

August 20, 2026

The Honorable Judge Brendan Michael Farrell, Presiding Judge
Colusa County Superior Court
532 Oak Street
Colusa, CA 95932

Foreperson
Colusa County Civil Grand Jury
P.O. Box 715
Colusa, CA 95932

Re: Response of City Council Member John Troughton Jr.

To the Honorable Brendan Michael Farrell:

R1 – Mandatory Governance Training

I agree with Recommendation R1. Mandatory training is required by the State of California and includes training concerning the Brown Act, ethics, discrimination, and other responsibilities of elected officials. These requirements are important because, among other things, a majority of the City Council cannot discuss City business outside of a properly noticed public meeting when doing so would constitute a meeting under the Brown Act.

I believe this training should remain mandatory so that elected officials clearly understand their responsibilities, limitations, and obligations to the public. I have completed the required training and received a certificate of completion.

R2 – Use of Public Funds

I strongly agree with Recommendation R2 regarding annual review of the City's credit card policies and actual credit card use, followed by employee training.

When I became aware of what I believed to be improper use of a City credit card, I brought the matter to the attention of the other members of the City Council. I also learned that the matter had reportedly been brought to the attention of then-City Administrator Frank Kennedy approximately two years earlier but, to my knowledge, had not been reported to the City Council.

I subsequently learned that the Director of Public Works had allegedly used a City credit card for approximately \$750 in personal purchases. The use of public funds or a City-issued credit card for personal purposes is a serious matter and should be promptly investigated, documented, reported to the appropriate authorities when required, and addressed through appropriate personnel and financial-control procedures.

For these reasons, I support stronger oversight, annual policy review, regular auditing of City credit card transactions, and training for all employees authorized to use City credit cards.

I am further concerned by the circumstances surrounding this matter and what I believe warrants investigation into whether there was an effort to keep the incident from being properly reported or disclosed. After learning of the alleged personal use of the City credit card, I personally went to the District Attorney's Office regarding the matter and was referred to the Police Department. I subsequently spoke with the Police Chief; however, to this day, I am not aware of any record showing that the matter was formally reported, documented, or investigated. I am also concerned that the Finance Department reportedly had to contact Public Works to obtain information concerning the personal purchase after the charge appeared on the City credit card bill. The employee did not voluntarily come forward and promptly reimburse the City; rather, he reportedly had to be contacted concerning the charge, and reimbursement was not made until approximately 37 days later. In my view, these circumstances—including the failure to voluntarily disclose and promptly reimburse the personal expenditure—raise serious questions concerning knowledge, intent, accountability, and whether others within the City administration failed to properly report or disclose the matter. I believe these circumstances warrant independent review by the appropriate authorities under all potentially applicable California laws, including **Penal Code section 424** concerning certain misappropriations or unauthorized uses of public money, **Government Code section 1222** concerning willful violations of laws relating to official duties by public officers or employees, and **Government Code section 6259** concerning judicial review regarding the withholding or disclosure of public records. I am not making a legal determination that any particular individual violated these statutes; rather, I believe the documented circumstances are sufficiently serious that the appropriate authorities should determine whether any of these provisions or other applicable laws were violated and whether any City official or employee improperly concealed, failed to report, or failed to act upon the alleged misuse of public funds.

R3 – Conflict of Interest Enforcement

I agree that robust ethics and conflict-of-interest training is necessary. However, training is only effective when elected officials, managers, and employees actually follow the laws and policies covered by that training.

Officials must not only receive training but also understand and comply with the rules they learn. When potential conflicts arise, they should be disclosed and handled in accordance with state law and City policy. Based on my observations of past City operations, I believe stronger accountability and enforcement are necessary in addition to annual training.

R4 – Executive Hiring Standards Reform

I fully agree with Recommendation R4 and the need for formal and comprehensive background investigations.

The finding regarding inadequate background investigations is particularly concerning because weaknesses in the hiring process can result in individuals being placed in important supervisory or executive positions without the City having sufficient information about their backgrounds. In my experience, concerns involving the hiring of a Public Works Director and a previous City Manager were discovered only after hiring had occurred.

The City should conduct thorough and documented background investigations before hiring future executive and supervisory employees. This should include verification of employment history, qualifications, references, and other legally permissible information relevant to the position. Proper background investigations protect the City, its employees, and the public.

R5 – Comprehensive Review of Staffing Needs and Employee Morale

I agree that the City should conduct a comprehensive review of staffing needs, job descriptions, employee responsibilities, and morale. I also believe City Council members need appropriate opportunities to communicate with department heads and obtain accurate information necessary to understand City operations, while respecting the City's established administrative structure and the respective roles of elected officials and staff.

During my service as City Treasurer, I raised concerns regarding the City's financial condition. In approximately May 2024, I provided the City with a warning concerning financial trends that I believed were unsustainable. My concerns were consistent with concerns expressed by the Finance Director, but, to my knowledge, they were not adequately acknowledged or addressed by the City Council at that time.

I was also concerned that the previous City Administrator had instructed employees not to speak with me regarding the City's condition and finances. Restrictions on the flow of relevant financial information can make it more difficult for officials charged with oversight responsibilities to identify and address problems before they become more serious.

These concerns became more significant when I subsequently learned of the alleged personal use of a City credit card by the Public Works Director. Shortly thereafter, the City Administrator took a proposed substantial raise for the Public Works Director to the Personnel Committee rather than the Finance Committee, despite the financial and credit-card concerns that had arisen.

For these reasons, I support a comprehensive staffing and morale review as recommended. I also believe the City should ensure that appropriate information is available to officials responsible for oversight, that concerns raised by employees and elected officials are properly documented and considered, and that personnel and compensation decisions are made through transparent and appropriate procedures.

F6 – Interference with Oversight

I believe Finding F6 is supported by the written directive issued by then-City Administrator Frank Kennedy to City staff. In that letter, Mr. Kennedy instructed employees that if a member of the City Council needed information from staff or wanted to provide information to staff, the Council member was required to go through him first. The letter further instructed employees that Council members "should not be coming directly to you" unless Mr. Kennedy or the employee's Department Head had first authorized the communication. If contacted directly, employees were instructed to determine what information the Council member wanted, notify the Department Head or City Administrator, and wait for further direction regarding the next steps. In my view, this written directive demonstrates the type of interference with oversight identified in F6 because it restricted direct communication between elected City Council members and City employees and placed the City Administrator between Council members and staff seeking to exchange information. This is particularly relevant to **R5 – Comprehensive Review of Staffing Needs and Employee Morale**, because effective oversight requires that elected officials have appropriate access to accurate information concerning City operations, staffing, finances, and employee concerns while respecting lawful administrative roles and procedures. The letter should be considered as documentary evidence when evaluating whether oversight was obstructed and whether transparency between City staff and elected officials was undermined.

This concern is further supported by the City of Williams Municipal Code. Section 2.06.010 provides that the City Administrator is appointed by the City Council and "shall hold office at the pleasure of the city council." Section 2.06.040 further provides that the City Administrator serves as the administrative head of City government "under the direction and control of the city council." In my view, these provisions are important when considering the written directive issued by then-City Administrator Frank Kennedy restricting direct communications between Council members and City staff. While an administrator may establish appropriate procedures for the efficient management of employees, those procedures should not have the effect of preventing the City Council from carrying out its lawful oversight responsibilities or obtaining information necessary to govern the City. The City Administrator serves under the direction and control of the City Council, not the reverse. I believe the written directive and its effect on the Council's ability to obtain information should therefore be examined as part of Finding F6 and the comprehensive review recommended in R5.

Additional Statement – City Council Censure and Retaliation Concerns

I also believe it is important to address the City Council's actions in voting on two separate occasions to censure me, City Council Member John J. Troughton Jr. In my view, these censures were retaliatory and arose, at least in substantial part, because I pursued matters involving City operations that other members of the City Council had failed to adequately investigate or address. Many of those same matters are reflected in the findings and concerns subsequently identified by the Civil Grand Jury.

My actions were taken as part of what I believed to be my responsibility as an elected official to protect public funds, obtain information concerning City operations, and raise concerns when I believed misconduct or inadequate oversight had occurred. This included my discovery and pursuit of the alleged personal use of a City credit card, my concerns regarding how that matter

was handled and reported, and other information I uncovered that was unfavorable or potentially detrimental to the then-City Administrator and the manner in which the City was being administered.

Rather than those concerns being fully and independently investigated when I raised them, the City Council twice pursued censure against me. Based on the timing and circumstances surrounding those actions, I believe the censures should be reviewed to determine whether they were used, at least in part, to retaliate against or discredit an elected Council member for raising legitimate concerns regarding public funds, accountability, transparency, and City administration. In my view, the Council's decision to censure me rather than fully investigate the concerns I was raising also indicated an apparent acceptance or approval of the City Administrator's conduct. I believe the Council's responses to the Civil Grand Jury findings have further reinforced that concern because, in my opinion, those responses have been vague and have not directly addressed or acknowledged the seriousness of the underlying conduct identified in the findings. The fact that the Civil Grand Jury subsequently identified significant concerns involving many of the same areas I had been attempting to bring to the City's attention further supports my belief that my actions were undertaken in furtherance of my oversight responsibilities rather than for an improper purpose.

I respectfully request that the resolutions censuring me, the stated grounds for each censure, the evidence relied upon, the timing of those proceedings, and all related communications be considered together with the Civil Grand Jury's findings. In my view, that examination is necessary to determine whether the censure process was used appropriately or whether it had the effect of discouraging an elected official from investigating and reporting matters involving the alleged misuse of public funds and other issues affecting the City.

Sincerely,



John J. Troughton Jr.
Williams City Council Member



City of Williams

810 E Street P.O. Box 310
Williams, CA 95987
Office (530) 235-3270 Fax (530) 473 -2445

Team,

Recently we've had some miscommunications and direction management issues between me, staff and the City Council. I want to take this opportunity to provide clarification, so you all know what to expect and what is expected of you. If a member of the City Council needs information from staff, or wants to provide information to staff, they will come to me first. This is so that I'm in the loop and that I get them to the right staff member. They should not be coming directly to you unless you have heard from me or your Department Head that they will be doing so; that way you'll know the first step in the communication chain has been completed. If a Council member contacts you and you haven't heard from me or your Department Head that they will be doing so, please just politely ask what information they need and let them know that someone will get back to them as soon as possible. Then let your Department Head or I know the Councilmember reached out. Either I or the department head will provide directions about the next steps.

If you have any questions at all, please let me know, and thanks in advance for your cooperation.

Frank Kennedy
City Administrator

*Directed at me
John*

[CITY OF WILLIAMS LETTERHEAD]

August 19, 2026

The Honorable Judge Brendan Michael Farrell, Presiding Judge Colusa County Superior Court
532 Oak Street
Colusa, CA 95932

Foreperson
Colusa County Civil Grand Jury
P.O. Box 715
Colusa, CA 95932

Re: Response to 2025-2026 Colusa County Civil Grand Jury Report dated June 30, 2026.

To the Honorable Brendan Michael Farrell:

The City of Williams ("City") is in receipt of the 2025-2026 Colusa County Grand Jury report entitled "City of Williams." Per the request of the Grand Jury, and in compliance with section 933 of the California Penal Code, please find within this letter the response of the City.

Findings:

F1: Employee furloughs and executive compensation. In July 2025, the City implemented furloughs reducing employees' hours and wages by 10%. The City imposed financial hardship on employees while increasing executive compensation and demonstrating inequitable and inconsistent fiscal priorities.

F1 Response: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. Faced with difficult budgetary decisions, the City approached unions with a discussion of limited options: either a 10% furlough or a potential for layoff. Unions selected the former and as a result, the City implemented a 10% furlough for all City employees, including the former City Administrator. Executive compensation did not increase during this period. The 10% furlough was subsequently discontinued in January 2026 when the City's finances permitted.

F2: Declining revenue ignored. The Finance Director and a City Council member reported declining revenues including reductions in sales tax and gas tax. The City failed to adjust spending in response to declining revenue, contributing to avoidable fiscal instability.

F2 Response: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. The respondent agrees with the statement that declining revenues were reported at the May City Council meeting. The City curtailed spending in a number of ways, including but not limited to not hiring a new Public Works director when that position became vacant due to a resignation and soliciting donations from private businesses to offset the cost of operating the City's public pool to continue to provide this amenity to the public while reducing the City's expenditures.

F3: Questionable dismissal of employee concerns. Employee unions reported being pressured to accept furloughs or face layoffs. A “vote of no confidence” and complaints were filed against a director. The City’s handling of employee concerns reflect disregard for the workplace conditions.

F3 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The City faced difficult financial circumstances and engaged unions in a discussion of options. As discussed above, the options were limited and were either 10% furloughs or the potential for layoffs. To avoid layoffs, the unions selected, and the City implemented, 10% wage and hour reductions. The City had no input on how union representatives presented the options to the membership so the City cannot speak to any pressure any employees may have felt.

F4: Employee morale and retention decline. Evidence shows low employee morale and denial of cost-of-living adjustments after reinstatement from furloughs led employees to seek employment elsewhere. The City’s management practices have significantly degraded workforce stability and morale.

F4 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. In the approximately seven months since reinstatement of full compensation following the 10% furloughs, only two employees have left employment with the City. For comparison, three employees left employment with the City while the furloughs were in place. The City cannot speak to employee morale or other motivations for why any individual may leave employment with the City as only employees know their personal reasons for the decision to move on from a position.

F5: Appearance of a conflict. The City awarded a contract to a company employing someone that had a close personal relationship with a Director without sufficient public disclosures, thus eroding public confidence.

F5 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The City follows all contracting laws, including analyzing conflicts of interest when the City becomes aware of potential conflicts

F6: Interference with oversight. The City Manager instructed the finance staff not to communicate with a city official. This directive obstructed oversight and undermined transparency.

F6 Response: The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. The former City Administrator issued a memo to all staff outlining that he was to be the first point of contact for all communications between staff and City Council members. The impetus for this directive was to ensure staff time was being efficiently utilized, the City Administrator was kept aware of all issues, to foster transparency, and ensure compliance with state law.

F7: Procurement violations. The City declared an “emergency” to bypass the bidding requirements for a roadway project despite longstanding poor road conditions and accepted private financing, bypassing private bidding. The “emergency” declaration appears unjustified.

F7 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. In its June 5, 2024 special meeting, City Council adopted findings supporting an exception to the competitive bidding process and authorized the negotiation of a contract for the construction of the Morning Star Old Highway 99 project in light of concerns about the dilapidated conditions of the highway and the likelihood

of a complete failure of the road in the very near future. Given the time constraints and the severity of impact and public safety issues, the City did not have sufficient time to conduct a full bidding process and complete construction before the likely road failure, and as a result moved forward with an exception to the bidding process.

F8: Brown Act concerns. Three City Council members were observed meeting privately outside of official meetings on more than one occasion. These actions raise serious concerns of potential violations of the Brown Act.

F8 Response: Respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The mere presence of multiple councilmembers in the same location outside of a noticed public meeting does not constitute a Brown Act violation. Instead, if discussions, deliberations, and actions are taken outside of a noticed public meeting by a majority of the Council, such acts could constitute a Brown Act violation. No details were provided regarding when three Council members were observed in the same location outside of a noticed public meeting and likewise no evidence was provided about what, if anything, they may have discussed that could have given rise to a Brown Act violation.

F9: Lack of City Council competence and engagement. Evidence shows some City Council members lack understanding of their roles. Multiple members appear to be insufficiently prepared at meetings to discuss agenda items. A lack of preparation among elected officials constitutes a failure of governance.

F9 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. City Council members prepare for Council meetings in a variety of ways, and each member may use a different approach based on individual preferences and the nature of the matters before the Council.

F10: Failure to adequately vet and evaluate executive leadership. Evidence shows when the City hired a Director they had knowledge of prior employment concerns. The City did not adequately vet a senior executive thus exposing the organization to foreseeable risk.

F10 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The City has a hiring policy and follows that policy for all hiring decisions.

F11: Failure of oversight. Due to a lack of engagement and understanding, the City Council failed to identify and correct misconduct and mismanagement by leadership. The City Council failed in its fundamental duty to supervise executive leadership and protect the public interest.

F11 Response: The respondent disagrees wholly with the finding. The City Council exercises oversight of the City Manager (formerly referred to as City Administrator) and City Attorney. To the extent this Finding relates to management of other City staff, that responsibility falls within the City Manager's (formerly City Administrator's) purview.

Recommendations:

R1: Mandatory Governance Training. All City Council members shall annually complete training on their roles, oversight duties, and compliance with the Brown Act.

R1 Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The City Council already satisfies its state-mandated training requirements.

R2: Use of Public Funds. The City shall review annually the current credit card policy and the actual use of the City's credit cards, followed by employee training.

R2 Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The City reviewed and updated its credit card policy in March of 2025 and completed employee training regarding this policy shortly thereafter. Credit card usage is reviewed by department heads, finance personnel, the City Administrator / City Manager, and the Council Member signing checks.

R3: Conflict of Interest Enforcement. All elected officials and managers need more robust ethics training on an annual basis to ensure compliance of state law and city policy regarding conflict of interest and public disclosures.

R3 Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The City Council and managers already satisfy all state-mandated training requirements.

R4: Executive Hiring Standards Reform. The City shall consistently implement formal background investigation requirements and take findings seriously.

R4 Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The City already conducts background checks. The City's standard practice is to run background checks on all new hires.

R5: Comprehensive review of staffing needs and employee morale. Review job descriptions and employee responsibilities and make the adjustments to staffing as deemed necessary to assist in improving the City's financial crisis and employee morale.

R5 Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. The City council has control over the budget process and general power to approve spending for the City. The City Manager is responsible for the day to day management of the City, including all employment decisions apart from the hiring and firing of the City Attorney.

R6: Report out with an agenda item completion of R1 through R5 as each occurs.

R6 Response: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable. This response serves as the City's response to the Grand Jury's report pursuant to Penal Code Section 933.

The City of Williams appreciates the opportunity provided by the Grand Jury to provide a response to the 2025-2026 report. Should you have any further questions, please feel free to contact our office.