

---

**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 27, 2026****CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

The Council of the City of Milton-Freewater met in a Special Session on June 27, 2026, in the Albee Room of the City Library, 8 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue 6:00 p.m.

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

Councilor Ward 2 position has been filled by the appointment of Jon Mendez who will be sworn into office August 10, 2026.

Staff members present were: City Recorder Leanne Steadman, Police Chief Joe Shurtz, Finance Director Laurie Bubar, Electric Superintendent Richard Jolly, Library Director Lili Schmidt, Fire Chief Shane Garner, Emergency Communication Specialist Tracy Martinez, Public Works Assistant/Project Aide Krista Gannon, Facilities Maintenance Worker Jorge Estrada, Human Resource Officer Wendi Daugherty, Public Works Engineering Technician Steven Patten, Conservation Specialist Ryan Westman, Emergency Communication Specialist Rhianne Carr, Bent Detective Greg Bunker, and Police Officers Zach Paine, Craig Robinson and Dylan Garica.

Guests or citizens present were: Carol Irving, Bill Daugherty, Sally Babcock, Ann Jolly, David Prock, Kay West, Tina Kain, Paul Seaquist, Tammy Seaquist, Jon Mendez, Kenny Jenkins, Clarence York, Melissa Porter and Amelia Wallace of Jensen Strategies.

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

**BUSINESS ITEMS:****DISCUSSION – CITY MANAGER – CONTRACT/INTERIM/RECRUITMENT**

Mayor Odman stated that the city manager position became open following the withdrawal of Nicole Schneider. He encouraged discussion noting there were three other candidates in the final interview process; Jaime Lee Stickel, Aaron Palmquist and Steven Dahl.

Councilor Koklich suggested reaching out to retired city managers who might serve in an interim capacity.

Councilor Irving stated they went from 16 applicants to eight possibilities to four that were chosen to interview. He suggested remaining with the three that came in “second”, “third” or “whatever”, and reach out to them and see if there's a possibility that any of them are still interested. He said some of them may have had other job offers or just decided to stay where they're at. He stated the city paid a lot of money to do the recruitment and he would hate to have to go through that again.

Steadman reported the service warranty with SGR has passed, as that was in reference to the council not being satisfied with the original pool of applicants. She recommended if the council chose to go back out for city manager recruitment that this service be done in-house by city staff. There are two recent recruitments that cost the city approximately \$64,000 and she stated she believes staff can do all the advertising and position profile.

Tina Kain, 403 Willow Street - said she is a retired city employee, she also suggested that city staff conduct the recruitment in-house to save money rather than hiring a third-party recruiter.

Ann Jolly 225 Maple asked if the city manager was required to live within the city limits.

Councilor Lyon stated the Charter called for the city manager to live within the 97862-zip code.

Mayor Odman noted that many other communities in the Pacific Northwest were currently seeking city managers, which limited the candidate pool.

Councilor Irving advocated for Aaron Palmquist, the current City Manager of Irrigon, noting Palmquist had been in his role for 13 years and had applied for this position twice, showing strong interest. He noted Mr. Palmquist has been his first choice both times.

Councilor Jensen recommended that they go back out for recruitment and invite Mr. Palmquist to be part of that.

Councilor Jensen voiced concern regarding whether Palmquist would be here for long term. She expressed a preference for someone committed to a five- to ten-year term.

The council discussed Palmquist's contract terms, using previous city manager Chad Morris's previous contract as a template.

Councilor Irving proposed reducing the severance terms to three months' pay for termination in the first year and six months' pay thereafter.

Councilor Lyon stated he preferred the amended contract that council just adopted.

A brief discussion ensued regarding the candidates, starting salary and contract benefits.

Councilor Jensen suggested referencing the ICMA website for sample contracts and ethical negotiation resources.

Councilor Koklich stated there was a lot of competition out there.

Councilor Lyon mentioned other competing cities seeking managers, such as College Place and Sunnyside, Washington.

Councilor Irving motioned to offer the city manager position to Aaron Palmquist at the salary of \$150,000 with a six-month review, and matching the offer previously made to Nicole Schneider. Councilor Lyon seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

A brief discussion ensued regarding an Interim City Manager.

City Recorder Leanne Steadman was proposed as the interim city manager, and she agreed to serve as both interim city manager and city recorder. When discussed, Steadman declined monthly salary offers of \$8,500 and \$9,500, requesting the same monthly rate of \$12,500 that was offered to Nicole Schneider and that was paid to Interim City Manager Tim Johnson.

Councilor Irving moved to appoint Leanne Steadman as Interim City Manager and Recorder until a permanent city manager is in place with a review in six months, at a monthly salary not to exceed \$12,500, starting July 28, 2026. Councilor Jensen seconded the motion which passed with Councilor Koklich being the dissenting vote.

### **AUTHORIZATION TO PROCEED WITH THE PUBLIC WORKS SUPERINTENDENT RECRUITMENT WITH JENSEN STRATEGIES**

Human Resource Officer Wendi Daugherty introduced Amelia Wallace, a Senior Associate with Jensen Strategies, who attended the meeting via conference phone.

Amelia Wallace introduced her firm as an Oregon-based company with an office in Portland. She recapped the project, noting recruitment began in mid-April. Following city manager candidate Nicole Schneider's withdrawal on July 17, 2026, the city decided to proceed with the recruitment. Wallace proposed a schedule with a September 8<sup>th</sup> closing date, followed by application reviews and interviews the week of September 14, 2026. She asked the council to designate an interim project manager and advised consulting legal counsel regarding hiring authority in the absence of a permanent city manager.

A brief discussion ensued regarding whether the expense for this recruitment was in the current fiscal year budget.

Finance Director Laurie Bubar stated when the previous Interim City Manager Tim Johnson was here it was talked about, but he did not include it in the budget. She stated there may need to be a budget adjustment.

Councilor Jensen asked who would be doing the interviews.

Daugherty stated the city will be doing the interviews.

Councilor Lyon asked for clarification on how many candidates will be selected as finalists.

Wallace stated they typically recommend, just like the city manager process, that the city do an interim semifinalist stage. She explained typically that those interviews are conducted via Zoom. They would be providing recommendations on the semifinalist shortlist. They could prioritize that a little bit more, but it would be ultimately at the discretion of the city who's nominated as a finalist and brought forward for in-person interviews that they recommend conducting.

Councilor Lyon asked if the council would see all the applicants.

Wallace stated in the council-manager form of government, the hiring and firing of a department head is delegated to the city manager or an interim, typically with some other limitations in recognizing the interim period. She stated, no, council does not review applications or participate.

Councilor Koklich stated the council should be involved with the people that will be chosen to do the interviews as it should be someone who knows the day-to-day operations.

Councilor Lyon stated he believed how this will happen is the interim city manager cannot hire or fire so that will have to come to council as recommended by the interview panel.

Wallace thanked the council for allowing her to join via phone and she looked forward to having some great candidates. She also expressed her appreciation for the public works staff in getting their comments and input on the position profile.

Councilor Lyon motioned to approve of continuing with the contracted scope of work with Jensen Strategies, LLC. The application submission deadline for the Public Works Superintendent position will be scheduled for September 8, 2026. A semi-finalist notification will be set to occur in the week of September 14, 2026, and interviews will then be scheduled to proceed with the hiring process. Councilor Irving seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:01 p.m.

Approved August 10, 2026

---

Mike Odman, Mayor