

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD MAY 05, 2025

Mayor Barnhart called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL: Councilor King, Councilor Lovering, Councilor Piper, Councilor Price, Councilor Robinson, Councilor Shepard and Mayor Barnhart.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

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

Approval of Claims - May 5, 2025 - \$97,052.62

Approval of Payroll Claims - April 25, 2025 - \$181,575.37

Approval of Regular Council Meeting Minutes - April 21, 2025

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on agenda)

Leanette Galaz, 1447 11th St. W., recognized National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), advocating for equitable treatment of missing persons and highlighting disparities in law enforcement responses. She also addressed the recent detainment of Beker Enrique Rengifo-Del Castillo, expressing concerns about racial profiling and requesting clarification on the city's policy regarding language translation services and coordination with Border Patrol.

Colton Little, 3195 MT Hwy 206, voiced concern over the detainment of Mr. Rengifo-Del Castillo, framing the issue as a violation of civil liberties and constitutional rights. He urged the council to act in defense of all community members regardless of background.

Darin Fisher, 303 3rd Ave. E. thanked Public Works for relocating bleachers to the baseball field and offered to answer questions regarding the Housing Study as Chair of the Planning Commission.

Matt Hutcheson, 227 3rd Ave. E. requested a moratorium on short-term rentals, citing regulation and concern for accessibility. He asked whether a formal written request was required and questioned the rationale behind permitting numerous rentals in the city limits.

Katima Morsheim, 514 St. Andrews Dr., expressed solidarity with previous speakers and emphasized concerns over racial profiling in immigration enforcement.

November Blackburn, Diane Rd., echoed concerns about racial injustice and urged the city council to avoid collaboration with agencies that may violate civil rights.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Sidewalk and Parking Improvements Project - Phase 2

The second phase of the Nucleus Avenue Business District improvements will include curb, gutter, and sidewalk installations.

Columbia Falls Housing Needs Study

City Planner Eric Mulcahy presented findings from the Housing Needs Study, including short-term rental data (223 in the area, 83 within city limits). He highlighted the need for a new Land Use Plan as the next step.

Darin Fisher said folks can see the Housing Study online. Mr. Fisher said the STE's are in the study and recommend that the public take a look at it as its pretty self-evident, and a very well-done study.

Mayor Barnhart opened the Public Hearing at 7:36 p.m.

Daniel Sitter, 529 9th St. W. of Housing Whitefish, offered insights on local housing challenges and encouraged practical, immediate steps to address density and affordability.

Shirley Folkwein, 285 Shooting Star Dr. representing the Upper Flathead Neighborhood Association, expressed appreciation for the study and encouraged visionary planning for the future.

Matt Hutcheson 227 3rd Ave. E., expressed parking concerns related to infill development and encouraged council adopt the housing project plan accordingly.

Julie Waddell, 1492 North Fork Rd. expressed safety concerns about increased traffic and pedestrian behavior.

Mayor Barnhart Closed the Public Hearing at 8:51 p.m.

Councilor Shepard noted data limitations due to the use of ZIP code 59912, which includes areas outside city jurisdiction, and clarified the impact of Senate Bill 382 on planning requirements.

Mayor Barnhart and City Planner Mulcahy discussed the city's current administrative processes for short-term rental permits, performance standards, and potential future restrictions as part of zoning code revisions. If we get a complaint, we can call the owner, to resolve the issue, and get additional parking for short-term.

Councilor Piper made motion to adopt the Columbia Falls Housing Needs Study, seconded by Councilor Lovering with Council voting as follows. Ayes: Lovering, Piper, Price, Robinson, Shepard, King and Barnhart.

NEW BUSINESS:

CFPD Grant Application Notification

The Columbia Falls Police Department has submitted a grant application with Flathead Electric to purchase equipment designed for crisis response.

Police Chief Stephens reported submission of a grant application to Flathead Electric for crisis response equipment. The Grant amount is pending until award of the grant.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON MAY 05, 2025

Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget Plan of Action & Milestones

City Manager Hanks presented a proposed timeline for budget planning, including council workshops and committee meetings. Public budget hearings are scheduled to begin July 7. Hanks will provide historical council goal documentation. Mayor Barnhart asked if Hanks could provide a copy of last year's goal. Hanks replied yes he will provide some goal history.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Piper inquired about the Porta Potties at the parks that have bathrooms; do we still need them there? City Manager Hanks said he will inquire with Public Works.

Piper said the Senior Center lawn is roughed up around the sidewalk, can city staff get it fixed. Hanks said it was on the Public Works list and he will follow up.

Councilor King expressed interested in attending the Municipal Summit training in Libby. King mentioned a Memorial fishing derby at Pine Grove for a local girl.

Councilor Price inquired if the walking path on Talbot was repaired. Price said there is a city cone on Talbot with a chunk out of it. City Manager Hanks said he would ask Public Works about the repairs.

Price asked when the city mailed out the Study Commission surveys how many residents responded. Hanks said he was unsure of the exact number but believes it was a better response.

Councilor Price said she loves the City Manager report.

Councilor Shepard concurs with Price on the City Manager Report.

Shepard provided updates on the Lakeside Sewer Plant hearings and ongoing efforts to establish a dedicated veteran's cemetery in Columbia Falls.

Councilor Lovering commended youth civic engagement and recent community developments including the Skatepark grand opening, which was well attended and the community garden opening last week.

Lovering said the community garden will be taking care of the Nucleus beautification triangle. There is a bench there and Lovering would like to move it to the pickleball courts.

Mayor Barnhart requested updates on language interpretation procedures. City Attorney Breck advised withholding legal discussion on coordination with federal immigration agencies. The mayor also requested updates on fish stocking efforts at River's Edge Park.

Mayor Barnhart said the City cannot prevent or tell someone they cannot have a nightly rental if they apply for a conditional use permit and they meet standards. The County Health Department completes an initial health inspection for each nightly rental.

The City has been working towards a grant in combination with the DNRC, to put a pier out into the pond and asked City Manager Hanks if he could look into it and give council an update.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

- City Manager's Report in the current format is still a work in progress said Hanks. We're still looking at other distribution on the website and eventually as we set up a social media page, a portion of it will be available.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON MAY 05, 2025

- Staff has done a lot of work over the last two weeks on the departmental preparation for the FY 25-26 budget season.
- Arbor Day was another successful event.
- Skatepark grand opening was well attended. The Columbia Nursery will be donating shrubs and bushes for Skatepark beautification.
- Fire department did a control burn for training exercise.
- The City pool is moving forward with a good set of candidates for the manager and staff positions. The current plan is to open the pool on June 14th.
- Lateral hiring for two police officers
- Traffic and parking signage planning for Fenholt Park, no parking this side of the street signs on the south side of 9th Street East.
- The Falls Park Waterfall is turned on and active.
- Parkside Credit Union donated office furniture for city departments. Iron Fitness donated a significant amount of gym equipment to the fire department. Columbia Nursery is donating shrubs and bushes to the Skatepark for beautification.
- Upcoming budget amendment for FY 24–25, to include the police car, the sale of a fire truck, and some resort tax issues.

MISCELLANEOUS

Fire Department April Reports
Correspondence

ADJOURN: Councilor Lovering motioned to adjourn at 8:25 p.m. seconded by Councilor King.

Mayor

City Clerk