CITY COUNCIL MEETING

City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Tuesday, May 26, 2026
6:00 PM

Mayor
Amáda Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
Connie Buesgens
Rachel James
Justice Spriggs
Laurel Deneen
City Manager
Aaron Chirpich

MINUTES

The following are the minutes for the Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00 pm on Tuesday, May 26, 2026, in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL
Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Deneen; Councilmember Spriggs; Councilmember James

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Joe Kloiber, Finance Director; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Eric Alverado, City Resident; Sean Clerkin, Columbia Heights Lions Club Member; Nelson Moore, Columbia Heights Lions Club Member; Tonya Moore, Columbia Heights Lions Club Member; Marianne Schuemacher, City resident

MISSION STATEMENT
Columbia Heights is a vibrant, healthy, and connected City. We are here to actively support the community, deliver equitable services, build and strengthen connections, improve upon our past, and uphold our successes. We strive to be better and ensure Columbia Heights is a great place for everyone, today and in the future.

A. Columbia Heights City Council and Staff Norms.
While we are accountable to each other for these norms, the Mayor and City Manager will help us adhere to them with respectful reminders and reinforcement as needed.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

APPROVAL OF AGENDA
Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve the Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. Asian and Pacific Islander Month

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed May 2026 as Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, and Councilmember Buesgens read the City's proclamation.

B. Foster Care Awareness Month

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed May 2026 as Foster Care Awareness Month, and Councilmember Deneen read the City's proclamation.

C. Menstrual Hygiene Awareness Day

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed May 28, 2026, as Menstrual Hygiene Day, and Councilmember James read the City's proclamation.

D. Reaffirming Columbia Heights' Adoption of Minnesota's New State Flag and Seal

Mayor Márquez Simula read the City's proclamation adopting Minnesota's new State Flag and Seal.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James stated she visited the Fridley-Columbia Heights Rotary Club and spoke about Operation Metro Surge and the volunteer operations in the City. She added that she attended a meeting with members from the local mutual aid group. The Council attended the listening session. She expressed concerns about moving forward with the Anoka County drone-assisted response and the City's Flock cameras due to privacy and data-sharing concerns and questions regarding accountability. She shared an update from Commissioner Meisner that the project is on hold for now, and she is working on a memorandum of understanding.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that she volunteered with the Blooming Sunshine Garden, attended the Flock town hall, and added that she is looking forward to discussions during the work session.

Councilmember Deneen congratulated the citizen and business of the year. She added that she attended the EDA meeting, the work session meeting, the Columbia Heights School Board meeting, the Valley View appreciation event, the Library Board meeting, the 2050 Comprehensive Plan kick-off meeting, and the Flock town hall. She explained that she continues to have conversations with residents and expressed concern about the Flock cameras and noted that there are many questions she still has and looks forward to discussing the item further during a Council work session.

Councilmember Spriggs stated he attended the Flock town hall meeting, a University of Minnesota Foundation event regarding the importance of medical schools. He added that he participated in the League of Minnesota Cities' "We Cities Challenge".

Mayor Márquez Simula noted that there will be a Peace Breakfast on June 9th at Murzyn Hall. Tickets are still available, and the event will focus on those who gave themselves during Operation Metro Surge. She mentioned that she attended the Sustainability Commission meeting and took a tour of the Metro Transit wastewater treatment plant. She attended the Flock town hall with the rest of the Councilmembers and explained that she is remaining open-minded as staff and the County continue to provide the Council with information. Flock cameras will be discussed during the work session meeting next Monday, and it is a public meeting where everyone can attend in person or virtually. She noted she listened to the State of the Region address from the Met Council. There was a cultural event at Heights Theater. The City hosted a Memorial Day observance at Huset Park at the World War II memorial.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich stated the City's summer newsletter would arrive in mailboxes soon. Staff was notified by CenterPoint Energy that they are planning on replacing approximately 1,100 gas meters throughout the City, which may cause street disruptions. Project information can be found at centerpointenergy.com/construction, and the City will post links on the City's social media pages and website.

He provided an update regarding Sullivan Lake and noted that a statement was shared regarding the future playground, and expressed appreciation for the community for their patience. Mayor Márquez Simula added that the City is asking for fresh input and feedback, but the previous feedback is not lost or left out of the process.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Marianne Schuemacher, City resident, explained that she attended the Flock listening session and created a document including Flock marketing materials, and information about what she believes is actually happening. She asked the Council if they would be interested in the document. The document references the current lawsuits against Flock. She noted that a low-level search on Flock will show that Flock is amazing and solves crime. However, there has been one study conducted that has some solid research, and it was paid for by Flock. She also inquired about the Drone First Responder Program that Anoka County is working on, and asked how it was decided to put the project on hold. Mayor Márquez Simula replied that she just found out today. Councilmember James encouraged Ms. Schuemacher to contact Anoka County Commissioner Meisner.

Tonya Moore, Nelson Moore, Sean Clerkin, and Columbia Heights Lions Club Members introduced themselves. Ms. Moore thanked the Council for partnering with them for the Jamboree this year and expressed excitement for the years to come. The council expressed their excitement for the Jamboree.

CONSENT AGENDA

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

1. **Approve May 4, 2026, City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes.**
   Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich
   MOTION: Move to approve the May 4, 2026, City Council Work Session meeting minutes.

2. Approve May 11, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.
Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich
MOTION: Move to approve the May 11, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.

3. Accept January 15, 2026, Charter Commission Meeting Minutes.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the January 15, 2026, Charter Commission meeting minutes.

4. Accept April 1, 2026, Library Board Minutes.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the April 1, 2026, Library Board meeting minutes.

5. Approval of Resolution No. 2026-035 Declaring the Official Intent of the City Of Columbia Heights, Minnesota to Reimburse Expenditures of Project 2414 (Replacement of the Municipal Service Center) From the Proceeds of Tax-Exempt Bonds to Be Issued By the City.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-035, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-035, declaring the official intent of the City of Columbia Heights, Minnesota, to reimburse certain expenditures from the proceeds of tax-exempt bonds to be issued by the City.

6. Adopt Resolution 2026-034, Awarding Contracts for Solar and Lighting Improvements for Select City Facilities, City Project 2607.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-034, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-034, approving amending the 2026 budget to appropriate fund balance from liquor fund 609 and governmental equipment fund 431 for certain capital improvements and authorizing the City Manager to enter into the related vendor agreements.

7. Approving Plans and Ordering Advertisement for Bids on 2026 Street Program - Municipal State Aid (MSA) Street Mill & Overlay Project 2602.
Presenting Item: *Aaron Chirpich, City Manager*
MOTION: Move to approve plans and order advertisement for bids for 2026 Municipal State Aid Street Mill & Overlay, City Project 2602.

8. Approve Permits for the 2026 Jamboree.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to authorize staff to close Jefferson Street from 39th to 40th Avenues beginning Tuesday afternoon, June 23, through Sunday, June 28, 2026.
MOTION: Move to authorize the Police Department to issue a parade permit for the Jamboree Parade to be held on Friday, June 26, 2026, beginning at 6:00 PM for the following streets: 45th Avenue to Quincy Street, south to 40th Avenue, west to 5th Street.

MOTION: Move to authorize fireworks at dusk on Saturday, June 27, 2026, and to waive the Fire Department fireworks display permit fee.

9. Consideration of Resolution 2026-031, Authorizing the Green Corps Host Site Agreement for Program Year 2026-2027.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-031, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-031, a resolution authorizing the execution of a host site agreement with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for participation in the Minnesota GreenCorps program in program year 2026-2027.

10. License Agenda.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for May 26, 2026**,** as presented.

11. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval
Presenting Item: *Aaron Chirpich, City Manager*
MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for May 26, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

12. Review of Bills.
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move that in accordance with Minnesota Statute 412.271, subd. 8 the City Council has reviewed the enclosed list of claims paid by check and by electronic funds transfer in the amount of $1,343,038.02.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

13. Resolution No. 2026-033 Adopting a Capital Improvement Plan For Project 2414 (Replacement of the Municipal Service Center) and Providing Preliminary Approval For The Issuance of General Obligation Bonds Thereunder.
Presenting Item: Joseph Kloiber, Finance Director

Finance Director Kloiber stated that the Municipal Service Center is the City facility used for public works activity. In each annual budget since 2022, the City has disclosed and publicly discussed the need to replace the Municipal Service Center building due to irreparable structural failure, as determined in a 2021 study by Oertel Architects.

Finance Director Kloiber noted that a project of this scale will require external financing; the City will issue long-term bonds, which will be repaid primarily with property taxes over approximately 25 years. In Minnesota, to finance construction of municipal facilities in this manner first requires a public hearing on the matter, followed by a preliminary approval by the City Council to begin a 30-day “reverse referendum” period. This is the purpose of Resolution 2026-033.

Finance Director Kloiber explained that if a valid petition signed by five percent of the voters in the 2024 general election is received during the 30-day reverse referendum period, an additional approval of the proposed financing will be required by a majority of voters at the 2026 general election. Assuming those 2026 approvals (as applicable) are obtained, in approximately February 2028, the City Council in office at that time will make the final decision whether to adopt a 2028 resolution calling for the actual issuance of the bonds. If they affirm the 2026 prior approvals, then in approximately March 2028, the City will award the sale of the bonds to the lowest bidder in the municipal bond market, obtaining the financing necessary to complete this project.

Finance Director Kloiber stated it is important to note that Resolution 2026-033 does not set the dollar amount of bonds that will be issued for this project. It only sets the maximum dollar amount that could be issued for this project. The format of Resolution 2026-033, dictated by MN statute section 475.521, adopts a five-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) for the project, and within that CIP provides for issuing up to $31,515,000 of tax-exempt general obligation bonds.

Finance Director Kloiber noted that, depending on the construction bids received in 2027/2028 for this project, the final amount of state and federal funding made available for this project, and the interest rate at the time of issuance, it is reasonably possible that the actual amount of bonds issued will be less than the $31,515,000 maximum authorized under the CIP.

Finance Director Kloiber explained that the supplementary information provided during the meeting includes an estimate of the property tax increase that, in theory, could result from this project for owners of single-family homes with various values. It is important to note this tax estimate:

- Omits the approximately 20% subsidy provided by the Metro-Area Fiscal Disparities Levy each year after 2029.
- Assumes the City will issue the maximum dollar amount of bonds allowed under the CIP.
- Assumes the City will not use any annual State Aid to Local Government (LGA) to pay a portion of the debt service for this project.

Finance Director Kloiber stated the City Council will likely choose to use LGA to pay a portion of the debt service for this project. For 2026, the City Council applied $500,000 of LGA towards the $1.1 million of existing annual debt service on the public safety and library buildings. The City receives $2.6 million of LGA annually.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if the last big bond project was for the library building. Finance Director Kloiber agreed and noted that it was in 2015. Councilmember Buesgens reminded the community that it has been 11 years since the City has done any bonding and that the City Hall building was funded through years of saving. She asked if there was some funding the City received from the State recently for the municipal building. Finance

Director Kloiber replied that the City received under $2.5 million from the State and two awards from the federal government.

Councilmember Spriggs asked when the final interest rate was set. Finance Director Kloiber replied that the interest rate is set when the City goes to market for bond bids, which is scheduled to be in February 2028.

Councilmember James noted that many people ask why there needs to be a new building when the current one is 55 years old. She asked staff to share the effect that residents are going to see on the operational efficiency of the new building. City Manager Chirpich replied that the building has reached its functional obsolescence. There was an analysis conducted that determined the costs to make replacements exceeded having a new building. The City has made many updates to the current building. The major deficiency of the current building is that it is a low-bearing design, and the upper floor was never designed to carry heavy equipment, which has caused the concrete and rebar to be degraded to the point that it is not worth investing in anymore. A new building would increase efficiency and allow the City to do more projects. Staff has a plan for relocating divisions.

Councilmember James noted that the current Public Works building is unsafe, and building a new building is a necessity for the City. Councilmember Buesgens added that the rebar was crumbling 20 years ago, and at the time, the Council decided to try to fix the building. Now, there is so much decay throughout the building. She encouraged community members to take a tour of the Public Works building so people can see how crammed it is and how the City has outgrown the space.

Councilmember Deneen thanked staff and the contractors lobbying on behalf of the City. It is a necessity that the building be replaced since it is crumbling and not safe.

Mayor Márquez Simula noted that the recycling center will be replaced as part of the project. The current recycling center is old and in need of an upgrade. The Public Works building is not ADA accessible and only has stairs. A new Public Works building is a must-have instead of a “nice to have”. She added that she does not want the building to break before it is replaced.

Mayor Márquez Simula opened the Public Hearing.

Eric Alverado, City resident, stated he is currently working as an electrician and emphasized the importance of having a safe environment for people to work. He expressed his support for the new Public Works building.

Marianne Schuemacher, City resident, stated she supported the project and that workers have the right to work in a safe environment. She added that the recycling center is a wonderful resource.

Finance Director Kloiber noted that if the building was no longer able to be used, the contingency plan would be to rent space from other cities to store the equipment, which would cost the same annual costs as having a building in the City. Councilmember Buesgens added that Fridley has already outgrown their Public Works building, so it would have to be a city that is even further out.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to close the hearing and waive the reading of Resolution 2026-033, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to adopt Resolution 2026-033, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights, adopting a capital improvement plan and providing preliminary approval for the issuance of general obligation bonds thereunder. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinances and Resolutions

14. Consideration of Resolution 2026-032, a Rental Density Cap Exemption for 4033 Washington St NE
Presenting Item: Mitch Forney, Community Development Director

Community Development Director Forney stated that at the beginning of May 2026, City Staff received a request from the homeowner of 4033 Washington St NE for an exemption from the single-family rental density cap. The property is located on Block 97 with 2 single-family rentals out of 23 total single-family units and an allotment of 2 single-family rentals.

Community Development Director Forney noted that the applicant is appealing the staff's decision. The applicant has provided a narrative that is attached. The applicant's narrative does not align with the Rental Density Cap policy or intent and therefore cannot be recommended for approval by staff. If the Council decided to approve the exemption, Resolution 2026-032 would grant a 2-year temporary rental license exemption to the homeowner with a few additional requirements. The homeowner is required to complete the license application process within 6 months of the passage of the Resolution. This puts a limit on how long they can take to bring the house into rental compliance if needed. After the term of the temporary license, the persons requesting a temporary license must make an annual application to the City.

Applicant Eric Alverado expressed his gratitude to the City and the community members for standing strong during a time when immigrant families went through a difficult time. He noted he has been a resident for six years. He explained that he worked hard to purchase his home. The house was a mess when it was purchased, but it has been worked on throughout the years. He stated he works as an electrician and has noticed that his home is inadequate and needs a lot of electrical work done. He asked for the opportunity to rent out his current home while he looks for another home for his family. The house was

purchased at a time when the monthly payment was manageable, which means the rent would be manageable. He expressed his understanding regarding the density cap requirements and the exceptions. He explained that he is an immigrant and would like to pass the house down to his children someday. He added that the house is outgrown. The goal is for him to purchase a home in the City and fix it up.

Councilmember Deneen noted that the extension would be for two years and asked Mr. Alverado what his plan was after two years. Mr. Alverado replied that he would hope for additional time and would be willing to pay the monthly fees for the renters.

Councilmember Buesgens expressed her understanding of the desire to keep the home for family, but the Council sets the rules, and it is the Council's role to uphold the standards. She added that she is not willing to break the rule for this situation since it would set a precedent for other people who are asking for a similar situation.

Councilmember Spriggs explained that the density cap was created to limit big corporations from buying properties and renting them out. He noted that the State housing is difficult right now. He pointed out that Mr. Alverado is looking for a short-term solution and is not looking to make a profit off the property. The spirit of the exemption is for situations like this, where someone is trying to make ends meet and improve their life. He stated he is in favor of the exemption.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that she felt like the density cap should be looked at again and encouraged Mr. Alverado to continue to check in with the City to see if a rental license opens up on his block. Mr. Alverado mentioned that his father was a hard worker who used to flip houses in order to receive income and noted that he has experience with taking care of buildings.

Councilmember Buesgens reminded the Council that there have been similar requests made, and an exception was not made in those situations. She added that there could be issues for the City if the previous applicants found out that there was an exception to a similar situation they were in. Providing an exemption would create inconsistency.

Councilmember Spriggs acknowledged Councilmember Buesgens comments and suggested that the Council revisit the policy.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-032, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Sprigs, to adopt Resolution 2026-032, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4033 Washington St NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421. 4 Ayes, 1 Nay, Motion Carried 4-1. Ayes: (Márquez Simula, James, Spriggs and Deneen). Nay: (Buesgens).

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary