

From: [Jacob Patterson](#)
To: [City Clerk](#)
Cc: [Whippy, Isaac](#)
Subject: Public Comment -- 1/26/26 CC Mtg., Item No. 8B, Broadband Boondoggle
Date: Saturday, January 24, 2026 11:32:37 AM

City Council & Staff,

I don't think I have ever read a staff report stuffed with so much BS that it stinks before you even start reading it! "[S]taff has identified a clear path forward supported by a solid implementation plan." If only that were true. No sensible person can actually think the same people that got us into this mess have a solid implementation plan, they clearly do not. This seems more like magical thinking. This project has been and continues to be a total disaster and if you follow these ridiculous and delusional staff recommendations rather than exploring a major course correction, you could very well end up bankrupting the City. This project doesn't need tweaks, it needs an entirely new direction. It is good we fired the obviously negligent construction manager firm but why did we pay them anything let alone keep paying them anything? I am glad there was mention of litigation, it NEEDS to happen, including suing GHD and their professional liability insurance can help fill these gaps rather than the debt that we have already incurred paying for it. Unfortunately, GHD isn't the only problem, HP Communications should have also been fired or scaled back as much as possible.

A lot of the issues with this project resulted from how these contracts were structured and the staff responsible for that, primarily Sarah, John, and Isaac, have a lot of explaining to do. Honestly, we should be asking for resignations over how poorly this project has been handled.

Regardless, I implore you to not approve this change order tonight. In the least, we need A LOT more explanation of what has gone on and the details of where we are now before anyone can be expected to approve something as significant as the proposed change order. It sounds like we don't even know exactly what all this additional money is for, the public and City Council certainly don't based on the sparse content in this staff report that spends more time trying to paint a rosy picture about our prospects than it does providing information about the requested action.

Before you do anything, you need a Council strategy session with legal counsel--not J&M, you need a better litigation firm with public capital project construction expertise to represent us in our efforts to recover damages from just about every company involved in this project. Unfortunately, we can't recover anything from City staff who got us into this mess but we can mitigate those losses by ceasing to pay their salaries and send them to the unemployment lines.

I am almost at a loss for words at how ridiculous and irresponsible this is. The consequences of these decisions have far-reaching ramifications and could lead us down a very dangerous path that ends in ruinous consequences like massive cuts to the PD because we can't afford to keep paying for all the services we currently rely on. We can still have the broadband benefits from this technology but without all the crazy risk associated with staff plans. Honestly, this reminds me of how we got embroiled in the foolish litigation with the skunk train that derailed our progress toward developing the Mill Site and set back any progress toward economic development rather than advancing it. We might have to do that by selling or leasing it all to a company that knows what they are doing rather than trying to operate this ourselves and bringing the whole city down.

Please don't catch whenever crazy staff has apparently caught.

--Jacob

Paoli, Diana

From: Jacob Patterson <jacob.patterson.esq@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, January 24, 2026 8:32 PM
To: City Clerk
Cc: Whippy, Isaac
Subject: Public Comment 8B--Fwd: Willits Braces for Layoffs as Consultant Prepares a Plan for a Strategic Reorganization

City Council,

This is where we could end up if we don't get our act together regarding broadband.

--Jacob

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Elise Cox from Mendo Local <mendolocal@substack.com>
Date: Sat, Jan 24, 2026, 7:31 PM
Subject: Willits Braces for Layoffs as Consultant Prepares a Plan for a Strategic Reorganization
To: <jacob.patterson.esq@gmail.com>

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Willits Braces for Layoffs as Consultant Prepares a Plan for a Strategic Reorganization

"There are those of us who will not be here in the future."

ELISE COX

JAN 25



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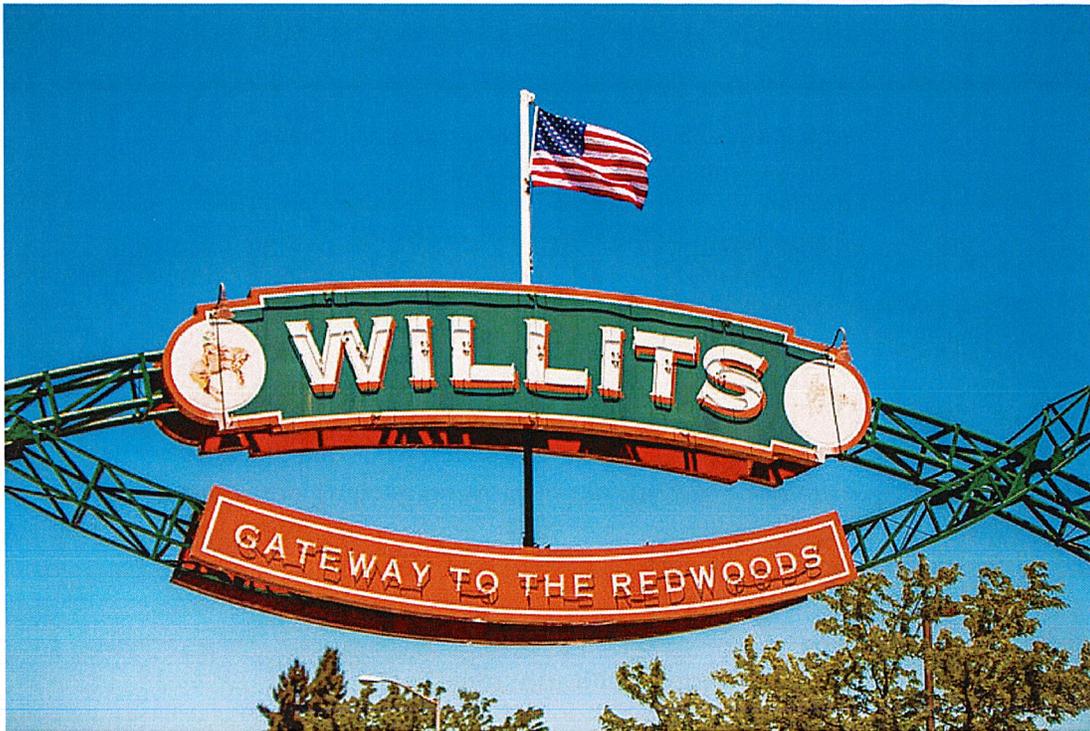


Photo of the Willits gateway courtesy of Thomas Hawk

Editor's note: Information for this story has been provided by whistleblowers who have reported misuse of public funds, abuse of authority and gross mismanagement. MendoLocal.News has checked the information they provided that is used in this story with original source material. We will not be identifying these individuals further.

A week before Christmas, interim City Manager Robert Richardson called an all-hands meeting of city employees.

“I don’t want to sugarcoat this,” Richardson told them. “There are those of us who will not be here in the future.”

Richardson, who had himself been hired just 16 days earlier, said he wanted to set expectations about potential layoffs and explain why cuts were coming. After months of warnings about the city’s financial woes, change was coming quickly for the roughly four dozen people employed by the city.

Employees took the news quietly, asking few questions.

Richardson said he planned to spend January learning how the city operates — who does what, and why — and identifying positions that could be consolidated

or reimagined. In February, he said, he would present a proposed strategic plan to the City Council.

Once the plan is approved, Richardson said he would meet with the bargaining units that represent city employees. Employees whose jobs are targeted in the reorganization would receive 21 days' notice. If Richardson's timeline holds, notices would go out by the end of February.

Employees who receive notices and qualify for another position within the city would have five days to decide whether to accept the job.

In response to questions, Richardson assured employees that the city would not contest unemployment claims, as it has done in the past.

"The council is pretty much mortified by this," he said. "They have a lot of personal relationships here. They like you. I don't see them taking any punitive action against the personnel going through this."

At the same time, Richardson indicated that employees who had spoken up in the past, may have reason to be worried. "Reorganizations can be fun," he said. "But they're really for people who like to work a lot differently than we do. Differently than most cities work. But people have to be very flexible. They have to be incredible team-oriented. They cannot be people who have difficulty with others."

In private conversations, employees pointed to long-standing management issues and a lack of accountability for decisions that transformed Willits from a city with a balanced budget into one that routinely spends about 50% more than it takes in.

Employees also noted the complexity of the financial picture Richardson described. His framing assumes that the city's general fund pays 100% of salaries for employees outside public safety. In reality, about 56% of non-public-safety salaries are paid through fees collected by the city's water and wastewater services and taxes allocated to those divisions.

Water, wastewater and public safety are the three core government functions the city provides.

According to budget documents, the Water Enterprise Fund is projected to bring in \$3.58 million in revenue this fiscal year while incurring \$2.59 million in expenses — including salaries, benefits, insurance, rent and debt service — leaving nearly \$1 million. The Wastewater Enterprise Fund is projected to take in \$5 million in revenue and incur \$4.54 million in expenses, leaving about \$462,000.

The apparent surplus in the Wastewater Enterprise Fund, however, disappears when transfers for capital improvements are taken into account. The largest is a \$3.7 million transfer from the Wastewater Enterprise Fund in the current fiscal year to pay for a solar project approved by the City Council in June 2024.

At the time, council members were told the water and wastewater funds held about \$5.7 million and \$5 million in cash, respectively. The solar project was projected to generate \$5 million to \$7 million in savings over 20 years — assuming annual PG&E rate increases of 2% to 5% — and to qualify for about \$1.8 million in Inflation Reduction Act incentives.

Under state law, utility service fees must bear a reasonable relationship to the cost of providing service. Cities may not charge rates simply to generate surplus revenue unrelated to costs.

A year and a half later, an employee said that investment — which could eventually reduce wastewater rates in the late 2030s — appears to now be coming at the expense of jobs.

A \$203,492.85 change order for the solar project, approved by the council at its Jan. 14 meeting, prompted comparisons of the amount to the cost of salaries.

“I went through all our current openings,” employee Nici Caldwell told the council. “We’re looking for a city manager paying between \$137,000 and \$176,000. A police officer position pays between \$43,000 and \$59,000. A community service officer position pays between \$53,000 and \$64,000.”

She added that the city’s lowest-paid employees — operators-in-training hired with no prior experience — earn about \$39,000 a year.

Caldwell also criticized the city for preparing to lay off modestly paid workers while hiring consultants whose hourly rates equate to annual salaries of roughly \$145,600 to \$364,000.

Mayor Tom Allman responded that the consultant’s role was to ensure employee rights were respected and to protect the city from legal claims that could result from the re-organization.

Earlier in the meeting, Allman accepted a nomination to continue serving as mayor. He comments reflected the gravity of the city’s current financial situation.

“In the next 90 to 120 days, this council is going to make some really tough decisions,” Allman said. “Those decisions will be made as a team, with as much input from the public and from employees as possible. I appreciate the trust you’re placing in me — but this is not a banner year to be on the council, or to be mayor. We are not flush.”

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