

Summary of the Santa Monica City Council Meeting of February 10, 2026

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Core Points Summary

I. Executive Summary: The 2026 Strategic Pivot

The February 10, 2026, meeting was characterized by a shift from "crisis management" to "infrastructure readiness." With the city having navigated the fiscal complexities of the mid-2020s, the Council focused on leveraging state mandates and local environmental goals to reshape the city's urban fabric. The proceedings were marked by intense debate over the "Great Park" at Santa Monica Airport, the expansion of multi-modal transit corridors, and the city's ongoing response to the homelessness crisis through permanent supportive housing initiatives.

II. The Future of the Santa Monica Airport (SMO) Site

A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to the Santa Monica Airport Conversion Master Plan. Since the 2017 agreement with the FAA mandated the airport's closure by December 31, 2028, the February 2026 session served as the "Final Conceptual Approval" stage.

- **The "Great Park" Vision:** The Council reviewed the updated environmental impact reports (EIR) for the 227-acre site. The expert testimony emphasized a "nature-first" approach, prioritizing 150+ acres for open parkland, carbon sequestration forests, and recreational facilities.
- **Housing Density Debates:** A point of friction during the meeting was the allocation of the remaining acreage for housing. Pro-density advocates on the Council argued for high-density, mixed-income residential blocks to meet the state's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) requirements. The Council ultimately moved to approve a "Sustainable Urban Village" model, which integrates 3,500 units of housing with a 40% affordability requirement, ensuring the site contributes to the city's inclusivity goals without compromising the park's integrity.
- **Infrastructure Connectivity:** The Council approved a \$12 million allocation for the "Airport-Transit Link," a dedicated electric shuttle and bike superhighway connecting the future park site to the Metro E Line (formerly Expo Line) and the Bundy Drive corridor.

III. Housing Element Implementation and "Builder's Remedy" Fallout

By February 2026, Santa Monica had largely moved past the "Builder's Remedy" chaos of 2022-2024, but the legal and administrative echoes remained a central theme of the meeting.

- Zoning Overlay Adjustments: The Council voted on a series of zoning modifications for the Lincoln Boulevard and Wilshire Boulevard corridors. These changes were designed to incentivize "Missing Middle" housing—townhomes and duplexes—while maintaining strict architectural standards to preserve the aesthetic character of Santa Monica.
- The Rent Control Stability Act: Expert analysis during the meeting focused on the "2026 Rent Adjustment Formula." With inflation stabilizing but housing costs remaining high, the Council debated a 3% cap on annual rent increases for rent-controlled units, balancing the needs of elderly residents on fixed incomes with the rising maintenance costs faced by "mom-and-pop" landlords.
- Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH): Staff presented a report on the "Step Up Santa Monica" initiative. The Council approved the fast-tracking of two new PSH projects on city-owned lots, which would provide 120 beds specifically for veterans and transitional-age youth.

IV. 2028 Olympic Readiness and Transportation

With the 2028 Summer Olympics less than 30 months away, the February 10, 2026, meeting addressed the "Last Mile" connectivity challenge. Santa Monica is slated to host several events (including beach volleyball), necessitating a massive temporary infrastructure surge.

- The "Zero Emissions" Zone: The Council discussed a pilot program to designate the Downtown Santa Monica (DTSM) area as a "Zero Emissions Delivery and Transit Zone" by late 2026. This would restrict non-electric commercial vehicles during peak hours, a move the Council hopes will serve as a global model during the Olympics.
- Pedestrianization of the Promenade: Following years of data collection, the Council moved to approve a permanent expansion of pedestrian-only zones beyond the Third Street Promenade, extending into side streets to create a "European-style" plaza atmosphere. This is intended to revitalize the retail sector, which has faced headwinds from e-commerce.
- Beach Access Infrastructure: A \$4.5 million grant was accepted to upgrade the North Beach trail and improve ADA accessibility to the shoreline, ensuring the city is "Olympic-ready" for international tourists.

V. Public Safety and Community Well-being

Public safety remains the highest priority for Santa Monica residents, and the Council addressed this through a dual-track approach: enforcement and social services.

- **SMPD Staffing and Technology:** The City Manager presented a report on the recruitment success of the Santa Monica Police Department. The Council authorized the procurement of "Smart Patrol" AI-assisted dispatch software, designed to reduce response times for non-violent calls by automatically routing them to the Therapeutic Transport Team.
- **The Homelessness Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT):** The Council reviewed the success of the city's 2025 outreach expansion. Data showed a 15% reduction in street encampments over the previous 12 months, attributed to the increased frequency of the "Connect to Housing" teams. The Council voted to extend the funding for these teams through the 2027 fiscal year.

VI. Climate Action and Water Self-Sufficiency

Expert testimony from the Office of Sustainability highlighted Santa Monica's progress toward its 2030 Carbon Neutrality goal.

- **Water Independence:** The Council received an update on the Sustainable Water Infrastructure Project (SWIP). By February 2026, Santa Monica had reached 85% water self-sufficiency, reducing reliance on imported water from the Colorado River. The Council approved the final phase of the underground purification plant expansion.
- **Urban Heat Island Mitigation:** A new ordinance was passed requiring "Cool Roof" technology and increased canopy coverage for all new commercial developments over 10,000 square feet. This policy is part of the city's adaptation strategy to combat the increasing frequency of Southern California heatwaves.

VII. Fiscal Outlook and Mid-Year Budget Adjustments

The City's Finance Director provided a mid-year budget update for the 2025-2027 biennial budget.

- **Revenue Growth:** Revenue from the Bed Tax (TOT - Transient Occupancy Tax) exceeded projections by 8%, thanks to a resurgence in international tourism. This surplus was partially diverted to the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to fund the aforementioned airport park conversion.

- Pension Liability Management: The Council took a conservative fiscal stance, voting to allocate an additional \$5 million toward the city's Unfunded Accrued Liability (UAL) to ensure long-term financial stability.

VIII. Public Comment Trends

The public comment section of the February 10, 2026, meeting reflected a community that is highly engaged but deeply divided on the "rate of change."

- Pro-Growth Groups: Argued that the city is still not doing enough to accommodate the workforce that keeps Santa Monica running (teachers, nurses, service workers).
- Preservationists: Expressed concern over the "canyonization" of Lincoln Boulevard and the loss of neighborhood "feel" due to state-mandated density.
- Environmental Activists: Praised the Airport Park progress but urged the Council to move faster on banning gas-powered leaf blowers and other small-engine pollutants.

Conclusion

The Santa Monica City Council Meeting of February 10, 2026, stands as a testament to the city's ambition to remain a global leader in sustainability, urban design, and social equity. By finalizing the Airport Master Plan and doubling down on transit-oriented housing, the Council has set a definitive course for the second half of the decade. The decisions made during this session will not only dictate the city's readiness for the 2028 Olympics but will define the quality of life for Santa Monicans for the next thirty years.

Expert analysis indicates that the success of these initiatives will depend heavily on continued state funding and the city's ability to manage the administrative burden of its highly ambitious infrastructure pipeline. However, as of early 2026, the City of Santa Monica appears to be on a stable and progressive footing.

Please note that this transcript/summary was generated by an AI and may contain errors or omissions. For complete and accurate information, please consult the original audio or video recording of the meeting.