

CITY OF CONNELL
CITY COUNCIL MEETING
January 7, 2026

City Clerk Marissa Ortiz administered the Oath of Office to Shelly Harper for Mayor Position #1, Terri Cerna for Council Position #2, Frankie Meraz for Council Position #3, and David Dixon for Position #4.

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, and David Dixon.

STAFF PRESENT:

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

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Planning Commission

- Ray Minor - Reappointed
- Jerry Sackmann - Reappointed
- Robert Welch - Appointed

Hotel Motel Committee

Term: January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026

- Mayor Shelly Harper
- Bob Koch
- Ashley Eagy
- Helen Tobin
- Randy Kallenbach

Parks & Recreation Board

- Gerardo Barragan
- Liz Villanueva Bauer
- Cynthia Brogan
- Bill Cartwright
- Parker Dolezal

CORRESPONDENCE

Mayor Harper read a letter as correspondence addressing matters related to the severance pay and termination of the former City Administrator involving the former Mayor. In her remarks, she expressed her disappointment over how the matter was handled and emphasized the lack of transparency that occurred under previous leadership would not happen under her administration. She reaffirmed her commitment to openness, accountability and restoring trust between the City Council and community.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to approve the consent calendar as presented:

- a) Minutes of the Regular Council Meeting November 19, 2025
 - b) Check Register 11/17/25 for \$22.99
 - c) Check Register 12/01/25 for \$3.00
 - d) Check Register 12/3/25 for \$91,324.52
 - e) Check Register 12/17/25 for \$185,098.94
 - f) Check Register 12/30/25 for \$48,206.30
 - g) Payroll Register 11/20/25 for \$81,868.57
 - h) Payroll Register 12/05/25 for \$117,110.78
 - i) Payroll Register 12/20/25 for \$106,186.13
- Councilmember Cerna seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to approve the agenda as presented. Councilmember Meraz seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

CITIZEN COMMENTS

Pam Welch – shared that our new Mayor spoke with her about serving on a newly formed neighborhood committee focused on bringing people together and improving the care of our community.

Kara Booker – remarked on the presence of new faces and noted that transparency concerns she intended to raise were already addressed by Mayor Harper through a letter read at the beginning of the meeting.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mayor Harper asked the following candidates to give a brief statement introducing themselves, providing an overview of their background, and reasons they were seeking appointment to the vacant position for City Councilmember.

- Michelle Welch
- Mich Parks - was unable to be present
- Joe Escalera

MEETING RECESSED

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Mayor Harper recessed the Regular meeting at 6:19 p.m. to enter Executive Closed Session for 15 minutes. Pursuant to RCW 42.30.110 (1)(h), for the purpose of evaluating the qualifications of a candidate for appointment to elective office.

MEETING RECONVENED

Mayor Harper called the regular meeting back to order at 6:34 pm.
The Council, after the executive session, made a motion to choose a candidate.

Motion: Councilmember Cerna moved to appoint Michelle Welch to the vacant Councilmember Position #6. Councilmember Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

After the motion, City Clerk Marissa Ortiz administered the oath of office to Michelle Welch as the newest Councilmember in Position #6.

ELECTION OF MAYOR PRO TEMPORE

Mayor Harper announced that the Mayor Pro Tem position would rotate every six months, with each council member taking a turn. She then stated that the first selection would be Councilmember Terri Cerna.

Motion: Councilmember Hebel moved to appoint Councilmember Terri Cerna as Mayor Pro Tem. Councilmember Meraz seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

DISCUSSION – AMENDING REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING DAYS

The City Council briefly discussed the possibility of amending the regular City Council meeting days from Wednesdays to Mondays. After discussion, the Council reached consensus to maintain the current meeting schedule, and no changes were made.

LEASE AGREEMENT – NORTH FRANKLIN VISITOR CENTER

Staff presented a proposed lease agreement developed during the FY 2025 budget process for the Greater Connell Area Chamber of Commerce to assume use, scheduling, and responsibility for utility costs at the North Franklin Visitor Center. Under the agreement, the City of Connell would retain ownership of the building and continue to cover building insurance, while the Chamber would assume all utility expenses, resulting in annual savings to the City's General Fund. The lease agreement between the City of Connell, the Greater Connell Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Port of Pasco was presented for Council consideration.

Motion: Mayor Pro Tem Cerna moved to approve the lease agreement between the City of Connell and the Greater Connell Area Chamber of Commerce and authorized the Mayor to sign. Councilmember Dixon seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

MAYOR REPORT

Mayor Harper reported that she had been occupied with filling committee appointments and staff positions in the Public Works and Administrative departments. She noted that the Public Works Director position was split into two roles, with Kim Phanthavong serving as Field Director and

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Tyson Steele as Technical Director. Additionally, she received a call from Lamb Weston, indicating plans to demolish their building rather than sell it.

STAFF AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

Fire Chief, Ken Woffenden – provided an update on recent fire activity and completed the annual fire safety inspection at Coyote Ridge Correctional Facility.

Treasurer, Teresa Steele – reported being busy with year-end financial tasks and noted the audit for fiscal year 2022-2024 were currently underway.

City Clerk, Marissa Ortiz - listed tasks that were completed, including provided support for the December 17 council workshop, assisted the new incoming council, coordinated the hiring for the recent maintenance position, managed recruitment for the Accounting Clerk position, and continued processing ongoing public records requests.

Public Works Technical Director, Tyson Steele – provided a detailed update on ongoing tasks, including internet systems, gas card accounts and other projects, and collaborated with the Public Works Field Director. He also expressed appreciation for everyone’s cooperation during his recent transition.

Police Chief, Chris Lee – reported that Officer Brad Quinton had retired but would continue to serve as a reserve officer. He was also actively working to hire a replacement.

CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS

All council members thanked everyone who supported and voted for them during the election and expressed their enthusiasm for the work ahead.

FINAL CITIZEN COMMENTS

Kara Booker – stated that a rumor circulated suggesting someone was being considered for the City Administrator position.


Burl Booker - He congratulated everyone and urged them to consider carefully what they approve.

MEETING ADJOURNED

There being no further business before the City Council of Connell Mayor Harper adjourned the meeting at 7:06 pm.

ATTEST: _____
Marissa Ortiz, City Clerk




Shelly Harper, Mayor