
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
vacant
Jose Garcia

Mayor
Ward 1
Ward 2
Ward 3

CITY OF MILTON-FREEWATER**June 22, 2026****CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

The Council of the City of Milton-Freewater met in a Special Session on June 22, 2026, in the Albee Room of the City Library, 8 SW 8th Avenue 6:00 p.m.

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

Councilor Ward 2 position is vacant.

Staff members present were: City Recorder Leanne Steadman, Police Chief Joe Shurtz, Finance Director Laurie Bubar, Library Director Lili Schmidt, Fire Chief Shane Garner, Court Clerk Tracy Martinez, Public Works Assistant/Project Aide Krista Gannon, Emergency Communications Specialist Luz Garcia, Police Officer Zach Paine and Pool Manager Russell Woodward.

Guests or citizens present were: Carol Irving, Megan Hoel, Thomas Hoel, Paul Seaquist and Donna Sheridan.

Representing the news media was: Sherrie Widmer of the Valley Herald.

BUSINESS ITEMS:**AUTHORIZATION FOR A CURRENT, FULL-TIME EMPLOYEE TO BE TRANSFERRED FROM ONE DEPARTMENT TO ANOTHER**

Mayor Odman explained that both the city's labor attorney and the city attorney strongly advised waiting until a permanent City Manager is hired before proceeding with this transfer. However, Mayor Odman invited Police Chief Joe Shurtz to present the Police Department's operational perspective.

Chief Shurtz explained that the dispatch center was down two dispatchers and operating with only four, forcing single-coverage 12-hour shifts and causing extreme staff burnout. He then presented the chronological timeline of failed recruitment, noting that he requested former Interim City Manager Tim Johnson to open the dispatch position on March 3, 2026, which Human Resources (HR) posted online on March 4, 2026. On March 29, 2026, testing was scheduled but no applicants showed up, leading him to request that the position remain open "until filled" on March 30, 2026. Although two applicants passed testing on May 9, 2026, and were interviewed on May 22, 2026, one candidate dropped out due to graveyard shift requirements. Another dispatcher resigned on June 5, 2026, to join the Walla Walla Dispatch Center. Tracy Martinez subsequently submitted her official transfer application on June 11, 2026. He emphasized that a new hire requires a background check, psychological evaluation, a 3-week academy in Salem, and a 3-day Emergency Medical Dispatch course, meaning a new hire would not be certified and independent until December if there were to be hired now. Conversely, Tracy Martinez is already certified and has covered 71.75

hours of dispatch overtime this year, and 755 hours since 2022. The transfer was discussed and approved by former Interim City Manager Tim Johnson, but he did not communicate this to HR.

Councilor Lyon asked about nepotism concerning the transfer.

Chief Shurtz explained that an anti-nepotism policy under OAR 199-008-0008, established under former City Manager Chad Morris, is in place and at Morris's request he sent the policy to Morris and HR. Under this policy, Tracy Martinez will report directly to him and eventually to a second sergeant once hired, completely bypassing direct family supervision conflicts.

Councilor Jensen asked how this situation was presented to the attorneys.

Mayor Odman clarified that according to the labor attorney, former Interim City Manager Tim Johnson did not possess the charter authority to pre-approve the transfer before his departure. He then stated that the attorneys' primary objections: they recommended opening a brand-new position rather than a direct transfer and raised potential nepotism concerns regarding Tracy Martinez's family relations.

Chief Shurtz explained that a "no" vote would cause a major coverage crisis, resulting in cancelled staff vacations, union grievances, and potential resignations.

Councilor Lyon asked if Umatilla County could assist with dispatch coverage.

Chief Shurtz explained that Umatilla County operates on an incompatible CAD and radio system, and the City of Milton-Freewater is not part of the county radio district. He shared that Walla Walla Dispatch was the only CAD ally, but a dispatch transfer agreement is highly complex and logistically difficult.

Councilor Jensen stated she would like to see what the attorney's responses were.

Councilor Koklich asked if the transfer was approved who would do the court clerk's work.

Finance Director Laurie Bubar stated that she does not wish to hire a replacement court clerk until a permanent City Manager is hired, planning to cover duties internally and absorb Tracy's absence.

Chief Shurtz explained that under the union contract, Martinez will lose her seniority and drop to the bottom of the dispatch roster, and her pay rate will adjust to the dispatch scale.

Court Clerk Tracy Martinez spoke from the audience, detailing the stress of understaffed dispatching. She recounted a traumatic shift where she worked a 12-hour shift completely alone and had to coordinate a critical medical response requiring three separate ambulances and a Life Flight helicopter for a severe injury, while simultaneously managing multiple active police dispatch calls.

Councilor Koklich asked if the court clerk position was budgeted and how many dispatchers were needed.

Bubar stated the court clerk position was budgeted.

Chief Shurtz replied to Councilor Koklich's question with six dispatchers.

A brief discussion ensued regarding Martinez's additional duties pay.

Chief Shurtz stated that would not be additional pay as she was already receiving that pay due to performing the police records requests and body camera requests.

Mayor Odman asked if there was a way she could do this temporarily.

Councilor Jensen again asked to know how this was presented to the attorneys.

Martinez stated that she didn't understand that it was alright for her to fill the position temporarily but not be there full-time.

Councilor Lyon again mentioned nepotism.

Martinez stated that not having enough dispatchers was not sustainable for the current dispatch staff.

Councilor Koklich asked if police officers could help.

Chief Shurtz stated that the police officers were not certified and there could be potential liability to allow that to happen for a 12-hour shift. He stated that there are a few officers that will cover a dispatcher a temporary basis, for example while a dispatcher uses the restroom.

A brief discussion ensued.

Councilor Lyon motioned to approve the transfer of Tracy Martinez to dispatch on a temporary basis until September 30th, subject to final review and permanent approval by the incoming City Manager. Councilor Irving seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the motion failed unanimously.

A brief discussion ensued regarding Martinez being paid at the dispatch scale.

Councilor Lyon motioned transferring Tracy Martinez to dispatch on a temporary basis, through September 30th and to be analyzed by the new city manager for a permanent position with council approval, with pay at the dispatch level. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

AUTHORIZATION TO HIRE A SEASONAL LABORER FOR PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

City Recorder Leanne Steadman explained this was a request for authorization for the Public Works department to hire up to two seasonal parks maintenance laborers. Out of 7 applications, 5 candidates were interviewed.

A brief discussion ensued regarding applicants and nepotism, seasonal schedules for park bathrooms.

Steadman recommended that Finance Director Laurie Bubar be authorized to sign off on the hirings to maintain consistency.

Councilor Lyon motioned to authorize the Finance Director to hire up to two candidates selected from the interview process held on Thursday, June 18, 2026, to support the Public Works Department during the 2026 summer season, contingent upon budget funding and adherence to city personnel policies. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which was passed unanimously.

**AUTHORIZATION TO HIRE ADDITIONAL AQUATIC CENTER STAFF AND
RESOLUTION AMENDING THE AQUATIC CENTER EMPLOYEE PAY PLAN**

Pool Manager Russell Woodward provided some details on the pool operations. Woodward highlighted that the Aquatic Center has 14 aquatic staff members earning \$14.05/hour, which is uncompetitive compared to Walla Walla Memorial Pool wages. He explained that expanded offerings have added 12 new swim sessions, 9 swim classes, 12 advanced classes, and 3 advanced swim sessions for competitive swimmers called the "Milton Marlins". He noted that he contacted Interim City Manager Tim Johnson in February to meet, who referred him to HR, who said she was waiting on Johnson, causing a cycle of inaction through March and April. He reported that staff are facing extreme burnout, with 7.3% of total hours worked in the last two weeks (1,276 total hours) being overtime. Active recruitment is underway, with four candidates recently graduated from lifeguard training, plus two others from a class that ended June 7th, and three additional swim instructors ready to start. Woodward clarified his specific request was to hire 4 additional lifeguards and 2 aquatic specialists, and to boost aquatic specialist pay to \$16.00/hour.

Councilor Lyon motioned to authorize the Finance Director to sign for the hiring of additional staff up to 4 lifeguards and 2 aquatics specialists for Aquatic Center operations within the designated budget until the new City Manager is in place. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Councilor Lyon motioned to adopt Resolution number next in order (2609), Resolution Amending the Aquatic Center Employee Pay Plan. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Woodward stated he would be sharing an Excel spreadsheet with the council, he would have brought copies, but he was having problems with the printer.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Adopted July 13, 2026

Mike Odman, Mayor