



RIO DELL CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING – 6:00 P.M.
TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2026
City Council Chambers
675 Wildwood Avenue, Rio Dell

A. CALL TO ORDER

The regular meeting of the Rio Dell City Council was called to order at approximately 6:00 PM by Mayor Garnes.

B. ROLL CALL

Present:

- Mayor Garnes
- Mayor Pro Tem Carter
- Council Member Woodall
- Council Member Orr
- Council Member Wilson

Staff Present:

- City Manager Kyle Knopp
- Finance Director Travis Sanborn
- Community Development Director Kevin Caldwell
- Chief of Police Josh Phinney
- Wastewater Superintendent Moore
- Water Superintendent Jensen
- City Clerk Jessica Hill
- Sr. Fiscal Assistant Rosa Maciel

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Council.

D. CEREMONIAL MATTERS

No ceremonial matters were presented.

Addition to Agenda

Mayor Garnes requested that the Council add an urgency item to the agenda regarding the Miranda's Rescue agreement for animal care services, stating that the matter arose after posting of the agenda and required immediate attention.

ACTION: Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to add the item to the agenda.
Motion carried 5-0.

E. PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Garnes opened the public presentations portion of the meeting, inviting comments on matters not listed on the agenda and within the Council's jurisdiction.

Mary Clark, Community Service Officer, addressed the Council and requested evaluation of the current classification and bargaining unit placement of the City's Community Service Officers. She stated that the role of the CSO has evolved significantly and now includes duties such as:

- code enforcement,
- animal control,
- scene support,
- assisting with search warrants,
- coordinating vehicle tows,
- encampment enforcement,
- records and evidence handling, and
- assisting officers in the field when staffing is limited.

Clark explained that CSOs work under the same chain of command as police personnel, are held to the same policies and standards of conduct as members of the Police Officers Association, and often operate in conditions closely aligned with sworn personnel, including completion of the 832 course by many service officers. She stated that both the Rio Dell Police Department and members of the Police Officers Association support evaluation of whether CSOs should be transitioned into that bargaining unit.

No other public comments were received.

F. CONSENT CALENDAR

Items on Consent:

1. Approve Minutes of the April 7, 2026 Regular Meeting
2. Discussion and Ratification of the Letter the Mayor Signed in Opposition Unless Amended of SB 866 Related to the Homeless Housing, Assistance, and Prevention Program: Housing Element
3. Discussion of Cost Recovery for the Abatement of 520 First Avenue
4. Discussion of Cost Recovery for the Abatement of 483 Fourth Avenue
5. Discussion of Cost Recovery for the Abatement of 337 Second Avenue

6. Transportation Development Claim for Fiscal Year 2026–27

No items were removed from the Consent Calendar.

ACTION: Motion by Council Member Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to approve the Consent Calendar.

Motion carried 5–0.

G. ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT CALENDAR

No items were removed from the Consent Calendar.

H. REPORTS / STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

1. City Manager / Staff Update (Item 2026/0505.07)

City Manager Knopp reported the following:

- As part of the City’s FY 2024–25 annual audit, the City’s new auditors, Harshwal & Company, requested that each Council member complete two brief questionnaires: a fraud risk questionnaire and a related party questionnaire. These had been circulated on April 27 and were needed in order to conclude the audit.
- Wastewater Superintendent Marshall Moore passed his Wastewater Grade 3 examination on April 27. Council congratulated Moore on the accomplishment.
- Chief Phinney wished to read a special commendation into the record for Officer Liam Burns.

Chief Phinney read a commendation recognizing Officer Burns for his actions on April 18, 2026, during a volatile incident involving an intoxicated juvenile armed with what appeared to be a firearm, later determined to be a BB gun. The commendation stated that Officer Burns demonstrated exceptional judgment, tactical awareness, restraint, and professionalism, and that his calm and disciplined response contributed to a peaceful resolution without injury to the subject, officers, or the public.

Council members expressed appreciation for Officer Burns’ conduct and asked that he be invited to a future meeting so the Council could thank him in person.

Additional brief staff discussion referenced current animal service impacts, including that four dogs and no cats had been transported to Miranda’s prior to May 3.

No public questions for staff were received.

I. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS / STUDY SESSION

No special presentations or study sessions were held.

J. SPECIAL CALL ITEMS / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS / PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Discussion and Direction on the Chamber of Commerce’s Proposed Community Oriented Billboard (Item 2026/0505.08)

Community Development Director Kevin Caldwell presented the staff report regarding the Chamber of Commerce’s proposal to install a community-oriented billboard on the City’s wastewater disposal parcel. Caldwell reviewed the proposed sign concepts included in the agenda packet and explained that the sign was intended to attract highway travelers and encourage them to exit into Rio Dell. He noted that the Council had previously amended the sign regulations to allow such a use at the northeast corner of the parcel.

Caldwell summarized the Chamber’s original concept, featuring the Rio Dell logo, redwood and river imagery, “Next Exit,” “River Access,” and “Gateway to the Redwoods,” and also reviewed alternative concepts incorporating local services such as fuel, food, lodging, shopping, river access, and cannabis. He stated that a Conditional Use Permit would be required and that issues such as maintenance, liability, structural engineering, and design refinement would need to be addressed.

Wally Coppini, representing the Rio Dell-Scotia Chamber of Commerce, gave an update on project development. He reported that:

- the Chamber had explored obtaining utility poles from PG&E but was informed PG&E could not donate them;
- PG&E may be able to install poles if obtained elsewhere;
- the proposed sign would likely be 10 feet by 16 feet;
- the Chamber hoped to obtain lumber donations from HRC;
- aluminum panels would cost approximately \$1,000;
- the vinyl decal/sign face was estimated at \$2,085;
- structural engineering was estimated at approximately \$1,500; and
- total costs were estimated at roughly \$4,500, not including any increase due to materials or other unknowns.

Coppini also reported that a grant request to the McLean Foundation had been denied and that the Chamber was continuing to pursue funding opportunities, including through Coast Central.

Council discussion focused on sign readability at highway speed, whether the sign should emphasize Rio Dell’s visual identity or immediate traveler services, and which elements best distinguished Rio Dell from neighboring communities. Several Council members commented favorably on including river access and dispensary/cannabis as unique local draws, while also discussing fuel and other services.

During discussion, Council generally agreed that the sign should remain visually appealing and uncluttered, while adding a limited number of practical items to encourage motorists to exit.

By consensus, the Council directed staff to work with the Chamber to bring back one more revised design iteration, based generally on the concept shown on page 34 of the agenda packet, narrowed to three key items. The consensus direction was for a revised sign including:

- River Access
- Fuel
- Dispensary

Caldwell further advised that the project would still require a Conditional Use Permit and likely permitting through Caltrans under the Outdoor Advertising Act process.

Staff clarified that no formal motion was required, but council had to propose and agree that the revised design would return to the Council for final approval at a future meeting.

K. ORDINANCES / SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS / PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Approval and Adoption of Ordinance No. 421-2026 Amending the City's Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations, Section 17.30.020 of the Rio Dell Municipal Code, to Align the City's Size Regulations with State Law (Item 2026/0505.09)

Community Development Director Caldwell presented the staff report, reminding the Council that the ordinance had first been introduced on April 7, 2026. He explained that the City's current ADU regulations did not align with state law because state law requires jurisdictions to allow ADUs of at least:

- 850 square feet for one-bedroom units, and
- 1,000 square feet for units with more than one bedroom.

Caldwell stated that the proposed ordinance would amend the Rio Dell Municipal Code to bring the City into compliance with state law.

Council members had no questions, and no public comments were received.

ACTION: Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to approve and adopt Ordinance No. 421-2026.
Motion carried 5-0.

Urgency Item Added to Agenda: Miranda's Rescue / Animal Care Services

City Manager Knopp introduced the added urgency item and asked that comments remain limited due to the sensitive and active nature of the matter. He then turned the item over to Chief Phinney.

Chief Phinney reported that the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office was conducting an active investigation into allegations that Miranda's Rescue had been unjustifiably and cruelly killing

animals for profit. He emphasized that the investigation was active and ongoing and that releasable details were therefore limited.

In response, the City had suspended sending all animals to Miranda's Rescue effective the prior Friday, when the City became aware of the matter.

Chief Phinney further stated:

- the Police Department was not accepting owner surrenders of animals at that time;
- abandoning animals remained illegal;
- the department would work to connect residents needing to surrender animals with local nonprofit resources; and
- the City was coordinating with allied agencies for temporary sheltering and treatment of animals as needed.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter stated that, over the prior years, the City had shifted its approach away from relying solely on shelter intake and toward prevention strategies, including support for spay and neuter services, education regarding trap-neuter-release, and connecting residents with appropriate resources. She emphasized that the City's Community Service Officers had done substantial work to help residents address animal issues before they became shelter problems. She reiterated that community members needing assistance should contact the City rather than abandon animals.

Council members thanked Chief Phinney and staff for addressing the difficult situation.

No public comments were received.

The item was received as informational only, and no formal action was taken.

L. COUNCIL REPORTS / COMMUNICATIONS

Mayor Pro Tem Carter reported that she had attended the City Leaders Summit in Sacramento two weeks earlier and found it informative and motivating. She also reported on a RREDC meeting where members heard about Proposition 4 funding being pursued for harbor-related energy improvements. In addition, she shared a report from the Resource Center for March, including:

- 347 households served at commodity distribution,
- 148 student weekend meals provided,
- housing assistance provided to 8 people,
- clothing provided to 341 people,
- 223 participants in the senior exercise class, and
- 58 participants in the First 5 playgroup.

She further noted that a community meal had been provided every other Tuesday and that the Gerald Phelps Southern Humboldt Optometry Van had made its first visit in March, serving 16

clients, and would now be making Rio Dell a monthly stop during the fourth week of each month.

Council Member Woodall announced the upcoming community cleanup day at the school on May 9, noting that it would provide residents with an opportunity to dispose of bulky items such as furniture and green waste at no cost, and that it might be the last such event.

Council Member Orr had no report.

Council Member Wilson had no report.

Mayor Garnes reported that she had attended City's Week, had an HTA meeting scheduled for the following day, and would be attending a Great Redwood Trail meeting on May 21. She also announced that the Community Garden would hold a start sale on May 16 at the garden on Butcher Street. She described the extensive volunteer work being done there, including planting trees, building a gazebo, constructing a greenhouse, and growing food to share with the community, and encouraged public support for the garden.

M. ADJOURNMENT

ACTION: Motion to adjourn made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall.

Motion carried 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:50 PM until the next regular City Council meeting on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at 6:00 PM.

APPROVED:

Debra Garnes, Mayor

ATTEST:

Jessica Hill, City Clerk