

CITY OF GEARHART
Worksession of the City Council
Monday, November 24, 2025
4:00 pm On-site and Virtual/Telephonic

A worksession of the Gearhart City Council was held Monday, November 24, 2025. Council members, City staff, and the public were able to attend on-site, virtually, or by dialing in on a telephone.

Present were Mayor Kerry Smith, Councilor Paulina Cockrum, Councilor Preston Devereaux, Councilor Dana Gould, Councilor Sharon Kloepper, City Administrator Chad Sweet, Fire Chief Josh Como, Police Chief Josh Gregory, Executive Assistant Krysti Ficker, and City Treasurer Justine Hill. A quorum of the Council was present.

Mayor Smith opened the worksession and explained the purpose was to discuss the Public Safety Building (PSB) project and related community survey.

Administrator Sweet presented the PSB survey results. He noted that there were 704 total responses, which he felt demonstrated good participation. He also mentioned there were approximately 300 comments submitted, which he reorganized into themes using AI. He indicated that the survey results would be posted publicly.

Councilor Kloepper inquired if City staff were able to weed out participants that may have taken the survey multiple times. Administrator Sweet indicated that there were social media posts where individuals had taken the survey multiple times; however, there was no strong indication of anyone “cheating” the system. He mentioned that survey software (Survey Monkey) gave a 4.5% error rate, which he thought may need to be adjusted due to the potential of duplicate surveys. Councilor Kloepper inquired if the strongly opposed survey results may be more weighted due to the potential duplicate responses. Administrator Sweet indicated potentially; however, staff had not had time to adequately review. Councilor Kloepper expressed concern that the opposition group may have intentionally tried to influence the survey results. Executive Assistant Ficker confirmed that there were 375 responses to question 10 and that the duplicate survey takers on social media had indicated that their purpose was to intentionally have varied their responses to create “chaos”. Councilor Gould felt that with 700 responses, the number of duplicate attempts would have to be substantial to create a false direction (e.g., 20 responses was only approximately 2%).

Administrator Sweet reported that Question 1, “What is your name?”, was answered 416 times. Councilor Gould confirmed that the names of survey participants will not be released. Councilor Cockrum felt that it

may be beneficial to the Council members and/or staff to have access to the names (e.g., follow-up, provide support). There was continued discussion about the potential need to redact statements that create a hostile work environment for City staff in the comments section.

Administrator Sweet reported that Question 2, “Are you currently a registered voter in the City of Gearhart?”, was answered 704 times. He indicated that the data breakdown appears to show that voters and non-voters responded very similarly to the survey questions.

Administrator Sweet reported that Question 3, “Are you a property owner in Gearhart?”, was answered Yes 94.89% and No 5.11%.

Administrator Sweet reported the results for Question 4, “How do you feel about the option (A - Current Downtown Project)?”, which were Strongly Support 8.95%; Somewhat Support 14.77%; Neutral 11.65%; Somewhat Oppose 15.63%; Strongly Oppose 49.01%.

Administrator Sweet reported the results for Question 5, “How do you feel about this option (B - Remodel Existing Downtown Facility)?”, which were Strongly Support 25.85%; Somewhat Support 25.71%; Neutral 11.93%; Somewhat Oppose 14.20%; Strongly Oppose 22.30%.

Administrator Sweet reported the results for Question 6, “How do you feel about this option (C - Dunes Meadow Park)?”, which were Strongly Support 10.37%; Somewhat Support 11.08%; Neutral 6.25%; Somewhat Oppose 11.51%; Strongly Oppose 60.80%.

Administrator Sweet reported the results for Question 7, “How do you feel about this option (D - Highland Site)?” which were Strongly Support 21.59%; Somewhat Support 21.59%; Neutral 14.06%; Somewhat Oppose 11.36%; Strongly Oppose 31.39%.

Administrator Sweet reported the most preferred ranking of Question 8, “Rank the four options below in order of your preference. (1=Most preferred, 4=Least preferred)”, which were option B (Remodel Existing Downtown Facilities) 49.29%; option D (Highland Site) 27.27%; option A (Current Downtown Project) 14.35%; option C (Dunes Meadow Park Site) 9.09%.

Administrator Sweet reported the results for Question 9, “(select one) What factor matters most to you when choosing an option?”, which were cost of project 35.94%; safety and elevation (tsunami and disaster resilience) 18.89%; longevity and future adaptability 12.78%; preserving the fire station's traditional

downtown location 15.48%; other (with comments) 16.90%. He also noted that software rated the feel or “mood” of the comments using AI, which were positive 15%; neutral 48%; negative 34%; undetected 3%.

Administrator Sweet reported that Question 10, “Please share any additional thoughts, concerns, or suggestions you’d like the City Council to consider?”, was answered 375 times. He also noted that using AI the software provided a thematic analysis of the comments, which were positive 9%; neutral 23%; negative 67%; undetected 1%. Administrator Sweet also mentioned the categories that AI further analyzed in the comments, which were site location considerations 24%; project cost concerns 21%; community engagement and opposition 12%; facility renovation and access 9%; tsunami and earthquake risks 9%; public safety infrastructure 7%; city government criticism 6%; survey methodology concerns 4%; project timing concerns 4%; shared services evaluation 4%.

After Administrator Sweet finished going over the survey results, he transitioned into a document he created with the assistance of AI (*Summary of Comment Themes*), which provided a summary of the 375 written comments submitted in Question 10 and provided an overall assessment of the Public Safety Building project.

1. Cost and Affordability - strong sensitivity to project costs; preference for practical, lower-cost approaches; and skepticism towards large-scale or ambitious capital projects.
2. Park Site Opposition (Dunes Meadow / Leslie Miller Park) - loss of parkland and green space; fear of setting a precedent for development within parks; emotional attachment to the existing park environment; and desire to preserve public space for recreation/community use.
3. Trust, Transparency, and Process Concerns - whether prior survey efforts were handled well; whether decisions are being made before community input is fully evaluated; confusion about elements of the project; and misinformation circulating on social media.
4. Downtown Rebuild Skepticism - concerns about building in the tsunami zone; worries about cost; questions about whether the rebuild solves long-term needs; and confusion created by misinformation online.
5. Support for the Downtown Remodel Option - lower cost; reduced disruption; and perception of being a reasonable, balanced approach.
6. Mixed Feedback on the Highlands Lane Site - interest in the tsunami-safe location; concerns about response times, distance, and access; and questions about whether moving services away from the center of town is appropriate.
7. Influence of Misinformation - City Hall being combined with the project; the survey methodology; and the City’s intent or decision-making process.

- Overall Assessment was that 1) the downtown remodel option had the strongest community support; 2) the Highlands Lane site was the only alternative with meaningful public openness; 3) the park site (Dunes Meadow/Leslie Miller) was not publicly viable; 4) the downtown rebuild concept, as previously developed, faced significant public opposition.

Councilor Kloefer expressed concern over the comment regarding a remodel being “minimally disruptive” when it would actually be very disruptive. Administrative Sweet felt the comment may have meant less disruptive to the residents rather than City operations.

Councilor Cockrum inquired about the viability of having two options on the ballot. Administrative Sweet was going to follow up with the City’s legal counsel.

Councilor Devereaux had concerns over the morale of the volunteer fire staff, which may cause irritation and resignations. He felt like they can only take so much negativity. He also had concerns that eventually OSHA, the Fire Marshall, and the Police Bureau would start putting pressure on the City to improve conditions. Administrator Sweet felt that the firefighters would be satisfied with having a facility that addressed safety concerns (e.g., office space, shower, bathroom). He felt that one of the main concerns of volunteers has been the social media comments. He would like to engage the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department’s President to get his input.

There was continued discussion on merging with Seaside’s fire department; community support; the influence of specific groups on social media; significance of mutual aid; pay-to-play fire departments; previous votes; financial constraints; and the relevance of funds being spent on a remodel.

The Mayor adjourned the worksession at 4:53 pm.

Mayor Kerry Smith

Chad Sweet, City Administrator