

CITY OF GEARHART  
Worksession of the City Council  
Tuesday, January 13, 2026  
4:00 pm On-site and Virtual/Telephonic

A worksession of the Gearhart City Council was held Tuesday, January 13, 2026. 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, Fire Training/Operations Hank Schendel, Executive Assistant Krysti Ficker, and City Treasurer Justine Hill. A quorum of the Council was present.

Administrator Sweet distributed two documents (*City Attorney Services Discussion and Fire/Police Station/City Hall Public Safety Facilities Discussion*).

Mayor Smith called the worksession to order. He noted that the City Attorney services item would be discussed first.

Administrator Sweet explained that the purpose was to discuss if the City should initiate a formal recruitment process for City Attorney services or continue the current interim arrangement with Beery, Elsner, & Hammond, LLP (BEH) with the potential of a permanent agreement. He indicated that it may behoove the Council to clarify what values the City would like in a City Attorney and make sure the services align with Gearhart's needs. He noted the current interim agreement with BEH; however, he reiterated that it was still temporary due to BEH's staffing levels. He indicated that BEH had hired some new staff and indicated they may be able to handle Gearhart's workload on a permanent basis.

Mayor Smith felt that City staff should move forward with a RFP recruitment process. He felt that because there was uncertainty in the longevity of the interim agreement, the City should be prepared. He indicated he was not dissatisfied with the current BEH arrangement; however, he did not want to be reactive if the interim agreement suddenly ended. Councilor Kloepper inquired about the length of notice that BEH would provide if they were unable to continue services. Administrator Sweet indicated that BEH has indicated they will provide an adequate notice period if they cannot provide services. Councilor Kloepper has been satisfied with BEH; however, she noted that Administrator Sweet had expressed concern about having to work with several different attorneys rather than one, dedicated person. Administrator Sweet clarified that originally he did feel that it may be better to only have one, dedicated person; however, as the relationship with BEH staff has evolved, he felt that having a team of attorneys to assist has been beneficial. Councilor

Kloepfer appreciated the ability to take advantage of multiple experts and did not want to waste City staff efforts if BEH was able to provide service. Councilor Gould felt that having access to specialized attorneys was a positive and that she has also been satisfied with BEH. Councilor Devereaux appreciated BEH stepping up when Gearhart was in an emergency situation. He felt they have been providing excellent service. He expressed interest in staying with BEH. Councilor Cockrum felt that information provided in Administrator Sweet's handout (*Defining What Gearhart Needs in a City Attorney section*) was good; however, under one of the categories, (*Broad general municipal law*) many of the items could be supported by other City resources (LOC, CIS). She felt that the core priorities of Oregon-specific municipal experience; strong land use expertise; and election law experience were more critical. Councilor Cockrum inquired about the costs of the RFP process. Administrator Sweet felt the costs were minimal (e.g., advertising; staff time). She felt that with the information that had already been gathered and the minimal amount of required staff time, the City should move forward updating the RFP. She indicated she was also satisfied with BEH; however, felt the City should be nimble and prepared if BEH was unable to provide service. Mayor Smith noted that it would be beneficial in the RFP process to note to applicants that they must notify the City if they have multiple lawyers providing services. Administrator Sweet was going to work on a draft RFP to share with the Council.

Mayor Smith introduced the discussion on the remodel of the Public Safety Building, which he indicated would be a remodel of the current fire station. Administrator Sweet explained that the focus of the discussion was to give a status update on the evaluation of a remodel of the downtown facilities (fire, police, public works); as well as the feasibility of providing a potential measure at the May 19, 2026 election. After discussions with FFA Architecture and Interiors (City's architects), Administrator Sweet felt that it would be possible to meet election deadlines.

Administrator Sweet went over the preliminary planning costs of the remodel project, which is being estimated at \$10 million. He noted that some of the high-level components were: a new public works facility (\$2.0 million); fire station seismic improvements (\$0.9 million); fire station remodel allowance (\$1.0 million); city hall/police remodel allowance (\$0.5 million); and sitework (\$0.8 million).

Administrator Sweet noted that the seismic improvements would be very limited (e.g., roof system, steel plate walls) and would not really improve resiliency. He indicated the intention was to move public works to a new facility, which would allow a remodel of the current public works facility for the fire department. Councilor Kloepfer inquired about a drainage system for the fire station apron area. Administrator Sweet did not think it was specifically in the renovation plan; however would note the item. Councilor Gould inquired about costs for the temporary relocation of the fire department during construction. Administrator Sweet mentioned that the plan was to have a new public works facility completed first so that the fire department could temporarily be relocated there until renovations were completed. He noted that the

current renovation project has public works remaining on the current City Hall property area. Councilor Gould also felt it would be prudent to purchase the Pacific Power property adjacent to City Hall during the process due to the limited amount of space. Administrator Sweet went over the cost summary, which included net hard costs (\$5.2 million); margins and adjustments (\$2.4 million); escalation to Q2 2026 (\$0.9 million); and soft costs (\$1.5 million). He also noted some exclusions in the preliminary estimate, which were owner contingency; additional year of escalation; and essential-facility foundation or DSM soil improvements.

Mayor Smith noted that there may need to be more public meetings and asked the Council to be ready to convene. Administrator Sweet covered the key election and filing deadlines for the City to be on the May 19, 2026 ballot. Councilor Cockrum inquired if the proposed timeline had enough flexibility to allow for any appeals. Administrator Sweet indicated that as long as the mandatory dates were met, the City should be able to make the May election. Councilor Cockrum recommended filing with the County as early as possible.

Councilor Gould felt it was critical that time at each meeting be dedicated for communication about the Public Safety Building project to get ahead of negative comments (e.g., combining with Seaside, “secretive” money). Councilor Devereaux was frustrated by the comments about merging Seaside and Gearhart fire departments. He noted the discrepancies in funding between the two fire operating budgets. He felt Gearhart residents would not want to pay the increased taxes if there was a merger with Seaside. He agreed that the ballot measure filing should be submitted as soon as possible because of the tight timeline.

Administrator Sweet said it was essential to work on communication; as well as having Councilors continue to ask questions about the project. Councilor Cockrum asked if there was any interest in not going to the voters in May. Administrator Sweet talked about alternative election timing options (e.g., August 2026, November 2026). Councilor Gould and Councilor Cockrum were not interested in an August election.

The Mayor adjourned the worksession at 4:56 pm.

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Mayor Kerry Smith

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Chad Sweet, City Administrator