

**RIO DELL CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 2, 2025**

Mayor Garnes called the regular meeting of the Rio Dell City Council to order at 5:15 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Present: (Closed Session) Mayor Garnes, Mayor Pro Tem Carter, Councilmembers Orr, Wilson and Woodall, and City Manager Knopp

Present: (Regular Meeting) Mayor Garnes, Mayor Pro Tem Carter, Councilmembers Orr, Wilson, and Woodall

Others Present: City Manager Knopp, Water/Roadways Superintendent Jensen, Wastewater Superintendent Moore, Chief of Police Phinney, Finance Director Sanborn, City Clerk Dunham, and Senior Fiscal Assistant Maciel. Community Development Director Caldwell attended remotely.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED IN CLOSED SESSION

Public Employee Performance Evaluation – Title: City Manager – Gov't Code 54957

RECESS INTO CLOSED SESSION

The Council recessed into closed session at 5:15 p.m. to discuss the above listed item.

RECONVENE INTO OPEN SESSION

The Council reconvened into open session at 6:00 p.m.. Mayor Garnes announced that there was nothing to report from the closed session.

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Garnes invited public comments on non-agenda matters. There were no public comments received.

CONSENT CALENDAR

Mayor Garnes asked if any council member, staff, or members of the public would like to remove any item from the consent calendar for separate discussions.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter removed consent calendar Item 2 – Resolution 1653-2025 Suspending the Rental Housing Inspection Program.

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A motion was made by Carter/Woodall to approve the consent calendar, including the following items:

- 1) Approve Minutes of November 18, 2025, Regular Meeting; and
- 2) Adopt Resolution No. 1654-2025 Establishing 2-Hour Parking Limitations on Specific Section of Wildwood Avenue

The motion carried 5-0.

ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT CALENDAR

Adopt Resolution No. 1653-2025 Suspending the Rental Housing Inspection Program (RHIP)) and Direct Staff to Refund all RHIP Registration and Inspection Fees

Mayor Pro Tem Carter expressed concern about suspending the RHIP program and said that she was uncomfortable with suspending it without further discussion. She said that the program was presented to the City Council in January 2024, and the way that it was presented was that the 2022 earthquake had highlighted substandard housing conditions in Rio Dell. She said it was pointed out that there were many renters who were living in substandard housing but were afraid to complain in fear of retaliation by the landlord. Staff also indicated that the program would not involve a lot of extra staff time to implement. As such, she was confused when she read the staff report reciting the opposite that there was a decline in substandard housing and no longer a need for the program.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that in 2024 when the RHIP was adopted, there were a significant number of complaints related to substandard housing conditions in rental properties. Since then, many of those properties have been repaired as the result of the 2022 earthquake.

He said in 2024, the city only had one Community Services Officer (CSO) and now there are two CSO's who provide response to code enforcement issues, including rental property concerns.

He said that out of approximately 465 rental units the city would be responsible for inspecting, only 85 of those properties registered in the program. He also noted that adopting the program helped to send the message to landlords that they needed to maintain their properties.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that the 7th Cycle Housing Element update based on the housing needs assessment needs to be done which will consume a huge amount of staff time.

He argued that because the city now has two CSO's and given the reduction in rental housing complaints, staff is recommending suspending the Rental Housing Inspection

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Program and refunding all collected registration fees, estimated at \$2,385. He pointed out that the program would be suspended and not repealed so the program could be reactivated in the future if necessary.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter said that she was a little hung up on the complaint issue because in talking to people in the community, there are a lot of places that were not necessarily red-tagged after the earthquake but still have repairs that landlords are not responding to. She said that there are still problems that exist and reiterated that many renters are afraid to complain, which was one of the reasons for adopting the program.

She said that it was her understanding when the program was adopted that the Community Development Director would take the lead on implementing the program with the CSO's focus on vehicle abatement, and nuisances related to the outside of the property. She said that she was not aware of the CSO's going inside homes to ensure minimum health and safety standards were maintained.

She asked Chief Phinney for his perception on the roles of the CSO's related to the RHIP.

Chief Phinney said that his initial understanding of the program was to make sure rental properties met the minimum health and safety standards and the role of the CSO's were to identify substandard housing conditions based on complaints.

He said that his understanding of the Community Development Director's breakdown of the program is that it is more in the formal building, electrical, and plumbing arena, meant to be addressed by both the Building Inspector and the CSO's. The CSO's role would be to assist with photos, evidence, reports and assist with notices and warrants whereas the Building Inspector would deem whether there are violations or not. He said that there are two very different roles and the CSO's are not trained or experienced or have the legal basis to determine whether the building is up to code. He said that's what we have building and fire inspectors for.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter said that it was her understanding that the Community Development Director would take the lead and work in conjunction with the CSO's and offer them some training on what to look for during the inspections so at some point they would be able to go out and inspect rental property for health and safety violations. In her perception, from the very beginning, the CSO's were never intended to take the lead on the program.

She commented that she would feel more comfortable suspending the program if staff had actually launched the program and let it run for 2-5 years and had data to show that there was a decline in substandard housing conditions and the program was no longer needed. She felt the reasons for suspending the program were conjuncture at this point and was not in favor of suspending the program without documented data.

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Councilmember Wilson agreed with Mayor Pro Tem Carter and said that staff put a lot of time into creating the forms and sending out letters. With regard to complaints, there were a lot of renters that feared retaliation noting that he recalled one rental with no running water or only cold water.

He said that based on the 465 rental properties, it was initially anticipated that it would take three years to inspect all units and after the initial inspection, units could either qualify for annual self-certification or continue with city inspections every three years.

He said that he initially thought the program was a little over-kill and not in support of the program because he keeps his rental up to code but if there is a problem with substandard housing, it needs to be addressed. He suggested giving the program more time before suspending it.

Councilmember Woodall said that she has always been in support of the RHIP and feels that it is fair and allows property owners adequate opportunity to correct violations. She commented that once the initial inspections are conducted, it would be less work for staff because of the self-inspection option.

She said the program is not as much for the landlords but the renters who are afraid to complain. She gave an example of a gentleman she recently spoke to that was telling her about some of the problems he was having with his rental. She said that she told him about the program and encouraged him to file a complaint, but he was afraid to do that because his wife was having some serious medical problems and they couldn't afford to move. She indicated that there are likely a lot of people experiencing the same problems.

She commented that even the homes that were red tagged after the earthquake, were declared unsafe due to damage on the outside such as foundations and not inspected inside. She said that staff should give the program a chance before throwing it aside too early.

Councilmember Orr said that he was against the RHIP from the beginning and was still against it. He said that suspending it is a good idea. He commented that the city can't say that it's not really needed but continue to charge people anyway. He pointed out that suspending it is not eradicating it and said that he is absolutely in support of suspending the program.

Mayor Garnes said that she understands the need for the program and doesn't have a problem with keeping it but if there is not enough staff to enforce it, it's a waste of time. She agreed that a CSO is not qualified to perform the duties of a building inspector.

She said if the program is on the books just to be on the books and not enforced, then it is useless. She asked Community Development Director Caldwell if he had the time to conduct the inspections or if it would need to be contracted out.

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Community Development Director Caldwell pointed out that the city cannot require a property owner to bring their rental unit up to current building codes but can force them to repair existing health and safety violations. He commented that the Rental Housing Inspection Checklist is very simple for both the exterior and interior of the unit. He said examples of the checklist are that electrical receptables must have cover plates and that smoke alarms are operable and in each sleeping area and adjacent hallway.

He said that in the end, he could perform the inspections, but the city would likely need to contract out the Housing Element update. He said that Placeworks assisted with the previous update and staff did obtain a quote for the current update and it was \$88,000.

He noted that he could do five inspections a week but the 85 properties that registered are probably already in compliance. It's the property owners that haven't signed up are those that have properties that are problematic. He reiterated that he had not received any complaints following the earthquake. He said if the council decides they want to enforce the RHIP, they need to understand that it will cost money, whether he does the inspections and the city contracts out the Housing Element update or if the inspections are farmed out to a third party.

He pointed that as far as renters being afraid to complain about the conditions of their rental, retaliation is illegal in the state of California, and the property owners could face consequences.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter commented that she still feels that she is hearing the exact opposite of what she was told in 2024. She was confused how it switched to become a massive number of steps when the Council was literally told initially that it was easy to manage.

Councilmember Woodall asked Community Development Director Caldwell if he was aware of the Housing Element update when he recommended the RHIP be adopted.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that he was aware of the update, but the last update was actually paid for by Placeworks.

He said that there has been an improvement in rental housing conditions due to voluntary compliance and improved landlord responsiveness. He clarified that during the earthquake event, CalOES inspectors did perform some inspection of the interior of homes when people were there which is how they determined that there were some substandard homes in town.

He said that if the Council wants to move forward with the RHIP, they need to understand that there are costs associated with doing that.

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Mayor Pro Tem Carter said that the Housing Element update was not part of the initial decision to adopt the program and is now being thrown in at the last minute with no warning.

Community Development Director Caldwell suggested continuing the item to the next regular meeting on January 6, 2026, to allow staff to present the Rental Housing Inspection Checklist so the Council can see that it is not that technical. He explained that the inspections are more of an observation that could be done by any staff as to whether the residential units meet the criteria on the checklist. He said with assistance of the CSO's staff could move forward with the program if the Council so directs.

Mayor Garnes called for public comments in which no public comments were received.

Councilmember Woodall agreed that when driving around town, the exterior of properties do look better but has no idea on the condition of the inside.

Councilmember Orr commented that these are all the same arguments made during the initial discussion of the program and he can't see what good it would do to continue the discussion to the next meeting. He said that it was asinine to charge people for something that wasn't needed in the first place. He pointed out that the property owners who registered are the ones that take care of their properties and the ones that don't, won't comply so why should responsible property owners be punished and not the ones who don't.

Councilmember Wilson commented that staff mentioned that only 85 properties registered for the program and asked if the program was optional.

Community Development Director clarified that everyone with a rental(s) was required to register and said that staff sent out letters to every rental property owner and property managers for 465 rental properties with a registration deadline of December 1, 2024.

Councilmember Wilson said that he was uncomfortable with the suspension of the RHIP being placed on the consent calendar with no recommended discussion. He said that initially staff were adamant that the program be adopted and now it's buried on the consent calendar to undo it. He agreed to bring it back to the Council at the meeting of January 6, 2026, meeting for further discussion and a solid recommendation by staff.

A motion was made by Wilson/Woodall to continue the item to the January 6, 2026, regular meeting and direct staff to return with a solid recommendation on suspension or continuation of the RHIP including a quote for a third party to complete the 7th Cycle Housing Element update.

City Manager Knopp said that update of the Housing Element is a legal mandate and must be completed. He agreed that it is costly but is fundamental to the operations of the city. The costs for the last update were fully covered but likely not this time. He said that there isn't the question about the value of the RHIP but a question about staff availability to get the project done.

Mayor Garnes asked if there were fines associated with not registering for the program.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that there were no fines and pointed out that there was a lot of impetus on the fact that CalOES inspectors brought forward information that there were a lot of substandard housing conditions however, some of those homes were likely owner-occupied homes. He said that he would support whatever direction the Council takes related to suspension or continuation of the RHIP.

The motion carried 4-1, with Councilmember Orr dissenting.

REPORTS/STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

City Manager/Staff Update

City Manager Knopp provided highlights of the staff update and referred to the staff update presented by the police department under separate cover. Under notable cases, he commended Chief Phinney for his actions related to the recent criminal threat case and subsequent arrest and restraining order of the suspect.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter reported that there was only one cat and two dogs transported to Miranda's Rescue.

She reported that she received a very nice phone call about the police department and said the caller was impressed how the department was able to walk the line between being authoritative and compassionate.

SPECIAL CALL ITEMS/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

Provide Staff Direction on Adding Parametric Earthquake Insurance Coverage

City Manager Knopp provided a staff report and said at the August 28, 2025, Small Cities Risk Effort (SCORE) Board of Directors meeting, the Board received a presentation on the topic of Parametric Earthquake Insurance. Quotes were provided for jurisdictions investigating this level of coverage and the annual cost to Rio Dell would be \$13,730 for a maximum coverage of \$500,000.

He explained that parametric earthquake insurance represents a new approach to catastrophic coverage that differs fundamentally from traditional policies. Parametric insurance coverage pays out a predetermined amount based on the intensity of a specific event, rather than on actual losses incurred. He said that one of the most significant advantages of parametric coverage is the speed in which payments are

received, typically 7-30 days after a qualifying event, compared to months or years for traditional claims. In addition, the funds can be used at the discretion of the City Council including rolling funds into unmet needs for residents or to fill coverage gaps left by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) or where the California Disaster Assistance Act (CDAA) falls short. He noted that the City does not currently retain any insurance coverage for earthquakes and the coverage would provide a level of flexibility for recovery efforts. SCORE has requested that the city accept or decline coverage by December 19, 2025.

Councilmembers expressed support for the program.

Mayor Garnes called for public comment on the subject. There were no public comments received.

A motion was made by Carter/Orr to authorize staff to add base level parametric earthquake insurance coverage through the SCORE, the City's Joint Powers Authority that administers the City's risk management. The motion carried 5-0.

Possible Cancellation of December 16, 2025, Regularly Scheduled City Council Meeting
City Manager Knopp reported that more often than not, the second City Council meeting in December is canceled for the holidays unless there is urgent business to come before the Council, noting that there is no urgent business pending at this time.

A motion was made by Woodall/Wison to approve the cancellation of the December 16, 2025, regularly scheduled meeting. The motion carried 5-0.

ORDINANCES/SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

Introduction and First Reading (by title only) of Ordinance No. 419-2025 Amending the City's Sign Regulations 17.30.320, Chapter 17.25 to Include a Qualified Combining Zone (Q) and Redesignating Approximately 3,000 Square Feet from Public Facility (PF) to Industrial Commercial (IC) With a Qualified Combining Zone to Limit Future Uses to Freeway-Oriented Signs (Billboards) and Community-Oriented Billboards

Community Development Director Caldwell provided a staff report and said that at the October 7, 2025, City Council meeting, Wally Coppini, representing the Rio Dell Chamber of Commerce, addressed the Council requesting the Council agendaize a discussion on billboards, in particular Community-Oriented billboards promoting the city and local businesses.

He said that the City Council directed staff to present options to amend the City's Zoning Ordinance concerning freeway-oriented signs (billboards). He explained that the amendments are intended to 1) facilitate a third billboard on the east side of Highway 101 within the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park (HRDBP) by amending the separation from ½ mile to 1,000 feet; 2) establish a definition and use type for "Community-

Oriented Billboards” to promote the City and its businesses; and 3) facilitate up to three billboards (including one Community-Oriented Billboard) on the west side of Highway 101 on the City’s Wastewater Disposal Field parcel, requiring the rezoning of small designated portions of that parcel to Industrial Commercial (IC) with a Qualified (Q) Combining Zone.

Community Development Director Caldwell reviewed the proposed performance standards for billboards and said that lighting for non-LED signs should be downward directed. LED signs shall have automatic brightness controls limiting nighttime brightness to a maximum 0.3 footcandles above ambient lighting at night, have a minimum display time of 10 seconds and a maximum transition time of 2 seconds, and include full cutoff fixtures or visors along the top and sides of the billboard face to prevent light spill.

He commented that community-oriented billboards will be permitted subject to first obtaining a conditional use permit from the Planning Commission to ensure the proposed billboard complies with the zoning regulations.

Mayor Garnes said that she was 1,000% against three billboards on the west side coming into Rio Dell but supported one community-oriented billboard and billboards on the east side of Highway 101 at the Humboldt-Rio Dell Business Park.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter agreed and said that she supported the community-oriented billboard southbound and had no problem with billboards on the east side.

Councilmember Woodall agreed with only one community-oriented billboard on the west side of Highway 101 and supported billboards on the east side.

Mayor Garnes asked if the Council would need to make a motion to modify the recommendation to limit the number of billboards on the west side from three to one community-oriented billboard.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that the recommended action is for the introduction and first reading of the ordinance (by title only) and to direct to return at the January 6, 2025 regular meeting for its second reading and adoption. Modifications to the ordinance could be made at that time.

Mayor Garnes opened the public hearing to receive public comment on the proposed ordinance.

Jesse Jeffries questioned the 25-foot height restriction on the northbound billboards and asked if that was a Caltrans rule or the City’s rule.

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Community Development Director Caldwell explained that the 25-foot height restriction is for the west side of Highway 101, the height restriction on the east side at the HRDBP is 35-feet which is unchanged.

There were no further public comments, and the public hearing was closed.

A motion was made by Carter/Woodall to approve the introduction and first reading (by title only) of *Ordinance No. 419-2025 Amending the City's Sign Regulations 17.30.320,*

Chapter 17.25 to Include a Qualified Combining Zone (Q) and Redesignating Approximately 3,000 Square Feet from Public Facility (PF) to Industrial Commercial (IC) With a Qualified Combining Zone to Limit Future Uses to Freeway-Oriented Signs (Billboards) and Community-Oriented Billboards. The motion carried 5-0.

COUNCIL REPORTS/COMMUNICATION

Mayor Pro Tem Carter reported on upcoming meetings and events and extended special thanks to the Community Resource Center, the Rio Dell Volunteer Fire Department, the Rio Dell School said local churches for hosting the Thanksgiving dinner at the school on November 22nd and said that she received a lot of positive feedback about the event. She thanked Mayor Garnes for volunteering to serve at the event. She announced the Tree Lighting and Truck Parade Event will be on December 6, 2025, from 5:00-6:30 p.m. at the Community Resource Center.

Mayor Garnes said the dinner at the school was a great success and that they served 250 meals.

Councilmember Orr commented on the unfinished Glenn White building at the Humboldt Rio Dell Business Park and said that its only a matter of time when someone get hurt on the scaffolding around the building.

Councilmember Wilson reported that the December meetings of HWMA and RCEA were canceled.

Mayor Garnes said that she would not be able to attend tomorrow's HTA meeting and also thanked the Community Resource Center, the Rio Dell Fire Department, the Rio Dell School, the churches and all of the volunteers for putting together the community dinner. She wished everyone a happy, safe holiday season.

ADJOURNMENT

Carter/Garnes made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:13 p.m. to January 6, 2026, regular meeting. Motion carried 5-0.

Attest:

Debra Garnes, Mayor

Karen Dunham, City Clerk