

**Agenda of the Legislative Meeting of the  
Mayor and City Council  
City of Mount Rainier, Maryland  
In-Person Meeting  
Tuesday, March 3, 2026, 7:00PM**

**1. Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance**

**2. Review of Agenda (5 minutes)**

*The Mayor and Council will review the agenda for the meeting, adding or deleting topics of interest or discussion.*

**3. Mayor and Council Members Event Announcements**

**4. M-NCPPC, Department of Parks and Recreation - Plan 2040 Update (20 Minutes)**

*The Mayor and Council will receive a presentation from the Parks Planning and Environment Stewardship Division regarding the Plan 2040 Update.*

**5. City Manager's Report (20 Minutes)**

*City Manager Kourosch Kamali will present his report to the Mayor and Council.*

**6. Public Comment**

*Please see page 3 of the agenda, where the rules for Public Comments are listed. If you wish to speak, please advise during the meeting.*

**New Business**

**7. First Reading and Adoption of Resolution No. 02-2026, Appointing Mr. Derek Reynolds and Ms. Jasmine White to the Ethics Commission (10 Minutes)**

*The Mayor and Council will have the first reading and adoption of Resolution No. 02-2026.*

*Vote: \_\_\_\_\_*

**8. Vote on Approval of Minutes (20 Minutes)**

*The Mayor and Council will vote on approving the minutes for:*

- *January 6, 2026, Legislative Meeting*
- *January 20, 2026, Work Session*
- *February 3, 2026, Legislative Meeting.*

*Vote:* \_\_\_\_\_

**9. Adjournment**

**Upcoming Events**

**Budget Public Hearing – Saturday, March 21, 2026, Potts Hall/Welcome Center**

**Egg Hunt – Saturday, March 28, 2026 – 11 AM – 1 PM – Mount Rainier Nature Center**

**Mount Rainier Day – Saturday, May 16, 2026, 11 AM – 4 PM- Mount Rainier Nature Center**

## Rules for Public Comment

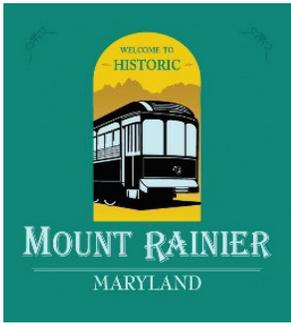
The Mayor and City Council invite and welcome comments at public meetings. The Mayor or presiding officer will recognize you. Please introduce yourself (first and last name, for recording purposes) and give the name of your street and block number (e.g., 4300 block of 34<sup>th</sup> St.). Please indicate in the chat whether you would like the Mayor to read your comment or you will speak on your comment. If the Mayor reads your comment, that will serve as your allotted speaking time. Public Comment has a time limit of 3 minutes per speaker, unless otherwise agreed upon by the Mayor.

While speaking, please maintain a courteous tone and avoid personal attacks. If you wish to lodge a complaint about the performance or conduct of any City employee, please bring your concern to the attention of the City Manager, who will look into the matter and respond to you.

As a courtesy to other residents and businesses, the Council requests that speakers not use specific addresses or names of individuals when describing a situation or making a complaint. Noting the block is preferred over a specific address.

### ***Please Note:***

*Pursuant to the Annotated Code of Maryland, State Government Article Section 10-508(a), the Council by majority vote may retire to executive or closed session at any time during the meeting. Should the Council retire to executive or closed session; the chair will announce the reasons, and a report will be issued at a future meeting disclosing the reasons for such session.*



## CITY OF MOUNT RAINIER, MARYLAND

### RESOLUTION No. 02-2026

Introduced by: The Mayor and City Council

### **A Resolution of the City of Mount Rainier Appointing Derek Reynolds and Jasmine White to the Ethics Commission**

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of Mount Rainier have established an Ethics Commission in accordance with the City Charter and applicable law; and

**WHEREAS**, the Commission was established to hear and decide, with the advice of the City Attorney or other legal counsel if appropriate, all complaints filed regarding alleged violations of Chapter 1D of the City Code by any person; and

**WHEREAS**, vacancies exist on the Ethics Commission, and it is in the best interest of the City to appoint qualified individuals to serve; and

**WHEREAS**, Derek Reynolds and Jasmine White are residents of the City of Mount Rainier and are qualified and willing to serve on the Ethics Commission; and

**WHEREAS**, the City Council desire to appoint Derek Reynolds and Jasmine White to the Ethics Commission for the terms provided by law.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the City Council of the City of Mount Rainier, Maryland, that:

1. Appointment. Derek Reynolds and Jasmine White are hereby appointed to serve as members of the Ethics Commission of the City of Mount Rainier.
2. Term. The term of these appointments shall be for a period of three (3) years, commencing on March 3, 2026, and expiring on March 6, 2029, or until their respective successors are duly appointed and qualified, in accordance with the City Charter and applicable law.
3. Effective Date. This Resolution shall take effect immediately upon its adoption.

**THIS RESOLUTION IS ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF MOUNT RAINIER THIS \_\_\_\_\_ DAY OF \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.**

Attest:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Melissa Sam, City Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Celina R. Benitez, Mayor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Danielle Carter, Councilmember Ward 1

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jennifer Hoffpauir, Councilmember Ward 1

\_\_\_\_\_  
Valerie Woodall, Councilmember Ward 2

\_\_\_\_\_  
Joseph Jakuta, Councilmember Ward 2

**Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier**  
**Mayor and City Council**  
**Legislative Meeting**  
**January 6, 2026, Virtual Meeting**

**Call to Order**

7:00 pm

**Presiding Officer**

Mayor Celina Benitez

**Officials Present**

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall

Councilmember Danielle Carter

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta

**Staff Present**

City Manager Kourosh Kamali

Director of Code Compliance Alma Ferrufino

City Clerk Melissa Sam

Media Production Coordinator Jared Alindogan

**Minutes provided by:**

City Clerk

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**Reading of Agenda**

The agenda was read by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall and accepted with the removal of number 11, Discussion and Vote on Support for the “Help Us Stop The Landover Data Center” Community Outreach.

**Mayor and Councilmember Event Announcements**

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir stated that the ribbon cutting was scheduled for the following day at 11:00 a.m. at Potts Hall, 1 Municipal Place, Mount Rainier, and expressed hope that residents would attend.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta encouraged residents to visit the City’s website and sign up to join the Mount Rainier Green Team. He stated that applications were being accepted and that an environmental background was not required, though preferred. He noted that individuals who simply wanted to help benefit the environment in

Mount Rainier were welcome to apply. He added that approximately three additional applicants were still needed to reach full membership.

Councilmember Danielle Carter mentioned the following:

- She thanked everyone who participated in the Parade of Lights in December, noting that it was a great success, and extended special thanks to the four residents who provided cider stations.
- She encouraged residents to participate in the City's Compost Program and advised them to visit the City's website to complete the form to request a compost bin. She stated that residents with questions could reach out to any member of the Council.

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall announced a vacancy on the Arts Commission and encouraged interested residents to apply through the City's website.

Mayor Celina Benitez read the upcoming events listed on the agenda and stated the following:

- The waste management schedule was available on the City's website, and live Christmas trees were scheduled for collection on January 13 and January 27.
- She thanked staff and volunteers for their work on the Holiday Basket Distribution and the Breakfast and Photo with Santa.
- The Police Department held a Shop with a Cop event, during which many children received toys.
- She thanked the Mount Rainier Volunteer Fire Department for hosting Santa Run and noted that the Police Department escorted the event. She expressed appreciation for the continued collaboration.
- She congratulated Ms. Wala Blegay on being sworn in as the new at-large County Councilmember on Monday.
- She gave a shout-out to Speaker Joselyn Peña-Melik for becoming the first Afro-Latina immigrant Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates.
- She stated that the legislative open session would take place the following week.

### **Presentation from the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA)**

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall recused herself from the presentation.

Megan Baco and Grace Hearnese presented on the following:

- (Re) Introduction
- Community Tourism
- Example Heritage Area Projects & Programs
- Grant Opportunities

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir asked about small businesses and their preservation, noting that the City had many small businesses in its historic downtown core, and inquired whether they were able to access grant funding through ATHA. Megan Baco stated that the funding they had available was not something small businesses could use. She explained that they had seen partnerships take place in the Gateway Arts District in which a business benefited significantly as the buildout tenant of a property owned by a nonprofit. She also noted that Prince George's County was unique in that the County Historic Preservation Commission had a grant program for which private property owners were eligible.

Motion to add three minutes Moved by Mayor Celina Benitez Seconded by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed
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The Mayor and Council thanked Megan Baco and Grace Hearnese for their presentation and stated that they wished the trail extended all the way to the City.

### **Presentation of Building Application for 3803 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, Mount Rainier, Maryland**

The owner of the property explained the scope of the project.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta stated the following:

- The city had a noise ordinance (Code Section 10-121), construction activities were to be limited to 8 am to 8 pm to avoid violating it.
- There was a tree ordinance (Section 12B-7) that protected private trees measuring 56½ inches or more in circumference at 4½ feet above the ground. If any work was planned involving a tree of that size, even if it was in poor condition, Code Enforcement needed to be consulted. Additionally, any pruning needed to be reviewed in advance.
- Care should be taken when digging, moving, or grading soil to prevent stormwater from running into neighboring yards or the rain garden.
- When in doubt, the Code Compliance Director should be contacted.

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall asked whether the owner planned to live in the home, sell it after renovations, or rent it. The owner stated that he was planning to rent the property.

The Mayor and Council thanked the owner for the presentation and for the project.

### **City Manager's Report**

City Manager, Kouros Kamali presented on the following:

- Weekly meeting with directors.
- FY27 Operating Budget
- Potts Hall/Welcome Center
- ARPA Funding –
  - (1) Newton Street Green Infrastructure Improvements (Between 34<sup>th</sup> Street and 37<sup>th</sup> Street)
- SS4A Grant Funding –
  - (1) High Visibility Crosswalks, Curb Ramp Improvement, and Speed Humps
  - (2) Sidewalk Maintenance
- Installation of Stop Sign Enforcement Cameras
- Installation of Solar Panels on the Five City Buildings
- 31<sup>st</sup> Street and Perry Street Green Street Project
- Façade Improvements and Mural Projects
- Grant Activities

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir expressed frustration that they were not meeting in person, questioned why the furniture had not been ordered earlier, and asked for an explanation for the delay. Mr. Kamali explained that they had to wait until the council chamber was finished to obtain accurate measurements for the furniture. He also stated that if they had proceeded with the original plan to furnish the chamber, it would have cost the City more than \$100,000. Therefore, he had shopped around to find a better price. He eventually found a vendor who provided a reasonable quote, but they were out of state, and it would take two months. He also mentioned that the City was better off waiting the two months rather than paying an additional \$50,000.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta stated that some of the businesses he had spoken with on 34th Street were concerned about how the parking meters had been removed. A report provided previously indicated that this would be about the time the parking meters were to be reinstalled, and he asked about the status. Mr. Kamali explained that they usually held weekly meetings with the vendors. He noted that although the process had been promised to be quick at the beginning, it was taking longer than anticipated. They had received all the signs for the parking area, but were still waiting for the program to be installed, which was somewhat sophisticated, and staff also needed to be trained.

Councilmember Danielle Carter asked the following questions:

- In this situation with the Barking Lot, were mediation services offered to the residents and the business owner to mitigate the situation.
- Did he, as City Manager, or one of his designated staff, investigate the petition to ensure all signers were 18 years or older and that the 60 percent threshold had been met.

Mr. Kamali stated that he believed the matter should be addressed in a different meeting, such as a community conversation, where the Director of Code Compliance could also be present. He explained that she had forwarded information to Councilmember Carter that afternoon, and because a County investigation was ongoing and a court date was scheduled for the following Thursday, some information could not be released as it was not public. He added that he had reached out to the City Attorney after receiving the emails from her. He also noted that most of the email correspondents did not live on that block. He reiterated that a community conversation involving the owner, the residents who signed the petition, and city staff would be the appropriate forum.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Julie Chamberlain, 3700 block of 37th Street, stated that she was two months away from her twentieth anniversary of living in Mount Rainier and that she had always heard the narrative of supporting residents and local businesses. She said it was baffling to her the situation being discussed. She noted that a resident who had invested in the community and gone through the permitting process to establish her business was now coming up against this wall, with seemingly no engagement from the entity in this body. She stated that no one had talked about any actions taken directly by City personnel. She said she had been under the understanding that it was partially the City undertaking this action, not just residents complaining about barking. She stated that she would definitely like some answers regarding what City involvement had been in the issue, not just complaints from residents. She added that the meeting on Thursday was coming awfully quickly for the turnaround on information, given that the matter had been going on for quite some time.

Mr. Jon Pattee, 3200 block of Shepherd Street, mentioned that he wanted to express deep concern, noting that he was sure that no group of people who packed food baskets for kids and did things for families was anything but good-hearted. He stated that he also knew the business owner had lived in the community for what he believed was coming up on twenty years and that she was a decent and kind person.

He said it surprised him that no common ground could be found in this situation and that it was a deep concern to him. He stated that he trusted they would all find the same compassion and common sense and make it possible for her to continue a business that she had poured her life savings into as a single mother, a veteran, and someone investing in the community that was desperate to avoid blight, closed businesses, and the social consequences that came when people tried to do something good in their community and ran into obstacles.

He stated that his understanding of what was happening was not that there was something significant involving the County, but rather that the City had moved the goalpost on her and that there was something about a foot issue. He stated that, from what he had heard, he thought it was not going to turn out well. He said he was sad for his City and sad for his neighbor, and he hoped that the matter would be taken very, very seriously, noting that he knew they were good-hearted people.

Ms. Heather Ware, 3700 block of 35<sup>th</sup> Street, said that she had concerns because she received a notice from the County without any mediation or conversation with the City Council, City staff, or neighbors. She stated that she thought the matter would have been handled in house rather than being fast-tracked to the County. She asked the Council to consider having a dialogue, at least initially, either with her or with the main person who had the complaint. She stated that instead, they had only been yelling at them at their business and at her while she was walking to her job, along with emails sent by a particular individual. She stated that she then received a noise notice from the City and felt a disconnect, questioning why the issue had not been addressed in house before being taken to the County.

Ms. Ayelet Hines, 3200 block of Shepherd Street stated that she was there to speak on behalf of the business and that she sometimes took her dog there. She stated that she understood the neighbor in the immediate vicinity might have had concerns and that, of course, the City needed to look out for their interests. Her request was that the City stand up equally and fight equally for the interests and concerns of the business owner.

She stated that the owner was a lone proprietor, a veteran, a single mother, and someone known throughout the community for being an active member who helped shape the future of the community. She said her hope was for the City to stand up for her as much as it did for the people who lived on that block. She noted that while it was true she did not live on that block, the town center was important to her and she did not want it to become blighted or for the only businesses that could thrive to be those that sold drugs. She stated that she knew the business owner had been dealing with the matter for months and that this was what it had taken to finally have this conversation. Even if the explicit intention was not to shut the business down, placing roadblocks in front of a small business owner was essentially the same thing.

Ms. Valerie Silensky, 4100 block of 31<sup>st</sup> Street, mentioned that she had lived there for almost twenty-one years. She said she had seen many businesses struggle to come to the area and that there had been numerous attempts to attract businesses that ultimately did not succeed. She stated that the community needed businesses, and here they had someone who had been so dedicated to investing in the community, moving there, making it her home, and raising a child there. She noted that all of these actions were deliberate and intentional.

She stated that the business owner had started the business there and, as others had said, had gone through all of the onerous and difficult challenges of opening a business. She said it was clearly a popular and beloved business that helped build community. As a dog owner herself, she stated that her dogs had never actually been to the business other than to visit and say hello, and she had always found it to be clean and well-managed.

She said it seemed that some were letting the best be the enemy of the good. She noted that there had been some great ideas in the discussions about having a community dialogue and addressing issues at the community level to mitigate any problems. She stated that she would like to know why that had not been done before it got to this point. She said, as others had noted, that the matter had been going on for months and seemed to involve issues that could have been addressed earlier, especially given who the owner was and her investment in the community. She stated that other businesses had been far more troublesome and problematic, yet had not risen to this level, particularly not so soon. She expressed hope that their voices and logic would have an effect.

Ms. Margaret Boozer-Strother, 4000 block of 34<sup>th</sup> Street, stated that she had been a business owner in Mount Rainier since 2003 and that it was not easy to be a business owner. She emphasized that the City had a lot of vacant properties and that they had expressed a desire for businesses to come to the area. She stated that Heather's business was exactly the kind of business they wanted, someone who lived in the community, was responsible, an upstanding citizen, and invested in the neighborhood.

She noted that when pets were lost, people called Heather because she knew everyone and their pets, reuniting pets with their owners. She stated that it was an important business in the neighborhood, as people needed it to care for their pets while they worked. She said the community needed the business and questioned why a process could not be followed, as others had suggested, where they could sit down, talk, and work things out, instead of going from zero to one hundred and suddenly having a hearing.

She stated that she had not personally experienced this, but she had run into many situations where her first interaction felt like a slap instead of a handshake. She said she thought the City could do better and should not treat their valued citizens and businesses this way.

Mr. Derek Reynolds, 4000 block of 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, said that he did not know one hundred percent of the background regarding what had happened with this business. He said he understood there had been a noise complaint and that the City had apparently taken it to the County, with some rapid communication happening regarding the complaint. He stated that he had lived in the community for about eight years and that at almost every meeting he attended, he heard people complaining about the businesses at the traffic circle—being disruptive, having liquor licenses at 8 a.m., and all kinds of things happening downtown at the bus circle. Yet he said he had never heard of the City taking any of those issues to the County. He questioned whether he was missing something and why the City had never acted on the liquor stores, yet was now targeting another business that did not have any “drunk things” or disruptive behavior occurring.

He stated that he was confused why the community and the City were suddenly attacking this small business owner. He said he had been hearing for years that there was nothing the City could do about all the other businesses that people had complained about over the past eight years.

Mayor Celina Benitez stated that they had heard their concerns and that what limited what they could say at this time was that it was an active investigation. She stated that they had received a large number of documents that

needed to be reviewed. She explained that when they sometimes discussed businesses and licenses, it was largely handled by the County, not the City, as the County cleared most of the permits.

She noted that about four years ago, there had been a petition regarding a business that residents were upset with and wanted removed. She stated that the Council did not grant licenses, nor did it approve or dictate the hours certain businesses could operate. She said the City could request that residents take certain actions, but it was ultimately up to the residents what they chose to do, and the City was not the only outlet for complaints when residents were unhappy with certain issues. She stated that they would review the information and have a discussion with the team.

### **Second Reading and Adoption of Resolution No. 10-2025**

Motion to adopt Resolution No. 10-2025, Proclaiming December 10<sup>th</sup> as Human Rights Day  
Moved by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall  
Seconded by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir  
Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed

### **Vote on Approval of Minutes**

Motion to approve the minutes for:

- November 18, 2025, Special Legislative Meeting and Work Session
- December 2, 2025, Public Hearing and Legislative Meeting

Moved by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall  
Seconded by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta  
Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed

### **First Reading of Resolution No. 01-2026**

Mayor Celina Benitez read Resolution No. 01-2026, Authorizing Participation in the Prince George’s County Planning Assistance for Municipalities and Communities (PAMC) Strategic Action Plan Project.

**During the discussion, Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir made a point of order concerning a statement she noted as a disparagement, but no determination was made on the point of order.**

**Councilmember Danielle Carter made a motion to reconsider and hold a vote on N0. 01-2026. Councilmember Joseph Jakuta seconded the motion.**

**Mayor Benitez later stated that the motion was not following protocol, and Councilmember Danielle Carter then withdrew her motion to vote on Resolution No. 01-2026.**

### **Presentation of Minutes**

The City Clerk presented the December 16, 2025, Work Session Minutes to the Mayor and Council.

## **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:44 pm.

Motion to adjourn the meeting: Moved by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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**Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier**  
**Mayor and City Council Work Session**  
**January 20, 2026, Virtual Meeting**

**Call to Order**

7:00 pm

**Presiding Officer**

Mayor Celina Benitez

**Officials Present**

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall  
Councilmember Danielle Carter  
Councilmember Joseph Jakuta

**Officials Absent**

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir

**Staff Present**

City Manager Kourosch Kamali  
City Clerk Melissa Sam  
Media Production Coordinator Jared Alindogan

**Minutes provided by:**

City Clerk

**Reading of Agenda**

The agenda was read by Councilmember Valerie Woodall and was accepted with the removal of number 11, Discussion on Simple Resolution.

**Presentation and Discussion on Missing Middle Housing**

Ms. Karen Mierow and Mr. John Parks presented the following:

- What is Missing Middle Housing?
- Why is the lack of Missing Middle Housing in Prince George's County a Problem?
- What are the benefits of Missing Middle Housing?
- MMH Mission Statement

Motion to add 10 minutes Moved by Mayor Celina Benitez Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed
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Councilmember Danielle Carter asked what individual council members could do to help, especially in a community like Mount Rainier, which did not have many vacant real estate to encourage that kind of growth. Ms. Mierow stated that they had certainly heard all of those sentiments echoed by almost everyone they had talked to. Everyone had housing issues; they just experienced them at different stages of life. She said they could help by spreading the word, and the team would be happy to give the presentation to any other groups they worked with in Mount Rainier. Additionally, they could support the effort by attending planning board hearings, providing testimony, and participating in county council meetings.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta asked how increasing Missing Middle Housing could help a city with taxes and infrastructure. Mr. Parks stated that infill development of this type generally accomplished two items: (1) increasing the residential tax base, as new residents added to the local and county tax base, and (2) decreasing the tax burden for everyone in the area. He explained that most times, if there was a relatively strict tax population or taxable base, there was only a one-to-one replacement on that restrictive zoning or residential lot. As everyone knew, the cost of infrastructure only increased, which meant that local residents in those one-to-one replacements of single-family homes were faced with an increasing tax burden to pay for the rising escalation of infrastructure costs. That type of development brought density, which meant there was an increased number of people paying for infrastructure maintenance because there were house-scaled single-family homes formed into multi-unit dwellings.

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall asked whether there would be any report coming down from the state or county regarding opportunities for funding to support the development of Missing Middle Housing, noting that building smaller homes could be expensive and many developers might not be able to do that at such a small scale. Ms. Mierow stated that in the study she could not disclose everything because it was not finished, but they were exploring ways to creatively finance some of the projects. She noted that in other states, a specific Missing Middle Housing fund had been created, where money, perhaps from an impact fee, went into a fund to support the creation of Missing Middle Housing. Sometimes these programs were geared toward people earning 80 to 120 percent of the area median income, while eligibility for mortgages or other support could be lower for those at the lower end of the income scale.

Mr. Parks added that one benefit mentioned in the presentation was that, in many cases, the primary homeowner of an entire Missing Middle Housing structure could rent out units, allowing the rents from those units to be underwritten in a conventional mortgage. This structure created small-scale homeownership opportunities while also enabling housing providers to use the rents from other units to pay for the mortgage for the entire building. He noted that FHA had recently published guidelines on how to underwrite this type of ownership structure into conventional mortgages.

The Mayor and Council thanked Ms. Mierow and Mr. Parks for their presentation.

### **Presentation of Building Application for 3001 Taylor Street, Mount Rainier, Maryland**

The owner of the property explained the scope of the project.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta stated the following:

- The city had a noise ordinance (Code Section 10-121), construction activities were to be limited to 8 am to 8 pm to avoid violating it.

- There was a tree ordinance (Section 12B-7) that protected private trees measuring 56½ inches or more in circumference at 4½ feet above the ground. If any work was planned involving a tree of that size, even if it was in poor condition, Code Enforcement needed to be consulted. Additionally, any pruning needed to be reviewed in advance.
- Care should be taken when digging, moving, or grading soil to prevent stormwater from running into neighboring yards.
- When in doubt, the Code Compliance Director should be contacted.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta asked whether any work had been done prior. The owner clarified that if he had been referring to the tarp, it had been covering materials they had planned to use once they received the permits.

The Mayor and Council thanked the owner for the presentation and for the project.

### **Presentation and Discussion on Report from the Arts Commission**

The Arts Commission Team, Mr. John Deamond, Ms. Rebecca Solow and Ms. Kelenna James presented on the following:

- Who are we and why are we here?
- What is our Process?
- How did we choose this location?
- February 2025 Public Call Request for Artist Qualifications
- March 2025 Public Meeting to vote on Qualified Candidates
- The 3 Finalist
- High Quality Proposals
- Final Voting
- The Mural is Completed
- 3510 Mural Budget
- Was this Project a Success?
- What Else Have We Been Up To?
- Past Project
- Future Project: Big Banners
- Mock-ups
- Estimated Budget
- Future Project: Sculpture Program
- Future Projects: Traffic Circle
- Mock-ups

Motion to add 10 minutes  
 Moved by Mayor Celina Benitez  
 Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter  
 Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

- Overall Next Steps

Councilmember Danielle Carter asked about the mural on Eastern, noting that she thought it would have continued down the wall, and asked whether that was a plan for the future or if it had been scrapped and the reason behind it. Mr. Deamond stated that when the building owner and the owner of Station 3510

came to them with the idea, they had discussed extending the mural down that wall. Later in the process, they learned that the wall was not theirs. They had to track down who the wall belonged to, and that person reached out to them. They explained what the project was and indicated that, if the owner wanted the mural there, they could work on it. The owner did not get back to them. At the same time, the muralists and the contractor looked at the wall and stated that it needed work before a mural could be placed on it.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta asked which of the future project ideas would bring the most people on a regular basis from outside the community to visit the city. Ms. Solow stated that it would likely be the sculpture. She explained that physical objects people could walk around would be like a destination, and that the rotating nature of the sculpture would generate continued change and a sense of freshness, with opportunities to announce when it was changing. She noted that the banner idea created a certain vibe, while the sculptures created focal-point interest and served more as a destination.

Mayor Celina Benitez asked whether conversations had started with MUTC regarding the banners for the wall, noting that MUTC had very specific rules concerning banners placed on walls. She also asked whether insurance would be included for the sculpture project, referencing a past experience in which a previous sculpture in the City had been constantly hit by vehicles.

The Mayor and Council thanked Mr. Deamond, Ms. Solow, and Ms. James for the presentation, as well as the entire Arts Commission for the work they were doing for the City.

### **Discussion on Support for the “Help Us Stop The Landover Data Center” Community Outreach**

Mr. Joshua Ddamulira and Mr. Michael Lavina, members of the Party of Socialism and Liberation, explained the environmental and community impacts of such a large data center, including energy consumption equivalent to over a million homes, water pollution, and increased electricity bills for all residents sharing the same grid. The group requested support from the Mayor and Council through signing a community letter or passing a resolution opposing the data center and offered to partner on future educational panels.

Mayor Celina Benitez asked if they had a timeline for when the matter would be discussed by the County and whether they could assist with drafting a letter of support from the City. Mr. Lavina mentioned that they had been hosting bi-weekly community meetings and, in terms of the County Council, had been in contact with them in an effort to secure a meeting. He stated that there was supposed to be a meeting that day with the County Council regarding the task force report, but they believed the report was not covering the full spectrum. The meeting was canceled, and they were still waiting for it to be placed on the Council agenda. He stated that they would send the different draft documents they had prepared to the Mayor and Council.

The Mayor and Council thanked Mr. Ddamulira and Mr. Lavina for their presentation. The Mayor and Council also agreed to provide a letter of support.

### **Presentation and Discussion of the FY2026 Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Second Quarter Financial Report**

Mr. Ronald Wilson presented an overview of the expenditure through December 31, 2025, for the following departments:

- Mayor and Council
- City Hall
- Administrative Services

- Code Compliance
- Economic Development
- Police
- Public Works
- Other

Councilmember Danielle Carter asked whether, for the Potts Hall redevelopment, the monies that had been allotted last year had not been spent during the year, and the answer was yes.

The Mayor and Council thanked Mr. Kamali and Mr. Wilson for the presentation and for the work they were doing.

**Discussion on Resolution No. 05-2025, Appointing a New Resident Agent for the City of Mount Rainier**

The Mayor and Council discussed the resolution and noted the need to comply with the Council Rules and Procedures, which require items to be presented at a work session before being brought to a legislative meeting.

**Discussion on Resolution No. 06-2025, Designating a Public Information Act Representative for the City of Mount Rainier**

The Mayor and Council discussed the resolution and noted the need to comply with the Council Rules and Procedures, which require items to be presented at a work session before being brought to a legislative meeting.

Councilmember Danielle Carter asked whether it was possible to start the new legislative session with a work session instead of a legislative meeting in order to introduce new items that had been pending over the summer. She stated that she had previously made this proposal to begin the month with a work session and end the month with a legislative meeting.

**Discussion on Resolution No. 07-2025, Vice Mayor Rotation**

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta recommended three amendments to the resolution: that Councilmember Carter’s term would start at the end of the February legislative session and end at the February legislative session in 2027; that his term would be shortened because Ward 2 would have had a longer period of holding the Vice Mayor position; and that the gap in time between when the Vice Mayor position ended at the Council meeting prior to the one at which the next Vice Mayor’s term began would be amended.

The Mayor and Councilmembers Woodall and Carter expressed that they had not seen the document with the changes. Mr. Kamali explained that the City Attorney usually drafted resolutions for the City and that, when the amended resolution was received, the City Attorney was not available for him to consult with her. He emphasized the importance of sharing documents with the full Council to avoid confusion.

Motion to add 5 minutes  
 Moved by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta  
 Seconded by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall  
 Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed

The Mayor and Council were unable to reach a consensus on how to proceed with the amendments to the resolution.

**Presentation of Minutes**

The City Clerk presented the January 6, 2026, Legislative meeting minutes to the Mayor and Council.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:37 pm.

Motion to adjourn the meeting. Moved by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall Seconded by Mayor Celina Benitez Vote Recorded: 4-0-0, Motion Passed
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**Official Minutes of the City of Mount Rainier**  
**Mayor and City Council**  
**Legislative Meeting**  
**February 3, 2026, Virtual Meeting**

**Call to Order**

7:00 pm

**Presiding Officer**

Mayor Celina Benitez

**Officials Present**

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall

Councilmember Danielle Carter

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta

**Staff Present**

City Manager Kourosh Kamali

City Clerk Melissa Sam

Media Production Coordinator Jared Alindogan

**Minutes provided by:**

City Clerk

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

**Reading of Agenda**

The agenda was read by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall and accepted as presented.

**Mayor and Councilmember Event Announcements**

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir stated that the next Council work session would be held in person at Potts Hall.

Councilmember Danielle Carter reported the following:

- The CERT team would host a Bioterrorism and Weapons of Mass Destruction training on Monday, February 9, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers. She noted that the training had been rescheduled due to the weather event.
- The next CERT meeting would take place on Monday, February 26, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

- She thanked everyone who volunteered as a Snow Angel during the unprecedented and brutal weather event. She shared that the program began in the winter of 2024 with eight residents, grew to twelve participants the following year, and had expanded to twenty-one residents this year. As of that date, Snow Angels had assisted more than thirty-five residents throughout the City.
- She also thanked residents who assisted their neighbors and stated that moments like these demonstrated the strength of the community and made her even more proud to call Mount Rainier home.
- She noted that anyone interested in joining the Snow Angels program to assist residents could contact her via email at [dcarter@mountrainiermd.org](mailto:dcarter@mountrainiermd.org) or by phone at 240-539-2021.
- She announced that Thomas Stone Elementary School would host its Black History Month Showcase on Thursday, February 26, 2026, at 6:00 p.m.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta stated that the next Tree Commission meeting would be held on Thursday, February 12, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Mayor Celina Benitez read the upcoming events listed on the agenda and stated the following:

- Gateway CDC had several upcoming events and residents were encouraged to stay informed.
- She expressed her gratitude to the City Manager, Public Works Department, Police Department, and Code Enforcement for working tirelessly over the previous ten days to remove the snow and ice.
- She thanked the Fire and EMS departments for collaborating with the City to relocate the snow to other locations.
- She thanked county, state, and school partners for their collaboration and support in addressing the snow emergency.
- She also thanked residents who attended District 47 Night in Annapolis, hosted by Senator Augustine and Delegates Fennell, Ivey, and Taveras.

### **Presentation and Discussion on Legislative Update from Greenwill Consulting Group**

Mr. Jonathan Carpenter and Ms. Lesly Feliz presented updates on the following:

- Overview of the 2026 Maryland Legislative Session
- Legislative Priorities
- Bill advocacy updates

Councilmember Danielle Carter asked whether there had been any movement or developments regarding Senate Bill 255 on voters' rights and Senate Bill 49 concerning the rights of unhoused individuals and affirmative defense. Ms. Feliz stated that there had been a recent update on SB 255, noting that as of that day the bill had passed by the committee with amendments, and several senators had requested to be added as co-sponsors. She explained that the bill advanced to the floor but was laid over, meaning a senator requested that consideration be delayed until the next legislative day. Regarding SB 49, Ms. Feliz stated that she had not yet seen the bill come up for a vote but would check and follow up.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta stated that they might have been working from the positions of the previous Council and emphasized that it was important for the current Council to have input on which bills it did or did not support. He indicated that it would make the most sense to hold a discussion at the next Work Session regarding which bills the Council wished to lobby for or against. He asked whether providing documents after the Council's February Work Session would align with their timing. Ms. Feliz stated that this approach would work, but noted that the bottle bill was time-sensitive and scheduled for the following week; depending on

the date of the Work Session, they might not be able to act in time. Mr. Carpenter stated that they never advocated for or take a position on legislation that had not been directed by the Council.

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall stated that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) had approximately seventy-three million dollars going through the budget appropriation process, and noted that there might be additional funds available for other programs after the budget cycle through the normal grants process. She asked whether they knew how much funding was included in that allocation. Mr. Carpenter mentioned that the amount could change depending on where budget negotiations concluded. He stated that as they monitored and followed the process, they would report back on what DHCD was considering for its budget after the budget conference committee process.

Motion to add ten minutes  
Moved by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir  
Seconded by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta  
Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir stated that she knew MML and MACO often took strong positions on bills. She asked whether, in their experience during the current or previous sessions, the City of Mount Rainier had ever taken positions that were contrary to those of MML or MACO, and if so, whether they could provide an example. Mr. Carpenter stated that, in his thirty years of experience with Annapolis and legislation, he had learned that as a lobbyist his role was to communicate the position reported by the organization he worked for, even if he or the legislature did not personally agree with it. In such cases, he explained, they would rely on the Council and the City to provide guidance.

The Mayor and Council thanked Mr. Carpenter and Ms. Feliz for their update and for their work especially for the funding for Potts Hall/Welcome Center.

### **City Manager's Report**

City Manager, Kourosh Kamali presented on the following:

- Snow and Ice Cleanup Operation
- Weekly meeting with directors.
- FY27 Operating Budget and Capital Improvements
- Potts Hall/Welcome Center
- Installation of Stop Sign Enforcement Cameras, SS4A Grant Funding Project
- SS4A Grant Funding –
  - (1) High Visibility Crosswalks, Curb Ramp Improvement, and Speed Humps
  - (2) Sidewalk Maintenance
- Parking Enforcement Program
- 31<sup>st</sup> Street and Perry Street Green Street Project
- Installation of Solar Panels on the Five City Buildings
- Façade Improvements and Mural Projects
- Newton Street Green Infrastructure Improvements (Between 34<sup>th</sup> Street and 37<sup>th</sup> Street)
- Grant Activities

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta stated that some residents had expressed concerns that the snow emergency routes had not been cleared, noting that part of the problem was caused by parked cars. He asked how they could ensure that this did not happen again. Mr. Kamali responded that the emergency routes had been a priority and that snow removal began with those routes. He explained that, unfortunately, some residents had parked on the routes, and unless a state of emergency was declared, which would prohibit all parking in the area. He also asked the Council for any suggestions on how to address the problem.

Councilmember Danielle Carter stated that she had spoken with the Public Works Director from a city in Oregon, who suggested that someone from Public Works could attend the American Public Works Association (APWA) Snow Conference being held in Cleveland, Ohio, in April of this year. She also asked whether Mr. Kamali or someone from Toole Design Group would be presenting the final design for the 31st Street and Food Forest project. Mr. Kamali stated that he had attended similar conferences in Maryland and that it was not necessary to travel out of state. He noted that the Maryland Public Works Association hosts such conferences and that he had advised the Public Works Director to attend. Regarding the 31st Street and Food Forest project, he confirmed that the final design would be presented once it was completed.

Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir stated that she was confused as to why the City had not been enforcing the emergency road regulations by ticketing and towing vehicles. She also questioned the decision to postpone issuing fines to property owners responsible for clearing their sidewalks, noting that enforcement had been delayed twice and that it had been a week and a half since the snowfall. She stated that residents should have taken responsibility by that time. She acknowledged that some individuals had difficulty clearing their sidewalks and expressed sympathy for those situations. She noted that “Snow Angels” legislation would be introduced at the next Work Session to establish an official City program to assist homeowners or property owners who needed help. She added that issuing fines could help identify those who were unable to clear their sidewalks, while others were choosing not to comply, thereby creating a safety hazard. Mr. Kamali stated that the City had previously towed vehicles from emergency routes approximately six to seven years earlier, which had resulted in significant community outcry. He emphasized that such decisions had consequences and urged the Council, as the policy-making body, to reach a clear and unified decision so that City staff, including Public Works and Police, would not bear the burden of the decisions. Regarding extensions for residential single-family properties, Mr. Kamali stated that he had received requests from Councilmembers to grant extensions after the initial deadline had passed. He expressed concern about receiving conflicting direction and asked the Council to provide clear guidance in advance. He requested that once a decision was made, it be consistently supported by all members of the Council to avoid placing staff in a difficult position.

Councilmember Valerie Woodall suggested that the City could improve communication with residents by providing updates as conditions were unfolding. She stated that even brief messages, such as noting that roads were passable and advising residents to use caution, would help residents feel informed, engaged, and included in the cleanup process. She added that such communication would be helpful.

Mayor Celina Benitez mentioned regarding towing on emergency routes, prior towing efforts had resulted in significant community dissatisfaction, complaints of vehicle damage, and financial costs to the City. She cautioned that resuming towing could have legal and financial consequences and advised that any stricter

enforcement should be discussed publicly with full consideration of those impacts. Regarding the extensions for sidewalk clearing, the Mayor stated that due to the severity of the storm, additional time had been granted at the request of elected officials and residents. She noted that staff worked with the County to verify seniors and residents enrolled in assistance programs to avoid citing those awaiting help. She added that staff had faced some negative interactions while conducting enforcement.

The Mayor and Council expressed their appreciation to Mr. Kamali and the Public Works team for their efforts in the snow cleanup.

### **Proclamation in Recognition and Celebration of Black History Month**

Mayor Celina Benitez read the proclamation.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Mariette Largess, 3200 block of Shepherd Street, stated that she lived in Mount Rainier her whole life and remembered the city newsletter would announce all emergency snow routes at the start of winter. She knew someone who lived on one of the emergency routes and never received a notice to move their car. It seemed to be an issue of improving communication. She also thanked all the city employees who helped with ice and snow removal.

Ms. Monica McDowell-Harris, 4200 block of 28th Street, expressed appreciation for the city employees' efforts in the snow removal, specifically acknowledging the assistance of the Snow Angels who helped her. She noted the importance of snow emergency routes but mentioned that area still needed more assistance. She also expressed interest in becoming more involved in city activities and appreciated the opportunity to attend the meeting.

### **Second Reading and Adoption of Resolution No. 01-2026**

Motion to adopt Resolution No. 01-2026, Authorizing Participation in the Prince George's County Planning Assistance for Municipalities and Communities (PAMC) Strategic Action Plan Project  
Moved by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall  
Seconded by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir  
Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed

### **Discussion and Vote on Resolution No. 07-2025, Vice Mayor Rotation**

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta moved to approve Resolution No. 07-2025 as originally presented, and Councilmember Danielle Carter seconded the motion.

During discussion, Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir moved to amend the text of Resolution No. 07-2025 to match the second version that was in the legislative agenda package and displayed on the screen. Councilmember Joseph Jakuta seconded the motion. Mayor Celina Benitez stated that a motion and second were already on the floor, and another motion could not be considered until the first was resolved, as two motions could not be on the floor simultaneously.

A point of order was raised by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir, that the Vice Mayor Rotation was delivered to the City Clerk by the deadline on Wednesday, the amendment was submitted to the City Clerk on Friday.

However, it was properly included on the agenda. Mayor Celina Benitez requested clarification on the rule allegedly being violated and ultimately ruled that no procedural violation had occurred, declining the point of order.

Motion to add ten minutes Moved by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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Councilmember Joseph Jakuta amended his motion on Resolution No. 07-2025 to revise the text of the resolution to include Amendment 1.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta read the resolution with Amendment 1.

Motion to add ten minutes Moved by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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Motion to add ten minutes Moved by Councilmember Danielle Carter Seconded by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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A point of order was raised by Councilmember Jenny Hoffpauir alleging that the Mayor was violating Council rules and decorum under Article Five, Section D. Mayor Celina Benitez ruled that no violation had occurred and declined the point of order.

A subsequent point of order was raised by Councilmember Danielle Carter, referencing Robert's Rules of Order, §62:8 and asserting that if a chair ignored a valid point of order, a member may restate it and potentially put it to a vote. Mayor Celina Benitez requested identification of the specific rule violated and ruled against the point of order.

Motion to adopt the amended Resolution No. 07-2025, Vice Mayor Rotation (Amendment 1) Moved by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter Vote Recorded: 3-2-0, Motion Passed
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### **Vote on Approval of Minutes**

Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall moved a motion to approve the minutes as presented and it was seconded by Mayor Celina Benitez.

During discussion Councilmember Danielle Carter objected to the January 6 meeting minutes under First Reading of Resolution No. 10-2026, stating that although Council rules require only a synopsis, Robert's Rules of Order, §48:4-6 and §48:10 required that all main motions, motions bringing a question again before the assembly, and all points of order and appeals, whether sustained or lost, together with the Chair's rulings and the reasons for those rulings, be included in the minutes. She asserted that the minutes did not reflect that a motion to reconsider had been made and seconded, that the Mayor denied consideration of the motion, that debate occurred regarding its legality, or that the motion was withdrawn following extended debate without

conceding the legality. She moved that the January 6 minutes be rewritten to accurately reflect those actions. Mayor Celina Benitez stated that a motion was already on the floor and reminded members that two motions could not be considered simultaneously.

Councilmember Joseph Jakuta made a subsidiary motion to divide the question to consider the December 16 and January 6 minutes separately. With agreement from Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall and Mayor Celina Benitez, the minutes were divided into two separate votes.

Motion to add ten minutes Moved by Councilmember Danielle Carter Seconded by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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Motion to approve the minutes for December 16, 2025, Work Session Moved by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall Seconded by Mayor Celina Benitez Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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As the discussion continued on January 6, 2026, Legislative Minutes, Councilmember Joseph Jakuta made a subsidiary motion to lay the January 6, 2026, legislative meeting minutes on the table to allow edits to be considered at the next work session. Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall and Mayor Celina Benitez accepted the subsidiary motion.

Motion to add three minutes Moved by Councilmember Joseph Jakuta Seconded by Councilmember Danielle Carter Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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Motion to lay the January 6, 2026, legislative meeting minutes on the table to allow edits to be considered at the next work session Moved by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall Seconded by Mayor Celina Benitez Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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**Presentation of Minutes**

The City Clerk presented the January 20, 2026, Work Session Minutes to the Mayor and Council.

**Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 pm.

Motion to adjourn the meeting Moved by Councilmember Danielle Carter Seconded by Vice Mayor Valerie Woodall Vote Recorded: 5-0-0, Motion Passed
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