

**CITY OF COLUMBIA FALLS
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
HELD SEPTEMBER 16, 2024**

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

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

Also present: Interim City Manager Shrives, City Clerk Staaland, City Attorney Breck and Sergeant Rice.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilor Lovering motioned to approve the agenda, seconded by Councilor Robinson and the motion carried.

CONSENT AGENDA:

Councilor Piper 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 - September 16, 2024 - \$560,082.57

Approval of Payroll Claims September 13, 2024 - \$109,882.33

Approval of the Regular Council Meeting Minutes - August 19, 2024

Approval of the Regular Council Meeting Minutes - September 3, 2024

VISITORS/PUBLIC COMMENT (Items not on agenda)

Chris Peterson, Hungry Horse News said there is a storm drain at the corner of Nucleus Avenue and Hwy 2 that is starting to erode.

NEW BUSINESS:

The City of Columbia Falls will receive sealed bids for the WWTP Grit Classifier Procurement until October 2, 2024, 2:00 p.m.

Interim City Manager Shrives said the last time the city put the WWTP Grit Classifier out for bid there were no bids received. This bid consists of furnishing a new grit Classifier with Cyclone for the headworks building at the WWTP.

ORDINANCES / RESOLUTIONS:

Resolution # 1933 - 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, 2024 and Ending June 30, 2025, Approving Appropriations for Each Fund of the City of Columbia Falls

Susan Nicosia gave a budget message for Mayor, City Council and Citizens of Columbia Falls.

The Fiscal Year 2025 (2025 FY) budget was developed with the goals and priorities of the City Council, the needs of the individual departments, as well as the service level expectations of our community. The 2025 FY budget represents the Council's ongoing commitment to providing outstanding service to our community by

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providing appropriate staffing, improving and maintaining facilities, leveraging local funding with grants while considering the impacts to the City's property taxpayers.

The Council's 2025 FY priorities focused on public safety, public health and maintaining and improving the City's current level of services and facilities. The mission of the City Council is to provide the expected level of services necessary to foster a community in which people can live, work and play.

As a small-sized city, our annual total appropriations do not vary significantly from year to year unless impacted by capital projects. The 2025 FY budget appropriations are \$ 23,864,711, reflecting an 18% increase over the adopted 2024 FY budget of \$20,158,677. The 2025 appropriations are impacted notably by grants and capital projects. Capital outlay appropriations are \$10,684,183, accounting for 45% of the total budget. The Capital Projects are described in detail below in the Budget Summary.

The 2025 FY staffing changes include two full-time employees: an additional police officer and an additional finance/administration department position approved by Council during the preliminary budget meetings. The Council has approved an additional police officer in both 2024 and 2025 bringing the total sworn officers to 11 full-time employees. The need for the additional police officers was identified in 2018 along with the need for paid firefighters. The need for additional police officers and full-time firefighters culminated in the Resort Tax approved by the voters in June 2020 with collections beginning in October, 2021. The 2023 FY activity reflected the first full fiscal year of collections. The Resort Tax collections and appropriations are described in detail in the Budget Summary.

The 2024 Certified Taxable Valuation increased by 1.81% as it was not a revaluation year. Pursuant to state statute, 15-10-420, MCA, the City's tax increases are limited to dollars and are based on ½ the rate of inflation, or 2.80% for the 2025 FY and an allowance for newly taxable property. The inflation factor provided \$21,038 in new funding and the newly taxable property provided \$35,435 in new funding for a total of \$56,473. Based on the statutory formula, as shown in the Budget Summary, there is a corresponding decrease in the number of mills levied when the taxable valuation is increased even slightly. Due to the Resort Tax collections, the Council was able to approve a General Fund levy that was reduced by \$371,785 or 30.36 mills. The total city-wide tax levy increased by 38.620 mills. Consequently, City taxpayers will see an increase in their City taxes for the 2025 FY.

Staff recommends adoption of the budget.

Councilor Shepard motioned to adopt Resolution #1933, seconded by Councilor Piper with council voting as follows. Ayes: Robinson, Shepard, King, Lovering, Piper, Price and Barnhart.

REPORTS / BUSINESS FROM MAYOR & COUNCIL

Councilor Piper said in addition to the September 3rd council minutes referencing sheds encroaching into the alleys, he recently noticed excess vehicles and rubbish that could be considered hazardous when it comes to emergency vehicle access. Mayor Barnhart suggested notifying the Police Department when seeing potential hazards.

Piper said there is a slide at Marantette Park that has significant cracks in it and should be evaluated by the parks department for repair. Piper said at Horine Park soccer fields there is a plaque on the ground that is not visible and asked if the city can raise it up for better visibility.

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Councilor Shepard said he has looked at maintenance and upkeep of 5 different Post Offices and the Columbia Falls Post Office is in the worst condition. Shepard said he is hopeful the letter council sent out will be well received and we see improvements at the Post Office.

Councilor Lovering said she saw the first bear in town and it was in the garbage. Lovering suggested getting the information out to the public on bear awareness and city ordinance.

Mayor Barnhart said the telephone box at Columbus Park needs a new cover on it but he taped it up the best he could and asked if the city could contact the telephone company to have the cover replaced.

Mayor Barnhart said our hiring committee for the City Manager position should be getting together to move forward in the hiring process. City Manager Shrives concurred and said he will set up a meeting soon.

CITY MANAGER REPORT

Interim City Manager Shrives said he has been out of city government for some time but it's all the same and comes back to you quickly. He is looking forward to assisting the City of Columbia Falls until a permanent City Manager is employed.

Mr. Shrives said the Resort Tax is such a great tool to have in place; it opens up a lot of possibilities for Columbia Falls.

Local Government Study Commission – Mr. Shrives said he recently had a conversation with Dan Clark with the Local Government Center to get an idea on how the process works. There are certain steps to go through but it could be done within six months and may not have to go on the 2026 ballot. We only have one candidate that filed and council will need to fill two additional positions said Shrives. Staff will put a notice on the city website that council will be accepting letters of interest until the close of business on October 17, 2024. Letters of interest received will be brought forward to the October 21st council meeting. The good news is the Local Government Study Commission training will be held in Kalispell sometime in December said Shrives.

The Housing Study - There was discussion at the City Planning Commission meeting on September 12th on how information would be dispersed for residents to see how the Housing Study is moving along. Staff will put information on the city website and will update as needed. WSW Consulting, Inc. will be asked to provide Housing Study information on their website as well.

City Manager Shrives said he has reached out to the City Managers in the state to get information on hiring consultants they have utilized in a hiring process. It sounds like an estimated cost for such service would be between \$30,000 - \$35,000. This price would include all recruiting, advertising, interview involvement, and are included in the hiring process. If the first interview doesn't work out they will reopen the position for a second round at no cost to the city. Shrives said he would like to discuss this further at the hiring committee meeting.

The new Chief of Police Chad Stephens will be starting work on September 30th. Mr. Shrives said he has spoken to Mr. Stephens and he believes he will be a good fit for the City of Columbia Falls.

Mr. Shrives said as discussed prior to accepting the interim position with the city he will be leaving at noon on Thursday and returning the following Wednesday or Thursday.

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Staff is working on the Director of Finance job description, upon completion and council approval the city will advertise the position. Mr. Shrives said he recommends getting the Finance Director in place first in order to be part of the hiring process of the new accounting clerk position. Mayor Barnhart inquired on the salary of the Finance Director; City Clerk Staland said she believed it to be between \$80,000 - \$90,000 DOE. Mayor Barnhart said he thought council wanted it higher due to credentials. After council discussion City Manager Shrives said he will take a closer look at salaries for the Finance Director and City Manager positions.

ADJOURN: Councilor Lovering motioned to adjourn, seconded by Councilor Shepard and the meeting adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

Mayor

City Clerk