

**RIO DELL CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 6, 2026**

Mayor Garnes called the regular meeting of the Rio Dell City Council to order at 4:30 p.m.

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

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

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

Absent: Wastewater Superintendent Moore (excused)

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 4:30 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. No items were removed.

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

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- 1) Approve Minutes of December 2, 2025, Regular Meeting;
- 2) Adopt Resolution No.1655-2026 Adopting an Updated Citywide Records Retention Schedule; and
- 3) Authorize the City Manager to Execute a Pass-Through Grant Sub Award with the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services.

The motion carried 5-0.

REPORTS/STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

City Manager/Staff Update

City Manager Knopp provided highlights of the staff update and thanked the Public Works Department for dealing with all the storm-related issues over the past couple of weeks.

He reported that in discussions with the solid waste negotiations franchise team and Recology Eel River, the anticipated date of January 1, 2027 for implementation of the new solid waste franchise agreement has been moved back to the original start date of July 1, 2026, in line with the other jurisdictions. He noted that there are a lot of efficiencies with a consistent rollout date. Staff are continuing to work with the other jurisdictions on the new franchise agreement, but the progress has been delayed as the negotiation team works with Recology to define and better understand the numbers related to the rollout.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter asked if all of the jurisdictions would be rolling out universal collection on July 1, 2026. City Manager Knopp noted that the city would be rolling out the program in conjunction with Fortuna, Eureka, Arcata and the County of Humboldt.

She extended thanks to the Public Works Department for their hard work during the recent storm and congratulated the Police Department for implementing 24-7 police coverage. She also noted that there were no cats transported to Miranda's in over a month.

Councilmember Woodall also thanked the Police Department for implementing 24-7 coverage.

Councilmember Wilson asked if staff would report back to the Council to clarify the plan for universal collection before it is implemented.

City Manager Knopp explained that staff would come back to Council with a report once Recology completes reconciliation of the numbers. The City Council would need to

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adopt a Universal Collection Ordinance and approve the Solid Waste Franchise Agreement before implementation of universal collection.

Mayor Garnes suggested relaying to citizens how much would be saved by implementing the program in July 2026 rather than January 2027. She expressed thanks to staff for their hard work and welcomed Supervisor Bushnell to the meeting.

SPECIAL CALL ITEMS/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

Suspension or Continuation of the Rental Housing Inspection Program

Community Development Director Caldwell provided a staff report and said that at the December 2, 2025 regular meeting, staff recommended suspending the Rental Housing Inspection Program for a number of reasons, citing a decline in rental related complaints, increased Code Compliance staffing, and the pending preparation of the 7th Cycle Housing Element. After meeting with the City Manager and the Police Chief to review the Rental Housing Inspection checklist, it was determined that implementing the Rental Housing Inspection Program could be accommodated with inspections conducted by the Building Inspector and the two Community Services Officers.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter was pleased to hear that the program would not be suspended. She asked if the potential suspension of the program went to the Planning Commission for consideration, and if the decision to continue the program was contingent upon hiring out the Housing Element update.

Community Development Director Caldwell said that the item did not go before the Planning Commission and that with additional help from the CSO's, he would have some free time to work on the Housing Element update. He commented that staff reached out to Planwest Partners to possibly provide some assistance, but that staff would be doing the tables and as much of the work as possible. In the end, staff may need to contract out a portion of the work.

He noted that the plan related to inspections is to have all three team members conduct the first 12-15 inspections. After that, each staff member would perform inspections independently.

Councilmember Wilson commented that during the discussion at the December 2nd meeting, staff indicated that there were only 88 people who registered for the Rental Housing Inspection Program and asked if that number was accurate.

Community Development Director Caldwell clarified that there are actually 150 parcels and 219 units registered, which is approximately one-third of the rental units.

Councilmember Wilson asked what would be done with those that have not registered.

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Community Development Director Caldwell said that staff would be following up with letters to those not registered for the program.

Councilmember Woodall said she was thrilled to see the program moving forward and asked when the inspections would begin.

Community Development Director Caldwell indicated that he sent out emails today asking people to call and schedule inspections.

Mayor Garnes called for public comments on the Rental Housing Inspection Program.

Supervisor Bushnell addressed the Council as an owner of a rental property in Rio Dell. She said that she was not opposed to the program but is opposed to targeting only rentals and not requiring this for all households. She commented that if the intent is to bring housing up to a standard, it should apply to all homes. She noted that there are many owner-occupied homes in Rio Dell that are substandard. While she supports the concept, she is opposed to targeting a single group.

Chief Phinney responded that while this program is specifically focused on rental units, the code compliance division is addressing the substandard owner-occupied homes on an individual basis.

Michelle Bushnell commented that she invested in a home in Rio Dell and maintains her property, so she is not upset about the inspection. What she is upset about is that the program is targeted to rental properties and not all properties, making it inequitable.

A motion was made by Councilmember Woodall to direct staff to immediately implement the City's Rental Housing Inspection Program (RHIP).

Mayor Garnes said that it was a fair statement made by Supervisor Bushnell to say that the program was inequitable and it may be something the City Council should address in the future.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-1; Councilmember Orr dissenting.

ORDINANCES/SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS/PUBLIC HEARINGS

Second Reading (by title only) and Adoption 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

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Community Development Director Caldwell provided a staff report and said that at the December 2, 2025, City Council meeting, there was a lengthy discussion about the zone changes and freeway-oriented signs/billboards and community-oriented billboards. There were concerns expressed by councilmembers about the number of signs on the west side of Highway 101 at the City's Wastewater Disposal Site.

He said that staff are recommending a maximum of three signs but in talking with Jeff at All Points Signs, he indicated that the market is soft and that there may not be a need for three signs at this time. He did, however, encourage the city to provide that opportunity should the need arise.

Community Development Director Caldwell suggested the Council allow the placement of one community-oriented billboard now and come back at a later time and consider up to two more.

He directed the Council to some examples of signs/billboards and said that the examples are for illustrative purposes only.

He then reviewed the performance standards for LED signs which he noted are mitigation measures to offset the impact.

Mayor Garnes said that she adamantly opposed more than one billboard on the west side of the highway 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 one 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.

Councilmember Wilson asked for clarification on what the City Council is voting for.

Community Development Director Caldwell explained that the recommended action is to allow up to a maximum of 3 signs on the west side of the highway, 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 signs (billboards), and to amend the current performance standards for LED signs to include some additional mitigations measures for automatic brightness controls to reduce the intensity of the light at night. The other amendment would allow for a third sign, on the east side which is already allowed, but reduces the separation between the signs to 1,000 feet.

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Mayor Garnes opened the public hearing to receive public comments on the proposed ordinance. No public comments were received.

A motion was made by Carter/Woodall to approve the second reading (by title only) and adoption 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 limiting one (1) Community-Oriented Billboard on the West side of Highway 101*. The motion carried 5-0.

Introduction and First Reading (by title only) of Ordinance No. 420-2026 Amending Section 15.05.020 "Building Codes" of the Rio Dell Municipal Code (RDMC) to Reference the 2025 California Building codes and the 2024 International Property Maintenance Code

Community Development Director Caldwell provided a staff report and explained that every three years, the California Building Standards Commission (CBSC) adopts a compilation of building regulations referred to as the California Building Standards Code (California Code of Regulations, title 24). Through the code adoption process, the CBSC selects and approves a set of model codes.

He explained that it is a State mandate to adopt the new codes which require update of the Rio Dell Municipal Code (RDMC) (Chapter 15) to reflect that the codes have been adopted. He reviewed a list of ten (10) individual 2025 codes for adoption in addition to adoption of the 2024 International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC).

Mayor Garnes called for public comments on the proposed ordinance. No comments were received.

A motion was made by Carter/Woodall to approve the introduction and first reading (by title only) of *Ordinance No. 420-2026 Amending Section 15.05.020 "Building Codes" of the Rio Dell Municipal Code (RDMC) to Reference the 2025 California Building codes and the 2024 International Property Maintenance Code*. The motion carried 5-0.

COUNCIL REPORTS/COMMUNICATION

Mayor Pro Tem Carter reported on upcoming meetings and events and said that she would be attending a Fire Commissioners meeting and a Rio Dell School Board meeting on Thursday. She then gave a shout out to all of the Fire Departments that assisted with the tragic fire in Arcata and condolences to those who lost everything.

Councilmember Woodall announced there would be a senior luncheon on Thursday at 11:30 a.m. at the Community 'Resource Center and extended an invitation to all seniors.

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Councilmember Orr wished everyone a Happy New Year and thanked staff for all the work they do.

Councilmember Wilson also thanked staff and Public Works for their hard work and said that he would be attending an HWMA meeting on Thursday.

Mayor Garnes said she would be attending an HTA meeting tomorrow and thanked Public Works as well as the admin staff for dealing with the problems related to the recent storm.

ADJOURNMENT

Carter/Woodall made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:37 p.m. to January 20, 2026, regular meeting. Motion carried 5-0.

Debra Garnes, Mayor

Attest:

Karen Dunham, City Clerk