

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD MAY 19, 2025

CITY COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP 6:00 P.M.

City Manager Hanks presented the proposed Fiscal Year 2025–2026 budget plan and outlined strategic goals and priorities for the City Council. The workshop adjourned at 6:55 PM.

REGULAR MEETING – 7:00 P.M.

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

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

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

Approval of Claims - May 19, 2025 - \$614,883.95

Approval of Payroll Claims - May 09, 2025 - \$116,310.87

Approval of Regular City Council Meeting Minutes - May 5, 2025

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on agenda)

Chris Peterson requested the installation of "No Overnight Camping" signage at Marantette Park.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS/PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Habitat for Humanity of Flathead Valley - Requesting Growth Policy Amendment, zone change and creating a subdivision of 6 residential lots.

City Planner Eric Mulcahy presented Staff Report #GP-25-01 outlining the proposed amendment to the City Growth Policy, which seeks to reclassify property currently designated as park land (zoned CB2) to a residential designation (CR5). The application also includes a preliminary plat for six single-family residential lots. Mulcahy reviewed the four required criteria for amending the Growth Policy, citing the region's housing affordability crisis and alignment with city planning goals as justification.

Mulcahy further presented:

- **Staff Report #CZC-25-01:** Supporting the zone change from General Business (CB2) to Two-Family Residential (CR5), consistent with surrounding land uses.
- **Staff Report #CPP-25-01:** Affirming that the proposed subdivision meets all city requirements, with no variances requested. The site is fully serviced by municipal infrastructure, has no environmental hazards, and includes 15 recommended conditions for final plat approval.

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Mayor Barnhart inquired whether curb and drainage requirements were included in Condition #3. Mulcahy clarified that while no curb is required due to existing conditions, a comprehensive stormwater management plan is mandated.

Darren Fisher, Chairman of the Columbia Falls Planning Commission, noted the Commission's unanimous support for the proposal following thorough review and public input. He addressed concerns regarding HOA formation, emphasizing only future residents of the proposed development would be subject to HOA requirements, not neighboring property owners.

Engineer Mike Brode stated that City Planner Mr. Mulcahy provided a thorough and accurate description of the project applications. Mr. Brode elaborated that the developer seeks approval for three concurrent applications: These three applications are being submitted and reviewed simultaneously. Mr. Brode emphasized that while each application is distinct, they are interdependent and must all be approved for the project to proceed as proposed.

Mayor Barnhart opened the Public Hearing at 7:21 p.m.

Mary Beth Moraund said the proposal is to build six single-family, owner-occupied, energy-efficient homes priced at \$350,000–\$400,000. Buyers will receive 2% fixed mortgages via the Montana Board of Housing. Homes are deed-restricted and part of the Northwest Montana Community Land Trust with capped equity resale provisions.

Pete Umaraco & Tyke Nagel: Raised issues about increased neighborhood density, poor road conditions, rising property taxes, snow removal challenges, and the introduction of HOAs.

Donna McCann: Advocated for preserving the current baseball field as a community space.

Hunter D'Antueno: Supports the development as a positive change for the community.

Leah Liebig: Habitat homeowner expressed support, citing affordability, local investment, and long-term community growth.

Mayor Barnhart closed the Public Hearing at 7:52 p.m.

Council Response: Emphasized limited scope of zoning change, confirmed snow management logistics, and discussed potential relocation of the ballfield to Horine Park.

Councilor Robinson made motion to adopt Staff Report #GP-25-01 as Findings of Fact, seconded by Councilor Lovering with council voting as follows. Ayes: King, Lovering, Robinson, Shepard and Barnhart.

Councilor Shepard moved to approve Amendment of the Columbia Falls Growth Policy and direct the City Manager to prepare the appropriate resolution for the next regular council meeting agenda, seconded by Councilor King with council voting as follows. Ayes: Lovering, Robinson, Shepard, King and Barnhart.

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Councilor Lovering motioned to adopt Staff Report #CZC-25-01 Findings of Fact, seconded by Councilor Robinson with council voting as follows. Ayes: Robinson, Shepard, King, Lovering and Barnhart.

Councilor Lovering made motion to approve zone change and direct City Manager to prepare the appropriate ordinance for the next regular council meeting, seconded by Councilor King with voting as follows. Ayes: Shepard, King, Lovering, Robinson and Barnhart.

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve Staff Report #CPP-25-01 as Findings of Fact, seconded by Councilor Robinson with council voting as follows. Ayes: King, Lovering, Robinson, Shepard and Barnhart.

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve the Preliminary Plat Application and direct City Manager to prepare the appropriate resolution for the next regular council meeting, seconded by Councilor King with council voting as follows. Ayes: Lovering, Robinson, Shepard, King and Barnhart.

NEW BUSINESS:

Rivers Edge Park Disc Golf Course

Proposal by Flathead Valley Disc Golf Association (FVDG) Presentation from Julian Nizzoli:

- 9-hole, family-friendly disc golf course designed for multi-use compatibility and minimal environmental impact.
- Equipment and installation costs estimated at ~\$7,000; fundraising already underway.
- Will utilize concrete tee pads, removable baskets, and community volunteer labor.
- David Trussell, Sam Richardson, Darin Fisher and Joseph Urban supported the project as a healthy, inclusive, and low-maintenance recreational option.
- Shirley Folkwein, inquired about the master plan for the park and if they were available on the city website.

Councilor King motioned to approve the Disc Golf Course at Rivers Edge Park, seconded by Councilor Lovering and the motion passed unanimously.

City Manager Hanks reviewed the FY 2025-26 Health Insurance City Contributions

- 12.2% medical premium increase; total 21% increase over two years.
- City will continue contributing 90% of employee insurance costs.
- Total city contribution to rise to \$714,265.

City staff recommends approval of the contribution rates as listed.

Councilor King motioned to approve the city contributions as recommended by staff for the FY 25-26, seconded by Councilor Robinson and the motion carried unanimously.

ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:

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Resolution #1940 - Adopting the 2025 Columbia Falls Housing Study

City Manager Hanks said the Housing Study was reviewed and approved at the last council meeting.

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve Resolution # 1940, seconded by Councilor Robinson with Council voting as follows. Ayes: King, Lovering, Robinson, Shepard and Barnhart.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Mayor Barnhart requested distance markers for River's Edge Park trails and highlighted poor road conditions near the Railroad St. housing project.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

- The report noted several operational achievements, including the reopening of the city pool on schedule, staffing improvements (e.g., lifeguard hiring), and progress on major public projects like the Glacier to Gateway initiative.
- Updates were given concerning police recruitment, discussions on police policy in line with federal/state guidelines using Lexapol contracts, and future implications of changes in property tax policies following new state bills.
- The City Manager also touched on routine maintenance and improvement matters such as the placement of fish in River's Edge Park's pond and upcoming public works plans.
- Noted State property tax reform which could include 18% average savings for homeowners, but significant increases (68%) for second homes/Airbnbs effective FY 2027.

MISCELLANEOUS

April Financial Reports

Correspondence

ADJOURN

Councilor Lovering motioned to adjourn at 8:52 p.m., seconded by Councilor King.

Mayor

City Clerk