

**ASHLAND CITY COUNCIL
STUDY SESSION MINUTES
Monday, April 20, 2026**

Mayor Graham called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Council Present: Mayor Graham and Councilors Bloom, DuQuenne, Hansen, Kaplan, Dahle, and Sherrell.

Staff Present:

Sabrina Cotta	City Manager
Scott Fleury	Director of Public Works
Brandon Goldman	Director of Community Development

I. Call to Order

II. Reports and Presentations

a. Strategic Plan Update

Representatives from SSW Consulting presented an update on the City's strategic planning process. The overarching goals of the project were outlined as: developing Ashland's first long-range strategic plan through robust community and staff engagement, facilitating Council alignment on a shared vision and priorities, and clarifying the City's strategic direction over the next five to ten years. The project timeline called for continued engagement through the end of May, followed by theme analysis and plan development in June, with adoption targeted for late summer.

The engagement effort was outlined as well underway, with over 650 survey responses received to date—a record among communities SSW has worked with. Engagement channels include social media, e-newsletters, print materials, a utility bill insert reaching over 15,000 residents, 56 distribution locations, and 16 one-on-one stakeholder interviews with organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, SOU, OSF, and faith-based leaders. Upcoming in-person engagement events include Ashland First Friday, the Kids Music Jamboree, staff open houses, and outreach to schools, SOU, and community organizations through late May. Following the engagement period, themes will be synthesized and a draft plan developed through the summer.

Councilors asked whether a mid-process summary of survey themes would be shared with the Council and whether responses could be segmented by engagement channel to identify any variation in public sentiment across platforms. The consultants confirmed both were feasible and would determine the appropriate level of detail within the project budget. Consultants agreed to provide a complete list of interviewees along with how contacts had been categorized for various engagement activities. A request was also made for confirmation of school outreach and town hall dates, which the consultants indicated would be finalized and communicated within the week.

Councilors noted the City's strategic planning web page provides helpful context and consultants encouraged the use of the unique links provided to support response tracking. Cotta clarified that a separate poll regarding City Hall and Civic Center options are a distinct effort initiated by the legal department and unrelated to the strategic planning process.

b. *2026 Water Supply Update*

Fleury provided an overview of the City's 2026 water supply outlook. Snowpack on Mount Ashland stood at approximately 2 percent of the 30-year median average and comparable to drought conditions experienced in 2014–2015. Inflow into Reeder Reservoir was running at 7 to 9 million gallons per day, well below the typical seasonal range of 15 to 20 million gallons per day. Summer community water demand typically ranges from 4.5 to 6 million gallons per day, driven largely by temperature.

Reeder Reservoir is the City's primary water source and is heavily dependent on snowpack. The City's secondary water source is the Talent Irrigation District (TID) with 1,369 acre-feet of municipal-use water rights and an irrigation season generally running from May 1 through September 30. While TID's upper reservoirs—Howard Prairie and Hyatt Prairie—were in better condition than in 2021–2022, a previous positive test for algal toxins in TID raw water in September 2020 required careful monitoring before use. The City is required by the Oregon Health Authority to test raw water intakes every two weeks for cyanobacteria during the irrigation season, and a positive exceedance would obligate issuance of a do-not-drink advisory. Fleury indicated that sampling will occur when TID comes online before any decision to pump its water to the treatment plant.

The City's third water source, the TAP (Talent–Ashland–Phoenix) Intertie, delivers fully treated water from the Medford Water Commission. The City holds 1,000 acre-feet of stored water in Lost Creek Lake with delivery capacity of 2.13 million gallons per day through its pump station. The pump station was designed with capacity for an additional pump station to reach 3 million gallons per day, and downstream system upgrades funded through ARPA grants were underway to support that capacity.

The current operational approach prioritizes TAP as the first supplemental source with TID as a blended secondary option pending water quality assessment. Staff anticipated beginning TAP draw in May or June and noted both supplemental sources might need to be used this year. The goal is to protect Reeder Reservoir levels through September and October – the most critical period for local wildfire risk. A permanent booster pump station was identified among the top five capital priorities along with the planned expansion of TAP capacity and replacement of the Granite Street Reservoir in the late 2020's / early 2030's.

Fleury reviewed the City's four-stage water curtailment ordinance and clarified the City Manager may declare a water shortage based on demand levels, reservoir volume, and drawdown trajectory. Voluntary conservation messaging would be deployed as soon as drawdown begins, and if the Medford Water Commission entered curtailment, TAP access for all partner communities would be affected accordingly.

Graham noted the importance of coordinated messaging of water conservation and wildfire risk reduction given the early onset of dry conditions. Fleury confirmed that public outreach would include news releases, utility inserts, event tabling, coordination with the Ashland Climate Collaborative, and regular updates to the City's real-time water use dashboard. The overarching message conveyed was for residents to begin using water wisely immediately.

c. Building Fund Update

Goldman explained that the Building Division is currently housed within the General Fund and operates at approximately 75 percent cost recovery—a target established by Council in 2019. Under state law, building permit fees are required to support building division activities only, and the prevailing model among Oregon jurisdictions is a dedicated Building Fund.

Two structural issues were identified as contributing to the funding gap: the fee schedule has not been comprehensively updated since 2019 and building permit fees rely on International Code Council (ICC) valuation tables that significantly understate actual construction costs in Ashland—sometimes by more than half. Staff proposed a phased approach to bridge the funding gap including an approximate 20 percent increase in building permit fees and an increase in the community development fee from 1.2 to 1.5 percent of construction valuation (with 0.5 percent directed to a dedicated building fund and 1.0 percent retained as General Fund revenue). The proposal targets slightly above 100 percent cost recovery to enable the building of a reserve, with a long-term target of a 15 percent reserve and 3 percent contingency.

Council discussion touched on the rationale for the prior 75 percent cost recovery target, the general public safety value of building inspections as partial justification for General Fund subsidy, the chilling effect of fee increases on development activity, the importance of stakeholder engagement with the Home Builders Association, the benefits of a dedicated fund with respect to transparency, and the timeline constraints relative to the upcoming biennium budget. It was noted that the General Fund currently absorbs approximately \$146,000 in building division costs in FY2026, rising to approximately \$300,000 in FY2028 when full fund separation costs are factored in.

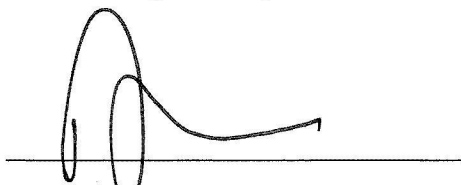
The session concluded with the following Council direction to staff conveyed by show of hands:

- Establish a dedicated Building Fund in the next budget biennium.
- Move toward full cost recovery (100 percent) for the Building Division and to bring forward a detailed proposal for Council consideration.
- Develop and assess a fee waiver program for affordable housing as part of the full cost recovery structure.


Council did not direct staff to implement fee adjustments effective July 1, 2026, expressing a preference to first review the full cost recovery proposal and fee waiver framework before acting on specific fee changes. It was understood that mid-year fee adjustments remain possible and that the matter would be considered in conjunction with the miscellaneous fees process anticipated in May.

III. Adjournment of Study Session.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 pm.



Deputy City Manager Jordan Rooklyn



Mayor Tonya Graham