

LEAVENWORTH CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

March 24, 2026

Mayor Carl Florea called the March 24, 2026 Study Session to order at 5:32 PM.

Council Present: Mayor Carl Florea, Clint Strand, Anne Hessburg, Zeke Reister, Shane Thayer, Travis McMaster, Mike Bedard and Rob Eaton.

Staff Present: Matthew “Selby,” Chantell Steiner, Maggie Boles, Brantley Bain and Andrea Fischer.

1. Resolution XX-2026 – Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

City Clerk Andrea Fischer presented the updated Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy for the City of Leavenworth. She noted that since the initial review at the Study Session in November 2025, the policy had been substantially revised and approved by the City Attorney. She also confirmed that the City's IT provider did not recommend any specific platform, opting instead to allow employees to select whichever generative AI tool best fits their individual workflow. To ensure compliance with public records requirements, she would maintain access to each platform used by staff.

The Council discussed the policy's requirement to disclose AI use. Ms. Fischer clarified that staff would be required to note when AI was used in producing a document, along with a notation of any review performed by “human eyes”. The question was raised of whether failing to cite AI use could expose the City to legal liability. Ms. Fischer confirmed that having a formal policy in place limits the City's liability; if an employee fails to abide by the policy, the City can demonstrate that a standard was established and not followed. The Council appeared satisfied with the policy as presented, and no further changes were requested.

2. Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) Update

City Engineer Brantley Bain presented an updated draft of the 2026–2031 Capital Improvement Plan, which was revised to reflect projects currently in the planning stages or underway and to align with the forthcoming 2026 Comprehensive Plan update. The updated CIP incorporates projects identified through the water system plan, the general sewer plan currently underway and the Transportation Improvement Program, including projects from the recently adopted Safety Action Plan. Notable additions and updates include the parking garage, the relocation of the City pool and a new community center at Osborn and the Front Street Pedestrian Plaza.

The total identified need across the six-year period approaches \$300 million. Annual project costs range from approximately \$11–12 million in 2026, rising to approximately \$75 million in 2028, driven largely by the parking garage project. Staff acknowledged that the actual cash flow will span multiple years for large projects, and that some projects will likely need to be deferred as priorities evolve.

Mr. Bain indicated a seven-month seasonal construction inspector position is planned for the coming summer, and that future conversations with the City Administrator and Finance Director will be needed to determine whether additional full-time or contract staff are warranted given the

scale of upcoming construction activity, and the potential cost advantages of in-house staffing over contracted construction management were noted.

The Council raised the importance of securing federal and state funding, noting that the current FY 2027 funding cycle is already underway and that the City should begin positioning itself for FY 2028 appropriations. Council consensus was that a dedicated session on funding strategy should be incorporated into the upcoming spring retreat. City Administrator Selby stated he had written down three questions for the retreat based on feedback from the Council; where the City has been, where it is going and how to pay for it.

The Council asked questions and discussed the information that was presented.

The CIP is expected to be finalized ahead of the Comprehensive Plan adoption, anticipated in summer 2026.

3. Comprehensive Plan Review/Updates

Community Development Director Maggie Boles presented three draft elements of the 2026 Comprehensive Plan for initial Council review: the Utilities Element, the Economic Development Element and the Climate Element.

Director Boles noted that the Utilities and Economic Development elements represent minor updates rather than comprehensive revisions. Throughout the entire Comprehensive Plan document, a mountain symbol icon has been added to goals and policies that support the new Climate Element.

The Climate Element is an entirely new section for this Comprehensive Plan update. Director Boles explained that a Climate Team was convened to identify key hazards and develop goals and policies to guide future code changes. Identified hazards include drought and snowpack loss, wildfire, wildfire smoke, and, newly added following the December 2025 storms, severe storms. She noted that climate resilience content was generally well-received by the community, with less pushback than seen in other jurisdictions across the state.

Regarding the Climate Element's sourcing, Director Boles stated that a data appendix will be shared with the Council and Planning Commission soon. The Climate Element is scheduled for review at the Planning Commission the following week.

The Council raised a concern about how the Climate Element addresses the relationship between increased density and wildfire risk, suggesting that language should be added to clarify that new density is built to far more stringent fire-resistant standards, including the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) code and Firewise requirements, than older construction. Without such context, readers might draw an inaccurate conclusion that more density increases fire danger. It was also noted that fire agencies who have presented to the Council have consistently stated that density, when built to modern code, is safer and easier to defend than sprawl.

A notable statistic from the Economic Development Element was brought up by the Council: that only 14% of people who work in Leavenworth also live here, and that more than 16% of workers commute over 50 miles. This underscores the urgency of supporting workforce housing so that employees can afford to live in the community where they work.

4. Council Updates/Suggestions for Future Agenda Items

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The Council held a brief discussion regarding the Leavenworth Fund, with Administrator Selby noting that this was the first year the fund was fully utilized, which was attributed to more proactive outreach by staff to potential applicants. The possibility of increasing the Leavenworth fund in the future was raised as a topic for the upcoming budget process.

Study Session adjourned at 6:51 PM.

APPROVED

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Carl Florea

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Carl Florea

Mayor

ATTEST

Signed by:

Andrea Fischer

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Andrea Fischer

City Clerk