

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

APPROVED
MARCH 3, 2026

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 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
- 31st 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 34th Street and 37th 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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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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