

**CLE ELUM SPECIAL MEETING**  
**MINUTES**  
**FEBRUARY 24, 2026**  
**5:00 PM**  
119 W FIRST STREET  
**CLE ELUM, WA 98922**

**1. Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance, and Roll Call**

**Councilmembers Present:**

Cassidy Buechle-Curtis  
Ken Ratliff  
Steven Harper  
Jon Cornelius  
Audrey Malek  
Steven Cook  
Beth Williams

**Staff Present:**

Matthew Lundh - Mayor  
Rob Omans - City Administrator  
Debbie Lee - Clerk  
Erica Krum - Assistant City Administrator  
Rich Albo - Police Chief

**2. Unfinished Business**

**3. New Business**

- a. Fire Department Discussion — Rob Omans — City Administrator

Brian Carlson presented the attached Fire Protection Summary.

The current six-year fire levy is set to expire at the end of 2026. Inflation data included in the columns reflects annual inflation rates.

Gary Berndt, Fire Advisory Committee, gave some history of the fire department. His time dates back to 1985, with the fire department operating independently since 1902. There is skepticism regarding the feasibility of establishing a district, highlighting the evolution of community needs.

Council discussions underscored the urgency of city decisions, supported by survey results indicating some public support for fire services. The necessity of maintaining fire department operations to ensure life safety and public safety has been acknowledged, as future service needs are anticipated to exceed current capabilities. Fire District 7 is

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considered the most viable option, although concerns about service levels persist.

Addressing the bankruptcy situation is a priority, along with evaluating whether the city is receiving fair value for services provided. Proposed annexation of efficient services aims to expand service capabilities, with potential reductions in insurance rates. Currently, District 7 operates under a levy of 1.25 and relies on grants to support personnel costs, necessitating future levies for renewal. The council is open to possible annexation of District 7 and seeks input from other municipalities. Cle Elum is currently benefiting from District 7's response capabilities at no cost, underscoring the urgency for annexation.

Initial discussions among the mayors have received positive responses regarding this collaboration, and future joint meetings with District 7 representatives are planned to ensure transparency.

Any proposed annexation will require community support, council approval, and commissioner endorsement, with a public vote necessary to finalize the agreement and levy adjustments related to annexing District 7.

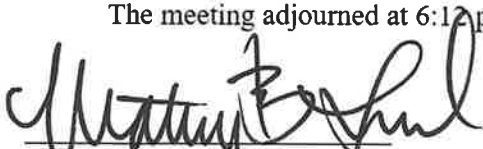
Community meetings are suggested to facilitate public engagement. Should the proposed levy fail, alternative fire services will need to be explored. Discussions about volunteer fire departments indicate challenges in obtaining sufficient personnel, particularly given commuting patterns, though contributions from dedicated volunteers are acknowledged.

A resolution regarding this matter must be filed by May 1, 2026, to align with the August 4th ballot. Roslyn and South Cle Elum are engaged in similar discussions, and further meetings will be scheduled to share updated information.

4. **Other Committee Comments**

5. **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

  
Matthew Lundh, Mayor

  
Debbie Lee, Clerk