

CITY OF RIO DELL
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES:
Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Date: Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Time: 6:00 PM

Location: City Council Chambers, 675 Wildwood Avenue, Rio Dell, CA

A. CALL TO ORDER

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

B. ROLL CALL

Present:

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

Staff Present:

- City Manager Knopp
- Community Development Director Caldwell
- Finance Director Sanborn
- Wastewater Superintendent Moore
- City Clerk Hill
- Fiscal Assistant Maciel
- Chief Phinney

C. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mayor Garnes.

D. CEREMONIAL MATTERS

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None.

E. PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Garnes announced the public presentations portion of the meeting, noting that this is the time for persons wishing to address the Council on matters not on the agenda. Comments were limited to a maximum of three minutes.

Rick Pelren, a community member, addressed the Council to share an update on the senior exercise class held at the Community Resource Center. He presented a photograph of the group, noting approximately 25 participants were present, with attendance having reached as many as 34–35 on other occasions. He remarked that when he first joined the group years ago there were only about 11 participants and he was the first man in the group; the group has since grown into a large and diverse membership. He expressed gratitude to the City Council for their continued support, noting that without it the group would not be able to use the Community Resource Center.

No other public presentations were made.

F. CONSENT CALENDAR

No items were pulled from the Consent Calendar by staff, the public, or Council members.

ACTION: Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to approve the Consent Calendar. Motion carried 5–0.

Items Approved:

- Approve Minutes of the March 3, 2026, Regular Meeting (Item 2026/0317.01)
- Discussion and Possible Action to Authorize the Mayor to Execute Correspondence in Support of AB 1866 Related to the California Disaster Assistance Act (Item 2026/0317.02)
- Receive and File the Check Register for February 2026 (Item 2026/0317.03)

G. ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT CALENDAR

None.

H. REPORTS/STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

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1. City Manager/Staff Update (Item 2026/0317.04)

City Manager Knopp provided the Council with a staff update. Key items included:

- The Nuisance Advisory Committee will meet the following day, Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 3:00 PM in City Hall Council Chambers.
- On March 26, 2026, at 5:30 PM, Caltrans will hold a public meeting at 845 Main Street in Ferndale related to the potential replacement of Fern Bridge. City Manager Knopp noted the importance of this meeting to the region, given that the only practical backup route for Ferndale runs through Rio Dell via Blue Slide Road.
- The State Water Resources Control Board has requested that the Scotia Community Services District conduct a feasibility study to evaluate connecting Scotia's wastewater system to Rio Dell's wastewater system. City Manager Knopp reported holding an initial meeting with the Scotia CSD Director that day to discuss early parameters. He stated that Rio Dell is willing to participate in the study but that all staff and City Engineer time would need to be fully reimbursed by Scotia's grant funding.

Council Comments on Staff Report:

Mayor Pro Tem Carter:

- Noted no animals were transported to Miranda's Rescue during the reporting period, characterizing the update as positive news.

Council Member Wilson:

- Welcomed back by the Council following his absence at the prior meeting.
- Asked whether an outside engineering firm would be involved in the Scotia feasibility study and whether the City could ensure its own engineering firm (such as GHD) would be engaged to represent Rio Dell's interests, rather than relying solely on Scotia's engineers. Council Member Wilson expressed concern about infrastructure conditions in Scotia, referencing exposed railroad materials, deteriorated infrastructure, and recent boil-water notices, and emphasized the importance of having independent representation for the City's ratepayers.

City Manager Knopp responded that he had already been in contact with the City's engineers, including the firm that originally designed the plant (Aeromod), and made clear to all parties that Rio Dell's staff and consultants' objective is to protect the City's ratepayers first and ensure the City is not subsidizing a neighboring jurisdiction. He noted that nothing in his conversations with Scotia or their consultants suggests the City

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would be compelled to cooperate without compensation. He also observed that while Scotia's collection system has been largely updated, however their water and wastewater treatment infrastructure is problematic — the inverse of Rio Dell's situation, where the wastewater treatment plant and water intake systems are strong but the distribution and collection systems require work. Knopp also mentioned that there is currently \$12 million dollars worth of work being done to improve the drinking water distribution system.

Mayor Garnes:

- Commented that Scotia may also need to defer its senior water rights as a condition of any agreement.

Public Comment:

Rick Pelren addressed the Council and asked whether Scotia has the financial capacity to fund the proposed project and whether they are pursuing grants.

City Manager Knopp responded that he could not speak on behalf of the Scotia Community Services District and had no information regarding their financing plans.

No other public comments were received.

I. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS/STUDY SESSIONS

None.

J. SPECIAL CALL ITEMS/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Tax Defaulted Property at 175 Wildwood Avenue, APN 053-141-025 (Item 2026/0317.05)

Community Development Director Caldwell introduced the item. He explained that each year at this time the County Tax Collector publishes a list of tax-defaulted properties. This year, a vacant parcel at 175 Wildwood Avenue — located between EnJ Liquors and the Family Motorcycle Club — has appeared on the list. The property has been on the tax default rolls for at least five to six years and was identified in the City's Park Master Plan as a potential pocket park site. Director Caldwell noted the current default amount is approximately \$7,180 and may approach \$8,000 once fees and publishing costs are included. He asked whether the Council wished to submit a letter of interest to the County and potentially pursue acquisition of the property for a public park or other public use. He also noted that the City could cancel its interest at any time, including after submitting a resolution of interest.

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Council Comments:

Mayor Pro Tem Carter:

- Expressed strong support, noting she often drives by the parcel and believes it has potential. She also observed that the City's revitalization efforts have been focused primarily on the Uptown area, and that adding a usable, attractive public space in the downtown area would be beneficial. She also noted that if the City does not acquire the property, it is unknown who else might purchase it.

Council Member Orr:

- Expressed support for the City acquiring the property, stating it would be to the City's advantage.

Council Member Wilson:

- Expressed support, noting the value of real estate as a reason to move forward.

Council Member Woodall:

- Expressed general support, noting some concerns about a pocket park specifically but indicated willingness to support the acquisition if other uses could also be considered.

Mayor Garnes:

- Expressed hesitation regarding ongoing maintenance obligations and potential issues given the neighboring uses, but indicated willingness to proceed and noted that the Council's direction was clearly in favor of moving forward.

No public comments were received.

ACTION: Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to direct staff to move forward with the possible acquisition of 175 Wildwood Avenue. Motion carried 5-0.

K. ORDINANCES/SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. Adoption of Resolution No. 1663-2026 Related to FY 2025-26 Capital Budget Amendments – Multiple Projects (Item 2026/0317.06)

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Finance Director Sanborn presented the item. He explained that Resolution No. 1663-2026 approves budget amendments for 10 capital projects across multiple funds. The timing is intentional as the City heads into fiscal year 2026–27 budget development, ensuring the current year capital budget is reconciled before the new budget is built. He noted that all 10 projects included in the amendment had received prior City Council authorization through project approval, grant acceptance, or contract award. The action establishes the budget authority necessary to align the capital budget with authorized project activity and ensure compliance with appropriation requirements prior to close of the fiscal year.

No questions were raised by the Council. No public comments were received.

ACTION: Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to adopt Resolution No. 1663-2026 related to FY 2025-26 Capital Budget Amendments. Motion carried 5–0.

2. Adoption of Resolution No. 1660-2026 Approving and Adopting the Humboldt County Regional Climate Action Plan and Making the Required CEQA Findings as a Responsible Agency (Item 2026/0317.07)

City Manager Knopp provided context, noting that this item was previously brought before the Council a couple of meetings prior, when a motion to approve the resolution failed on a 2–2 vote with one absent Council member. At the most recent Council meeting (March 3, 2026), a motion was made to place the item on this agenda for reconsideration, and that motion passed. He then turned the presentation over to Community Development Director Caldwell.

Community Development Director Caldwell summarized the item. He noted the Council had thoroughly discussed the Climate Action Plan at a prior meeting and provided a summary of key advantages of adoption, including:

- Regional coordination: The City does not have the capacity to develop its own Climate Action Plan; working with other cities and county agencies helps staff identify and address related issues.
- Streamlined CEQA process: Adoption simplifies greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled analysis for future projects, including general plan amendments, rezonings, and subdivisions.
- Consistency with California mandates: Adoption reduces legal risk for both the City and applicants.

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- Improved competitiveness for grants: Adoption makes the City significantly more competitive for energy- and climate-related grant funding, including potential funding for a UV disinfection system at the wastewater treatment plant.

Council Comments:

Mayor Garnes:

- Acknowledged that there are aspects of the plan that reasonable people may disagree with, but emphasized that Rio Dell's ability to operate and maintain the city depends on competitive grant funding. She stated that competitiveness for grants was the primary reason for her vote in support.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter:

- Agreed, stating that funding is critical and without it nothing gets done.

Council Member Woodall:

- Stated she does not agree with every aspect of the plan's approach but indicated she did not want to cast a vote that would disadvantage the future Council in accessing needed resources. She expressed appreciation to the Council for their consideration.

Council Member Orr:

- Voted in opposition. He raised concerns with the plan, including: lack of sensitivity analysis for scenarios where emission reduction targets are not met; typographical errors in the document suggesting insufficient review (including the City's name being misspelled); the plan had not yet been formally adopted at the County level at the time of this vote; higher construction costs that could impact housing production in a city that already faces housing shortages; concerns about cost pass-through from larger cities managing carbon offsets; mitigation measures lacking independent evidentiary support; emission reduction goals based on 1990 baseline numbers with state averages applied rather than local data; the plan's primary focus on urban needs, with inadequate treatment of rural issues; and no accounting for industries such as agriculture, logging, and forestry, which are significant in Humboldt County but excluded from reduction targets. He noted that even conservative estimates suggest only a 40–60% probability of meeting the 2030 emission reduction goals, and cautioned against committing to a plan before its practical feasibility could be demonstrated.

Council Member Wilson:

- Supported adoption, noting that while the City may not agree with every element of California’s plans, opposing the Climate Action Plan would likely cost the City access to grants. He emphasized the practical importance of maintaining eligibility for funding, including for a UV disinfection system at the wastewater plant and solar arrays with battery backup, and stated he would support adoption as the lesser of two evils.

Wastewater Superintendent Moore provided additional context regarding the proposed UV disinfection system, noting it would be a larger-scale system than similar installations, would likely be paired with a solar array and expanded battery storage, and would convert the existing chlorine contact basin into an emergency storage basin for high-flow events. He confirmed the system would be sizeable and costly, making grant funding essential.

No public comments were received.

ACTION: Motion by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall, to adopt Resolution No. 1660-2026, approving and adopting the Humboldt County Regional Climate Action Plan and making the required CEQA findings as a responsible agency. Motion carried 4–1, with Council Member Orr voting no.

L. COUNCIL REPORTS/COMMUNICATIONS

Mayor Pro Tem Carter:

- Reported that the St. Patrick’s Day event hosted by the Chamber of Commerce went well, with approximately 49 meals served and the Chamber raising a couple hundred dollars.
- Reminded the Council of the Nuisance Advisory Committee meeting the following day at 3:00 PM in Council Chambers.
- Noted she would be attending the Fire Commission meeting the following day at 5:30 PM. The Fire Commission has changed its regular meeting to the third Wednesday of every month at the fire hall.
- Reported attending the School Board meeting on March 2, 2026. Enrollment is stable. The School has launched a new family night program aimed at encouraging families to put down their phones and connect with one another, which has been well received. Agnes Johnson School (a charter school in the Miranda area) has closed, and the district is anticipating some additional enrollment as a result.

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- Noted attending the Cal Cities Redwood Region meeting on Friday, March 13, 2026, where discussion included AB 1866 (a letter of support for which was approved as part of the Consent Calendar that evening) and AB 1378 (related to funding for tribal foster youth). Proposition 4 funding was also discussed.
- Reported an upcoming RREDC meeting on March 30.

Council Member Woodall:

- Asked about the timeline for removal of the distressed trees at Memorial Park. City Manager Knopp indicated that staff is working through the necessary steps and that removal is most likely scheduled for early May.
- Requested that an ad hoc committee be formed to consider what species of replacement trees the City might want to plant. Mayor Garnes agreed the idea could be discussed at the next meeting.
- Noted that the flowering blossoms on some of the smaller trees along the avenue are beginning to appear.

Council Member Orr:

- No report. Noted an upcoming HCAoG meeting on Thursday.

Council Member Wilson:

- Noted an upcoming RCEA meeting the following week.
- Requested that the City's next community newsletter include an explanation of the tree removal at Memorial Park, with photographs and context, so that residents understand the reasons and do not react negatively when they see the work taking place. City Manager Knopp acknowledged the suggestion and confirmed a newsletter is planned within the next month or two.

Mayor Garnes:

- Noted upcoming meetings including an HTA meeting the following day, a special meeting on Thursday, and the Cal Cities Redwood Region meeting.
- Reported that she attended a Seismic Safety Commission meeting and has invited the Branch Chief for the California Geological Survey to present to the Council on earthquake activity in the region. The presentation is scheduled for April 7, 2026.
- Announced she will testify before the State Assembly in Sacramento on Monday regarding AB 1866.
- Will attend the Seismic Safety Commission meeting the first week of April.

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- Wished the community a Happy St. Patrick's Day.

M. ADJOURNMENT

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

The meeting was adjourned. The next regular City Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at 6:00 PM.

APPROVED:

Mayor Garnes

Date: _____

ATTEST:

Jessica Hill, City Clerk

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