

BURNS CITY COUNCIL
June 24, 2026

The Burns City Council met in regular session on June 24, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. Members present were as follows:

Mayor: Jen Hoke
Councilor President:
Councilors: Susan Lowe
Shane Brockmann
Bryan Garo
Chase Patterson
Andrew Roy
Tod Gahley

Also, in attendance were City Manager Brenda Engebretson, Public Works Director Ty Richardson, Police Chief Robby Tiller, Fire Chief Scott Williamson, Finical Clerk Mindy Clemens, and City Clerk Tiffany Leffler.

SUMMARY

The Burns City Council meeting focused primarily on public budget discussions, with extensive debate over funding for the Harney County Chamber of Commerce. The council held public hearings on the city budget, URA budget, and Community Development Block Grant, with overwhelming public support for maintaining Chamber funding at 20% of transient lodging tax revenues rather than reducing it to \$16,000 as proposed. After significant public comments in favor of the Chamber, including testimony from the Executive Director Jess Hedges about the organization's impact on tourism and local business, the council voted to restore Chamber funding to \$34,000 by reallocating money from parks improvements. The meeting also included committee updates, appointment of new council member Bryan Garo to an open seat, and discussion of various intergovernmental agreements and resolutions.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Kim Rollins, 831 Riverside Drive, raised concerns about the minutes not meeting ORS requirements and indicated that he had written two letters about this to the council and would be writing a third letter about it. He felt that Councilor Gahley tried to address it by adding the video recording of the meeting to the minutes, but that it did not satisfy the requirements. He said the city could have their Zoom recording be the minutes, but once it's put in writing it has minimum standards including who spoke, what they spoke, etc. On another note, he wanted to let the council know that the work session meeting on June 22 was the best meeting he had been to in 40 years. He was very proud of the council but said he may change that opinion once he sees the finished product and then gave the council kudos for giving the public a chance to speak and give input the evening of the work session.

Kevin Pryse, business owner at 90 West A Street, treasurer of the Chamber of Commerce, thanked the city for their support to the Chamber. He felt the Chamber is a very important entity in the community. The support they get from the City of Burns helps them continue to run.

AGENDA APPROVAL AND ADDED ITEMS

Mayor Hoke added an intergovernmental letter of support to new business and removed the department head report.

Councilor Patterson made a motion to approve the agenda with the added items. Councilor Gahley seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

CONSENT AGENDA

Regular City Council Meeting Minutes – June 10, 2026 –

Councilor Gahley responded to Mr. Rollins' comments about the minutes. He disagreed with Mr. Rollins because after looking at the minutes, and every way it could be done, as well as looking at the ORS statute, he felt the minutes were appropriate, and within the guidelines that they had established. They had been using this system for quite some time, so he was unsure of what the complaint was because he didn't see the same issue.

Councilor Gahley made a motion to approve the consent agenda. Councilor Roy seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

PUBLIC LETTERS OF INTEREST

Eric Andersson, 868 North Diamond, felt it was his duty to serve his community. His family moved here in 2018 where he eventually retired from teaching at Slater Elementary School, Hines Middle School, and Crane School. He currently works at Harney ESD and informed them that he may have some time conflicts with when the City Council meetings are held but would not know until the 1st of June. He asked them to take that into consideration when they made their decision that evening.

Bryan Garo, 280 West C Street, has lived here almost his whole life and moved back after college because he liked Burns and would like to be a part of a positive change for the community. He said he had been interested in serving for a while now. He had attended a few meetings over the years and got interested in how things work on City Council and was urged by a few residents to get more involved. He then joined the Planning Commission and has been serving for 3 years now and feels it has been very informative and eye-opening. This has made him want to serve more and gave him interest in being on City Council. He wants to be part of the positive change for the community.

The council interviewed both candidates for the open city council seat. After discussing their qualifications and potential conflicts, the council voted unanimously to appoint Brian Garrow to the position.

Councilor Patterson made a motion to approve Bryan Garo for the open council seat #3. Councilor Gahley seconded the motion. Mayor Hoke, Councilor Lowe, Councilor Patterson, Councilor Roy, and Councilor Gahley were in favor. Councilor Brockmann was opposed. (5/1)

PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. City of Burns Budget for fiscal year 2026/2027

The City Council held a public hearing on the proposed budget for fiscal year 2026-2027, which included a reduction in Chamber of Commerce funding from \$34,000 to \$16,000.

Jess Hedges, Executive Director of the Harney County Chamber of Commerce, presented the current financial challenges facing the organization, highlighting a significant budget reduction, starting from a current budget of \$123,000, which had been reduced by \$60,000

over the last four years, the proposed reduction of 16,000 and eventual phase out to zero would have significant impact on chamber services. She emphasized the impact of these cuts on chamber services, including events like the Chamber Awards and Community Bike Night, as well as local shopping initiatives and tourism promotion. Jess requested confirmation on the change from a previous directive to allocate 20% of transient lodging tax funding to the chamber to the current proposal of phasing out all funding.

Multiple community members spoke in support of maintaining current funding levels, citing the Chamber's positive impact on tourism, local businesses, and community events.

Robert Medley, a Hines resident and chamber member, expressed support for the chamber and acknowledged the difficulty of budget decisions, urging consideration of the chamber's value to the community.

Pat Brewster, 662 Riverside Drive, felt it was a great resource and asset to the community, and we don't take our assets and throw them away. We support them. The Chamber shows that we do have things going on within our community, where you hear so many people saying there's nothing in Burns, it's a drive-through, spend the night and get the heck out.

Mayor Hoke noted the comments online.

Diane Weible said she would encourage continued support of the Chamber.

Duana Woodfin said events don't organize themselves, Jess does. She is a driving force behind the Chamber organization who will promote activities if she does not. Folks come to Burns for an experience.

Joshua Weible said he was representing both Broadway Fitness and Rising Phoenix Martial Arts, and he was in support of the Chamber and all that has happened to support both businesses' growth and support in the community. The Chamber took a huge role, especially during COVID, helping him stay open and continue to touch both kids and adults, since February of 2025. Jessica has worked hard to ensure the Harney Knights is successful in growing each time.

Brad Herrera said he was in support of the Chamber. He said he understood the wants of the city, but needs are not being met and cutting the budget to the Chamber and not fixing potholes is not acceptable.

Natasha Gunn was in support of the Chamber and its board president. She said she hopes the Council will recognize the Chamber's positive impact on the community and local businesses. Driving tourism and economic development.

Council members expressed concerns about the budget cut, with some noting that it contradicted previous commitments and strategic plans to support the Chamber. The discussion also touched on the need to improve collection of transient room taxes from short-term rental platforms like Airbnb and Vrbo, which could potentially generate additional revenue to support both the Chamber and parks initiatives.

Councilor Gahley clarified that the parks budget spent approximately \$30,000 last year, with \$71,000 budgeted for the current year.

City staff expressed concern about redirecting funds from the parks budget to the Chamber, arguing that it would limit park maintenance and improvements to only basic maintenance.

The meeting then focused on clarifying questions about a municipal loan, particularly regarding the loan amount, repayment terms, and budget implications. City staff explained that the loan process is complex and ongoing, with the city still working on projections and documentation required by lenders.

The discussion revealed uncertainty about specific loan payment amounts and timing, with Councilor Brockmann indicating that while the full loan amount appeared on the budget as anticipated revenue, actual loan payments and their timing were not listed and remain undetermined.

The council continued to discuss the budget discrepancy regarding funding for the Chamber versus park improvements. After debate, the council passed a motion to reallocate \$15,000 from park improvements back to the Chamber and to continue 20% funding.

Councilor Garo made a motion to reallocate \$15,000 from park improvements back to the Chamber and approve the budget, with that change. Councilor Lowe seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/0)

2. URA budget for fiscal year 2026-2027

Mayor Hoke opened the public hearing at 7:20 p.m.

No public testimony was provided.

The discussion focused on the Urban Renewal Agency (URA) budget for fiscal year 2026-2027, where Councilor Gahley explained the funding mechanism for the URA, which comes from frozen property tax bases in designated urban renewal areas over a 20-year period.

Mayor Hoke closed the hearing at 7:21 p.m.

The council again addressed questions about a loan, with Mayor Hoke clarifying that while there had been discussions about a potential zero-interest loan to pay off existing debt, no action had been taken yet due to lack of URA leadership.

The motion to approve the URA budget passed with six votes in favor and one against.

Councilor Gahley made a motion to approve the URA budget for the fiscal year 2026-2027. Mayor Hoke, Councilor Garo, Councilor Brockmann, Councilor Patterson, Councilor Roy, and Councilor Gahley were all in favor. Councilor Lowe was opposed. (5/1)

3. 2026 Community Development Block Grant

Mayor Hoke opened the public hearing at 7:28 p.m.

City Manager Brenda Engebretson informed the council and community that the 2026 Community Development Block Grant application seeks \$5 million total with priority emphasis on sewer system improvements. After explaining that the grant funds must be used specifically for approved purposes and cannot be used for stormwater runoff projects.

No public testimony was provided.

Mayor Hoke closed the public hearing at 7:31 p.m.

The council unanimously voted to approve the grant application.

Councilor Garo made a motion to approve the 2026 Community Development Block application. Councilor Patterson seconded the motion. All Ayes (6/o)

NEW BUSINESS

1. Committee Discussion –

With new council members joining the council, it was decided that committees would be rediscussed and reassigned.

Councilor Gailey expressed interest in withdrawing from the Safety Committee to chair the URA committee but wanted to remain on R3.

Mayor Hoke said she was on the Waterways Committee and Airport Committee and wanted to remain on the Waterways Committee.

Councilor Lowe liked the Cemetery Committee and wanted to continue being on it.

Councilor Brockmann and Councilor Patterson were not available for any of the committees due to conflicting schedules.

Councilor Garo said his schedule conflicted as well but may be able to swing something after 4 p.m. and if they could accommodate, he would be willing to try.

Councilor Roy said he had expressed interest in the Safety Committee, so possibly that one, but he wanted to put a disclosure there that with the project running up on the hill coming to a close, he was not sure what his hours were going to be, but until it was open, he didn't really have a set schedule.

Mayor Hoke clarified that, at least for now, he would be on the Safety Committee.

Councilor Roy agreed.

The council discussed potentially changing the Airport Committee to quarterly meetings with monthly reports instead of regular committee meetings, as most issues are handled directly with the city manager. No decisions were made at that time and the discussion on the Airport Committee would be continued at a later time.

2. Intergovernmental Letter of Support -

City Manager Brenda Engebretson informed the council that the Burns Paiute Tribe, Harney County, City of Burns, and City of Hines were the four governments that have come together and been working with Oregon Solutions. They have been going through a process where they have helped develop a declaration of Cooperation documenting commitments from the governments, the irrigators, well users, and the environmental groups, which all started with the water 512 ruling. They've worked on a charter and developed a two-year plan, and they have committed to that. She said moving forward, there needs to be a post-plan coordination grant, and this was a letter of support to support that grant to go to the Oregon Water Resources Department to review

it. They would be coming back here to work with the Watershed Council and would handle the grant to continue to move forward with the planning for the next two years. She just needed their support for the letter, and having it signed so she could move on to getting it to the tribe for their signature.

There was a unanimous approval of the Intergovernmental Letter of Support for a post-plan coordination grant related to water resources.

Councilor Patterson made a motion to support the letter of support for the post-plan coordination grant. Councilor Garo seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES

1. Ordinance No. 26-909 – An Ordinance of the City of Burns amending Chapter 13 of the Burns Municipal Code to establish a stormwater utility and stormwater service charge and imposing an initial monthly stormwater charge per utility account.

**Councilor Garo made a motion to read Ordinance No. 26-909 by title only.
Councilor Gahley seconded the motion. All Ayes (6/o)**

Councilor Gahley made a motion to table Ordinance No. 26-909. Councilor Garo seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

2. Resolution No. 26-825 – A resolution adopting the URA budget.

**Councilor Patterson made a motion to read Resolution No. 26-825 by title only.
Councilor Garo seconded the motion. All Ayes (6/o)**

Councilor Gahley made a motion to approve Resolution No. 26-825. Councilor Patterson seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

3. Resolution No. 26-826 – A resolution adopting the budget.

**Councilor Garo made a motion to read Resolution No. 26-826 by title only.
Councilor Patterson seconded the motion. All Ayes (6/o)**

Councilor Brockmann made a motion to approve Resolution No. 26-826 with the changes made. Councilor Gahley seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

4. Resolution No. 26-827 – A resolution declaring the city's election to receive State Revenues.

**Councilor Garo made a motion to read Resolution No. 26-827 by title only.
Councilor Brockmann seconded the motion. All Ayes (6/o)**

Councilor Gabley made a motion to approve Resolution No. 26-827 and authorize mayor to sign. Councilor Brockmann seconded the motion. All Ayes. (6/o)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

It was reported that the airport is fully staffed and preparing for fire season, with several ongoing projects including building grants and potential NASA collaboration.

There was discussion on future work sessions on Vrbo/Airbnb regulations and charter updates, but no final dates were set.

NEXT STEPS

1. City Manager Brenda Engebretson: Investigate possibility of eliminating or reducing frequency of Airport Committee and report back to council on necessity/charter requirements
2. City Manager Brenda Engebretson: Look into changing Safety Committee meeting times to later in the day to accommodate Council members' schedules
3. City Manager Brenda Engebretson: Continue work with attorney (Jeremy) to complete agreement with Chamber of Commerce regarding funding
4. City Council: Schedule work session regarding Vrbo/Airbnb tax collection enforcement and to update City Charter
5. City Manager Brenda Engebretson/City Council: Schedule budget education session for new council members (targeted for February)
6. City Manager Brenda Engebretson/City Council: Schedule URA meeting to officially appoint chair
7. City Council: Review and potentially update committee assignments at next meeting

ADJOURN

Mayor Hoke adjourned the meeting at 8:08 p.m.

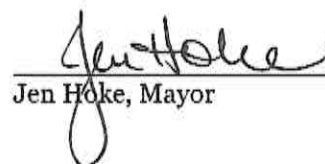
Recording for June 24, 2026, City Council meeting:

https://zoom.us/jc/share/SmCPDOHda1PUBjJw7SPIZRRGDZmSW9Wmnud5k_ubUSqDkTzNIXUgDy74P69sIKuu.AqLym9UYlcALvdHH?startTime=1782349304000

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Tiffany Leffler, City Clerk



Jen Hoke, Mayor