THE OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY OF GERING KENO COMMITTEE, August 5, 2026
A regular meeting of the City of Gering Keno Committee was held in open session at 4:32 p.m. in the Gering City Hall Conference Room at 1025 P Street, Gering, NE, on August 5, 2026. Present were Committee Members Darrell Bentley, Don Kugler, Julie Morrison, Jennifer Sibal, Matt Janecek, and Amy Doll. Absent: None. Also, present were City Administrator Pat Heath, City Treasurer Lyndsey Mathews, and Secretary Carol Martin. Notice of the meeting was given in advance by publication in the Star-Herald on July 28, 2026, the designated method of giving notice. All proceedings hereafter were taken while the meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

A. Call to Order and Roll Call
Julie Morrison called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.

B. Open Meetings Act - Neb. Rev. Stat. Chapter 84, Article 14, As required by State Law, public bodies shall make available current copies of the Open Meetings Act provided in the meeting room on the counter near the entrance to the Council Chambers. Agenda items may be moved up or down on the agenda at the discretion of the Chairman. As required by State Law, additions may not be made to this agenda less than 24 hours before the beginning of the meeting unless they are considered under this section of the agenda and the Keno Committee determines that the matter requires emergency action.

C. Determine method of advance meeting notice

Moved down after Keno application discussion.

D. Approval of May 6, 2026 Keno Committee Meeting Minutes

Motion by Darrell Bentley to approve the minutes of the May 6, 2026 Keno Committee meeting. Seconded by Matt Janecek. There was no discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Sibal, Janecek, Kugler, Morrison, and Doll. "NAYS": None. Absent: None. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

E. Keno Fund Financial Report

Lyndsey Mathews, City Treasurer, reported the following balances as of June 30, 2026:

• Pooled Cash	$69,591.08
• US Bank Keno	$216,021.03
• Pooled Investments:	$1,064,985.75
• Total Cash	$1,350,597.86

Outstanding Obligations:

• Taxes to be paid:	$8,338.74
• Deferred Commissions:	$108,607.04
• Obligations not yet paid:	$40,123.29
Total Outstanding	$157,069.07

Available Cash	$1,193,528.79
Last quarter brought in	$42,736.44
Total Cash Available	$128,543.04
Minus obligations	

Darrell explained that in the past, half of the money was put away to build up the funds and it has been replenished. That is why there was enough money in there for the pickleball courts. Money is set aside for special things like the tennis courts and pickleball. They work at replenishing the money that has been used and they would like to keep it at a million dollars.

F. **Review and discuss applications for Keno Funds**

NOTATION
Application information provided in the minutes is taken directly from the Keno Fund Application submitted by each applicant

1) **Scottsbluff/Gering Noon Lions Club - $11,040.00 Matt Haas and Tory Schwartz**

The funds will be used to purchase two new sight cameras. We are a Lions Club International Chapter serving Scottsbluff and Gering, Nebraska. Lions Club primarily serves a role in helping those with sight and hearing health needs that cannot afford to pay for treatment. The two new cameras would help us screen eyes for site issues and refer them to local optometrist for further evaluation and treatment. The Lions club also helps scholarship those in need of financial assists for care.

2) **Gering Merchants – 14,800.00 – Jamie Meisner and Melanie Knouse**

The Gering Merchants Association kindly requests your support for our community projects in 2026. Merchants Bucks will be utilized at all events featuring food vendors to foster economic growth.

Summer Bash

On June 6th, we kicked off our annual Summer Bash at the Gering Plaza. We are seeking $4,500 for this project. This event is a free family-friendly activity, offering live entertainment throughout the day. Attendees enjoyed over a dozen games for children, face painting, hair braiding, performances by extreme cheerleaders and karate, a bounce house, axe throwing (not real), and live music. We encourage support for local businesses, including the food trucks we feature. Additionally, several local businesses participated with their own game booths. This marks our fifth year hosting this event.

Oktoberfest

We plan to host Oktoberfest in late October or November, requesting $2,500 to cover the band and hotel accommodations. The band, hailing from Omaha, has provided us with Polka music for the past three years. Attendees can expect various games such as Beer Hoist, Tray Racing, Barrel Rolling, and Wiener Toss. This year, we are introducing an open bid with local alcohol suppliers for the beer garden, who will manage all gates and alcohol consumption. There will also be two to three food vendors present at this event.

Santa Village

Our Santa Village will open on November 28, featuring two events with Santa and continuing with a single event each weekend until Christmas. We are requesting $6,000 for this project. Over the past few years, the Santa Village has significantly improved, and we plan to enhance it further with multiple light metal decorations and other upgrades. Following the loss of our light tunnel last year due to severe winds, we will seek sponsors to help replace it, with part of the funds allocated for rebuilding lost items. These events have fostered community togetherness, attracting an estimated 8,000 to 10,000 visitors over two years, greatly benefiting Gering. Additionally, a new fire department house was built last year, and the police department is considering adding one this year.

Storage Rental

This last year we have realized that our space needed for storage has increased. So, we recently moved all of our event items and Santa building to a metal building on the edge of town to give us more room. We are renting it from the owner at $150 per month. Asking for $1800 for the year.

3) **Gering Parents/City of Gering**

Pat stated the applicant was asked to define the application; they are not ready and did not have two quotes. They may resubmit the application for the next Keno meeting. Pat suggested the committee deny the application and they can submit a new application with the proper paperwork.

DISCUSSION REGARDING KENO FUND REQUESTS:

Scottsbluff/Gering Noon Lions Club

Matt questioned the number of Gering children who benefited from the program. He appreciates what they do, but does not feel the City of Gering needs to fund all of it. Julie thought they needed to look beyond the City of Gering for funding. She said that Scottsbluff has Keno funds and should be able to provide funding, especially since they are going to ESU. Matt indicated that he does not have a problem with helping them, but agreed that the City does not need to fund the entire program.

Darrell stated that after listening to the presentation, he felt the numbers had decreased somewhat because Sioux County and Banner County were included. However, those counties do not have the same funding available to provide this type of assistance. Matt said the mobile unit they have is not being taken to Sioux County or Banner County, but instead being brought to Gering or Scottsbluff. He thought the camera would be used to provide more coverage to the smaller schools.

Amy thought that the Lions Club tournament had a large two-day event and that Scottsbluff and Gering hotels fill up. They are bringing people into Gering and spending money here, which ultimately helps all everyone. Don stated that he had no idea the Lions Club did this. Julie asked if all kids get to do this. Amy asked if the schools are required to do this, what would they do if they did not have that service, and how would the schools pay for that?

Pat said they served 400 kids last year. Matt thought that was just with the camera, and it was not just Gering kids. Matt said it's a community event and is bringing money in and they help put on the tournament. Amy added that the Lions Club is profiting from this.

Pat indicated that he did not think Keno should fund the whole purchase of the two cameras. He recalled that when he was in fourth grade, at age nine, his teacher came to his parents' house because his grades had dropped from straight A's to C's. A few weeks later, a hearing test revealed that he had lost 25% of his hearing in one ear. He believes programs like this are important because some people cannot afford to see an eye doctor, hearing specialist, or dentist. Julie noted that they provide glasses for kids. Pat said Keno funded a glasses program for them around the time of COVID. Julie asked if this falls under community betterment. Darrell replied that it does if they support the youth of their community.

> **Motion by Amy Doll to recommend $5,520.00 for Scottsbluff/Gering Noon Lions Club. Seconded by Matt Janecek. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Sibal, Janecek, Kugler, Morrison, and Doll. "NAYS": None. Absent: None. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.**

Gering Merchants

Darrell stated that, over the last couple of years, Gering Merchants has had a new chairman who has stepped up to provide direction and leadership. He feels that Gering Merchants is a very important part of Gering because the organization does not have to spend its time going up and down the street asking for funding. He said they can focus their time on the functions and get them done.

Darrell noted that once Oktoberfest is completed, the organization immediately begins working on plans for the following year. Because of the time and effort required to organize these events, there is little time available to go door-to-door seeking funds. He feels that Gering Merchants has been one of the better organizations in Gering, and they usually do not spend everything for which they requested funds.

Matt thought there was an application recently about decorations and wasn't sure if it was Gering Merchants or the City of Gering. Julie thought it was for the lights to put in the walkway. Pat said there are lights in the walkway between the bank and the Aging office. Darrell said it was during the last Christmas season.

Amy asked the committee if there were concerns that they may not be clear about what the funds will be used for. She felt that at one time, it was for advertising, but now it is for each event, and they said Oktoberfest is for the band and hotel. The Summer Bash and Santa's Village doesn't really state what it's for. Julie restated

that this is why she asked for receipts. Amy doesn't feel they will misuse the funds, but feels this sets a precedent for other requests. Amy isn't questioning what they are doing; she just wants to make sure they know where the money is being spent. They were asking for $4,500 for Summer Bash, $2,500 for Oktoberfest (band and hotel), $6,000 for Santa's Village, and storage rental. They listed some of the costs, but Julie indicated that she didn't feel good about paying for storage rental and thought that was for the operating budget. Darrell said the storage will have to go to Santa's Village, regardless. Pat thought they should have more of a breakdown of expenses showing what the funds will be used for.

Motion by Julie Morrison to recommend $14,800.00 for the Gering Merchants Association contingent upon supplying a breakdown of each category of what the funds will be used for and in the future supplying a more detailed list of what the expenses will be.

Discussion: Julie stated she is not comfortable with the storage rent. It was not clear who the storage fee is paid to. Darrell noted all of the units are stored for $150.00 per month. Julie thought the storage unit would be an operating budget expense. Darrell added that they need to provide a breakdown of the storage rental for Santa's Village.

Seconded by Don Kugler. There was no further discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Sibal, Janecek, Kugler, Morrison, and Doll. "NAYS": None. Absent: None. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

Gering Parents/City of Gering

Darrell stated that a motion would be needed to deny the application. Amy noted that if the application were denied, the applicants would not be able to return with another application immediately. Pat explained that the applicants would need to submit a new application. He also stated that the application could be tabled and later taken off the table when the applicants return. Darrell spoke with Amy Seiler regarding the application. She stated that she was in favor of the application but clarified that the $6,000.00 quote did not come from her. She explained that she does not provide price quotes and that the applicants would need to return with a written quote. She further stated that the applicants were not ready and would need to submit a different application.

Pat stated that if no motion was made, and the application therefore failed, the applicants could return with a new application. Darrell disagreed, and stated that the Keno application states that applicants must wait a quarter before submitting another application. Amy clarified that applications cannot be submitted in consecutive quarters, except when an application has been returned as incomplete, it may be resubmitted as a complete application in the following quarter. It was determined that the application was incomplete. The applicants could resubmit the application in the next quarter with the required information and a complete application.

C. Determine method of advance meeting notice

Pat stated that there has been a change in the Nebraska Open Meetings Act regarding notification of meetings. The poster will not be displayed on the wall as before. He said there will be paper copies where the press corps sits in the Council room. The Keno Committee needs to make a motion because, by statute, they have to determine the method of publishing meeting notices. The revised statute states that meetings have to be published quarterly. The City Council meetings will be published quarterly for the meetings coming up in that quarter. For any other meetings, they can be published on the website, in the paper, and on the state website. A motion from this committee is needed to publish the meetings on a quarterly basis and to also post them on the website. Darrell asked how it's different from what they are doing now. Pat replied the state requires that the committee state its option or method.

Motion by Julie Morrison to recommend publishing Keno Committee meetings every quarter and on the website or the newspaper.

Discussion: Matt asked if this is for every meeting that they need to do this. Pat replied, no.

Seconded by Amy Doll. There was no further discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Sibal, Janecek, Kugler, Morrison, and Doll. "NAYS": None. Absent: None. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

G. Defining Community Betterment

Pat stated that he doesn't want a decision today; he just wanted to get the discussion started. Darrell would like to have this item on the next agenda, also. He asked the committee to give it some thought and come back to the next meeting with ideas.

Darrell stated that Sugar Valley Rally would come every year knowing they would receive some money. There was also Father's Day Classic, Monument Marathon, and the problem is, in his opinion, they might start out with $1,000.00, then it would go to $2,000.00, then $5,000.00. He noted that it's going to be a fine line and he asked everyone to come up with their opinion on how they define community betterment. For example, the Sugar Valley Rally, one-third of the people in the rally were local, and the others came from out of town for the weekend. He said it benefited hotels in the area, some across the river, and some restaurants; is that community betterment or not?

There is community money they didn't have years ago because they didn't have hotel funds. Now, there are people double-dipping from Keno and the hotel funds (Occ Tax Funds). Darrell would like this on the next agenda to discuss and look at some of the applications that have come up to define what the committee feels is community betterment. They used to help sponsor the State Boys Club; in his opinion, it's good for the community, but is it community betterment? He said that so far, they have always had enough money to cover what has been approved, but that does not mean they have to spend it just because they have it. He would like everyone to think about those they have helped. It does state in the application that it has to be in the jurisdiction of Gering, unless there is money available and the committee approves it. He gave an example of the big fans at the fairgrounds or stables at the Saddle Club. Darrell said the stage at the cemetery is community betterment and it's going to be there for a long time. He gave the example of the cameras in the Council room and the money for the microphones, and guest speakers coming in to talk with people; is that community betterment? They need to establish where the money is being spent for community betterment.

Pat thought that, over the last five and a half years since he took over as City Administrator, the committee has done a great job. In some of the audits involving local municipalities, Scotts Bluff County, or the Airport Authority, he questioned whether money was being spent legally. Once that money hits the City offices, it becomes public funds. They have to follow the law regarding public funds. They have been strict, but looking back, maybe it should have been done differently. There were minor things, but they don't want to set themselves up for something like that.

Community Betterment doesn't need to be so defined that it limits what they can do, but it should be kept somewhat broad without being restrictive on everything. There are some things that could be borderline, like the car show that usually provides meals for the participants; is that really public or community betterment? The City can provide an employee dinner, but that has to be part of an award or recognition process. The City cannot buy coffee for employees with public funds. Pat said it is very restrictive when it comes to the use of public funds.

Matt asked if the car show were to ask for those funds to pay for something else, would that be okay? Pat replied if there was advertising or marketing promotions, that would be more of an operational part of it. Matt asked if the City would be in trouble for purchasing the meals for the Old Settlers. Pat said possibly, and that is something to work through with Oregon Trail Days and possibly find something different that is open to the public.

Pat said they could invite the City of Scottsbluff and Scotts Bluff County to come over, and they can purchase a meal for them (multi-jurisdictional). However, staff cannot purchase meals for a working Council meeting, because it's only for the Gering City Council (not multi-jurisdictional). He said they don't believe there has been much, but some things could be questioned, such as a group like the Old Settlers, or the car show-buying dinner for them.

Pat looked up Community Betterment and found a good definition of it – "Taking action to improve public health, safety, and the daily life of people in a local area, and involves group projects, volunteer work, funding, and local programs that fix public spaces, support families in need, and help small towns." He said they cannot help families in need because that is separating out one specific group. He will speak with the City Attorney to have them draft up something before the next meeting, and maybe restrict it to Keno.

Darrell said it's a fine line, as it says it can't be part of their budget. His concern is with the wording, that may separate out certain people from others. The wording could give the impression that they were intentionally excluding or separating certain individuals. Julie said when she thinks of community betterment, she thinks of playground equipment, walkways, or the ballpark - something that is going to be here to stay. When there is an event, it brings people into the community, and they use the hotels. She feels that is more occupation tax funding because that is who benefits from it. The City receives sales tax from those situations, but it might not be much.

Matt said because of some of the events here, there is some community betterment. Julie noted that the events are showcasing the town, which is good, but giving money out to showcase the town is a fine line. Pat said the money that is spent here improves Gering, and he thinks there are people who live here because of that. He knows people who lived in Colorado and moved here because they like the community.

H. Discuss City Budget

Pat explained that as a City, they are struggling, and the budget is getting tighter, and it isn't the utilities. There is an Enterprise Fund and a General Fund. The Enterprise Funds collect fees like electric, water, sewer, golf course, and sanitation that support themselves. The General Fund is tough because it's based on property tax and sales tax revenue, and the excess funds in the utility department or electric department are transferred to the General Fund.

Pat said the City doesn't have much sales tax revenue. He thinks that $2.3 million was sales tax revenue for this budget year; comparing that to Scottsbluff, they brought in over $8 million in sales tax revenue. Based on some tracking that was done, 475,000 people go from Gering to Walmart, and 670,000 people go to Gering's Dollar General. It is the top Dollar General store in the region, including Cheyenne and Scottsbluff, but Gering's Dollar General beats both of the others combined, which is amazing. He said there are people who go over to Home Depot, Menards, Target, and the mall. Gering doesn't have the sales tax revenue, and with the lids the state is putting on everyone, it's starting to take effect. Pat said the last two or three years, the City avoided the joint public hearing, and every time they do that, the levy drops. As the costs go up, the City's levy is dropping, so less cash is coming in.

The state has a fund called the Municipal Equalization Fund that used to contribute $700,000 to $800,000 to Gering; it is down to $539,000 (this year) and is going up to $596,000. Pat said the state may withhold the final payment to the City, which would be on June 30. If the sales tax revenue doesn't come in, and that's the City's largest payment of the year, the City would receive only half of the MEF. Pat is concerned they will take away the City's Municipal Equalization Funds; that would be another $400,000 loss to the General Fund.

The City is going through negotiations for COLA (cost of living increases) with the unions, which the City is required to do. Pat suspects that $350,000 will be cut out of the General Fund this year. Plus, the City had a loss from the Municipal Equalization Fund of $139,000 this year because it can't be budgeted if staff don't think it will be received, and they don't want it being spent before the end of the fiscal year.

He added that it's getting tougher, looking at the playgrounds and restrooms at the parks, and even trying to purchase a fire truck. He said eight years ago, a fire truck cost $250,000; now it's $900,000 to replace a fire truck. Staff are looking at ideas of where they can come up with the extra cash. The City may never replace a 50-year-old playground at Oregon Trail Park the way it's operating now. He thinks they did something good with the Keno funds when they were used for the pickleball courts - using a little bit of the endowment, and that has built back up. He stated they might start doing that, so more City applications may come in. He wasn't sure how else to do it unless the Council starts raising property taxes.

Pat said the property tax has dropped from .34¢ to .31¢ because the Council avoided the joint public hearing, (that pink postcard sent out the last two years), and it has really taken a toll on the City. He said there will be several cuts this year. The City is at the maximum that can be transferred from utilities.

I. Discuss Keno Funds and Occupation Tax Grant Funds

Pat stated that the committee needs to make sure the City Council is on board on the other side of the Occupation Tax Grant Fund. That will be open for discussion at future meetings to see where the Council stands on that. There is concern that some applicants are double-dipping; some things need worked on.

Julie asked whether the Occupation Tax Grant Fund Committee received the amount designated for that fund. Pat replied yes, and the fund has a balance of $137,909. His understanding from staff is that there was a disagreement on where that money should go. The original "sell" to the hoteliers was that occupation tax would go towards City facilities to upgrade the amphitheater, ball fields, and parks, to help upgrade and maintain them, to bring in tournaments and concerts at the amphitheater, and to increase hotel occupancy. He explained that when the Occupation Tax Grant Fund Committee started developing the policies, the idea shifted to be more like Keno, where money would also be distributed to people who host events. He thought the amount brought in from the Occupation Tax Grant Fund would be split roughly two-thirds to the City and one-third to event holders. The City had the ability to contribute more if needed through the Keno Committee, while the City's share could also be used to support the people or organizations applying for funding from the Occupation Tax Grant Fund Committee. Now, people realize that they can get half of their money from the Keno Committee, also. Pat added that the Keno Committee and City Council need to talk about this in future meetings. It needs to be broad enough that funds can be given out to the right group that defines community betterment, or the Occupation Tax Grant Fund.

J. **OPEN COMMENT:** Discussion or action by Keno Committee regarding unscheduled business will not take place. This section is for citizen comment only. None.

K. **Adjourn**

Motion by Amy Doll to adjourn. Seconded by Julie Morrison. There was no further discussion. The vote was called. "AYES": Bentley, Sibal, Janecek, Kugler, Morrison, and Doll. "NAYS": None. Absent: None. Abstaining: None. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:51 p.m.

Darrell Bentley, Chairman

Carol Martin, Secretary