

**CITY OF MANITOU SPRINGS
CITY COUNCIL**

Regular Meeting Minutes
606 Manitou Avenue
August 4, 2026

The City Council of Manitou Springs met in Regular Session on Tuesday, August 4, 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
Councilor Judith Chandler
Councilor John Shada
Councilor Julie Wolfe
Councilor Nathan 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 members of the City Council were present for the roll call.

D. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler moved to approve the agenda as amended, removing items I3, Planned Sign Program Permit, and I4, Resolution 1626 to be rescheduled to the next week's Council meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Storm. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

E. PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

There was no public comment.

F. CONSENT CALENDAR

1. July 14, 2026 City Council Meeting Minutes
2. July 21, 2026 City Council Meeting Minutes
3. July 28, 2026 City Council Meeting Minutes
4. Approval of Task Order No. 1 with Stantec for the Local Impact Accelerator

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

G. PRESENTATION

1. Fire Mitigation Update

Fire Chief Keith Buckmiller presented an overview of the City's new fuels mitigation program, using before-and-after examples to demonstrate how strategic vegetation removal can slow wildfire spread and improve firefighters' ability to protect homes and property. He reported that two members of the three-person fuels crew are already in place and have begun mitigation work in neighborhoods, with the third expected to begin within a week. Chief Buckmiller thanked Council for supporting the program and noted that the approved burn box will assist with disposal of removed vegetation.

There was a discussion about biochar and the burn box, in which Fire Chief Buckmiller explained that vegetation removed during mitigation work will be processed in the City's approved burn box rather than left on site, reducing wildfire fuel while producing biochar that can be returned as a soil nutrient. He added that all firefighters will be trained and certified to operate the burn box, which is designed to safely contain embers while vegetation is burned in a controlled environment with fire suppression equipment available.

There was a discussion about maintenance frequency and mitigation priorities. Fire Chief Buckmiller stated that maintenance schedules will depend on weather conditions, but the goal is to cycle through treated properties annually to keep vegetation manageable and maintain wildfire mitigation efforts. He explained that the highest priority is reducing wildfire risk along primary evacuation routes to improve public safety during an emergency, followed by overgrown City properties based on need.

Mayor Johnson noted that the City Council is starting a budget process to prepare for the next year and suggested that the Fire Chief let the City Council know if there are any requests or recommendations from the Fire Department.

Fire Chief Buckmiller stated that the Fire Department will evaluate future needs as the mitigation program progresses. He added that the City's previous investment in a new ambulance has contributed to improved emergency response and patient outcomes.

H. HEARINGS

1. Second Reading and Public Hearing for Ordinance No. 0726, An Ordinance Amending the Annual Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

Finance Director Nate Moore noted that the only change since first reading of the ordinance was an allocation of \$3,200,000 to the Manitou and Pikes Peak Railroad Company (COG).

There was a discussion about budget savings from salary and benefit reductions. Finance Director Moore explained that the proposed budget adjustments reflect updated staffing levels and associated benefits rather than reductions to employee pay or benefits. City Administrator Denise Howell added that the savings also reflect a vacant police officer position, reduced staffing allocations in Planning, Parks, and part-time pool operations and the Pool and Fitness Center closure. She added that the City also replaced a project manager position with a lower-salaried support position to meet workload needs.

City Administrator Howell confirmed that the Summer Beautification Program was not eliminated but substantially reduced.

Finance Director Moore confirmed that funds were transferred from the Parking Budget to the General Reserves.

There was a brief discussion about whether there was a hiring freeze. City Administrator Howell confirmed that a hiring freeze was in place during 2025, but not currently. She explained that when a position becomes vacant, the City evaluates whether it should be refilled or whether the workload can be redistributed.

City Administrator Howell shared that the part-time position in the Planning Department will not be refilled and that the department currently has four full-time employees. She added that Code Enforcement is a separate department with one full-time position, which is currently staffed by a seasonal employee.

Mayor Johnson opened the public hearing at 6:21 PM. Due to no public comment, Mayor Johnson subsequently closed the public comment portion of the hearing.

City Attorney Jeff Parker noted that Section 2 was added to the ordinance after first reading to clarify that the ordinance both amends the budget and appropriates funds for the approved expenditures. He also recommended revising the ordinance title to reflect the appropriation of funds.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler moved to adopt on second reading Ordinance 0726, An Ordinance Amending the Annual Budget and Appropriating Funds for Fiscal Year 2026, as amended to include the proposed Section 2 and title change reflecting the appropriation of funds. The motion was seconded by Councilor Storm. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

I. BUSINESS

1. Consider Appointing Rose Lyda to the Manitou Arts, Culture, and Heritage Board

Manitou Arts, Culture, and Heritage Board (MACH) Chair Ralph Routon stated that the Board has two vacancies following the expiration of two members' terms. He noted that former Board Member Wren Almitra brought significant grant expertise and that the Board was seeking a candidate with similar qualifications. He recommended Rose Lyda, highlighting her experience with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the City of Colorado Springs, and nonprofit organizations, as well as her master's degree in public administration and certification as a grants manager.

Councilor Wolfe moved to appoint Rose Lyda to MACH as a regular member. The motion was seconded by Councilor Storm. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

2. Approval of Settlement Agreement with the Manitou and Pikes Peak Railroad Company

City Attorney Jeff Parker provided background on the settlement agreement between the City and the COG, explaining that the tax incentive agreement was originally approved in 2018 to reimburse a portion of the COG's excise taxes as an incentive to support continued operations and infrastructure improvements. He stated that, following litigation and mediation related to the agreement, the parties reached a proposed settlement under which all claims would be dismissed, the reimbursement agreement would be terminated, and the City would make a one-time payment of \$3,200,000, ending any future obligations between the parties.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler expressed appreciation to City staff, legal counsel, and both the current and previous City Councils for their efforts throughout the negotiations. She stated that the settlement represents a significant milestone that will save the City millions of dollars over the remaining term of the original agreement.

Councilor Latimer echoed Mayor Pro Tem Chandler's remarks, expressing appreciation to current and former City Council members, City staff, and legal counsel for their work throughout the litigation and negotiations. She stated that approving the settlement was among the most important actions she expected to take as a Council member.

Mayor Johnson expressed appreciation to current and former City Council members, City staff, legal counsel, and the COG for their work toward reaching the settlement.

She also thanked the Manitou Springs community for its patience and expressed optimism about rebuilding the City's relationship with the COG.

Mayor Johnson opened the floor for public comment.

Steve Bremner, Manitou Springs Resident, expressed support for the proposed settlement agreement, stating that it benefits both the City and the COG. He also voiced concern about a potential COG depot outside City limits, stating that it could increase traffic on the narrow access road serving the area and recommended that the City closely monitor any future proposals.

Bob Todd, Manitou Springs Resident, congratulated the City Council, City staff, and legal team on reaching the proposed settlement agreement. He commended their efforts throughout the negotiations, expressed hope for a positive working relationship with the COG moving forward, and reflected on the history of the original 2018 agreement, recognizing former City officials and community members who contributed to its development.

Howard Morrison, Manitou Springs Resident, expressed support for the settlement agreement, describing it as a significant milestone for the City. He thanked those involved in reaching the agreement and recognized Councilor John Shada for his longstanding opposition to the original reimbursement agreement and his efforts related to the matter.

Mayor Johnson closed the floor to public comment.

Councilor Shada moved to approve the settlement agreement with the Manitou and Pikes Peak Cog Railroad Company. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Chandler. The motion carried unanimously (7-0).

3. Planned Sign Program Permit

Note for the Record – This item was removed from the agenda during Section D, Approval of the Agenda.

4. Resolution No. 1626, A Resolution in Recognition and Support of the Highway 24 Signage Design Plans within the City of Manitou Springs

Note for the Record – This item was removed from the agenda during Section D, Approval of the Agenda.

J. RECEIVE OR ACT ON COUNCIL CORRESPONDENCE

Councilor Wolfe requested that the next City Council meeting include discussion and vote on the agenda for the August 15, 2026, budget retreat. She stated that she wanted the Council to determine the format and topics for the budget discussion in advance.

Councilor Latimer requested that Council members share any proposed agenda ideas before the next meeting so they could consider them in advance of the discussion.

Councilor Wolfe requested a future work session discussion on a proposed ordinance requiring permitting and City Council approval for new parking lots in the downtown area. She shared that residents expressed concern about overdevelopment of parking west of Tubby's Turnaround. She stated that the proposal would provide an opportunity for public input before additional parking lots are developed.

Councilor Nassif shared that a new world record was officially set in Manitou Springs, under the Guinness Book of World Records, on Saturday August 2, 2026 for dunking donuts on Sun Mountain. Additionally he reported that on August, 2, 2026, the Manitou Springs Community Foundation launched the Kindness Ambassador Program, a professional ensemble performed from the COG to the base of the Incline, and the Mineral Springs Foundation hosted a concert sponsored by the Manitou Music Foundation. Lastly, Councilor Nassif commended the Manitou Pools and Fitness Center water aerobics class.

Mayor Pro Tem Chandler reported on a community meeting regarding traffic issues on Becker's Lane and El Paso Boulevard, noting that approximately 21 community members attended. She thanked Councilor Latimer for organizing the meeting and stated that the discussion was productive and that residents' concerns were heard and considered. Mayor Pro Tem Chandler added that August 4 is the anniversary of the discovery of Emma Crawford in 1929.

K. CITY ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

City Administrator Howell highlighted two recent achievements, including the finalization of the settlement agreement with the COG and the beginning of filling the newly rehabilitated 2-million-gallon water tank. She noted that the water tank project strengthens the City's water system and supports fire suppression, public health, and community safety.

ADJOURN

With no other items to discuss, Mayor Pro Tem Chandler moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilor Latimer. The motion carried unanimously (7-0). The meeting adjourned at 7:01 PM.

Attest:



Elena Krebs, City Clerk

Natalie Johnson, Mayor

If you need this document in an alternative format, such as large print, accessible PDF, or Braille, please contact the City Clerk's Office at cityclerk@manitouspringsco.gov or (719) 685-2554.