

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD NOVEMBER 03, 2025**

Mayor Barnhart called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with roll call as follows: Councilor Piper, Councilor Price, Councilor Robinson and Mayor Barnhart. Absent: Councilor King, Councilor Lovering and Councilor Shepard.

Also present: City Manager Hanks, City Clerk Staaland, City Attorney Breck and Public Works Director Bates.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Councilor Robinson made motion to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilor Piper and the motion carried.

CONSENT AGENDA: Councilor Piper motioned to approve the consent agenda noting all claims appeared to be in order, seconded by Councilor Price and the motion carried.

Approval of Claims - November 3, 2025 - \$72,669.31

Approval of October 24, 2025, Payroll Claims - \$205,139.31

Approval of Regular Council Meeting Minutes - October 20, 2025

Acknowledgment of Receipt – Audit Conclusion Governance Letter from Nexus CPA

NEW BUSINESS:

Communications Consultant Contract – Maven Ops, LLC

The consultant will establish a professional social media and communications foundation for the City of Columbia Falls. The purpose of this effort is to enhance transparent, consistent, and engaging public communications that strengthen the connection between the city, its residents, businesses, and visitors.

The City is proposing a 90-day contract with communications consultant Ms. Lauren Manley. Ms. Manley is an experienced professional who has presented a strong model for establishing and expanding the City's presence on Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn, as well as enhancing existing Facebook pages for the Police and Fire Departments. Funding for the contract will come from the Administration budget. The City has available contract funds in Administration, and approximately half of the cost will be covered through the STEP Grant recently awarded for the DUI Police Officer position. This grant includes funding for educational outreach, which will be used for a DUI awareness campaign and other traffic-safety messaging over the 90-day period.

Councilor Price asked whether the contract includes development of a communications plan and social media standards for employees, or whether a designated employee will be responsible for managing social media moving forward. City Manager Hanks responded that a social media policy will be implemented to outline acceptable correspondence from the City, establish communication standards, and define the rhythm and consistency of public messaging.

Councilor Piper motioned to authorize the City Manager to execute the contract with Maven Ops, LLC, seconded by Councilor Robinson with council voting as follows: Piper, Price, Robinson and Barnhart.

City Staff will provide an overview of the City's Snow Clearance procedures and Street Priorities Map.

Public Works Director Bates reviewed the snow plowing priority map. Priority 1 includes emergency service routes and main corridors, followed by Priority 2 school routes and then Priority 3 residential streets. The city also clears select multi-use paths and limited sidewalks adjacent to Highway 2; the State is responsible for clearing Highway 2 sidewalks.

Mayor Barnhart asked who initiates plowing operations. Bates stated the Police Department notifies Public Works when snowfall reaches four inches.

Mayor Barnhart requested clarification on sidewalk clearing along Highway 2. Bates explained the city will assist only after higher-priority routes are addressed, typically the day after a major snow event. The State may also assist, but under City Code adjacent property owners remain responsible. Staff will be sending snow-removal reminder letters to businesses along Highway 2 and Nucleus Avenue. Mayor Barnhart expressed interest in a more defined policy, and Councilor Piper agreed. Bates noted equipment is available, but staffing is limited. Councilor Price asked whether the City would charge property owners for clearing services. Council directed staff to review potential ordinance amendments. City Manager Hanks stated he and Bates will return with additional information at the next council meeting.

Matt Hutcheson 227 7th St. E. asked where downtown businesses should place sidewalk snow, noting previous direction was to shovel into the street. Hanks clarified snow should be placed to the side to avoid driveways being re-covered by plows. Bates added that sidewalk snow must be placed on the City right-of-way or the property itself, and if no boulevard exists, it may be placed near the curb. Snow should not be pushed into the street.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Price asked about responsibility for replacing the porta potties that were recently burned. Director Bates stated the unit rented by the City will be replaced at no charge, while the second unit, contracted by the soccer program, may be their responsibility.

Price also inquired about a resident parking multiple vehicles on a city street, including two trucks and a covered motorcycle. Chief Stephens said he would look into the matter.

Mayor Barnhart addressed school safety and the importance of consistent SRO coverage. Chief Stephens explained that the previous SRO moved into the DUI enforcement position, creating a vacancy now temporarily filled by a detective. The department is hiring two new officers to backfill positions, after which the SRO role will be restored. The SRO schedule provides four days per week of school coverage, with one rotating fill-in day, and includes collateral patrol duties. Mayor Barnhart asked that maintaining SRO coverage remain a priority.

Mayor Barnhart also noted an increase in vacation rentals and asked whether Council wished to consider limits. City Attorney Breck stated the City may regulate vacation rentals through zoning changes, though existing rentals could likely be grandfathered and changes could face challenges from property owners. Zoning-based limits are common and legally permissible when enacted through proper public process. Breck noted that the upcoming zoning and subdivision code update would be an appropriate time for Council to review options. Staff will return with information for further discussion.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

City staff supported various Halloween events, including activities with the library and the Trunk-or-Treat, with strong participation.

The Fire Department will hold a Fire Engine Push-In Ceremony on November 6th at 6:00 p.m. to welcome the new engine, coinciding with the department's monthly training.

A joint Council and Planning Commission meeting is scheduled for November 13th at 6:00 p.m. to kick off the Land Use Planning Consultant project. The Land Use Planning Consultant will provide an overview of their approach to addressing the land use element of the City's Montana Land Use Planning Act work.

A public hearing on the final report of the Study Commission is scheduled for November 19th at 6:30 p.m. Notices will be published in the newspaper on the two preceding Sundays. Members of the public may provide comments during the meeting or submit written comments to the City Clerk.

On November 20th at 5:00 p.m., an open house will be held to review the current conditions of the City's water and sewer systems as part of Montana Land Use Planning Act work. Staff and engineers will present information and gather public input to guide future infrastructure planning. The Public Works Committee will meet prior to the next Council meeting to discuss water and wastewater projects in greater detail.

In Public Works, the Floater position was recently vacated and filled with a current water operator. Recruitment for a new water operator is underway. Geotechnical boring on the hillside is scheduled for the week of November 17th, with neighbors notified and access maintained. The Wastewater Treatment Plant expansion project is past substantial completion, with only minor cleanup items remaining.

The recent state audit reported no issues reflecting the City's continued fiscal responsibility.

Infrastructure projects continue, including the Gateway to Glacier Safety Mobility Project, for which funding has not yet been obligated; the bid process is anticipated in December with a public open house in January. Delays may make it more challenging to secure construction bids for fiscal year 2026. River's Edge projects are scheduled for discussion with the Parks and Recreation Committee on December 8th, with staff coordinating with local organizations and potential grant opportunities, including a possible FWP match grant for fishing pier construction. The Rotary Club has been presented with a funding request and follow-up is pending.

The original fire engine (430) remains in excellent condition and has been sold to Blankenship, continuing to support firefighting operations. No additional items were reported, and staff will continue to follow up on pending projects and public engagement opportunities.

MISCELLANEOUS

Correspondence

ADJOURN

Councilor Robinson motioned to adjourn the meeting at 7:53 p.m. seconded by councilor Price.

Mayor

City Clerk