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MEMORANDUM

City Manager's Office

Date: February 11, 2026

To: Mayor Jackola and City Council
From: Ron Whitlatch, City Manager
Subject: Direction to Proceed with Municipal Jail and Local Option Levy Process

Background

The City Council's goal regarding the re-opening of the Lebanon Municipal Jail has reached a point where staff needs direction by the City Council to proceed. Staff has presented information regarding the operational needs, and fiscal considerations associated with the Municipal Jail, and the use of a Local Option Levy to support its operation during the regular meeting on January 28, 2026. A motion was made to table the item until February 11, 2026 so all of the Councilors would have an opportunity to vote on the matter.

Under Oregon law, City staff's role in any levy or ballot measure process is limited to providing factual, neutral information. Any effort to advance a Local Option Levy beyond staff analysis and education must be directed and led by the City Council.

Issue

- **Policy Direction:** Moving forward with a Local Option Levy requires clear Council direction to initiate the process and determine next steps.
- **Legal Constraints:** Staff are limited by statute in advocacy or campaign-related activities and cannot lead or promote a levy effort.
- **Public Engagement and Messaging:** Successfully advancing a Local Option Levy will require expertise in public outreach, messaging, and campaign strategy that extends beyond internal staff capacity.
- **Consultant Expertise:** Retaining a consultant with demonstrated experience in local government levy and ballot measure campaigns would assist the Council in understanding options, timelines, risks, best practices, and polling, while ensuring compliance with legal requirements.

Recommendation

Should the City Council elect to move forward with a Local Option Levy, Staff recommends a motion to include the following:

1. Engage a qualified consultant with expertise in local option levy and ballot measure campaigns to assist the Council; and
2. Begin the Local Option Levy process, with the City Council leading policy direction, community engagement strategy, and decision-making, consistent with legal limitations on staff involvement.

This direction will allow the Council to evaluate the feasibility of a Local Option Levy, establish a clear process, and determine whether to proceed toward placing a measure before voters.