

# Town of Los Altos Hills

## City Council Regular Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 10, 2026, at 6:00 P.M.

Council Chambers, 26379 Fremont Road, Los Altos Hills, California

Present: Mayor Bhateja, Vice Mayor Tyson, Councilmember Mok, Councilmember Swan, and Councilmember Tankha

Absent: none

Staff: Acting City Manager Cody Einfalt, Community Development Director Bradford, City Attorney Mattas, Public Works Director Kim, Finance Director Leung, and City Clerk Arika Birdsong-Miller

### **CALL TO ORDER (6:00 P.M.)**

Mayor Bhateja called the meeting to order at 6:02 P.M.

### **ROLL CALL**

Mayor Bhateja, Vice Mayor Tyson, Councilmember Mok, Councilmember Swan, and Councilmember Tankha were present.

### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

#### **1. AGENDA REVIEW**

**Mayor Bhateja** asked if there were any changes to the agenda. He then proposed moving the Community Development Director's Report (ITEM 8C) to the beginning of the agenda due to updates from Housing and Community Development. There were no objections from the Council, and Director Bradford to begin his report. (detailed in ITEM 8C)

#### **2. PRESENTATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS**

A. Consideration of an Appointment to the Los Altos Hills Pathways Committee – John Lewis (Staff: A. Miller)

**City Clerk Birdsong-Miller** introduced John Lewis for consideration to a Pathways Committee appointment, noting that he and his family enjoy the Town's pathways and that his goal is to help extend pathways throughout the Town.

**John Lewis** introduced himself as a resident of Central Drive for the past four years. He expressed appreciation for the Town's natural setting and stated that he looked forward to contributing to the community. He noted his interest in the Pathways Committee and was excited about the possibility of joining.

**Mayor Bhateja** thanked John Lewis for volunteering and asked about his experience with the Town's pathways, his overall thoughts on them, and whether there were any changes he would propose.

**John Lewis** responded that he and his family live near Foothills Park and had used approximately 30–40% of the Town's pathways, including attending the New Year's Day

Pathway Hike. He acknowledged the need to balance different uses, including cycling, horseback riding, and walking, and expressed his interest in maintaining the pathways as safe and enjoyable for everyone. He also noted that his property includes pathways on two sides, giving him firsthand familiarity with their impacts.

**Councilmember Tankha** thanked John for stepping up to volunteer and indicated she was prepared to propose a motion.

**MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Councilmember Tankha** motioned to APPOINT John Lewis to the Pathways Committee.

**Councilmember Swan** seconded the motion.

**MOTION PASSED: 5-0**

AYES: MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, TYSON, BHATEJA  
NOES: NONE  
ABSTAIN: NONE  
RECUSED: NONE  
ABSENT: NONE

- B. Consideration of Reappointments to the Los Altos Hills Open Space Committee – Anita Baldwin and Viggie Mokkarala (Staff: A. Miller)

**City Clerk Birdsong-Miller** introduced a request to reappoint two members to the Open Space Committee. She stated that this would be Viggie’s second term and Anita’s third term. Their appointments were set to expire at the end of the month. She noted that both members enjoyed serving on the committee and had been active participants. Although they were unable to attend the meeting, she conveyed their request to be reappointed for another four-year term.

**MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Mayor Bhateja** motioned to APPROVE the reappointments for Anita Baldwin and Viggie Mokkarala to the Open Space Committee.

**Councilmember Tyson** seconded the motion.

**MOTION PASSED: 5-0**

AYES: MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, TYSON, BHATEJA  
NOES: NONE  
ABSTAIN: NONE  
RECUSED: NONE  
ABSENT: NONE

- C. Report from the Los Altos Hills Community Fire District (J. Logan, LAHCFD General Manager)

**J. Logan**, General Manager of the Los Altos Hills County Fire District (LAHCFD), addressed the Council and introduced Finance and IT Manager Russ Morreale, Santa Clara County Fire Department Fire Chief Suwanna Kerdkaw, and Deputy Fire Chief Brian Glass. She stated that this was the fifth memorandum report presented to the Council since July 2025. Ms. Logan explained that Mr. Morreale would provide an overview of the Fire District’s 2026–27 draft budget submitted in January and that she would report on services provided under the 10-year fire and emergency medical services agreement between the Fire Department and the Fire

District. She noted that a summary of services was included in the agenda packet and that Chief Kerdkaew could comment on the long-standing partnership providing fire and emergency medical services to Los Altos Hills residents. She stated that the presentation would conclude with responses to Council questions.

**Finance and IT Manager Russ Morreale** provided an overview of the Fire District's 2026–27 draft budget, explaining that it supported services to the Los Altos Hills community and followed the County of Santa Clara budget process. He highlighted the district's focus on fiscal transparency and its six service areas: fire and emergency response, planning and mitigation, community outreach, infrastructure and capital, operations and administration, and technology.

He reported that about 75 percent of the \$22 million budget, roughly \$17 million, funded direct community services, including \$9 million for fire and emergency services from the Santa Clara County Fire Department and \$7 million for fire mitigation programs such as evacuation planning, defensible space, home ignition zone initiatives, and the I-280 fuel break. Additional funds from prior years supported projects such as new fire apparatus, the I-280 fuel break, and a feasibility study for a potential new fire facility. The district operated with 13.5 full-time positions and used contracted services while maintaining low administrative overhead.

**J. Logan** described the partnership between the Los Altos Hills County Fire District and the Santa Clara County Fire Department under their 10-year agreement to provide fire and emergency medical services. She explained that the two organizations provide complementary services to reduce risks from wildfires, emergencies, earthquakes, and other hazards.

She reported that the Fire Department provides daily emergency response, specialized Wildland Urban Interface protection, and regional leadership, while the Fire District supplements these services with additional staffing, seasonal firefighters, wildfire engine operations, and extra apparatus. Seasonal staffing at Palo Alto Fire Station 8 was noted as part of the collaborative effort.

Ms. Logan added that the Fire Department collaborates with Town and Fire District staff on fire risk reduction, code review, public outreach, the I-280 fuel break, Wildland Urban Interface compliance, and a feasibility study for a potential new fire facility. She concluded by inviting Chief Kerdkaew to provide closing remarks and thanked the Council for the opportunity to present.

**Chief Kerdkaew** highlighted the 30-year partnership between the Santa Clara County Fire Department and the Los Altos Hills County Fire District. She noted her and Deputy Chief Glass's early experience in the area, the district's support in providing advanced equipment like the Auto Pulse for CPR, and the value of past patrols in familiarizing firefighters with local terrain. She emphasized that fire risk has increased over time and stressed the importance of the ongoing partnership in enhancing resources, preparedness, and response. She concluded by offering to answer questions.

**Mayor Bhateja** thanked the representatives for their presentations and comments and invited council members to ask questions.

A question-and-answer session between the City Council and the LAHCFD representatives ensued.

## **Mayor Bhateja OPENED PUBLIC COMMENT.**

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

1. **Jim Waschura**, Vice Chair of the Planning Commission, addressed the Council and expressed appreciation for the town's capable fire services. He built on a point raised earlier by Mayor Bhateja regarding the development process, noting that residents at a recent listening session had raised concerns about delays caused by fire department review requirements. He mentioned that new Planning Commissioner Malika Junaid, a long-time local architect, had observed similar issues firsthand, particularly with ADU and other development projects, where fire department requirements could add six months to the approval cycle.

Mr. Waschura noted that the finance presentation showed a roughly 40% reduction in the planning budget from the previous year, which he felt was inconsistent with the town's goal of accelerating development approvals. He also referenced a slide describing the "mosaic of services" between departments, noting that planning functions were not highlighted. He suggested that the Town coordinate with the fire department to provide additional resources, including dedicated counter hours, to help reduce the six-month approval delays. He concluded by thanking the Council for their time.

**Mayor Bhateja** asked if anyone from the staff or fire department could provide their thoughts on Mr. Waschura's suggestion before moving on, specifically regarding the possibility of offering counter hours or additional planning resources to help reduce development approval delays.

**Mr. Morreale** clarified that the term "planning" in the fire district budget refers to the planning of programs, projects, and service delivery, not community development or land-use planning. He apologized for any confusion and explained that the "Planning Programs and Projects" line in the budget specifically addresses the organization and execution of fire mitigation services.

**Mayor Bhateja** asked specifically about the possibility of providing counter hours from the fire district to help address development delays.

**Chief Kerdkaew** responded that a six-month delay was much longer than the fire district's expected turnaround time. She explained that the district first needed to identify where the bottlenecks were and committed to exploring the issue with staff, including Deputy Chief Glass's counterpart, to determine what was causing the delay before committing additional resources.

**Mayor Bhateja** clarified that the responsible staff member was not Chief Glass, and Chief Kerdkaew confirmed that the matter fell under Chief Estrada's division, reporting to Chief Mark Shumate. She added that she would follow up the next day with Chiefs Shumate and Estrada regarding the issue.

2. **John O'Connell** commented on the issue of jurisdiction, emphasizing that wildfires do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries. He noted that while the fire district had mitigated eucalyptus trees along Horseshoe Lane, there were still many hazardous trees on private property above that route. He stressed that the focus should be on addressing hazards rather than jurisdictional ownership.

He expressed appreciation for the presence of Los Altos Hills County Fire District Board members, including President Roger Spreen and Councilmember Tyson, and referenced a prior

discussion about the CZU fire and Interstate 280, noting that jurisdictional issues had complicated fire response. He explained that much of the wildland interface needing protection is in San Mateo County, with adjacent areas in Palo Alto, and that the fire district should help bridge these jurisdictional gaps.

Mr. O’Connell acknowledged progress, such as the reopening and staffing of the fire station in Palo Alto’s Foothill Preserve after the city had closed it, but emphasized that more could be done. He urged stakeholders to move past prior conflicts, including issues involving Mr. Cortese, and to focus collectively on ensuring community safety.

3. **Mr. Evans** addressed the Council, staff, and public, emphasizing the role of firefighters in putting out fires by spraying water. He advocated for the use of wildfire protection systems—exterior sprinkler systems for homes—which operate independently of the electrical grid through propane, gas, or diesel-powered generators and utilize stand-alone water tanks or pools. He explained that these systems often include surfactants or wetting agents to keep landscaping, roofs, walls, and windows wet, helping protect homes during wildfires.

Mr. Evans noted that at a prior town fire meeting, no one had discussed wildfire protection systems, and when he asked, a Santa Clara County Fire battalion chief expressed limited knowledge of them and questioned their utility without power or water. He emphasized that in a large wildfire, firefighters like Chief Glass would prioritize evacuation over protecting individual homes, making it the responsibility of residents to install such protection systems.

He concluded by stating that, for smaller fires, local resources are sufficient, and that funding should focus on increasing water supply, such as water tanks, rather than building another fire station.

**Councilmember Tankha** asked whether the district has sufficient water supply, noting that inadequate water was a major issue during the Los Angeles fires and Chief Kerdkaew provided a detailed response.

4. **Dave Stewart**, attending via Zoom, directed a question to General Manager Logan regarding the Fire District’s role in improving early warning and notification systems for residents. He noted that while the district uses N5 sensors for early detection, he was interested in whether the Fire District could help enhance the technology for notifying residents, beyond simply forwarding alerts handled by police and fire.

**J. Logan** responded that the Fire District has not implemented alert or alarm systems for notifications. She noted that the district is currently focused on N5 sensors as part of a broader “mosaic” of detection and mitigation efforts and is collaborating with town committees, such as the EPRC, that are exploring notification systems. She emphasized the district’s interest in the outcomes of those efforts.

**Mayor Bhateja** asked whether the district is committed to N5 sensors or still evaluating them, and whether their effectiveness for early warning has been assessed.

**J. Logan** responded that the district is still working on implementation logistics but believes the sensors are useful and wants to integrate them into the district’s network as part of a broader wildfire detection strategy. She noted that past use in Woodside demonstrated their value.

**Mr. Morreale** added that budget funds have been allocated for a pilot N5 program.

**Deputy Chief Glass** explained that the county is piloting about 15 N5 sensors in partnership with Supervisor Lee’s office, County Parks, the Fire Safe Council, and Santa Clara County Fire. He described N5s as passive “sensors” that detect fire early in areas not covered by cameras or staffed personnel, complementing other technology like the Alert Wildfire Camera Network. He emphasized that early warning is a collaborative effort and clarified that evacuation orders remain the responsibility of law enforcement, with the Fire Department providing wildfire expertise and rapid response.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED PUBLIC COMMENT.

### **3. PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR**

*Persons wishing to address the Council on any subject not on the agenda may do so now. Please complete a Speaker Card located on the back table of the Council Chambers and submit it to the City Clerk. Comments are limited to two (2) minutes per speaker. California law prohibits the Council from acting on items that do not appear on the agenda. Under a Resolution previously adopted by the Council, such items can be referred to staff for appropriate action, which may include placement on the next available agenda.*

Speakers and members of the audience are reminded that public comments must comply with the Town’s Rules of Decorum. Profane language or disruptive conduct is prohibited under Los Altos Hills Municipal Code Sections 2-1.115(c) and (d).

**Gautham Agarwal** shared a presentation and provided an update on the Community Fiber Project and answered questions from staff and the Council.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR.

### **4. INFORMATIONAL REPORTS (ITEMS PROVIDED SOLELY FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES)**

A. Treasurer’s Report (Staff: T. Leung)

B. Disbursement Report (Staff: T. Leung)

### **5. CONSENT CALENDAR**

A. Approval of the City Council Regular Meeting Minutes January 15, 2026 (Staff: A. Miller)

B. Vacating Appointments to the History Committee – Jitze Couperus and Duffy Price (Staff: A. Miller)

C. Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Purchase a Replacement Chipper Not to Exceed \$100,000 and Either Sell or Donate the 2009 Carlton 1790 Towable Chipper (Staff: M. Schloetter)

**Public Works Director Kim** explained that staff was recommending replacing, selling, or donating the current chipper, which had experienced major repair issues and had feeder problems. He noted that evaluating or quoting repair costs would require taking it to a facility in Livermore. The proposal was to upgrade to a chipper with greater capacity and features to optimize operations. He added that the current 2009 unit had limited capacity and about 1,000 hours of use. Replacement costs were estimated at \$90,000–\$100,000, and while leasing was

suggested, research showed that long-term leases were not available, only short-term rentals. Kim invited Maintenance Superintendent Michael Schloetter to provide further details.

**Michael Schloetter**, LAH Maintenance Superintendent, stated that leasing options for the chipper are not available. One company offered a lease-to-buy program through their financial services, while the only other option would be to rent the equipment short-term from them or other rental agencies as needed.

**Director Kim** stated that staff had recommended replacing the chipper but was open to exploring other options as directed by Council.

**Councilmember Mok** raised safety concerns comparing the new and old chippers. Mr. Schloetter explained that the new chipper reduced manual lifting, included a winch for heavy limbs, and had multiple emergency stop bars, unlike the current unit which had only one.

Councilmembers agreed that safety was paramount and emphasized the need for higher capacity equipment. They noted that renting was not optimal due to time constraints and concluded there was consensus to purchase a new chipper rather than lease or buy used. **Mayor Bhateja** confirmed the current unit was 13 years old and opened the item for public comment.

1. **John O’Connell** commended Mike’s team for their excellent work, stating that providing them with the proper tools allows them to handle tasks that others cannot. He added that purchasing a chipper would be an effective way to remove brush and other debris.

**MOTION MADE AND SECONDED:** Councilmember Swan moved to APPROVE the purchase of a chipper up to \$100,000.

**Councilmember Mok** seconded the motion.

**MOTION PASSED: 5-0**

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, TYSON, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	NONE

- D. Consideration of a Resolution Adopting the 2026-2027 Two-Year City Council Work Plan (Staff: C. Einfalt)

**Mayor Bhateja** requested ITEM 5C be pulled from the CONSENT CALENDAR and considered separately.

**MOTION MADE AND SECONDED:** Vice Mayor Tyson moved to APPROVE the CONSENT CALENDAR for items 5A, 5B, and 5D.

**Councilmember Swan** seconded the motion.

**MOTION PASSED: 5-0**

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, TYSON, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE  
RECUSED: NONE  
ABSENT: NONE

## 6. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Discussion on Emergency Management Services in Town and Possible Council Action to Approve Resolution Adopting Job Classification for an Emergency Manager and Amendments to the Town's Salary Schedule (Staff: C. Einfalt)

**Acting City Manager Einfalt** provided the staff report and shared a presentation.

The Councilmembers discussed the importance of preparing for catastrophic events, noting that while the town had avoided major disasters so far, proactive planning was necessary. **Councilmember Mok** emphasized the need to act, **Councilmember Tankha** suggested exploring resource sharing with the Fire District before deciding, and **Councilmember Swan** raised concerns about budget constraints and the feasibility of hiring a full-time employee. **Vice Mayor Tyson** noted the town's returned reserves and stressed evaluating priorities like public safety, fire, and housing. **Mayor Bhateja** underscored that safety is the town's top priority and OPENED the discussion to PUBLIC COMMENT to gather resident input.

### PUBLIC COMMENT

1. **Phil Harter**, chair of the EPRC, emphasized the town's top priority as the safety of people, property, and the environment. He supported hiring a full-time emergency manager, arguing that part-time consultants had not resolved the workload over the years. Harter noted that while the Fire District provides services, the town needs an in-house person who understands local needs. He urged the Council to be creative in funding the position, referencing the town's returned reserves, and offered to answer questions from Councilmembers.
2. **Dave Stewart** supported hiring a full-time emergency manager, agreeing with Phil Harter's points. He noted that part-time staff had been insufficient for completing required state paperwork and emphasized that a full-time employee would serve as a force multiplier by coordinating volunteers across EPRC, CERT, Teen CERT, the ham club, and other emergency groups.
3. **John O'Connell** expressed support for hiring a full-time emergency manager, emphasizing the preference for strengthening the town's employee base over relying on consultants. He noted that if the right candidate can be found, hiring is a clear choice but cautioned against hiring if a suitable person cannot be identified.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED PUBLIC COMMENT.

Councilmembers discussed the need for a full-time emergency management position. **Councilmember Mok** emphasized that the responsibility could be shared with the Fire District, noting that while it might not be full-time for the Town alone, it would be a full-time role overall. **Vice Mayor Tyson** and **Councilmember Tankha** suggested reviewing potential collaborations and touchpoints with the Fire District before approving the position, while **Councilmember Swan** raised the possibility of state grants to help fund it. **Acting City Manager Einfalt** explained that although the Fire District could provide input, the town would still need a lead employee to manage projects. **Mayor Bhateja** highlighted that public safety is the council's top priority and requested that the next meeting include information on potential cost-sharing with the Fire District or with



the City of Los Altos to offset expenses.

**Vice Mayor Tyson** stated he would deprioritize collaboration with Los Altos, noting the town already had enough workload to manage internally. Mayor acknowledged this but suggested exploring limited cost-sharing on projects of mutual relevance. Acting City Manager Einfalt noted that most projects were specific to the town, though some shared response components could potentially involve collaboration. **Mayor Bhateja** concluded that staff should return with information on cost-sharing opportunities and a plan for filling the emergency management role so the council could make a decision.

NO MOTION.

B. Process and Considerations for Establishing a New Standing Committee (Staff: A. Miller)

**City Clerk Birdsong-Miller** provided the staff report and shared a presentation.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED PUBLIC COMMENTS.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

1. **Ms. Evans** emphasized that many residents lacked understanding of the state’s housing requirements, which often led to reactionary responses. She noted that the community included residents with expertise in architecture, building, fundraising, and communications. By forming a standing Housing Element Committee, the town could engage these residents, increase transparency, and educate the community about compliance efforts. She urged the Council to support establishing this committee.
2. **Jim Waschura** noted that the housing issue, which he referred to as “the H word,” was complex and challenging. He cautioned that forming a citizen committee, as Portola Valley had done, could raise resident concerns and create division. He urged the Council and Planning Commission to lead efforts to clearly communicate decisions to residents and ensure transparency throughout the process.
3. **John O’Connell** expressed a different view from Jim Waschura, advocating for a resident-based committee with representation from all areas of town, including Mora Drive, Ly Circle, and O’Keefe. He suggested having two council member liaisons supporting the Planning Commission and noted that such a committee would provide better guidance than consultants alone. He emphasized the importance of establishing the committee quickly, ideally within two to three months.
4. **Sue Welch** urged the Council to form a standing housing committee of 10–12 residents with 1–2 council liaisons. She emphasized that state housing mandates will continue for many years and that resident committees have historically been a valuable resource in Los Altos Hills, citing the town’s longstanding use of resident committees since 1956. Welch noted that residents have diverse expertise, including knowledge of housing mandates and legal requirements, and could contribute to innovative, minimally disruptive solutions to meet RHNA goals while preserving the town’s character.

Councilmembers discussed the potential creation of a standing Housing Element committee. Several members supported the idea, noting it could improve transparency, build public trust, and provide informed advisory input to the Council on long-term housing issues.

Members emphasized the need to carefully define the committee’s charter, scope, and membership to ensure broad community representation and avoid conflicts of interest. Questions were also raised about how the committee would interact with the Planning Commission and whether adequate resources would be available.

Staff were asked to research how other municipalities, such as Carmel and Portola Valley, structured similar committees and return with options and recommendations for committee structure, composition, and best practices.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

5. **John O’Connell** suggested that interested residents help draft the committee charter rather than assigning the task to staff, noting this could reduce staff workload and move the process forward. He stated that involving potential applicants in developing the charter could help address questions raised by the Council and emphasized that committee meetings would provide an open and accessible forum for residents. He also expressed concern that additional considerations discussed might delay the process.
6. **Ms. Evans** urged the Council not to overcomplicate the discussion and emphasized the importance of trusting residents’ intentions. She stated that community members cared deeply about the town and wanted to help develop a housing plan that engaged residents, built consensus, and preserved the character of the community. She encouraged staff to consider ways residents could assist and expressed support for greater citizen involvement in the housing element process.
7. **John O’Connell** noted that a recent community meeting fostered valuable discussion and that residents seeking to join the committee were motivated to contribute constructively. He added that it was unlikely anyone would join solely to block housing near their own property and that the Council could screen applicants by asking about their motivations.

**Councilmember Tankha** expressed concern that, while she was not referring to any specific individual, in the event a resident joined the committee primarily to prevent housing near their own property, appropriate guardrails would be needed to ensure the committee remained fair and balanced.

**Mayor Bhateja** commented that Mr. O’Connell could likely identify someone in Town who should not serve on the committee but did not elaborate further and then suggested turning the discussion over to the city attorney.

**City Attorney Mattas** advised that the committee should have a clear charge and purpose, aligned with the town’s adopted housing element. He recommended that the Council provide guiding principles for the committee, such as broad community representation and conflict-of-interest rules, while allowing flexibility in how the committee develops recommendations. He noted that the Council could either draft the charter themselves or allow the committee to draft it based on established principles. He emphasized that the committee’s role should be to provide diverse, representative input and actionable recommendations to help the Council achieve the housing element’s goals, rather than making final decisions independently.

**Vice Mayor Tyson** agreed that starting with guiding principles would help resolve the “catch-22” of selecting committee members before a charter exists. **Councilmember Tankha** added that the committee could then develop its own charter once it understood the Council’s goals,

which **Vice Mayor Tyson** confirmed he understood.

**City Attorney Mattas** explained that the committee's charter, similar to the Technology Committee, would return to the Council for final approval after incorporating committee input, guiding principles, and public feedback. He noted that this approach could apply to either a standing or ad hoc committee but indicated it aligned more with a standing committee, as it would allow broader representation and voting authority beyond just the Council members, unlike an ad hoc committee where only legislative members vote.

**Councilmember Tankha** noted that having a majority decision from the standing committee would help the Council justify its actions and decisions.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

8. **Jim Waschura** suggested that the Council consider strengthening the existing ad hoc committee rather than creating a long-term standing committee. He acknowledged the value of a standing committee for long-term issues but expressed concern about complications, such as residents near proposed housing being excluded from participation. He recommended a more consistent ad hoc approach to ensure affected residents' voices were heard and to avoid potential conflicts.

**Councilmember Tankha** stated that the ad hoc committee approach had been tried previously, including work with staff, but noted that the process was still perceived as lacking transparency by the community.

**Mayor Bhateja** responded that previous ad hoc committees, such as those working with Twin Oaks, were based on specific charters and did not invite public comments. He explained that the current task of identifying alternative housing sites was not intended for public input at this stage. He noted that forming an ad hoc committee with public members, similar to approaches in Portola Valley and Carmel, would be different and could include Planning Commission members. He then invited Director Bradford to comment on how a committee could add value.

**Director Bradford** identified four key topics that a committee charter could focus on to provide the most value to staff: density, site size, housing types, and locations for potential development.

**Mayor Bhateja** suggested that staff research how committees in Carmel and Portola Valley operated to gather insights before making any decisions. **Vice Mayor Tyson** supported this approach, emphasizing that it was more important to implement the process correctly than quickly.

**Acting City Manager Einfalt** confirmed he understood the Council's direction and suggested that, as a homework item, the Council consider the guiding principles outlined by Attorney Mattas. He noted that when staff returned with information, the Council would have all the necessary elements to make a decision.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

9. **Ms. Evans** noted that Carmel's committee process was highly transparent, with weekly website updates and publicly noticed meetings. She emphasized that it was a long-term project rather than a typical ad hoc committee and highlighted the mayor's active leadership in the process. She encouraged the Council to review Carmel's approach.

NO MOTION.

C. Discussion on Adjustments to the City Council Member Stipend (Staff: J. Parcutilo)

**Management Analyst Parcutilo** provided the staff report and shared a presentation.

**Vice Mayor Tyson** explained that when the law changed in 2023, the previous \$300 per month stipend, which had remained the same for about 30 years, became adjustable. He initially voted against increasing it because he believed the town was small and simple. He stated that he had since changed his mind, emphasizing that any adjustment would set a precedent for future councils and support the long-term health of the organization. Mr. Tyson noted that serving on the Council now required significant time, which could limit participation to those already established, and suggested increasing the stipend to a level similar to other cities, such as \$950 per month with healthcare benefits.

**Councilmember Mok** noted that about a third of residents are seniors and that serving on the Council is not typically a person's primary job, making it financially difficult for many to participate. He suggested that increasing the stipend could allow a more diverse group of residents, including younger people and those with different careers, to serve. Mok supported raising the stipend to at least \$600 per month, stating that the current \$300 was insufficient, though he did not advocate for \$950 with healthcare benefits.

**Councilmember Swan** supported increasing the stipend to \$950 per month and proposed allowing councilmembers on Medicare to opt out of the town-provided medical benefits. He suggested that those members could apply the stipend toward their own Medicare costs, which would save the town money and better accommodate individual councilmembers' life circumstances.

**Mayor Bhateja** questioned the stipend and benefits comparison chart, noting that in some cities, such as Hillsboro, it was unclear whether "healthcare offered" meant councilmembers had to pay for it. He contrasted this with Los Altos Hills, where councilmembers can receive benefits without personal cost. Acting City Manager Einfalt clarified that in those cases, the benefits were fully provided.

A question-and-answer session between the City Council and staff regarding benefits ensued.

**FIRST MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Vice Mayor Tyson** moved to increase the compensation to Councilmembers to \$600 a month, that we add the annual inflation adjustment as noted in the document, and make no other changes.

**Councilmember Mok** seconded the motion.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

1. **Jim Waschura** stated that while the stipend amount was not personally important to him, he emphasized the need to ensure that serving on City Council is accessible to residents of all income levels. He noted that \$950 per month was relatively small compared to other town expenses and the value of health benefits, highlighting that financial barriers should not restrict participation.

**Councilmember Swan** proposed amending the stipend to \$950 per month to allow for medical benefits.

**City Attorney Mattas** clarified the procedure for voting, explaining that if a substitute motion is made and seconded, the Council should vote on the substitute motion rather than the original motion.

**Councilmember Swan** formally made a substitute motion to set the stipend at \$950 per month.

**Councilmember Mok** seconded the motion.

**City Attorney Mattas** explained that the Council should first vote on the substitute motion. If it passes, no further action is needed; if it fails, the Council would then consider the original motion. He reminded the Council that tonight’s vote provides direction, and state law requires two public hearings at separate meetings. He also noted, as Vice Mayor Tyson mentioned, that any approved changes would not take effect until the next Council is seated. He also confirmed that the stipend decision does not require a public election.

**City Attorney Mattas** also explained that under the law, any approved stipend changes take effect following the next election that elects new council members.

**The City Clerk** performed a roll call vote on the substitute motion made by Councilmember Swan.

**MOTION PASSED: 3-2**

AYES: MOK, SWAN, TYSON

NOES: TANKHA , BHATEJA

ABSTAIN: NONE

RECUSED: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

**City Attorney Mattas** stated that staff would return with documentation, and the item must be heard at two separate Council meetings at least a month apart. If adopted after the second hearing, the changes would take effect after the next election. He noted that the Council would technically vote only at the second meeting, unless they chose to direct staff not to bring it back.

**Mayor Bhateja** expressed concern about the optics of increasing the stipend, noting that with health benefits included, the Council could become one of the highest-paid, and that this might be a public perception issue.

**7. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, AND CONCILMEMBERS ON OUTSIDE AGENCIES**

A. Update from Mayoral Rotation Ad Hoc Committee (~3:28:38 in the meeting video)

**Vice Mayor Tyson** provided the ad hoc committee report and shared a presentation.

Councilmembers discussed how mayoral and vice mayoral succession is determined in cases where elections were not held. **Councilmember Swan** suggested that if a second election was canceled, vote totals from the previous election could carry forward. **Vice Mayor Tyson** noted that the practice had been based on time served as mayor. **Councilmember Tankha** clarified that

succession follows a staggered system based on longest time having not served. **Councilmember Mok** initially misread a rule about eligibility after serving as mayor once, but **Mayor Bhateja** and **Councilmember Tankha** clarified that a councilmember remains eligible if they have served only once, and Mr. Mok acknowledged the correction.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED PUBLIC COMMENTS.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

1. John O’Connell shared his modification and expressed concern that the proposed mayoral succession rules could discourage new candidates from running for council. He noted that requiring council members to serve two years or complete certain steps before becoming mayor gives priority to long-serving members, limiting opportunities for newer members. O’Connell suggested reducing the requirement to one year, since vice mayor service already ensures some continuity. He emphasized that most candidates bring relevant professional experience, and mistakes in process can be corrected, so strict experience-based rules are unnecessary. He concluded that clarifying current ambiguities would suffice, and that the proposed changes create a new policy that could disincentivize participation.
2. **Jim Waschura**, speaking as a resident, suggested a revision to the proposed policy on council leadership. He supports having experienced people in leadership but emphasized that any five councilmembers should be able to choose their leader. He recommended striking the phrase “if it determines that extraordinary conditions apply” from the sentence granting the Council the ability to suspend the policy, leaving it as: “Each City Council has the ability and right to suspend this policy.” Mr. Waschura explained that this reflects current practice, allowing the council to use their judgment without having to justify it under special conditions.

**Councilmember Tankha** recalled two past instances in the town’s history when the Council bypassed the leadership policy, noting that both involved women, both Asian, being challenged as not fit to serve as mayor. She emphasized that in one case the challenge did not prevail. **Jim Waschura** expressed hope that such judgments about fitness would not happen in the future. **Councilmember Swan** agreed, noting that defining extraordinary conditions is difficult and vague, and suggested ending the policy statement simply at policy to avoid over-specifying. **Vice Mayor Tyson** added that while the norm should follow the policy, the Council always has discretion to deviate, and over-specifying exceptions can be counterproductive.

**Mayor Bhateja** then CLOSED PUBLIC COMMENTS.

**Mayor Bhateja** expressed support for allowing a newly elected council member to serve as vice mayor, noting that it encourages engagement and brings energy and fresh ideas to the role. He emphasized that representative government reflects the community’s choices, so giving recent election winners a chance to make an impact is valuable. Mr. Bhateja also highlighted a past situation where two candidates for vice mayor had competing rationales based on experience and tradition, pointing out that the policy does not currently address such conflicts. He concluded that even a vice mayor with little experience can be guided by other council members, and that giving new members responsibility and a “charter” helps energize the council. He noted that this discussion is informational and not expected to result in a vote today.

NO MOTION.

**MOTION MADE AND SECONDED:** Vice Mayor Tyson moved to extend the meeting past 10:00 PM.

**Councilmember Mok** seconded the motion.

**MOTION PASSED: 5-0**

AYES: MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, TYSON, BHATEJA

NOES: NONE

ABSTAIN: NONE

RECUSED: NONE

ABSENT: NONE

B. Update from Community Survey Ad Hoc Committee

**Mayor Bhateja** provided the ad hoc committee report and shared a presentation.

Councilmembers discussed the proposed Town survey and expressed skepticism about general questions. **Councilmember Swan** noted that past surveys were only useful when addressing pressing issues, and that broad “motherhood and apple pie” questions are unlikely to produce actionable results. **Councilmembers Tankha** and **Mok** emphasized targeting specific “hot-button” topics, such as housing, broadband, or property values, through focused “vertical” surveys, which are shorter, more relevant, and easier for residents to respond to. **Mayor Bhateja** agreed that vertical surveys are preferable and suggested staff develop a list of sample questions for the next meeting. **Vice Mayor Tyson** noted that broad surveys can provide a general reference point, but current feedback supports concentrating on actionable, targeted issues. The council seemed to reach a consensus to pursue shorter vertical surveys rather than a broad survey, and staff will return with proposed areas and sample questions.

NO MOTION.

**8. STAFF REPORTS**

A. City Attorney

No report.

B. City Clerk

**City Clerk Birdsong-Miller** reported that the records project at the corporation yard is progressing well. A consultant recently reviewed the boxes, and records past their retention period are being destroyed. The City plans to issue an RFP within the next two weeks to move the remaining records to a secure location, with the project expected to be completed by this summer.

C. Community Development Director (first item discussed in the meeting)

**Community Development Director Bradford** reported that the Department has been in communication with the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) regarding the Town’s Housing Element amendment and adopted multi-family zoning. HCD confirmed that the Town’s Housing Element remains certified and that the amendment is generally in conformance. HCD also reviewed the Town’s zoning and did not identify any major issues, noting three minor items that staff will review and return to the Council with recommended actions.

**Mayor Bhateja** asked Director Bradford to provide a high-level overview of the three issues identified by HCD.

**Director Bradford** provided a high-level overview of three minor issues identified by HCD related to the Town's objective design standards for multifamily housing:

1. **Site Size Requirements:** The Town's standards had defined a minimum multifamily site size of 3.5 acres and a maximum of 10 acres. HCD expressed concern that these limitations could be seen as restrictive and suggested a 1-acre minimum with no maximum cap.
2. **Unit Size Ranges:** The standards allowed units ranging from 350 to 2,000 square feet, with an average around 750 square feet. HCD viewed these ranges as constraints as well. We responded that the goal was to incentivize smaller units for more naturally affordable rents or purchases. They recommended considering it as an incentive program and requested an alternative methodology to encourage smaller, more naturally affordable units to achieve the Town's overall objectives.
3. **Setback Standards:** The Town had required 60-foot setbacks for multifamily developments. HCD suggested smaller setbacks, generally around 20 feet for front setbacks and proportionally less for side setbacks, while allowing flexibility for refinement.

**Director Bradford** noted that staff would continue working with HCD to refine these items and that proposed revisions would be brought to the Planning Commission for review before being presented to the City Council for consideration.

**Mayor Bhateja** acknowledged the tension surrounding the Housing Element amendment and noted that certification remained intact. Mayor stated that only a few minor corrections or changes were needed to achieve full approval of the Housing Element amendment and zoning. He thanked staff, the City Attorney, residents who contributed to the process, the Council, the City Manager, and the Community Development Department, and recognized their efforts with a round of applause.

**Mayor Bhateja** then OPENED PUBLIC COMMENTS to Director Bradford's report on the Housing Element amendment.

#### PUBLIC COMMENT

1. **John O'Connell**, a Los Altos Hills resident, recalled that after the Town received Housing Element certification in May 2023, little progress occurred for over a year. He urged the Council to learn from other jurisdictions with more experience in multifamily and affordable housing. He noted that San Jose recently provided fee credits totaling \$39 million in 2025 across seven programs, producing 2,225 units but only 112 (5%) were lower-income units. He emphasized that achieving the Town's target of 80–90 lower-income units would require a much larger scale under similar strategies. He also noted that comparisons of private developments indicated low percentages of affordable units, whereas single, fully affordable developments produced the full targeted number of units. Mr. O'Connell encouraged the Council to consider strategies from other cities, such as Los Altos and Palo Alto, to implement approaches that are more effective in producing affordable housing.



**Mayor Bhateja** thanked John O’Connell for his research, preparation, and input, and expressed appreciation for his efforts in providing detailed information to the Council.

2. **Dave Kehlet** of Mora Drive in Los Altos Hills congratulated the Town on the success of the Housing Element amendment. He emphasized the importance of preventing Builder’s Remedy from impacting the Town, noting that nearby Los Gatos recently lost a related case. He expressed concern that Builder’s Remedy could allow inappropriate developments and thanked the Council for their efforts.

**Mayor Bhateja** thanked the public for their comments, noted that the mid-cycle review would occur in less than a year, and then CLOSED PUBLIC COMMENTS on the Housing Element amendment. He then moved on to the next agenda item, PRESENTATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS.

D. Finance Director

**Finance Director Leung** reported that staff is implementing AI-based software to streamline bank and cash reconciliations by integrating data from the Tyler ERP system and bank and investment accounts, with a goal of automating the process by the end of Q2 2026. Staff is also preparing the FY25–26 mid-year budget report for review by the Finance and Investment Committee on February 24 and the City Council on March 19. In addition, the FY26–27 and FY27–28 budget process has begun, including a staff budget retreat and development of a five-year forecast. Departments will submit budget requests in March, the proposed budget will be prepared in April, and it will be presented to the Finance and Investment Committee in May, along with a planned joint meeting with the City Council to review the proposed budget.

E. Public Works Director

- Update on the Town Hall HVAC Replacement Emergency Project

**Director Kim** reported updates on the Town Hall Emergency HVAC project, noting that after the Council declared an emergency in December due to failure of two of three heating zones, a contractor repaired the gas furnace serving the lobby and removed the existing heat pump system serving the offices and kitchen. Installation of new mini-split units is scheduled to begin next week and is expected to take about 10 business days.

**Mr. Kim** also reported that two of the three furnace units serving the Council Chambers have failed, and staff is evaluating replacing at least one with a heat pump unit at an estimated cost of about \$23,000.

Additionally, staff issued an RFP for a consultant to conduct a sewer cost sharing and flow estimate study ahead of negotiations with Los Altos and Palo Alto. One proposal was received, from FNL for approximately \$50,000, which staff plans to review with the Sewer Ad Hoc Committee.

**Mayor Bhateja** asked why staff proposed replacing only one of the two failed furnace units serving the Council Chambers. **Director Kim** explained that the building has three gas furnace units, one of which had already been out of service for over a year, leaving the space operating on two units until the second one recently failed. Staff plans to restore at least two functioning systems for the winter and gradually transition the remaining units to heat pumps. **Mr. Kim** noted that replacing both failed units now is possible but would cost about \$50,000 and would likely require tapping into the facilities replacement reserve, which would

need Council approval. **Mayor Bhateja** commented that replacing both at once could be more cost-effective than completing the work in separate visits.

F. City Manager

**Acting City Manager Einfalt** reported several updates. He thanked George Lee for assisting with the security camera replacement project, noting that all cameras at Town Hall will be replaced by next week, followed by installations at the corporation yard in March and West Wind Barn in April. Staff is also collecting new data from speed feedback sign locations and plans to report the results to the Council in May.

Einfalt provided a public safety update, noting two residential burglaries so far this year. With the planned removal of Flock cameras later this month, staff is monitoring conditions closely and coordinating with PAL American to maintain adequate patrol coverage.

He also announced upcoming community events, including registration for the Pathways Run and a Coffee with the Sheriff event. Town Hall will be closed for the Presidents Day holiday. Finally, Einfalt noted he will attend the California League of Cities City Managers Conference in Napa, where he plans to gather information from other city managers about approaches to housing element committees.

**9. COUNCIL INITIATED ITEMS**

**Mayor Bhateja** thanked staff and consultants for their work on the housing element amendment, zoning updates, and communications with the California Department of Housing and Community Development. He also acknowledged a positive letter received from St. Nicholas and expressed appreciation for the cooperation from Foothill College, suggesting the City send thank-you cards to both organizations. He additionally asked that appreciation be conveyed to the consultants for their work.

**Councilmember Swan** proposed establishing a town Poet Laureate program to highlight local artistic talent. She suggested forming a small group to define the role and responsibilities, such as speaking at community events, and inviting residents to submit work for selection. Swan noted that the program would be voluntary and cost-free, aside from a brief announcement in the City Manager's Weekly Newsletter and indicated she would bring the idea back for future discussion.

**10. ADJOURN**

*Pursuant to Ordinance No. 506, the Council Meeting shall adjourn no later than 10:00 p.m., unless otherwise approved by a majority of the Councilmembers present.*

The meeting adjourned at **10:20 PM**.

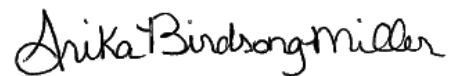
**ASSISTANCE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in the meeting, please contact the City Clerk at 650-941-7222. Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the City to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.

Copies of all agenda reports and supporting data are available for inspection at Town Hall, 26379 Fremont Road and the Los Altos Main Library 72 hours in advance of the meeting. A complete agenda can be found on the Town's webpage: <http://www.losaltoshills.ca.gov>. A complete packet of information is available for inspection during the meeting at the table to the back of the Council Chambers.

The Council may take action on any agendized matter in any manner deemed appropriate by Council.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arika Birdsong-Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Arika Birdsong-Miller