

LEAVENWORTH CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

April 28, 2026

Mayor Carl Florea called the April 28, 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. Review of Rate & Fee Schedule Changes

Finance Director Chantell Steiner briefly noted that the senior utility rate discount updates had been incorporated as discussed at the April 14th Legislative Meeting, reflecting the Council's prior recommendations to raise the low-income base threshold from \$30,000 to \$50,000 and the additional hardship threshold from \$15,000 to \$25,000, with annual CPI adjustments going forward.

Community Development Director Maggie Boles then presented several updates to building and miscellaneous fees that had been identified through day-to-day permit processing.

- **Adding A Building Permit Renewal Fee**

Director Boles explained that the proposed renewal fee, up to 50 percent of the original permit fee for permits expired more than 30 days, was intended to give staff a tool to manage stalled or long-dormant projects. She noted that the current system allows permits to auto-renew every six months if the applicant calls for inspections, but projects that go without any contact for more than six months expire. She acknowledged having open permits dating back to 2019.

Council raised concerns about the subjective nature of the proposed renewal fee and the lack of defined parameters around how long an expired permit may remain eligible for renewal rather than requiring a new application. Director Boles acknowledged that some permits dating to 2019 remain open and noted that the renewal fee was intended to encourage progress rather than penalize applicants. Council directed staff to rework the provision with clearer parameters and bring it back at a later date.

- **Adding \$50 Refundable Deposit Fee For Public Notice Boards**

Director Boles explained that public notice boards are frequently not returned after public comment periods, resulting in ongoing replacement costs that the proposed \$50 refundable deposit would help offset. The concept that the deposit would be refunded upon return of the board, was received without objection.

- **Adding New Special Use Permit Fee For Use Of On-Street Parking Spaces**

Director Boles introduced the proposal, which would establish a separate, higher fee for Special Use Permits (SUPs) involving on-street parking spaces on open streets such as Commercial Street, as distinct from closed streets like Front Street, where the standard \$1.50 per square foot fee already applies.

Several Councilmembers expressed concern that the differential rate was inequitable to Commercial Street businesses, which already receive less tourism exposure than Front Street

and had no role in the decision to close Front Street to traffic. Council agreed the item should be referred to the Parking Advisory Committee for further review before returning to Council. Director Boles agreed to pull the item at this time.

2. Golf Course Housing Discussion

Kurt Peterson, representing the Housing Advisory Committee (HAC), presented background on the Build It Together initiative, through which the HAC issued a Request for Ideas for affordable housing in February 2026. One submission proposing a multi-benefit redevelopment of the City-owned 104-acre golf course property upon lease expiration was found to be outside the HAC's scope, prompting a subcommittee to bring the concept to Council. Peterson was explicit that no formal proposal, plan, or timeline exists, and that the HAC was not asking for any decision regarding the golf course. The request before Council was solely for permission to define a public process for further exploration and community dialogue.

John Groen and Joe Geivett spoke on behalf of the Leavenworth Golf Club, presenting the historical, economic, and legal context of the golf course. Mr. Groen outlined the course's origins dating to 1926, its integral role in Project L.I.F.E. and the City's Bavarian economic revival, and the fact that the club had voluntarily deeded both the front and back nine to the City at significant cost to membership, with the reasonable expectation of continued use as a public golf course. He cautioned that any change in land use would require a comprehensive plan amendment, SEPA review, and alternatives analysis, and noted that the City's existing land capacity analysis already concludes sufficient land and zoning to meet the projected housing need of 361 units by 2046. Mr. Geivett added a financial analysis indicating that the golf course generates approximately \$9.3 million in total annual economic activity, that club improvements represent \$15–20 million in City-owned assets, and that development scenarios he modeled showed costs exceeding market value, with significant upfront planning expenses of \$3–5 million and unknown environmental remediation liability.

There was substantial Council discussion. Councilmembers Eaton, Strand and Hessburg expressed strong opposition to pursuing the concept further, arguing it would distract from more viable housing solutions, risk polarizing the community, and undermine the City's credibility with those who entrusted the land for recreational use. Councilmember McMaster expressed appreciation for the investments the Golf Club had made and acknowledged the green space value of the property but suggested that this conversation had opened the door to a broader question about what other community purposes, such as trails and other recreational uses, the property might serve beyond housing. He indicated interest in an exploratory committee focused on that wider question. Councilmember Thayer questioned whether the Council was prepared to commit the time and financial resources a full study would require and whether the concept had ever been seriously explored before, noting that the current housing crisis was a relatively new pressure. He suggested that if the conversation were strictly about housing, other avenues should be pursued first.

Councilmembers Mike Bedard and Zeke Reister advocated for allowing the discussion to proceed, arguing that representative government requires the Council to hear from all constituents, not only the most organized voices, and that with the lease not expiring until 2033–2034, there was adequate time for a measured, transparent community process. Councilmember Bedard suggested a community poll as a low-cost first step.

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Mayor Florea, after hearing the range of views, observed that while the discussion was passionate on all sides, he did not detect a Council majority in favor of advancing the concept. He summarized the direction as setting the golf course discussion aside for the time being while the Council and housing committee continue to explore other housing options. He acknowledged that political circumstances may change in the future and encouraged the community to remain engaged, while affirming that all parties shared a genuine commitment to the community's wellbeing.

3. Council Updates/Suggestions for Future Agenda Items

The Council ran out of time to discuss this item.

Study Session adjourned at 7:06 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