

CLE ELUM SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES

APRIL 20, 2026

6:00 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

Beth Williams via zoom

Steven Harper

Jon Cornelius

Audrey Malek

Steven Cook

Absent:

Staff Present:

Matthew Lundh - Mayor

Rob Omans - City Administrator

Debbie Lee - City Clerk

Ed Mills - Fire Chief

Erica Krum - Assistant City Administrator

2. Unfinished Business

a. Discussion with the Fire Advisory Committee

Council members are now invited to pose questions regarding the current topic. At this time, no motion has been proposed.

Chief Mills discussed the outdated 2023 strategic plan, attributing the delay to workload. Some updates are complete, but others remain pending, including the replacement of a command rig and an aid car. A part-time administrative employee has been hired, and officer rotations have taken place.

Equipment replacement timelines were reviewed, with Councilmember Cornelius highlighting potential vehicle transactions through the hospital district and citizen donations. Interlocal agreements enhance the city's equipment access and enable fire engine recertification. An inquiry was made regarding the engines' usage duration and the placement of the first-out engine at the station. The command rig has 3,888 miles, averaging 5 square miles of travel per year among the other seven vehicles. Eight transports occurred last year to Ellensburg, along with a brush truck that was sent to Wenatchee.

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A future replacement plan for the pumper truck is needed, as the Ratings Bureau certifies the pumpers annually. Funding considerations indicate a potential need for a levy, with various funding levels impacting possibilities.

Discussions with Gary Berndt of the Fire Advisory Committee centered on Option #3: a three-year levy while considering annexation into Fire District 7.

Concerns were expressed regarding underfunding for future needs.

Using reserves for operational costs was also discussed without immediate plans for full-time employees for five years, as stated by Chief Mills.

Councilmember Cornelius acknowledged the merits of District 7, but highlighted the significant challenges of requesting annexation. Emphasis was placed on respecting volunteers and preserving the culture, cautioning against a “fire sale” perception. A phased approach was recommended, noting the risk of rank loss for volunteer firefighters.

Support for Option #9 includes renewing the levy to support the fire department, and seeking overarching organizational structures that can unify fire districts.

Councilmember Cook emphasized the necessity to adapt to city growth and supports Option #9.

Councilmember Malek underscored the importance of positioning the fire department for future needs, advocating for a levy and a reassessment of Cle Elum's needs to avoid underfunding.

Councilmember Buechle-Curtis recognized the advisory board's recommendations and the need for long-term planning.

Councilmember Harper evaluated the potential absorption of the fire department into an existing district, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging Cle Elum Fire Department's history.

A levy renewal is seen as crucial for operational maintenance.

The matter of a judgment against the city and impending bankruptcy was also addressed.

Councilmember Harper expressed opposition to the annexation to District 7, calling for separate discussions with Councilmember Ratliff supporting this position and favoring the Cle Elum Fire Department over a merger.

The immediate focus will be on drafting the levy renewal resolution while initiating separate annexation discussions.

Councilmember Cornelius raised concerns about combining actions that may lead to

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conflicting votes.

MOTION: Councilmember Cook made a motion to direct Mayor Lundh to draft two resolutions proposing renewal language for a \$0.95 per \$1,000 levy for a two-year renewal and to simultaneously explore all options, including annexation, with a determination to be taken prior to the expiration of the 2-year levy; seconded by Councilmember Williams

MOTION CARRIED: 6 yes 1 no. (Councilmember Ratliff)

Councilmember Cornelius announced his resignation from the council at this meeting, marking his final attendance. The council expressed gratitude for his service.

[Council Options](#)

[Council Fire 1](#)

[Regional Fire Authority](#)

[Interlocal Cooperation in Fire Services](#)

[Cle Elum Voter Poll Summary](#)

[CEFD Vehicle Data](#)

[Fire Service Funding Analysis](#)

3. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

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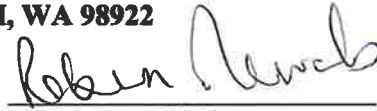
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Matthew Lundh, Mayor



~~Debbie Lee~~, Clerk

Robin Newcomb