

ALPINE CITY COUNCIL TRAINING

December 4, 2025

Mayor Carla Merrill called the meeting to order at 8:15 am in the Conference Room.

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Attendance: Mayor Carla Merrill, Council Member Jessica Smuin, Council Member Chrissy Hannemann, Council Member Brent Rummel, Council Member-elect Sarah Blackwell, and Council Member-elect Andrew Young

Staff: City Administrator Shane Sorensen, City Planner Ryan Robinson, City Attorney Steve Doxey, and City Engineer Jason Judd

II. DISCUSSION ITEMS

City Planner Ryan Robinson introduced the agenda and explained that this was a public meeting, although no residents were in attendance.

A. Roles and Responsibilities

1. Roles of the City Council
2. Roles of the Mayor
3. Planning Commission
4. Committees
5. Roles of the City Staff
6. Overview of Various City Departments

City Attorney Doxey explained the roles and responsibilities within Alpine City government. He clarified that Alpine City's powers as a municipal government are vested in a council consisting of six members, one of whom is the mayor.

Mayor Merrill's functions as CEO were outlined. Mr. Doxey explained that the mayor keeps the peace, enforces laws, and performs duties required by statute, ordinance, or resolution. The mayor may recommend measures for council consideration and, with council's advice and consent, can assign council members to administer departments or appoint people to fill vacancies.

The group discussed the concept of 'advice and consent' in terms of the roles of the mayor and council in the appointment process. Mayor Merrill summarized the current manner in which appointments are being handled and council members indicated they would appreciate advance notice of a proposed committee appointment to give them time to consider the individual that is being recommended for appointment and to avoid the element of a surprise in a business meeting during which an appointment is recommended. Mr. Doxey stated that meeting packets are published on Fridays and council members have an entire weekend to reach out to the mayor to offer their advice regarding proposed appointees. Council member Chrissy Hanneman stated that there have been instances where the names of recommended appointees

are not provided until the night of the meeting and this has been problematic in the past. Council members do not want to create a contentious situation by rejecting an appointee in a public voting meeting, so advance notice of recommended appointees would be helpful.

Council members Jessica Smuin and Chrissy Hanneman discussed training they have received in the past regarding their ability to counsel with one another so long as a quorum (three council members) is not present during any discussion. It is important for them to communicate with one another outside of business meetings to gain a clear understanding of what the group feels is best for the community. However, if there is an email to the entire group, council members should **not** use “Reply All,” to avoid creating an electronic meeting. Jessica and Chrissy also clarified that not all employees of the city report directly to the mayor. Mayor Merrill confirmed that she is a part-time mayor and the day-to-day operations of the city are handled by Shane Sorensen and employees report to him for stability and continuity of supervision purposes.

Attorney Doxey then clarified that the mayor does not vote except to break tie votes, when matters involve modification of the mayor's powers, or when the council is considering hiring or dismissing a city administrator. He noted the mayor has no veto power but chairs the council meetings and conducts ceremonial functions.

The group was informed that individual council members cannot speak for the entire council and should be careful not to make promises they cannot keep or to predict how the council will vote. Mr. Doxey advised council members to avoid attending Planning Commission meetings, as their presence could put pressure on the commission. Council Member-elect Andrew Young stated he finds it very helpful to attend Planning Commission meetings to gain a clear understanding of proceedings and recommendations of items that are being forwarded by the commission to the council. This led to high level discussion among the group regarding options for engaging in the Planning Commission's process while avoiding putting undue pressure on the commission.

Discussion among the group then centered on council members' ability to contact staff directly. Shane Sorensen explained that since he serves multiple roles (City Administrator, Finance Director, and Public Works Director), it is more efficient when council members schedule an appointment with him rather than calling randomly throughout the day. The group also discussed how council members can reach out to the City Attorney, with Mr. Doxey recommending that questions be directed through the mayor or Shane Sorensen. Mayor Merrill encouraged council members to accept input from residents, but in an instance where a resident is complaining about something that has happened in the city, it would be best for the council member to contact city staff to get the background of the story before jumping to a conclusion. There was some philosophical discussion about instances when council members may need to contact Mr. Doxey directly before first communicating through the mayor or City Administrator. Mayor Merrill advised the council that any time the city contacts Mr. Doxey, it results in a charge for services, and council members should not be incurring costs for the city on their own. Mr. Doxey stated that if there is a critical issue for which an individual council member needs advice, he would still recommend that they communicate with him through Shane Sorensen.

Shane Sorensen mentioned that staff have created a project request form for council members to use for budget planning. He explained that if a council member has an idea for a project, they can fill out the form with basic information and staff will compile all the proposals for discussion at the budget retreat in January. This would help identify council priorities and determine what could be funded within budget constraints.

Andrew Young asked what power a council member has to impose their will on staff in the event the council member does not believe staff is performing in the way that they should. He offered a hypothetical scenario in which a council member is upset about something that has happened in the community, and they want it addressed differently by staff. Shane Sorensen stated that council members can reach out to him and voice their input and concerns. Mayor Merrill added that the council has legislative authority and can amend the City Code or a city policy, and city staff will then be charged with administering the code or policy, however, council members should not be directing staff individually. Mr. Doxey reiterated his previous comments advising council members against making promises to residents about any given issue in the city, as one council member cannot speak for or represent the entire council.

B. Meeting Procedures

1. Meeting Schedules and Procedures
2. Council Packets and Agenda Items
3. Robert's Rules of Order

This section of the meeting included training covering Robert's Rules of Order, which ensures that one person speaks at a time and only one item of business is handled at a time. Mr. Doxey praised Mayor Merrill's courteous but firm approach to ensuring procedures are followed during meetings. During this portion of Mr. Doxey's presentation, the group discussed public comment procedures, with Mayor Merrill explaining that public comment periods are primarily to receive input, and council members generally just thank commenters without extensive dialogue during the meeting. Council members can follow up with residents after the meeting if needed. There was extensive debate about the appropriate way for council members to handle the public comment period of meetings. Andrew Young stated he feels that residents have an incorrect understanding of the purpose of the public comment period of a meeting and it would be helpful to try to correct that misunderstanding to provide clarity. Residents feel frustrated when they do not receive a response and they believe they are up against a brick wall. Shane Sorensen and Ryan Robinson noted that if there are instances when residents feel that way, it is typically because the city is simply following its ordinances or policies and should not deviate from them to accommodate individual resident requests. Andrew stated he wants to pursue ways for residents to get some response from the city when they have an issue. Council Member-elect Sarah Blackwell agreed.

Discussion then moved into specific past topics of discussion among the council, staff, and the public. Council members expressed frustration on behalf of themselves and the public about the lack of follow-through by the city after certain issues (such as traffic on Main Street), have been discussed and studied at length.

The group also discussed the form for requesting agenda items. Ryan Robinson presented a newly created form requiring two council members' signatures to place an item on the agenda. This form helps track requests and provides background information to prepare for meetings.

C. Governing Documents & Master and Guiding Plans

1. General Plan
2. Transportation Master Plan
3. Water Master Plan
4. Pressurized Irrigation Master Plan
5. Sewer Master Plan
6. Storm Drain Master Plan
7. Trails Master Plan
8. Parks Master Plan
9. Gateway & Historic Design Guidelines

Shane Sorensen provided a detailed explanation of the master plans that Alpine City has in place for vital infrastructure areas, including transportation, water, pressurized irrigation, sewer, storm drains, and parks. These master plans serve as strategic guides that not only identify upcoming projects essential for accommodating future growth but also pinpoint any current system deficiencies that need to be addressed. Shane emphasized the importance of these plans in ensuring an orderly and sustainable development path for the city.

A significant focus during the discussion was on how these crucial projects are financed. Shane explained that funding mechanisms for these projects include impact fees, which are one-time charges on new developments to help cover the costs of expanding services to accommodate growth. In addition to impact fees, user fees collected from utility services also contribute to funding these projects. These fees are structured to ensure that users of the city's services are contributing directly to the maintenance and improvement of those services, effectively making the system self-sustaining where possible.

Shane also mentioned the option of using bonds or loans as a financing tool. This approach allows the city to manage current cash flow efficiently by borrowing against future revenue streams, enabling the execution of large-scale projects that might otherwise be financially unfeasible in the short term. This financial strategy requires careful planning to balance current and future budgets to ensure long-term fiscal health.

Additionally, Shane highlighted the role of grants as an occasional yet significant source of funding for certain projects. These grants often come from state or federal programs designed to support municipal infrastructure development and can provide substantial financial relief to the city's budget. The strategic application for and allocation of these grants is a key part of the city's financial planning.

Shane's presentation underscored the interconnectedness of planning, fiscal responsibility, and sustainable growth, ensuring that Alpine's residents continue to enjoy high-quality services while the city effectively manages its resources and plans for the future.

D. Budget

1. Fund Overview
2. Revenue Sources
 - o General Fund (property tax, sales tax, PARC tax, Class C Road Funds & others)
 - o Enterprise Funds (user rates, impact fees)
3. Expenses
4. Budget Process & Timeline

Shane Sorensen provided an in-depth overview of the city's financial structure, emphasizing its division into distinct funds: the general fund, the capital improvement fund, and enterprise funds dedicated to utilities. The general fund supports a range of services, including administration, general operations, garbage collection, street maintenance, parks, and the cemetery. This fund is critical for the city's day-to-day operations. Meanwhile, the capital improvement fund holds reserves for significant future projects, effectively acting as a savings account for larger infrastructure needs, such as the anticipated fire station expansion. Shane also highlighted the enterprise funds, which function like independent businesses within the city, covering utilities such as water and sewer through the revenue generated by user fees. These funds are intended to be self-sustaining, without a direct reliance on the general fund.

The discussion transitioned to property taxes, a pivotal revenue stream for the city. Shane clarified that even on a million-dollar home, the city only receives \$661 out of the total approximate property tax of \$4,800, with around 70 percent directed towards local schools. He provided clarity on a common misconception, explaining that property taxes do not automatically increase with rising property values. An increase occurs only if a specific tax hike is passed by the city's governing bodies. This ensures that taxpayers are not burdened solely due to property market dynamics.

Andrew Young expressed appreciation for the newly introduced project request form, which is designed to allow council members to propose and prioritize projects efficiently during budget planning. This tool fosters a collaborative approach to align council initiatives with fiscal capabilities.

Shane further detailed the financial state of the capital improvement fund, which has amassed approximately \$10 million. However, while this seems substantial, much of it is earmarked for upcoming projects, including the critical expansion of the fire station. The discussion underlined the fiscal challenges Alpine faces as a predominantly built-out community, where opportunities for new growth-related revenue are limited. Given these constraints, alternative revenue sources were considered. One potential avenue discussed was expanding commercial development. This strategy leverages the fact that commercial properties are taxed at the full assessed value, unlike residential properties, potentially increasing city revenues without raising residential property taxes. Another option on the table was the possibility of increasing property taxes to cover public service needs, though this would require careful consideration to balance the city's revenue needs with taxpayer burden.

Overall, the discussion underscored the importance of strategic financial planning to maintain fiscal health and ensure continued quality of life for Alpine residents.

III. ADJOURNMENT

The training meeting concluded with council members expressing appreciation for the informative session.

The meeting adjourned at 1:23 p.m.