



White Salmon City Council MEETING MINUTES

October 1, 2025 – 6:00 PM
119 NE Church Ave and Zoom Teleconference

Attendance:

Council Members:

Jason Hartmann
Ben Giant
Patty Fink
Morella Mora

Excused:

David Lindley

Staff:

Marla Keethler, Mayor
Kelly Hickok, City Attorney
Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk
Jennifer Neil, Director of Finance and Operations
Chris True, Director of Public Works
Mike Hepner, Police Chief

- I. **Call to Order, Land Acknowledgement and Presentation of the Flag (6:00 p.m.)**
Mayor Marla Keethler called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. There were three members of the public in attendance in person and via teleconference.
- II. **Roll Call (6:02 p.m.)**
Moved by Ben Giant. Seconded by Jason Hartmann.
Move to excuse the absence of Council member David Lindley from the October 1 City Council meeting.
MOTION CARRIED 4-0
Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Hartmann – Aye, Mora – Aye.
- III. **Changes to the Agenda (None)**
- IV. **Presentation**
 - A. **Hispanic Heritage Month (6:03 p.m.)**
Mayor Marla Keethler began by noting that this was the Council’s second meeting during Hispanic Heritage Month. Councilor Morella Mora shared that although she had hoped to bring in guest speakers, many were unavailable due to their involvement in immigration and Latino community work nationwide. As a result, Councilor Mora prepared and presented her own, with accompanying photographs.

In her presentation, Councilor Mora spoke about the agricultural workers who sustain the economy and community of the Columbia River Gorge. Washington State’s agricultural sector employs over 120,000 workers at its peak, 98 percent of whom are Latino and 83 percent of Mexican descent. She emphasized that agriculture contributes \$20 billion annually to Washington’s economy, with \$130 million coming from Klickitat County alone, making it the county’s central economic engine. Mora highlighted that the health, safety, wages, and living conditions of farmworkers are closely tied to the overall wellbeing of the community.

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Councilor Mora shared personal reflections from her first years in the Gorge, when she worked on an orchard on Underwood Mountain. Living alongside a Mexican family, Maria, Pedro, and their neighbor Don Santos, she experienced their generosity, community spirit, and hard work firsthand. She described these experiences as deeply formative, calling the farmworkers she met “among the kindest, most hardworking, and talented people” she has ever known.

Councilor Mora then told the story of Don Santos, her friend and mentor, who has worked in agriculture on Underwood Mountain for over fifty years. At 91 years old, he continues to work every harvest season. Known for his skill and dedication, Don Santos still prefers to work without gloves, saying he needs to “feel the fruit,” and attributes the strength of his hands to an old rancher’s trick he learned as a boy in Mexico, applying cow fat each night. Councilor Mora described him as a man of quiet wisdom and deep resilience, whose story reflects the spirit of many Latino farmworkers in the Gorge.

In closing, Councilor Mora expressed hope that the community will continue to recognize and support the farmworkers who have long sustained the region. She called on everyone to see them as essential and generative members of the community and to ensure that all who live and work in the Gorge feel safe, valued, and at home.

V. Public Comment (6:08 p.m.)

No members of the public provided comment.

VI. Consent Agenda (6:09 p.m.)

- A. Approval of Change Order No. 1 – North Main-Spring Street Water Improvements**
- B. Approval of Small Works Contract with SMP**
- C. Approval of Meeting Minutes – Special Joint Council Meeting Minutes 09.10.2025, Council Meeting Minutes 09.17.2025, Special Council Meeting Minutes 09.24.2025, and Special Joint Council Meeting Minutes 09.24.2025.**
- D. Approval of Vouchers**
Vouchers audited and certified as required by RCW 42.24.080 and expense reimbursement claims as required by RCW 42.24.090 as of this 1st day of October 2025.

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Type	Date	Beginning Check	Ending Check	
Claims	10/01/2025	24828	42860	\$284,663.28
	10/01/2025	EFT	EFT	\$17,354.85
			Claim Total	\$302,018.13
Payroll	N/A			
			Payroll Total	–
Manual Claims	N/A			
			Manual Claim Total	–
Voided Checks		42826	42826	
		<i>*42827 Used for Street Sweeper Purchase</i>		
			Voided Total	–
			Toal Vouchers	\$302,018.13

Discussion: Councilor Patty Fink raised questions about the Dock Grade bike lane, noting her appreciation for the project but expressing safety concerns about placing the lane on the left side of the road instead of the right. She suggested consulting a WSDOT bike and pedestrian expert. Public Works Director Chris True explained the lane was placed on the left based on Association of Washington Cities (AWC) recommendation to avoid conflicts with the highway turn lane but said the placement could be reconsidered.

Councilor Fink also mentioned issues with falling rocks and debris in the lane, which make cycling hazardous. Director True noted rockfall warning signs have been added, and mitigation is being considered. Police Chief Mike Hepner reminded all that cyclists may legally ride in the travel lane if safer.

Moved Jason Hartmann. Seconded by Ben Giant.
Motion to approve Consent Agenda and Vouchers for \$302,018.13.
MOTION CARRIED 4-0
Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Hartmann – Aye, Mora – Aye.

VII. Business Items

A. Ordinance 2025-09-1183 – WSMC 5.04 - Business Licenses (6:14 p.m.)

1. Presentation

Clerk Erika Castro Guzman introduced Ordinance 2025-09-1183, amending White Salmon Municipal Code Chapter 5.04 regarding business licenses. She presented the proposed updates, noting that under state law, the city must revise its ordinance for outside-city business licensing.

Key changes include that, effective January 1, 2026, businesses earning over \$4,000 per year will be required to pay the city’s licensing fee (\$75 for new licenses, \$50 for renewals). The threshold will be reviewed by the state every four years for inflation, with a 5% annual cap, and rounded to the nearest \$100.

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Businesses below the threshold may continue to register for free, and the city has the option to set a higher threshold.

2. Discussion

Councilmember Patty Fink asked where the collected fees are directed. Mayor Keethler confirmed that the funds go into the city's general fund and are not marked for specific purposes.

Councilor Morella Mora asked whether all LLCs and home-based or consulting businesses earning over the threshold must obtain a license. Mayor Keethler confirmed this applies to any registered business operating within the city. Councilor Mora noted that nonprofit organizations are required to obtain a license but are exempt from paying the fee if they provide proof of federal tax exemption; Clerk Castro Guzman confirmed this.

Councilor Fink added that businesses pay through the state's unified system, which automatically calculates city-level fees. Mayor Keethler concluded that the state integration simplifies the process for both large and small businesses through one-stop registration.

3. Action

Moved by Jason Hartmann. Seconded by Ben Giant.

Move to adopt Ordinance 2025-09-1183 regarding WSMC 5.04 – Business Licenses.

MOTION CARRIED 4-0

Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Hartmann – Aye, Mora – Aye.

VIII. Reports and Communications (6:18 p.m.)

1. Staff Reports

Police Chief Mike Hepner reported on the July 6, 2025, shooting outside the Family Mexican Restaurant in Bingen, WA. Evidence was found at the scene, and after a months-long investigation, a suspect was arrested on September 26 and booked into the Klickitat County Jail. Search warrants led to the recovery of a stolen firearm, other weapons, and narcotics. The investigation remains ongoing, with additional arrests expected. Chief Hepner thanked assisting agencies and community members for their support.

2. Council Member/Committee Reports

Councilor Patty Fink began by noting the passing of Jane Goodall, stating that it is a great loss and honoring her as an inspiration for generations of women in science. She then requested assistance from Clerk Erika Castro Guzman in locating a public letter about Oak Street to follow up with the sender, noting her interest in including Oak Street improvements in future budget priorities. Clerk Castro Guzman responded that written comments are available in the meeting calendar details and offered to forward the letter.

Councilor Fink also suggested a council discussion on proportionality, requested clarification on the pavement striping, the Community Roots Wellness Center, and inquired about updates to the police facility and the .09 Funding Application. Mayor

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Marla Keethler confirmed the police building was repainted, explained that NWRORP refers to Northwest Rural Partners, and outlined the waterline projects included in the city's .09 Infrastructure Funding Application.

Councilor Fink reiterated her request for a workshop on council governance protocols and procedures, expressing concern that the discussion had been delayed. Mayor Keethler stated the topic would be added to the October 15th agenda and clarified that related resolutions had been remanded to committee.

Councilor Morella Mora expressed appreciation for revisiting governance discussions, noting their importance for continuity and shared decision-making. She suggested holding separate sessions for these conversations to allow thoughtful discussion. Councilor Mora also announced two community events: an Allyship and ICE Verification Workshop on October 9th at the White Salmon Grange, and an End of Harvest Festival on October 18th at the Bingen Park celebrating local farmworkers.

Councilor Ben Giant closed by reminding everyone to cherish loved ones and not take time for granted, sharing that a family member had recently received a terminal diagnosis.

3. Mayor's Updates

Mayor Marla Keethler reported that most of her updates had been shared previously but highlighted progress on the Community Wellness Hub, located in the former Comprehensive Healthcare building. She noted that the project represents a strong collaborative effort and expressed hope that representatives would present to the council before year-end to share program details. Mayor Keethler also mentioned that staff would attend the upcoming state Snowball Event focused on winter preparedness and forecasting.

She reported meeting with the City of Bingen earlier in the week to review the interlocal agreement for shared police services, which is renewed every three years, and to preview the 2026 budget, which will come before council later in the fall. Mayor Keethler also clarified that the council rules and procedures resolution was presented on August 6 and confirmed it will return for discussion on the October 15 agenda.

In response to Councilor Patty Fink's question about ownership of the Community Wellness Hub building, Mayor Keethler stated that it was purchased by a private owner two years ago after Comprehensive Healthcare closed and that property details are available through the public property map.

IX. Executive Session (None)

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:43 p.m.

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Marla Keethler, Mayor

Signed by:

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Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk