

CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD MARCH 04, 2024

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

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

Absent: Councilor Lovering and Councilor Price.

Also present: City Manager Nicosia, City Clerk Staaland, City Attorney Breck, Finance Director Bates and Police Chief Peters.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

Approval of Claims - March 4, 2024 - \$79,239.95

Approval of Special Payroll - February 20, 2024 - \$8,899.66

Approval of Payroll Claims - March 1, 2024 - \$109,306.39

Approval of Regular Meeting Minutes - February 20, 2024

APPOINTMENTS:

Probationary Patrolman Ronald "RJ" Thompson Appointment and Oath

Police Chief Peters said the city went through an exceptionally long hiring process but is excited to add RJ Thompson to the department. RJ comes to us from Alabama with Law Enforcement experience, which will fit well with current staff.

Councilor Piper motioned to appoint Mr. Thompson as Probationary Patrolman, seconded by Councilor Shepard and the motion carried unanimously.

City Clerk Staaland administered Oath of Office to Mr. Thompson.

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on agenda)

Susan Wheeler, 170 River Road, said she was curious if the new City Planning Commission meetings were open to the public. City Manager Nicosia said the meetings are public meetings with the first meeting on March 14, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

Shirley Folkwein, 285 Shooting Star Dr. said she is representing Coalition for a Clean CFAC and wanted to thank council and staff for their long-standing support of the cleanup. As you have seen in your packet there is a letter from the Flathead County Commissioners to Missy Haniewicz at the EPA Denver office said Folkwein. The Montana Legislative Branch sent out the meeting notice that has CFAC on the agenda for an update at their March 14, 2024, meeting. It is the desire of the Coalition to work closely with the City Council to ensure broad-based community involvement and awareness in the EPA decision making and clean up decisions.

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Del Phipps, 3945 North Fork Road, said the EPA's proposed plan discredits the possibility to remove the material safely and effectively. The Coalition is in the process of examining the best technologies and practices used by environmental remediation to successfully remove toxic materials.

Glenn Wehe, 267 Rogers Rd. brought attention to an article in the newspaper about Kalispell water, and he does not want that to happen to Columbia Falls water.

Jaden Woeppel, Kalispell said he is a member of the Flathead County Advisory Committee that oversees the Mountain Climber bus service. Mr. Woeppel would like to invite a member of council to serve on the Transportation Advisory Committee. In the last couple of months Columbia Falls has outpaced the number of rides serviced in the city of Whitefish. As Columbia Falls continues to grow it would be great to have a member from Columbia Falls to add insight. The next meeting is April 4th at 2p.m. There are currently three openings on the board said Woeppel.

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS/PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Mayor Barnhart continued the Public Hearing - Amend Title 13 Water/Sewer Account Provisions:

The City Council continued the hearing from February 20, 2024, on the Title 13 Amendments, related to requiring the water/sewer utility accounts to remain in the name of the owner.

City Manager Nicosia said city staff is proposing to leave the water account in the owner's name but also send a bill to the tenant. The city is not a private utility company, and the account stays with the address. Some believe the issue is with the buildings downtown, those are not the units that are delinquent as they have one meter that the owner manages between tenants.

Mayor Barnhart said for clarification the changes are that we are invoicing the owner and renter. Nicosia said correct, the main change is we would not transfer water service into the tenant's name. We are not creating a new account when a tenant moves in or out, the owner will be responsible for contacting the city of a tenant change.

Councilor Robinson asked what the software cost would be to implement the change. Finance Director Bates said he does not have the exact cost but does not anticipate it being too much as other cities utilizing the same software already have it in place.

Mayor Barnhart continued the Public Hearing at 7:25 p.m.

Aubrie Lorona, 355 Gladys Glen Road, Coram, said they purchased property in Columbia Falls for employee housing. They are keeping the rent at a reasonable rate so employees can live here year-round. Ms. Lorona said the compromise sounds reasonable as long as residents can still prove they are a Montana resident. If they are not financially responsible for the water bill then they are more likely to not pay. With the bills going to the owner and the tenant, they will be held responsible and understands the owner is ultimately responsible to pay the bill.

Vickie Ott, 1685 Monte Vista Dr. said she has worked for the city for 19 years and is now retired. Ms. Ott said she worked as a Utility Billing Clerk and understands the extra work involved in moving tenants in and out. It is not fair that all taxpayers that do not own rentals could be subject to a rate increase due to the extra time spent on move in and move outs. Another thing to consider is the water deposits requested by the landlord

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will sometimes be waive for certain tenants, then put back on for new tenant. Keeping the water in the owner name will save time for city staff. Ms. Ott said she is in favor of the amendment.

Mayor Barnhart closed the Public Hearing at 7:32 p.m.

Councilor Shepard motioned to take the amendment off the table, seconded by Councilor Piper.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Railroad Park Update - Baseball Field availability on School District 6 Property

City Manager Nicosia said staff reached out to School District #6 and there is school property available for a ball field between the Jr. High and Ruder. There is also a little ball field by the Jr. High.

Kim Morisaki with Northwest Community Land Trust is already recruiting funding and grants. The City will have to submit an application to do a Growth Policy change, followed up with a zone change. This summer the park will be available said Nicosia.

Councilor Shepard motioned to move forward with the potential for housing, seconded by Councilor Piper and the motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS:

Call for Bids - WWTP Improvements Project Phase 2

City Manager Nicosia said the city is requesting to call for bids in order to get this project in the bidder's hands. Bids would be due back by April 9, 2024 and will be brought forward at the April 15, 2024 council meeting.

Councilor Robinson made motion to call for bids for the WWTP Improvements Project Phase 2, seconded by Councilor King and the emotion carried.

Call for Bids - Scum Pump and Controls Replacement Project

City Manager Nicosia said this is one of your HB 355 projects. Staff is requesting authorization to call for bids.

Councilor King motioned to call for bids for the Scum Pump and Controls Replacement Project, seconded by Councilor Shepard and the motion carried.

ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:

First Reading - Ordinance # 829 Amending Title 13 - Water/Sewer Utility Account Provisions:

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS, MONTANA AMENDING THE TITLE 13 WATER/SEWER UTILITY ACCOUNT PROVISIONS

Councilor Piper motioned to adopt the amendment to Ordinance #829, seconded by Councilor Robinson.

Councilor Shepard said one owner was concerned that if there was is a leak in the home they would not know, but with this compromise they will see the bill as well. Finance Director Bates said that is correct.

Councilor Piper said this is a great compromise.

Councilor King said she is happy the public came forward so she could see both sides.

Mayor Barnhart said there was good discussion from the landlords at the last council meeting which had staff looking at this compromise.

Motion carried unanimously.

Resolution # 1915 - Authorizing Application for Land & Water Conservation Fund Assistance

City Manager Nicosia said this resolution authorizing the application is required by the Land & Water Conservation Fund and Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This is for the Fenholt Park Skatepark and Restroom. The estimated cost is \$738,000 for the Skatepark and Restroom.

Councilor Piper motioned to approve Resolution #1915, seconded by Councilor Shepard with council voting as follows. Ayes: Piper, Robinson, Shepard, King, and Barnhart.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Piper asked Shirley Folkwein the group that was going to talk about CFAC. Ms. Folkwein replied the Environmental Quality Council. Piper asked if it would benefit for council to send a letter for that meeting.

Councilor Shepard said we have sent a letter and our position has never changed.

Councilor Robinson thanked City Manager Nicosia for following through with the baseball fields for the younger children. It is important the city put forth the effort to provide individual housing.

Councilor Shepard concurred with Robinson and added he is happy the ground will be put to good use.

Mayor Barnhart concurs with Shepard and Robinson on the ballpark.

Mayor Barnhart said we have a good pool of City Manager applicants and will be looking at them in the next week. City Manager Nicosia said she would like council to submit their top 5 candidates in the next week. Then we will do background checks and set up interview dates. There will be a closed meeting to go over applicants which is not open to the public. When a meeting has to do with personnel it is confidential said City Attorney Breck. Mayor Barnhart said interviews are open to the public.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

The 2023 consumer water report will be released soon. The city has clean water and had no detects. Council has authorized additional testing for items that could be a byproduct of the Aluminum Plant. We do that testing every two years with non-detects which will appear on our report. We want to put our communities mind at ease stating we have pure clean water said Nicosia.

MISCELLANEOUS

Police Department Activity - December 2023 and January 2024

Fire Department Activity - February 2024

Correspondence

ADJOURN

Councilor King motioned to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Piper and the meeting was adjourned at 7:56 p.m.

Mayor

City Clerk