

Town of Garfield
TOWN COUNCIL
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
January 28, 2026 – 7:00 P.M.
405 W California St.

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Cody Lord

ROLL CALL: Council Members: Jason Bankus, Roni Mundell, and Connie Schaut

Staff: Clerk/Treasurer: Donnell Ellsworth **Public Works:** Monty Rojas, and Walt Fealy

Guest: Neal Leon, Aaron Lawhead, Able Rushing, Steven Schramm, Michael Slavish
David Watkins

Council member Andrea Mills was excused from attending the January 28th council meeting during the January 14, 2026, meeting.

REGULAR TOWN COUNCIL MEETING: The meeting was called to order at 7:00 P.M.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:

AARON LAWHEAD WITH EMPIRE DISPOSAL:

Aaron Lawhead with Empire Disposal introduced himself and stated that he was in attendance to provide background information on Empire Disposal and to answer questions from residents and elected officials. Aaron explained that Empire Disposal services five counties in Eastern Washington. He noted that garbage rates are set by the Washington State Utilities and Transportation Commission and are typically based on the cost of providing service, including wages, insurance, maintenance, equipment, and related expenses.

Aaron stated that if Empire Disposal were to take over garbage service for the Town of Garfield, they would offer multiple cart (toter) sizes as well as dumpsters. Empire Disposal operates Monday through Thursday and observes six holidays. When a holiday falls on one of those days, garbage service is typically delayed by one day. If Empire Disposal were to assume service in Garfield, the regular garbage pickup day would move to Thursday, with service beginning at 5:00 a.m.

Able Rushing asked about dumpster and cart (toter) placement. Aaron stated that Empire Disposal would work with residents and businesses to determine appropriate placement to allow trucks to safely and efficiently service the containers. He also explained that residents who own their dumpsters are charged a different rate and that Empire Disposal would work with those residents to ensure their dumpsters are compatible with Empire's trucks.

All service requests and orders would go through DonNell at Town Hall, who would coordinate with Empire Disposal to generate work orders. Connie Schaut asked about rental dumpsters, and Aaron confirmed that Empire Disposal does offer rental dumpsters at a different rate. Aaron also stated that all garbage must be placed in bags before being put into carts (toters) to prevent trash from blowing around during collection.

Aaron provided an update regarding his visit to the Garfield Meat Shop, where he met with Annie, toured the facility, and gained a general understanding of the type and volume of waste generated on a weekly basis. He explained that while most household and commercial waste can be compacted, the waste from the Garfield Meat Shop is already as compact as possible. As a result, the meat shop's weekly waste is approximately equal in weight to that of the rest of the town combined. Aaron stated that Empire Disposal does not want to negatively impact small businesses; however, rates must reflect the cost of service. If Empire Disposal were to take over garbage service, they would work with the meat shop to explore available options.

Aaron thanked everyone for their time and stated that Cody and DonNell have his contact information for anyone who may have additional questions. He added that once a contract is signed, Empire Disposal would begin planning and could be prepared to take over service by the first week of March.

JUB ENGINEERING: FACILITY PLAN UPDATE:

Steven Schramm and David Watkins of JUB Engineers attended to discuss the Garfield Wastewater Treatment Facility Plan. Steven noted the extensive scope of the project, highlighting that a third-party rate study was done. This was to determine if there is a necessary sewer rate increase. The current residential rates are \$67.00 per month. To fully fund a new facility, rates would projectably need to increase to \$255.00 per month. David noted that even if the town increased rates to \$100.00, an \$11 million funding gap would remain.

Steven noted that regarding funding through the Washington Department of Ecology (DOE). Options include a design loan which is 50% forgivable, a construction grant of up to \$5 million, and construction management which is 100% a loan. Both Steven and David recommended that town officials and engineers begin lobbying state legislators to have the project written into the state budget, which has been done for one other small town in Eastern Washington.

Roni Mundell stated that she would like to avoid rate increases but suggested that, if necessary, the town implement them slowly to allow residents to adjust. David proposed that the town consider stepped up increases, such as \$20.00 increments, up to \$150.00 per month.

David addressed the DOE's responses to the facility plan, specifically regarding Inflow and Infiltration (I&I). DOE requires a formal plan within the town's general sewer plan to address current and future I&I. David noted that the DOE (via Diana) is concerned that building a plant based on current flows could result in an oversized, cost-inefficient facility. David also advised the town to consider

purchasing land for the future plant now, as changing the location would necessitate a complete redesign of the plan.

David noted that the DOE is approximately ten years behind in issuing a new permit and has yet to define future discharge limits, which complicates planning. JUB suggested holding a workshop with the DOE, town staff, and engineers to resolve these issues and offered to draft a statement addressing future concerns. Additionally, both representatives recommended that town officials and JUB attend the IACC Conference this fall to explore further funding.

To address I&I immediately, it was suggested that Public Works inspect manholes for leaks and that the town mail notices to residents requesting that sump pumps not be discharged into the sewer system. While DOE suggested flow testing, JUB recommended using temperature monitors as a more manageable alternative for data collection.

Mayor Lord thanked Mr. Schramm and Mr. Watkins for their time and requested that someone work with town staff to train on the GIS mapping system. Mayor Lord closed guest comments at 7:55 p.m.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Connie Schaut **MOVED** to approve the minutes for the Regular Town Council Meeting on January 14, 2026. Jason Bankus **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.**

POLICE REPORT:

Marshal Handley was not present at the meeting.

Mayor Lord notified the town council members that we are currently waiting on an offer from the Whitman County Sheriff, Brett Meyers, for the spike strips, taser, and rifle. Marshal Handley has taken the firearms to Kings Arms to have them appraised.

PUBLIC WORKS REPORT:

Monty Rojas and Walt Fealy were present at the meeting.

WATER/SEWER

Monty and Walt reported the installation of the pump at wastewater treatment plant and that there are currently four operational pumps at the plant. KME identified that the previous pumps failure was due to electrical amperage exceeding 20 amps, which caused it to burn out. KME is evaluating the remaining pumps for potential rebuilding or replacement. It was noted that much of the wiring at the plant is incorrectly installed, which will need correction to prevent ongoing electrical issues.

PARK/GARBAGE/STREET

There is nothing to report at this time.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **SEWER AND WATER REPLACEMENT PUMP UPDATE:** Mayor Lord reported that a rough estimate for the replacement water pump for Well #4 has been received, with costs ranging from \$40,000 to \$60,000.
- **IT SUPPORT UPDATE:** Mayor Lord reported Josh Gamez, of Secure Path Consulting, has submitted a list of proposed installation services. Josh recommended migrating all town staff to the Gmail platform to streamline data sharing, optimize storage, and uniformity.
- **EPA DEADLINE FOR LEAD PIPE INVENTORY:** Mayor Lord confirmed that the required EPA lead service line inventory is now complete and will be submitted on Thursday, January 29. DonNell will be the contact for future communication on this matter and will be checking to see if there is anything else needed to bring us into compliance with the Department of Health and the EPA. The town will be notifying the residents again in the annual Consumer Confidence Report, which is distributed to residents each June.
- **UPDATE ON STRUCTURE BUILT OVER THE ALLEY:** Mayor Lord reported that he and Jacob, the town building inspector have gone over to the property at 3rd and Jefferson and have taken a look at the structure that is encroaching into the easement. The mayor also explained to the property owners that if or when they sell their property, they will have to include a disclosure in their real estate documents stating that they have built into the alley and that the town has authority to access the alley if ever needed. To accommodate the building inspector the property owner needs to provide an affidavit that the building was built to code since the final construction of the walls were completed before the building inspector could inspect the work completed. This will remove the liability from the building inspector going forward. The homeowner was encouraged to pull a building permit before building in the future.
- **EMPIRE DISPOSAL DRAFT CONTRACT:** Mayor Lord reported he received the draft contract from Empire Disposal, and he has sent it to Eric Hanson, with Bishop Law Office, for review and input. Discussion is tabled until the February 11, 2026, council meeting to allow Eric time to review and respond.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **LETTERS OF INTEREST FOR COUNCIL POSITION 1:** Mayor Lord let the town council members know that the town has received three letters of intent regarding Council Position #1. The people interested are Neal Leon, Jody Opheim, and Michael Slavish. Interviews will take place at the February 11th meeting to allow anyone else time to turn in a letter before close of business on Thursday, January 29, as advertised.

- **COUNCIL MEETING POLICY:** Mayor Lord asked the town council members if they had had a chance to review the council policies he sent out. Connie asked for this discussion to be tabled until February 11, 2026.
- **2026 AMENDED BUDGET ORDINANCE 504:** Mayor Lord presented **Ordinance 504 to amend the 2026 Annual Budget**. The mayor explained the increases and decreases in the budget and also stated that there will be an explanation attached to the ordinance for anyone wanting more information on what the changes are. The changes reflect additional spending on water and sewer system repairs, and the revisions to the 2026 budgeted beginning and ending balances.

Jason Bankus **MOVED** to approve and adopt **Ordinance 504 amending the 2026 Annual Budget**. Connie Schaut **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously**.

- **RESOLUTION NO. 2026-01: EMERGENCY DECLARATION:** Mayor Lord reported an emergency at the wastewater treatment plant due to a pump failure, which has affected its operational efficiency and potentially creating a health hazard. The mayor also noted that the water pump for Well #4 has completely failed and requires replacement. Well #4 is the town's primary water source, requiring urgent action be taken to restore functionality.

Roni Mundell **MOVED** to approve and adopt **Resolution No. 2026-01 Emergency Declaration** for the pump failure and replacement at the Garfield Wastewater Treatment Plant and the pump failure and replacement for Well #4. Connie Schaut **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously**.

- **RESOLUTION NO. 2026-02: AUTHORIZATION FOR MAYOR'S CREDIT CARD AND LIMIT:** Mayor Lord asked the town council to approve a credit card with a monthly limit of \$4,000. Jason Bankus **MOVED** to approve **Resolution No. 2026-02** which is authorizing the mayor's credit card with a **\$4,000 per month limit**. Roni Mundell **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously**.

Connie Schaut asked for a couple items on the website to be updated and asked that we put something on the website about the RV Park and space rental.

FINANCIAL:

Approval of Checks

Jason Bankus **MOVED** to approve payment of the bills. Connie Schaut **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously**.

Payroll:

Checks: 17039-17043

Total = \$6,277.39

Claims:

Checks: 17044-17050 & DOR

Total = \$8,856.35

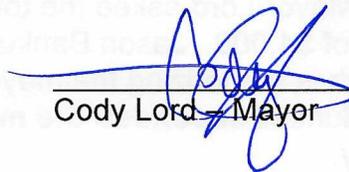
Total Claims and Payroll = \$15,133.74

MAYORS' COMMENTS:

- **2022-2024 AUDIT STARTING:** DonNell will be working on this throughout the month of February 2026.
- **CLERK TRAINING IN SPOKANE:** Mayor Lord reminded the town council members that DonNell will be at training with Springbrook Express on **February 11-12**. Mayor Lord has asked another clerk to attend the council meeting to take minutes while DonNell is gone.
- **PUBLIC WORKS SUPERVISOR JOB OPENING:** Mayor Lord notified the town council members that the town received 20 applications. The town only received one application that checked all the boxes. The candidate is currently making \$70k with all certifications, and CDL. Mayor Lord asked if the town council is willing to match this amount. All council members stated that they were okay with matching the dollar amount. The mayor will notify the candidate and then schedule another interview with two council members present.

ADJOURN:

Jason Bankus **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. Connie Schaut **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously**. The council meeting was adjourned at 8:48 P.M.



Cody Lord – Mayor

ATTEST:



Donnell Ellsworth – Clerk/Treasurer