

Town of Garfield
TOWN COUNCIL
PUBLIC HEARING
REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING
March 11, 2026 – 7:00 P.M.
405 W California St.

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Cody Lord

ROLL CALL: Council Members: Jason Bankus, Andrea Mills, Roni Mundell, Jody Opheim, Connie Schaut.

Clerk-Treasurer: DonNell Ellsworth **Public Works:** Walt Fealy

Guest: Nathan Arganbright, Amanda Bankus, Nick Curry, Kathie Griner, Neal Leon, Kelsey Merrill, Eric Mills, Logan Pfaff, Kevin Pickron, Abel Rushing, Sue Ulrick

PUBLIC HEARING:

Mayor Lord opened the public hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Mayor Lord opened the floor for public comments to discuss whether the town should keep the garbage department or dissolve it in favor of contracting with **Empire Disposal**.

Kelsey Merrill and Kevin Pickron, representing LaDow Court, expressed concerns that changing from the town the handling the garbage removal in town or going to a private contractor mid-year would have negative impact on LaDow Court. Kevin stated that their yearly budget has already been approved. This change would also have a negative impact on their employee wages, and resident rates. Bonnie Riebold questioned how the town would recoup any lost revenue and asked for clarification on the proposed rates. In response to Nathan Arganbright's question regarding the reason for the town even considering changing, Mayor Lord provided a summary of the department's challenges, including the deteriorating condition of the 2002 Mack garbage truck, which was purchased in 2013 used. Also, the lack of a backup plan, and the current difficulty in staffing a driver with a **CDL license**. He also brought up that undercharging for dumpster services has further strained the town's finances. Jason Bankus agreed that the commercial dumpster rates need to be increased.

Logan Pfaff expressed concern regarding the proposal for Public Works staff to obtain chemical applicator licenses, if the town dissolves the garbage department. He cited existing time constraints, the 40-hour annual education requirement, and potential increases in liability insurance. He feels continuing with Palouse Hills Lawn & Shrub to keep the liability with a private contractor. Regarding seasonal maintenance, Mayor Lord presented early mowing quotes from Larry Hunt (\$130/week) and Craig Mitzimberg (\$150/week, including bathroom cleaning), noting that further details will be provided as the season approaches.

Mayor Lord stated that if no one has anything else they want to discuss he will close the public hearing at 7:10 p.m.

REGULAR TOWN COUNCIL MEETING: The meeting was called to order at 7:11 P.M.

INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS:

Mayor Lord stated that if no one else wanted to speak about anything else he would close guest comments at 7:12 P.M.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Andrea Mills **MOVED** to approve the minutes for the Regular Town Council meeting on February 25, 2026. Jody Opheim **seconded the motion**, Jason Bankus **voted yea**, Roni Mundell **voted yea**, Connie Schaut **voted nay**.

POLICE REPORT:

A report was presented by Whitman County Sheriff Office. This report will be reported quarterly. They will contact the town if there becomes a chronic issue.

FIRE DEPARTMENT REPORT:

Andrea Mills stated the fire department has had a quiet month. They are getting a lot of new parts for the new vehicle that was donated. Also, Kim Wertz was there and is getting people lined up to be annexed. There will be a meeting in April to discuss this further.

PUBLIC WORKS REPORT:

Walt Fealy was present at the meeting.

After the upgrades at the community center bathrooms, the walls could use a fresh coat of paint. Also, after the heavy rain the other day Walt went and checked out the community center and no longer found standing water. The problem seems to be fixed.

WATER/SEWER

KME will be here on March 19th, for the pump installation. Walt is still working on locating the valves to shut down the inflow and outflow of the water system at town hall.

Due to the high flow at the wastewater treatment plant, the pumps cannot keep up, and people may smell a fowl odor due to the plant being at full capacity.

PARK/GARBAGE/STREET:

Garbage went well for Walt's and Abel second week.

OLD BUSINESS:

CODE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER: Mayor Lord informed the town council that the town has three potential candidates for the Code Enforcement Officer position. He informed the town council that Logan Pfaff has expressed interest at \$850 per month and is willing to handle personal interactions and court appearances. Joe Handley at \$1,000 per month and Lisa Carmack at \$600 per month. However, Lisa wants to only handle the administrative paperwork. The mayor suggested that the town finalize a **job description** to clarify expectations for the role. Roni Mundell added that she likes the idea of having an officer who lives in or near Garfield. Town council members agreed to table this discussion.

EMPIRE DISPOSAL DRAFT CONTRACT: Mayor Lord stated that the town council has many things to consider. When running a utility, a town must be profitable, that is written into the state statues. The town is starting to see mechanical issues and the age of the truck

as well as normal wear and tear are some of the things that have to be taken into consideration when making this decision. If the town has to purchase a new truck this means the town will have to finance it, which means a payment ranging anywhere from a \$20k+ to \$48k+. The garbage department is averaging a profit of \$5k a year, which is not enough to make this payment. Which will make the new payment have to trickle down to residents. If the town changes service, most residential customers will actually see a small decrease in their monthly bills.

Another thing to consider is not having a licensed CDL driver is making things tough. Jason Bankus volunteered to ride in the truck if needed to keep garbage going until we hire someone and Walt can get his CDL. Another thing to consider is that the residential toters seemed to have been carrying the dumpster customers as most have not been charged proportionately. Jason Bankus stated that he agreed with that because the residential dumpsters have had about a \$35 increase since the beginning of 2025 and they are only \$4 less than light commercial dumpsters.

Mayor Lord also addressed that because water, sewer, and garbage are all in one fund, this is also making things more confusing and making the information blurry. He did state that there will be no replacement of revenue other than the **12% Admin fee** and the additional \$4 fee and taxes. Jody Opheim asked Mayor Lord if he is comfortable with the revenue loss if the town chooses to go with Empire Disposal. Mayor Lord stated that he is comfortable with the town dissolving the garbage department and going with Empire Disposal.

Abel Rushing thanked the town council for tackling this issue as this is not an easy decision and stated one of the things to also consider is that people seem to overfill their toters and the town may also be losing money because of that. He feels that maybe that should be addressed. He also has driven the garbage truck and does not feel it needs to be replaced right away. Kelsey Merrill asked if there is something specific that is making the town make this decision right now and if the town goes with Empire how soon until they can start. Andrea Mills stated that the town must start looking ahead and plan for all contingencies, and the citizens can expect changes about a month after the contract is signed.

Mayor Lord asked the town council if they were ready to take action.

Roni Mundell **MOVED** to table the decision and discussion of the Empire Disposal Contract. Jason Bankus **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.**

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK UPDATES: Mayor Lord stated that he and Andrea Mills are still working on the final touches and when they are finished, they will present the final draft to the town council members.

NEW BUSINESS:

DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY: CLOSEOUT WQC-2021-GARTO-00116; I&I REDUCATION: Mayor Lord explained that the town opted to close on the I&I Reduction contract with the Department of Ecology last fall. Now he is asking the town council to approve him signing the final contract.

Andrea Mills **MOVED** to approve the mayor signing the contract to close out contract WQC-2021-GARTO-00116; I&I REDUCATION. Jody Opheim **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.**

FINANCIAL AND PROCEDURAL POLICIES: Mayor Lord brought up multiple changes throughout the entire policy. He will make the changes mentioned and present the final draft at the town council meeting on March 25, at 7:00 P.M.

FINANCIAL:

Approval of Checks

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

Payroll:

Checks: 17086-17091, AWC, EFPTS, DRS, HRA VEBA **Total = \$11,658.83**

Claims:

Checks: 17092-17108 **Total = \$20,292.91**

Total Claims and Payroll = \$31,951.74

MAYORS' COMMENTS:

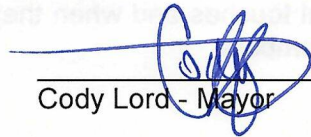
GREG PARTCH: Mayor Lord updated everyone that the steam engine that Greg originally asked the town to store will no longer need to be stored as it is no longer coming to town. Also, Greg is asking if he can store some stuff in a corner in the old Methodist Church. The mayor suggested having an agreement stating that the town is not liable for damages.

WELL #4 REPAIR: Mayor Lord reiterated that on **March 19th** KME will be here with the new motor and pump for **Well #4**. The new pump and motor are complete and in KME's possession.

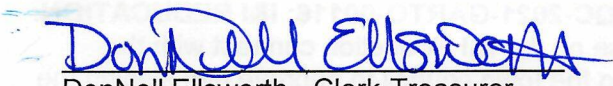
TOWN PROPERTIES: Mayor Lord, Andrea Mills, and Connie Schaut went to the county assessor's office and Wraylee is willing to put all the town owned properties on a map in the GIS link for the town.

ADJOURN:

Jason Bankus **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. Jody Opheim **seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.** The council meeting was adjourned at **8:36 P.M.**


Cody Lord - Mayor

ATTEST:


Donnell Ellsworth - Clerk-Treasurer