

## WHITEFISH CITY COUNCIL

February 17, 2026

7:10 P.M.

### 1) CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Muhlfeld called the meeting to order. Councilors present were Qunell, Feury, Caltabiano, Davis, Sweeney, and Norton. City Staff present were, City Clerk Howke, City Manager Meeker, City Attorney Jacobs, Finance Director Gospodarek, Planning and Building Director Taylor, Public Works Director Workman, Parks and Recreation Director Butts, Police Chief Kelch, Fire Chief Hadley and Community Services Coordinator Belski. Approximately 40 people were in the audience and 6 people attended virtually.

### 2) PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Muhlfeld asked Rachel Schmidt to lead the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 3) PROCLAMATION ([YouTube Video 1:45](#))

- a) [A Proclamation](#) Supporting Solidarity With The City And Citizens Of Minneapolis, Minnesota, And Reaffirming Support Of A Just, Equal And Welcoming Community (p.381)

Mayor Muhlfeld read the proclamation that is provided in the packet on the website. He also mentioned that five of the six councilors are in support of the proclamation. Councilor Sweeney said he is grateful the city is taking a stand and believes it's important for local communities to speak out against what happened in Minnesota and reject that kind of injustice anywhere. Councilor Qunell thanked the mayor for the chance to reaffirm his oath, saying recent events show constitutional rights are being ignored across the country, not just in Minnesota, and it's important for leaders to stand up for those rights. Councilor Norton suggested sending the proclamation to the mayor of Minneapolis as a gesture of support, noting Whitefish has faced hate incidents too. She said this is a pivotal moment in history and leaders must take it seriously.

Councilor Caltabiano explained that while he agrees that any loss of life is tragic and supports civil rights and human dignity, he did not support the proclamation because he believes it goes beyond the council's proper role. He said the mayor can issue proclamations, but the council is a legislative body responsible for local governance, not national issues outside its jurisdiction. Taking official positions on matters they cannot oversee creates expectations they cannot fulfill. He emphasized that the council can still treat everyone in Whitefish with dignity while staying focused on its local responsibilities.

### 4) COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC— (This time is set aside for the public to comment on items that are either on the agenda, but not a public hearing or on items not on the agenda. City officials do not respond during these comments but may respond or follow up later on the agenda or at another time. The mayor has the option of limiting such communications to three minutes depending on the number of citizens who want to comment and the length of the meeting agenda)

([YouTube Video 11:36](#))

Keegan Siebenaler, 306 Lupfer Avenue, Executive Director of Shelter WF said the draft land-use plan is fundamentally off-track because it effectively downzones much of the city, reducing housing capacity in many areas while relying on only a few sites to absorb roughly 1,500 future units—an outcome he believes is unrealistic and will push growth into sprawl and annexation. He argued this contradicts the growth policy's goals for multimodal transportation, open-space protection, downtown vitality, and infill. Shelter WF believes most new housing should be built within a mile of downtown and that every property owner should have the chance to create workforce housing. He said the current plan concentrates dramatic change in only

a couple areas while leaving most neighborhoods untouched, which is the opposite of balanced planning, and urged significant revisions.

Rachel Schmidt, Executive Director of Safe Trails Whitefish, thanked the council for their Minnesota proclamation and gave a brief update on the Riverlakes City Park and trail planning. After a successful stakeholder meeting, they are hosting an open house on March 3–4 at North Valley Music School from 7–8 p.m. for the public to review maps, share ideas, and help shape the future of the park.

Richard Hildner, 104 5<sup>th</sup> Street, thanked the mayor for issuing the proclamation supporting Minneapolis and reaffirming citizens' rights to peacefully speak out. He said silence isn't an option when civil and human rights are threatened and reminded the council of past moments when Whitefish publicly stood against hate. He praised the mayor's leadership and courage in continuing that tradition.

Rhonda Fitzgerald, 512 Lupfer Avenue, thanked the mayor for the proclamation supporting Minneapolis and said "Not In Our Town" remains an important guiding message for the community. She expressed pride in living in a town where the council takes such actions and thanked each council member for doing so.

Scott Wurster, 222 Montana Avenue, Scott thanked the mayor for the proclamation and said he was glad to share it with his sister-in-law in Minneapolis, who has been sending him updates from the ground. He also noted that as the one-year anniversary of the O'Piccolo's building fire approaches, he has seen no visible progress on the site and would appreciate an update when appropriate.

Schuyler Johnston, 174 Armory Road, spoke on behalf of several Armory Road residents regarding the conceptual design for the road project. He said they've worked closely with staff, feel their concerns have been heard, and that most neighbors support the current plan. They would like to see it move forward to completion.

Karla Steele, 168 Armory Road, said the consultants have done a good job addressing neighbors' concerns about the Armory Road project. They've been responsive, explained the land use clearly, and demonstrated the proposed improvements. She asked the council to approve construction.

"Zee", (Councilor Caltabiano removed himself from the council dais and stood at the back of the chambers), said the proclamation disrupted her prepared remarks, but she first responded to Councilor Qunell by noting the city is being sued for violating someone's constitutional rights, which she felt made his comments disingenuous. She dedicated her statement to Alex Pretti and addressed what she called false accusations made against her by several councilors. Holding up her sign, she explained that it depicts one specific officer involved in a racial-profiling lawsuit, the KKK as a racist ideology, and ICE as an agency that targets people based on race. She said the sign does **not** claim the Whitefish Police Department is racist. She emphasized her First Amendment right to petition the government, stating that while her signs may be offensive to some, civil-dialogue guidelines are not laws, and she warned the council not to punish or defame her for her speech.

Councilor Caltabiano returned to the council dais.

Toby Scott, Barkley Lane, Toby Scott listed several improvements he'd like the city to consider: installing a stoplight (not a roundabout) at 13th and Baker, painting or wrapping the silver signal boxes to make them more attractive, adding more public EV charging stations, removing the leased-space restriction on the garage's EV chargers, and requiring new multi-unit buildings to include—or at least be wired for—EV charging. He noted EV use is growing and believes the city should plan for that future.

5) **COMMUNICATIONS FROM VOLUNTEER BOARDS** ([YouTube Video 32:13](#))

Toby Scott, chair of the Lakeshore Protection Committee, updated the council on recent issues involving county-side violations of lakeshore regulations. After Whitefish notified the county of two major violations, he attended a county meeting where officials seemed unaware of the problem and admitted they lack staff to enforce rules on Whitefish Lake. He and others from Whitefish pushed for stronger oversight, and the county planning director indicated openness to letting Whitefish administer the county portion of the lake. Toby is now working with committee members to compare city and county regulations, encourage public reporting of violations, and open discussions with county commissioners. Their long-term goal is better cooperation—or possibly more local control—to protect the entire lakeshore.

Councilor Norton reported that the Climate Action Plan Committee is exploring options for more EV charging stations, but new units cost around \$25,000, and current funding, about \$6,000, is far short of what's needed for a Depot Park charger. They are also considering upgrading the slow chargers in the parking garage, though doing so would require charging fees and collecting state-mandated taxes. Manager Meeker added that a recent state law prevents cities from requiring EV-charging wiring in new buildings, limiting what Whitefish can mandate going forward. Director Workman stated the \$6,000 that is in FY26 budget was intended to be a match for grant that Flathead Electric had applied for but was not granted.

- a) **[Ordinance No. 26-02](#); An ordinance amending Whitefish City Code Title 2, Chapter 12, regarding membership qualifications for the Convention and Visitor Bureau Committee (First Reading) (p.383)**

Zak Anderson, Executive Director of the Whitefish Convention and Visitor Bureau asked the council to adjust the appointment rules for the CVB Board. He requested allowing up to three county residents instead of two and requiring that board members be CVB members in good standing, giving the council more flexibility while keeping the board representative of the community.

**Councilor Sweeney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Qunell to adopt [Ordinance No. 26-02](#); An ordinance amending Whitefish City Code Title 2, Chapter 12, regarding membership qualifications for the Convention and Visitor Bureau Committee (First Reading). The motion carried**

- 6) **CONSENT AGENDA** (The consent agenda is a means of expediting routine matters that require the Council's action. Debate does not typically occur on consent agenda items. Any member of the Council may remove any item for debate. Such items will typically be debated and acted upon prior to proceeding to the rest of the agenda.)
  - a) **[Minutes](#) from January 20, 2026, Regular Meeting (p.398)**
  - b) **[Ordinance No. 26-01](#); An Ordinance to repeal Title 2, Chapter 10, Architectural Review Committee of the Whitefish City Code (Second Reading) (p.404)**
  - c) **[Consideration](#) to modify side yard setback to conform to WR-1 zoning, located at 364 Shady River Lane (Lot 10) (p.405)**

([YouTube Video 46:36](#))

**Councilor Caltabiano made a motion, seconded by Councilor Qunell to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. The motion carried.**

- 7) **PUBLIC HEARINGS** (Items will be considered for action after public hearings) (Resolution No. 07-33 establishes a 30-minute time limit for applicant's land use presentations.)
  - a) **[Resolution No. 26-03](#); A Resolution to establish an increase in the public usage fee the Whitefish City Beach boat launch (p.415) ([YouTube Video 47:04](#))**

Director Maria Butts presented her staff report that is provided in the packet on the website. Qunell asked how “resident” is defined for boat-fee purposes, and staff explained it’s based on where the boat is registered. The fee increase supports the aquatic invasive species (AIS) program, not boat type or size. Qunell suggested considering boat type in the future since wake boats and fishing boats create different impacts. Staff noted wake boats require more time for inspection and hot-water decontamination, but the city cannot charge separately for decontamination.

Mayor Muhlfeld opened the Public Hearing,

Andre Groschupf, 120 River Butte Drive, a longtime lake user and commercial permit holder, said the state is only concerned about AIS when boats leave the Flathead Basin, not when they stay within it. He agreed commercial operators should pay more since they use the ramp frequently, and he supports a tiered fee system for others who use the lake less. He also argued that non-residents who register boats in Montana should still pay out-of-state fees.

There being no further public comment, Mayor Muhlfeld closed the Public Hearing and turned matters over to the Council for consideration.

**Councilor Sweeney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Qunell to adopt [Resolution No. 26-03](#); A Resolution to establish an increase in the public usage fee the Whitefish City Beach boat launch.** Norton, Sweeney, and Caltabiano all expressed support for the AIS fee changes and appreciation for staff’s work. Sweeney and Caltabiano said the city should eventually define “resident” as a Montana resident with a Montana-registered boat. Caltabiano added that locals pay taxes year-round and suggested much lower fees for residents and higher fees for non-residents, noting the Park Board discussed reviewing the system again in a year or two. **The motion carried.**

- b) **[Resolution No. 26-04](#); A Resolution approving an Amendment to the Lease Agreement and to Glacier Twins Long-term Lease of Stadium Land at Memorial Park (p.429) ([YouTube Video 1:05:44](#))**

City Attorney Angela Jacobs presented her staff report that is provided in the packet on the website. Qunell asked for clarity on priority use and confirmed the school district is treated separately. Questions were raised about who determines damage costs, and Jacobs said that is handled in the Twins’ sublease. Norton asked about liability, and Jacobs confirmed the city is listed as an additional insured. Feury asked how rental rates would be set; Jacobs said the Park Board would review them annually, supported by the Twins’ required yearly report listing all subleases and rates. Manager Meeker added that this reporting gives the Park Board oversight to question anything that seems unreasonable.

Mayor Muhlfeld opened the Public Hearing.

Ray Queen argues that the Glacier Twins’ \$1-per-year lease at Memorial Park no longer serves the community. The program has shrunk to 11 players, yet the high school must pay thousands each year to use a public field the Twins control. He says the Twins overstate costs, claim questionable “in-kind” values, and keep most revenue from a cell tower on city land. He believes the lease has shifted from supporting youth baseball to generating income for one organization, limiting access for local kids. He urges the city to rewrite the agreement, ensure fair use for the high school, and return Memorial Park to serving the whole community, not just one declining program. His full letter to the Council is appended to the packet on the website.

**Mayor Muhlfeld excused Council Davis at 8:40pm.**

Julio Delgado, Karrow Avenue, said baseball shaped his life, and it bothers him that Whitefish High School students can't freely use a public field their families help fund. He argued the Twins' lease gives them too much control, with vague rules, high fees, and the power to block school access. He questioned inflated maintenance costs, unclear "exclusive use" terms, and the fairness of the Twins controlling a taxpayer-owned park. He urged the city to ensure high school players can practice and play at Memorial Field without excessive restrictions or costs, saying the field should serve all local kids, not just one program.

Johanna Muller, 1850 Whitefish Village Drive, thanked those who have supported the Glacier Twins through a difficult year and said the volunteers work hard with integrity. She said accusations from Julio and Ray are false and have harmed families, including her own. She emphasized that the Twins have been transparent, opened their books, welcomed lease changes, and want the high school to play at Memorial Field, though scheduling conflicts exist. She said the Twins are learning, willing to adjust, and committed to partnering with the city and community, but they reject claims of wrongdoing and feel the criticism has been unfair and uninformed.

Mark Voelker, Park Knoll Lane, a Twins board member, said the Twins are a volunteer nonprofit and that all buildings and equipment at Memorial Field were donated and built by the Twins—not the city. Because of that investment, they feel responsible for protecting the facility. He added that high school baseball is new, and the school initially entered the sport without a plan for where to play; the Twins have offered field use each year, including the pricing referenced earlier.

Jeff Dalen, Lupfer Road, said many in town care deeply about baseball, including his own family. He wants the high school team to be able to use Memorial Field at true cost—covering only actual expenses like electricity, water, and mowing—just as they volunteer and maintain fields at Smith Fields. Since high school baseball is a self-funded club, he believes eliminating inflated or unclear fees and basing access strictly on real costs would create a fair, workable agreement going forward.

There being no further public comment, Mayor Muhlfeld closed the Public Hearing and called for a recess at 9:00pm and reconvened at 9:06pm.

**Councilor Sweeney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Feury to adopt [Resolution No. 26-04](#); A Resolution approving an Amendment to the Lease Agreement and to Glacier Twins Long-term Lease of Stadium Land at Memorial Park.** Sweeney said the claim that the Glacier Twins overcharge the high school is false. He emphasized that the Twins have only ever sought to recover actual field-maintenance and operating costs, nothing more. He added that the Twins have historically worked to include all kids in baseball, offering scholarships and opportunities to anyone who wants to play. **The motion carried.**

**8) COMMUNICATION FROM PARKS AND RECREATION DIRECTOR**

- a) **[Consideration](#) to approve Urban Forestry educational banners to be placed on light poles in the downtown district (p.447)**

Parks, Recreation and Community Services Director Maria Butts presented her staff report that is provided in the packet on the website.

**Councilor Norton made a motion, seconded by Councilor Qunell to approve the Urban Forestry educational banners to be placed on light poles in the downtown district. The motion carried.**

- b) **Consideration authorizing staff to proceed with bidding Armory Park Parking Lot and Open Space (p.449)**

Director Butts presented her staff report that is provided in the packet on the website.

**Councilor Sweeney made a motion, seconded by Councilor Feury to authorize staff to proceed with bidding Armory Park Parking Lot and Open Space project. The motion carried.**

#### 9) COMMUNICATIONS FROM PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

- a) **Consideration to approve conceptual design for Armory Road and authorize staff to proceed with final design and bidding for construction (p.469)**

Public Works Director Craig Workman presented his staff report that is provided in the packet on the website.

**Councilor Caltabiano made a motion, seconded by Councilor Norton to approve the conceptual design for Armory Road and authorize staff to proceed with final design and bidding for construction. The motion carried.**

#### 10) COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY MANAGER

- a) **Written report enclosed with the packet. Questions from Mayor and Council? (p.481)**

Norton asked whether the proposed roundabout at Big Mountain Road and East Lakeshore Drive was finalized. Manager Meeker said a new property owner is working with MDT on shifting the road and adding a roundabout, and the project has passed initial review, but it is not tied to a development the city can control. Access issues for emergency vehicles are being worked through with the developer and nearby property owners.

Norton also asked about bear-safety outreach. Meeker said the city is coordinating education efforts to prevent complacency, especially in years when natural food sources are low, and will continue public messaging.

Caltabiano congratulated several Parks and Recreation staff members on earning professional certifications and praised staff for completing multiple city goals.

- b) **Other items arising between February 11th through February 17<sup>th</sup>**

Meeker to prepare, the budget calendar is on the agenda, which means she will be reaching out to the Council to discuss preliminary budget thoughts in March.

#### 11) COMMUNICATIONS FROM MAYOR AND CITY COUNCILORS

- a) **Consideration of approving the tentative FY27 Budget calendar (p.488)**

**Councilor Qunell made a motion, seconded by Councilor Caltabiano to approve the FY27 Budget calendar. The motion carried.**

- b) **Letter from Tara Zimmerman requesting additional Deer Crossing signs on Wisconsin Avenue (p.489)**

No comment.

c) **Letter from Toby Scott – Action items for City to undertake (p.490)**

No comment.

d) **Letter from Karin Hilding asking Council to support the vulnerable in our community (p.491)**

No comment.

**Councilor Comments**

Norton said she supports adding deer-crossing signs on Wisconsin Avenue. She noted that Toby Scott continues raising the same issues and confirmed that Heart of Whitefish is already working on wrapping electrical boxes. She appreciated Karin Hilding's letter about her family's history and the reminder about the times we're living in.

Feury honored the recent passing of former Kalispell councilman Jim Adkinson and longtime community member Clifford Persons.

Qunell asked about returning to YouTube livestreaming; Manager Meeker said recent tests have gone well and the city can begin discussing reinstating it. He also said the land-use update seems to be missing an analysis of how proposed neighborhood areas align with existing zoning and how that will affect what people can build.

**12) ADJOURNMENT (Resolution 08-10 establishes 11:00 p.m. as end of meeting unless extended to 11:30 by majority)**

Mayor Muhlfeld adjourned the meeting at 9:33 p.m.

*/s/John Muhlfeld*

---

Mayor Muhlfeld

Attest:

*/s/Michelle Howke*

---

Michelle Howke, Whitefish City Clerk