



RIO DELL CITY COUNCIL
REGULAR MEETING – 6:00 P.M.
TUESDAY, JULY 21TH, 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 Wilson
- Council Member Woodall

Excused:

- Council Member Orr

Staff Present:

- City Manager Kyle Knopp
- Finance Director Travis Sanborn
- Water/Roads Superintendent Jensen
- Wastewater Superintendent Moore
- RDPD Chief Phinney
- Community Service Officer Clark
- Community Service Officer Wolfe
- 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.

E. PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Mayor Garnes opened the public presentations portion of the meeting. No public comments were received. Mayor Garnes closed public presentations.

F. CONSENT CALENDAR

- 2026/0721.01 – Approve Minutes of the July 7th, 2026, Regular Meeting
- 2026/0721.02 – Receive and File Check Register for June 2026
- 2026/0721.03 – Adopt Resolution No. 1678-2026, a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Rio Dell Authorizing Examination of Sales or Transactions and Use Tax Records, Superseding Resolution No. 1672-2026

- 2026/0721.04 – Discussion and Possible Action Authorizing the City Manager to Submit a Low Population Waiver Application to CalRecycle Under SB 1383 (14 CCR § 18984.12) and Authorize the City Manager to Execute the Application

No items were removed from the Consent Calendar.

ACTION: Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter and seconded by Council Member Woodall to approve the Consent Calendar as presented. Motion carried 4–0 (Council Member Orr excused).

G. ITEMS REMOVED FROM THE CONSENT CALENDAR

No items were removed from the Consent Calendar.

H. REPORTS / STAFF COMMUNICATIONS

1. 2026/0721.05 – City Manager/Staff Update (RECEIVE & FILE)

City Manager Knopp reported that staff had submitted the City's Opportunity Zone 2.0 application the previous day; if the census tract, which runs from the Van Duzen River south to Redway and includes both Rio Dell and Scotia, is designated, it could provide additional investment incentives for the area. He reported that the local Girl Scout troop donated \$450 toward a dog waste bag station, to be installed shortly, and that Mayor Garnes, Council Member Woodall, and volunteers planted flowers at Blue Star Memorial Park. He announced street sweeping scheduled for Friday, July 24th, and asked residents to avoid parking on Wildwood Avenue that day. He reported that paving work was underway on Davis Street in connection with the water capital improvement project and was expected to be substantially complete by Friday. He reported that the Painter Street sewer line upsizing project was underway and that the construction crew had cleared the most difficult section of the work near the treatment plant, with the project expected to be completed before the winter rains.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter had no questions and noted the low number of animal-related calls for the reporting period, with zero dogs transported to Fortuna.

Council Member Wilson reported receiving a photo of a hole near Grundman's that posed a stepping hazard; Water/Roads Superintendent reported that a cone has been placed over it and PG&E had been contacted to arrange repair.

Mayor Garnes thanked Public Works for its work improving the appearance of Main Street ahead of Wildwood Days, and asked whether the City could place cones or notices to help keep parking clear on street sweeping day; City Manager Knopp confirmed Public Works typically posts notices on cones the day before sweeping.

I. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS / STUDY SESSIONS

1. 2026/0721.06 – Senior Home Repair Program Contract Renewal, Fiscal Year 2026-27 (DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION)

Finance Director Sanborn presented the item as the annual renewal of the Senior Home Repair Program agreement with the Humboldt Senior Resource Center (HSRC), and introduced Rachael Sovereign, HSRC's Director of Operations. He summarized that the program provides minor home repairs, capped at \$300 per household, to income-eligible residents aged 60 and older, and reported that the program served four Rio Dell households in FY 2025-26 at a total City cost of approximately \$841 against a \$2,500 authorization, and that across both years of the program the City has served ten households for a combined cost of approximately \$1,938. He reported that HSRC proposed reducing its own request from \$2,500 to \$1,500 based on prior-year trends, and that staff recommended approval of the reduced amount, noting that the amount is a ceiling rather than a commitment and that unused funds lapse.

Ms. Sovereign offered to answer questions. Mayor Pro Tem Carter and other Councilmembers discussed the program's low uptake in Rio Dell, suggesting that eligible residents may not realize the qualification requirements are as generous as they are, and asked that the program be promoted more broadly, including through the Community Resource Center, the Chamber of Commerce newsletter, and the City's own newsletter. Ms. Sovereign confirmed the Resource Center is the program's leading referral source. No members of the public wished to comment on this item.

ACTION: Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter and seconded by Council Member Woodall to approve renewal of the Senior Home Repair Program agreement with Humboldt Senior Resource Center for FY 2026-27 in an amount not to exceed \$1,500, and authorize the City Manager to execute the agreement. Motion carried 4-0 (Council Member Orr excused).

2. 2026/0721.07 – Discussion and Possible Action Receiving a Presentation from the Redwood Coast Energy Authority on the Authority's 26-27 Budget and Rate Recommendation and Related Direction to Councilmember Wilson on Voting for or Against the Authority's Proposed Budget and Rate Recommendation (DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION)

Beth Burks, Executive Director of the Redwood Coast Energy Authority (RCEA), presented with Lori Biondini, RCEA's Director of Business Planning and Finance. Ms. Burks reviewed RCEA's budget process: priorities and cost-saving strategies were presented to RCEA's Board in May 2026; in June 2026 the Board adopted a budget with direction to set rates less than 10% above PG&E rates while maintaining a minimum of \$26 million in financial reserves; and the Board was scheduled to meet Thursday, July 23, 2026 to finalize a recommended rate increase of 6%, effective September 1, 2026.

Ms. Burks described the Board's priorities for FY 2026-27, including maintaining RCEA's 100% renewable and carbon-free energy portfolio; maintaining financial health, reserves, and long-term rate stabilization; administering an unprecedented amount of externally funded programs, including the Northern Rural Energy Network; regional coordination on the Regional Climate Action Plan and an update to RCEA's strategic plan; and optimizing operations, customer service, and cost-neutrality of RCEA's electric vehicle charging network.

She described budget reduction measures adopted for FY 2026-27, including no cost-of-living increase for at least two years, reduction of part-time staff, freezing four vacant full-time positions, salary reductions to absorb an extra 27th pay period rather than paying it out (saving approximately \$200,000), a reduction of approximately \$30,000 to Community Choice Energy-funded rebates while preserving core rebate funding, reduced travel, training, education, and outreach budgets, elimination of consultant funding for the strategic plan update in favor of completing that work in-house, and pursuit of a prepay power purchase agreement expected to reduce power costs by a minimum of approximately 8 percent, and conservatively estimated to save approximately \$2 million annually.

Ms. Biondini presented RCEA's budget summary, reporting a projected FY 2026-27 net income deficit of approximately \$5.6 million, driven primarily by power costs exceeding revenues even with the proposed 6% rate increase. She reviewed a breakdown of revenue, including approximately 71% from electricity sales and approximately 24% from state contracts and other external funding supporting energy efficiency programs regionally, and a breakdown of expenses, with wholesale power supply as the largest category, followed by professional and program services, personnel, incentives and rebates, and facilities and operations.

Ms. Biondini explained the Power Cost Indifference Adjustment (PCIA), a charge assessed by PG&E to recover the above-market cost of power resources PG&E procured on behalf of customers before those customers left for community choice aggregation roughly ten years ago. She reported that the PCIA increased 232% for RCEA customers this past year and is now equal to approximately 51% of the generation charge, and that RCEA's rates would be approximately 31% lower than PG&E's without the PCIA. She presented a bill comparison showing that, with the proposed 6% increase, RCEA's generation charge plus the PCIA would be approximately 6% higher than a comparable bundled PG&E customer's generation charge, resulting in a total bill approximately 1.6% higher than a comparable PG&E bill, and that RCEA customers would still be paying less in generation charges than they paid in 2025, translating to an estimated increase of \$2.33 per month on an average residential bill.

Ms. Burks stated that next steps include the RCEA Board finalizing the rate at its July 23, 2026 meeting, with rates effective September 1, 2026, and quarterly monitoring with adjustments authorized up to a Board-approved cap of 9.5% above PG&E rates to protect reserves. She noted RCEA offers free home energy assessments, energy efficiency kits, a rebate catalog, and rate reviews to help customers offset the increase, and provided contact information for customers with questions (707-269-1700, redwoodenergy.org).

In response to Council questions, Ms. Burks and Ms. Biondini confirmed that customers retain the option to opt out of RCEA and return to bundled PG&E service, noting a waiting period applies to customers who later wish to opt back in. Council Member Wilson asked what would happen if RCEA did not raise rates; staff responded that RCEA would lose approximately \$6 million this fiscal year at current rates, which would erode reserves to a bare minimum within a few years absent other changes. Council Member Wilson expressed concern about the cumulative effect of repeated rate and fee increases on the community, noting that other City utility rates have also risen, and asked about the duration of the Board-authorized 9.5% cap; Ms. Burks responded that any increase above 9.5% would require a new Board discussion, which could also be brought back to the Rio Dell Council. Ms. Burks described RCEA's approximately \$10 million in annual local economic activity, including approximately \$6 million in wages supporting more than 40 local jobs, noting those funds would otherwise flow to PG&E shareholders, and described RCEA's advocacy efforts, including a legal appeal and support for state legislation to increase transparency in the PCIA calculation methodology.

Community member Shannon Brasher asked how the increase would affect bills that differ from the \$140 average bill shown in the presentation; Ms. Biondini clarified that the 6% increase applies to the electricity generation portion of a customer's bill regardless of the customer's total bill amount, and that charges unrelated to electricity, such as natural gas, are unaffected. Council Member Woodall noted that customers have the option to opt out of RCEA if concerned about the increase.

ACTION: Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Wilson, to direct Councilmember Wilson to vote in the affirmative on the RCEA budget and rate recommendation. Motion carried 3-1, Mayor Garnes voting Nay.

J. SPECIAL CALL ITEMS / COMMUNITY AFFAIRS / PUBLIC HEARINGS

1. 2026/0721.08 – Update on Spay and Neuter Voucher Program (DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION)

Finance Director Sanborn presented an update on the Spay and Neuter Voucher Program, established by Resolution No. 1623-2024, noting that Rio Dell is a small, rural community of approximately 3,400 people. He reported that, through June 2026, the program has served 53 animals (32 dogs and 21 cats) over 22 months of continuous operation, with an average provider cost of approximately \$120 per animal. He reported that the program has secured \$13,221.05 in funding across three sources: approximately \$8,971 in dedicated Animal License and Control fee revenue, \$3,500 from two McLean Foundation grants, and \$750 from three community donors. He noted the McLean Foundation grants supported the program's launch and closed in October 2025, after which dedicated fee revenue took over as the program's primary funding source, with fee collections in FY 2025-26 reaching \$4,999, roughly double the \$2,500 annual projection in the founding resolution. He noted the State's \$50 million California for All Animals initiative directed the majority of its funding toward spay and neuter services and is now fully awarded, and suggested Rio Dell's program could serve as a model for future state or regional funding efforts, while noting that dedicated local fees cannot fund program growth, such as feral cat services or expanded regional demand.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter spoke at length in support of the program, thanking staff for the presentation and describing her personal experience trapping and paying to have 18 cats spayed or neutered. She stated that pet ownership should not be cost-prohibitive and that unplanned litters are a significant driver of shelter intake, and expressed hope that the program could be expanded to include feral and stray cats in the future. She noted that Rio Dell's program is the only one of its kind in Humboldt County and one of very few in the state, and thanked City staff, the Critters Without Litters clinic, and the program's three community donors.

Jennifer Raymond, founder of Critters Without Litters and the Humboldt Spay Neuter Clinic, addressed the Council. She described the high number of animals historically euthanized annually by the county's impound facility prior to the creation of her nonprofit, and the significant number of animals served by her clinic in its first year of operation. She commended Rio Dell's program as a model and stated she intends to present it to the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors as an example for a countywide program.

Council Member Woodall and Council Member Wilson expressed support for the program. No further members of the public wished to comment.

ACTION: Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Council Member Woodall to direct staff to establish a recurring dedication of Animal License and Control fee revenue to the Spay and Neuter Voucher Program beginning in FY 2026-27. Motion carried 4-0 (Council Member Orr excused).

2. 2026/0721.09 – Discussion and Possible Action Regarding the Police Department Animal Kennel Project (DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION)

Police Chief Phinney presented the item, recalling that the Council previously formed an Ad Hoc Committee to evaluate options for a permanent kennel facility. He recommended a 12-foot by 24-foot, six-run prefabricated commercial kennel (approximately \$70,000, with the originally proposed air conditioning system replaced by a fan and heating element to reduce cost), construction of a 28-foot by 18-foot reinforced concrete slab (approximately \$12,890), and installation of an automatic electric gate and associated fencing improvements (approximately \$9,750). He reported that additional utility and wastewater holding tank improvements, previously estimated at approximately \$10,000, are now estimated at closer to \$25,000, bringing the total anticipated project cost to approximately \$125,000.

Chief Phinney recommended the Council authorize immediate construction of the concrete slab given limited local contractor availability and the goal of completing the project before winter, and recommended the Council authorize staff to solicit donations, sponsorships, and grants toward approximately 30% of total project costs, with staff returning to Council once that threshold is met to consider funding of the remaining balance.

Mayor Pro Tem Carter, who serves on the Ad Hoc Committee, spoke in support of the project, stating that the City's current reliance on Fortuna Police Department kennel space is not sustainable. Chief Phinney confirmed the City currently has access to only one, occasionally two, kennels at Fortuna, that Fortuna has indicated it may demolish its kennel facility as part of a sewer expansion project as soon as next year, and that the last quoted cost for contracting with the County for kenneling services was approximately \$130,000 per year plus travel time. Mayor Pro Tem Carter estimated that approximately 85% of animals taken into custody are reclaimed by their owners within a short period.

In response to Council questions, Chief Phinney confirmed the kennel could be operated by current staffing levels without additional hires, that fees to reclaim animals would apply consistent with the City's existing fee schedule, and that feeding costs are expected to be modest, estimated at a few hundred dollars per month, which can be absorbed within the existing budget, with community donations available if needed. Council Member Woodall expressed support for the project and requested a future discussion of operational details, including holding periods and veterinary care; Chief Phinney confirmed that the request before the Council that evening was limited to authorization of the concrete slab. City Manager Knopp confirmed the project would require a budget adjustment as an unbudgeted General Fund expense, but that the

City's reserves are sufficient to cover the cost while still meeting minimum reserve requirements.

A member of the public asked whether reclaiming an animal requires proof of spay or neuter status, and separately suggested that encouraging or requiring landlords to allow spayed or neutered pets could meaningfully reduce animal intake, particularly in communities with a large number of apartments. Council acknowledged the suggestion but noted the City cannot compel private landlords' pet policies.

ACTION: Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter and seconded by Council Member Woodall to (1) authorize construction of the concrete slab for the Police Department Animal Kennel Project, (2) authorize staff to solicit donations, sponsorships, grants, and other community funding sources with a goal of securing approximately 30% of total project costs, and (3) direct staff to return to Council once outside funding totaling 30% of total project costs has been secured for consideration of funding the remaining balance. Motion carried 4-0 (Council Member Orr excused).

3. 2026/0721.10 – Continued Public Hearing on the Objection to the Delinquent Sewer Service Charge for Assessor's Parcel Number 052-122-021-00, and Consideration of a Revised Report of Delinquent Sewer Service Charges (DISCUSSION/POSSIBLE ACTION)

Finance Director Sanborn summarized that on July 7, 2026 the Council adopted Resolution No. 1675-2026 confirming the report of delinquent sewer service charges, and that the property owner of Assessor's Parcel Number 052-122-021-00 (1231 Eeloa Avenue) had submitted a written objection requesting additional time to prepare a response. The Council continued the hearing as to that parcel only to the July 21 meeting; all other parcels on the report were confirmed on July 7 and were not before the Council. He reviewed the Council's options under Rio Dell Municipal Code Section 13.10.244(B): overrule the objection and affirm the charge, in which case no further Council action is required, or adopt Resolution No. 1677-2026 modifying or removing the charge for this parcel, which would amend Resolution No. 1675-2026 solely as to this parcel. Staff recommended the Council overrule the objection and affirm the charge, noting that any account paid in full on or before August 6, 2026 would be removed from the report and excluded from the tax roll regardless of the Council's determination.

Mayor Garnes reopened the continued public hearing. Al Petrovich, a Rio Dell resident, addressed the Council for approximately ten minutes. He presented his position that governmental entities, including the City, operate as for-profit corporations rather than as lawful government, referencing historical materials including House Joint Resolution 192 (1933) and the Federal Reserve System, and distributed printed materials to the Council. He stated his belief that the charge had, in effect, already been satisfied and that he should not be compelled to pay it, and referenced a past dispute regarding a

State directive on water use restrictions. He asked the Council to study the matters he raised.

Council Member Wilson responded that he had a great deal of respect for Mr. Petrovich, recalling that Mr. Petrovich had previously and correctly identified that the City was not required to comply with a State directive to reduce water service. He stated, however, that on the current matter the City's legal counsel had reviewed and approved the City's sewer service charge collection process, and that the costs of operating the sewer system must be borne by ratepayers. He encouraged Mr. Petrovich to pay the sewer charge. Council Member Woodall stated she respects Mr. Petrovich's perspective but agreed the sewer bill needs to be paid.

No further members of the public wished to comment. Mayor Garnes closed the continued public hearing.

ACTION: Motion made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter and seconded by Council Member Woodall to overrule the objection and affirm the delinquent sewer service charge for Assessor's Parcel Number 052-122-021-00 as confirmed by Resolution No. 1675-2026, with no further Council action required. Motion carried 4-0 (Council Member Orr excused).

K. ORDINANCES / SPECIAL RESOLUTIONS / PUBLIC HEARINGS

No items were presented.

L. COUNCIL REPORTS / COMMUNICATIONS

Mayor Pro Tem Carter:

- Reminded the community to spay and neuter pets.
- Reported the Nuisance Advisory Committee meets at 3:00 p.m. the following day in the Council Chambers.
- Reported a COAD Board meeting the following Thursday
- Reported her REDEC meeting this month was canceled.

Council Member Woodall:

- Noted Wildwood Days is approaching and encouraged the community to attend and support the many events, including those put on by the fire department.

Council Member Wilson:

- Reported he has an RCEA Board meeting Thursday and thanked the Council for its direction.

Mayor Garnes:

- Reported a Seismic Safety Commission meeting Thursday.

- Thanked volunteers Elizabeth Warren, Susan D'Angelo, Cindy Tridwell, and City Manager Knopp for their work improving Triangle Park, and thanked Public Works for maintaining the plantings there.
- Thanked Conservation Corps volunteers for extensive work at the Community Garden over multiple consecutive weekends, noting produce grown there is delivered to the Community Resource Center for distribution to residents ahead of Commodities Day, and announced the Community Garden's grand opening during Wildwood Days weekend.

M. ADJOURNMENT

ACTION: Motion to adjourn made by Mayor Pro Tem Carter, seconded by Mayor Garnes.

Motion carried 4–0.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:42PM. The next regular City Council meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 4th, 2026 at 6:00 PM.

APPROVED:

Debra L. Garnes, Mayor

ATTEST:

Jessica Hill, City Clerk