



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, November 24, 2025
6:00 PM

Mayor
Amada 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 Monday, November 24, 2025, 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; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Emilie Voight, City resident; Kathy Bennett, City resident; Mary Kunesh, State Senator; Rodney Seifert, City resident; Mark Veronicas, City resident; Nikki Wakal, City resident; Brenna Zeimet, 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 James, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to approve the Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. Native American Heritage Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Senator Mary Kunesh

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed November 2025 as Native American Month and read the City's proclamation.

Senator Kunesh accepted the Proclamation. She thanked the City for the Proclamation and for recognizing the rich heritage of indigenous people. She explained that she is a descendant of the Standing Rock Nation. She noted that this is her fifth year as the City's State Senator and was previously the City's State Representative for four years. She added that she is currently the chair of Education Finance and was a teacher for 25 years. She noted she sits on the Agriculture Veterans Broadband, the Rural Development Committee, the Education Policy Committee, the Environment, Climate, and Legacy Committee, and the Permanent School Fund Commission. She reviewed her leadership roles and noted that she is an Assistant Majority Leader in the Minnesota Senate, the chair of the National Caucus of Native American State Legislatures, and the chair of the Midwestern Legislative Conference.

Senator Kunesh noted that during the past session, they have been focused on issues such as housing. They were able to invest \$3 million in manufactured home infrastructure. She added that they are working on an owner's bill of rights for manufactured home communities.

Senator Kunesh provided an update regarding the 11 Tribal Nations. This year, they invested \$3.5 million in the Indian Scholarship Program and \$3.15 million into the Tribal College Supplemental Assistant Grants. She added that they were able to provide a temporary polling place on tribal land. She reviewed updates regarding education. They enacted the Universal Breakfast and Lunch for all K-12 students. She added that they would continue to invest and support hard-working teachers. There has been an improvement in teachers' pensions. They are continuing to fully fund unemployment insurance for hourly school workers. Accountability has been increased in financial transparency and ethical standards for charter schools and their leaders. She added that they have helped farmers fill the gaps of the federal government cuts. She explained that they have seen the devastating effects of tariffs that have happened, as well as grants that were ignored and unfunded for agricultural workers.

Senator Kunesh noted that there has been a challenge in that the House is tied at 67/67. Two new members were welcomed into the Senate. The DFL has one person to make it the majority.

Senator Kunesh mentioned that they are working to get funds to the City for the new Public Works building. The State invested \$121 million in asset preservation and rehabilitation at Minnesota State colleges and universities. They were able to put \$33 million into DNR asset preservation for State parks and public lands. \$26 million was put into public housing rehabilitation, \$18 million was put into emerging contaminant grant programs, and about \$55 million was put into the Anoka Miller Direct Care and Treatment building. \$3.6 million has gone towards mitigating PFAS in Fridley. \$750,000 was put into library construction grants.

Senator Kunesh stated that the next session would be in the middle of February. It will be a policy year. It will hopefully be a bonding year, so the dollars from taxes could go back into communities to support projects and infrastructure.

Councilmember Buesgens thanked Senator Kunesh for her work.

Senator Kunesh mentioned that there are missing and murdered indigenous relatives license plates. She encouraged the community to get one when they get a new license plate because a vast majority of the dollars for them go to that office. There is a reward fund for any cold cases and current cases.

Mayor Márquez Simula thanked Senator Kunesh for being a partner with the City. She explained that the Public Works building is in dire need of being updated and added that the Council does not want to burden the taxpayers. She added that Senator Kunesh has worked with the City in collaboration.

B. Happy Holidays Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Church of All Nations

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed November 24, 2025, as the beginning of the Holiday Season, and Councilmember Deneen read the City's proclamation.

Church of All Nations accepted the Proclamation. Sanjana Kantayya stated that they celebrate many holidays in the City, which makes the City beautiful. She explained that they pray that during the trying times, people will have the ability to celebrate their sacred times with their family and loved ones. She wished everyone safety, dignity, and true peace. She thanked the Council for the Proclamation.

Mayor Márquez Simula requested to reorder the agenda and have the City Council and Administrative Reports before the Community Forum. The Council agreed.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James stated she attended the Public Safety lunch and the bonding tour with the House Representatives. The Public Safety building is failing and has been repaired many times, and has been evaluated as non-repairable at this point. The project to rebuild the building will be about \$30 million, and the City is asking for about \$14 million. She mentioned that she brought some teens to volunteer at SACA. She mentioned that she attended a town hall meeting at Murzyn Hall. There have been concerns about immigration enforcement. She thanked the community members who have been showing up and showing care. She encouraged the community to reach out to the Council if they have concerns regarding immigration.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that she attended the Public Safety lunch, the Minnesota House bonding tour, the HeightsNext board meeting, the fire relief meeting, the MWMO board meeting, the Metro Council Policy Adoption meeting, and the East African town hall meeting.

Councilmember Deneen noted that she attended the bonding tour with the House members, and she volunteered at Valley View Elementary School with Every Meal. She added that she met with a local community member to discuss careers in local government and city planning for a paper he was writing for college. She noted that she attended a community meetup at Heights Coffee Bar. She stated she attended the town hall with the East African community.

Councilmember Spriggs explained that he attended the Multicultural Advisory Committee, the Council work session, and the fall forum with the League of Minnesota Cities.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that the community has been impacted by immigration enforcement. There have been over 200 children who have been unable to attend school because their families are afraid to leave their homes. She explained that those children are neighbors and deserve safety and stability, and care. She thanked the community for the bravery and solidarity that they have shown and for standing with immigrant neighbors during this time. She encouraged community members to reach out to the Council, and they would do their best to connect people with trusted services and resources. She added that there are many people who care about immigrants.

Report of the City Manager

City Chirpich stated the City offices would be closed on Thursday and Friday in observance of Thanksgiving. The City's newsletter was sent today and should be arriving later this week or early next week. The Columbia Heights Firefighters Association is hosting a pancake breakfast on Sunday, November 30th, from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm at Murzyn Hall. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for ages 4 through 11.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Brenna Zeimet, City resident, stated this morning she was standing with immigrant community members as ICE showed up and was attempting to do raids in the City. She explained that she believed the police's involvement was inappropriate. The police officers were not protecting the citizens. An ICE agent almost ran over a citizen. The police did not deal with the ICE agents and towed a work truck for ICE. The City is a City of immigrants, and families are scared. Police officers were asking community members why they were there and would stop them from talking to other community members. The police were controlling the situation against community members. She noted that the Council needs to have accountability for the police and for the police to be trustworthy.

Nikki Wakal, City resident, expressed her disappointment in the Police Department and how they handled ICE. She explained that she does not appreciate people wearing police vests when they are not police, especially after what happened in the State. An ICE agent almost hit someone with their car. She added that she was sworn at, and a policeman did nothing about it. The police are there to protect the people in the City, and they did nothing. She added that the police towed a vehicle on ICE's orders when they are not supposed to be working with ICE. She explained that it can take years to become a US citizen and cost a lot of money. She added that she had a lot of trust in the Police Department and

thought the immigrant community could too, but the trust dissolved in one day. She asked for accountability from the Council to ensure that the police are trustworthy.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that she would be meeting with the police chief tomorrow to discuss the concerns.

Mark Veronicas, City resident, expressed his concerns regarding parking on Gould Avenue and Peters Place. He noted that in six days of the winter parking restrictions, he had counted 140 cars parked on the street between 2:00 am and 6:00 am. He asked why the winter parking restrictions are not enforced. He asked if the City would enforce winter parking. Mayor Márquez Simula replied that it should be enforced. Mr. Veronicas mentioned that there has been a motorcycle that has been parked on the street since June. He added that with the snow coming, it makes it difficult for plows to get through due to all of the cars parked on the street. Residents could not drive down the street after the April snowstorm. Mayor Márquez Simula replied that it should not be the case. Mr. Veronicas agreed and explained that he hears that every year, yet nothing changes.

Mr. Veronicas asked what the update was regarding the exhaust vent at Ratio. He noted that residents complain about how loud it is. He stated that his decibel meter reads it at 100 decibels. He explained that the City did something to try to fix it this year, but it only made the sound louder. He is concerned that residents' taxes are increasing, and the quality of life is going down.

City Manager Chirpich replied that the City recently received the latest engineering and redesign of the ventilation system, and the engineering team is reviewing it. They are tasked with meeting the required decibel levels per the City Ordinance and State Statute. He noted that the changes they previously made did not work and are in the design phase to correct the issue in the spring when the fans turn back on. He added that the fence was not created for noise mitigation, but it was designed to keep headlights from shining into properties and to create a clear delineation of the City Hall parking area. He expressed his frustration with the fan and added that he is hopeful that the complete redesign of the system could solve the issue.

Kathy Bennett, City resident, stated she lives on Gould Avenue. She noted that the police do not have time to ticket all of the vehicles because they are calling each individual to give them an opportunity to move their car. She expressed concerns that the police are waiting for individuals to move their cars, which is why it is taking so much time. She explained that when cars are parked on both sides of the road, it makes it difficult for snow plows to come through, which causes dangerous roads and cars to slide onto Central Avenue.

Rodney Seifert, City resident, expressed his concerns regarding parking on Gould Avenue. He expressed his concerns that it took one week of the winter parking restrictions being in place before anyone got a ticket. He mentioned he called the police, and an officer said that they could not ticket the vehicle since they did not know who the owner was. The officer said they would chalk the tires. He mentioned that the police are doing courtesy calls. He wondered how people would learn if they were getting away with the behavior. He stated that there needs to be daytime permit parking on Gould Avenue and Peters Place. He mentioned that the library parking area sits empty. He suggested putting the cars that are parked on Gould Avenue and Peters Place in the library parking area. He stated that he feels

that the police are obligated to enforce the City's Ordinances. He noted that someone is telling them not to do it. He mentioned that he would like to hear updates on the parking issue.

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember James highlighted item 5 of the Consent Agenda and noted that it was a competitive bid process. She thanked the Community Development team for writing the grant. She pointed out the senior citizen utility rates and explained that she is glad the City does that.

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

1. **Approve November 10, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to approve the November 10, 2025, City Council meeting minutes.
2. **Approve November 10, 2025, City Council Executive Session Meeting Minutes re City Manager Annual Performance Appraisal.**
MOTION: Move to approve the November 10, 2025, City Council Executive Session meeting minutes to memorialize the completion of City Manager Chirpich's positive performance review with a corresponding 3% merit increase effective June 25, 2025 (\$187,469) and 4% COLA increase effective January 1, 2026, which will result in a salary of \$194,958.40.
3. **Accept October 1, 2025, Library Board Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to accept the October 1, 2025, Library Board meeting minutes.
4. **Cancel the December 22, 2025, City Council Meeting.**
MOTION: Move to cancel the December 22, 2025, Regular City Council Meeting.
5. **Consideration of Resolution 2025-87 for a 2025 Minnesota Housing (MHFA) Local Housing Trust Fund Grant.**
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-87, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to approve Resolution 2025-87, a resolution of the City Council for the City of Columbia Heights, Minnesota, accepting a 2025 Local Housing Trust Fund Grants Program grant from Minnesota Housing.
6. **Consideration of Resolution 2025-88, Updating Income Limit for Senior Citizen Utility Rates.**
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-88, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2025-88, being a resolution updating the income limit for senior citizen utility rates.
7. **4300 Central Avenue – TIF Pledge for General Obligation TIF Revenue Bonds Amended.**
MOTION: Move to approve the pledge agreement between the City of Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority and the City, hereby authorizing the Mayor and City Manager to execute and deliver the Pledge Agreement substantially in the form on file,

providing for the pledge of tax increment derived from property in the TIF District for the payment of the principal of, premium, if any, and interest on the Bond.

8. Approval of Tow Contract Recommendation.

MOTION: Move to authorize the City Manager to enter a contract with Collins Brothers Towing dba Schmit Towing, Inc. for towing, impounding, and storage of motor vehicles as specified in the City's Request. The term of this contract is to be January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2030.

9. License Agenda.

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed on the business license agenda for November 24, 2025, as presented.

10. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval.

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for November 24, 2025, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

11. Review of Bills.

MOTION: Move that in accordance with Minnesota Statute 412.271, subd. 8 the City Council has reviewed the enclosed list to claims paid by check and by electronic funds transfer in the amount of \$1,118,372.76.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinances and Resolutions

12. Second Reading of Ordinance 1720, Being an Ordinance Amending Chapter 5.3 of the Columbia Heights City Code.

Presented by Community Development Coordinator Emilie Voight.

Community Development Coordinator Voight stated at the November 10, 2025, City Council meeting, the Columbia Heights City Council reviewed Ordinance 1720 and set the second reading for November 24, 2025. If approved, the bulk of the Ordinance will go into effect on July 1, 2026. Two provisions of the Ordinance, as listed below and as explicitly specified in the draft Ordinance language, will have later effective dates.

Community Development Coordinator Voight noted that Ordinance 1720 amends Chapter 5.3 of the City Code and incorporates the following policy initiatives:

- Ends the sale of flavored products in tobacco product shops, effective January 1, 2028 (note: the sale of flavored products by accessory tobacco retailers is already prohibited);
- Reduces the number of tobacco product shop licenses to zero through attrition;

- A one-time succession allowance is provided for tobacco product shops duly licensed as of December 31, 2025, that sell or transfer ownership of their shop to a new owner on or before January 1, 2028;
- Eliminates price discounting by:
 - Restricting the use of coupons and discounts; and
 - Setting minimum prices and package sizes for tobacco products, including electronic delivery devices such as vapes;
- Increases penalties and fines for sales violations by licensees; and
- Removes Purchase, Use, and Possession (PUP) penalties.

Community Development Coordinator Voight stated in addition to these policy updates, Ordinance 1720 adds a definition and a licensing process for “accessory tobacco retailer.” The accessory tobacco retailer category already makes up the majority of Columbia Heights’ tobacco licensees, but there is no clear definition of this category in the City Code. The new definition specifies that in order to qualify for an accessory tobacco retailer license, a retail establishment must derive no more than 45% of its gross revenues from the sale of licensed products.

Councilmember Deneen thanked staff for incorporating the discussion and changes from the Council into the proposed Ordinance.

Councilmember Spriggs noted that overall, it is a great policy and will help the overall health of the public. He stated that putting the flavor ban 25 months out is too far. He expressed his understanding of business owners needing to get new products. He proposed six months to one year to implement the flavor ban. He added that 25 months is allowing more people to purchase the products and get addicted to them. He stated he would ultimately vote in favor of the Ordinance since it is important to move forward with.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to waive the reading of Ordinance No. 1720, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to approve the second reading of Ordinance No. 1720, being an ordinance amending Chapter 5.3 of the Columbia Heights City Code, and to direct staff to send the summary ordinance for publication in the legal newspaper with the amendment to move the start date for the flavor ban and the transfer of ownership to January 01, 2027.

Councilmember James explained that the report that staff provided did not have anything about just tobacco businesses. The report was about stores that have other products as well. Ideally, the entire Ordinance would go into effect for places that are not just tobacco stores. She explained that she does not understand why the Ordinance cannot be applied to just tobacco or convenience stores. Community Development Director Forney replied that convenience stores are not allowed to sell flavored products at this time. The flavor ban is just for tobacco shops. Staff would like consistency for the enforcement of tobacco shops and convenience stores.

Councilmember Deneen expressed her understanding regarding Councilmember Spriggs' comments regarding shortening the time of implementation. She explained that her issue is that local business owners have been running legal businesses for a number of years. She stated she wants the ban to move forward in the most kind and equitable way possible and to allow time for business owners to change their business model. She added that she did not think shortening the time would have as big an impact as they would hope to see. She stated she would vote in favor of the original proposed Ordinance.

Councilmember Spriggs noted that his concern is that more people will get more hooked on the flavored products as long as they are available. The business owners are selling products legally, but it is an addictive and has harmful chemicals. Business owners are aware of the kinds of products they are selling. The closer implementation date would be best for everyone. The goal is not to have the products be easily accessible.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that it weighs on her to think about an additional year being given for businesses since she thinks about those who could be addicted and business owners, and how they would be affected. She stated she would vote against the amended Ordinance in order to be equitable to business owners.

2 Ayes, 3 Nays, Motion Failed 2-3. Ayes: Spriggs, Buesgens. Nays: Márquez Simula, James, Deneen.

Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve the second reading of Ordinance No. 1720, being an ordinance amending Chapter 5.3 of the Columbia Heights City Code, and to direct staff to send the summary ordinance for publication in the legal newspaper.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that the cities that had shorter implementation dates had given businesses a heads-up. The City gave businesses a 30-day notice, which did not give them enough time.

All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

13. Consideration of Resolution 2025-84, Approving a Fourth Amended Loan Agreement and Related Documents for the 4300 Central Avenue NE Redevelopment Site.

Presented by Community Development Director Mitch Forney.

Community Development Director Forney stated in July 2021, the City partnered with Alatus LLC to acquire the priority redevelopment site at 4300 Central Avenue NE. To facilitate the acquisition and preparation of the property, the City provided a bridge loan that allowed Alatus to purchase the property, demolish the existing buildings, and complete environmental testing and clearance activities. To fund the loan, the City issued Taxable General Obligation Temporary Tax Increment Bonds, Series 2021A, in the amount of \$5,935,000.

Community Development Director Forney noted that in May 2023, the City extended the loan maturity date to December 15, 2023, to allow additional time for Alatus to secure permanent financing for Phase I of the project. When it became apparent that additional time was still needed, the City, working with its financial consultant Ehlers and legal counsel Kennedy & Graven, issued Taxable General Obligation Temporary Tax Increment Bonds, Series 2023A, in the amount of \$6,615,000. The proceeds were used to refund the Series 2021A bonds and issue a new loan to Alatus, extending the repayment period. In July 2025, the City extended the loan maturity date to December 15, 2025, to allow additional time for Alatus and the City to explore options for the payment of the Series 2023A bonds. The 2023A bonds are currently set to mature on February 1, 2026.

Community Development Director Forney stated that as the City approaches the 2026 bond maturity date, Alatus has not yet secured permanent financing and continues to work with the City to advance project planning. The City Council is expected to review the latest project concepts and discuss the proposed scope at its December 2025 work session. To allow additional time for Alatus to continue development activities and finalize permanent financing, staff are proposing to reissue a new series of general obligation bonds in January 2026 to pay off the existing 2023A bonds and extend the loan term. As part of this process, the City must amend and restate the existing loan agreement with Alatus to align with the new bond issuance and updated repayment timeline.

Community Development Director Forney explained that the amended loan agreement will maintain substantially the same terms as the prior agreement, with one notable change: the City will be issuing permanent bonds rather than temporary bonds, as has been done in previous cycles. The new loan to Alatus will extend through December 15, 2028. Interest payments will be covered by bond proceeds for the first three years; thereafter, repayment will either occur through Alatus's permanent financing or, if that has not yet occurred, the City will be responsible for covering the bond payments. After approval of the amended and restated loan documents. The Council is then expected to authorize the bond sale at its December 8th meeting, with final bond approval anticipated at the first Council meeting in January 2026.

Community Development Director Forney stated staff recommends approval of Resolution 2025-84, a resolution approving the amended and restated loan agreement with Alatus LLC, reflecting the continuation of the City's interim financing structure through the issuance of new general obligation tax increment bonds. This amendment will provide the City and Alatus with the additional time needed to advance the development plans for the site and secure permanent financing for Phase I of the redevelopment project.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-84, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve Resolution 2025-84, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights

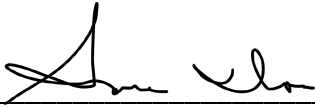
approving modification of certain terms of a loan from the City to Alatus Columbia Heights II LLC and approving forms of fourth amended and restated loan documents. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:28 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary