



White Salmon City Council M E E T I N G M I N U T E S

January 21, 2026 – 6:00 PM
119 NE Church Ave and Zoom Teleconference

Attendance:

Council Members:

Ben Giant (Zoom)
Patty Fink
Doug Rainbolt (Zoom)
David Lindley
Morella Mora

Staff:

Marla Keethler, Mayor (Zoom)
Shawn MacPherson, City Attorney (Zoom)
Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk
Jennifer Neil, Director of Finance and Operations
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 ten 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, constituting a quorum.

III. Additions or Corrections to the Agenda (None)

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

Emily Harris, Community Journalism Director for Uplift Local

Emily Harris, Community Journalism Director for Uplift Local, spoke in support of the draft ordinance discussion regarding committee meetings. She described Uplift Local's Documenters program, which trains and pays residents to attend public meetings, produce fact-checked notes, and share information through local media partners. Harris emphasized the importance of accessible public meeting information and encouraged adoption of the ordinance, noting that a centralized meeting calendar helps reduce barriers to public participation. She thanked the City of White Salmon for welcoming Documenters at various meetings and expressed appreciation for the City's commitment to public engagement.

V. Presentation (6:07 p.m.)

A. Big River Community Land Trust Housing Project Update (6:07 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler welcomed representatives from Big River Community Land Trust and invited founder and board member Anne Medenbach, joined by Executive Director Alicia Sherburn, to provide an update.

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Board Member Medenbach gave an overview of the community land trust model, explaining that the nonprofit acquires and stewards land long-term while homeowners purchase and own the homes through standard mortgages, with eligibility capped at 120% of Area Median Income. Homes remain permanently affordable through a renewable 99-year land lease.

She reviewed the organization's history since forming in 2018, including nonprofit status in 2019 and the hiring of its first Executive Director in 2023. She highlighted completion of the organization's first home in Hood River, OR, which is currently under contract to an eligible family.

Founder and board member Medenbach presented plans for the Avalon Drive project in Hood River, a proposed 42-unit affordable homeownership development currently in the planning and funding phase, with construction anticipated to begin in 2027.

She discussed challenges including limited funding, high land costs, organizational capacity, and the need for continued education and awareness of the community land trust model. Opportunities identified included increasing state and local housing funding, partnerships with local jurisdictions, land contributions, shared data on housing needs, and collaborative regional efforts to expand affordable homeownership.

Discussion

Council Member Patty Fink asked whether Big River Community Land Trust could undertake smaller projects and integrate commercial uses into developments. Founder and board member Anne Medenbach responded that the organization can accommodate projects of any size, including small developments, and that mixed-use and commercial components are permitted under the land trust model. She noted that Big River's focus complements, rather than duplicates, the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority, with Big River primarily serving middle-income households.

Council Member Doug Rainbolt praised the quality of the completed Tucker Road home and asked questions regarding land lease rates and homeowner equity. Medenbach explained that the land lease functions similarly to an HOA fee, typically around \$100 per month with an additional reserve contribution. She clarified that resale prices are restricted to income-eligible buyers, with appreciation capped to ensure long-term affordability.

Council Member David Lindley inquired about the process and legal considerations related to gifted public land. Medenbach noted that the Hood River, OR, property provided a clear public benefit and was an underutilized parcel, and that specific parameters were addressed by the City of Hood River.

Council Member Morella Mora asked about the organization's engagement with low-income housing needs and partnerships. Medenbach responded that Big River collaborates with a wide range of housing providers and views itself as one tool among many. She emphasized flexibility in project design, coordination with housing authorities, and the potential for mixed-income and mixed-use developments, while acknowledging the urgency of low-income housing needs.

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Mayor Marla Keethler requested clarification on Area Median Income figures referenced in the presentation. Medenbach stated the figures were based on current estimates and agreed to provide a reference source.

Mayor Keethler thanked Big River Community Land Trust for the update and expressed interest in future partnership opportunities.

B. City Highlights with the Mayor (6:28 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler reported that she and Councilmember Doug Rainbolt attended City Action Days in Olympia, WA, and joined the meeting remotely. While there, they are meeting with Senator Paul Harris and Senator Curtis King to discuss the City's legislative priorities. With Senator Harris, the focus will be on securing funding to restart the State Route 141 washout project. Senator King will be updated on City projects, including progress on the Bluff Trail, which received \$1 million in funding with his support, and continued collaboration despite changes to his district. Mayor Keethler also acknowledged his role in securing funding for the Bingen underpass and his ongoing engagement with neighboring districts.

Mayor Keethler announced a community open house for the Phase IIA water infrastructure project on February 24 from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. This major project will result in traffic delays along State Route 14 and north towards Trout Lake, WA. Construction is expected to begin in the spring and conclude by July. The City will continue outreach to ensure the community is informed.

Mayor Keethler reported that the Department of Licensing confirmed the effective date of the vehicle licensing fee approved in 2023 as part of the Transportation Benefit District. The fee, previously delayed due to an administrative error, is now recognized as effective September 1, 2023, ensuring the City receives the full intended duration of revenue.

Mayor Keethler addressed recent recycling service disruptions, noting that White Salmon recycling is transitioning to Monday collection on an A–D week cycle. She acknowledged resident frustration related to schedule changes and staffing challenges and expressed optimism that service will stabilize in February 2026.

Lastly, Mayor Keethler updated the Council on an ongoing issue within the Fort Vancouver Regional Library System. As a member of the advisory committee for the system's strategic plan, she noted continued debate over language related to equity and equitable access. She expressed concern that the issue has received limited attention locally and noted concerns raised by the Friends of the White Salmon Library. To increase awareness and encourage public engagement, Mayor Keethler shared a video featuring remarks from Trustee Mary Williams.

Summarized Statement from Trustee Mary Williams:

Trustee Mary Williams delivered prepared remarks expressing concern over actions by certain members of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library Board of Trustees related to the strategic planning process. She stated that efforts to remove or weaken language concerning equity and intellectual freedom undermine the mission, values, and public responsibility of the library system.

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Trustee Williams emphasized that the strategic plan was developed through extensive community engagement, professional consultation, and staff participation, and she characterized resistance to the plan as an attempt to substitute personal discomfort for data-driven governance. She underscored equity and intellectual freedom as foundational principles of public libraries and urged community awareness and engagement to uphold these values. The full statement can be found: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKZVSJUr6yI>

Council Member Morella Mora thanked Mayor Keethler for the presentation and asked whether public comment was still being accepted. Mayor Keethler confirmed that public comment remains open, noting that the trustees' next meeting is Monday, January 26, 2026, with additional information available on FVRL.org.

VI. Consent Agenda (6:55 p.m.)

- A. Approval of Meeting Minutes - December 17, 2025
- B. Change Order No. 1 - Transmission Main Replacement Phase IIA
- C. Change Order No. 3 - Buck Creek Roof Replacement Project
- D. Change Order No. 4 - N Main/ Spring Street Improvements
- E. Change Order No. 5 - N Main/ Spring Street Improvements
- F. Interlocal Agreement - Incarceration Services of City Prisoners with Klickitat County
- G. Pay App No. 1 - Tapani Inc - Transmission Main Replacement Phase IIA
- H. Pay App No. 3 - Slateco, LLC - Buck Creek Roof Replacement Project
- I. Pay App No. 4 - Slateco, LLC - Buck Creek Roof Replacement Project
- J. Pay App No. 6 - Ajax NW - N Main/ Spring Street Improvements
- K. Pay App No. 7 - Ajax NW - N Main/ Spring Street Improvements
- L. Resolution No. 2026-01-640 – Removing and Authorizing Signers on City Financial Accounts
- M. 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 21th day of January 2026.

Type	Date	Beginning Check	Ending Check	
Claims	12/31/2025	43137	43159	\$162,427.85
	01/21/2026	43160	43179	\$60,164.02
			Claim Total	\$212,591.87
Payroll	01/20/2026	EFT	EFT	\$96,499.78
			Payroll Total	\$96,499.78
			Toal Vouchers	\$309,091.65

Moved by David Lindley. Seconded by Morella Mora.

Motion to approve Consent Agenda and Vouchers for \$309,091.65.

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

MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

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VII. Business Items (6:57 p.m.)

A. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) – Home Repair Program Closeout

1. Presentation (6:57 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler introduced the closeout of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Home Repair Program and opened the public hearing at 6:57 p.m.

Liz Wilbur, Housing Resource Center Manager, and Salvador Cruz-Torres, Housing Counselor and Spanish interpreter for Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation (CCHC), presented the program summary, reporting that \$124,766 in federal CDBG funds were expended to complete six repair projects at three single-family homes. Repairs included three roof replacements, a heat pump replacement with required electrical panel upgrades, bathroom repairs at two homes, window replacements, weatherization measures, and structural and safety repairs, including foundation and deck improvements.

Manager Wilbur reported that the program assisted three households, including two Hispanic households, two female-headed households, and two households with elderly residents. One household had income below 30% of Area Median Income (AMI), one between 30–50% AMI, and one between 50–80% AMI. She noted that additional grant funds were approved to address unforeseen structural issues discovered during one of the roof replacements.

2. Public Hearing (7:04 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler opened the public testimony portion of the agenda item regarding the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Home Repair Program Closeout at 7:04 p.m.

Hearing none, Mayor Keethler closed the public testimony portion at 7:05 p.m.

3. Discussion (7:05 p.m.)

Council Member Doug Rainbolt commended Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation for its work, noting the positive impact on residents facing hardship.

Council Member Patty Fink echoed the Council's appreciation, expressing support for continued funding to assist additional households.

Mayor Keethler thanked the Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation staff for the multi-year partnership and noted that the program benefited not only City of White Salmon residents, but also eligible residents in the broader Klickitat and Skamania County areas.

Mayor Marla Keethler closed the public hearing at 7:06 p.m.

B. Planning Commission's 2026 Workplan (7:06 p.m.)

1. Presentation (7:06 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler introduced the Planning Commission's 2026 Work Plan.

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Planner Rowan Fairfield presented the draft work plan, noting it was developed following a joint Council–Planning Commission meeting to better align priorities. They explained that the draft includes seven items, does not assume all will be completed in one year, and does not assign priority. They stated that council retains discretion to revise, remove, or prioritize items.

2. Discussion (7:08 p.m.)

Council Member Patty Fink suggested adding a coordination item with the City Lab related to equity under Activity 1 and expressed concerns that Activities 2 and 3 may not fall within core planning functions. Sh noted interest in the pre-approved building plan item and suggested further Council discussion on downtown parking before Planning Commission review.

Council Member Doug Rainbolt supported Activity 1, emphasizing the importance of shared utilities analysis and peer comparisons. He questioned whether the work plan sufficiently focused on land use and planning priorities and requested time to return with additional suggestions.

Council Members David Lindley, Morella Mora, and Ben Giant echoed concerns regarding Activities 2 and 3, suggesting they be deprioritized or removed in favor of more core planning tasks.

Planner Fairfield clarified that Activities 2 and 3 were proposed by Planning Commissioners based on issues they had recently observed.

Mayor Keethler summarized that Council appeared to favor deferring action for additional discussion.

Council Member Rainbolt suggested allowing work to proceed on Activity 1 while holding other items for further review, with the matter to return at a future meeting.

3. Action (7:14 p.m.)

Moved by Doug Rainbolt. Seconded by Patty Fink.

Motion to defer action on the Planning Commission's 2026 Work Plan and return on February 4 with a more comprehensive list of key focus areas for Council consideration.

Further Discussion (7:14 p.m.)

Council Member Ben Giant expressed support for deferring the item to allow additional input but cautioned against unnecessarily delaying well-developed work. He emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum on actionable items, noting the need to balance refinement with progress. He stated support for the motion given the specific request for additions and suggested deprioritizing Activities 2 and 3, with the goal of returning for full approval of the work plan.

Council Member David Lindley asked whether deferring action would delay any upcoming Planning Commission meetings. Planner Rowan Fairfield responded that no

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meetings would be delayed, noting that recent bylaw changes designated the second monthly meeting as a workshop and that no meeting was scheduled without a finalized work plan. Council Member Lindley indicated agreement and stated that Council should be prepared to make a decision at the first meeting in February.

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

MOTION CARRIED 5-0.

VIII. Reports and Communications (7:18 p.m.)

A. Council Committees – Code Framework and Next Steps (7:18 p.m.)

Mayor Marla Keethler opened discussion on Code Framework and Next Steps, explaining the draft ordinance was for discussion only and had not yet received legal review. No action was scheduled; Council feedback was requested to guide revisions for a future agenda.

Council Member Patty Fink said she requested the item to revisit committee roles, transparency, and expectations. She expressed concern that past code changes did not fully consider downstream impacts and that committees have advanced policy recommendations with limited Council input. She asked Council to clarify the intended role of committees and related transparency standards.

Council Member Doug Rainbolt supported the general intent of the draft but noted implementation would need to consider staff capacity, communication, and prioritization.

Council Member Ben Giant asked about trade-offs of returning to OPMA-style requirements, particularly staff workload impacts.

Mayor Keethler stated prior changes were driven by staff burden and concerns about “committee creep.” She noted the City has nine committees, with another beginning soon, and emphasized committees do not make binding decisions. Department heads echoed workload concerns, noting additional requirements would divert time from core duties and could require more staffing.

Mayor Keethler explained committee work requests are secondary to adopted budget priorities and managed by department heads. Council Member Lindley said his prior vote aimed to reduce staff burden, not limit public input, and supported earlier public engagement. Council Member Mora supported increased transparency and asked about middle-ground options, offering volunteer support.

City Attorney Shawn MacPherson declined to give an ad hoc opinion, stating he would provide written legal guidance after review. Council discussed possible refinements, including clarifying public testimony language, standardizing committee practices, varying formality levels, and consolidating committees. Staff clarified distinctions between committees and boards under the code.

Council Members Giant and Mora emphasized improving public access while minimizing staff burden and expanding engagement beyond ordinance changes.

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Mayor Keethler confirmed staff would revise the draft, incorporate legal review, and return with options, including OPMA or hybrid approaches, for future Council consideration.

B. Staff Reports (7:56 p.m.)

City Attorney Shawn MacPherson reported completing an onboarding discussion with Council Member Rainbolt regarding the roles and responsibilities of elected officials, noting other Council members previously received similar training.

Public Works Director Chris True reported Phase IIA of the Bald Mountain Corners area project is expected to begin soon and will cause significant traffic impacts, including an anticipated 34-day road closure. Staff are coordinating with Emergency Management and the school district to maintain emergency access and minimize bus route disruptions. A public open house is scheduled for February 24, with contractor mobilization expected in mid-February and construction beginning in March. Road closure is anticipated around May, pending WSDOT approval.

C. Council Member Reports (7:58 p.m.)

Council Member Rainbolt reported attending City Action Days in Olympia, where discussions focused on state budget challenges, trade-offs, and financial priorities. He noted the value of hearing from state leaders and stated he is focused on completing planning priority work before the next Council meeting.

Council Member Giant shared that this was his first Council meeting since welcoming a new child and thanked colleagues and the community for their support.

Council Member Lindley thanked the Mayor for the Fort Vancouver presentation, stating it was informative and meaningful.

Council Member Mora expressed appreciation for the Mayor's presentation style and reported an upcoming school board meeting related to a levy and bond. She also described attending a student-led school walkout of over 100 students, noting it was largely peaceful and that a confrontation was successfully de-escalated.

Council Member Fink reported the Tree Board is planning a tree walk and working with staff on a map. She also acknowledged the recent loss of a young community member and reminded the public of support available through the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

IX. Executive Session (None)

X. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 p.m.

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Marla Keethler, Mayor

Signed by:



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Erika Castro Guzman, City Clerk