMENT: City Administrator
PREPARED BY: Ryan Garcia, Brian Wicke, Kori Land
AGENDA ITEM NUMBER: 2.A.

MEETING TYPE

Special Meeting - NOTE LOCATION CHANGE

AGENDA ITEM

Federal Immigration Activity Update

ACTION TO BE CONSIDERED OR DESIRED OUTCOME

Topics are introduced for discussion. If so directed by the Council, any of these can be presented at a future City Council meeting for formal consideration. To summarize staff's recommendations:

- Staff is recommending against adopting new ordinances at this time.
- Staff is supportive of making a one-time donation from the General Fund to Neighbors, Inc. to help in their mission to address food instability in our community. Staff would also suggest that the City could organize, amplify and/or support a personal care/hygiene products and diaper drive as these are continuing areas of need for our community members served by Neighbors.
- Staff is cautious about the allocation of Local Affordable Housing Aid for the purpose of providing emergency rental assistance. Staff must acknowledge that the City does not currently have an emergency rental assistance program established and does not have the capacity to administer such a program internally. If appropriate grant-making infrastructure could be put in place in short order, such a program may align with Neighbors, Inc.'s (or other housing assistance entities') mission and their current efforts in supporting families in need of rental assistance. However, advancing such an initiative introduces significant financial and administrative risk, in Staff's opinion.
- Staff is recommending against a small business grant program at this time.
- Staff recommends the Council consider and adopt a Resolution that reiterates the City's denouncement of the overly aggressive, in many cases unconstitutional tactics employed by Federal Immigration Enforcement entities in our community and state, and reaffirms the City's recognition of the stark delineation between the community-centric approach to public safety and public service provided by our Staff and the out-of-touch and inflammatory approach to the enforcement of federal immigration regulations being employed during Operation Metro Surge by the Department of Homeland Security.

OVERVIEW

Throughout 2026, the impacts of "Operation Metro Surge" have motivated community members

to seek dialogue and action from the City Council in response to the sustained and aggressive approach to the enforcement of Federal immigration laws by the Department of Homeland Security throughout the Twin Cities, including within South St. Paul. Community members have voiced frustration about and rejection of the tactics employed by Federal Agents in our region, have shared how these tactics have impacted their lives and livelihoods, and have advocated for the City Council to take actions that they believe would demonstrate alliance with and support of impacted community members, family, friends, and loved ones. While we have maintained a [dedicated page on our website](#) to provide resources and fact-based statements to clarify the City's role (or lack thereof) in federal immigration enforcement, Community and Council member comments at recent meetings suggest that at minimum a focused Council discussion on this generational challenge for our community, state, and nation is overdue.

That having been said, Staff does not expect that this memo or the conversation at the special worksession will satisfy every expectation or demand that's arisen as we navigate Operation Metro Surge, and certainly it won't "solve" the complex situation that we the people find ourselves in. Instead, this memo is intended as a primer for discussion and a resource rooted in Staff's understanding of various "responses" that have been suggested for consideration in recent weeks. In addition, and in Staff's opinion equally importantly, this memo is intended to reinforce that the City's fundamental commitment to our [organization's core values](#) and to the safety, well-being and prosperity of all members of our community is unwavering.

Potential City Response Actions - Adopt Ordinances Under the Auspices of Limiting ICE Activity in the Community

As alluded to above, several community members have taken the time to write, call, and show up to public forums and suggest that the City Council should take certain actions that attempt to counteract the impacts that Federal Immigration Enforcement activity is having on our community. Ideas suggested include the adoption of ordinances such as:

- A separation ordinance related to immigration enforcement.
- An ordinance prohibiting law enforcement from wearing face coverings and requiring them to identify themselves.
- An ordinance prohibiting the use of public property for the purpose of staging and coordinating immigration enforcement activity.

In close coordination with City Attorney Kori Land, Staff has discussed, researched and evaluated such options but continues to recommend against adopting new ordinances at this time. This is in no way a rejection of the intent or spirit underlying these ideas nor is it an acceptance or validation of ICE tactics as "good governance". However, in a practical sense these types of ordinances do not have the impact that the Council would like to make because they are at worst constitutionally flawed and outside City authority, at least candidates to be challenged or pre-empted by state or federal law or policy, and at best difficult if not impossible to effectively enforce. Unenforceable ordinances have the potential of damaging, rather than strengthening, the public's trust in local government by creating a false sense of security and level of expectation that the City does not have the legal or practical means to deliver upon. Recognizing that this situation is unprecedented in our country's recent history and changing rapidly and constantly,

Staff will continue to evaluate the appropriateness or applicability of "legislative" options that the Council might consider. As we stand today, Staff's opinion is that there are other methods of communicating the Council's position on ICE without adopting ordinances that are more or less toothless.

Potential City Response Actions - Provide Economic Assistance to Impacted Community Members

Council members have inquired about the City's ability to appropriate City funds for the following purposes:

- Provide a cash donation to Neighbors, Inc. to support their food insecurity and hunger relief efforts
- Use some portion of the City's Local Affordable Housing Aid (LAHA) funds to provide rent relief/emergency rent assistance
- Provide emergency small business grants

The question has been presented as to whether City funds could be allocated towards community-supporting initiatives such as hunger relief, emergency rent assistance, and small business assistance. It is clear that the current situation has upended daily life for members of our immigrant and non-white community acutely, with community members living in fear of detainment and therefore choosing not to leave the home for basic necessities such as work, food, health care, and school. These challenging conditions have led to families struggling to access or afford meals and housing, and have dealt a debilitating blow to businesses as a significant proportion of our trade area population continues to forego patronage at local businesses. These impacts set our community back and make urgent the need for neighbors to pull together in support of one another.

In staff's opinion, there is a reasonable nexus between the City's duty to preserve and protect the overall health, safety, and welfare of the public and programs such as hunger relief, housing support assistance, and small business assistance. An argument can be made that, short of City intervention, harm could come upon the public at large if businesses are forced to close, properties are vacated, and residents are left hungry and without shelter. Where Staff urges caution is in the implementation and oversight of funds dedicated to such programs. It is not lost on Staff that there is currently a significant level of debate and scrutiny in Minnesota related to the use of public funds to support well-intentioned community care initiatives.

[State Statute specifically provides](#) that a City Council may donate monies from its general fund or other unrestricted funds for the purpose of supporting "nonprofit organizations operating community food shelves that provide food to the needy without charge." Of the ideas suggested, a cash donation to Neighbors, Inc. likely carries the least amount of administrative burden and financial risk to the City. In concept, the City Council could adopt a resolution committing to an amendment of the 2026 Budget to provide a certain level of financial support as a grant to Neighbors, Inc. to support the operation of the food shelf.

While the City is a recipient of Local Affordable Housing Aid (LAHA) and those funds are

eligible to be dedicated towards Emergency Housing Assistance Payments, to date our local program has focused on low-income housing rehabilitation and radon mitigation through a program that is wholly administered by the Dakota County CDA. Although the City has not yet committed to utilizing our 2025 LAHA for the partnership with CDA, offering emergency housing assistance isn't as simple as just saying we're going to do so. Program parameters - aligned to [State Statute authorizing Cities to utilize LAHA for specific purposes and target populations](#) - would need to be vetted and established, in Staff's opinion. Our understanding is that only one community (West St. Paul) has chosen to dedicate LAHA specifically to households impacted by Operation Metro Surge, and their approach involves granting the money to nonprofits/schools who do the "legwork" of identifying eligible aid recipients and distribute the funds to those eligible. With all due respect and admiration to our neighbors, a program administered this way would introduce a significant level of eligibility, oversight, and reporting risk to our small Staff which we are not confident that we have the capacity to faithfully take on in the best interests of the City. For what it's worth, Dakota County provides (and has provided, for years) [rent assistance to qualified persons](#) through a structured process that confirms eligibility and assures that limited resources are targeted specifically at those most in need. Staff is concerned that it would be particularly challenging for City Staff, or a nonprofit provider, to quickly establish an effective methodology for confirming necessity, eligibility, and priority for emergency rent/mortgage assistance if we were to move in the direction of such a program.

While the EDA administers a small business and development loan program, those programs are specifically geared towards relatively easily measurable business/development expenditures such as the purchase of real estate or business equipment, building and business expansions, and other physical improvements to property. In concept, an emergency business grant program would have a program purpose of supporting businesses by providing money for fundamental operating expenditures such as rent, utilities, insurance, payroll, etc. If this is a program Council wishes to advance, it would seem that we'd need to decide what businesses are eligible and why. Presumably, we'll be picking winners and losers through such a program as funds are limited and ostensibly the intention is only to provide funding to businesses directly impacted by the collateral damage (people refusing to shop, go to work) of Operation Metro Surge. Moreover, it would seem prudent to undertake a substantially comprehensive review of any applicant's financial situation to assure that an inability to make rent, payroll, etc. is explicitly and uniquely a result of these impacts. While this seems doable in concept, it may prove overly cumbersome to small business owners to have to essentially audit their financials and depending upon the volume of inquiry and requests for assistance it is possible that it could take weeks to "underwrite" an application and get money to impacted businesses - time that they may not have.

Staff's honest reflection is that the City lacks the internal administrative expertise and capacity to implement a "bulletproof" hunger relief, emergency rent assistance, or small business grant program. The program/administrative infrastructure necessary to oversee such programs would take more than a few days to stand up, and even if successfully launched we may need to rely on outside partners substantially to do some of the heavy lifting.

Potential City Response Actions - Articulate Rejection of Current Immigration Enforcement Tactics through Council Resolution or Communications to / Partnerships

with Other Government Entities

A growing number of Minnesota communities have communicated their concerns and acknowledgment of the negative impacts of Operation Metro Surge through the passage of Resolutions, Proclamations, and direct correspondence to State and Federal government officials. This approach can help to raise awareness at higher levels of government of the City's concerns and reinforce the City Council's position in the eyes of the public. Direct correspondence (a letter) to Representative Craig and Senators Klobuchar and Smith (and potentially others such as the DHS Secretary, President, etc.) demanding that they take action to prevent the current type of ICE activities would send a clear message to the people who represent the community in Washington D.C. and are in the best position and have the power to actually do something about Operation Metro Surge and its impacts on our community. Staff is confident that we understand the Council's consensus on the spirit of a potential resolution: that fundamentally we are committed to a higher level of public service and public safety than our community and state have experienced, witnessed, and documented in the course of federal actions undertaken throughout Operation Metro Surge.

SOURCE OF FUNDS

ATTACHMENTS

None