

**City of Rainier
City Council Meeting
March 2, 2026
6 p.m.
Rainier City Hall**

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

Council Present: Scott Cooper, Robert duPlessis, Jeremy Howell, Mike Kreger, Paul Langner, Charleen Ratkie and Denise Watson

Council Absent: None

City Attorney Present: No

City Staff Present: Russ Reigel, Public Works Director

Flag Salute

Additions/Deletions from the Agenda: Councilor Denise Watson moved to add a discussion about utility rates to the agenda under new business. That motion was seconded by Councilor Paul Langner. Councilors Scott Cooper, Robert duPlessis, Jeremy Howell, Mike Kreger, Langner, Charleen Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Mayor's Address: Cole congratulated Kiya Roe for being Rainier's first female state wrestling champion. He also gave recognition to Jonny Rice for winning sixth place at 144 pounds and Hayden Belcher for winning fifth place at 215 pounds.

Visitor Comments: Chad Taylor is asking permission to remove a fir tree that's on a street parallel to Washington Way. He discussed it with Public Works Director Russ Reigel, who said he had no issues with it but that the City wouldn't pay for the removal. Cole asked if the request was time sensitive because he just wants to make sure the tree isn't located on private property. Taylor said it isn't time sensitive. Cole said the item would be placed on the agenda for the April meeting. Charlie Shreiner followed up on a previous request for a vacant lot in his neighborhood to be used as a community garden. Cole said staff researched it and determined that the lot is private property. Sharon Jump said she also lives nearby and is opposed to having a community garden at that location.

Consider Approval of the Consent Agenda

Consider Approval of the February 2, 2026 Regular Council Meeting Minutes and Monthly Financial Statements—Kreger moved to approve the consent agenda. That motion was seconded by Howell. Councilors Cooper, duPlessis, Howell, Kreger, Langner, Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

New Business

a. Columbia 911 Presentations—Board Member Tyler Miller said that the district is asking for endorsements for its latest levy. The City of St. Helens refused to endorse it. Miller said he's a Scappoose City Councilor and defeated an incumbent by a wide margin for his seat on the 911 board because voters wanted change. The county Republican and Democratic parties have both opposed the levy. The agency has had no layoffs and its

staffing has increased. It has \$4 million in reserves, so the levy's failure is unlikely to result in service reductions. He said the agency has documented incidents of wasting public funds and that the county should run 911 instead of a special district. There are 13 counties that do it that way and only three have special districts. Most of them have a city in the county that runs it. The agency also serves areas outside of the county, even though none of those properties pay into the district. Sally Jones said she's the former Executive Director of Columbia 911. She gave an overview of its history. Executive Director Jeremy Hipes said there will be consequences if the county's system fails. He emphasized that it is a replacement levy that has been renewed by voters five times. Columbia River Fire and Rescue Chief Eric Smythe said that there needs to be a path forward. He added that the 911 Advisory Committee voted to support the levy. Cole offered to help Columbia 911 board members get on the same page.

b. Resolution 26-03-01—Authorizing City Staff to Switch the City Bank Account to Columbia Bank—Langner moved to approve the resolution. That motion was seconded by Kreger. Councilors Cooper, duPlessis, Howell, Kreger, Langner, Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

c. Resolution 26-03-02—Forgiving an Interfund Loan Between the General Fund and Sewer Fund—Kreger moved to approve the resolution. That motion was seconded by Cooper. Councilors Cooper, duPlessis, Howell, Kreger, Langner, Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

d. Approve Budget Calendar—Kreger moved to approve the budget calendar. That motion was seconded by Howell. Councilors Cooper, duPlessis, Howell, Kreger, Langner, Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

e. Appoint Budget Officer—duPlessis moved to appoint City Administrator W. Scott Jorgensen as budget officer. That motion was seconded by Kreger. Councilors Cooper, duPlessis, Howell, Kreger, Langner, Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

f. Revenue Committee Recommendations—Langner gave an overview of the recommendations. They will be part of the budgeting process. He said it's important that fees cover the staff time associated with providing services. For example, the fees charged by the City to connect to its water and sewer don't cover the City's costs. Cole said he doesn't like the idea of indexing sewer rate increases to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Instead, he proposes that council evaluate and vote on those rates every March, and have that rate not exceed the previous CPI. Langner suggested that it could match the Social Security increases. Cooper said the City needs to run its utilities like a business. That involves fully funding the operations, repairs and replacements and having reserves. Cole said Council will have to decide how much the City should have in reserves and how to get there. He thinks there should be a public hearing on any fee increases and the business license fees should be compared to those of other cities.

g. Council Goals for 2026-27—Cole suggested tabling this item to the next meeting. Council agreed by consensus.

h. Utility Rates—Watson said she was opposed to adding a screw press to the wastewater plant. Reigel said the plant can't get solids out fast enough with the centrifuge. Screw presses are more reliable. Watson suggested that a life cost analysis be done and felt that adding a screw press would be short-sighted. Reigel said the screw press is a small part of the expansion. It will also include getting a larger clarifier and digester. The City has two years to fix its collections system and reevaluate the flows. Langner said he supports applying for a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) to help fix the leaky laterals in town. Watson moved to direct Jorgensen to apply for the CDBG. That motion

was seconded by Ratkie. Councilors Cooper, duPlessis, Howell, Kreger, Langner, Ratkie and Watson all voted in favor. None were opposed.

Unfinished Business

a. Wastewater Plant MAO—Reigel said flow testing is still underway and the manhole repairs are expected to take place around mid-March.

Reports—Reigel said that the Sarah Zuber memorial bench has been mounted at the park. Watson said the Senior Center is having its yard sale March 14 and its St. Patrick’s Day raffle March 17.

City Calendar/Announcements-- Kreger said there will be a REDCO meeting April 6 to approve the budget calendar.

Cole adjourned the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

Mayor Jerry Cole

W. Scott Jorgensen, City Administrator