

**Regular Meeting of the City Council
City of Rockport
1472 Military Road, Rockport, Arkansas
Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025**

Call to order

Council member Brenda Womble called the meeting to order at 5:29 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation

Womble led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Council member Melinda Baker gave the invocation.

Roll call

Council members present: Mayor Kevin Baker, Melinda Baker, Darrell Hughes, Jimmy Shuffield, Brenda Womble

Other city personnel present: Shira Kelley, Police Chief Toby Morales, Sylvia Orrell, Darlene Shockey

Approval of minutes

- M. Baker motion to approve minutes of September meeting
- Hughes second
- Voting yes: Baker, Hughes, Shuffield, Womble

Departmental Reports

Financial statement:

The financial report was a combination of handwritten document and bank statements. Womble reminded the council that Legislative Audit has approved this format through the end of the year. It did not include information from the street department because there were no changes in that account since the last report.

- Hughes motion to approve the financial report
- Baker second
- Voting yes: Hughes, Baker, Shuffield, Womble

Police Department: Morales presented a written report and said he hired three officers to fill vacancies. All three are already certified and began work Nov. 14. They are part-time now but will become full-time Jan. 1, 2026, at which time insurance and benefits will become effective. The new officers are Anthony Speed (formerly with Malvern Police

Department), Jonathan Smart (formerly with Hot Spring County Sheriff's Office), and James Jackson (previously worked for Rockport, also a federal employee in Hot Springs).

Planning Commission: no report

Street Department: no report

Sewer Department: Yoakum, Lovell & Co., PLC, has completed the 2022 audit (included in packet). State turnback money will remain frozen until the 2023 and 2024 audits are completed. Womble said she has hired an auditor from Arkadelphia who will conduct a "quick audit" which should be completed by the end of December. She said the new auditor was surprised that Yoakum, Lovell & Co. had done a full audit, because the small number of sewer customers only requires the "quick audit." Crews & Associates, which holds the sewer bond, paid for the Yoakum et al audit and will pay for the 2023-2024 audits.

Discussion: Womble asked K. Baker to contact Farmers Bank & Trust and notify them that she will not send a sewer payment in November or December because she needs to pay some other bills. She said this should be better (able to pay both bills and sewer note) after the turnback is reinstated.

K. Baker agreed to contact the bank. He said a representative of the planned TA truck stop contacted him three weeks ago, wanting to schedule a meeting for a construction permit, but never followed through.

- Baker motion to approve departmental reports
- Hughes second
- Voting yes: Baker, Hughes, Shuffield, Womble

K. Baker said residents need to be alerted that if they put "Malvern, AR" as their shipping/delivery address when they order items, Rockport does not receive the tax revenue.

Hughes asked Womble to get the last two quarters of sales tax receipts to determine how much sales tax the city gets from vehicle and equipment purchases and to find whether the city should be getting any money from fuel taxes.

K. Baker suggested establishing a committee to analyze lost revenue from order deliveries. He thinks Rockport is getting less than half of the sales tax it should get. (This includes packages delivered by USPS, UPS, FedEx, Amazon, etc., as well as Walmart and Sam's Club deliveries, food deliveries, and more.)

Morales pointed out that residents are responsible for entering the correct address when they place an order, and then the company where the order is placed is responsible for submitting taxes.

The problem is caused by sharing a ZIP code with Malvern. When placing an online order, if someone simply enters the 72104 ZIP code, many websites automatically populate the city as Malvern and may or may not allow the user to manually change that to Rockport.

K. Baker and M. Baker said they were recently told that someone is working to establish a separate ZIP code for Rockport. They said this was a reputable source but could not remember who it was.

Womble will contact Yancy, CPA Fred Penny, and the Municipal League to inquire about potential lost revenue and whether/how it can be recovered.

Old Business

2026 budget: Hughes says everyone needs to examine the budget in the October packet (introduced as Resolution 2025-2) to determine what needs to be changed. The budget must be adopted in December.

New Business

Clerk resignation

- The council reviewed a letter of resignation, effective Dec. 31, 2025, from clerk Shira Kelley.
- Baker motion to accept resignation
- Shuffield second
 - Discussion: Shuffield asks what if we cannot find anyone to fill this role?
Womble said she has contacted some previous people to find a temporary clerk and will call some others.
- Voting yes: Baker, Shuffield, Womble, Hughes

Secretary

The council held extensive discussion on the hiring of a part-time secretary to learn both Darlene's job and the sewer office. A candidate for secretary has been found and interviewed. If hired, the candidate would begin work Dec. 1. The city owes Damon Dyer one more check; then his overtime will be paid off.

K. Baker said the city still owes \$24,000 in back payroll taxes to the IRS and still must decide how to pay the county for 911 dispatch service. He said the county has indicated it will sue Rockport for any remaining balance at the end of the year. He also said he is spending about \$500 weekly from his personal finances to pay for the city's trash pickup, which the city has not reimbursed for a long time.

Sylvia said she has been making payments on the tax bill whenever money is available throughout the month and suggested paying the IRS a lump sum when turnback is restored, followed by paying for 911 dispatch and trash pickup.

She estimates the part-time secretary will need to work 20-24 hours weekly, but emphasized that this person must be trained before Darlene retires. She said the current struggle in being able to handle bills and payroll is because of the frozen turnback and estimated the city will receive about \$15,000 when turnback is released.

K. Baker said the county will also send a new \$34,000 invoice in January, which he said will bring to \$70,000 the amount owed to the county.

The city also owes a refund due to a state error regarding the airport.

K. Baker said he is not concerned about the full back amount for trash payments but said he cannot continue paying for that out-of-pocket.

He asked Sylvia and Darlene if we can afford to pay the part-time person.

Darlene agreed with Sylvia that when Damon's overtime is paid off the city will have more room to wait for turnback to be released.

Morales said since the new secretary will be part-time, her hours can fluctuate based on how money looks for that pay period.

Shuffield asked how long it will take to train the secretary. Darlene expects her to learn quickly, but they do need to get started.

K. Baker: Things are so tight that if (the money) is not working, we will know it soon.

Everyone needs to be willing to make hard decisions when the time comes, if we cannot afford to keep her. Must make it clear to her that this is a trial basis to see if we can afford it.

Morales and Darlene think the new hire will pay for herself, because some of her work will involve working on warrants so the city can collect fine money.

- Shuffield motion to hire the candidate on a trial part-time basis to see if the position can generate enough money to pay for itself plus additional revenue
- Hughes second
- Voting yes: Shuffield, Hughes, Womble
- Voting no: M. Baker

M. Baker asked Morales to explain for the record why he hired three officers who will become full-time in January.

Morales said this is for compliance: the police department is classified as a five-officer department, which allows hiring one part-time officer per full-time officer. The department had lost three full-time officers recently, leaving Morales and one other full-time officer. If those vacancies were left unfilled, the department would be reclassified as a two-person department, which would prohibit part-time officers and thus make 24-hour police coverage impossible.

M. Baker said the city attorney, Greg Vardaman, may be leaving for an appointed position elsewhere at the end of the year. The council needs to be looking for an attorney with both city and prosecutorial experience.

Adjournment

Shuffield motion to adjourn

Baker second

Voice vote: unanimous

Adjourned, 7:29 p.m.

Attest: _____ Approved: _____
Shira Kelley, Secretary Kevin Baker, Mayor