

City of Columbia Falls
City Council Regular Meeting Minutes
Held April 21, 2025

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

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

Also Present: City Manager Hanks, Public Works Clerk Sobczak, City Attorney Justin Breck, Deputy City Attorney Stephanie Breck, Public Works Director Bates and Police Chief Stephens.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

CONSENT AGENDA: Councilor Piper moved to approve the consent agenda, noting that the claims were in order. The motion was seconded by Councilor Lovering and passed unanimously.

Approval of Claims – April 21, 2025 – \$359,733.77

Approval of Payroll Claims – April 11, 2025 – \$121,502.13

Approval of Regular Council Meeting Minutes – April 7, 2025

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT: (Items not on the agenda)

Tanya Brothwell, 110 9th St E, Columbia Falls. inquired about the installation of lighting at the skatepark. Public Works Director Bates responded that lighting would not be installed. Ms. Brothwell also expressed concerns about potential noise disturbances from loudspeakers.

Darin Fisher, 303 3rd Ave E, Columbia Falls. thanked City staff for the prompt installation of pickleball and volleyball nets following snowmelt. He also requested signage on park restrooms indicating they are closed during the winter season.

NEW BUSINESS:

12th Avenue West Grade Crossing Tri-Party Agreement: City Manager Hanks presented a request from BNSF and MDOT to enter into a Tri-Party Agreement with the City for the installation of LED flashing lights and gates at the railroad crossing on 12th Avenue West. He clarified that this agreement is separate from ongoing sidewalk easement coordination. After installation, the crossing equipment will transfer to the City, with BNSF responsible for all future maintenance costs.

Motion: Councilor Lovering moved to approve the agreement; seconded by Councilor Price.

Vote: Roll-call vote; all present voted AYE. Motion carried.

State-Local Infrastructure Partnership Act Grants: The City seeks to finalize contracts for four SLIPA grants (House Bill 355, 2023), with a funding structure of 75% state and 25% local match. Projects include:

1. Flow meter repairs at Meadow Lake Boulevard lift station - completed
2. Maintenance of eight fire hydrants - completed
3. Repairs to the bike path between 11th and 9th Street West - completed

4. Upcoming fall repairs at the Wastewater Treatment Plant (electrical switchgear, grit bin, and scum pump systems) Total: \$135,000 in state funds, \$45,000 City match.

Motion: Councilor King moved to enter into the contracts; seconded by Councilor Piper.

Vote: Roll-call vote; all present voted AYE. Motion carried.

Emergency Medical Services Annual Memorandum of Understanding: Annual MOU with Flathead County for Columbia Falls Fire Department's QRU services. Includes:

- \$3,500 total annual readiness funding (2 mil EMS levy)
- Additional per-response payments (\$5,381 in 2024)

Motion: Councilor Robinson moved to approve the MOU; seconded by Councilor King.

Vote: Roll-call vote; all present voted AYE. Motion carried.

ORDINANCES/RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution # 1939 – SRF Bond Resolution 2025: Resolution authorizing \$750,000 in sewer system revenue bonds via the DNRC's Water Pollution Control Revolving Loan Program:

- \$367,500 (Series 2025A): 0% interest, forgivable upon compliance
 - \$382,500 (Series 2025B): 2.5% interest, 20-year term
- Funds will support ongoing modernization of the Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Motion: Councilor Lovering moved to adopt the resolution; seconded by Councilor Robinson.

Vote: Roll-call vote; all present voted AYE. Motion carried.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL:

Councilor Price asked about the status of ordered playground equipment and requested repairs to potholes on the Talbot Road walking path. Public Works Director Bates responded the equipment had not arrived and he would report back on repair plans.

Councilor Robinson announced Arbor Day celebrations on May 2nd with local fifth graders at Hoerner Park, where four trees will be planted.

Mayor Barnhart inquired about the location of the Railroad Park bleachers (currently at Hoerner Park). Requested their return post-tennis season. Asked about skatepark noise regulations—Police Chief Stephens confirmed a noise ordinance applies to sounds audible over 50 feet. Other topics discussed included:

- Traffic at skatepark: current infrastructure sufficient
- 9th Street East improvements: no current plans
- Fenholt Park restroom: plumbing complete, lock installation pending
- Skatepark signage under review

CITY MANAGER REPORT:

City Manager Hanks reviewed his new report format, which will be posted online. Key updates included:

- Skatepark grand opening: April 26, 12–5 p.m., ribbon cutting at 1:15 p.m.
- Fire Department training at airport
- Budget development ongoing; action plan to be presented next meeting
- Skatepark parking lot refinishing and grass seeding underway
- Still seeking a pool manager
- Second page of report will address Council/citizen questions
- Upcoming MDOT meeting
- Pickleball court gate estimates in progress
- Projected 2.1% inflation impact on budget

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- MMIA employee benefits renewal to increase by 12.2%
- Volleyball court fencing quotes being reviewed
- 2nd Avenue East parking also under evaluation

MISCELLANEOUS:

Finance Report – March 2025

Correspondence

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Mayor Barnhart closed this portion of the meeting for Council deliberations. (MCA 2-3-203-4) Except as provided in subsection (4)(b), a meeting may be closed to discuss a strategy to be followed with respect to litigation when an open meeting would have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public agency.

ADJOURNMENT:

Councilor Lovering moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Councilor King.

Mayor

City Clerk