



City of Williams

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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 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 Council.

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 layoffs. 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 agendized subjects. 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.