

CITY OF JOHN DAY  
CITY COUNCIL MINUTES February 24, 2026

**COUCILORS PRESENT:**

Sherrie Rininger, Mayor  
Chris Labhart, Councilor  
Bradley Hale, Councilor  
Ron Phillips, Councilor  
Heather Swank, Councilor  
Meloni Cochran, Councilor

**COUNCILORS ABSENT**

Vern Pifer (Excused)

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Melissa Bethel, City Manager  
Don Gabbard, Fire Chief  
Rob Gaslin, Contract Finance

**Agenda Item No. 1—Call Meeting to Order**

The City Council meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm.

**Agenda Item No. 2—Pledge of Allegiance**

The City Council stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Agenda Item No. 3—Roll Call and Attendance**

All councilors were present besides Councilor Pifer who is excused.

**Agenda Item No. 4—Amend or Accept Regular Agenda**

Bethel requested that Council move Agenda Item No. 10 to the beginning of the meeting.

***Councilor Hale made a motion to move Agenda Item No. 10 to the beginning and approve the agenda as amended. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cochran and passed unanimously.***

**Agenda Item No. 5—Public Comments**

Shannon Adair: She asked since agenda items are not permitted to be discussed during public comment, will the public have an opportunity to speak when the agenda item is presented.

**Agenda Item No. 6—Consent Agenda**

- a. Accounts Payable through 2-17-26
- b. Minutes of City Council Meeting 2-10-25 (unavailable)
- c. Minutes of City Council Meeting 1-13-26 (unavailable)
- d. Budget Calendar FY26-27

There will be a revised budget calendar with the first meeting in March moved to the second meeting in March.

***Councilor Phillips made a motion to approve the consent agenda as published. The motion was seconded by Councilor Cochran and passed unanimously.***

**Agenda Item No. 7—Finance Update; Gaslin Accounting**

Gaslin provided the budget to actual report to Council for review. He reported that he and Bethel have prepared a strong draft of the FY26-27 budget. He noted that, depending on audit availability, the goal is to have the City fully caught up by this time next year.

**Agenda Item No. 8—Strategic Plan – Adoption of Vision Statement; Jensen Strategies**

The revised John Day 2045 Community Vision Statement was presented to Council for adoption.

***Councilor Cochran made a motion to adopt the revised vision statement from Jensen Strategies with the future amended sentence. The motion was seconded by Councilor Swank and passed unanimously.***

**Agenda Item No. 9—Canton and Main Committee Presentation**

Mayor Rininger reminded those present that this matter is a Council decision and that no action would be taken at this meeting.

Councilor Labhart spoke on behalf of the committee, stating their mission is to create a beautiful and welcoming town square that serves both residents and visitors. He emphasized that the items presented were recommendations only.

Mr. Decew discussed proposed improvements, including renaming the “Pit Stop” to “Main Street Plaza,” upgrading parking curbs, adding seating, and making improvements to the restroom facilities.

Mr. LaMountain addressed signage and recommended installing standardized rest area signs and additional signage at the site, as well as adding security cameras. It was noted that permission for signage has been obtained from Oregon Department of Transportation.

Mrs. Adair discussed additional enhancement ideas, including a kiosk with directional information, bike lockers and a repair station, a picnic shelter, and landscaping improvements to provide shade and enhance the overall appearance of the area.

Decew presented the proposed placement of the Promised Land statue at the Main Street location. The committee voted 4-3 to recommend this site. Adair opposed the location, stating she supports the statue but believes additional public input is needed. Councilor Labhart stated the committee recommends the City Council hold a public hearing and gather community feedback before deciding.

Mayor Rininger stated they will seek public input, thanked the committee for its work, and said Council will review the information before determining next steps.

**Agenda Item No. 10—Amendment to Keller & Associates Contract (Amendment no. 2) for \$15,960 for DEQ required Value Engineering (VE) Report**

This amendment adds scope and compensation for completion of a value engineering study required by DEQ as part of the City’s infrastructure financing application for the wastewater treatment facility improvement project. The amendment increases the contract by \$15,960 for a total contract amount of \$3,835,569. The cost is eligible for reimbursement under the project’s financing structure.

***Councilor Phillips made a motion to amend the Keller & Associates contract (Amendment no. 2) for \$15,960 for DEQ required Value Engineering (VE) Report. The motion was seconded by Councilor Swank and passed 5-1 with Councilor Hale being opposed.***

**Other Business:**

**Agenda Item No. 11—City Manager Comments**

Bethel provided an update, noting Council recently toured City facilities to gain a better understanding of operations. A strategic planning retreat is scheduled for Friday, and the budget process will begin soon.

**Agenda Item No. 12—Mayor and Council Comments**

Councilor Labhart announced his resignation from the John Day City Council, effective immediately, citing concerns about the Council's direction and the appointment process for council positions.

Councilor Hale stated the Council is following the Charter and acting responsibly, disagreeing with Councilor Labhart's resignation statements, and said the Council is working to address challenges from prior years while doing what is best for the City.

Mr. Rowell recognized Bethel for her work at the recent public meeting held at the senior center, stating that provided direct answers to community questions and was a positive step forward.

Councilor Swank stated she believes the Council is strong and diverse, acknowledged the challenges inherited from previous terms, and expressed appreciation for the efforts made to address the City's financial burdens, and noted that the Council is making progress.

Councilor Phillips expressed satisfaction with the Council appointments, noting that they are genuinely invested in the City's success.

Mayor Rininger expressed appreciation for the Councilors and the effort and commitment they have shown to the City.

**Adjourn:**

There being no further business before council the meeting was adjourned.

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Melissa Bethel, CM