

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

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

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

Also Present: Interim City Manager Shrives, City Clerk Staaland, City Attorney Breck and Police Chief Stephens.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

CONSENT AGENDA: Councilor Robinson motioned to approve the consent agenda noting a claim adjustment by the Finance Director making the total claims amount \$288,092.85, seconded by Councilor Shepard with Council voting as follows. Ayes: Price, Robinson, Shepard, King, Piper and Barnhart.

Approval of Claims - March 03, 2025 - \$288,521.81

Approval of Payroll Claims - Feb. 28, 2025 - \$189,418.60

Approval of Regular Council Meeting Minutes - February 18, 2025

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Police Department Award Certificates:

Police Chief Stephens presented award certificates to Officer Friesen and Officer Hall for life-saving actions. Stephens thanked Friesen and Hall for their quick response and is very proud of their actions. Mayor Barnhart thanked both Officers for their service to the community and said council holds them in the highest regard.

NEW BUSINESS:

Letter of Support Hideaway Community Sewer Improvement Project

Hideaway Community has formed the Hideaway Water and Sewer District and is actively working to fund taking their failing septic's and drain field offline and replacing it with one large public sewer system.

Danielle Maiden, the Cooperative Housing Director for NeighborWorks Montana said they work with the residents of the Hideaway Community that's located on Highway 40, between Columbia Falls and Whitefish, not in the city limits. During the purchase process, they engaged with WGM group to do a full property conditions report on the property, and their septic systems are all failing, so at that time we did identify that the system needed to be fully replaced. We are trying to have minimal debt for the residents to be able to remain as portable as possible in that community. And there are two new grant applications that are coming forward that they're eligible to apply for through the DNRC to help with funding.

Matt Hutcheson would like to know how it was presented to the public and what support from the City of Columbia Falls entails. Mayor Barnhart said they are looking for a letter of support for lower income housing. The property is out of the city limits and there is no cost to the city.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON MARCH 03, 2025

Councilor King made motion to approve the letter of support for the Hideaway Community Sewer Improvement Project, seconded by Councilor Shepard with council voting as follows. Ayes: Robinson, Shepard, King, Piper, Price, and Barnhart.

ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution #1937

Adopting the 2024 - 2029 Western Montana Region Hazard Mitigation Plan

City Manager Shrives said once the plan is adopted, then it opens up federal funding for disasters and mitigation for the future. FEMA has approved the plan which is a requirement and the City just needs to close the loop on adopting annex E, which is the hazard mitigation portion of the overall plan.

Councilor Piper motioned to adopt Resolution #1937, seconded by Councilor Robinson with council voting as follows. Ayes: Shepard, King, Piper, Price, Robinson and Barnhart.

Resolution #1938

A Resolution of the City Council of The City of Columbia Falls establishing per diem reimbursement rates.

City Manager Shrives said staff has looked at the current city per diems rates and discovered the meal per diems are significantly lower than average. The last time the city changed meal per diem rates was in 2019. The fuel rates change on a yearly basis said Shrives.

Councilor Piper made motion to approve Resolution #1938, seconded by Councilor King with council voting as follows. Ayes: King, Piper, Price, Robinson, Shepard and Barnhart.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Price inquired on an estimate of how many completed surveys were returned to the city. Shrives said it is a Study Commission survey and he would know more by the next meeting on March 12th. Price said she would like to see the number of responses along with a household count in the city.

Councilor Price asked if the delinquent resort tax accounts have been satisfied. City Manager Shrives said we are still dealing with Department of Revenue and will update council as information is received.

Price inquired on money in the budget that the city could use to entice MDT with a possible traffic light on Hwy 2 and on Nucleus Ave. City Manager Shrives said he was unaware of extra money for traffic lights, but he will inquire with Contract Consultant Susan Nicosia.

Councilor Shepard asked Chief Stephens if there were any break-ins on the east side of town over the weekend. Stephens said he was not certain but would ask the officers.

Councilor Shepard gave Kudos to the Police officers for the certificates received this evening.

Mayor Barnhart said he and City Manager Shrives attended the Executive Forum in Helena last week. There are some hard working, dedicated, and underpaid mayors for small communities in the state. Mayor Barnhart said public comments should be allowed on any action council makes.

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES HELD ON MARCH 03, 2025

Mayor Barnhart would like to see Garbage cans put out on the day of pick up and not days before collection.

Mayor Barnhart reported there is a water pit that is tipped and full of water on Railroad Street behind the old stop and shop. He advised the public works department have a look at it.

The EPA meetings are coming up next week. Shrives said he has a meeting tomorrow with the EPA to discuss the record of decision. Mayor said there is an open forum here at the library tomorrow from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

City Manager Shrives reported on Thursday Kevin O'Neil dropped out of candidacy for the City Manager position. The Hiring Committee met today at 6:00 p.m. to discuss the draft contract and interview questions. Shrives discussed the Special Meeting Agenda on Friday, March 7, 2025.

City Manager Shrives said Public Works Director Bates is trying to get a Parks Committee meeting set up for March 4, 2025 at 5:00 p.m. If you are on the committee please let Shawn know if you are able to make the meeting.

Marybeth with Habitat for Humanity said they have purchased a lot on the corner of 6th Ave. W. and 8th Street W. and will be building four units on it. The application period is open now through April 15, 2025

ADJOURN

Councilor Robinson made motion to adjourn at 7:36 p.m., seconded by Councilor King.

Mayor

City Clerk