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**CITY OF MILTON-FREEWATER GOVERNING BODY**

Destiny Jensen At Large, Position 1  
Steve Irving - Council President At Large, Position 2  
Wes Koklich At Large, Position 3

Mike Odman  
John Lyon  
Emily Holden  
Jose Garcia

Mayor  
Ward 1  
Ward 2  
Ward 3

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**CITY OF MILTON-FREEWATER****December 8, 2025****CITY COUNCIL MINUTES**

The Council of the City of Milton-Freewater met in regular session on Monday, December 8, 2025 in the Albee Room of the City Library, 8 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue at 7:00 p.m.

The following members were present: Mayor Mike Odman, Councilors Steve Irving, Emily Holden, John Lyon, Wes Koklich, Destiny Jensen and Jose Garcia.

Staff members present were: City Recorder Leanne Steadman, Police Chief Joe Shurtz, Finance Director Laurie Bubar, Fire Chief Shane Garner, Electric Superintendent Richard Jolly, Library Director Lili Schmidt, Electric Engineering Technician Tina Kain, Public Works Engineering Technician Steven Patten, Public Works Assistant/Project Aide Krista Gannon, Conservation Specialist Ryan Westman, Court Clerk Tracy Martinez and Planning Assistant Kassidy Ruiz.

Guests and citizens present were: Michael Melder, Sally Babcock, Donna Sheridan, Paul Seaquist, Tammy Seaquist, Arlen Calley, Kyndahl Calley, Megan Hoel, Randy Reese and Corky York.

Representing the news media were: Sherrie Widmer of the Valley Herald and Sheila Hagar of the East Oregonian.

**CONSENT CALENDAR ITEMS:**

The consent calendar items consisted of:

- Regular Session Minutes from November 10, 2025
- Special Session Minutes from November 20, 2025

Councilor Irving motioned to approve all items on the Consent Calendar. Councilor Lyon seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

**NEW BUSINESS ITEMS:****PUBLIC HEARING/FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS OF LAW AND ORDINANCE NO. 999**

Mayor Odman opened and summarized the rules for a public hearing held for the purpose of a Zoning Map Amendment request from JM Land Development LLC to rezone the property located on Umatilla County Map 6N3535DC Tax Lot 3301 from Residential Low-Density, R-1, to Residential Medium-Density, R-2. He then explained that the testimony given in this hearing should be centered around the criteria for the amendment of the Zoning Map. He also explained failure to raise an issue with sufficient directness to afford the decision maker and the parties an opportunity to respond to the issue will prohibit an appeal to Land Use Board of Appeals on that issue.

Mayor Odman asked if any member of the Council wished to abstain or disclose ex-parte contact.

Mayor Odman then disclosed that he met with Mr. Melder, the applicant, after his last attempt at a zone change which was June 9, 2025 and had coffee.

Councilor Jensen disclosed that she had met with Mr. Melder after his last attempt at a zone change which was June 9, 2025, she visited the site and they had coffee.

No audience member challenged any Councilor's right to participate in the hearing.

City Recorder Leanne Steadman reported notice of the hearing had been published according to law and there were two written comments on file. In each letter they requested that their concerns be entered into the record for both the Planning Commission hearing which was on December 1, 2025 and the City Council hearing. The first letter received was from residences located at 1118 N Main Street, their concerns in summary were; increased traffic and congestion, impact on the community's quality of life, strain on local services and infrastructure and lack of clear information. They were opposed to the amendment. The second letter received was from residences located at 1119 N Main, their concerns in summary were; traffic and safety concerns, impact on neighborhood, infrastructure limitations and property value and livability concerns. They were opposed to the amendment. Both letters were included in the city council packet material for this hearing.

Mayor Odman then asked Planning Assistant Kassidy Ruiz to present the staff report which she did and is included in its entirety below.

## MILTON-FREEWATER PLANNING COMMISSION

### STAFF REPORT

December 1, 2025

APPLICANT: JM Land Development LLC

ISSUE: Zoning Map amendment from Residential Low-Density (R-1) to Residential Medium-Density (R-2) on approximately 3.32 acres of property located on Map 6N3535DC Tax Lot 03301. No situs address has been issued for the parcel.

HEARING DATE: December 1, 2025

#### I. BACKGROUND

The subject site has no current structures built on it and has been used for agricultural purposes in the past. The property was partitioned earlier this year by Benchstone Estates (1131 N Main Street) and the subject parcel was sold to JM Land Development LLC with the intentions of developing the property for additional housing units. The site fronts on N Main Street and is approximately

3.32 acres in size. The applicant intends to change the Zoning of the property to accommodate smaller residential lots.

The applicant originally requested an R-3 rezone, which the Planning Commission had recommended approval, but was denied by City Council in June 2025. Since then, the applicant has brought forward new evidence and information that makes his request

different than previously submitted. The applicant has noted that public feedback included ensuring no non-residential development, no large multifamily structures, or apartment complexes, which is not being proposed by the applicant. Multifamily structures could not be placed on properties in an R-2 zone.

The land is suitable and available for residential uses, but has not been developed for this purpose. According to the City of Milton-Freewater's Comprehensive Plan - Goal 10: Housing, Milton-Freewater provides a full range of housing types in a variety of price ranges and rent levels. JM Land Development LLC is proposing their future development to bring in medium - income housing for the city. By focusing on medium-income housing, this proposal will meet Goal 10 and decrease the gross vacant acreage of R-2 land within Milton-Freewater.

The applicant is intending to rezone the property to R-2 to maintain consistence with easterly and southerly development. The R-2 rezone will allow for smaller lot sizes than what is required in an R-1 zone, and increase development density onsite, to a maximum of 15 residential lots. The intent of this rezoning effort is to allow construction of single-family homes and duplexes, which are both outright approved in the Milton-Freewater City Code.

## II. SITE DESCRIPTION

The subject property consists of approximately 3.32 acres and is bordered by Residential Low-Density (R-1) properties to the north and west, Residential Medium-Density (R-2) to the east, and a mixture of Residential Medium-Density (R-2) and Residential – High Density (R-3) to the south. The property is surrounded by single family homes, except the parcel directly to the west, which is used for agriculture purposes, but is zoned Residential Low-Density (R-1). The property itself does conform with the City's Comprehensive Plan.

## III. APPLICABLE CODE PROVISIONS

### Chapter 12: Amendments

10-12-1: An amendment to the text of this Ordinance or to the Zoning Map may be initiated by the City Council, Planning Commission, or by application of a citizen.

Findings: The amendments were initiated by the applicant, who is a developing group.

10-12-2: Amendments to the text of this Ordinance or to the Zoning Map shall be processed under terms of the Level IV procedure in Section 10-3-10.

Findings: The amendments were processed as a Level IV procedure in accordance with this chapter.

10-12-3 In the Planning Commission report to the City Council, and in the City Council's action after review of the Planning Commission's report, the following standards shall be addressed:

The proposal is in conformance with all applicable provisions of the Comprehensive Plan text and map of land use designations.

Findings: The proposal conforms with applicable provisions of the Comprehensive Plan.

The proposal addresses a need which was improperly or inadequately addressed by the present ordinance text or map.

Findings: By amending the property zone to a higher density, the City Zoning Code will allow residential lots to be 7,500 square feet rather than 10,000 square feet. With the required size of lots being smaller, the applicant can construct more housing units within the parcel. This would provide more housing options for the city, thus supporting the goal of developing additional housing within Milton-Freewater.

The site is surrounded by single family residential lots, which makes the site more desirable for additional housing.

10-12-4 The City Recorder shall maintain records of text and map amendments.

Findings: As part of City procedure, the appropriate records will be maintained.

#### GENERAL COMMENT

The proposed Residential Medium-Density (R-2) rezoning is an appropriate designation for this property based on the applicant's stated intention to develop additional housing units – either single-family homes or duplexes – both of which are permitted outright under the City Code (10-4-3 A). The applicant does not intend to construct multi-family housing, which is not allowed in the R-2 zone, and has provided a conceptual site plan to illustrate the potential development layout.

That said, this request concerns only the rezoning of the parcel, not the detailed design or layout of any future projects.

#### STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The Planning Commission recommend approval of the amendments with a 3-1 vote in favor.

Mayor Odman then invited the applicant to speak.

Michael Melder resident of 1365 Beet Road, Walla Walla, Washington thanked Cassidy and said he appreciated the staff report. He stated he wanted to acknowledge Mayor Odman and thanked him for meeting after his initial request for a rezone to R-3 was denied and he thanked Councilor Jensen as well. For the record, he said he reached out to all the city council asking for feedback. He said he was just trying to chart a path forward and he appreciated the responses. He asked, so what's the difference than what he asked for last time, he said he came in with an R-3 application, but this time he was asking for an R-2 rezone. His expectation was that he was going to develop single family homes. He wanted to maximize density to the extent possible to increase the number of residential units. What he said he heard from the public feedback was R-3 was simply not acceptable to the surrounding neighbors; there was massive concerns about the actual land use. Concern that it wasn't residential and that maybe he was going to put storage units in there or multi-story apartment complex. He said that was never his intent, but that is what is allowed. After some reflection he said he thought that R-2 would still be very suitable and it matches the surrounding neighbors. He started evaluating that route. Councilor Koklich had several questions when he was here the last time on what was he going to do, did he have graphics, did he have a plan. What he prepared was in the packet which is a conceptual layout that he's working from for his planning document that he's using as a basis for his design. He said if the council were to look at it, it's an application for 15 residential lots varying from plus or minus 7500 square feet to about 7000 square feet. He did have to stub a road going into the westerly parcel as well as a cul-de-sac terminating the south-central area of the site. He was also showing some of the improvements to infrastructure and what they would look like. What remains is sewer mains, sidewalks, etc. He said he was wanting to give as much information as he could so it was understood on what his ask was with the R-2 rezone. He thanked the council and said he was happy to answer any questions they may have.

Councilor Koklich said he appreciated the plots that Mr. Melder provided. He said it looked like the entrance to the neighborhood comes off of N Main. He asked if that was right.

Mr. Melder replied, that was correct.

Councilor Koklich said it goes all the way into the other property then stops.

Mr. Melder replied, that was correct.

Councilor Koklich asked Mr. Melder if he owned the other abutting property.

Mr. Melder replied, no sir. He stated he did a partition plat. Part of the partition plat requires a fifty-foot access easement, so that is what is being shown to the rear portion of the property. The fifty-foot access is the same width as the city standard for a public road.

Councilor Koklich said there is an old dirt road that runs along the side of the houses, he asked if the road will remain or will it be taken out.

Mr. Melder stated on the south side there is gravel and on the north side there is the dirt road that Councilor Koklich is talking about.

Councilor Koklich stated the road has been pretty much taken over by weeds.

Mr. Melder stated one of them is probably for the ditch riders for irrigation.

Councilor Koklich asked if the irrigation district had an easement.

Mr. Melder stated they did not. He said he has been in contact with Travis Trumbull with the irrigation district and there are some grants out there and they are looking at possibly redoing some of the irrigation in that area. The neighbors to the north of his property have rights to the irrigation so he is ensuring that access to irrigation water is preserved.

Councilor Koklich said it looked like part of the ditch was going to take the corner of the property which would be on the north.

Mr. Melder stated at the northeast corner, there will be an easement flowing across that residential parcel where there will be an irrigation canal. He wasn't intending to do anything to the irrigation canal as there will be an easement. He said he did plot the setbacks to the city code and there is still plenty of room to build a very nice house and what that will take up was basically the rear yard setback.

Councilor Koklich said he noticed a cul-de-sac in the conceptual drawing and asked if that was large enough for fire trucks to turn around in.

Mr. Melder stated that was drafted according to the city municipal code and would answer that if the code is accurate, yes.

Councilor Koklich said it looked like there was one way in and one way out.

Mr. Melder stated that was correct.

Councilor Koklich asked what would happen if there was work to be done and the road had to be torn up; how would people get in and out in an emergency.

Mr. Melder stated it would be a public road and there are other dead-end public roads that existed throughout the city. If there was something that required the road to be torn up, then there would need to be some sort of traffic control requirements and it would be the requirement of the contractor to maintain access. He said he was not opposed to working on some sort of loop scenario. He has looked at possibly crossing the irrigation that would be on the south side of the property, which might be a future phase depending on how this first phase would go.

Councilor Koklich said this has happened before in other sections of town where there was a gas pipeline being replaced and the road was taken out for several months. In order to get around it, it required having to drive on other people's property.

Mr. Melder said when he gets to the design and platted portion phase, he would be happy to work with the council and the city to see what's acceptable. He said he hoped his conceptual drawing helped.

Councilor Koklich said by seeing the drawing it made it easier to see Mr. Melder's vision and goals.

Mayor Odman then opened the floor to citizen comments of those in favor of the amendment.

No one spoke.

Mayor Odman opened the floor to citizen comments of those opposed of the amendment.

No one spoke

Councilor Holden motioned to adopt the Findings of Fact and Conclusion of Law as presented by staff. Councilor Irving seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken: Councilor Irving, yea, Councilor Holden, yea, Councilor Lyon, yea, Councilor Koklich, yea, Councilor Jensen, yea and Councilor Garcia, yea, the motion passed unanimously.

Councilor Lyon motioned that Ordinance No. 999 be introduced by title only and full reading waived. Councilor Irving seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken: Councilor Irving, yea, Councilor Holden, yea, Councilor Lyon, yea, Councilor Koklich, yea, Councilor Jensen, yea and Councilor Garcia, yea, the motion passed unanimously.

The Interim City Manager then read the ordinance by title.

Mayor Odman announced that the council had introduced the first reading of Ordinance #999, Ordinance Amending the Zoning Map of the City of Milton-Freewater.

Councilor Irving said he would like to waive the normal ordinance adoption procedure and proceed with the second reading and adoption. Councilor Lyon seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken: Councilor Irving, yea, Councilor Holden, yea, Councilor Lyon, yea, Councilor Koklich, yea, Councilor Jensen, yea and Councilor Garcia, yea, the motion passed unanimously.

Councilor Lyon motioned that the second reading of Ordinance #999 be by title only and full reading waived. Councilor Irving seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken: Councilor Irving, yea, Councilor Holden, yea, Councilor Lyon, yea, Councilor Koklich, yea, Councilor Jensen, yea and Councilor Garcia, yea, the motion passed unanimously.

The Interim City Manager then read the ordinance by title.

Councilor Lyon motioned to adopt Ordinance #999, Ordinance Amending the Zoning Map from R-1 to R-2 on Umatilla County Assessor's Map 6N3535DC, Tax Lot 3301. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion and a roll call vote was taken: Councilor Irving, yea, Councilor Holden, yea, Councilor Lyon, yea, Councilor Koklich, yea, Councilor Jensen, yea and Councilor Garcia, yea, the motion passed unanimously.

#### **RESOLUTION NO. 2585, UNFORESEEN REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES**

Finance Director Laurie Bubar stated she was presenting a budget correction for the motion that was brought forward at the last council meeting regarding the purchase of the land where the radio tower is located. She said at the last meeting there was discussion regarding the total required amount of funding for the project as being \$17,503. After some research done by public works and electric department staff, it was discovered that some of that amount had already been paid under the previous city managers tenure. Out of that amount that was needed originally, \$8,018.10 had

already been paid. The new balance needed was \$9,484.90. She again credited public works and the electric department for working together and for the electric department coming forward with making the funds available to cover the remaining balance. Ms. Bubar was asking for authorization to transfer those remaining funds out of the electric departments contingency to finish the process of purchasing the land so the city could own and maintain the property moving forward.

Councilor Lyon motioned to adopt Resolution No. 2585, Resolution to Make Appropriations due to Unforeseen Revenues and Expenditures. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

**AUTHORIZATION TO APPLICATION FOR AN OREGON WATER RESOURCE DEPARTMENT WATER PROJECT GRANTS AND LOANS PROGRAM FOR CONTINUED WORK ON THE CITY'S AQUIFER STORAGE AND RECOVERY PROGRAM**

Public Works Technician Steven Patten first gave some background on the city's ASR (Aquifer Storage and Recovery) and how that came about. In 2017, the State of Oregon classified the Walla Walla Subbasin as a Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA) because of declining ground water levels. For the last seventy-five years the basalt ground water levels have been declining and city wells have declined approximately one-hundred-fifty feet since they were originally drilled in the 1940's – 1950's. This is a common occurrence in basaltic aquifers as it's easy to over pump them. The city partnered with the Walla Walla Basin Watershed Council (WWBWC) to find grant funding to do feasibility studies on the potential for an ASR program for the city. ASR is where you take surface water, treat it to drinking water quality, then inject it back into a well. The water is stored underground for a certain period of time, then recovered at a later time. The Cities of Walla Walla, Pendleton and Baker City all have operating ASR programs. With the grant funding the city received through the WWBWC, the city did two feasibility studies, the first one was looking at aquifer characteristics, and the second one looked at water quality testing and design work to see what it would take to retrofit one of the city wells to function as an ASR well. That was all finished in 2019-2020. When previous city manager Chad Morris came to the city, this was a project that he identified for staff to try and find grant funding for. This was a project that staff was actively looking for to move forward with. Earlier in the year the city received a grant for \$1.4 million grant from the State of Oregon for a due diligence research, which involves drilling a test bore hole, essentially a well, to determine the geology and underlining aquifer characteristics and identity if that location would be a good location for an ARS well. As part of the grant the city will also be doing some water quality testing because in the last five years the rules have changed due to PFAS (Per-and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances), known as "forever chemicals" so there will be some testing for that. He explained there is a grant opportunity that the city can apply for to continue moving the ASR program forward. It's through the Oregon Water Resource Department and it requires a 25% match. The purposed application, if the council decides to more forward, would seek funding to start working on designs for a water treatment plant. You can't inject water into a well until you have a treatment plant in place. He shared the potential conflict is the other water infrastructure needs that the city has, such as Well 10, the middle reservoir as well with the grant that the city just received to where if the project costs exceed the grant amount the city will be required to pay the increased amount beyond the engineers estimate. Mr. Patten asked for input and guidance on whether the council was interested in having staff move forward with the grant application or should this be put on hold and apply for in future years.

Councilor Lyon suggested holding a work session on this topic. He asked Mr. Patten if he knew what a water treatment facility would cost.



Mr. Patten said he didn't know the cost estimate for the actual facility. Additional testing would need to be done to see what level of treatment would be required. The testing that was approved last month will give the city that information along with the grant received earlier in the year that will be drilling the test bore hole.

Councilor Lyon said he doesn't remember hearing about water recharge, at least at the last few budget cycles. He asked how did it get to this point now.

Mr. Patten stated the work that was previously done, was done in approximately 2019-2020.

Councilor Lyon asked where would the matching funds come from.

Mr. Patten stated it would come from the water capital budget.

Councilor Lyon said there is no mention of an ASR in the budget.

Mr. Patten stated it would be a grant that would come into play for the next fiscal year, fiscal year 2027.

Councilor Koklich asked why was there a need to store water.

Mr. Patten explained as part of the SWMPA declaration, there is a likely outcome where the state may come into the basin and declare a critical ground water area. The state would then potentially regulate the water use to stabilize water levels. The city, twenty years ago, was using approximately nine-hundred million gallons of water annually, currently that number is six-hundred million gallons, which is a big reduction in water usage, but the water level trend is still declining.

Councilor Lyon recommended postponing this for a future work session and that there was other needed infrastructure at this time. He said the Public Works Superintendent did a presentation on the middle reservoir and the need for that. He said the City of Milton-Freewater doesn't want to happen what Lewiston Idaho went through with the collapse of their water reservoir. He said there has been clear direction by constituents to be fiscally responsible and he believed there to be other pressing needs.

Councilor Holden asked if everything went smoothly and as planned, what was a reasonable timeframe for a project like this.

Mr. Patten replied, approximately four-to-five years.

A brief discussion ensued regarding approximate project cost, what constitutes as "match" and review of project costs for Well 10 and a new reservoir.

Councilor Jensen asked Interim City Manager what his opinion was.

Interim City Manager Tim Johnson stated timing was everything, if it isn't in the current budget then it would require a budget fix. He shared that he will have a budget report for mid-year and he spoke about tax-increment for Urban Renewal. He reported that he and the Mayor met with a representative of Congressman Bentz which they shared some of the city's infrastructure needs.

There was a council consensus to table this item for consideration at a later date.

### **AWARD OF BID – FOR (3) 3-PHASE PAD MOUNT TRANSFORMERS**

Electric Superintendent Richard Jolly was seeking authorization to award a bid for (3), 3-phase pad mount transformers, two of those being 500 KVA and one being a 1000 KVA. He stated these transformers would be for inventory as currently the city did not have spares in these specific sizes. The delivery times for transformers are still extended, for these, the 500 KVA's are out 20 and 24 weeks and the 1000 KVA is out 70 weeks.

Councilor Lyon motioned to authorize the purchase of (3) 3-phase transformers from Stuart C Irby Co. not to exceed the amount of \$103,894. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **APPROVAL TO PROCEED WITH GLASS RECYCLING PLAN DUE TO THE RECYCLING MODERNIZATION ACT (RMA)**

Public Works Assistant/Project Aide Krista Gannon stated she worked with Interim City Manager who is helping with some clarification regarding RMA (Recycling Modernization Act). The discussion was centered around glass and glass recycling. She said Laurie Gordan with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is familiar with Interim City Manager Tim Johnson from his work at Lincoln County and his involvement with their successful recycling program. Ms. Gannon handed out an updated copy of the glass recycling options which is now highlighted, there was also a clarification on the maximum total for a full-time employee for decisions to be made later on. Currently, the City of Milton-Freewater allows for the recycling of glass no matter who recycles it at the depot, it's presumed the majority of glass recycled is from Washington State. There is a lot of money involved with recycling glass, it's very heavy and there is no market for glass. She reviewed the options for dealing with recycled glass, with Option 2 being what staff is recommending. Option 2 provides for a drop box to be located at the existing depot. Then, Waste Connections, formally known as Pendleton Sanitary and Recycling, would haul drop boxes when full with their staff and truck costing the city no out-of-pocket expenses. Circular Action Alliance (CAA), who was hired by DEQ, is currently working on a funding agreement. This process will involve the city to dedicate two drop boxes, for glass to be recycled, currently there is one dedicated drop box and it's getting full. The glass used to be able to be used as road bedding, but that is no longer allowed, it has to be hauled. Waste Connections will haul the drop box full of glass and that will be paid for by CAA. Washington State does not have a mandatory recycling program. There are locations that do accept glass at the cost of approximately \$200 per ton and requires a membership fee. The current fee for recycling for City of Milton-Freewater is \$4.57 per month to its citizens. One of the options moving forward is the concept of prohibitive pricing for out-of-service area customer for glass recycling and that would cut down and detour outer waste that didn't originate from the community. She then spoke about the daily tonnage allowance.

Councilor Koklich asked how long has the city recycled glass.

Ms. Gannon stated as far back as she can remember, approximately 3 permits ago. Horizon Project used to provide the recycling service until they could no longer do it. The city previously had a glass crushing machine which wasn't efficient so it was surplus.

Councilor Koklich said he knew that that the city used glass as road bedding.

Ms. Gannon stated the city had to apply for the use of glass being used a road bedding, it was a special provision which stopped July 1, 2025.

Councilor Koklich recommended a work session on recycling to get everyone up-to-date on what the state is requiring.

Ms. Gannon stated after the glass, the next step will be discussing an addendum for transportation and on-routed curb side recycling collection. This will need to be offered at least once a month with a 96-gallon cart being provided. A truck and bins will need to be ordered and the last garbage truck order took 26 months to get, but the city needs to commit to moving in this direction. Anything collected after July 1, 2025 falls under the RMA. Contamination is going to be key on how it will be addressed. She said compliance is key, fines could be put forth if Milton-Freewater is not in compliance.

Interim City Manager Tim Johnson thanked Ms. Gannon and staff for the report. Prohibitive pricing is crucial, as the majority of the glass recycling is outside the area and state. This could also bring in revenue that could off-set the overhead in order to meet state mandate. This would mean that the depot would need to be manned, and would have to identify the source of where the glass is coming from. If it's from Washington, then their cost would be \$250 or \$300 per ton. He said the people of Milton-Freewater should not have to pay for the cost of the city to endure the state program and the impact that comes from the neighbors to the north. The leadership and innovation with this concept of an Urban Trail, provides the opportunity to reuse on the construction base this commodity. If the city can eliminate 85% of the glass that comes here from out of state, then as a city, from the residents, there would be approximately four ton per year. As you start to innovate where you want that trail and how you want to build, you can reduce that cost of making that happen because you already have the commodity stored locally to be able to use as the basis to build that trail, along with other composites to be able to have what is needed to build that trail, which he stated is innovative. He said he appreciated the leadership on this, as this type of innovation is what ends up on the front end of magazine across the county. He complimented the public works staff as they have done a very good job of exploring this, they just haven't had the ability to be able to develop a corresponding business model so it's easily understood. He said he realized this only was dealing with glass, and there's still a lot of work to get to the curb side pickup, which is going to take a considerable amount of time. He recommended holding a work session in coordination with the budget after the first of the year.

Councilor Lyon motioned approving Glass Recycling Option 2, which indicates that the city will provide drop box containers for glass collection and coordinate with Circular Action Alliances' contractor, Waste Connections to haul drop boxes and empty them using their vehicles and staff at zero out of pocket cost to the city. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

**RESOLUTION NO. 2586 – AUTHORIZING SIGNATURE TO DOG IMPOUND AGREEMENT WITH BLUE MOUNTAIN HUMANE SOCIETY**

Police Chief Joe Shurtz stated this agreement was with the Blue Mountain Humane Society (BMHS) and it was unchanged from the previous agreement other than the fees which increased 2.8% each year of the two-year agreement. This agreement allows the city the ability to effectively deal with problematic dogs. Fees are only assessed if services are rendered by BMHS at the request of city staff.

Councilor Koklich asked how many times in the past few years has their service been requested.

Chief Shurtz said staff tries to work with the dog owner, but there have been times in the past where there was a need to impound a dog. There have been no dogs impounded to date for 2025, three times in 2024 and one time in 2022.

Councilor Lyon motioned to adopt Resolution No. 2586, A Resolution Authorizing Signature to the Dog Impound Agreement between the City of Milton-Freewater and the Blue Mountain Humane Society located in Walla Walla, Washington. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

### **OPTIONS FOR CITY MANAGER RECRUITMENT**

City Recorder Leanne Steadman stated with the upcoming recruitment for the next city manager, staff was looking for the council's desired direction. She asked if they wanted to go completely with a recruiting agency, perform this completely from in-house or go with a hybrid model of some tasks being done by a recruiting agency and some being done in-house.

Councilors Lyon and Koklich both stated they would like to try to go in-house this time.

Councilors Jensen, Holden and Mayor Odman stated they preferred the hybrid model.

Interim City Manager Tim Johnson stated he would be reaching out to the city council to meet one-on-one to get their input on what they are looking for in the next city manager. He shared that there were two times a year that were best to try and recruit for an executive position like this, right after the first of the year and right after the fiscal year. His goal is to hit the market with the position announcement by the end of January, with an approximate twenty-day application window. He then shared some names of recruiting agencies. As an additional approach to having a successful recruitment, he is planning to add a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to the interview process. What this is, is current city managers from neighboring cities who will sit in on the interview process as a resource during the interview process for the panel. He estimated a hybrid model costing under the \$18,000- \$40,000 he estimated for a full recruitment. The agencies will still require any travel required of them to be paid for by the city.

A brief discussion ensued.

There was a council consensus to pursue a hybrid approach to the city manager recruitment.

### **OPPORTUNITY FOR CITIZENS TO APPROACH THE COUNCIL WITH ISSUES NOT ON THE AGENDA**

Megan Hoel presented the following questions below. After she read all her comments and questions, Mayor Odman answered them following Sherrie Widmer's request to hear the answers. Instead of duplicating Ms. Hoel's comments, which are included in their entirety, the Mayor's comments follow each of the questions.

Ms. Hoel stated - over the past several weeks, I submitted multiple public records requests regarding the process that led to the appointment of the interim City Manager. After reviewing more than thirty days of internal emails, timelines, and communications, I am deeply concerned about

how this appointment was handled and what it suggests for the upcoming hiring process for a permanent City Manager.

My concerns fall into four main areas:

1. Recruitment began before the Council authorized it.

The Council voted on October 13 to direct the Mayor to find an interim City Manager. Yet emails show the Mayor had already begun contacting candidates during the first week of October — nearly two weeks prior.

This matters, because the vote to terminate the previous City Manager was not unanimous. The outcome was not predetermined. Beginning recruitment early gave the appearance that the process was already underway before the Council or the public understood a vacancy even existed.

Transparent governance requires that actions follow authorization — not precede it.

Mayor Odman's response was that they had started the evaluation process, and it had become clear to him that the council and the city manager were not on the same page. Being proactive, he sent the council an email and provided options concerning the city manager if there were to decide to terminate him. He posed a question at the time, which he stated that Ms. Hoel should have that email, that told the council before they made a decision to be sure to have an internal candidate to appoint or seek for a candidate outside the organization. There was no follow up discussion, and that was in September, October timeframe. As he gathered the individual evaluations, as he was tasked to do, it was obvious to him that the opinions of each of the councilors was that the city manager was not meeting the councils' expectations. He made a proactive decision to start looking for an interim just in case, he looked at the League of Oregon Cities list and reached out to everyone on that list who were available to go outside the county and Mr. Johnson was on that list and was one that responded. He agreed, that was the first of October, there was a phone call between the two of them and then Mr. Johnson sent him a resume along with a tentative draft work plan that he had come up with. It was two weeks later; the council made the determination to sever ties with the city manager.

Ms. Hoel's question #2.

Multiple candidates were contacted, but only one was presented to Council.

Records show the Mayor communicated with at least four prospective candidates.

Yet only a single candidate was ever presented to Council or made available to the public.

When only one option is brought forward, Council's role becomes limited to a yes-or-no vote, not genuine evaluation. This is especially concerning because the City Charter clearly places administrative authority — including hiring — under the City Manager and Council, not the Mayor acting independently.

The lack of comparative information prevented both Council and the community from understanding whether the final candidate was the strongest, or simply the most convenient.

Mayor Odman's stated the council didn't give him any guidelines or how many candidates they wanted to review, only that an interim city manager was needed. Without any guidelines, he came

up with his own, he reached out to a few people he knew one being a local candidate with a lot of school district experience and an internal candidate that had applied and a fourth candidate the he played phone tag with that he never made contact with. The internal candidate said they didn't have any experience for the position. He said he made the decision that Mr. Johnson had the level of experience required and ended up being the sole contact.

Ms. Hoel stated although she understood the council not giving the Mayor any guidelines, they also didn't say to only bring one candidate forward. She believed there to be a lack of disclosure and due diligence as it was the councils' jobs to select an interim, it was the Mayor's job to provide the candidate. She asked why not let the council review all the possible candidates, she said she felt it was the council's job to make that determination.

Mayor Odman stated he appreciated Ms. Hoel's comment and that he didn't disagree, it could have been handled better.

Councilor Holden stated that she made the motion, and she believed that the Mayor had the ability to appoint an interim city manager. Instead, he chose to allow the council to make the decision as a whole in a public meeting.

Ms. Hoel's question #3.

The Mayor stepped into operational roles not granted under the Charter.

Following the former City Manager's termination and the Public Works Superintendent's leave, the Mayor assumed a quasi-supervisory role within the Public Works Department. Email records show a sustained pattern of departmental communications being routed directly to the Mayor by a Public Works staff member who does not have managerial authority.

The City Charter assigns administrative and day-to-day oversight to the City Manager — not the Mayor. When those lines are blurred, staff become uncertain, accountability becomes fractured, and transparency is compromised.

This is not about the intentions behind those actions. It is about maintaining the structural boundaries that protect good governance.

Ms. Hoel added that there are supervisory positions at public works, she used to be a city employee, and there were a lot of emails that she believes are crossing the lines and there is a clear lack of transparency.

Mayor Odman shared two weeks after the city manager was terminated the public works superintendent went on leave. He said he was trying his best to recruit an interim city manager and help staff in any capacity he could. From a leadership standpoint, he brought the public works supervisory staff together along with Krista Gannon to talk about questions they had and how they could work together as a team. He stepped into that without approval because he saw a need and he said he would take ownership of doing that if it was frowned upon.

Councilor Lyon stated to Ms. Hoel that the Charter he has, he believed, states in the absence of a city manager the mayor took over that role.

Councilor Jensen stated the city has a weak Mayor and that was not the case.

Councilor Lyon said he needed to go back and read the Charter he has.

Ms. Hoel's question #4.

Communication with Council and the public was incomplete, selective, or delayed.

Candidate resumes, background details, and draft work plans were not shared with Council until the night of the appointment — and in some cases, not shared at all. Media inquiries were answered with partial information. Key facts were provided only after decisions were made.

This pattern creates an environment where the public cannot meaningfully participate, and Council is placed in the position of approving actions without full information. As the city prepares to begin the recruitment process for a full-time City Manager, these issues cannot be ignored. Whatever happened in October now sets the tone — and the precedent — for what comes next.

#### Closing Request

I want to be clear: this is not about personalities.  
It is about process, structure, and the obligation to operate within both the City Charter and Oregon's public meeting laws.

The community deserves: transparent hiring process, clearly defined roles and boundaries, and open communication that reflects best practices in municipal governance.

I ask that the Council develop and adopt a formal, written hiring protocol before proceeding with the recruitment of a permanent City Manager — one that includes timelines, disclosure requirements, candidate comparison standards, and public accessibility.

Milton-Freewater deserves a process we can trust.

Mayor Odman reminded everyone that he does have a full-time job and he was doing his best to manage that and expedite the process while learning the process. He sent a memo to the council in hopes of providing the information on the Friday before the meeting. In working with human resources, and redacting confidential information, that didn't happen until Monday, which was the day of the meeting.

Ms. Hoel stated she wasn't implying the Mayor wasn't doing a good job, or that Mr. Johnson wasn't a good selection, it is only about transparency and being transparent. There is not a lot of citizens that show up for the meetings and they rely on people like her to keep them updated and put the information out there.

Mayor Odman said he appreciated that.

Tammy Seaquist thanked Mayor Odman for his time and dedication to finding an interim city manager. She stated everyone is trying to do their best and that needs to be recognized. She said she was going to go home and pray for everyone, because that is what's needed right now.

Mayor Odman thanked her for her comment and that it was going to take everyone working together to make this work.

Councilor Irving thanked Mrs. Seaquist for her comment and stated that working with the League of Oregon Cities was the best decision.

### **MANAGER'S REPORT**

Interim City Manager Tim Johnson shared that he attended the Christmas parade and he compared it to a Krewe du Vieux Parade and the New Orleans Mardi Gras, he took over thirty photographs of the parade. He stated he prepared thank you notes to staff that volunteered for the parade to be signed by the city council. These letters will be included in the employees' personnel files. He shared he held the first department head meeting, which was very insightful. He shared some metrics and performance measures, research he has done on the high performance of the city's organization. The International City Managers Association (ICMA), which he is a part of, identifies there are about 4.89 public employees per every local government per thousand per capita. City of Milton-Freewater is about 8,000 in population and approximately 66 employees, he stated it continues to amaze him what this Eastern Oregon community has done over its history with an electric utility, farm, materials recovery, landfill and a golf course. Calculating this out, with 66 employees, the citizens of Milton-Freewater are getting the "biggest bang for their buck". He stated the people of the City of Milton-Freewater have received some of the highest performance from some of the most dedicated, enthusiastic and conscientious employees. He said the brand you should be thinking about is what goes on before you turn on the light switch, what does all the certification and knowledge look like before you turn on that switch, similarly what is all the training and education look like when you turn on your facet or call 911, he said to think about all the training and skill sets of all the officers and fire fighters of this community and what they commit their selves to. He shared with the chief that if ever the unfortunate were to happen, the first thing he would need to do even as an Interim City Manager, would be to take care of the chief and his family, because they are going to be so busy taking care of the officer's family that has been impacted then he would direct his attention to others. He said he takes this oath of office very seriously; he can't hire or fire as it's in the City Charter and also within the ethics of the ICMA only the council can do that. He said it is a pleasure to be here and that he hoped they understand that they have a pro working for them and he intended to only do one thing and that was to reinforce the quality of the performance and the people that are working for the city on a daily basis for the community. He plans to produce written reports and for transparency, be posted on the city website so anyone can go on there and see exactly what he is doing and working on. He also has an open-door policy for anyone who has questions, he is available.

### **COUNCIL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councilor Koklich listed the following as subjects he recommended for future work session; recycling and the new mandate, hiring of the city manager, budget and sound system for the Albee Room.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

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Mike Odman, Mayor