CITY OF AVENAL
"Pistachio Capital of the World®"
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL/SUCCESSOR AGENCY MEETING
January 8, 2026 13, 2025, 5:15 P.M.
AVENAL THEATER & EVENT CENTER, 233 E. KINGS ST., AVENAL, CA

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: by Mayor Preciado at 5:15 P.M.

ROLL CALL: Councilman Ricardo Verdugo, David Reynosa, Pablo Hernandez, Mayor Alvaro Preciado.

ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Gamez.

STAFF: López, Curiel, Ortiz, Davis, Velasco, Price, Arellano, Guerra, Morillon, Sanchez, Montes, Soto, Brigham, E. López.

LEGAL COUNSEL: Moses Diaz.

CITY CLERK:
Government Code Section 54952.3: The members of the City Council/Successor Agency are entitled to receive a total of $450.00 per month because of being elected to the City Council. They receive no other compensation for sitting as a member of Successor Agency.

PUBLIC COMMENT/ANNOUNCEMENTS & UNSCHEDULED APPEARANCES:

This time is reserved for members of the audience to address the City Council on items of interest that are both on the Agenda or not on the Agenda, and are within the subject matter jurisdiction of the City Council/Successor Agency. State Law prohibits any member of the Council from commenting or acting on matters not on the agenda. The Council asks that you keep your comments concise and respectful. Criticism, concerns, or support are welcome, provided they are expressed with appropriate courtesy. Each speaker will be allowed three minutes. A timer will notify you when your time is expired. Please begin your comments by stating your name and place of residence.

Special Recognitions: ***Hector de Dios Deniz –*** *Contributions to Senior Nutrition Program*
Happy Feet Day Care *- Contributions to Santa on Patrol*
Officer Anthony Guerra *- Contributions to Santa on Patrol*
Officer Baltazar Morillon *- Best Santa on Patrol Officer Award*
New Staff Introductions: ***Samuel Montes*** *&* ***José Soto****, PW Landscaper;* ***Samantha Brigham****, Part-Time Kennel Technician;*
Esmeralda López*, Part-Time Custodian;* ***Anthony Guerra*** *&* ***Mariano Sanchez,*** *Police Officer I*

Antony López, City Manager, provided a brief recap of the *Santa on Patrol* event and distributed Certificates of Appreciation to those who participated. Scott Davis, Public Works Director, introduced new staff members in the Public Works and Animal Control Departments. Chief Velasco introduced new Officer Guerra and returning Officer Sanchez.

Public Comments:
Dalilah Barajas, Avenal resident, questioned whether Council Members truly love the City and if they believe their actions are in the best interest of Avenal. She stated that the City Manager's contract amendment represents reckless governance, and that the Council should instead be discussing his immediate termination, as she believes he has caused harm to the City. She further stated that the initiation of the recall effort resulted from negative actions by the City. Ms. Barajas urged the Council to protect the City, be transparent, and take action during the meeting to demonstrate good faith and commitment to the City's best interests.

Lupe Villa, Kings County Registrar of Voters, presented Certificates of Sufficiency for recall petitions. He stated that the City has 14 days to call an election and that, if the City fails to do so, the County will call an election. Moses Diaz, Legal Counsel, requested clarification regarding whether Mr. Villa has an agreement with the City or the City Clerk to provide election services for the City. Mr. Villa stated that no such agreement exists. He explained that he was present on behalf of the individuals who requested the recall election and that he is following the required procedures. Mr. Villa stated that he believes his authority is based on a prior election resolution submitted when the current Council Members were elected. Mr. Diaz also confirmed that the City Clerk, Maria Angie Ortiz, did not authorize the County to conduct any election services, as previously confirmed via email. The City Clerk and Mr. Villa both confirmed this information verbally to Mr. Diaz. Mr. Villa also confirmed that the recall petitions were submitted to the Kings County Registrar of Voters' office and not to the City Clerk, who is the City's designated elections official. Mr. Villa stated that he is acting solely in his capacity as the Kings County Registrar of Voters.

Alex Walker, Kings County representative, read a letter submitted for the record by Kyria Martinez, Kings County Chief Administrative Officer, expressing concerns regarding the language included in the City's fire resolution on the agenda. City Manager Antony López thanked Mr. Walker for sharing the corrected figures related to the fire contract.

John Chamberlain, Kings County Fire Chief, expressed frustration with the language included in the fire resolution on the agenda, stating that it is degrading. He read a portion of the resolution and stated that it is inaccurate. He noted that the City has never reached out to him with inquiries, despite his continued availability. He also expressed concern regarding the consultant's report, specifically noting that certain fire trucks were being incorrectly classified. Additionally, he referenced a 2021 letter in which the City Mayor and City Manager stated that the City had benefited from a subsidy from the County and expressed a desire to eventually fully fund fire services, and he questioned what had changed since that time.

Frank Lopez, Avenal resident, thanked the City for allowing him to serve as Santa during the *Santa on Patrol* event and congratulated Council Members on their contributions over the past year. He commented that recent Facebook Page Avenal Press news articles appear to be AI-generated and portray the City negatively. He stated that the recent Brown Act violation constitutes a civil lawsuit and a "fix-it ticket" issue for the City, noting that no criminal charges would result. He also shared that Judge George Orndoff had passed away, stating that his passing is a significant loss for the City.

Alex Walker, Kings County representative, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to clarify information and stated that the County is willing to provide information regarding fire services costs to anyone with questions.

Mayor Preciado called for a moment of silence in honor of the passing of Judge George Orndoff and Renee Nicole Good of Minnesota.

Council Member Verdugo motioned to move Closed Session to the end of the meeting; the motion failed due to lack of a second.

Mayor Preciado closed Public Comment at 6:09 p.m. and recessed the meeting into Closed Session.

CLOSED SESSION: (City/Successor Agency):

A. Personnel (Government Code §54957(b)).
Consider Public Employee Performance Evaluation for the Position of: *City Manager*

B. PENDING LITIGATION (Government Code § 54956.9). It is the intention of this governing body to meet in closed-session concerning: Conference with legal counsel – ANTICIPATED LITIGATION (Government Code § 54956.9(d)). Significant exposure to litigation (Government Code § 54956.9(d)(2)). Number of potential cases is: 1.

Facts and circumstances clearly known to potential plaintiff (if any) that might result in litigation (Government Code § 54956.9(e)(2)):

a. Case 2, Government Claim received by Sheila Verdugo.

C. INITIATE LITIGATION (Government Code § 54956.9(d)(4)).

Conference with legal counsel - ANTICIPATED LITIGATION (Government Code § 54956.9(d)(4)).

Initiation of Litigation (Paragraph (4) of subdivision (d) of Gov. Code § 54956.9)).

Number of potential cases is: __1__.

City Council returned from Closed Session at 7:03 P.M. with nothing to report.

CONSENT CALENDAR:

All items listed under the consent calendar are routine or for approval only and are enacted by one motion: (Action).

A. Consider City of Avenal/Successor Agency's Approval of Minutes for November 13, 2025, Regular Meeting, & December 1, Special Meeting.
B. Ratify Prior Approval of Consider Purchase and Upfit a 2026 Ford Police Interceptor Utility under the Byrne State Crisis Intervention Program (SCIP) Grant (Discussion/Action).
C. Consider Approving the Recognized Obligation Payment Schedule 26-27 for July 2026 through June 2027.
D. Adopt a Resolution Authorizing the City to Accept CalHome Program Funds for First-Time Homebuyer Assistance.

Council Member/Successor Agency Member Reynosa motioned to approve the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Council Member/Successor Agency Member Hernandez, and the motion carried.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
AYES: Reynosa, Hernandez, Verdugo. Preciado
NOES: None
ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Gamez.
ABSTAIN: None.

MAYOR & COUNCIL MEMBER/ SUCCESSOR AGENCY/ ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION:

A. Special Presentation by Kings County Election Department, Registrar of Voters: Lupe Villa. (Discussion/Action).

City Manager Antony López presented the report as submitted and stated that there are still several legal concerns that will be addressed at a later time. Mayor Preciado added, for the record, details regarding the purpose of the previously canceled Council meeting. Council Member Verdugo clarified that he had informed City Manager López that he would attend the meeting regardless. Screenshots of text messages from the day of the canceled Council meeting were shared. Councilmember Verdugo stated that Notice of Adjournment should not have been signed at all as he was present. Legal Counsel, Moses Diaz, shared that the meeting being adjourned or cancelled would have no legal significance.

B. Investments 101 Presentation and Consider Possible Approval for Agreement for Investment Advisory Services with Optimized Investment Partners, LLC(Discussion/Action).

Brian Arellano, Finance Director, provided a brief introduction to Optimized Investment Partners' (OIP) services. City Manager Antony López recommended tabling the item to allow Legal Counsel additional time to review the agreement. Mayor Preciado added comments regarding the City's current investments with LAIF. Mr. Arellano stated that the estimated current investment amount is approximately $3.9 million. City Manager López noted that staff is still searching for the original investment amount.

Brittany Tran, OIP Marketing Director, presented the report as submitted. Mayor Preciado inquired about professional services fees. Ms. Tran stated that the fee for the City of Avenal would be $950 per month and includes unlimited online Council meeting participation. City Manager López stated that staff recommends further exploration of OIP's services. Mayor Preciado indicated that a future study session will be held on this item.

ACTIVITY REPORTS/SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS & COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Activity Reports:

1. Police Department Activity Report: Cecilio Velasco, Chief of Police.

Chief Velasco presented the report as submitted. Council Member Verdugo inquired about the Zoom bombing investigation. Chief Velasco stated that similar incidents occurred outside of Avenal and that the case would be forwarded to federal partners. Mayor Preciado commented on the reduction in arrests and commended the department on the decrease in traffic collisions. Chief Velasco explained that increased traffic citations often correlate with reduced collisions and stated that the department will have opportunities to educate the community regarding DUI-related issues.

Council Member Reynosa raised concerns regarding high volumes of semi-truck traffic entering the landfill. Chief Velasco stated that the department is issuing citations during periods of heavy traffic and encouraged residents to report incidents to dispatch. Council Member Reynosa suggested utilizing social media to encourage the public to report semi-trucks parked along Highway 269.

2. Public Works/Code Enforcement/Animal Control Departments Activity Report: Scott Davis, Public Works Director.

Scott Davis, Public Works Director, presented report as submitted.

a. City Engineer's Activity Report: Javier Andrade –A&M Consulting Engineers

Javier Andrade, City Engineer, presented report as submitted.

3. IT Department Activity Report: Humberto Bermudez, IT Director.

Humberto Bermudez presented the report as submitted. Mayor Preciado inquired about internet availability at the Community Center. Mr. Bermudez stated that separate trenching for fiber lines has been completed and that public internet access will be available. City Engineer Javier Andrade stated that completion is anticipated in February.

4. Community Development Activity Report: Joshua McDonnell, Contract City Planner, 4Creeks.

Teslla Ramirez, 4Creeks Consultant, presented the report as submitted. Mayor Preciado inquired about the difference between an ADU and a JADU. Ms. Ramirez clarified that an ADU is detached from the primary residence, while a JADU is located within the home.

5. Economic Development & Grant Writing Report: Emily Engelsgaard, Grants Manager, the CrisCom Company.

Renee Missakian, Chief Operating Officer and Executive Vice President of The CrisCom Company, presented the report as submitted. Mayor Preciado inquired about a potential KFC franchise relocating from Coalinga. Ms. Missakian stated that the specific franchisee is not currently seeking to open a new location but that staff will continue to pursue other opportunities.

6. Avenal Fire Department Development Update & Quarterly Fire Report: Ruben Veliz, Fire Consultant.

Ruben Veliz presented the report as submitted. City Engineer Javier Andrade added that updates regarding vehicle and equipment storage will be provided soon. Scott Davis, Public Works Director, stated that all fire vehicles are registered and street-legal.

City Manager Antony López also presented a quarterly summary of Fire Department expenditures from October 9, 2025, through December 31, 2025. Mayor Preciado stated that the fire trucks acquired by the City are operating well with no mechanical issues. He expressed optimism that the Avenal Fire Department will be as successful as the Police Department in securing grant funding and noted that a future volunteer program for Avenal residents may be developed.

PUBLIC HEARING(s):

Joint Hearing of the City of Avenal Successor Agency RDA Trust Obligations Fund/Public Finance Authority:

A. Consider the Close Out Report on the 2021-CDBG Homebuyer & Owner-Occupied Rehabilitation (21-CDBG-000010 and 21-CDBG-HA-00011)

a. Staff Report
b. Public Hearing
c. Approval of Resolution (Discussion/Action)

City Manager, Antony López, recommended that the public hearing be moved to a different time as there was an error on the public notice. Item was tabled.

OLD BUSINESS:

A. None.

NEW BUSINESS:

A. Consider Re-Ratification of Prior Actions Related to Establishing the Avenal Municipal Fire Department (Discussion/Action).

City Manager Antony López presented the report as submitted. Council Member Verdugo inquired about the reason for re-ratification. Legal Counsel Moses Diaz stated that the action was requested by the Kings County District Attorney. Council Member Verdugo asked about a $100,000 deposit that was made prior to Council approval. City Manager López stated that the deposit was subsequently approved by the Council and was made at the direction of the City Council. Council Member Verdugo shared comments regarding the sequence of events related to the fire department.

Council Member/Successor Agency Member Preciado motioned to approve Resolution 2026-02. The motion was seconded by Council Member/Successor Agency Member Hernandez, and the motion carried.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
AYES: Preciado, Hernandez, Reynosa.
NOES: Verdugo.
ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Gamez.
ABSTAIN: None.

B. Funding Agreement with State Water Board & City Manager Authorization for Water Treatment Plant PLC Replacement (Discussion/Action).

City Manager, Antony López, presented report as submitted. Mayor Preciado inquired if the new PLC replacement will be compatible with the new water system. Javier Andrade, City Engineer, stated it will be compatible.

Council Member/Successor Agency Member Preciado motioned to approve Resolution 2026-03. The motion was seconded by Council Member/Successor Agency Member Reynosa, and the motion carried.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
AYES: Preciado, Reynosa, Verdugo, Hernandez.
NOES: None.

ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Gamez.
ABSTAIN: None.

C. Consider Approval of City Manager Employment Agreement, Amendment #2.

Griselda Price, Director of Administrative Services, presented the report as submitted. Mayor Preciado clarified that the City Manager's new salary had already been negotiated and that the current item relates only to the length of the contract term. Council Member Verdugo stated that changes to the termination clause were added without full Council deliberation and that he had not been given sufficient time to review the amendments. Council Member Verdugo asked Legal Counsel about the potential budgetary implications if the termination clause were triggered. Legal Counsel Moses Diaz stated that there are multiple types of termination. He explained that a termination "without cause" would trigger severance pay, which is capped by statute at 18 months. Mayor Preciado stated that his primary concern is City stability and that he wants a City Manager who is available to provide daily services and lives in Avenal. He requested that Legal Counsel share information regarding a prior discussion about the City Manager's contract, clarifying that the discussion focused solely on City stability and was not a private conversation between himself and City Manager Antony López. By majority vote, the Council waived attorney-client privilege regarding that discussion.
Legal Counsel Moses Diaz confirmed the substance of the conversation. Griselda Price stated that the severance package consists of one year of salary plus an additional six months. Council Member Verdugo stated that the City Manager was "cushioning his pocket." City Manager Antony López asked what the specific concerns were regarding the termination clause and whether there was a plan for his termination. Council Member Verdugo responded that there was no such plan and stated that the amendments were not related to City stability. City Manager López referenced their prior service together on a school board and noted a similar employment agreement with the Superintendent, questioning his opposition to the contract clauses. City Manager López further referenced a series of incidents in which closed session information was allegedly disclosed publicly. He stated that during County negotiations, the County appeared to have prior knowledge of the City's position. He also presented a screenshot of a Facebook comment made by Council Member Verdugo's spouse, Sheila Verdugo, which referenced what he described as closed session City business. City Manager López also cited internal personnel incidents from actions and conduct by Councilman Verdugo that he claims have created a hostile work environment for City Employees and himself. City Manager López recommended that the Council review these matters seriously and stated that he would also initiate an internal investigation. Mayor Preciado shared additional examples of what he described as negative conduct by Council Member Verdugo. Legal Counsel Moses Diaz advised that these matters should be agendized and discussed at a future meeting.

Council Member / Successor Agency Member Verdugo motioned to waive attorney-client privilege regarding the City Manager contract discussion with Mayor Preciado. The motion was seconded by Council Member / Successor Agency Member Reynosa, and the motion carried.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
AYES: Verdugo, Reynosa, Preciado
NOES: Hernandez
ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Gamez
ABSTAIN: None

Council Member / Successor Agency Member Preciado motioned to approve Resolution No. 2026-04. The motion was seconded by Council Member / Successor Agency Member Hernandez; however, the motion failed due to lack of a majority vote.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
AYES: Preciado, Hernandez
NOES: Reynosa, Verdugo

ABSENT: Mayor Pro Tem Gamez
ABSTAIN: None

CORRESPONDENCE/ANNOUNCEMENTS/CLOSING COMMENTS:

Any Council member may request an item be placed on a future agenda, provided that a simple majority also support adding said item. Discussion or action on any item not on the current agenda is strictly prohibited. Closing comments are intended for Council members to report attendance of any special events and pertinent information back to the public.

- Upcoming/Future Agenda Items to Consider.
- Correspondence/Announcements/Information/Closing Comments.

City Clerk Maria Ortiz introduced an email from Avenal resident Veronica Aguirre for the record during Public Comment. City Manager Antony López stated that staff is planning a soft opening of the Community Center in the near future and noted that several upcoming projects are underway. Council Member Verdugo stated that there should be a way to reinstate a Zoom link to allow residents to participate in meetings remotely. He also stated that the adjournment form should not have been signed, as he was present at the previously canceled City Council meeting. Council Member Hernandez invited the community to attend upcoming City events. Mayor Preciado stated that he has been representing the City at meetings with state leaders, including Senator Hurtado. He also shared observations regarding services at Avenal State Prison. Mayor Preciado noted that he has several upcoming meetings scheduled, including a meeting in Sacramento with Senator Hurtado and Assemblywoman Macedo, as well as a meeting in Fresno regarding water-related matters.

ADJOURNMENT:

City Council meeting was adjourned at 10:54 P.M.

/s/ Karla Curiel
Karla Curiel, Deputy City Clerk