

Minutes of the special meeting of the Syracuse City Council, held on June 29, 2026 at 6:00 p.m., in a hybrid in-person/electronic format via Zoom, meeting ID 870 5603 8387, in-person in the City Council Conference Room at 1979 W. 1900 S., and streamed on the Syracuse City YouTube Channel in accordance with House Bill 5002, Open and Public Meetings Act Amendments, signed into law on June 25, 2020.

Present: Councilmembers: Andrea Brown
Brett Cragun
Julie Robertson
Paul Watson
Abraham Pollard

Mayor Dave Maughan
City Manager Brody Bovero
Administrative Services Director/City Recorder Cassie Z. Brown

City Employees Present:

City Attorney Colin Winchester
Fire Chief Aaron Byington
Police Chief Alex Davis
Public Works Director Robert Whiteley
Community and Economic Development Director Noah Steele
Parks and Recreation Director Kresta Robinson
Communications Specialist Kara Finley

1. Meeting called to order.

Mayor Maughan called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. as a special meeting, with notice of time, place, and agenda provided 24 hours in advance to the newspaper and each Councilmember.

2. Public comment.

Prior to opening public comment, Mayor Maughan read a prepared list of factual points intended to establish a common baseline for discussion, noting that significant misinformation had circulated since the governor's announcement the previous Thursday. The Mayor emphasized that the purchase and sale of fireworks had not been affected by the governor's order, that professionally licensed fireworks displays were similarly unaffected and outside the city's purview, and that the governor's order did not empower cities to alter the legally established dates of discharge. He further noted that under normal state law, Syracuse would not qualify for a fireworks ban due to the absence of historical wildfire data meeting the required threshold, and that the governor's executive order was the sole mechanism enabling cities to act. Mayor Maughan stated that open county lands surrounding the city remained under a ban regardless of any city action, that farm fields intermeshed within city limits represented a genuine and ongoing fire risk, and that the city's wildland fire crew—maintained primarily to service Antelope Island—had not historically responded to wildfires within or near city borders. He clarified that the governor's order, as it stood, extended only through July 5th, and that the city's authority was limited to that window. He noted that the governor himself had stated publicly that his intent was not to stop neighborhood fireworks, but rather to empower communities to protect wildland-urban interface areas. Mayor Maughan outlined three broad options before the Council: uphold the ban in full, lift the ban entirely consistent with state law, or lift the ban selectively in lower-risk areas while maintaining restrictions in higher-risk zones. He indicated no decision had been made and that the meeting had been called specifically to gather public input and hear from all five Councilmembers before any action was taken.

Administrative Services Director/City Recorder Cassie Brown read two written comments submitted by email prior to the meeting deadline.

“Thank you for holding this special meeting and carefully considering Syracuse City's response to the statewide fireworks ban. I appreciate the difficult position the City is in as it balances public safety, agricultural interests, local traditions, and the economic impact on fireworks vendors. While Syracuse has historically experienced relatively few wildfire incidents related to fireworks, our community still contains significant agricultural land and open spaces that are especially vulnerable during the current drought conditions. I believe protecting homes, crops, and public safety should remain the City's highest priority. I support a cautious approach that allows fireworks only in areas sufficiently separated from open fields and other combustible areas. The suggested approach of maintaining a buffer around open spaces appears to provide a reasonable balance between safety and allowing residents to celebrate Independence Day traditions. If the City elects to allow fireworks in designated areas, I encourage the City to provide clear maps and robust public communication so residents understand exactly where fireworks are permitted and to continue emphasizing proper disposal of spent fireworks. Thank you for your service and for your thoughtful consideration of this issue. Respectfully, Eric Willison.”

“Dear City Council Members, I would like to say for the record that I am against allowing personal fireworks this 4th of July weekend. As a family we shoot off fireworks every July 4th and 24th and even sometimes on New Years and I was looking forward to celebrating our 250th birthday with more fireworks, but there are just too many fires right now and it is not worth it. We have already lost some firefighters, we need to not risk any more lives. Thank you for listening to my opinion. Mary Deaton.”

The Mayor then opened comment from those in attendance, reminding speakers to state their name and address for the record and limiting comments to three minutes.

Darren Watson, 1765 West 2770 South, Syracuse, identified himself as a long-time resident and someone involved in the fireworks industry for 47 years. Mr. Watson expressed support for a common-sense approach that would protect high-risk areas such as farm fields while still allowing fireworks in lower-risk parts of the city. He argued that Syracuse's historical data did not support classifying it as a high-fire-risk area, and emphasized the importance of individual freedom and agency, cautioning against restricting the rights of responsible residents based on the opinions or concerns of others.

Devin Allred, 1258 South 4465 West, Syracuse, identified himself as a veteran and Purple Heart recipient. Mr. Allred stated that, based on community feedback he had observed, there was notable support for the governor's ban among some residents, particularly those with pets and veterans sensitive to loud noises. However, he personally opposed the ban, arguing that blanket restrictions punish responsible citizens for the behavior of irresponsible ones. He noted that the city of Richfield, Utah—located approximately 45 miles from an active wildfire—had chosen to allow personal fireworks, and expressed that he felt it was important to mark the country's 250th anniversary in a meaningful way for his children.

An unidentified speaker echoed sentiments regarding personal freedom and expressed that she had initially reacted to the governor's ban as an assumption that residents could not be trusted to act safely. She stated it was her last year in the community and that she had been looking forward to celebrating the occasion. She expressed that the city's historical record should weigh heavily in the decision.

Jeremy Berry, 3421 West 2280 South, Syracuse, offered a different perspective. Mr. Berry stated that over the past ten years he had been unable to enjoy fireworks in his own yard due to neighbors using illegal aerial fireworks purchased out of state, including bottle rockets that had broken a window on his property and left flaming debris in his yard. He noted that his lawn was drier than usual this year due to reduced watering, and expressed concern primarily about aerial fireworks rather than ground-based fountains.

Dan Nelson, 1982 South 800 West, Syracuse, a 22-year resident, expressed support for allowing legal fireworks while emphasizing personal responsibility. Mr. Nelson acknowledged that individuals living adjacent to fields should exercise greater caution and suggested that illegal fireworks—such as bottle rockets—should be reported and enforced. He expressed confidence that most residents would behave responsibly.

An unidentified speaker, 2115 South 1300 West, Syracuse, agreed that responsible use of legal fireworks was the appropriate standard and expressed trust in the community to make good decisions. She noted that the behavior described by Mr. Berry stemmed from the use of illegal fireworks, not legally sold ones.

Kyle (last name not provided), a resident of North Layton and an employee in the fireworks industry, spoke to the reasonableness of Utah's existing fireworks regulations, noting that the state had already prohibited directional aerial devices such as bottle rockets and artillery shells in favor of ground-stabilized fireworks. He also offered his assessment that current weather conditions—while warm—were not historically unusual compared to prior years he had experienced working in the industry.

Steve Ross, 850 West 3050 South, Syracuse, whose wife sells fireworks, stated that he was generally supportive of the governor's action as a matter of common sense but did not oppose allowing fireworks for those who would use them responsibly. He called on the Council to recognize that the majority of residents act responsibly and to ensure that those who violate the law face appropriate consequences, rather than allowing the actions of a few to restrict everyone.

An unidentified speaker from Draper thanked the Council for convening the meeting and echoed the common-sense theme of prior comments. He expressed support for the fire department's mapping efforts and suggested that targeted adjustments based on current conditions would be a fair and reasonable approach while still allowing residents to celebrate the nation's 250th anniversary.

3. Discussion and/or action regarding Syracuse City's response to State-wide fireworks ban.

Mayor Maughan referred to the comments he made at the beginning of the public comment period and offered two additional points of clarification: first, that the City's legal interpretation held that it did not have the authority to ban specific categories of fireworks (such as aeriels), as the Governor's power extended only to suspending state law rather than creating new restrictions on particular firework types; and second, that weather forecasts indicated wind speeds during the discharge days would be approximately five miles per hour, remaining within acceptable low-risk tolerances.

Fire Chief Aaron Byington reported that over the preceding weekend he had personally driven through the entire city to assess areas of elevated risk, including agricultural land, heavy vegetation, areas presenting firefighting access challenges, commercial zones, and properties in poor repair. Chief Byington stated that he would support either of two options: lifting the

ban in restricted areas while maintaining it in higher-risk zones, or upholding the ban in full. He noted his preference was for the selective restriction approach. Chief Byington also reviewed six years of historical fire call data and reported that Stage 2 fire restrictions had been in place every year during that period, and that a state of emergency due to drought had been declared in four of those six years—suggesting that current conditions, while serious, were not entirely unprecedented for the region. He attributed the governor's order primarily to the significantly elevated wildland fire activity in Central Utah's wildland-urban interface areas, rather than conditions specific to Syracuse.

Regarding staffing, Chief Byington confirmed that the City's seasonal wildland fire team was not currently deployed elsewhere and would be brought in for the holiday period. A mobile brush truck would patrol the city throughout the discharge nights, additional staffing would be secured to fully staff Station 32, and the police department was likewise planning for enhanced enforcement presence. Code enforcement was also already active in addressing weed abatement issues that could pose fire risks.

Mayor Maughan then presented a working draft map—distributed only to Councilmembers and not released publicly—developed with staff to illustrate which areas might have the ban lifted and which would remain restricted. The map's general approach was to maintain the ban over agricultural fields greater than approximately one acre, parks, church properties, school properties, large commercial areas, and a specific residential corridor in the southern portion of the city where homes were adjacent to unkempt wild spaces with dense dry vegetation. Residential neighborhoods in the interior of the city were largely proposed to have the ban lifted, with the mayor estimating that approximately 85 to 95 percent of residential areas would be accessible. Chief Byington emphasized that the map was best understood as selectively lifting the governor's statewide ban in identified lower-risk areas, rather than as the city imposing new restrictions. Mayor Maughan noted that residents living adjacent to restricted zones could generally access a permissible location by moving a short distance, such as across the street or to a neighbor's driveway.

Councilmember Cragun stated that, deferring to the expertise of the fire chief and taking comfort in the confirmation of adequate staffing and police enforcement capability, he would support a restricted plan that still allowed fireworks to proceed.

Councilmember Pollard shared that his initial instinct had been to support restriction given the broader state situation, but upon further reflection he had come to favor allowing residents the freedom to choose. He expressed that it was the city's responsibility to be prepared to respond to the consequences of that freedom, and affirmed his support for either the partial restriction approach or a fuller lifting of the ban. He stated he was not in favor of a complete ban, as he did not believe government should categorically restrict citizens in this manner. Councilmember Pollard encouraged the city to pair its decision with messaging asking residents to be mindful and responsible in their celebrations.

Councilmember Robertson expressed support for Option B as outlined in the information packet—lifting the ban with targeted area restrictions based on the fire chief's and mayor's recommendations—as the best approach to minimize risk while allowing residents to celebrate.

Councilmember Brown similarly supported Option 2, expressing trust in residents to act responsibly and affirming confidence in the preparation undertaken by city staff and the fire department.

Councilmember Watson noted that much of the public concern was driven by conditions in Central Utah, which did not reflect Syracuse's situation. He observed that city residents had been on regular watering schedules and that most lawns and vegetation remained green and healthy. He expressed uncertainty about whether a drought year changed the calculus enough to justify restrictions not previously considered necessary, and stated he would support lifting the ban without restrictions, citing historical low-risk data and the fire department's preparedness. He noted that houses themselves were not made more flammable by drought, and that the risk associated with fireworks near homes was inherent and consistent year to year.

Following discussion, Mayor Maughan indicated that the Council was broadly aligned on lifting the ban in lower-risk areas with targeted restrictions, consistent with the approach reflected in the draft map. He stated that a formal public communication would be issued by 5:00 p.m. the following day, including a finalized map. He reminded all present that fireworks inherently carry risk and that the city would not characterize any area as a "safe zone," but only as lower-risk relative to restricted areas.

COUNCILMEMBER POLLARD MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN. COUNCILMEMER ROBERTSON SECONDED THE MOTION; ALL VOTED IN FAVOR.

The meeting adjourned at 7:02 p.m.

City Council Special Meeting
May 26, 2026
Mayor

City Recorder

Date approved: July 14, 2026