

**City of Rainier
City Council Meeting
March 3, 2025
6 p.m.
Rainier City Hall**

Mayor Jerry Cole called the council meeting to order at 6 p.m.

Council Present: Connie Budge, Scott Cooper, Jeremy Howell, Mike Kreger, Paul Langner and Denise Watson

Council Absent: Robert duPlessis

City Attorney Present: No

City Staff Present: Sarah Blodgett, City Recorder; Gregg Griffith, Police Chief; W. Scott Jorgensen, City Administrator; Russ Reigel, Public Works Director

Flag Salute

Additions/Deletions from the Agenda: City Administrator W. Scott Jorgensen said that the water rate study presentation has been rescheduled for the April 7 meeting, but Councilor Paul Langner still wanted to have a discussion about it. Councilor Connie Budge said she wanted a work session with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission (OGEC). Jorgensen said he would reach out to the OGEC to schedule one, but added that there are several meetings coming up over the next few weeks, including the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) open house, council goal setting, REDCO, planning commission and parks committee.

Mayor's Address: Mayor Jerry Cole urged citizens to attend the UGB open house scheduled for March 10 at city hall.

Visitor Comments: There were no visitor comments at this time.

Consider Approval of the Consent Agenda

Consider Approval of the February 3, 2025 Regular Council Meeting and February 10 Council and Planning Commission Work Session Minutes—Councilor Scott Cooper moved to approve the consent agenda. That motion was seconded by Council President Mike Kreger. Councilors Cooper, Howell, Kreger, Langner and Watson voted in favor. Budge abstained.

a. Doing Business in Rainier and Columbia County Presentation—Columbia Economic Team Small Business Specialist Sierra Trass provided an overview of the recent Columbia County Business Community Connection initiative. Around 75 business owners throughout the county were interviewed. They represent businesses of all sizes and sectors. There are just under 1600 businesses in the county and 178 in the Rainier zip code. Just under 70 percent of the businesses in the county have 2-9 employees. Almost 80 percent started locally and almost 60 percent are women owned. Almost half are owned by members of Generation X. Around 5,000 workers commute to Columbia County. Around 6,000 residents work in the county and 18,000 commute elsewhere.

b. River Cities Transit Presentation—Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments Executive Director Bill Fashing said that entity is trying to reestablish bus service between Rainier and Longview. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) is ready to transfer some grant funds to the Washington Department of Transportation and those could

be used to fund the bus service. River Cities Transit Manager Jim Seeks said that \$48,000 federal funding will disappear in July if it isn't allocated. That would be enough to fund four to five round trips per weekday between Rainier and Longview per week. The bus could stop at CC Rider and the Senior Center and go to the Longview Transit Center. Seeks has presented this proposal to the Cowlitz Transit Authority and that body was supportive. The City would have to provide a match and that would be \$10,000 for the first two years and \$14,000 the next two. Cole asked what time the routes would run. Seeks said surveys could be used to help determine that. Jorgensen said utility bills will be going out soon. He could include the survey in that and online. Cooper moved to direct staff to research having a bus route from Rainier to Longview. That motion was seconded by Budge. Councilors Budge, Cooper, Howell, Kreger, Langner and Watson voted in favor. Council agreed by consensus to have Jorgensen work with River Cities Transit on getting a survey out to residents.

c. Water Rate Study Discussion—Langner said Jorgensen compiled rates from nearby cities in Oregon and Washington. He said the base rate is comparable, the water rate is lower than some and higher than others but the water connection fees are low and the City should consider implementing a stormwater fee.

7. Unfinished Business

a. Fox Creek Update—Jorgensen said the survey work for the vacant lot property has been completed for the partition. The appraisal still has to take place. Once that's finished, the City will know how much to budget for the property purchase.

b. Wastewater Plant MAO—Jorgensen said he and Public Works Director Russ Reigel are finalizing the application for the one-stop meeting to fund the required sewer plant upgrades.

c. Senior Center Expansion—Reigel said the project is finished and had its final inspection earlier in the day.

d. Gas Tax Discussion—Langner said state law allows cities to implement a three cent per gallon gas tax, if approved by their voters. Revenues raised would be dedicated to transportation projects. Washington's gas tax is higher than Oregon's. If the voters approve the tax, it would add 45 cents to the cost of filling up a 15-gallon tank. He's reached out to Wilcox and Flegel, and they confirmed that 40 percent of the fuel they sell in Rainier is to locals. The next step would be to have a council agenda item to move the proposal forward. He estimates it would generate \$70,000 to \$120,000 of revenue per year for the City. Cole said he supports voters being able to decide. Cooper said he agrees. He moved to move forward with putting a gas tax proposal on the ballot. That motion was seconded by Kreger. Councilors Budge, Cooper, Howell, Kreger, Langner and Watson voted in favor.

Staff Report—Reigel said the windows project at City Hall will be completed the following week. Nick North was just certified for flagging and will be trying to obtain his commercial drivers license in mid-April. Jorgensen said he did outreach for the property owners who could be affected by the UGB land swap, attended City Day at the Capitol with Reigel and Kreger, went to the League of Oregon Cities small cities meeting in Scappoose, the library board, Jail Operating Citizens Advisory Committee, Col-Pac, NWACT and Rainier Chamber of Commerce board meetings. He submitted the City's funding disbursement request to the Department of Environmental Quality, performed HR duties for the vacant public works position and helped set up and emcee the February 22 book signing event at the museum.

Council Reports—Watson said she recently attended a CC Rider meeting and reported that slash piles were recently burned in the City's watershed. Cole said he appeared on KLTN's Local Matters program. He promoted the March 17 St. Patty's Day lunch at the senior center, the March 13 Chamber of Commerce awards event, April 5 Little League pancake breakfast and April 12 Chamber spring bazaar. The museum will also be holding soft opening April 12. He said he did a tour of downtown businesses, including the Elevate coffee shop, Bridgeview

Antiques, Mee Maw's Attic and Columbia Bakehouse.

City Calendar/Announcements—Jorgensen said council goal setting is scheduled for March 17. REDCO will meet for an hour before the next council meeting.

Cole adjourned the meeting at 8:01 p.m.

Mayor Jerry Cole

W. Scott Jorgensen, City Administrator