

**CITY OF MANITOU SPRINGS**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
606 Manitou Avenue  
May 5, 2026

The City Council of Manitou Springs met in Regular Session on Tuesday, May 5, 2026, at 606 Manitou Avenue, in the City of Manitou Springs, County of El Paso, and State of Colorado.

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT FOR ROLL CALL:**

Mayor Natalie Johnson  
Mayor Pro Tem Judith Chandler  
Councilor John Shada  
Councilor Julie Wolfe  
Councilor Nate Nassif  
Councilor Carey Storm  
Councilor Gloria Latimer

**A. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Johnson called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**C. ROLL CALL**

All of the City Council were present for the roll call.

**D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler moved to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilor Latimer. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

**E. PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

Bill Bolch, with Colorado Springs Utilities (CSU), provided advance notice of a natural gas replacement project on Waltham Avenue beginning May 11, 2026, with an anticipated duration of 45 to 60 days. He explained the work would use directional boring to minimize surface disruption, with crews operating weekdays from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. He noted that notifications had been sent to affected residents. He also announced a community meeting on Thursday May 7, 2026 at 5:30 PM in Memorial Hall to gather public input and address questions regarding the Waltham Avenue Project. Representative Bolch acknowledged that some parking impacts are expected but stated

CSU is working to identify alternative parking options. He added that the existing infrastructure, approximately 55 years old, will be replaced with modern materials designed for a longer lifespan.

## **F. CONSENT CALENDAR**

### 1. April 21, 2026 City Council Minutes

Councilor Latimer moved to approve the consent calendar as presented. The motion was seconded by Councilor Storm. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

## **G. PRESENTATION**

### 1. Proclamation No. 0526, A Proclamation Declaring Support for Community Action against Human Trafficking

Mayor Johnson read Proclamation 0526 into the record, declaring support for community action against human trafficking.

### 2. Proclamation No. 0626, A Proclamation Recognizing May as Historic Preservation Month

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler read Proclamation 0626 into the record, declaring May as Historic Preservation Month.

## **H. HEARINGS**

### 1. Second Reading and Public Hearing for Ordinance No. 0526, an Ordinance Adding Chapter 12.40 to the Manitou Springs Municipal Code Prohibiting Unpermitted Construction or Grading Work

Public Services Director Ben Schmitt confirmed that the ordinance was unchanged since first reading. He explained that the ordinance is intended to strengthen the City's ability to address unpermitted grading and work in the right-of-way, particularly where it impacts drainage and street systems, noting that the approach prioritizes voluntary compliance before enforcement.

Mayor Johnson opened the public hearing at 6:15 PM. Due to no public comment, Mayor Johnson subsequently closed the public comment portion of the hearing.

Councilor Wolfe moved to adopt on second reading, Ordinance No. 0526, an Ordinance Adding Chapter 12.40 to the Manitou Springs Municipal Code Prohibiting Unpermitted Construction or Grading Work. The motion was seconded by Councilor Storm. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

## I. BUSINESS

### 1. Consideration of Resolution No. 1126, A Resolution Approving and Adopting a Fee for Performing Unpermitted Work in the City

Councilor Storm moved to approve Resolution No. 1126, A Resolution Approving and Adopting a Fee for Performing Unpermitted Work in the City. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Chandler. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

### 2. Direction on Bill Bauers Open Space

Parks and Recreation Director Gillian Rossi presented an overview of the Bill Bauers Open Space item and provided a timeline of the project. She highlighted the initial acquisition of the lower parcel in 2015, adoption of the Parks, Open Space, and Trails (POST) Master Plan in 2016, and the purchase of the upper parcel in 2023 to support long-term connectivity goals. Director Rossi reviewed subsequent OSAC discussions, site visits, and a 2024 Council work session that led to a professionally conducted community survey. Survey results were presented in early 2026, followed by Council direction on April 21, 2026, to postpone the project and discuss the open space when the POST Master Plan is updated. She explained the item was brought back for reconsideration due to a technical issue that resulted in Council not receiving 31 public comments prior to their decision.

A general discussion ensued about how to analyze the comments received after the survey. Councilor Shada noted that the survey was anonymous and it is unknown if there is overlap between the survey and recent public comments received.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler noted that the volume of emails on the proposed open space development was higher than she has seen on any prior issue. She shared that she reviewed all emails, categorized them as for or against when a position was given, noted key concerns and addresses, and identified a small number of neutral comments.

Councilor Storm shared that her analysis included emails sent directly to her, as well as feedback from residents in her ward. She tallied approximately 48 comments in favor and 43 opposed. She also reviewed input from boards and organizations, which were all supportive, except for the Climate Action Working Group. Councilor Storm reviewed the survey data and noted that the data indicated that about twice as many residents were in favor, compared to residents opposed, both citywide and within the immediate area.

Councilor Nassif expressed appreciation for the high level of community engagement. He noted that environmental concerns were a central theme in opposition and questioned why those issues had not been addressed earlier in the process. He stated support for conducting a robust environmental assessment to better evaluate potential impacts. Councilor Nassif also encouraged consideration of how much open space should remain undeveloped, suggesting a broader, long-term community discussion on

preservation priorities. He recognized the contributions of the Climate Action Working Group, specifically thanking Becky Elder for her input and expertise.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler emphasized the need to clearly define what constitutes a low-impact trail, noting that such trails typically prohibit motorized use, including electric bikes. She raised questions about how those restrictions would be enforced in practice. She also referenced a late-submitted email from the Manitou Springs Fire Department, which outlined concerns related to steep terrain, limited access, increased human activity, and potential fire and safety risks, and recommended including a fire-focused component in any future environmental assessment.

Mayor Johnson summarized themes from public comments, noting concerns related to environmental and wildlife impacts, fire risk, parking, safety, adjacent properties, and questions about project need, connectivity, and timing. Supportive comments emphasized improved connectivity, safe routes to schools and amenities, increased access to outdoor recreation, benefits to health and mobility, potential economic impacts, and alignment with prior planning efforts and survey results.

Councilor Latimer referenced information provided in the staff memo regarding consultation with Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), including comments that the area is already impacted by urban development and would likely experience negligible wildlife impacts.

Director Rossi stated that there was no new information from CPW but reiterated that they would review any environmental impact assessment conducted for the property and provide comments as part of that process.

Mayor Johnson opened the floor for public comment at 6:44 PM.

Neile Minch, Manitou Springs Resident, expressed concerns about potential impacts to wildlife and referenced observations from eBird indicating a variety of bird species in the open space not observed in other areas of the City. He stated that alternative routes into town already exist and urged Council to give greater weight to feedback from residents adjacent to the canyon, noting that most nearby neighbors opposed the project. He also discussed fire mitigation, easement considerations, and the history of the proposed trail in the 2016 POST Master Plan. Resident Minch encouraged the City to leave the canyon undeveloped and preserve it as natural open space.

Cory Sutela, Manitou Springs Resident, clarified that a connection to Crystal Hills was envisioned in the 2016 POST Master Plan, however not specifically through Bill Bauers Open Space. Resident Sutela expressed support for the trail as an important mobility and recreational connection while emphasizing shared community values related to nature, wildfire mitigation, and responsible use of OSAC funds. He recommended requesting a preliminary wildlife assessment from CPW before pursuing a formal environmental study and supported a volunteer-based approach to future trail development efforts. He stated he would be resistant to waiting for an updated plan.

Robin Boutilier, Manitou Springs Resident, stated that after reviewing the survey materials and visiting the site, she concluded the space may be better left undeveloped. She expressed concerns about impacts to wildlife and neighboring properties and questioned the need for an additional short trail connection.

Jim Yount, Manitou Springs Resident, stated that the Bill Bauers Open Space has long functioned as an urban interface where wildlife is already accustomed to human activity. Drawing on his experience as a former OSAC member and chair, he emphasized that neighborhood trail connections have been a longstanding priority dating back to the 1997 Open Space Plan. He stated that the proposed trail corridor has consistently appeared in successive master plans and public planning efforts as a way to connect neighborhoods to Manitou Avenue, the Creek Walk Trail, and other community amenities. He urged Council to honor the extensive public input and planning processes that have supported the trail connection over the past 30 years.

Sean McKeown, Manitou Springs Resident, stated that community support for a trail connection through Bill Bauers Open Space has been consistently demonstrated through the 1997 and 2016 POST Master Plans, public acquisition of the parcels, and the recent community survey. He emphasized that the survey showed strong support among residents and noted that OSAC, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PARAB), and the Mobility and Parking Board (MAP) had all supported the project. He urged Council to respect the established planning process, survey results, and advisory board recommendations by moving forward with the trail connection.

Aaron Stunkard, Manitou Springs Resident, stated that, as a nearby resident overlooking Bill Bauers Open Space, he strongly supports the proposed trail connection and noted he had followed the project through both parcel acquisitions over the past decade. He expressed concern that preserving the area without public access would effectively limit use of the taxpayer-funded open space to adjacent property owners. He argued the trail would provide a safe, low-impact pedestrian connection between the Crystal Hills neighborhood and Manitou Avenue, improve mobility in an area lacking sidewalks and bike lanes, and have minimal impact on nearby homes due to the terrain and spacing. He also noted that community members would be willing to volunteer labor to help construct the trail and reduce costs.

Jessica Wilson, Manitou Springs Resident, expressed support for discounting development of the proposed Bill Bauers Open Space trail. She stated that the area serves as an important wildlife corridor and shared concerns about environmental impacts from increased human activity, noting frequent wildlife sightings in the ravine near her property. She also questioned whether project funding should instead be directed toward aging infrastructure issues in the Crystal Hills neighborhood, including recurring sewer backups. Additionally, she raised concerns about the lack of a necessary easement for the proposed trail connection and stated that moving forward before resolving that issue would be fiscally imprudent.

Becky Elder, Manitou Springs Resident and Business Owner, spoke in opposition to the proposed Bill Bauers Open Space trail, emphasizing concerns about impacts to wildlife habitat and ecological corridors within Manitou Springs. She described the ravines as important natural corridors that allow wildlife movement into and through the City and argued that increased human activity and trail development would further stress wildlife populations already affected by climate change and habitat loss. She added that the City already has an extensive trail network and urged Council to prioritize preservation of undeveloped natural spaces and wildlife habitat over additional trail construction.

Tim Beeson, Manitou Springs Resident, speaking as a former member and chair of OSAC, discussed the history of the Bill Bauers Open Space acquisition and raised concerns about moving forward without a formal trail alignment study. He stated that, after spending more time evaluating the terrain and geology of the area, he became less supportive of a multi-use trail due to the steep conditions and potential need for significant excavation and switchbacks to accommodate bicycles. He suggested that a low-impact, soft-surface pedestrian path may be more feasible and urged Council to consider having an independent trail professional complete a formal alignment study before making final decisions about trail development.

Sally Fitzgerald, Manitou Springs Resident, questioned why the Bill Bauers Open Space matter had returned after the Council had already voted on the matter and expressed concern that reconsidering the issue was an unnecessary use of Council time. She stated that wildlife should also be considered in the discussion and supported conducting a wildlife study of the area regardless of whether the project proceeds.

City Attorney Jeff Parker clarified that the proposed trail was brought back to support transparency and fairness, after a technical issue in which 31 comments were not provided to the City Council before making their decision.

Linda Morlan, Manitou Springs Resident and member of the Climate Action Working Group, expressed concern about continued loss of open space and stated that the community should prioritize protecting wildlife and natural areas. She questioned how the project had been communicated to the public over the years and noted she had not previously been aware of it. Resident Morlan also emphasized concerns related to wildlife impacts and fire risk.

Mayor Johnson noted that the POST Master Plan processes in 1997 and 2016 included robust public engagement and consultant-led outreach.

Karen Rose, Manitou Springs Resident, stated that she supports conducting a wildlife study for the Bill Bauers Open Space area before moving forward with any trail development. She emphasized the importance of protecting existing open space and noted concerns about declining wildlife populations. She also stated that, given the number of existing trails in the community, any additional trail through open space should be carefully considered in light of potential environmental impacts.

Mayor Johnson closed the floor to public comment at 7:33 PM.

OSAC Vice Chair Paul Arlinghaus explained that securing an easement is closely tied to the overall direction of the project. He noted that approaching the property owner with a clear vision and Council direction would be more practical and improve likelihood of successful negotiations for an easement.

Director Rossi recommended beginning with a wildlife and environmental impact study, in conjunction with a wildlife study from CPW, before advancing any trail design or alignment decisions. She explained that such assessments would help identify environmental or cultural resource constraints and inform where a trail could or could not be located under state standards.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler reiterated concerns about the feasibility and impacts of a proposed low-impact trail through the open space, citing the steep, rocky terrain, unresolved easement issues, and lack of a formal trail alignment. She stated that any future consideration should begin with a robust environmental study. She also expressed support for prioritizing other trail and open space projects.

Councilor Latimer noted that two options for environmental study were provided in Director Rossi's Memorandum. Director Rossi stated that she believed the preference would be to conduct a due-diligence-level Natural Resources Assessment in coordination with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), CPW and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) as the option focuses on field work, as opposed to desk work.

Councilor Wolfe stated that her position is influenced by the survey results, noting that about 34%, less than a majority, of residents selected development of the Bill Bauers Trail as their top OSAC project priority. She identified other survey data that indicated less than 50% support for the proposed trail. She stated that, while supporters are passionate, she viewed the survey results as showing limited overall support for the project and did not support spending additional OSAC funds on environmental studies. Councilor Wolfe added that she preferred preserving OSAC funding for future land acquisitions.

Councilor Nassif reiterated support for pursuing an environmental study, stating that it would provide a balanced approach to evaluating the project. He also encouraged staff and OSAC to review potential process improvements, noting concern that environmental analysis had not been completed earlier in the process.

Councilor Storm stated her support for the recommended due-diligence-level Natural Resources Assessment and suggested adding a fire-focused component as part of the environmental study, based on the recommendation from the Fire Department. She added that trail alignment could be part of the next steps.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler stated that she did not support moving forward with the trail project at this time due to several unresolved issues. She emphasized that community priorities and awareness of climate-related issues have evolved since the original master plans were developed.

Councilor Latimer expressed support for moving forward with the project, citing recommendations from OSAC and PARAB, as well as staff analysis and survey results indicating community support for a trail connection. She stated that she believed a trail could be developed in a manner that minimizes environmental impacts and serves primarily local users. She also clarified that the motion at the previous meeting was to postpone discussion of the project pending a future master plan update.

Councilor Shada stated that he is in favor of the environmental study option and fire-focused component as supported by Councilor Storm.

Mayor Johnson supported moving forward with an environmental impact study and fire-focused analysis. She stated that public input demonstrated that wildlife and environmental considerations should play a larger role in future planning efforts, including future updates to the POST Master Plan, and expressed confidence that staff and advisory boards would continue working to address neighborhood concerns as the project moves forward.

Councilor Nassif moved to approve due-diligence–level Natural Resources Assessment with the fire focus element. The motion was seconded by Councilor Latimer. The motion carried (5-2) with Mayor Pro Tem Chandler and Councilor Wolfe as the dissenting votes.

**Note for the Record** – The City Council took at break at 7:54 PM and reconvened at 8:10 PM.

## **J. RECEIVE OR ACT ON COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE**

Councilor Nassif thanked the organizers and participants of the recent kindness event, noting strong community participation and positive energy throughout the event.

Councilor Latimer complimented the recent Chamber of Commerce Diamond Jubilee event and thanked staff for supporting several recent community engagement efforts, including the budget and parking community engagement meetings, as well as Open Mic Night. She also praised the facilitator at the parking meeting for effectively adapting the format to encourage productive public participation.

City Administrator Howell shared that the notes from the Parking Engagement Meeting will be shared on the City website within a few days.

There was a brief discussion about Budget Survey Post Cards, during which City Administrator Howell stated that residents should be receiving postcards in the mail within the next week.

Mayor Johnson shared that the Metropolitan District (Metro) Board requested a Council Liaison and suggested that Councilor Nassif could serve as liaison since he is already the liaison to MAP. The consensus was that Councilor Nassif would serve as liaison to the Metro Board.

Mayor Johnson announced that the Colorado Municipal League (CML) is hosting the District 4 Spring Meeting in Monument at 6:00 PM, on May 27, 2026. She shared that she will be attending the meeting, as well as the CML Conference.

There was a discussion regarding the April 28, 2026 Open Mic Night and the process for handling future events. Mayor Johnson noted that comments and feedback were collected during the event and inquired about how that information could be documented and incorporated moving forward. There was general support for organizing comments into broad themes in order to preserve the informal nature of the event while still communicating key topics raised by participants. Mayor Johnson stated that she would compile the notes to share with Council. Councilor Nassif suggested incorporating recurring themes from future Open Mic Nights into the City newsletter.

There was a discussion about potentially reviewing the City's ward structure. City Clerk Elena Krebs confirmed that Council has authority to adopt ward changes by ordinance and is not required to refer the matter to the ballot.

Councilor Latimer expressed interest in reviewing the current ward boundaries, noting that Ward 3 contains a large concentration of city assets, including major parks, municipal buildings, and multiple neighborhoods. She observed that some neighborhoods within Ward 3 may have stronger geographic and community alignment with areas in other wards and suggested that a review of ward boundaries could help better balance representation.

Mayor Johnson expressed openness to reviewing the City's ward boundaries, noting that while the current structure may ultimately remain unchanged, it is appropriate to evaluate whether adjustments are warranted. She also shared that the idea of examining ward alignment was raised by multiple residents during her campaign.

Linda Morlan, Manitou Springs Resident, stated that she sees Ward 3 as problematic and would like to see a change in the ward structure.

Councilor Wolfe expressed opposition to pursuing changes to the City's ward structure, stating she is not supportive of adding additional council seats. She indicated that she does not view redrawing ward boundaries as a priority compared to other city matters, such as budget-related issues, and added that it has not been a concern raised by constituents during her campaigns.

City Attorney Parker clarified that under the City Charter, Council is set at seven members, and any proposal to change the number of council members would require a charter amendment and therefore an election.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler stated she supports exploring whether current ward boundaries still make sense but is not interested in changing the structure of at-large versus ward representation. She noted that because the issue does not require a charter amendment or ballot measure, it is not urgent, though she would support community discussion on the topic.

Councilor Shada stated that he does not see a demonstrated problem that would justify redrawing ward boundaries and expressed concern that doing so could create unnecessary complexity, including potential changes to precinct boundaries and additional administrative and state-level processes. He noted that any rebalancing effort would require detailed study of household distribution and added workload for staff. He emphasized that he has not heard constituent concern about current ward alignment and cautioned that restructuring would not necessarily improve representation.

Mayor Johnson stated that concerns about ward structure arise regularly from residents, particularly in Ward 3, where constituents have expressed that a single representative covers a diverse set of issues and may struggle to fully reflect community perspectives. She stated that any effort would not be Council-led.

## **K. CITY ADMINISTRATOR REPORT**

City Administrator Howell reported that the new parking kiosks have arrived and will be installed when weather conditions allow.

## **L. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

1. An Executive Session to hold a conference with the City attorney for legal advice pursuant to Section 5.1(c) of the City of Manitou Springs Home Rule Charter, concerning *Manitou and Pikes Peak Railway Company v. City of Manitou Springs, Colorado*, El Pasa County District Court Case No. 2025CV30766

Mayor Johnson read the purpose of the Executive Session into the record at 8:30 PM.

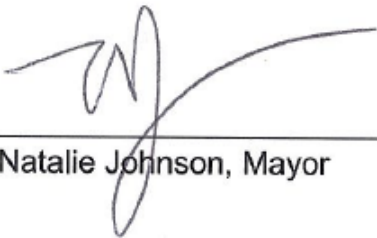
Mayor Pro Tem Chandler moved to enter the Executive Session for the stated purpose. The motion was seconded by Councilor Shada. The motion was carried unanimously (7-0).

The City Council moved back to Regular Session at 9:09 PM. Mayor Johnson confirmed the Executive Session was held solely for the stated purpose and that no formal decision was made.

## ADJOURN

With no other items to discuss, Councilor Shada moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Nassif. The motion carried unanimously (7-0). The meeting adjourned at 9:09 PM.

Attest:

  
Elena Krebs, City Clerk  
Natalie Johnson, Mayor

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