



White Salmon City Council MEETING MINUTES

December 17, 2025 – 6:00 PM
119 NE Church Ave and Zoom Teleconference

Attendance:

Council Members:

Jason Hartmann
David Lindley
Ben Giant
Patty Fink
Morella Mora

Staff:

Marla Keethler, Mayor
Shawn MacPherson, City Attorney
Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk
Jennifer Neil, Director of Finance and Operations
Mike Hepner, Police Chief
Chris True, Director of Public Works
Rowan Fairfield, City Planner

I. Call to Order (6:00 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. A total of nine members of the public were in attendance, both in person and via teleconference.

A. Land Acknowledgement (6:00 p.m.)

The Land Acknowledgement was delivered.

B. Presentation of the Flag (6:01 p.m.)

The Presentation of the Flag was conducted.

II. Roll Call (6:02 p.m.)

The meeting was called to order with all Council members present in person, constituting a quorum.

III. Additions or Corrections to the Agenda (6:02 p.m.)

Mayor Keethler announced one change to the agenda: the addition of an interlocal agreement between the City of Bingen and the City of White Salmon regarding ERUs, to be included on the consent agenda.

Moved by Jason Hartmann. Seconded by David Lindley.

Motion to approve the agenda as amended, including the addition of the interlocal agreement between the City of Bingen and the City of White Salmon regarding the Wastewater Treatment Plant Funding to the consent agenda.

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

MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

IV. Public Comment (6:03 p.m.)

Shelley Baxter, Inside City Resident

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Shelly Baxter commented on not receiving City Hall meeting notification emails and requested clearer meeting descriptions. She also suggested additional downtown holiday lighting and stated she had no budget comments.

V. Presentation (6:05 p.m.)

A. Recognition of Council Member Jason Hartman (6:05 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler recognized Councilmember Jason Hartman for completing two full elected terms on the White Salmon City Council, noting he was the first councilmember to do so in many years. She acknowledged his service and contributions to the City and presented him with an engraved plaque. Flowers were also presented to his wife in recognition of her support during his service.

Councilmember Hartman thanked the voters of White Salmon, the Mayor, fellow Council members, and City staff for their support. He expressed appreciation for the City staff's dedication and professionalism and stated it had been an honor to serve the community.

B. Hood River-White Salmon Bridge Authority Bridge Replacement Update (6:10 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler introduced Mike Shannon PE, Project Director with the Hood River–White Salmon Bridge Authority, who presented an update on the Bridge replacement project.

Project Director Mike Shannon reviewed the need for replacement of the existing bridge, noting its low sufficiency rating and functional limitations. He outlined key design elements of the proposed bridge, including two 12-foot travel lanes, 4-foot shoulders, and approximately 20 feet dedicated to pedestrian and bicycle facilities, consisting of an 8-foot sidewalk and two 5-foot directional bike lanes. The new bridge is being designed to meet current seismic and vessel collision standards and will improve river navigation by increasing the navigation width from approximately 249 feet to 450 feet.

Additional improvements include a design speed of 35 miles per hour, a roundabout connection on the Washington side, all-electronic tolling, enhanced emergency access, and long-term flexibility for potential future expansion.

Project Director Shannon reported that the project received final approval of the Record of Decision in November 2025, allowing the project to advance into final design, permitting, and right-of-way acquisition. He stated the current estimated project cost is approximately \$1.12 billion, which includes contingency and demolition of the existing bridge. Funding commitments include \$250 million from the states of Washington and Oregon, as well as a previously awarded \$200 million federal INFRA grant (from the Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highway Projects program), with an additional \$532 million in federal funding still being sought through the Bridge Investment Program.

Project Director Shannon noted ongoing coordination with federal agencies and tribal governments, including progress toward execution of Memoranda of Agreement. He outlined the anticipated project timeline, with design progressing toward 60 percent completion in 2026, potential funding decisions in 2026, construction anticipated to

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begin in 2027, an estimated four-year construction period, and approximately two years for demolition of the existing bridge.

Updated renderings of the proposed bridge were presented, and Project Director Shannon discussed anticipated construction phasing intended to minimize traffic impacts.

Discussion

Mayor Keethler facilitated a Council discussion using questions provided to the Bridge Authority in advance.

Project Director Mike Shannon stated the Authority is continuing to advance the project toward a signed and sealed set of plans and has sufficient funding to proceed to that point. He explained that if full funding is delayed, work can be paused, particularly on items with limited “shelf life,” such as certain permitting elements, so funds are not expended prematurely. He noted that if funding is not secured, the project could be placed on hold, with completed plans available to restart construction promptly when funding becomes available.

In response to questions regarding current costs and financial controls, Project Director Shannon estimated design-phase expenditures at approximately \$1.5 million per month during peak design activity, compared to approximately \$30 million per month during peak construction. He noted the Authority tracks activities that could be delayed or paused if funding assumptions change and emphasized the importance of completing design to avoid restarting work later. He also discussed the risk of cost escalation over time and stated that prolonged delays could require a reassessment of the project scope or alternatives.

Regarding state funding commitments, Project Director Shannon stated the Authority is maintaining legislative support by demonstrating progress, coordinating with lobbyists, and keeping state officials informed. He acknowledged that extended delays could require both states to reevaluate future commitments due to competing budget demands.

On local contribution and tolling assumptions for the TIFIA (The Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act) loan, Project Director Shannon stated the local share is planned at approximately \$105 million supported by toll revenues. He described the tolling assumptions used for financing, including a \$0.50 increase at bridge opening and 15% increases every five years thereafter (approximately 3% annually). He noted the Authority has received an initial BBB-credit rating and is conducting an investment-grade traffic and revenue study to refine assumptions. He stated the TIFIA interest rate would be set at loan closing and is expected to be below market rates. He further explained that tolling policies, including potential discounts and differential rates, have not yet been finalized and will be addressed through a tolling concept of operations.

Council questions included clarification on whether tolling assumptions account for local discounts and traffic mix; Project Director Shannon confirmed the revenue modeling incorporates vehicle types, payment methods, and discounts. He indicated a local

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discount approach has not been formally adopted, but the current plan includes a differential consistent with electronic tolling practices.

Councilmember Morella Mora asked about planning for potential restrictions on truck loads or weight limits on the existing bridge. Project Director Shannon stated that oversight of the existing bridge is managed by the Port and ODOT (Oregon Department of Transportation) through biennial inspections, with engineering consultation to inform any future load rating changes. He noted that any restrictions would likely occur incrementally based on safety and condition assessments.

City Attorney Shawn MacPherson asked about tribal agreements and tolling operations on the future all-electronic bridge. Project Director Shannon stated the Port currently provides free passage for tribal members and the Authority has expressed intent to continue accommodations, though final policies have not been adopted. He described potential electronic mechanisms (non-revenue transponders) to support those accommodations.

In closing questions, Mayor Keethler asked whether design work may limit future flexibility if project funding falls short. Project Director Shannon stated the project is being designed to meet required criteria without overdesign, noting some elements could be adjusted but overall flexibility is limited once a bridge type and location are selected.

Mayor Keethler also asked whether the planned 60% design milestone and cost schedule risk analysis would provide a public revalidation of total project cost and how the community can stay engaged. Project Director Shannon confirmed the analysis is intended to revalidate costs using market tracking and supplier pricing, and stated the resulting updated cost information would be shared publicly, though the process itself is technical and not structured for public input.

Mayor Keethler thanked Project Director Shannon for the update. Project Director Shannon indicated the Authority intends to provide ongoing updates and expressed willingness to return as needed, including at the 60% design milestone.

C. Community Roots Wellness Hub (6:59 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler introduced a presentation on the Community Roots Wellness Hub, located in the former Comprehensive Healthcare building, and noted the Hub hosted an open house in October 2025. Rita Pinchot, mental health therapist, attended in person, and Kay Elton, licensed independent clinical social worker, attended remotely.

Rita Pinchot and Kay Elton described the Hub as a collaborative, co-located model intended to expand behavioral health and community supports on the west side of Klickitat County, developed through K-Link collaborative. They noted current partners include Washington Gorge Action Programs (WAGAP) community mental health workers and the Perinatal Initiative, with openness to additional partners and group-based programming. Pinchot and Elton reported the Hub began operating in September 2025 and is continuing to develop policies, procedures, and partner guidelines.

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Rita Pinchot and Kay Elton stated initial start-up funding was secured through SWACH (Southwest Accountable Communities of Health) with support from Hot Creek Consulting to cover rent and basic renovations and furnishings for an initial two-year period. They shared plans for additional improvements, including exterior enhancements (mural, planters, and outdoor gathering space), and discussed efforts to establish sustainability beyond the initial funding period. They noted the Hub is in early stages of communication capacity, with the goal of hiring a staff person to improve accessibility and operations.

Discussion

Councilmember Ben Giant asked how the City could support the Hub beyond financial contributions. Rita Pinchot and Kay Elton identified potential needs related to facility maintenance and logistical support, and stated that City partnership in outreach and event promotion would be helpful. They also expressed appreciation for coordination with the Police Department during the transition from an extended vacancy to an active community space.

Councilmember Morella Mora asked about the Hub’s approach to selecting additional partners, potential use of the space for meetings or gatherings aligned with the Hub’s mission, and how community members can engage. Pinchot and Elton stated partner criteria and space-use policies are under development and expected to be finalized by the end of January 2026, with future communication tools (including a website and dedicated staff support) anticipated. In the interim, they advised community members to contact WAGAP (Washington Gorge Action Programs) for information and referrals. They also noted plans to share a “needs list” for donated items and materials and to host future work parties and community gatherings.

Councilmember Patty Fink suggested exploring use of the outdoor area as a welcoming community space and encouraged outreach to gather public input on desired uses.

Rita Pinchot and Kay Elton thanked Council for the discussion and support. Mayor Keethler thanked them and expressed the City’s interest in continued partnership and future updates. She noted interested community members may contact WAGAP to arrange a visit.

D. City Highlights with the Mayor (7:17 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler provided year-end updates on current and upcoming City activities. She advised that an atmospheric river was forecast for Thursday night through Friday morning and urged caution due to heavy rain and anticipated minor flooding on the Klickitat River, noting power outages had occurred in surrounding areas.

Mayor Keethler reported ongoing interlocal agreement discussions, including a water rate agreement with the City of Bingen and additional agreements with Bingen and Klickitat County, with the goal of concluding several items by January 2026.

Mayor Keethler noted that Village Lights was well attended and successful, and thanked staff and volunteers involved. She also noted the event provided an opportunity to activate a City-owned triangular lot, which hosted a community beer garden.

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Mayor Keethler reported that the city expects to share additional details regarding a partnership with Washington State University, in which planning and architecture/land use students will use White Salmon as a semester-long project. An on-site visit is anticipated in February 2026, and Councilmembers were invited to share topics or priorities for consideration.

Mayor Keethler also noted the Bridge RAISE open house occurred after the prior Council meeting and that City representatives and community members attended. The open house focused on public input regarding long-term plans to expand the bicycle and pedestrian network connecting to the future bridge access.

Councilmember Patty Fink stated appreciation for the Mayor's notes and raised concerns regarding implications of the school district's decision to relocate the elementary school outside the city. Councilmember Fink referenced potential impacts including safe routes to school, traffic, downtown businesses, and City taxing capacity, and expressed a desire for additional information prior to considering support for a related levy.

Mayor Keethler responded that the school district completed approximately 18 months of work, including a citizen committee process, and has information available on its website. She stated a resolution is anticipated for Council consideration in January 2026 and noted Councilmembers may contact school board members directly for additional information. Mayor Keethler also stated that public comment would be taken at the meeting when the resolution is considered to receive community input on the matter.

City Attorney Shawn MacPherson explained that consideration of a resolution supporting a levy is a statutory exception to the general prohibition on the use of public facilities for election-related activities. He stated that, when properly noticed and presented in resolution form, a legislative body may lawfully consider support for a levy or bond measure. He noted that the Public Disclosure Commission provides detailed guidance on election-related activities and offered to assist with any related legal questions.

VI. Consent Agenda (7:25 p.m.)

- A. Approval of Service Agreement - Johnson Controls Fire Protection LP**
- B. Approval of Leak Forgiveness - 846 NW Loop Road**
- C. Approval of Leak Forgiveness - 1590 SW Kohl Drive**
- D. Approval of Mayor Committee Appointments to the Wildfire Committee**
- E. Change Order No. 2 - Buck Creek Roof Replacement**
- F. Emergency Small Works Contract – Hurley Engineering, Amendment No. 1 (Emergency Pump Repair)**
- G. Interagency Agreement - Snow Plowing Services with Washington State Department of Natural Resources**
- H. Interlocal Agreement - Law Enforcement Services for City of Bingen**
- I. Interlocal Agreement - Wastewater Treatment Plant Funding for City of Bingen**
- J. Pay App No. 2 - Slateco, LLC - Buck Creek Roof Replacement Project**
- K. Pay App No. 5 - Ajax NW - N Main/ Spring Street Improvements**
- L. Resolution 2025-12-637 - Recognition of Council Member Jason Hartmann**

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M. Approval of Meeting Minutes - December 3, 2025

N. 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 17th day of December 2025.

Type	Date	Beginning Check	Ending Check	
Claims	12/01/2025	EFT	EFT	\$61,992.12
	12/05/2025	EFT	EFT	\$3,809.99
	12/15/2025	EFT	EFT	\$240.00
	12/17/2025	EFT	EFT	\$15,072.30
	12/17/2025	43039	43086	\$584,269.55
			Claim Total	\$665,338.96
Payroll	12/19/2025	EFT	EFT	\$77,802.51
			Payroll Total	\$77,802.51
			Total Vouchers	\$743,141.47
*ACH Converted to check	12/05/2025	43038	43038	\$38,644.30

**The payroll totals approved at the December 3, 2025, meeting include an ACH payment that was rejected and subsequently reissued and paid via check. Not included in total vouchers.*

Moved by Ben Giant. Seconded by David Lindley.

Motion to approve Consent Agenda and Vouchers for \$743,141.47.

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

MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

VII. Public Hearing (7:29 p.m.)

A. Ordinance 2025-02-1174 - Land Use Fee Schedule

1. Presentation (7:29 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler opened the public hearing at 7:29 p.m. to consider the adoption of Ordinance 2025-02-1174 regarding the proposed Land Use Fee Schedule and invited Planner Rowan Fairfield to present.

City Planner Rowan Fairfield explained this item includes both an ordinance and a companion resolution. They reviewed that, in September 2025, Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding with the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority to provide development review services, which included a fee-for-service component to reimburse the Fire Authority for staff time. The proposed ordinance adds a fire review fee consistent with that agreement.

Planner Fairfield further explained that the ordinance would move the Land Use Fee Schedule out of the codified municipal code and instead establish fees by resolution, which would allow for more efficient future updates. They stated that no changes to existing fees are proposed at this time, other than the addition of the fire review fee. They noted that the ordinance and resolution are

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structured to take effect simultaneously to avoid any gap in fee authority, and that broader fee revisions would be considered at a later date.

2. Public Hearing (7:30 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler opened the public testimony portion of the hearing at 7:30 p.m. to consider adoption of Ordinance 2025-02-1174, Land Use Fee Schedule.

Hearing none, Mayor Keethler closed the public testimony portion of the hearing at 7:31 p.m.

3. Discussion (None)

4. Action (7:32 p.m.)

Moved Ben Giant. Seconded by Jason Hartmann.

Motion to adopt 2025-02-1174, amending WSMC Chapter 3.36 to remove the codified land use fee schedule and instead establish such fees by Resolution 2025-12-633.

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

MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

Mayor Marla Keethler closed the public hearing at 7:32 p.m.

VIII. Business Items (7:33 p.m.)

A. Ordinance 2025-11-1184 - Adopting the Annual Budget for Fiscal Year ending

1. Presentation (7:33 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler presented the City's annual budget for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2026, noting that this was the third Council consideration following two public hearings.

Finance and Operations Director Jennifer Neil presented the item and reported a slight change to budget figures based on the conclusion of CBA negotiations, stating the proposal reflects an agreement intended to balance employee and City needs. Director Neil noted the budget adoption includes the salary matrix and that Council had received a public link to the budget and budget brief. She offered to review the materials in detail if desired.

2. Discussion (7:34 p.m.)

Councilmember Patty Fink thanked staff for the budget brief and asked clarifying questions regarding changes between the detailed and rolled-up budget formats. Director Neil explained that the City's financial software (Springbrook) currently displays certain accounts inconsistently, which can cause items (including clerk-related expenses) to appear split across sections. She stated the rolled-up format was provided to improve clarity.

Councilmember Fink inquired about Legislative Miscellaneous funding and whether additional amounts had been added for community projects. Director Neil stated no additional funding was added due to lack of a Council majority and noted Council may revisit the topic through the budget amendment process.

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Councilmember Fink asked about the \$90,000 computer services line item. Director Neil clarified it represents the City's annual IT support costs and does not include broader system upgrades, which could be considered later via amendment.

Councilmember Fink noted increases in building-related expenses and asked about staffing reflected in the organization chart. Director Neil confirmed the budget includes two Public Works intern positions and an administrative intern position as part of the youth internship program, as well as the addition of a senior accountant. Director Neil clarified that the clerk's position is not new; rather, related expenditures are being aligned with state reporting requirements by moving them from Finance to Legislative.

Mayor Keethler explained the clerk's primary role is legislative recordkeeping and documentation. Mayor Keethler stated the administrative intern would support the clerk and assist with projects such as digitizing historical records, front desk support, and communications capacity, while also providing a youth public service-learning opportunity.

Councilmember Fink asked about street repair funding, including Oak Street and Church Street, and whether the city has resources for chip seal or repaving in 2026. Mayor Keethler explained Oak Street remains a priority in the Council-adopted six-year transportation plan and that the city was not successful in securing Church Street funding. She noted the City does not currently have sufficient cash on hand in the Streets budget to fully reconstruct a street without grant support. Mayor Keethler stated the City will continue routine maintenance until funding is secured for either a citywide chip seal project or a prioritized street repaving project.

Councilmember Fink asked about the county chip seal program and prior funding. Mayor Keethler clarified prior chip seal work was funded through TIB (Transportation Improvement Board), with the County contracted to extend project dollars.

Public Works Director Chris True explained that many funding programs have eligibility limits based on street classifications and that the prior Church Street application may have been too large relative to available funding. He stated staff intends to pursue a more phased approach by breaking larger projects into smaller segments to improve competitiveness for future funding opportunities. He clarified that current funding pursuits are primarily through TIB rather than WSDOT (Washington State Department of Transportation).

Councilmember Fink asked whether WSDOT involvement would be useful; Director True responded that current funding efforts are through TIB and not WSDOT. Councilmember Fink thanked staff and concluded her questions.

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3. **Action (7:48 p.m.)**
Moved by Jason Hartmann. Seconded by David Lindley.
Motion to approve Ordinance 2025-11-1184, adopting the annual budget for fiscal year ending December 31, 2026 as presented.
Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Hartmann – Aye, Lindley – Aye, Mora – Aye.
MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

B. 2026 Legislative Priorities (7:49 p.m.)

1. Presentation (7:49 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler introduced the proposed 2026 legislative priorities, explaining the intent is to align Council and staff messaging when engaging with state legislators. She stated the recommended priorities reflect both longstanding issues, such as the need for more stable and reliable local revenue options, and recent Council actions, including priorities related to immigrant community support and transportation needs such as State Route 141. Mayor Keethler noted the upcoming legislative session beginning in January 2026 and invited Council feedback or additional suggested priorities.

2. Discussion (7:50 p.m.)

Councilmember Ben Giant asked whether childcare was intentionally omitted from the proposed priorities. Mayor Keethler responded that the five priorities presented were selected deliberately based on timeliness and anticipated legislative action. She stated childcare remains an active issue for the City, with ongoing engagement and established communication channels, but that other issues were prioritized for focused advocacy at the upcoming session.

Councilmember Morella Mora expressed appreciation for the City's proactive work on law enforcement transparency and community protections. She shared her pride in the City's leadership and preparedness, noting the City's policies and actions have positioned White Salmon to support neighboring communities and provide examples of constructive approaches. She thanked Council, staff, and City leadership for their collective efforts and commitment to community values.

3. Action (7:54 p.m.)

Moved by David Lindley. Seconded by Ben Giant.
Motion to approve the City's 2026 legislative priorities as presented.
Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Hartmann – Aye, Lindley – Aye, Mora – Aye.
MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

IX. Reports and Communications (7:54 p.m.)

A. Staff Reports (7:54 p.m.)

City Attorney Shawn MacPherson reported no updates beyond prior comments regarding election-related activity guidance and thanked outgoing Councilmember Hartmann for his service. He also extended holiday greetings.

B. Council Member Reports (7:55 p.m.)

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Councilmember Jason Hartmann thanked Council and staff for their support and stated it had been a pleasure to serve.

Councilmember David Lindley acknowledged adoption of the 2026 budget and thanked staff for the process. He reported on a recent CityLab meeting focused on 2026 priorities, emissions reduction planning, and climate resiliency analysis. He suggested a future presentation by the school superintendent related to the upcoming levy discussion and commended Councilmember Hartmann for his service.

Councilmember Ben Giant reported on attendance at the Downtown Business Association meeting, noting the success of Village Lights and upcoming beautification projects. He announced the next Community Development Committee meeting and extended holiday greetings.

Councilmember Patty Fink reported on Tree Board activities, including development of a Tree Walk concept, exploration of swale tree projects, and coordination with CityLab. She also reported on Solid Waste Management Committee progress, including completion of the Solid Waste Management Plan and exploration of organics management options. She requested a future Council discussion regarding committee visibility, vacancies, and public engagement.

Councilmember Morella Mora expressed gratitude to staff and Council for budget adoption and labor negotiations, thanked Councilmember Hartmann for mentorship and service, and reflected on community resilience and shared values, extending holiday greetings.

Mayor Keethler noted that the school superintendent would be scheduled to present when the levy-related resolution comes before Council. She identified upcoming committee vacancies due to Councilmember Jason Hartmann’s departure, including positions on the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority and the Bridge Authority, and invited Council interest. She referenced upcoming AWC City Action Days and training opportunities, thanked Council and staff for their work over the year, and extended holiday wishes.

X. Executive Session (None)

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

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Marla Keethler, Mayor

Signed by:

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Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk