

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD SEPTEMBER 5, 2023**

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

ROLL CALL: Councilor Fisher, Councilor King-via Zoom, Councilor Piper, Councilor Robinson, Councilor Shepard, and Mayor Barnhart. Absent: Councilor Lovering.

Also present: City Manager Nicosia, City Clerk Staaland, City Attorney Breck, Fire Chief Weeks and Sergeant Rice.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

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

Approval of Claims - September 5, 2023 - \$118,858.35

Approval of Special Claims Run - August 22, 2023 - \$42,282.13

Approval of Special Payroll - Clothing Allowance/Stipend - \$21,593.24

Approval of Payroll Claims - September 1, 2023 - \$114,232.37

Approval of Regular City Council Meeting Minutes - August 21, 2023

Approval of Change Order # 1 - Overlay & Reconstruction Project - LHC, Inc., \$2,662, and Authorize City Manager to Execute

APPOINTMENTS:

Approve the Appointment of Megan Kehl and Brandon Ryan as Probationary Volunteer Firefighters and Administer Oath of Office

Fire Chief Weeks said Ms. Kehl currently works for Flathead County OES and has obtained her FFI certification. She has passed a background check and a physical examination. She has also attended several trainings as an observer. Chief Weeks said he and City Manager Nicosia believe she will be a great addition to the team and recommend appointment.

Councilor Piper motioned to appoint Megan Kehl as Probationary Volunteer Firefighter, seconded by Councilor Shepard and the motion carried.

Fire Chief Weeks said Mr. Ryan is a Columbia Falls graduate and is employed as an HVAC technician with ACE Heating and Cooling. Mr. Ryan has passed the background check and physical examination. Since submitting his application, he has attended several trainings as an observer. Chief Weeks and City Manager Nicosia believe he will be a great addition to the department and recommend appointment.

Councilor Piper motioned to appoint Brandon Ryan as Probationary Volunteer Firefighter, seconded by Councilor Shepard and the motion carried.

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY DUE TO HOLIDAY MINUTES HELD ON
SEPTEMBER 05, 2023**

City Clerk Staaland Administered the Oath of Office to Megan Kehl and Brandon Ryan and they were congratulated by Council and City administrators.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS/PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Public Hearing Continued: 2023-24 Fiscal Year Preliminary Budget

City Manager Nicosia will present the Final 2023-24 Fiscal Year Budget and Recommend Final Budget Adoption

City Manager Nicosia said since the August 21st Council meeting staff increased the budget appropriations by \$101,312 for the following: General Fund - \$62,858, Permissive Medical Levy - \$11,575, Capital Equipment and Machinery - \$25,400 and SID 3538 Riverwood - \$1479. The adjustments were based on grant funding, resources available and line-item corrections. None of the adjustments resulted in an increase in the tax levy Nicosia noted.

Nicosia reported that the Department of Revenue was able to provide the taxable value makeup. Nicosia presented the 2023 Tax value breakdown and compared it to 2022 and past years. Nicosia noted that the overall taxable valuation increased 46.67%; just 2% of the change in value came from newly taxable property and 98% of the change came from revaluation. In 2022, it was not a revaluation year and the City's taxable value increased only 1.94%, 74% of the change was from newly taxable property and 26% from change in value.

Councilor Robinson asked how the city would know what percentage of our tax base has been protested. Nicosia said currently there are no official protests but there are multiple appeals, it is not a tax protest until November; however, MT DOR was not anticipating any significant change to the certified valuation.

Nicosia noted that the mill levy resolution and budget propose levying 90.36 mills, which is 90.65% mills less than last year. Nicosia explained the decrease in city taxes and increased property values and how it will reflect on individual property tax bills. The total overall budget is 2% less than last year's budget and reflects on-going capital projects and grant funded projects.

Nicosia also clarified the Resort Tax funding, reminding Council that the 2024 FY appropriation comes from the 2023 FY revenues and while the City is budgeting \$1.5 million in revenues, those funds are not appropriated for spending until the 2025 FY budget.

With no public comment Mayor Barnhart closed the Preliminary Budget Hearing at 7:28 p.m.

Mayor Barnhart read the Notice of Public Hearing - Planning/Zoning:

The Columbia Falls City-County Planning Board will hold a public hearing for the following item at their regular meeting on Tuesday, September 12, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall, 130 6th Street West, Columbia Falls, Montana. The Columbia Falls City Council will hold a subsequent hearing on October 16, 2023, starting at 7:00 p.m. in the same location.

Rocky Top Cabins Subdivision – A Two Lot Subdivision: A request by Herbert Enterprises LLC to create a two-lot subdivision. The property is 8.11 acres in size and the property is zoned CR-1 which allows a minimum lot size of one acre. The property is located at 269 Rocky Lane, Columbia Falls, and is described as Assessor's Tract 1 (Parcel A of COS 21669) located in Section 7, Township 30 North, Range 20 West, P.M.M., Flathead County.

ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution # 1907:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS, MONTANA, SETTING AND ADOPTING THE MILL LEVIES ON ALL REAL AND PERSONAL PROPERTY WITHIN THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS; APPROVING SPECIAL LEVIES FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES ON PROPERTY WITHIN THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS FOR THE 2023-24 FISCAL YEAR

Councilor Shepard made motion to adopt Resolution # 1907, seconded by Councilor Robinson with council voting as follows. Ayes: Robinson, Shepard, Fisher, King, Piper, and Barnhart.

Resolution # 1908:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS, MONTANA, ADOPTING THE BUDGET FOR THE CITY FOR THE FISCAL YEAR COMMENCING ON JULY 1, 2023 AND ENDING JUNE 30, 2024, APPROVING APPROPRIATIONS FOR EACH FUND OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS

Councilor Robinson motioned to approve Resolution # 1908, seconded by Councilor Piper with council voting as follows. Ayes: Shepard, Fisher, King, Piper, Robinson, and Barnhart.

Resolution # 1909:

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS, MONTANA CALLING FOR A GENERAL ELECTION TO BE HELD ON NOVEMBER 7, 2023, FOR THE OPEN CITY COUNCIL POSITIONS

City Manager Nicosia said this resolution is required by state statute and designates that the November election will be held by mail ballot, with over 60% of the City's registered voters signed up for absentee ballots, the majority of the ballots would already be mailed. The County Election Department confirmed that there will be two election judges at City Hall on November 7, 2023, as well as having a locked ballot box that will be checked daily by the election department. Staff recommends approval.

Councilor Fisher motioned to approve Resolution # 1909, seconded by Councilor Piper with council voting as follows. Ayes: Fisher, King, Piper, Robinson, Shepard, and Barnhart.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Piper thought the representative from DOT was going to be here tonight. Nicosia replied they will be here on September 18th and would like questions from Council in advance so they may be prepared. Staff and Council questions for MT DOT: green arrows on streetlights at intersections, a stop light at truck route, speed limit reduction on Highway 2 near 3rd Ave., and on the North Fork Road. Mayor Barnhart would like to see more yellow paint near the crosswalks to see pedestrians on Nucleus Ave.

Councilor Piper said the roadway on 5th Street W. is tight with the pull in parking. Nicosia said City staff was going to review that block with Council this evening.

Council Shepard said with the recent rain the water was higher on 7th Ave EN than it has been in the past, we may need to address another dry well.

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Councilor Fisher asked Fire Chief Weeks if he could give a brief report on day-to-day activities for the paid firefighters. He would like to see call times since the paid positions were in place. Chief Weeks said we are about 35% ahead of last year on call volume and it has been very busy.

Mayor Barnhart asked Sgt. Rice if it would be best to purchase a regular pickup and turn it into a police vehicle given the rising cost of police vehicles. Sgt. Rice said he is uncertain what the costs would be, we currently have two classic Dodge Ram pickups. Nicosia noted that the City currently purchases basic pursuit vehicles that are equipped with pursuit engines, better handling, wiring package specific to added police gear and different console configuration and then have them completed locally with police lights, camera, radio, electrical, cage, etc.

Mayor Barnhart said he noted some fire hydrants that were not the correct height. Chief Weeks said the risers for them are on order and have been for two months.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

City Manager Nicosia discussed the 5th Street diagonal parking providing photos of the block with cars parked and driving; noting that it was developed to meet council goals to increase downtown parking. 5th Street is a 70 foot right of way, which has plenty of space for sidewalks, diagonal, parallel parking, and room for two vehicles to pass. Sgt. Rice reported that Chief Peters reviewed the parking dimensions and found that traffic can safely pass through the street with the diagonal parking on the south and parallel parking on the north.

City Manager Nicosia said we are working on sidewalks on 1st Ave. W. and have not issued a contract just yet; we may have to re-bid the project. Fire Chief Weeks said there was a fire on 5th St. W. on Friday evening and there was room for vehicles to pass even with the fire truck on the road.

Councilor Shepard asked about the work being completed at the railroad crossing at 4th Ave EN. Nicosia said it is a BNSF crossing outside the City limits and they have not notified the City of their work.

MISCELLANEOUS

Fire Department - August Activity
June 2023 Financial Reports
Correspondence

ADJOURN: At 7:56 p.m. Councilor Shepard motioned to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Piper.

Mayor

City Clerk