

**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

**APPROVED**  
**MARCH 3, 2026**

**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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