

Unit 27 Council Meeting

May 28, 2026
11:00a.m. – 1:00 pm

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by Curtis Marshall at 11:03am. Verbal introductions were made around the table and name cards were placed before each attendee. Civil rights information slips, and meeting sign-in sheet were circulated around the room.

Council members present:

Alexander/Pulaski	Johnson	Massac	Union
Curtis Marshall Don Patton Natalie Sawyer	Raymond Bieri Patti Powell	Tracie Key Gregg Jeffords Don Robbins Dale McReynolds	Hannah Godfrey

Staff present: County Director Jody Johnson, John Shadowens, Monica Meyer, Shannon Pulliam

Meeting minutes from February 19, 2026, were reviewed. Motion made by Gregg Jeffords and seconded by Don Patton to approve prior minutes. Motion carried.

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

Dr. Teresa Steckler – Tick Research (Virtual Presentation)

Key Points:

- Tick populations and tick-borne diseases are increasing significantly.
- Diseases discussed: Lyme disease, alpha-gal syndrome, ehrlichiosis, anaplasmosis.
- Southern Illinois identified as a high-risk region, particularly for alpha-gal.
- Introduction to invasive species (e.g., garlic mustard, honeysuckle) contributing to tick population growth.
- Emerging threat: Asian longhorn tick (rapid reproduction and spread).

Prevention Recommendations:

- Wear light-colored clothing and protective gear.
- Use DEET (skin) and permethrin (clothing only).
- Perform frequent tick checks; use lint rollers for larvae.
- Maintain property (mowing, reduce wildlife exposure).
- Proper tick removal with fine-tipped tweezers.

Discussion Highlights:

- Small “invisible” ticks’ likely larvae/nymphs or Asian longhorn ticks.

- Tick population increase attributed to:
 - Weather patterns
 - Habitat fragmentation
 - Reduced land burning practices
- No confirmed plant deterrents: marigolds may have limited effect.

COUNCIL BUSINESS

A. Strategic Planning & Needs Assessment

- Extension focus areas:
 - Community, economy, environment, agriculture, health, technology
- Top identified community need: Youth mental health
- Next needs assessment scheduled for 2028

B. Community Issues Identified

Housing Shortage

- Major concern across all counties
- Issues discussed:
 - Lack of affordable housing
 - Growth of campers/tiny homes
 - Increase in homelessness (including “hidden homelessness”)
 - Short-term rentals reducing availability

Updates:

- Metropolis housing study underway (12–18 months)
- Interest in regional collaboration/summit
- Shawnee Development program providing emergency housing assistance

Childcare

- Shortage of infant childcare
- High cost forcing parents out of workforce
- Arrowleaf planning new childcare facility
- New Illinois Department of Early Childhood (0–5) noted

Additional Needs

- Housing for recovery populations
- Workforce and infrastructure support

EXTENSION UPDATES

A. Facilities & Operations

- Transition to cloud-based phone system effective July 1
- Ongoing facility improvements
- Union County office relocation under consideration

B. Financial Update

- Funding remains tight, operating near minimum reserves

- Increase in federal Smith-Lever funds (+\$50,000)
- Continued reliance on county and partner support

C. Legislative Update

- HB 5728: Request for increased Extension funding
- SB 4210: Support for farm transition (age 25–40)
- Strong local response:
 - ~80–90 witness slips from Southern Illinois
 - Letters of support submitted

Staffing

- New EFNEP nutrition position (pilot program)
- 4-H Youth Development position funded for 2 years
- Interviews underway

PROGRAM & PARTNERSHIP REPORTS

A. Youth & Education

- MyPI Disaster Preparedness Program
 - 24 students participated
 - Full-day emergency simulation conducted
 - Tours of IEMA and Fire Service Institute
- 4-H Beekeeping Club
 - Launching July 2026

B. Family & Consumer Sciences

- Conference held (30–35 participants)

C. Community Economic Development

- Housing and grocery industry initiatives ongoing
- Meat-cutting workforce training pilot planned
- Grocer Summit scheduled October 7

D. Community Programs

- Shawnee Development:
 - \$100,000 distributed in housing assistance pilot
- Master Gardeners/Naturalists:
 - Library outreach programs (youth education)

E. Partnerships

- Donations and collaborations:
 - Friends of Shawnee National Forest
 - Local schools and nonprofits
- CEO entrepreneurship program expanding

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Sparc “Weathering the Storm” Conference – Oct. 15 (Marion)
- Grocer Summit – Oct. 7
- 4-H Shows – June through August

Dates and Times of future council meetings

- September 17, 2026 @ Vienna – 11am-1pm (4-H staff)
- December 10, 2026 @ Vienna – 11am-1pm (NREE staff)
- February 18, 2027 @ Vienna - 11am-1pm (CED staff)
- May 20, 2027, 2026 @ Vienna – 11am-1pm (Reflection & updates)

Motion to adjourn made by Don Patton and seconded by Gregg Jeffords. No objections, meeting adjourned at 12:59pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Monica Meyer

Unit 27 - Office Support Specialist

For Unit 27 Unit Council secretary, Tracie Key