

CITY OF CONNELL
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
January 21, 2026

The Regular meeting of the Connell City Council was called to order by Mayor Harper at 6:00 pm in the City Hall and was opened with the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Mayor Shelly Harper and Councilmembers: Terri Cerna, Patrice Hebel, Frankie Meraz, Michelle, Welch and David Dixon.

STAFF PRESENT:

Fire Chief Ken Woffenden, City Clerk Marissa Ortiz, Treasurer Teresa Steele, Public Works Technical Director Tyson Steele, Police Chief Chris Lee, and City Attorney Heidi Ellerd.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS:

Mayor Harper announced the following member appointments to the Finance and Salary Committees.

Finance Committee

- Councilmember Terri Cerna
- Councilmember Michelle Welch

Salary Committee

- Katrina Kunkel
- Joe Escalera
- Pam Welch

CONSENT CALENDAR

Motion: Mayor Pro Tem Cerna moved to approve the consent calendar as presented:

- a) Minutes of the Regular Council Meeting January 7, 2026
- b) Accounts Payables 1/21/2026 for \$494,683.80
- c) Check Register 1/05/26 for \$1,100.00
- d) Payroll Register 1/05/26 for \$112,607.75

Councilmember Hebel seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to approve the agenda as amended: **Addition:** Task Order with Anderson Perry & Associates for Wastewater Lagoon Repairs. Councilmember Meraz seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

There were no citizen comments.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

CITY ATTORNEY PROFESSIONAL SERVICES AGREEMENT

City Attorney Heidi Ellerd requested Council consideration of a new Professional Services Agreement that would increase her hourly rate from \$200 to \$250. Ms. Ellerd stated that the proposed rate remained significantly lower than her standard non-municipal rate, which can be as high as \$425 per hour, and is consistent with the reduced rates she offers municipal clients. The current Professional Services Agreement, executed in 2023, remained in effect and was provided for reference along with the proposed agreement reflecting the new fees. Following review, approval of the new City Attorney Professional Services Agreement was recommended.

Motion: Councilmember Welch moved to approve the City Attorney Professional Services Agreement. Councilmember Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

LEASE AGREEMENT ADDENDUM AND CONTRACT RESCISSION – SIMMONS BROS INVESTMENT, LLC

For City Council’s review, an addendum to the existing lease agreement with Simmons Brothers Investment LLC for the property at 310 E. Clark Street was presented. The original lease, executed in April 2013, allowed the City to maintain a portion of the parcel for park and recreation purposes, with termination by either party upon 180 days’ notice. A previous termination letter issued by former Mayor Barrow was later rescinded by Mayor Harper, confirming the City’s intent to continue the lease. Since Simmons Brothers Investment LLC had been administratively dissolved, the addendum updated the lease to reflect the correct legal entity. Council was asked to authorize staff to finalize and execute the addendum with the property owner.

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to approve to authorize staff to finalize and execute the addendum and send it to the property owner for signature. Mayor Pro Tem Cerna seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

AMENDMENT TO MASTER FEE SCHEDULE D – COMMUNITY CENTER RENTAL FEES

As part of the 2026 budget development, Council previously approved the removal of private rental fees for the Community Center to reduce expenditure and achieve savings while continuing to support community access. Staff presented a proposed amendment to the Master Fee Schedule for removing private rental fees while retaining availability for non-profit and community-based events. The proposed amendment, reflected in Resolution No. 2026-01 amending Schedule D Parks & Recreation, was reviewed by Council. Approval of the amendment was recommended, with the understanding that private rental fees may be reconsidered in future budget year.

Motion: Mayor Pro Tem Cerna moved to approve the amendment to Resolution No. 2026-01, updating the Master Fee Schedule to remove Community Center private rental fees while

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provisions for nonprofit and community events as presented. Councilmember Hebel seconded the motion. (4-1 vote) Motion carried.

REPLACEMENT OF WASHINGTON COLLECTORS (TRI-CITIES) CONTRACT WITH VALLEY EMPIRE COLLECTION SERVICES

City staff reported that Washington Collectors Tri-Cities, the City's current collection agency, had been acquired by Valley Empire Collection Services. Valley Empire would assume all responsibilities under the existing contract, honoring current terms, rates, and scope of services, with no fiscal or operational impact on the City. Staff confirmed that all collection activities would continue without interruption. Approval of the contract with Valley Empire Collection Services was recommended.

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to approve the collections agreement between the City of Connell and Valley Empire. Councilmember Welch seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

WATER AND SEWER RATES DISCUSSION

Staff provided an overview of the City's water and sewer rate adjustment history and the CPI-W-based methodology used for annual rate adjustments. Council was advised that the current September to September CPI-W was 2.9%, within the established 3% cap, and that rate adjustments at or below this level did not require Council action. Recent rate history was reviewed: 2023 Water 3%, Sewer 2%; 2024 Water 3%, Sewer 3%; 2025 Water 2.2%, Sewer no increase. Council retained the authority to modify the rate-setting policy or cap at any time. Staff recommended continuing with the established process and adjusting rates based on CPI-W.

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to continue the existing process and adjust rates in accordance with the CPI-W. Councilmember Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

HAPO SIGNATORY AUTHORIZATION – 2026 -2029 CITY COUNCIL

Staff explained that following the seating of the newly elected City Council for the 2026 calendar year, it was necessary to update the authorized signatories on the City of Connell's bank accounts held with HAPO Community Credit Union. The memo identified the addition of Shelly Harper, Mayor and Terri Cerna, Mayor Pro-Tem, as authorized signatories, and the removal of Lee Barrow, (Former Mayor), and Cathleen Koch, (Former City Administrator). The update was noted as consistent with City policy and standard municipal financial practices, with all other authorized signatories remaining unchanged unless otherwise approved by Council.

Motion: Councilmember Welch moved to approve updating HAPO Community Credit Union signature cards. Councilmember Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

ORDINANCE NO. 1052 – AMENDING CMC 3.02.010 (OFFICIAL CITY DEPOSITORY)

Information was provided to the City Council noting that the Council previously authorized a change in banking institutions to Community First Bank, which has since been acquired by HAPO Credit Union. As a result, CMC 3.02.010 required an amendment to reflect the City's current banking relationship. Ordinance No. 1052 was presented to amend the official city depository designation accordingly, with the existing language code provided for reference.

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Motion: Mayor Pro Tem Cerna moved to approve Ordinance No. 1052 designating HAPO Credit Union as the City’s banking and depository institution. Councilmember Meraz seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-02 – SURPLUS CITY VEHICLES

Resolution No 2026-02 was presented for City Council review. The resolution authorized the Public Works Department to declare certain equipment and vehicles as surplus specifically those that are unused, expired, out of service, or inoperable and no longer needed. The resolution included one piece of equipment and two vehicles as surplus due to significant mechanical or electrical issues, lack of usability, and high repair costs. Declaring these items’ surplus would remove them from service, eliminate ongoing insurance and liability expenses, and result in cost savings for the City. The items would be disposed of in accordance with state law to achieve the best possible return.

Motion: Mayor Pro Tem Cerna moved Resolution 2026-02 to allow items listed to be disposed of and surplus in accordance with state law for the best attainable value. Councilmember Hebel seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

CITY OF CONNELL LOGO UPDATE 2026

Mayor Harper provided information regarding the consideration of a new City logo. The current logo was noted as reflecting agricultural images that no longer fully represented the community. A potential new logo was being explored to better reflect Connell’s railroad roots and local history and would align with the Connell Police Department’s updated 2023 badge. The proposed design highlighted the 1904 Presbyterian Church, also know as the North Franklin Heritage Museum, which was listed on the Washington State Historic Register.

Council expressed no opposition to updating the City logo and moved to proceed with the development of the full new design, reflecting Connell’s railroad heritage and local history.

Motion: Councilmember Hebel made the motion, and Mayor Pro Tem. seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE INTERAGENCY AGREEMENT

The City Council was informed of a time-sensitive opportunity to enter into a Periodic Update Grant (PUG) contract with the Washington State Department of Commerce. The grant would provide funding assistance for the City’s required Comprehensive Plan periodic update under the Growth Management Act. A prior 2024 application did not result in a finalized contract due to administrative transitions. State staff provided a draft scope of work and budget and requested the City’s review and confirmation to proceed. The City had to respond by January 22, 2026, to secure the grant. Acceptance would reduce the City’s financial burden on required planning activities, while failure to act would result in the loss of funding, though the update work would still be legally required.

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to approve the grant scope of work and authorize the Mayor to proceed with finalizing the grant contract with the Washington State Department of Commerce. Mayor Pro Tem Cerna seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

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TASK ORDER – ANDERSON PERRY & ASSOCIATES FOR WASTEWATER LAGOON REPAIRS

The City Council was asked to consider approval of a task order with Anderson Perry & Associates for professional engineering services related to recent damage at the City’s wastewater lagoon. The services would include technical evaluation, design support, and engineering oversight to ensure that repairs were completed in accordance with regulatory requirements and industry standards. Anderson Perry & Associates was noted for their expertise in municipal wastewater systems. Approval of the task order would allow staff to proceed with timely engineering assistance, minimize operational risks, and maintain regulatory compliance.

Motion: Mayor Pro Tem Cerna moved to approve the task order with Anderson Perry & Engineering to provide professional engineering services for the wastewater lagoon damage and repair project. Councilmember Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

MAYOR REPORT

Mayor Harper shared updates on her recent activities, including committee appointments with new members for the Salary and Finance Committees. She also established and filled new roles, such as Facilities Caretaker and a part-time City Planner, and met with Basin Disposal regarding an ongoing agreement. Additionally, she announced plans to participate in the Special Olympics Polar Plunge alongside the Connell Police Department and noted that Town Hall meetings would begin in February to enhance community engagement.

STAFF AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

Public Works Technical Director, Tyson Steele – stated that while working on the Striker sidewalk project, scheduled to begin in June, the contractor would repair a missing section of asphalt near Striker Park at no additional cost. He also reported that he obtained authorization to update the city website, ordered new flags for the city buildings, and upgraded the Community Center to fiber service.

Police Chief, Chris Lee – reported attending a regional meeting focused on joint efforts to address unlicensed food vendors operating after hours, which are suspected of being used as a cover for sex trafficking.

CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Pro Tem Cerna – thanked everyone for their work.


FINAL CITIZEN COMMENTS

Pam Welch – stated that as a resident she urged the Council to carefully consider the increase in water and sewer rates to ensure they remained affordable as the City continued efforts to improve its appearance. She also noted that the walking path needed attention due to cracks.

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MEETING ADJOURNED

There being no further business before the City Council of Connell Mayor Harper adjourned the meeting at 7:14 pm.

ATTEST: 
Marissa Ortiz, City Clerk


Shelly Harper, Mayor