

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD JULY 07, 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.

Also present: City Manager Hanks, City Clerk Staaland, City Attorney Breck, Finance Director Rice, Deputy City Planner Valade and Police Chief Stephens.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

CONSENT AGENDA: Councilor Lovering made motion to approve the consent agenda, noting all claims appeared to be in order, seconded by Councilor Price with council voting as follows. Ayes: Lovering, Piper, Price, Robinson, Shepard and Barnhart. Noes: King.

Approval of Claims - June 2025 - \$375,471.57

Approval of Claims - July 7, 2025 - \$69,353.72

Approval of Payroll Claims - 2nd Qtr. - \$94,426.73

Approval of Payroll Claims - June 20, 2025 - \$125,034.35

Approval of Payroll Claims - July 3, 2025 - \$126,759.74

Approval of Regular Council Meeting Minutes - June 16, 2025

Approval of City Auditor Contract

Approval of Cedar Creek Dam 5-Year Inspection Contract

Approval of Water and Sewer Preliminary Engineering Reports Contract

EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE:

Kara Darling - 15 year employee service pin presentation

Mayor Barnhart thanked Ms. Darling for her continued dedicated service with the city.

APPOINTMENTS: New Probationary Police Patrol Officers Josh Fields and Andy Doyle
Police Chief Stephens introduced new probationary patrol officers Josh Fields and Andy Doyle, highlighting their years of prior law enforcement experience. City Clerk Staaland administered the oath of office to both officers.

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on agenda)

Resident Mike Bauchman of 527 13th Street West expressed concern about a proposed sidewalk project near his property, explaining the sentimental and aesthetic value of his yard. He requested Council members visit the property to understand the potential impact before proceeding.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS/PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Staff Report #CZC-25-02 - A zone change request from the existing CI-1 (Light Industrial) to CB-2 (General Commercial)

City Planner Eric Mulcahy could not be here this evening so Donna Valade delivered staff report CZC-25-02 as Findings of Facts explaining the change would resolve split zoning on the property currently occupied by Lazy Day Mobile Home Park and align with the City's growth policy. The report indicated that the property fronts Highway 2 West, is served by City utilities, and is anticipated for urban-scale commercial or mixed-use development. The change would not adversely affect neighboring properties and complies with the comprehensive plan.

Councilor King inquired how long the property owner knew it was not residential zoning. Ms. Valade replied she did not know if they knew they were not in compliance, however, you are allowed to conform to use and most of the time the use was in place before the zoning.

Councilor Price asked if we were just combining the two zoning areas. Ms. Valade replied yes, that is correct.

With no public comments Mayor Barnhart opened and closed the public hearing at 7:21 P.M.

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve Staff Report CZ-25-2 as Findings of Fact, seconded by Councilor Shepard with council voting as follows. Ayes: Lovering, Piper, Price, Robinson, Shepard and Barnhart. Noes: King.

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve the zone change, seconded by Councilor Shepard with council voting as follows. Ayes: Piper, Price, Robinson, Shepard, Lovering and Barnhart. Noes: King.

Preliminary Budget Hearing - Special Revenue Funds

City Manager Hanks presented the preliminary budget for special revenue funds, including the Resort Tax, Street Lighting District, Street Maintenance District, and Gas Tax Fund. He emphasized that the hearing would remain open until final adoption in late September, as final tax values would not be certified until mid-August.

Hanks provided a detailed overview of the Resort Tax, established in 2019 and approved by voters in 2020. Of the three percent tax collected, 55 percent is allocated to public safety, 25 percent to property tax relief, 14 percent to infrastructure, five percent to businesses for administrative costs, and one percent to City administration. Fiscal year 2024 collections exceeded projections by \$637,960, which, by law, was applied to property tax relief. Fiscal year 2026 showed an excess of \$37,102, also returned to taxpayers. Total City collections reached \$1.56 million, with \$82,828 retained by businesses for processing fees. For the coming fiscal year, staff projects collections of \$1.736 million.

Planned appropriations include \$889,631 for public safety, covering three full-time police officers, two and a quarter firefighter positions, a new patrol vehicle, and fire engine debt service. Approximately \$200,000 will be reserved for future public safety capital needs, joining the current \$212,000 reserve. Infrastructure allocations will fund capital projects such as parks, sidewalks, and facilities, with \$528,000 currently available. Administrative costs for tax collection and software are budgeted at \$16,000.

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Hanks also reviewed the Street Lighting District Fund, established in 1949, which collects approximately \$30,049 annually to maintain streetlights. The City plans to explore adding lighting on 3rd Avenue East and Highway 2 pending neighborhood approval.

The Street Maintenance District Fund, which supports road maintenance, was increased by five percent last year and again for FY 2026 to \$363,825. The department's actual annual operating cost is roughly \$600,000, requiring supplemental funds from gas tax revenues and the general fund. Future plans include chip-sealing newly completed streets to extend their lifespan by seven to ten years.

The Gas Tax Fund, which collected \$224,389 last year, is projected at \$230,477 this year. These funds are restricted for maintaining existing streets rather than building new roads.

Councilor Robinson asked how staff is calculating the revenue from resort tax. Hanks replied we looked at the local business performances. I understand there are three significant resort taxpayers that may have come off the rolls this past year. However, the current estimates for those remaining businesses and the lodging tax. The lodging contribution of this has been increasing every year and that's where we're estimating. Robinson asked what happens if we don't meet the projection. Mayor Barnhart said it is appropriated by percentages of what is received. Hanks added the FY 26 appropriation is money we have already collected.

Mayor Barnhart asked if there were any public comments.

Marijke Stob, 201 1st Ave. W. asked if the tax relief goes to the full time property owners and if it could include tenants. Hanks said it goes to the property owner that pays the property tax. City attorney said it is a state statute.

Shirley Folkwein, 285 Shooting Star Dr. said she lives in the county and understands she would not be eligible for a tax rebate.

Mayor Barnhart said the Public Hearing will remain open at this time.

ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:

Ordinance # 834 - Amending the Columbia Falls zoning map from CI-1 Light Industrial to CB-2 General Business located at 2155 9th Street West

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve Ordinance #834 amending the Columbia Falls zoning map from CI-1 Light Industrial to CB-2 General Business located at 2155 9th Street West, seconded by Councilor Robinson with council voting as follows. Ayes: Price, Robinson, Shepard, Lovering, Piper and Barnhart. Noes: King.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Shepard reiterated concerns about speeding on 9th St. and Railroad Street and suggested the City continue working with MDT on speed reduction measures. Shepard also noted public confusion regarding new sidewalk projects and encouraged residents to attend Council meetings for accurate information.

Councilor Price requested further discussion with MDT about reducing speeds on Highway 2 in light of new businesses and inquired about repairs on Talbot Road. She also addressed the importance of safety near school routes and ongoing efforts to maintain Legion flags.

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Mayor Barnhart echoed the need for speed reductions and urged staff to address hazards associated with an unoccupied building on 9th Street. He also encouraged greater public respect for the flag during community events.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

City Manager Hanks provided updates on several projects. The City pool continues to draw visitors, although its boiler system failed again. Repairs and modernization plans are underway as part of a larger facility upgrade. He commended staff for their efforts and recognized lifeguards Lucy Hiner, Avery Role, and Quinn Clark for their swift response to a recent incident involving an injured child.

Hanks also reported progress on water system improvements, noting that the variable frequency drive for Horine Well is nearly operational. The City finalized an audit contract with Nexus John of Kalispell to replace the previous firm. Updates were provided on election meeting preparations and the Gateway to Glacier project, which will go to bid in October, with major construction scheduled for 2026.

Councilor Price inquired about the city website. Hanks said it is the same provider as Whitefish and Kalispell and he is working on city communications and updating the current city website.

OTHER REPORTS:

Police Chief Stephens announced the completion of annual active shooter training at Glacier Elementary School and reviewed June's activity report, noting a safe July 4th holiday. No significant incidents occurred.

MISCELLANEOUS

Fire Department Reports

Police Department June Activity Report

Correspondence

ADJOURN

With no further business, Councilor Lovering moved to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Robinson. The meeting adjourned at 8:27 p.m.

Mayor

City Clerk