

COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING
AUGUST 11, 2025
203 Broadway Ave N

PRESENT:

Pam McClain	Mayor	Andrew Wright	City Attorney
Marla Sisson	Council President	Jason Scott	Public Works Director
Michael Higbee	Council Member	Jazmine Mills	Planning and Zoning
Amanda Hawkins	Council Member	Aaron Wert	HMH Engineering
Sue Gabardi	Council Member	Maegan Hanson	Library Director
Chelsea Popplewell	Clerk	Concerned Citizens	
Autumn Jones	Treasurer		

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM:

Chelsea Popplewell confirmed a quorum.

CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Minutes of July 28, 2025 – Working Session
2. Minutes of August 4, 2025 – Special Meeting
3. Claims for Payment
4. Monthly Department Head Reports – Fire, Engineer, Public Works
5. Commission Minutes – Airport, Library, Planning & Zoning, Housing Authority
6. Clerk Report
7. Treasurer Report

Michael moved to approve the consent agenda. Marla seconded the motion. There was a roll call vote on the motion. Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, Amanda voted yes, and Sue voted yes. The motion passed.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There is no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS:

Review and Consideration of Civility Pledge - Michael moved to approve the review and consideration of the Civility Pledge. Michael noted that it was a recommendation from AIC. There was a roll call vote on the motion. Marla seconded the motion. There was no discussion. Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, Amanda voted yes, and Sue voted yes. The motion passed. The civility pledge was sent around to Council to sign.

Presentation by Clearwater Financial on Comprehensive Plan Survey and Demographics Report – Cameron Arial and Abbey Erquiaga from Clearwater Financial were in person at the meeting and presented on the current Comprehensive Plan Survey results as well as the Demographics report. Cameron noted that the survey has been an ongoing project and really is foundational to the process of the entire plan. He reminded Council that the purpose of the whole thing was to engage the community and allow for the community to have a voice in the process. It allows for a deep dive into the feedback of stakeholders in the community. Cameron also gave kudos to the city staff for their efforts in getting the word out about the survey and being the “boots on the ground.” He noted that the social media and news media outreach has been great.

Cameron and Abbey began their presentation. They began with timeline and where we’re at in the process. Cameron noted that we’re well on our way to the May 2026 goal. They gave examples of the website, earned media coverage, as well as highlighted some of the social media posts regarding the survey. Abbey noted that the information getting out on social media is really foundational information and an educational opportunity for the City to help the community understand what a comp plan is, why it’s important and how it correlated to the community’s every day life. She made the point that more connection/correlation equates to more participation and engagement.

They then began to look at actual results of the survey. They noted the age grounds and mentioned that no one in the 18-24 age group had completed the survey. Cameron said that Buhl has a good mix of “long timers” and newer residents.

Cameron then talked about employment status and household income. He noted that there is high employment, “which is impressive,” and also noted a high number of retirees. In terms of income, he noted there is some affluency as well as some lower income households.

Clearwater Financial then moved to the word cloud which summed up the words that described what people love about Buhl. Cameron noted that the words in the graphic are powerful statements on the values of the community but also represents what people love about Buhl.

Abbey said that 262 people filled out the survey which is fairly significant. She said that CWF does have a target number of respondents and 262 is great. They mentioned a high interest in the 55+ age group. Abbey noted that 18-24 didn’t have any respondents. Amanda asked about the number of respondents on this question (138) and wondered if the people who did not answer this question could be contacted because she knew that the school district just qualified for all free and reduced lunch. Or, she suggested, maybe Clearwater could reach out to the school district for their income data. Abbey did say that reaching out to the school could be a possibility. Michael brought up census data would be reflected in the demographic report. Abbey also mentioned that they do look at the state’s website, which houses the free and reduced lunch data, for information on income as well.

Cameron then moved on to some of the themes for services and infrastructure. He said there was a lot of really good commentary. He commented that there was a high level of support and that the community is looking long term at infrastructure. Abbey commented on the synergy between service and infrastructure. Highlights opportunity for education but also shows where the communities priorities are.

Abbey then talked about the rate of growth and whether it was acceptable to citizens. According to the slide, 69.3% said yes. She commented that it seems growth is well managed in the City. Michael commented that it doesn't seem like our growth has been quite as significant as surrounding communities and that when big subdivisions are planned, it still takes years to progress. Marla added that the school is actually going down a division in athletics because of enrollment. Cameron noted that it seems the City is ahead of the growth curve in doing this study.

The presentation then went on to what the community thinks the City should focus on regarding land use designations. Commercial was the highest, followed by residential. Michael asked is that was what they see elsewhere and Abbey responded no, not usually. Cameon said that there is typically a heavy emphasis on residential in small cities and more, civic focused emphasis in more established communities. Mayor McClain brought up a conversation with a citizen and how he would like to see a mix of commercial and industrial growth so that people could live and work in the same community. Cameron said that was a wise approach to land use and that there has been lots of research on that.

Clearwater highlighted a few other areas in terms of land use and how to balance new development with the need to reserve open space and natural resources. Over half of the respondents to that question said zoning regulations.

Cameron then went on to transportation and the current condition of the City's road network. He highlighted that the majority of respondents rated the current conditions as good or very good. Cameron showed some of the comments from those who rated the conditions as Poor or Fair. He said this is a good, healthy way to allow for feedback. He said that all specific comments could be shared with Council and the Mayor.

On the slide regarding transportation challenges, the biggest challenges were intersections and parking. Mayor McClain asked if there were specifics on this question. Cameron said there were specifics and they could be shared. Mayor McClain said that some of the intersections are ITD. She said it would be nice to know what the respondents meant by intersections. Marla said she had heard some concerns about the side streets that don't have stop signs. Cameron did encourage Council to look at the individual responses when they receive them. Mayor McClain also said that we're doing our best with the sidewalks. Cameron noted that a lot is out of the City's control which could be a good educational piece.

Cameron went on to Economic Development. He mentioned a majority of respondents through the current condition of the economy was good or very good. He also noted, from the next slide, that

limited local jobs was a reason for poor or fair responses. He said dining and retail were industries the respondents wanted the City to attract or retain and also said that industrial type businesses were what the City should avoid or discourage, according to the respondents.

Cameron discussed the housing market which was a little lower satisfaction rating than the other two focus areas. Abbey added that we're seeing that everywhere and in fact, most are bordering on dissatisfaction. Cameron talked about the type of housing the City should focus on (single family) and the challenges the City should prioritize (senior living and low income). Cameron talked about some of the other challenges that respondents put in the "other" comment box. He noted "more housing overall, especially to retain young families" was an interesting comment and it stems to affordability. Another on that Cameron commented on was the theme of cleanliness and code enforcement.

Cameron touched on the responses to how the City should address the needs to vulnerable populations (rehab vacant properties, partnership with housing agencies). He also spoke about the answers to which natural and cultural resources the City should prioritize. He said the two highest, parks are often equated to natural spaces.

Moving on to infrastructure, Cameron commented that a high level (71.9%) of respondents rated current infrastructure as good or very good. He stated that water was the top infrastructure priority according to respondents, followed by sidewalks/walking paths. Sidewalks/walking paths was interesting and he said maybe there was a correlation between the walkability and pedestrian focus.

Cameron then goes on to talk about how respondents would prefer to pay for the services. He noted a high interest in impact fees which could be something Council considers. The additional comments highlighted some interesting thoughts. High level of volunteerism. Public-private partnerships are usually a good great way to go about these projects. Michael joked about a second First Federal Park in Buhl. Cameron said his biggest takeaway is that we the City has a very engaged and willing community; it's just channeling that. He then noted that there seems to be a willingness to pay, shows a lot of pride and willingness. \$0-\$25/year 43.4%; \$26-\$50/year 24%; \$76-\$100/ year 25.1%.

Cameron then goes in quality of facilities and services. About 80% say good or very good. Public safety is a high priority. He also noted water, streets and utility. Abbey noted that slides are a good reassurance to how the City is managing the services, which is not always what they see.

Cameron then moved on to funding these priorities. Impact fees were the highest response. Abbey noted a higher than normal fluency on funding types. The respondents seem to have a high level of comfortability with bonds and impact fees.

Cameron spoke briefly on facilities and services the City should prioritize or improve upon. He noted schools, recreation and public safety facilities. He then moved on to partnerships and noted the higher correlation to local, county government.

Cameron then talked about the top 5 priorities noting property rights, school, economic development, public services and land use. He showed some specific comments. Abbey added that this question was telling in terms of the education component for the City and community.

Cameron finished up the survey portion with how the City should involve different agencies and stakeholders in the implementation process and he noted that community advisory board was the number one response. Abbey added that there is real value in a community providing what their needs and wants are and for a City to listen and provide that back to the community. Really brings it full circle. They then discussed some of the additional comments. Cameron then talked about some of the community comments. Mayor McClain noted that there's still time. She is still giving out the QRU code for the survey. She suggested we make more copies of the hard copy survey and confirmed that CWF was still taking comments. She added that she was talking to a citizen who had the idea of going to these empty businesses and say we'll reduce your utility bill if you'll get it rented – fixed up, rented or purchased in the next year. She added she thought that was very interesting and out of the box thinking. She added that she has been talking to people about their lots for a splash pad because of a grant opportunity, \$500,000. The individual wonders 'what's in it for me', can he be paid from the grant funds. Mayor said we'd name it after the family and they said 'oh no'. There are opportunities. Cameron agreed. Mayor explained it's a downtown grant based on getting more foot traffic to downtown. Marla thought it was interesting that people want some kind of rec center or rec district because she says they've tried several times, 3 or 4 years ago. She commented that maybe it's time to try again.

Cameron then went into the demographic report. He noted that Buhl is projected to grown and that the comp plan is timely in that regard. He provided a low forecast, mid forecast and high forecast. Using the mid forecast, Cameron noted that Buhl is forecasted to grow 12.5% by 2030, another 12.5% by 2040, 13.4% by 2050, and 13.4% by 2060. He mentioned that they are seeing the high forecast across the state. Cameron said that growth is inevitable and that channeling it correctly is the key. Mayor McClain commented that thoughtful growth is very important. Micheal told a story about a gentleman who moved here from California who has complained a bit about growth in Buhl. He added that the town has grown so much since he was a kid and it's interesting to see other people's perspective. Mayor McClain shared a story about a get together where every single person was either from California or Blaine County. She added that it's not just out of state people moving to Buhl but also people from around Idaho. Cameron commented that less people are leaving and more people are coming

Cameron then went on to housing. Housing stock is up 5.4%, vacancy rates are down and home ownership rates are up. He added that from the economic perspective, it's very healthy.

Cameron highlighted some great trends in education. Graduate and professional degrees are up significantly (118.2%) and residents with only a high school diploma has dropped significantly as well (18.1%). Michael said this was outstanding and referenced when the Labor Department would

come and .3% had more than a Master's degree. To see 100% increase in that and a drop in just high school, he commented that that was pretty incredible.

Cameron then talked about income where there were also great trends. The City is dropping in the low incomes and increasing in the high. Mayor McClain asking how many people responded to that and it was clarified that this was national level data source. Cameron confirmed that the data is just the City of Buhl's data but collected from a national source which is kind of the gold standard.

Cameron moved on to workforce. He noted that industry has declined which could be a good thing to investigate. He also noted that he kind of sees a diversification in the workforce – blue collar decreasing, white collar increasing. He then talked about directions and considerations which served as a wrap up of the presentation. Marla commented that this was really cool to see and very helpful. Mayor McClain added that we just needed more people to take the survey.

Mayor McClain confirmed there is no action on this.

Review and Consideration of intergovernmental agreement between the City of Buhl and the Buhl Rural Fire Protection District for capital impact fees – Chief Stephens introduced himself. He noted that there is a lot of legalese in the draft agreement so if he didn't know the answer to a question from Council, he would get back to them. Chief Stephens made Council aware that he is always available to them and the Mayor. The agreement has to do with the service area which includes the City of Buhl inside The District and is a County wide effort. He said it's about new growth and maintaining our current level service. Michael reiterated that it's to maintain the same level of service as we grow. Mayor McClain confirmed that this is what the attorney from Nampa was talking about. Chief Stephen's noted that 42.5 out of the respondents on the survey said their top priority was public safety which would include fire. He said they just had an ISO audit and they're going from a 4 to a 2 which is huge. He noted that that was significant but that it wasn't just fire services, it has to do with water supply and dispatch services. Michael commented that theoretically that should drop fire insurance. Chief Stephens agreed. He said this is the first step in the process and he would try and answer any questions. Micheal noted one concern in line 2.5. He quoted the line 'The City is experience considerable growth and development' and then noted that he thought it should say both since they actually had a higher rate of growth than the City. He added that he hoped Andrew had read through it and was wondering if he had any feedback. Chief Stephens agreed and said he would prefer the two attorneys talk. Andrew said we're pretty close with the agreement. He doesn't see a great deal of risk for the City. He noted that the Fire District is going to indemnify the City for if there are problems with the fees. He doesn't see a big concern. Do you think that impact fees will not attract growth? Mayor McClain commented that everyone moving in here is always so surprised at how 'cheap' we are. Chief Stephens also noted that they have realistic expectations on what impact fees we can collect. Michael confirmed that there will be a citizens committee from the District and from Buhl to decide on appropriate fees. Mayor McClain asked Chief Stephens what he needed from Council. He responded that he just needs a decision or Council to authorize the Mayor to sign. Mayor McClain asked if the meeting with the attorneys should

happen first and then bring it to Council. Chief Stephens said that meeting could happen first. Michael said he would feel more comfortable with that. Andrew asked where everyone else was in the process. Chief Stephens said that there are different levels but he's been told they're 'right there'. But it wouldn't make sense for the Mayor to sign a draft copy. Mayor McClain said there is also an appendix A that should be attached as well. Marla made a motion to allow Andy to work with the other attorney for the intergovernmental agreement between the City and the Buhl Rural Fire Protection District. Michael seconded the motion. Mayor McClain asked if there was any other discussion. Autumn Jones asked about the timeline of the fees. Chief Stephens didn't know the answer to that. This is the first step and we have many steps until we get to that point. Michael mentioned there would need to be four public hearings. Mayor McClain asked if the Fire District would pay for the public hearing notifications. Chief said we could discuss costs. Marla said that it would make her feel more comfortable having impact fees in place before going forward with other subdivision applications because she wants the developers to be able to add great things to our town without it being cheaply done and not make our town look good. She doesn't see a huge rush in the process. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote. Amanda voted yes, Sue voted yes, Marla voted yes, and Michael voted yes. The motion passed.

Review and Consideration of TRIBE Movie Night in Eastman Park – Alisa Atkinson requested that TRIBE be able to use Eastman Park for their annual back to school movie night this Friday night, 9pm to 11:30pm at the latest. They'll do several checks on the bathroom during that time. Kid friendly movie, no fee but they will be selling small concessions. Mayor McClain commented that it's been very successful in the past. Alisa summed up by asking for permission to use the park after hours. Michael made a motion to approve the TRIBE movie night for August 15th. Sue seconded the motion. Mayor McClain asked if Jason Scott had anything to add. He confirmed they would close the bathrooms around 11:45. Michael mentioned the movie in the park the next night and it was clarified that it was the next weekend. Marla said in full disclosure that she is part of TRIBE. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote. Sue voted yes, Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, and Amanda voted yes. The motion passed.

Review and Consideration First Federal Signers Resolution – Michael made a motion to adopt Resolution 2025-12. Marla seconded. There was no further discussion. There was a roll call vote. Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, Amanda voted yes, and Sue voted yes. The motion passed. Amanda asked if, for the record, we could state the signers names who are coming off and coming on. Mayor McClain said Karen Drown is coming off and Chelsea Popplewell is coming on. Amanda added that Marla Sisson is going on. Autumn confirmed that currently it was Michael. Michael and Mayor McClain thought that was changed last year. Autumn confirmed it was not changed on the signer's paperwork. Michael said he thought he was off of it.

Review and Consideration of Authorizing Resolution – Mayor McClain started by asking for a bit more explanation than what was in the packet. Aaron Wert approached the podium. He said it was to determine who is able to sign for grants with DEQ for pay requests. Autumn clarified so that each pay request doesn't have to go before Council. It authorizes the Mayor and Public Works Director

to sign each of those payment requests as they come in. Michael clarified that Council will have already agreed to the grant but this resolution is so that we don't have to come back each time and agree. Autumn confirmed that was accurate. She said they would become part of the normal payable that you sign. Mayor McClain said that the person signing their packets would just want to make sure they're paying very close attention to what they're signing. Amanda asked Aaron if this is for DEQ specifically. He said yes, for the grants. Amanda asked why we would take our the checks and balances of having the Council weigh in on those. Aaron said it makes the process easier instead of going in front of Council every time. It still goes in front of Council – the grant does. Mayor McClain asked if this resolution has been signed by other cities. Aaron said yes that it's a pretty standard form. There was discussion about by Council approving the grant, Council is approving the process. Mayor McClain stated that she understood now. Amanda sought clarification that it wasn't removing anything coming before Council. Autumn said no, not in terms of the grant application or grant agreement. When Council approves acceptance of the grant and in doing so Council accepts the transactions. The DEQ wants to know who can approve those payment requests. Michael asked if it was always just the Mayor or if the public works director was on there too. Jason Scott said he had signed for other things but the rest of his response was inaudible. Mayor McClain said she thought the public works director needed to be on there. Marla made a motion to approve resolution 2025-13 for DEQ and having the Mayor or Public Works Director to sign all applications, funding agreements, and other documents relating to wastewater project. Amanda asked if it would be better, instead of 'or' to have 'and' so it goes through two sets of eyes. Mayor McClain said that she had pointed that out, too, and is that what Council wanted. Autumn mentioned that Marla could amend her motion. Marla said she would change her motion to 'and'. Michael was okay with the amendment. Aaron asked to confirm that Council wanted two signers on everything. There was then some discussion from Michael regarding the process of approval. Aaron clarified that if one of the signers is gone, you have to wait for that person to come back before submitting. Mayor McClain said she just wanted Council to be clear on what they're voting on. Aaron clarified that the 'or' is so that if someone is gone, the other can sign and still move forward. The 'and' would make it so both people would have to sign. Marla changed her motion back to 'or'. Michael confirmed that Council is approving this as written. Autumn stated that is the motion on the floor. There was a roll call vote. Marla voted yes, Michael voted yes, Amanda voted no, and Sue voted yes. The motion passed.

MAYOR & COUNCIL COMMENTS: Mayor McClain read the below statement.

We need to make sure that we comply with the law regarding employee privacy issues. If a member of City Council would like to discuss any issues pertaining to complaints, discipline, etc., of a city employee, those will first need to be discussed with the mayor, who is the chief city administrator per Idaho Code 50-602. After review of the complaint, discipline, etc., if it needs to go before City Council, it will be listed under an executive session on the upcoming meeting agenda.

Mayor McClain said she had already told us about the empty lot. Four other lot owners turned her down. She's still talking to the one owner about the grant.

Michael was out of town so he asked about the mainline break at Rainbow and Brook. Jason Scott said it just broke in half.

Mike Goedhart, Buhl, Idaho – Mike thought everything was well addressed. He said the demographic report noted that 66% were here less than 3 years, didn't feel it was a good prospect. He thought the data was ambiguous and hard to validate. He thinks we're going to see more growth than the report showed. Mayor McClain commented on how some people in the stakeholder committee thought my voice doesn't matter but it's important to hear from all of them. Mike agreed. He said he loves this little town. Michael mentioned that reading that report gives you a lot of hope. Mike agreed. You're going to get growth. Either good growth or bad growth. He talked about sustainable growth. It's a good little town. Mayor McClain stopped him from talking after the 2 minute timer went off.

Jon Thomsen, Buhl, Idaho – Jon referenced a letter that Michael read recently about civility but said that he didn't think Council thinks it applies to them. He says that because he listens to what Council says but notices the body language. He referenced the Chief of Police tasing someone and the attorney saying it was justified. He commented about a city 'administrator' facing assault charges. He brought up another individual saying he is argumentative and aggressive. He stated an incident after a meeting. He said it was the mayor's husband. He went on to comment on the timer and interrupting people. He also said that as public servants, it's 'nice that you don't even have to respond to the public's questions.'

Robert Roderick, Buhl, Idaho – Robert said he moved to Buhl 4 years ago and has seen so many changes but has not seen any paperwork about these. He references recent community changes on trailers and cars parked on streets, why business and church families are attacked on this, using police for personal use needs to be checked into, and why are you still having people on your staff that attack people. This seems to be like the committee is a democrat picking on churches and republicans.

MEETING ADJOURNED –Marla moved that the meeting be adjourned; Sue seconded the motion. There was no discussion. All voted yes. The meeting was adjourned at 8:14 PM.

Minutes prepared by Chelsea Popplewell, City Clerk