

**CITY OF MEDICAL LAKE  
City Council Special Meeting**

6:30 PM  
August 29, 2023

Council Chambers  
124 S. Lefevre Street

**MINUTES**

**NOTE: This is not a verbatim transcript. Minutes contain only a summary of the discussion. A recording of the meeting is on file and available from City Hall.**

**COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL PRESENT**

**Councilmembers**

Chad Pritchard  
Art Kulibert (via Zoom)  
Bob Maxwell  
Ted Olson

**Administration/Staff**

Terri Cooper, Mayor  
Sonny Weathers, City Administrator  
Scott Duncan, Public Works Director  
Koss Ronholt, Finance Director  
Steve Cooper, WWTP Director  
Glen Horton (via Zoom), Parks & Rec. Director  
Roxanne Wright, Administrative Asst.

**WRITTEN PUBLIC COMMENTS**

If you wish to provide written public comments for the council meeting, please email your comments to [sweathers@medical-lake.org](mailto:sweathers@medical-lake.org) by 4:00 p.m. the day of the council meeting and include all the following information with your comments:

1. The Meeting Date
2. Your First and Last Name
3. If you are a Medical Lake resident
4. The Agenda Item(s) which you are speaking about

\*Note – If providing written comments, the comments received will be acknowledged during the public meeting, but not read. All written comments received by 4:00 p.m. will be provided to the mayor and city council members in advance of the meeting.

**Questions or Need Assistance? Please contact City Hall at 509-565-5000**

**1. CALL TO ORDER, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE, ROLL CALL**

- A. Mayor Cooper called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm, led the Pledge of Allegiance, and conducted roll call. Councilmembers Pritchard, Maxwell, and Olson were all present in person. Councilmember Kulibert was present on Zoom. Councilmember Harbolt was not present. Councilmember Kennedy asked to be excused as he is out of the country. Motion to excuse councilmember Kennedy made by councilmember Pritchard, seconded by councilmember Maxwell, carried 4-0.

**2. AGENDA APPROVAL**

- A. Mayor Cooper asked to strike Action Item 4A since Ms. Shaffer is not present. Motion to strike and approve agenda as amended made by councilmember Maxwell, seconded by councilmember Olson, carried 4-0.

**3. REPORTS**

- A. Mayor – Explained that the reason for this special meeting was to approve the emergency declaration and stated that there will not be any citizen comments. This is allowed by state statute.
- B. City Administrator & City Staff
  - i. Sonny Weathers, City Administrator – gave status report on Gray Road Fire. See attached.
  - ii. Scott Duncan, Public Works Director – good handle on water system, three more bacteria samples came back today as good. 20 of 54 sewer stubs capped from damaged homes. Six hydrants being tested. Releasing high school to irrigate again. City's insurance provider, WCIA met today and did tour of two damaged structures at Waterfront Park and the maintenance shop that had some damage. They will report back once they've done their review.
  - iii. Steve Cooper, WWTP Director – quickly realized that they needed a plan to manage the WWTP with residents evacuated. Had to then manage the 54 lines from damaged homes that were being flushed and had toxins coming in. Safety plan put into place since they were there 24 hours. Utilized buddy system, nobody did anything alone, pairs only. Maintained ph. Testing showed nutrients are all good. Will do some toxicity and heavy metals testing right away. Maintained flow to the lake and stayed in compliance.
  - iv. Koss Ronholt, Finance Director – managing front office staff and information flow. Make sure prepared for FEMA, created project accounts and recordkeeping. Investigated Innovia regarding monetary donations to make sure the city can rely on them. Found them to be very reliable. Explained emergency declaration authorizing using any funding necessary to deal with costs of fire.
  - v. Glen Horton, Parks and Recreation Director – were close to cancelling youth sports but decided to maintain a level of normality and keep activities for them. Little behind in organizing youth season, need coaches for soccer and flag football.
  - vi. Mayor – Silver Lake Bible camp free wi-fi available. Wants community to know our help doesn't end at city limits. Redemption Church has given use of their building on Herb Street to use for up to a year as a resource center for the Gray Fire.

**4. ACTION ITEMS**

- A. Swearing in of Keli Shaffer to Council Position #6. This item was stricken from the agenda.
- B. Ms. Shaffer arrived at the meeting at 6:45 pm. Motion to add her swearing in back to the agenda made by councilmember Pritchard, seconded by councilmember Maxwell, carried 4-0.
- C. Mr. Ronholt swore in councilmember Shaffer to Council Position #6.

**5. RESOLUTIONS**

- A. Resolution 23-622 Emergency Declaration Gray Road Fire

- i. Mayor Cooper read and explained the Resolution. Motion to approve made by councilmember Olson, seconded by councilmember Maxwell, carried 5-0.

**6. CONCLUSION**

- A. Motion to conclude meeting at 7:15 pm made by councilmember Pritchard, seconded by councilmember Maxwell, carried 5-0.

  
Terri Cooper, Mayor

  
Koss Ronholt, Finance Director/City Clerk

## Gray Road Fire Status Update

On Friday, August 18<sup>th</sup> at 12:27 pm, a fire started near Gray Road, west of Medical Lake and quickly spread by strong winds from the west. The fire ultimately grew to 10,085 acres and destroyed (at last count) 326 structures, 240 of which were deemed primary structures. There has been 1 fatality reported.

### **INITIAL RESPONSE**

City staff was quick to respond by evacuating Waterfront Park until Washington State Patrol took over. The office fielded calls and encouraged evacuation until power was lost. The fire quickly spread and surrounded the maintenance shop. Staff began to shuttle equipment toward City Hall and the Waste-Water Treatment Plant and used a water truck on site to protect the facilities and equipment. Minimal damage resulted.

An outpouring of regional resources raced into town to assist with evacuation efforts and the protection of people and property. A shelter was quickly set up at Medical Lake High School, which then moved to Cheney High School before being ultimately relocated to Spokane Falls Community College. The Red Cross is still managing that site as a shelter for anyone who needs it.

### **WATER SYSTEM**

Water levels in our reservoir struggled to keep up with demand, so maintenance crews worked through the night to open interties, increase pump speed, and shut off valves to structures that had burned down. A water boil advisory was issued in an abundance of caution out of concern that pressure would be reduced and allow the introduction of contamination into the system. Fortunately, we were able to maintain proper pressure and recover to adequate levels in the reservoir, so the advisory was lifted for most of Medical Lake and Strathview. The areas most affected by the fire (south of Campbell from Hallett St east to Silver Lake Ave) remained under an advisory until the mains in that area had been flushed and test results confirmed the water was safe to drink. Tests were submitted on Monday, August 21<sup>st</sup> and the water boil advisory was lifted for all of Medical Lake and Strathview on Tuesday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>.

### **WASTE-WATER TREATMENT**

The fire destroyed 53 homes that were hooked up to sewer infrastructure in Medical Lake. Water poured into that infrastructure with toxins from fire debris at a rate that overwhelmed the Southlake Terrace Lift Station. Staff raced into action, utilizing our vacator to pump out wastewater and keep the remaining homes from backing up in addition to making critical adjustments at the Waste-Water Treatment Plant that ensured sustainable operations. Further adjustments were required to deal with the lack of flow due to evacuations and again as families returned after evacuation levels were downgraded.

### **EVACUATION LEVELS**

Unsafe conditions existed that kept the City under Evacuation Level 3 (GO, Leave Immediately!), including falling tree hazards, downed power lines, uncapped natural gas lines, and smoldering fires that continued to burn. Law Enforcement enforced the evacuation levels and had a presence in town to provide security for vacated properties. Avista crews were hard at work to cap natural gas lines and restore power throughout the city. Fire crews continued to mop up hot spots and remove dangerous snags while improving conditions allowed for better containment and additional resources continued to arrive.

## Gray Road Fire Status Update

Much of the City currently remains at Evacuation Level 1 (Get READY to leave!). Inside the fire perimeter remains at Evacuation Level 2 (Get SET to leave!), requiring people to be prepared to leave at a moment's notice.

### **DECLARATIONS OF EMERGENCY**

Mayor Cooper signed a letter on Saturday, August 19<sup>th</sup> declaring an emergency due to the Gray Road Fire. Spokane County and the State of Washington also signed emergency declarations to free up resources to meet needs and hasten recovery efforts. Governor Inslee toured Lakeland Village and the Red Cross Shelter at Spokane Falls Community College offering assistance at the State level. Washington Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz toured the Gray Road Fire site and pledged additional assistance. Damage assessments are currently under way to make application for FEMA assistance.

### **LOCAL RESOURCE CENTER**

A local resource center has been set up at Redemption Church with the assistance of Convoy of Hope. Food, water, clothing, shoes, hygiene supplies, toys, and other basic needs are available. The American Red Cross is registering properties that have been damaged or destroyed, conducting damage assessments, and providing wildfire recovery kits. Other agencies on site include Spokane County Emergency Management, the Salvation Army, Veterans Affairs, and the Spokane Homebuilders Association.

### **DISASTER ASSISTANCE CENTER**

State and local agencies are providing services and information to those impacted by the Gray or Oregon Road Fires at Spokane Falls Community College.

### **EMERGENCY RESPONSE TEAM**

The City set up a single point of contact to coordinate and manage donations, volunteer efforts, and non-profit organizations offering help in addition to connecting trusted help to those in need. City Planner Elisa Rodriguez has taken responsibility

### **FREE ML WIFI**

Broadlinc, in collaboration with Peak Industries, New J, and Ptera, brought in mobile towers to restore Wi-Fi access for critical operations at Eastern State Hospital and Lakeland Village. We are also able to provide Free ML WiFi temporarily in the area immediately surrounding City Hall. We are actively looking to expand the reach to help keep us connected strong until all internet services are restored.

### **SPOKANE COUNTY LIBRARY DISTRICT**

The Medical Lake Library is now open 6 days a week to offer support and services including WiFi internet access, reservable computers, printing and photocopying, and more.

### **WATERFRONT PARK IS CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC**

Waterfront Park remains closed until further notice. Unsafe conditions exist due to falling tree hazards.

Gray Road Fire Status Update

**DEPARTMENT UPDATES**

*Public Works Director Scott Duncan*

Operations, Damage Assessment

*Waste-Water Treatment Plant Director Steve Cooper*

Operations

*Finance Director Koss Ronholt*

Operations

*Parks and Recreation Director Glen Horton*

Operations, Recreational Programs

**NEXT STEPS**

*Debris Management*

Debris management and clean-up efforts are being coordinated through stakeholders including the Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency, Sunshine Disposal & Recycling, Washington State Department of Ecology, Waste Management, Spokane County Solid Waste, and Spokane County Emergency Management.

We are aware that many are eager to engage in clean-up efforts, yet the process requires damage assessments and testing for hazardous materials that beckon our patience at this time.

*Weekly Community Meetings*

Our goal is to host weekly community meetings to share information and hear from community members.