



## White Salmon City Council MEETING MINUTES

January 7, 2026 – 6:00 PM  
119 NE Church Ave and Zoom Teleconference

### Attendance:

#### Council Members:

David Lindley  
Patty Fink  
Doug Rainbolt  
Morella Mora

#### Staff:

Marla Keethler, City Mayor  
Shawn MacPherson, City Attorney (Zoom)  
Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk  
Jennifer Neil, Director of Finance and Operations  
Chris True, Director of Public Works  
Mike Hepner, Police Chief  
Wes Long, WKRFA Chief (6:04 p.m.)

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

Mayor Marla Keethler called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. A total of 15 members of the public were in attendance, both in person and via teleconference.

#### A. Land Acknowledgement (6:01 p.m.)

The Land Acknowledgement was delivered.

#### B. Presentation of the Flag (6:02 p.m.)

The Presentation of the Flag was conducted.

### II. Oath of Office (6:02 p.m.)

#### A. Administration of Oath to Councilor Morella Mora

Councilor Morella Mora was elected on November 4, 2025, and subsequently sworn in as the City Councilor for Position #4 for a four-year term.

#### ~~B. Administration of Oath to Councilor Ben Giant~~

Mayor Marla Keethler noted that Doug Rainbolt is a newly elected Councilor and was sworn in on Monday, January 5, 2026, at City Hall. She also stated that re-elected Council Member Ben Giant will be sworn in either at City Hall or at a future Council meeting.

### III. Roll Call (6:02 p.m.)

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

*Moved by David Lindley. Seconded by Morella Mora.*

*Move to excuse the absence of Council member Ben Giant from the January 7 City Council meeting.*

**MOTION CARRIED 4-0**

**Mora – Aye, Fink – Aye, Rainbolt – Aye, Lindley – Aye.**

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**IV. Additions or Corrections to the Agenda (None)**

**V. Public Comment (6:05 p.m.)**

No members of the public provided comment.

**VI. Presentation (6:05 p.m.)**

**A. City Highlights with the Mayor (6:05 p.m.)**

Mayor Marla Keethler acknowledged national news from Minnesota that she found troubling and emphasized the importance of local governance rooted in integrity, shared facts, civic participation, and respectful conduct.

Mayor Keethler reported that Klickitat County Commissioners authorized the transfer of the County Emergency Management Program from the Klickitat County Emergency Management Department to the Klickitat County Public Works Department, effective on January 15. She noted that the three cities are signatories to the shared agreement and that additional information is being requested from the County. Updates will be provided as available.

Mayor Keethler shared that the Washington State Department of Natural Resources selected a contractor for the next phase of the fuels mitigation project. Work is tentatively scheduled to begin in April 2026 and last approximately three to four weeks. A future presentation to Council is anticipated in the spring. WKRFA Chief Wes Long added that this phase includes multiple property owners and emphasized continued outreach and community engagement related to wildfire preparedness.

Mayor Keethler reported that drones approved by Council in the fall have been purchased for the Bingen-White Salmon Police Department. Policies governing drone use are available on the City website, and a FAQ is in development. She also noted that the City is pursuing improvements to crosswalks along Jewett Boulevard and is addressing streetlight issues on the north side of Jewett as part of public safety efforts.

Finally, Mayor Keethler stated she will attend Association of Washington Cities Action Days. Councilmembers interested in attending Action Days were encouraged to coordinate with staff for registration.

**VII. Consent Agenda (6:11 p.m.)**

- A. Approval of Mayor's 2026 Committee Appointments**
- B. Approval of Utility Billing Grievance - 118 NW Cherry Street**
- C. Approval of Utility Billing Grievance - 913 NE Vine Street**
- D. Interlocal Agreement - District Court Services for Klickitat County**
- E. Resolution 2026-01-639 - Local Bond Program Funding**
- 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 7<sup>th</sup> day of January 2026.**

Type	Date	Beginning Check	Ending Check	
Claims	12/30/2025	43089	43124	\$178,381.13

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	01/07/2026	43125	43136	\$302,386.97
			<b>Claim Total</b>	<b>\$480,768.10</b>
<b>Payroll</b>	01/05/2026	43087	43088	\$41,545.57
	01/05/2026	EFT	EFT	\$96,907.94
			<b>Payroll Total</b>	<b>\$138,453.51</b>
			<b>Toal Vouchers</b>	<b>\$619,221.61</b>

***Moved by David Lindley. Seconded by Doug Rainbolt.***

***Motion to approve Consent Agenda and Vouchers for \$619,221.61.***

**Further Discussion (6:11 p.m.)**

Councilor Doug Rainbolt noted ongoing water leak issues and suggested the City provide informational resources on water-leak monitoring tools that could alert absent property owners and help prevent damage, without recommending specific vendors.

**Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Rainbolt – Aye, Lindley – Aye.**

**MOTION CARRIED 4-0**

**VIII. Appoint a Mayor Pro Tempore (6:12 p.m.)**

**A. Nomination (6:12 p.m.)**

Mayor Marla Keethler noted that a memo outlining the role of the Mayor Pro Tempore had been provided and advised that, due to one Council vacancy, Council could choose to defer the item to a future meeting.

Councilor Patty Fink nominated David Lindley for the position of Mayor Pro Tempore. Councilor Morella Mora seconded the nomination, citing Councilor Lindley’s preparedness and familiarity with meeting procedures.

**B. Action (6:13 p.m.)**

***Moved by Patty Fink. Seconded by Morella Mora.***

***Motion to appoint Councilor David Lindley to serve as Mayor Pro Tempore.***

**Further Discussion (7:14 p.m.)**

Councilor David Lumley stated that he accepted the nomination and expressed appreciation for the comments.

Councilor Doug Rainbolt expressed support for the nomination.

**Giant – Aye, Fink – Aye, Rainbolt – Aye, Lindley – Abstained.**

**MOTION CARRIED 3-0-1**

**IX. Business Items (6:15 p.m.)**

**A. Resolution 2026-01-638 - Expressing Support for White Salmon Valley School District Propositions Nos. 1 and 2. (6:15 p.m.)**

**1. Presentation (6:17 p.m.)**

Mayor Marla Keethler introduced Resolution 2026-01-638 and explained that Council would hear a presentation from the White Salmon Valley School District.

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Peter Harkema, Chair of the White Salmon Valley School District Board, and Superintendent Rich Polkinghorn presented information on the District's upcoming special election scheduled for February 10. The presentation covered two ballot measures:

**Proposition 1 (Bond):** A 20-year bond at an estimated rate of \$1.66 per \$1,000 of assessed value, totaling approximately \$78 million, to renovate and replace aging school facilities. The proposal would consolidate schools into a one-campus, two-school model (K–6 and 7–12), improve safety and security, modernize learning environments, enhance accessibility, and qualify the District for approximately \$34 million in state construction assistance.

**Proposition 2 (EP&O Levy):** A three-year renewal levy at an estimated rate of \$1.61 per \$1,000 of assessed value to support district operations, including staffing, curriculum, student services, extracurricular programs, and facilities maintenance.

District representatives Board Chair Harkema and Superintendent Polkinghorn noted the bond proposal was developed through a multi-year, community-led planning process and emphasized operational efficiencies, long-term cost savings, and the importance of timing to maximize state funding. Information regarding tax impacts, exemptions for qualifying seniors and individuals with disabilities, and voter timelines was also provided.

District representatives stated that ballots would be mailed January 23 and encouraged community members to participate in the election. They thanked Council for considering the resolution and offered to answer questions.

**2. Public Comment – Inviting Support/Opposition (6:34 p.m.)**

Mayor Marla Keethler thanked Superintendent Rich Polkinghorn and Board Chair Peter Harkema for the presentation and opened the floor for public comment, inviting comments in support or opposition to the proposed school district measures.

No public comments were received.

**3. Discussion (6:35 p.m.)**

Councilor David Lindley thanked the School District for the presentation and leadership, noted long-standing infrastructure concerns, and asked whether the bond amount was based on conceptual design and whether costs could come in lower and reduce the effective tax rate.

Superintendent Rich Polkinghorn replied that plans are at a conceptual level, square footage additions drive costs, and while cost savings may be possible during a formal design process, the bond request reflects an upper limit of \$77.8 million and the District intends to stay within that limit.

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Councilor Lindley also asked when planning would begin regarding the future of the Whitson property. Superintendent Polkinghorn stated Whitson would remain in use for at least approximately three years after a successful bond and that community engagement about future use would likely occur within the next two to five years; no decisions or substantive discussions have occurred to date.

Councilor Doug Rainbolt thanked the District and noted appreciation for the community-engagement process. He raised concerns about affordability impacts for some residents and asked about available relief. Superintendent Polkinghorn noted that Skamania and Klickitat counties offer property tax relief programs for qualifying seniors and individuals with disabilities and stated the District has emphasized this information in its materials. He acknowledged the bond is a significant request but stated the District believes the benefits of modernizing facilities and improving efficiency outweigh the costs of continuing to maintain aging facilities.

Councilor Morella Mora thanked the District and emphasized the community-led engagement process. She expressed support for the measures and framed the proposal as an investment in the community's future, while acknowledging affordability concerns and the importance of ongoing community conversations about mitigating impacts to financially vulnerable residents.

Councilor Patty Fink thanked the District and stated she intends to vote in support personally, while raising concerns as a City Councilor regarding overall tax burden and potential impacts on the City's ability to pursue future funding needs. She expressed concerns about safe routes to schools, potential infrastructure needs to support access to a consolidated campus, and the District's significant land holdings in the downtown area in relation to affordable housing needs. She stated she may abstain from the Council vote due to outstanding questions and expressed a desire to continue working collaboratively with the District.

Superintendent Polkinghorn responded that the District already operates a school at the proposed campus and that students currently walk or bike there. He acknowledged community attachment to Whitson and stated the District is aware of its land holdings and recognizes a role in future affordable housing conversations, noting "first things first" is improving facilities.

Board Chair Peter Harkema added that the District recognizes shared interests with the City regarding affordability, livability, and community integrity and expressed commitment to collaborative work going forward.

Councilor Fink clarified she was not advocating to remain at Whitson, but noted broader City concerns remain.

Mayor Keethler asked whether the bond requires a supermajority. Superintendent Polkinghorn stated the bond requires 60% + 1 approval and a

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40% voter turnout validation based on the prior election; the EP&O levy requires a simple majority (50% + 1).

Mayor Keethler asked a follow-up question regarding the statewide \$10 per \$1,000 property tax cap and whether voter-approved bonds/levies are outside that cap. Superintendent Polkinghorn stated he did not know. Mayor Keethler then stated follow-up would be provided to Council by email, noting the belief that the measures fall outside the \$10 cap.

**4. Action (6:57 p.m.)**

***Moved by David Lindley. Seconded by Morella Mora.***

***Motion to adopt Resolution No. 2026-01-638 expressing support for the White Salmon Valley School District's 2026 Proposition No. 1 (Capital Bond) and Proposition No. 2 (EP&O Levy Renewal).***

**Further Discussion (7:32 p.m.)**

Councilor David Lindley provided a personal disclosure and expressed strong support for public schools, noting his family background in education. He stated that facility conditions demonstrate a clear need for improvement, while acknowledging the bond request is significant and will require continued community discussion. He emphasized that, in small communities, civic participation and investing in the future, through taxes that benefit the broader community, are important and that the school measures are a key part of White Salmon's future.

**Giant – Aye, Fink – Abstained, Rainbolt – Aye, Lindley – Aye.**

**MOTION CARRIED 3-0-1**

**X. Reports and Communications (6:59 p.m.)**

**A. Staff Reports (6:59 p.m.)**

City Attorney Shawn MacPherson reminded Council that the resolution supporting or opposing a ballot measure is a narrow exception under public facilities and election laws. He emphasized that public facilities may not be used for election advocacy outside this exception, noted the procedural requirements reflected in the resolution (identification of measure numbers and opportunity for opposition), and encouraged Councilmembers to consult legal counsel with any election-related questions.

Mayor Marla Keether thanked the City Attorney MacPherson and clarified that the City will not engage in educational or promotional communications regarding the School District ballot measures. She noted prior experience with election compliance during the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority (WKRFA) vote and encouraged Council to consult staff with questions.

WKRFA Chief Wes Long reported that the first year of the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) has concluded successfully. He noted progress toward voter commitments, addition of two full-time employees, improved service delivery, and that the RFA finished 2025 under budget. He stated the Board has initiated a strategic planning process to guide future fire, EMS, emergency services, public education, and wildfire mitigation efforts.

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WKRFA Chief Long also noted plans to begin replacing an aging fire engine serving White Salmon.

Public Works Director Chris True announced that the Public Works Department is now fully staffed following the hiring of two new employees, who began work on January 5.

**B. Council Member Reports (7:06 p.m.)**

Councilor Morella Mora shared reflections on national and international events and emphasized the importance of community-led, peaceful, and justice-oriented local governance.

Councilor David Lindley offered brief remarks to congratulate newly elected officials, acknowledged a Councilor’s family addition, and expressed appreciation for the upcoming year.

Councilor Patty Fink noted efforts to shared information regarding updated recycling pickup schedules and reported on upcoming Tree Board work, including a potential funding request later in February.

Councilor Doug Rainbolt thanked staff for onboarding support, reflected on community responsibility and leadership, and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve.

**XI. Executive Session (None)**

**X. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

DocuSigned by:



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Marla Keethler, Mayor

Signed by:



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Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk