



MINUTES

Richland City Council Regular Meeting
Tuesday, January 6, 2026
Richland City Hall ~ Council Chambers
625 Swift Boulevard

City Council Regular Meeting - 6:00 p.m.

Councilmember Richardson called the Council meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Welcome and Roll Call

Councilmember Richardson welcomed those in the audience and expressed appreciation for their attendance.

Attendance:	Councilmember Richardson	Present
	Councilmember Holten	Present
	Councilmember Jones	Present
	Councilmember Maier	Present
	Councilmember VanDyke	Present
	Councilmember Whitten	Present

Also present were City Manager Amundson, Deputy City Manager Schiessl, Assistant City Manager Florence, City Attorney Kintzley, Fire Chief Aust, Chief of Police Pilcher, Energy Services Director Whitney, Finance Director Allen, Parks & Public Facilities Director Waite, Development Services Director Rizzitiello, Human Resources Director Paulsen and City Clerk Rogers.

Pledge of Allegiance

Councilmember VanDyke led the Council and audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

COUNCILMEMBER JONES MOVED AND COUNCILMEMBER VANDYKE SECONDED THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PUBLISHED. MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Presentations

- Swearing-In of Councilmembers:
 - Pat Holten, Position No. 3 (Elected) 4-Year Term
 - Kurt Maier, Position No. 6 (Re-Elected) 4-Year Term
 - Ryan Whitten, Position No. 7 (Re-Elected) 2-Year Term

City Clerk Rogers administered the oath of office to councilmembers elected and re-elected into public office.

2. Selection of Mayor for 2026-2027

City Clerk Rogers opened the floor for nominations for the office of Mayor.

- Councilmember Whitten nominated Councilmember Richardson.
- Councilmember Maier nominated Councilmember Jones.

No additional nominations were made.¹ The following votes were cast:

- For Richardson: Holten, Jones, Maier, Richardson, VanDyke and Whitten.

Councilmember Richardson was re-elected to the office of Mayor for the 2026-2027 term by unanimous vote.

3. Selection of Mayor Pro Tem for 2026-2027

Mayor Richardson opened the floor for nominations for the office of Mayor Pro Tem.

- Councilmember Maier nominated Councilmember Jones.
- Councilmember Whitten nominated Councilmember VanDyke.

No additional nominations were made. The following votes were cast:

- For Jones: Jones and Maier.
- For VanDyke: Holten, Richardson, VanDyke and Whitten.

Councilmember VanDyke won the office of Mayor Pro Tem for the 2026-2027 term by a majority vote of 4-2.

4. New Hires & Retirements

A video featuring the new hires and retirees for December 2025 was played for the audience.

The City welcomed seven (7) new employees to the City of Richland in December 2025:

- Darius Bunch, Jr. - Police Officer, Police Division
- Marco Covarrubias - Police Officer, Police Division
- Andrea Henderson - Administrative Assistant II, SECOMM Operations

¹ City Clerk Rogers called on Councilmember Richardson during the nomination process because her call light remained illuminated from the start of the meeting; Richardson did not intend to make a nomination.

- Korbin Kavanagh - BCES Information Systems Manager, SECOMM Operations
- Jose Luera, Meter - Power & Protection Technician I, Systems Division
- Danae Sands - Payroll Specialist, Finance Division
- Ryan Steele - Parks & Recreation Assistant, Recreation Division

The City recognized two (2) employees who retired in December 2025:

- Battalion Chief James Hempstead retired after 40 years of service.
- Fire Chief Tom Huntington retired after 31 years of service.

Public Hearing

City Clerk Rogers read the Public Hearing and Public Comments procedures.

5. Proposed Amendments to Richland Municipal Code Title 23: Zoning Regulations related to Minimum Parking Requirements, Ordinance No. 2026-01

Mayor Richardson opened the open-record public hearing at 6:11 p.m.

- Francine Pierre-Saget, 104 Edgewood Drive – Ms. Pierre-Saget expressed support for the City's downtown couplet project and noted that significant planning has gone into improving the downtown area to create a true downtown district. She suggested that the City continue to build on this work by adopting equally forward-looking land use reforms.

Ms. Pierre-Saget referenced a parking study conducted by the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments and noted that the study recommended that the City of Richland completely repeal minimum parking requirements. Ms. Pierre-Saget also mentioned an additional parking study commissioned by the City in the prior year. She emphasized that because the analyses were funded by taxpayers, the City has a responsibility to give due consideration to their recommendations.

- Lora Rathbone, 538 Fuller Street, Richland – Ms. Rathbone spoke in support of reconsidering minimum parking requirements. She encouraged policies that promote walking and biking and expressed support for incorporating additional shade in areas where parking is provided.
- Francesca Maier, 2146 Hudson Avenue, Richland – Mrs. Maier stated that the minimum parking requirements presented include both legally required changes and optional policy choices, ranging from eliminating parking minimums in the downtown core and portions of the waterfront district to abolishing parking requirements citywide. She encouraged Council to follow the national trend toward eliminating parking minimums citywide to maximize productive use of city land and allow developers to determine appropriate parking based on use. She also supported the proposed bicycle parking standards, noting that secure bike parking is essential and affects where residents choose to shop and travel.

No other testimony was offered. Mayor Richardson closed the public hearing at 6:18 p.m.

Public Comments

The following individuals provided public comments:

- Jon Irvahn, Richland resident, voiced concerns over the construction of data centers in the community, noting that data centers have had negative impacts, including increased residential utility costs, despite prior assurances. Mr. Irvahn urged Council to conduct additional research before making a decision on data center impacts on the community.
- Colleen Spadoni, Richland resident, raised concerns about pitbulls and other dangerous dogs in the City, and proposed that the City reinstate its regulations requiring animal registration to mitigate issues associated with owning aggressive breeds. Ms. Spadoni also recognized Law Enforcement Appreciation Week.
- Nathaniel Davis, Richland resident, cautioned Council about supporting the construction of data centers and encouraged them to explore opportunities to maximize long-term revenue. He then commented on the need for action to address the trash heap at 2100 Pullen.
- Michelle Livingood, Richland resident, spoke against the construction of data centers within city limits, and provided examples of impacts on communities.
- Donna Davis, Richland resident, spoke against the construction of data centers within city limits.
- Anthony Ambrose, Kennewick resident, spoke against the construction of data centers and urged Council to consider their long-term effects within the community.

Consent Calendar

City Clerk Rogers read the Consent Calendar.

Minutes

6. Approval of the December 16, 2025 City Council Regular Meeting Minutes

Ordinances - First Reading

None.

Ordinances - Second Reading & Passage

7. Ordinance No. 2025-40, Approving the 2029 Council Compensation Plan

8. Ordinance No. 2025-41, Rezoning Approximately 29 Acres located at Parcel No. 1-2098-100-0002-004 from Suburban Agriculture (SAG) to Low Density Residential (R-1-10)
9. Ordinance No. 2025-42, Rezoning Approximately 58.39 Acres located at Parcel Nos. 1-3498-201-0595-005, 1-3498-200-0005-007, and 1-3498-200-0008-000 from Agriculture (AG) to Medium-Density Residential - Small Lot (R-2S) and Retail Business (C-2)

Resolutions – Adoption

10. Resolution No. 2026-01, Authorizing an Option Agreement with Pahlisch Homes, Inc. for 90.53 Acres of Real Property located at 2851 Twin Bridges Road
11. Resolution No. 2026-02, Authorizing a Lease Agreement with Gee-Way Development Company, L.L.C. for Commercial Office Space to support Richland Fire & Emergency Services
12. Resolution No. 2026-03, Authorizing Application and Acceptance for a Washington State Home Electrification and Appliance Rebates Program Grant
13. Resolution No. 2026-04, Authorizing Application and Acceptance of Professional Development Grants from the Washington State Library
14. Resolution No. 2026-05, Authorizing a Five-Year Cooperative Service Agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture for Wildlife Damage Management at the Horn Rapids Landfill

Items - Approval

None.

Expenditures – Approval

None.

COUNCILMEMBER WHITTEN MOVED AND MAYOR PRO TEM VANDYKE SECONDED THE MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PUBLISHED. THOSE IN FAVOR: MAYOR RICHARDSON, MAYOR PRO TEM VANDYKE, AND COUNCILMEMBERS HOLTEN, JONES, MAIER AND WHITTEN. THOSE OPPOSED: NONE. MOTION CARRIED 6-0.

Items of Business

15. Ordinance No. 2026-01, Amending Richland Municipal Code Title 23: Zoning Regulations related to Minimum Parking Requirements

With the aid of a PowerPoint Presentation, Development Services Director Rizzitiello presented on the proposed amendments to Title 23 of the Richland Municipal Code related to minimum parking requirements. The ordinance implements recent state legislation and eliminates all minimum off-street parking requirements within the Central Business District (CBD) and Columbia Point North Waterfront District. The changes are intended to bring the City's zoning code into compliance with state law while supporting redevelopment by reducing development costs and encouraging infill development in targeted areas.

Development Services Director Rizzitiello provided an overview of the Parking Optimization Project, including a consultant analysis conducted by Kimley-Horn & Associates, public and stakeholder engagement efforts, advisory recommendations, and evaluation of industry best practices.

The consultant's analysis outlined three (3) potential approaches for implementing state-mandated parking reforms. Following review and discussion at a City Council workshop meeting on July 22, 2025, staff advanced the option recommending elimination of minimum parking requirements within the CBD and Columbia Point North Waterfront District.

Council was advised that, in addition to implementing the mandatory provisions of ESSB 5184 and SSB 6015, the ordinance includes related code updates. These amendments consist of revised zoning definitions, consolidated and clarified parking tables, enhanced bicycle parking standards, allowance for alternative parking configurations, and technical updates to parking design and dimensional standards.

The Richland Planning Commission conducted public hearings on September 24, 2025 and December 10, 2025, and recommended approval of the ordinance, including the elimination of minimum off-street parking requirements within the CBD and Columbia Point North. The Commission also recommended that additional study be conducted prior to considering elimination of minimum parking requirements on a citywide basis.

The Economic Development Committee reviewed the proposal on December 1, 2025, and recommended implementation of the state-mandated reforms to ensure compliance with state law.

Following the presentation, Council engaged in an in-depth discussion and question and answer session with staff regarding the scope of implementation, the recommendations of the advisory bodies, and the ordinance's alignment with state law and long-range planning objectives.

Mayor Richardson expressed appreciation for the overall process, noting that while change in government can be slow and at times frustrating, the deliberative approach taken in this case was valuable. She emphasized the importance of the thoughtful input provided by both the Planning Commission and the Economic Development Committee, and commended the seriousness and care with which members of both groups

approached the issue.

COUNCILMEMBER MAIER MOVED AND COUNCILMEMBER WHITTEN SECONDED THE MOTION TO APPROVE ORDINANCE NO. 2026-01, AMENDING RICHLAND MUNICIPAL CODE TITLE 23: ZONING REGULATIONS RELATED TO MINIMUM PARKING REQUIREMENTS, FOR FIRST READING. THOSE IN FAVOR: MAYOR RICHARDSON AND COUNCILMEMBERS HOLTEN, JONES, MAIER AND WHITTEN. THOSE OPPOSED: MAYOR PRO TEM VANDYKE. MOTION CARRIED 5-1.

Reports and Comments

City Manager

City Manager Amundson welcomed Councilmember Holten to the City Council, congratulated Councilmembers Maier and Whitten on their re-election, and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to continue working collaboratively with Council as a whole.

He then outlined the process and anticipated timeline for filling the current vacancy in Council Position No. 4, including the recruitment period and expected appointment at a City Council special meeting scheduled for January 27, 2026.

City Manager Amundson also informed Council that the 2026 Legislative Session will begin on January 12, 2026, and that he, Deputy City Manager Schiessl, and three (3) councilmembers will travel to Olympia on Wednesday, January 21, 2026 to meet with state legislators to advocate for the City's adopted legislative priorities.

In closing, City Manager Amundson announced that all city facilities will be closed to the public on Monday, January 19, 2026 for the annual staff in-service day.

City Council

Councilmember Maier referenced public comments regarding aggressive dogs and stated that he has heard similar concerns from other residents. He suggested that the City consider reviewing its ordinances related to dangerous or aggressive animals. He expressed interest in exploring opportunities to strengthen protections for residents, and encouraged Council to evaluate whether the City's regulatory approach to animal control could be improved.

Councilmember Maier also addressed public comments regarding data centers, stating that many concerns were not focused on the facilities themselves, but on their impacts on surrounding neighborhoods and the environment. He stated that while he does not believe it is in the City's best interest to prohibit data centers outright, he does believe the City has a responsibility to strictly regulate their operations. He referenced issues such as water use, electrical demand, noise, backup power systems, and cooling technologies, noting that these impacts can be addressed through operational requirements, such as

closed-loop cooling systems and enforceable noise limits. He emphasized that the rapid pace of data center development creates urgency, as companies are moving quickly to capitalize on current market conditions. He encouraged Council to consider timely zoning or regulatory updates to mitigate the most significant impacts before construction begins.

Councilmember Whitten welcomed Councilmember Holten to the City Council. He then concurred with Councilmember Maier's concerns regarding stray and loose dogs. He expressed support for measures that would strengthen accountability for pet owners.

Councilmember Whitten also expressed concerns relating to the proposed development of data centers. As Council liaison to the Utility Advisory Committee, he acknowledged awareness of the state's current and projected energy capacity, which he identified as one of his primary concerns. He cautioned that the introduction of multiple energy-intensive data centers without corresponding increases in available power could place a strain on the electrical system.

While acknowledging that such facilities may not fall within the same energy tier currently serving Richland residents, he stated that it cannot be definitely concluded that they would have no impact on energy rates without confirmation from Bonneville Power Administration. Councilmember Whitten stated that Council has several options and a responsibility to carefully evaluate proposals to ensure that residents are protected and that the benefits of data center development serve the community as well as the investors.

In closing, Councilmember Whitten stated that the City is actively working to address issues related to the property located at 2100 Pullen Street, and other associated residences owned by the same individual. He emphasized that the City is taking steps not only to mitigate the current situation but also to prevent similar issues in the future.

Councilmember Jones wished everyone a Happy New Year.

Mayor Pro Tem VanDyke stated that animal control and concerns related to aggressive animal behavior have been a recurring issue and would benefit from additional discussion in a workshop meeting. He emphasized the need to review historical data and recent operational changes to identify gaps, understand current risks, and determine what improvements can be made.

He then noted that a comprehensive risk review would be appropriate as the City continues development discussions in North Richland related to data centers. Mayor Pro Tem VanDyke emphasized that these projects carry inherent risks and stressed the need to fully understand existing legislative requirements, regulatory frameworks, and contractual provisions to determine what actions the City should take to responsibly mitigate risk.

Mayor Pro Tem VanDyke concluded by sharing his appreciation for the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce. He commended the Chamber for its effective leadership and the positive impact it continues to have on the community.

Councilmember Holten stated it is an honor to serve on the Richland City Council, and emphasized her deep appreciation and optimism for its future. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to work alongside fellow councilmembers and indicated that she looks forward to serving the community in this capacity.

She also addressed public concerns related to aggressive dogs, sharing that she has personally experienced an incident involving a dog attack, which provides her with a strong understanding of and sensitivity to issues involving aggressive animals.

Councilmember Holten also acknowledged concerns related to certain highly visible nuisance properties in the City and affirmed her commitment to doing what she can to help resolve the issues.

Mayor

Mayor Richardson advised councilmembers that there may be adjustments to seat assignments and invited them to share any preferences in advance. She also noted that liaison assignments would be addressed in the coming weeks. Additionally, Mayor Richardson acknowledged concerns raised by a fellow councilmembers regarding animal control services. She expressed an interest in receiving more information on the current requirements, the City's partnership with other jurisdictions, and in evaluating whether there are areas where services could be strengthened to better meet the needs of residents and the community.

Mayor Richardson reported that she has received multiple emails from community members regarding the proposed data center, many of which echoed concerns previously raised. She emphasized the importance of identifying specific, measurable issues that warrant attention and that can be clearly substantiated prior to entering into a purchase and sale agreement.

In conclusion, Mayor Richardson proposed a change in terminology related to the City's legislative priorities. She explained that the term "nuclear," as used in resolutions and in related public-facing materials, often creates an immediate barrier to productive dialogue, particularly with stakeholders on the west side of the state. To foster more constructive conversations, she proposed replacing the term "nuclear" with "advanced energy manufacturing" to better support outreach and dialogue during the upcoming legislative session.

Council deliberated on the proposal and recognized the value of using terminology that broadens the conversation to include multiple energy technologies and related infrastructure. At the same time, councilmembers expressed caution about making sweeping changes without coordination, noting the City's longstanding connection to the nuclear industry and the importance of maintaining aligned messaging with regional partners and organizations. The discussion indicated support for beginning with a limited, practical application rather than implementing a permanent, across-the-board change.

Councilmembers also discussed potential refinements to the proposed wording, including whether “advanced energy” would be a more appropriate term than “advanced energy manufacturing,” and emphasized the need to clearly define any new terminology to avoid unintended interpretations.

The overall consensus supported further coordination, refinement, and targeted use of revised language.

In response to the concerns regarding mitigating risks associated with data centers, City Manager Amundson informed Council that the City is in the process of retaining qualified outside expertise to assist with developing appropriate regulations to address the issues raised. He emphasized that the concerns are being taken seriously and that work is underway to ensure they are thoughtfully and effectively addressed.

Executive Session

16. Executive Session Per RCW 42.30.110(1)(i): Discuss Current or Potential Litigation with Legal Counsel (45 minutes)

At 7:23 p.m., Mayor Richardson announced that Richland City Council would convene in executive session for forty-five (45) minutes to discuss current or potential litigation with legal counsel. A brief transition from the Council Chambers to the executive session room occurred, with the executive session beginning at 7:30 p.m.

Present with Council for the executive session were City Manager Amundson, Deputy City Manager Schiessl, Assistant City Manager Florence, City Attorney Kintzley, and Chief of Police Pilcher.

Council exited the executive session at 8:15 p.m. No action was taken after the executive session concluded.

Adjournment

Mayor Richardson adjourned the meeting at 8:15 p.m.

APPROVED:



Theresa Richardson, Mayor

ATTEST:



Jennifer Rogers, City Clerk

DATE APPROVED: January 20, 2026

DATE PUBLISHED: January 21, 2026