



# City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes

680 Park Avenue  
Idaho Falls, ID 83402

Friday, March 6, 2026

12:00 PM

City Council Chambers

## Call to Order and Roll Call

There were present:

Mayor Lisa Burtenshaw

Councilor Michelle Ziel-Dingman

Councilor Kirk Larsen

Councilor John Radford

Council President Jim Francis

Councilor Jim Freeman

Councilor Brandon Lee (Arrived at 12:07)

Also present:

Pam Alexander, Municipal Services Director

Zack Jones, City Attorney

Brooks Slyter, Assistant Finance Manager

Emily Geisler, City Clerk

Mayor Burtenshaw called the meeting to order at 12:04 p.m. with the following items:

## Mayor - Welcome, Announcements, Plans for the Day

Mayor Burtenshaw welcomed everyone to the meeting and handed out some documentation that would help later in the meeting.

## City Council, Mayor, Finance - Roundtable Discussion: Budget Assumptions & Expectations, Budget Status/Constraints, Budget Calendar

- Director Alexander and Brooks Slyter presented a financial review and early budget assumptions for the upcoming fiscal year, outlining current financial performance, major projects, and potential budget pressures.
- Fire Department finances were a major discussion point. An EMS budget overage of about \$1.2 million occurred, largely due to staffing costs and operational changes. The overage was covered using the EMS fund balance, reducing reserves. Council also discussed concerns about hiring decisions being made earlier than expected without full Council review, highlighting communication gaps between departments, HR, and Council liaisons.
- The City is tracking several major grants and capital projects, including:
  - The North Fire Station construction and opening
  - Airport terminal expansion and apron improvements (with additional federal funding)
  - Frontier Center upgrades
  - Park irrigation conversions
  - Electric vehicle charging stations
  - Transportation and sidewalk projects through state grants
  - Implementation of a new ERP system for finance and HR
- Additional infrastructure projects included a new peaking power plant, water tower construction, wastewater treatment expansion, and a new police shooting range.
- Staff reported declining permit and impact fee revenues, currently about one-third of last year's level, likely due to slower construction activity and economic uncertainty.

- The City has shifted some costs between funds in recent years, including moving streetlights and traffic signals to Power, street sweeping to Sanitation, and certain property maintenance costs to enterprise funds. Staff will evaluate whether these changes are working as intended.
- Public safety overtime remains a financial risk due to court appearances, training, and staffing shortages.
- The City is also monitoring the state's Homeowner Property Tax Reduction program, which lowers local property taxes but depends on continued state funding.
- The Fire Department expects \$600,000–\$1 million in GEMT Medicaid reimbursements, though only \$600,000 was budgeted. Because the program's future is uncertain, the department plans to use the funds mainly for equipment purchases rather than ongoing operations.
- Staff reviewed major debt obligations, including:
  - About \$2 million annually for the police complex bond
  - About \$5.3 million annually for power revenue bonds
  - About \$1 million annually for a wastewater DEQ loan
- Other ongoing obligations include fire equipment leases (~\$300,000 annually), police vehicle leases (~\$1.5 million annually), and repayment for golf course irrigation improvements and fiber network expansion.
- For the upcoming budget, there were several key financial assumptions proposed:
  - A 3% property tax increase (about \$1.5 million) to cover salary and benefit increases
  - About \$500,000 in growth and annexation revenue for potential new initiatives
  - Possible use of foregone property tax capacity, though Council has not yet decided whether to use it.
- Personnel and benefits assumptions include:
  - Standard step increases for employees
  - A projected 2% COLA for most employees
  - About 6% wage increases for Power Department union employees depending on negotiations
  - Estimated 5% health insurance increase and 10% dental insurance increase
  - A 3.5% buffer for potential PERSI retirement changes
- The City negotiated a 4.7% health insurance premium increase for one year, avoiding larger increases while keeping employees on the same insurance plan and provider network, which minimized disruption.
- Council discussed several upcoming budget and policy issues, including:
  - Staffing the North Fire Station, which will eventually require 9–12 additional firefighters
  - The future of animal control services
  - Whether streetlight and traffic signal costs should remain in the Power fund or return to the General Fund.
- The City also reviewed remaining funds from the police complex bond project.
  - About \$950,000 is being used for the police shooting range.
  - Roughly \$680,000 remains available, which Council may keep invested, use for one-time projects, or potentially apply toward early debt repayment in the future.
- A significant gap in long-term capital replacement funding was emphasized.
  - The City budgets well for vehicles and major equipment, but lacks consistent funding for building systems, roofs, parking lots, and periodic equipment replacements.
- Finance staff are compiling a Citywide inventory of assets and replacement timelines to determine how much money should be set aside annually to avoid large emergency purchases.
- Council also discussed the snow removal budget, noting about \$400,000 was unspent this year due to mild winter conditions. The City already has a \$1 million snow reserve, so Council may decide how to allocate the surplus.
- Councilmembers raised concerns that infrastructure maintenance—especially roads and buildings—may already be underfunded, reflecting a broader issue for many Idaho local governments.



# City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes

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- Some noted that residents may currently benefit from lower taxes partly because maintenance and capital replacement have been deferred, which can lead to larger costs later.
- It was emphasized that the workshop was intended to identify financial trends and planning needs, not signal an immediate fiscal crisis.

- City Council, Mayor Finance - Discussion: Review and Evaluate Council & Department Priorities

## 1. Parks, Recreation, and Zoo Development

- **Zoo Funding & Expansion:** The Council has debated how much funding to dedicate to the zoo versus other community projects. The zoo receives higher proportions of City funding than comparable cities to meet AZA accreditation standards and ensure proper animal care. Residents have questioned the level of investment, but maintaining quality is a priority.
- **Adventure Island & Community Facilities:** Discussions included whether to prioritize the zoo, a community center, or both. There is a desire to pursue multiple projects without choosing one over the other.
- **Splash Pads & Neighborhood Parks:** Expansion of splash pads is planned to improve access across the City. Lovejoy/Bel-Air Park is considered a prime location, particularly serving low-to-moderate income neighborhoods, with potential funding from Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). Lessons from existing splash pads emphasize cost-effective replication rather than custom design.
- **HK Pit Site:** Potential for recreational use, including ballfields, water-based recreation (kayaks, paddleboarding), and connection to master park plans. Development timelines are contingent on current HK operations and funding availability.
- **Master Plan Management:** The Council emphasized the need to review and refine master plans for parks and recreation before committing funds to projects like roundabouts (in parks), trails, and water features. Some projects (like playground equipment replacement) are already ongoing.

## 2. Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) & Impact Fees

- The City has completed a strong impact fee study and continues to work on standardized capital planning forms. The goal is to ensure capital plans meet or exceed the requirements of the impact fee study.
- Projects funded through the CIP and Greenbelt CIP, including roadwork and park infrastructure, will require contracted services, not just City staff.

## 3. River & Greenbelt Planning

- The River Plan is in early stages, focusing on signage, safety, and developing a committee to coordinate with the county. Opportunities include:
  - Canoeing, kayaking, paddleboarding
  - Potential fishery restoration of tributaries like Willow Creek and Sand Creek
  - Heritage Park and island connectivity via bridges
  - RFPs for private entities to propose recreational river uses
- Greenbelt maintenance funding exists, and looped signage systems are being installed for trail guidance.
- River and greenbelt initiatives are interdepartmental, requiring coordination between planning, public works, and parks departments.

## 4. Sustainability & Landscaping

- **Recycling & Composting:** The City is exploring joint recycling and compost programs with neighboring cities like Pocatello.



# City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes

680 Park Avenue  
Idaho Falls, ID 83402

- Streetscape Improvements: Low-cost enhancements (drip irrigation, trees, minimal rock landscaping) along key corridors like Yellowstone Highway are being piloted. Large-scale landscaping projects are cost-prohibitive, so the City focuses on scalable, maintainable solutions.

## 5. Community Policing & Public Safety

- Trust-building is central to community policing. Initiatives include:
  - Four-beat system for neighborhood engagement
  - Citizens Police Academy offered in Spanish
  - Police Night Out events in central locations to improve accessibility
  - Community outreach and proactive engagement by bilingual officers
- Legislative changes could impact trust and operations, such as bills requiring local involvement in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) administrative warrants.
- Emphasis on using local police for sensitive operations (traffic control, crowd management) to ensure safety and preserve community trust.

## 6. Code Enforcement & Community Standards

- Code enforcement remains a priority for maintaining a welcoming, attractive City.
- Key actions:
  - Proactive monitoring of sidewalks, arterials, and snow removal
  - Educating residents about responsibilities for sidewalks, parking lots, and trees
  - Seasonal messaging campaigns to enhance compliance
  - Potential volunteer “neighborhood captains”, inspired by Boise’s Tree Captain program, to assist with monitoring and education
- Coordination across police, parks, and public works maximizes efficiency while maintaining community standards.

## 7. Fire & Emergency Services

- Priorities include:
  - Collaboration with the regional fire district
  - Maintaining and expanding the regional training center
- Staffing challenges exist, with budgeted positions not fully filled.

## 8. Travel, P-Card, and Mileage Policies

- Council is reviewing travel reimbursement policies, including P-card usage, per diem, and mileage, to align with federal standards while maintaining employee safety (personal cars preferred over rentals for long trips).
- Updates are recognized as complex and time-intensive, and will follow after more immediate priorities.

## Key Themes Across All Initiatives

- Community-first approach: Projects emphasize accessibility, trust, and engagement.
- Practical planning & fiscal responsibility: Focus on phased, manageable development, pilot projects, and replication of proven models.
- Interdepartmental collaboration: Parks, public works, police, and planning work together on overlapping priorities.
- Long-term vision with adaptability: Master plans, river, and greenbelt initiatives are flexible to allow for phased development and public input.
- Volunteer and neighborhood involvement: Programs like tree captains and neighborhood engagement support enforcement, education, and stewardship.



# City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes

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There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:04 PM.

/s/ Emily Geisler  
Emily Geisler, City Clerk

/s/ Lisa Burtenshaw  
Lisa Burtenshaw, Mayor



# BUDGET EXPECTATIONS & ASSUMPTIONS

Friday March 6, 2026



# Discussion Roadmap

## ■ Background

- FY2024-25 Performance

- FY2025-26

  - Grants & Projects

  - Watch Spots

- Obligations

  - Debt

  - Leases

  - Internal Obligations

## ■ FY2026-27 Assumptions

- Property Tax Revenue

- Personnel

- Areas of Note

Background



# FY2024-25 Performance

## ■ Revenues

- Zoo Revenues Increased \$200K - Under budget (\$460K)
  - Need to Right-size Budget
- Interest Earnings \$500K over budget
- Property Tax Late Fees & Interest \$800K

## ■ Expenditures

- Fire (\$150K)/EMS (\$1.2M) Overbudget-Overtime & Personnel
- Personnel Vacancy & Turnover Savings

# FY2025-26 Grants

- ARPA
  - Police Bearcat
  - Frontier Center
  - N Fire Station
  - Surface Water Conversions
- Roadways, Trails, & Sidewalks
- Airport Terminal Expansion
- Commercial Meter Conversion
- Power Electric Vehicle Charging Stations

# FY2025-26 Additional Large Projects

- ERP Implementation
- Peaking Plant
- Water Tower
- Wastewater Treatment Expansion
- Police Shooting Range
- Fire/EMS Storage Facility
- Sanitation/Street Administration Facility
- Water Administration Facility
- Water Commercial Meter Conversion

# FY2025-26 Watch Spots

- Permit & Impact Fee Revenues down
- Governmental Services Charged Directly to Enterprise Funds
  - Parks Maintenance to Power
  - Street Lights & Traffic Signals to Power
  - Street Sweeping to Sanitation
- Power FERC Maintenance Repayment
- Public Safety Overtime
- Timing of Homeowner Tax Reduction (HTR) & Property Tax Reduction (PTR/Circuit Breaker for limited income)
- EMS GEMT Funding

# Ongoing Debt Obligations

- Debt Annual Payments
  - Police Complex COP Bond \$2.0 million
  - Power Revenue Bonds
    - 2021 Transmission \$1.5 million
    - 2024 Power Supply \$3.8 million
  - Wastewater DEQ Loan \$1.1 million

# Ongoing Lease Obligations

- Lease Annual Payments
  - Police vehicles \$1.5 million
  - Fire equipment \$0.3 million

# Ongoing & New Internal Obligations

- Golf Irrigation MERF Replenishment \$300K+ annual payment (4.5yrs left)
- Fiber to Power \$19.2 million + interest
- **New** – ERP Implementation Repayment Allocation to Wastewater

# FY2026-27 Assumptions



# FY2026-27 Revenue Assumptions

- Property Taxes
  - 3% allowable ~\$1.5 million – for personnel & benefits
  - Growth & Annexation ~\$525K – hold for new requests
  - Forgone Option
    - 1% for operations ~\$525K
    - 3% one-time for Capital Projects ~\$1.5 million

# FY2026-27 Baseline Personnel Assumptions

- Step & Grade Wage Increases (Performance Based)
- Power 6% Market Adjustment
- All other employees 2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)
- Insurance increase
  - Health 5.0% (negotiated 4.7%)
  - Dental 10% (TBD)
- PERSI 3.5% (TBD)

# FY2026-27 Areas of Note

- Staffing N Fire Station
- Use of Impact Fees
- COP Police Complex Excess Funding \$680K
- Animal Control
- Street Lights & Traffic Returning from Power
- Capital Replacement to preserve existing services
  - Infrastructure (Golf Irrigation, Parking Lots etc.)
  - Buildings (Restrooms, Roofs, etc.)
  - Equipment & Vehicles (MERF & other - e.g. Ballistic Shields, Basketball Hoops, Bleachers, etc.)

# Questions

