



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, September 22, 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, September 22, 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; Joe Kloiber, Finance Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Fire Captain Emily Kosman; Travis Scott, Assistant City Attorney; Rochelle Widmer, City Engineer; Kevin Centeno, Columbia Heights Public School teacher; Amanda Fulk; Nely Gutierrez, City resident; Alexandra House Representative; Anna Margl, Vice President of Polish American Cultural Institute of Minnesota (PACIM); Leueen Saavedra, Columbia Heights School District employee.

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. Fire Prevention and Awareness Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: City of Columbia Heights Fire Department Captain Emily Kosman, Assistant Fire Chief Brad Roddy, and Fire Chief Dan O'Brien.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed October 05-11, 2025, as Fire Prevention Week, and Councilmember Spriggs read the City's proclamation.

Fire Captain Kosman accepted the Proclamation. She mentioned that there had been a fire recently due to a lithium battery. She noted that the Fire Department is committed to informing the population that lithium batteries can cause fires. She thanked the Council.

Márquez Simula asked if the Fire Department was doing an open house in the fall. Fire Captain Kosman replied that there would be an open house at the Fire Station on October 11th from 11:00 am until 2:00 pm. She invited the community to attend and mentioned that there would be activities for everyone.

B. Domestic Violence Awareness Month Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Amanda Fulk, Alexandra House.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed October 2025 as Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and Councilmember James read the City's proclamation.

Alexandra House Representative Amanda Fulk accepted the Proclamation. She thanked the Council for the recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month and for their steadfast support. She expressed her gratitude for the Council's leadership and dedication to ending domestic violence. Sadly, partner violence remains a widespread issue. In 2024, there were at least 24 domestic-related homicides in Minnesota. Tragically, 17 lives have already been lost to domestic violence this year. Last year, over 2,500 incidents were reported to law enforcement entities in Anoka County that involved a domestic partner. Change is possible, and it requires everyone. She mentioned a way to take action is by displaying a domestic violence awareness month sign, illuminating homes in purple, and engaging in conversations about domestic violence. She added that in order to show solidarity, people can wear purple on Purple Thursday on October 23rd. She stated that HopeFest is an event that will take place on Saturday. To learn more about HopeFest and the Alexandra House domestic violence initiatives, people can visit alexandrahouse.org. She thanked the Council for its partnership and leadership.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that the Police Department and the School District work with Alexandra House.

C. Polish American Heritage Month Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Anna Margl, Vice President, Polish American Cultural Institute of Minnesota (PACIM).

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed October 2025 as Polish American Heritage Month and read the City's proclamation.

Vice President of Polish American Cultural Institute of Minnesota (PACIM) Anna Margl accepted the Proclamation. She thanked the Council for the Proclamation and for the

honor and recognition of the Polish People, and their heritage. She added she is proud to be a part of Columbia Heights. Many people from Poland came to Minneapolis during the 19th and 20th centuries. She thanked the Council and the United States.

D. Latine Heritage Month Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Kevin Centeno, Leueen Saavedra, Nely Gutierrez.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed September 15, 2025 – October 15, 2025, as Latine Heritage Month and read the City’s proclamation.

Nely Gutierrez, City resident, stated that she is proud to be a part of the City and thanked the Council for having her there.

Kevin Centeno, Columbia Heights Public School teacher, explained that it is an honor to receive the Proclamation and have the month acknowledged for those who may not have a voice. He expressed his gratitude for the community in Columbia Heights.

Leueen Saavedra mentioned she works at the placement center in Columbia Heights. She thanked the Council. She thanked Mayor Márquez Simula for her help with Latino families in the school district. She added that she is in charge of enrolling kids into the school district. She noted that it is an honor to enroll kids and to work with the Columbia Heights School District. The Latino families feel welcomed in the City. She expressed her appreciation for the Council and the work they do for the students and families.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked Mr. Centeno to give an update on the soccer field. Mr. Centeno explained that soccer is one of the top sports in the world. People do not need to speak the same language to play soccer. He noted that people will use different items as goals if they do not have soccer nets. He explained that the City is putting in a soccer field, and it will be a way to welcome in families. Mayor Márquez Simula added that the soccer field has been a bridge with the Somali community as well.

E. Pedestrian Safety Month (Walktober) Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Columbia Heights Active Agers

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed October 2025 as “Walktober” and Pedestrian Safety Month, and Councilmember Deneen read the City’s proclamation.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that there was no one present to accept the Proclamation, but the Council would be sharing the Proclamation with the seniors at Murzyn Hall because they have a senior walking group.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James stated that she attended the Sustainability Commission. She invited the community to the energy action team kickoff event on October 15th at City Hall. She noted that she attended the retirement party for the former Public Works Director, Kevin Hansen. She mentioned that she volunteered at the Pride Festival and congratulated the Pride Committee. She stated she attended the Home Ownership event on September 16th and volunteered with the League of Women Voters to do voter registration. She added that she attended the Hylander Days Sports at the High School. She mentioned that she toured the Habitat for Humanity House that was approved by the EDA. The fall Central Avenue clean-up event will be on October 11th. This Friday is homecoming for the High School.

Councilmember Buesgens noted that she attended the MWMO Board meeting and is volunteering at the Blooming Sunshine Garden. She added that she attended Kevin Hansen's retirement party and the League of Women Voters meeting. She mentioned that she attended the swearing-in ceremony for the new police officers and the 3rd annual VFW ribfest.

Councilmember Deneen stated she volunteered at the Columbia Heights Pride Festival. She added that she attended the SPAR Home Ownership Resource meeting and a tour of the new Habitat for Humanity home. She wished Kevin Hansen well in his retirement.

Councilmember Spriggs mentioned that he attended the Hylander football team's first game and the Multicultural Advisory Committee meeting. He explained that he has been working with an opioid reduction specialist through Anoka County to see what they could do in the City to reduce the prevalence of opioids and their side effects. He mentioned that flu and COVID-19 vaccines are available for people.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated she joined LíderCon, which is a Latino leadership convention. She thanked the Library for hosting its Great North Star read event. She congratulated Sergeant Farah on his promotion. She mentioned that she attended the finale for Downton Abbey at Heights Theater. She noted that she was honored to speak at the Metropolitan Council's panel about the importance of planning for the future. She spoke with Representative Koegel to discuss business opportunities in the City and the State's support. She stated she attended the Stories in Our Neighborhood event, the Operation Pollination meeting, and the Community Picnic.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich mentioned that the homeownership event was in English and Spanish and was recorded. The recordings can be found on the City's YouTube channel. The e-newsletter went out last week. He encouraged community members to register to receive the e-newsletter by going to the City's website. On Wednesday, September 24, from 6:00-7:30 pm, there will be an open house regarding the future improvements at Sullivan Lake Park and will be hosted at Sullivan Lake Park. On Thursday, September 25th from 6:00-7:00 pm, the City is hosting an open house dedicated to the development of the soccer field and will be hosted at City Hall. There is a short survey available to provide feedback on the soccer fields, which can be found on the City's website and Facebook page. The City will be creating an online survey tool for the Sullivan Lake Park improvements.

6. City Manager's Response to September 8, 2025, Community Forum.

City Manager Chirpich mentioned that there was a resident who was asking about the potential installation of a crosswalk at 37th Place and Stinson Boulevard NE. The Engineering Department is looking into it. When considering a crosswalk, the Engineering Department refers to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices. It is recommended that a study be conducted to look at a variety of elements. The Engineering Department is proposing to install a camera in the intersection to understand what pedestrian activity is taking place in the area. After they study the area, they will make recommendations. The City is only in control of half of the street and would need some collaboration with St. Anthony.

COMMUNITY FORUM

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember Buesgens requested to pull item 6, "Award of Professional Services for Sullivan Lake Park," from the Consent Agenda. Mayor Márquez Simula asked Councilmember Buesgens if she wanted to pull the item for a separate vote, or if she would like to have the City Manager provide additional details on item 6 while reviewing the items.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she would like City Manager Chirpich to provide additional detail for item 6 and would not need to pull the item for a separate vote.

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

1. Approve September 8, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes.

MOTION: Move to approve the September 8, 2025, City Council meeting minutes.

2. Accept August 4th, 2025, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.

MOTION: Move to accept the August 4th, 2025, EDA meeting minutes.

3. Adopt Resolution 2025-72, Being a Resolution Establishing Amount of City Share and Amount of Special Assessments on Projects to Be Levied.

Mayor Márquez Simula clarified that the price for the alley would not increase. City Manager Chirpich agreed and mentioned that there was an amount that could not be exceeded for assessments earlier in the year.

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-72, there being ample copies available for the public.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2025-72 being a resolution establishing amount of City share and amount of special assessments on projects to be levied.

4. Adopt Resolution 2025-75 Approving the 2025 Community Development Fee Schedule Amendments.

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-075, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to approve Resolution 2025-075, a resolution amending the 2024 Community Development fee schedule

5. Approval of Resolution 2025-76, Renewing Legislative Service Agreement with Lockridge, Grindal and Nauen P.L.L.P.

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-76, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to approve Resolution 2025-76, a resolution of the City Council for the City of Columbia Heights approving legislative service agreement with Lockridge, Grindal and Nauen P.L.L.P.

6. Award of Professional Services for Sullivan Lake Park.

City Manager Chirpich explained that the contract with ISG provides for taking the City through the process that would lead to construction with the next phase of work. The items that are included in the scope of work are: master planning and community engagement for Sullivan Lake Park, meetings with City staff, design of the park amenities, and bidding for the park amenities. ISG will attend future Parks and Recreation Commission meetings and meetings with the City Council. ISG will provide a survey for site plan prep, minimum geotechnical work, coordinate permitting with the DNR, develop preliminary and final plans, provide cost estimates, and coordinate the redevelopment of Sullivan Lake Park.

City Manager Chirpich noted that the request is for the Council to authorize 50% of the contract cost with ISG. ISG is proposing the work for \$64,900. The City received a grant from the DNR and Anoka County through the Community Development Block Grant program. It is a 50/50 match, so the City will split the costs of everything as they move forward. The Council would approve a cost not to exceed \$35,000. 50% is grant-funded. The estimated total redevelopment cost for the park is \$750,000. The playground will need to be replaced to make room for the fitness court.

Councilmember Buesgens asked how much the trails would cost. City Manager Chirpich replied that the effort did not include the trail system around the entire lake. The trails that would be focused on would be trails that are within the park boundaries.

MOTION: Move to award the Sullivan Lake Park Improvements, City Project No.2512, to the consulting firm of ISG based upon their qualified, responsible proposal for a cost not-to-exceed \$35,000 appropriated from Fund 412-2512-43050

7. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval.

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for September 22, 2025, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

8. 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 \$1,212,809.71.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinances and Resolutions

9. Resolution 2025-68 Adopting A Proposed Budget For The Year 2025, Setting The Proposed City Levy, Approving The HRA Levy, Approving A Tax Rate Increase, And Establishing A Budget Hearing Date For Property Taxes Payable In 2025.

Presented by Finance Director Joe Kloiber.

Finance Director Kloiber stated that six months ago, staff began the internal portion of preparing and compiling the 2026 budget. During the August 25th meeting, the public portion of the budget process began with the City Manager's proposed 2026 budget. The document is available on the City's website. He explained that they are in the Truth and Taxation process. If the Council adopts the Resolution, then Anoka County will prepare the Truth and Taxation statements that get mailed to each property owner in the City. The statement will list what their proposed property tax will be for 2026. He summarized that 2026 results in an average of an 8.2% increase to the local taxpayer. The City will receive a 9.2% increase because of an increase in the fiscal disparities subsidy provided by taxpayers outside of Columbia Heights.

Finance Director Kloiber mentioned that a new policy this year is \$600,000 proposed as a property tax levy used for street reconstruction. While it will increase taxes in the short term, in the long term, it is a relatively neutral item for the property owner because it would be paid as a special assessment or a tax. The City has some significant expenditures beyond 2026, including the reconstruction of the Public Works Building and the reconstruction of Central Avenue. Instead of having large tax increases in the future, the City will increase taxes slowly so that it is easier for residents and homeowners to gradually prepare and budget for.

Councilmember James expressed her excitement about the change to fund street work through general property taxes, so that it is more equitable and more predictable for the City. She added that it will save the City money so that it does not have to administer an expensive program to collect taxes.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to waive the reading of Resolution 2025-68, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to adopt Resolution 2025-68, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights adopting a proposed budget for the year 2026, setting the proposed city levy, approving the HRA levy, approving a tax rate increase, and establishing a budget hearing date for property taxes payable in 2026 of December 8, 2025, at approximately 6:00 p.m. in the City Council Chambers. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Bid Considerations

10. **Accept bids and Award of Contract for 2025 Sanitary Sewer Lining.**

Presented by City Engineer Rochelle Widmer.

City Engineer Widmer stated that the City received four bids for the 2025 sanitary sewer line project. The low bid was submitted by Insituform Technologies, LLC of Chesterfield, MO in the amount of \$439,789.05 and is consistent with the Engineer's estimate of \$440,000. Sanitary sewer lining is an annual program in the City and typically utilizes \$150,000-\$200,000 each year. The 2025 project is a larger program due to the federal grant received by the City, thanks to the efforts of Representative Omar for an up to \$400,000 grant. The grant is an 80/20 split, with the funding for the City's 20% cost share coming from the sanitary sewer construction fund. Construction is scheduled between late fall of 2025 and early spring of 2026.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to accept bids and award the contract for Sanitary Sewer Lining, City Project 2504-B, to Insituform Technologies based upon their low, qualified, responsible bid in the amount of \$439,789.05 with funds to be appropriated from Fund 652.9999.45185.2504, and, furthermore, to authorize the Mayor and City Manager to enter into a contract for the same. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary