

CORTEZ CITY COUNCIL
WORK SESSION / SPECIAL MEETING
TUESDAY, JULY 14, 2026

The work session was called to order at 5:45 p.m.

A. Teen Court Information presented by Judge Beth Padilla

Judge Beth Padilla, municipal court judge for Cortez since 2021 and also serving Durango as its municipal court judge, presented a new Teen Court program planned for an August launch. She explained that municipal court had been handling more low-level juvenile cases, including shoplifting and possession of marijuana, tobacco, or alcohol. The additional Teen Court was described as a voluntary diversion program in which a juvenile admitted responsibility and was sentenced by a jury of trained teen peers, with teen volunteers serving as judge, prosecutor, and defense attorney under her supervision. She emphasized the program's restorative focus on understanding the causes of the offense. Non-compliant participants would return to traditional court, and successful completion would keep the matter off the juvenile's record. Judge Padilla noted that the program followed a national model and was informed by the established Los Alamos, New Mexico program she observed in June. She cited reductions in recidivism associated with Teen Courts (Alaska 6% versus 23%; Missouri 9% versus 27%) and highlighted benefits including pro-social and civic engagement, career exposure in a local "legal desert," and mandatory community service completed directly by the youth. She outlined sentencing guidelines across three offense levels, confirmed that restitution would remain required as in traditional court, and identified partners such as the Piñon Project for community service opportunities. She reported that the first training was planned for late July or early August and that the first Teen Court session was scheduled for Monday, August 17 at 7:45 a.m. Council members expressed support and encouraged public outreach.

B. Airport Advisory Committee Interviews

City Manager Drew Sanders explained the phased approach to seating the Airport Advisory Committee, with interviews conducted over more than one session, first reading of an ordinance revising residency requirements at the regular meeting, and appointments to follow after second reading. Council interviewed four applicants and asked each a standard set of questions.

- a. Eddy Lewis — a county resident, pilot, and president of the local Young Eagles who has held the airport weed-control contract since 1997, cited hangar demand, a self-serve fuel farm, a tanker base, and a possible crosswind runway, and emphasized keeping the airport clean and welcoming.
- b. John Hernandez — chair of the Montezuma County Planning and Zoning Commission and a 20-year resident with a real-estate and land-management background, called the airport the community's "welcome wagon" and prioritized restoring a rental-car agency, modernizing TSA screening equipment, and updating restroom facilities.
- c. David Bostrom — a SkyWest captain of nearly 26 years who learned to fly in Cortez, advocated for a longer runway and expanded terminal to attract more commercial service, noting SkyWest's past interest in a Canadair Regional Jet needing roughly 2,000 additional feet of runway.
- d. Robert Wright — a pilot of 17+ years and longtime owner of 4 States Tire, identified funding as the central challenge, praised recent airport improvements, and said paid parking was overdue and underpriced.

Council advised applicants that decisions would be made at the next meeting.

C. Lodger's Tax – Intended Purpose / Use

City Manager Drew Sanders reviewed the lodger's tax, which is currently 2% and generated approximately \$250,000 per year. He noted that Cortez lagged behind most Colorado communities that levied 6% or more. He recommended retaining the five existing allowable uses in the city code rather than amending them and advised that public messaging should be clear and specific, emphasizing direct and visible reinvestment in the community. He identified tourism and marketing, economic

development, redevelopment and beautification, downtown walkability, and arts and cultural events as key focus areas, while recommending that messaging steer away from core municipal functions. Council discussed prioritizing tourism promotion, support for community events such as the rodeo and parades, and beautification of areas including South Broadway. Councilmember Randle urged that a portion of revenue address water and infrastructure needs used by visitors, while others cautioned that voters expected visible results and that specific percentage allocations should not be codified in the ballot question. Staff was directed to work with the city's TABOR attorney to refine the ballot language, with the consensus recalling a proposed increase to 6%.

D. Council General Discussion

Council briefly discussed the Empire Building project, which is idle pending staff capacity while more pressing matters such as the lodger's tax are addressed. Council noted that the architects' report has been received and awaits analysis, and emphasized the importance of ensuring outside consultants' recommendations fit the community.

The work session was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.