

Stevenson City Council Meeting

August 21, 2025

Public Comment Received

Mitch Patton - 07/28/2025:

"Tiffany,

Thanks for the feedback. It's starting to sound like this PRR might be pretty difficult to fill, so I'm hoping we can find a workable solution. If we can get the video converted to a zip file, that would be helpful — but more importantly, I think this issue needs to be addressed at a **City Council meeting**, after the **Public Works Director** has had a chance to review the old VHS tape.

I do find it a bit odd that the tapes are in **VHS format and nothing newer is on file** Back when I was working on large subdivisions — 150 to 200-lot projects in Vancouver and Battle Ground and all across clark and cowlitz, lewis counties — everything was stored on **floppy disks** or **CD-ROMs**. But I could be wrong, and maybe this specific data was kept on VHS — it just feels off.

That said, I **don't want the city to spend a lot of time or money** converting these files unless absolutely necessary. Instead, I'd rather see **Public Works and the City Planner Ben Shumaker** review the tapes and then give their **professional assessment** to the City Council — especially regarding the **condition and efficiency of the sewer main lines upstream of the new treatment plant**.

I've already been told by a contractor who worked on the city's water and sewer lines that this sewer main is in **disrepair and failing in many areas**, allowing **groundwater intrusion** — which is one of the biggest contributors to the failure of wastewater treatment plants, like the one we just had to replace. I have been told that breweries are the second largest contributors to sewer plant and grinder failures in the last 15 -20 years all across the US.

So again, I strongly believe the **City Planner and Public Works Director** should give their **perspective on the condition of the entire sewer main line**, and share that with the Council at the next meeting.

At some point, **we — the public — need to see for ourselves** what condition that sewer main is really in. I truly do not believe it can handle a **full build-out**, and in my opinion, it should have been at the **top of the priority list for replacement**, not the treatment plant.

If the city had **removed the breweries from the equation** — which are well-documented across the U.S. to cause **sewer plant, pump, and grinder failures** — it's even clearer that the

main issue lies with the **aging sewer main line**. Many of these problems were known long before our city administration ever started asking breweries to pretreat or remove their byproducts from the sewer system.

Unfortunately, the opportunity to update the sewer main was missed — and now the **residents are the ones suffering the consequences of poor planning** and management by the city administration once again

Let me know your thoughts on whether it's worth converting the videos, or if it makes more sense to simply have staff review them and report their findings."

Mitch Patton - 08/12/2025:

"After reviewing information on the possible recall of a City Council member and hearing a local fire department representative state that "the mayor can just write me a check because it's under a certain dollar amount," I have serious concerns that there has been spending occurring for years without the full knowledge of the Council.

As a private citizen who values transparency and accountability, I believe it is time for the City Council to require—at every meeting, or at least every 1/4 —a report detailing **every dollar spent by the mayor without prior Council approval**. This would allow Council members to make informed decisions and ensure the public's tax dollars are being spent responsibly.

Currently, the lack of visibility into certain expenditures, including questionable legal billing from the City Attorney. That clearly seems more than nearby cities or even our own port of skamania county are being billed for their legal council , creates the appearance of secrecy and undermines public trust. If the mayor can authorize spending below a certain threshold without Council review, how can the Council vote fairly on budgets and priorities if they don't know the full picture? The city council and staff need to utilize MSRC more often and stop allowing the city attorney to have an open checkbook to our tax dollars in stevenson.

It is also concerning that past city leadership—both the City Planner and former City Manager—have shown patterns of inconsistency, favoritism, and lack of transparency. Developers have allegedly received favorable treatment while other landowners have been blocked by excessive or selectively applied "critical area" regulations that don't appear to follow DNR best practices for fire safety.

Now is the time for a fresh start with new leadership, a new City Planner, and a new Fire Chief working together to align critical area designations with genuine fire safety needs—not as tools for government overreach or arbitrary obstruction.

The people of Stevenson deserve **fair, consistent, and transparent governance**. Requiring full disclosure of mayor-approved spending is one simple step toward rebuilding public trust and ensuring all residents are treated equally.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to seeing these transparency measures discussed and implemented soon. Feel free to call or send your thoughts as well. The city council needs to be back in control, not be a rubber stamping council due to poor or misleading information given to them half truths. It just doesn't work well for an open government.

Oh and one last thing is there a list of checks the mayor has written without council's approval or does that list have to be made up as i will more than likely be making a PRR for these documents at some point i truly would like to see just what the mayer has been spending money on without council's approval or even councils knowledge."

Rob Farris – 8/20/25:

To the Stevenson City Council:

I am writing in response to Councilmember Rice's recent email regarding the fire engine purchase, which reflect a concerning lack of understanding of this long-planned project. As one of four former fire chiefs who have been directly involved in nearly 25 years of planning for this replacement engine, I feel compelled to set the record straight.

This purchase is not a sudden want; it is a carefully planned and well-documented need. The City's only fire engine, Engine 26, is approaching 25 years of service. When Engine 26 was placed into service in 2001 at a cost of \$219,000, City leadership at the time made a deliberate decision to begin saving annually for its eventual replacement within 20 to 25 years. Once the original loan was paid off, the council, city administrator, and fire chief agreed to continue setting aside the equivalent loan payment—about \$19,000 per year—toward the replacement fund. Later, after a brief pause in funding caused by the city's obligation to repay a grant for the 12" water line to Skamania Lodge, the savings transfer was increased to \$25,000 per year.

This savings practice was not accidental. It was the result of deliberate, consistent efforts by four fire chiefs over two decades. I personally participated in the budgeting process each year to ensure this plan stayed on track.

The design of the new apparatus has been under discussion for the past five years, with great care taken to ensure it meets community needs while maximizing interoperability with our closest partners. The pump and cabinet design will mirror those used by Fire Districts 1 and 2, which allows for seamless mutual aid operations. In fact, this new engine will become the fourth in the county with the same pump panel design, a tremendous benefit for training, efficiency, and safety. Fire District 1 responds to every structure fire in Stevenson under our mutual aid agreement, so this alignment is especially important.

Unlike the 2001 purchase, this engine will also arrive fully equipped. At the time Engine 26 was purchased, the city lacked the funds to outfit it, and Fire District 2 had to step in to provide equipment. Recognizing that mistake, fire leadership has deliberately budgeted for equipment alongside this purchase. This was the purpose of the “rollover” budgeting practice established under the previous city administrator and maintained during my tenure as chief. In terms of foresight, planning, and fiscal responsibility, this project stands as one of the best-prepared capital projects the city has undertaken in decades.

To portray this effort as rushed or unnecessary is simply inaccurate. What is reckless is delaying or obstructing a replacement that has been responsibly planned for nearly a quarter of a century. This new fire engine will serve the city and surrounding communities for the next 25 years. To jeopardize its purchase now is to jeopardize public safety and send a troubling message to taxpayers and the volunteer firefighters who dedicate their time and risk their lives for this community.

I strongly urge the council to move past misinformation, recognize the careful planning that has gone into this project, and support this essential public safety investment. Anything less undermines both the protection of our citizens and the credibility of city leadership.

Respectfully,

Rob Farris

Former Fire Chief, City of Stevenson