SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Tuesday, November 10, 2026
6:00 PM

AGENDA

ATTENDANCE INFORMATION FOR THE PUBLIC

*Members of the public who wish to attend may do so in-person, or by using Microsoft Teams Meeting at columbiaheightsmn.gov/joinameeting: ID **263 719 223 297 785 4**, Passcode **yj2vQ3aM**. For questions, please contact Administration at 763-706-3610.*

Auxiliary aids or other accommodations for individuals with disabilities are available upon request when the request is made at least 72 hours in advance. Please contact Administration at 763-706-3610 to make arrangements.

COMMUNITY FORUM: At this time, individuals may address the Sustainability Commission about any item not included on the regular agenda. All speakers need to state their name and connection to Columbia Heights, and limit their comments to five (5) minutes. Those in attendance virtually should send this information in the chat function to the moderator. The Commission will listen to brief remarks, ask clarifying questions, and if needed, request staff to follow up or direct the matter to be added to an upcoming agenda.

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve the October 14 Regular Commission Meeting Minutes.
   MOTION: Move to approve the Consent Agenda as presented.

BUSINESS ITEMS

2. **IT Department Sustainability Initiatives**
   Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
   Discussion of Sustainable practices in the Columbia Heights IT Department

3. **Comprehensive Plan Update and Discussion**
   Presenting Item: HKGI Consultants

BUSINESS UPDATES

Staff Updates
Subcommittee Updates
Commissioner Updates
Planning and Coordination

ADJOURNMENT

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SUSTAINABILITY COMMISSION

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Wednesday, October 14, 2026
6:00 PM

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL
The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Jensen Christen at 6:04 p.m.

Members present: Commissioners Carlson, Jensen Christen, LaPlante, Leoni-Helbacka, Matson-Brady, Nelson

Staff present: Liam Genter, City Forester/Natural Resources Specialist
Maya Wellendorf, GreenCorps Member

Members absent: Commissioner Small

Council Liaison: None present.

COMMUNITY FORUM
No community members were present.

CONSENT AGENDA

1. **Approve the September 9, 2026, Regular Sustainability Commission Meeting Minutes**

   Chairperson Jensen Christen noted that a sentence under the Subcommittee Updates section of the meeting minutes was unfinished. Forester Genter noted the mistake and stated that he would review the meeting video and correct the error.

   MOTION: Move to approve the Consent Agenda with the suggested edits.
   Motion to approve by Commissioner LaPlante, seconded by Commissioner Nelson. The motion was approved unanimously.

BUSINESS ITEMS

2. **Introduction of New Green Corps Member (Maya Wellendorf) and Youth Commissioner (Me'Shulon Langley)**

   Maya Wellendorf, a new GreenCorps Member who will be working with the City, introduced herself to the Sustainability Commission. GreenCorps Member Wellendorf recently graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management. Wellendorf said that she would be continuing many of the projects started by her predecessor, GreenCorps Member Zekima Rashid. Some of the projects include continuing to work with Partners in Energy to execute the Energy Action Plan, working on implementation

of the recently passed Sustainable Purchasing Policy, reaching GreenStep Cities Step 4 status, energy benchmarking, and a variety of other projects. The Commissioners introduced themselves to GreenCorps Member Wellendorf and described their backgrounds and their time serving on the Commission.

Youth Commissioner Langley was not present at the meeting.

3. Sustainability Commission Work Plan
Review Commission Work Plan with GreenCorps Member

Commissioner LaPlante, Jensen Christen, and Leoni-Helbacka described the work of the Commission over the last 3 years, including GreenStep Cities Step 3, the Complete Streets Policy, the Partners in Energy Action Plan development and kickoff, MDA Invasive Species grant and volunteer events, and the development and adoption of a Sustainable Purchasing Policy. Commissioner Carlson described the goal-setting session that the commission held earlier in 2026 and the goals that the Commission had developed for the near future. Commissioners described the sustainable topics forum series, Clean Energy Response Team (CERTS) certification, Mayor's Monarch Pledge, and other ongoing projects. The Commissioners described the various subcommittees and their past and current activities for GreenCorps Member Wellendorf. Wellendorf thanked the Commissioners for describing their activities chronologically and said that it was very helpful to have the context and details.

4. Climate Resiliency Hubs
Continued discussion about Climate Resiliency Hubs

Commissioner Leoni-Helbacka said that the goal of the discussion was to develop resources for residents during climate related emergencies including extreme heat, cold, storms, wildfire smoke, and others. Leoni-Helbacka said that other communities have successfully developed hubs or locations for residents to go to during climate events, including North Minneapolis. Commissioner LaPlante started the discussion by asking the group what the scope of their efforts should be regarding the development of local climate resilience hubs. LaPlante said that the development of resilience hubs, depending on their form and scope, could require funding and staffing. LaPlante also said that government owned buildings may be places that people are not comfortable utilizing, and that resilience hubs are often more successful when a non-government location like a place of worship is used. LaPlante said that resilience hubs can be full-time facilities or activated based upon weather conditions or events. Commissioner Nelson said that involving the City Council immediately would be the best way to proceed as a first step. Nelson suggested that the City Council and staff should be engaged before the Commission completed too much work on resilience hubs to avoid repeating efforts and unnecessary work. Chairperson Jensen Christen agreed and said that bringing the issue to the City Council would open the topic up for public commentary and engagement at an early stage. Commissioner Nelson asked if a survey would be possible to gauge the interest level of various groups within the community. Commissioner LaPlante said that engaging the library would be important as they already serve as a de facto resilience hub. Commissioner Carlson told the

group about available free webinars about developing community climate resilience hubs and said he would share the link in the Commission's Teams channel. Commissioner Matson Brady asked if the Commission had ever taken on a project of this scope. Commissioner LaPlante said that this would be the largest project undertaken by the Commission to date. Commissioner Leoni-Helbacka added that it would require more guidance and structure from City Staff than any previous Commission projects. Forester Genter agreed that the best first step would be to engage the City Council with a formal letter from the Commission recommending that the City explore the development of Climate Resilience Hubs. Commissioner Nelson asked Forester Genter what the timeline was for budget development at the City. Forester Genter replied that budgeting was a year-long process which starts very early each year. Though the City Council usually approves the budget in December of each year, City Staff finish their budgets preliminarily much earlier in the year. Commissioner LaPlante described her attendance at the previous City Council Work Session and said that it was very informative to see the budget presentations by half of the City departments. Commissioner LaPlante described a guiding background document that she had put together and put on the Commission Teams channel. LaPlante described some of the most comprehensive climate resilience hubs and the services that they provide and described the potential scope of hubs in Columbia Heights. Commissioner Matson Brady said that in her opinion the best approach was to start small and look to scale up over time. Commissioner Nelson said that she agreed and thought the Commission should rank the different types of climate emergencies and work on providing resources for the highest priority type of events first. Chairperson Jensen Christen said that initially focusing on day-long hubs and gauging community needs and interest was the best first step. She agreed that describing and ranking the various types of climate emergencies was important and advocated for focusing initially on reprieve from wildfire related poor air quality and extreme heat events. Forester Genter said that a thorough inventory of existing resources should also be taken and mentioned City Hall, the library, Murzyn Hall, and other public buildings as potential existing resources. Commissioner LaPlante described the various stakeholders that should be part of developing resilience hubs including religious organizations, community leaders, city staff, local business owners, school district, and residents at large. LaPlante walked the Commissioners through the remainder of the guidance document and described some of the common challenges. LaPlante asked that the commissioners thoroughly read and edit the document before the next Commission meeting. LaPlante suggested the December City Council Work Session as a potential target for initial discussions with the City Council, with January as a backup.

5. Sustainability Page on City Webpage

Discussion of updates to Sustainability page on City website

Commissioner Carlson described efforts that had been made to date to create a Sustainability FAQ document with resources for residents on the Sustainability Commission website. Carlson said that the document was extremely information and link-dense and may conflict with the prevailing aesthetic on the city website. Carlson asked if the Commissioners had thoughts on how to present the document or formatting. Commissioner Nelson asked if changes to the website formatting were related to accessibility issues. Commissioner Carlson said that gathering all the resources into a single spreadsheet which is linked to from the website would help to clear things up and streamline the resource page. Carlson also said that the Commission

would need to make clear that the City was not endorsing and private businesses referenced in the resources. Commissioner LaPlante suggested gauging the interest of the City's communications staff and getting more explicit formatting directions before doing too much additional work on the sustainability resource hubs.

BUSINESS UPDATES

Staff Updates

Forester Genter related that Refuse and Recycling Coordinator Jesse Davies had asked him to let the Commission know that the updated Solid Waste Operating Policy would be going before the City Council for review at the December 7 work session, and that any commissioners interested in attending the MN Re-use conference at the end of the month should contact Jesse directly.

Forester Genter told the Commission that tree planting was underway and about halfway completed for the year.

Subcommittee Updates

Commissioner Leoni-Helbacka related that the Invasive Species subcommittee had hosted the final volunteer event of the year the previous Sunday at LaBelle Park. The event had several volunteers and included planting native shrubs to replace the removed plants. The native shrubs planted included black chokeberry, regent serviceberry, gray dogwood, and dwarf honeysuckle.

Commissioner Nelson provided updates about the Monarch Pledge subcommittee activities, including some issues with reporting previous years' activities.

Commissioner LaPlante related that the costume swap was a success and that Molly had completed the reporting for the CERTS program. LaPlante also related that the Truck or Treat event was coming up later this week, and that she was going to attend. GreenCorps Member Wellendorf said that she would be attending as well.

Commissioner Updates

Commissioner Matson Brady said that she would be travelling next month and unable to attend the meeting.

Commissioner Nelson reminded the commissioners that Vice-chairperson Coveyou had resigned from the Commission and had not yet been replaced. Commissioner LaPlante made a motion to nominate Commissioner Nelson to be the Vice-chairperson of the Commission. The motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: Move to nominate Commissioner Molly Nelson to be the Vice-chairperson of the Sustainability Commission.

Motion to approve by Chairperson Jensen Christen, seconded by Commissioner LaPlante. The motion was approved unanimously

Planning and Coordination

ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Jensen Christen made a motion to adjourn, and Commissioner Leoni-Helbacka seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Liam Genter
City Forester/Natural Resources Specialist

Memorandum

Planning | Landscape Architecture | Urban Design

To: Columbia Heights Sustainability Commission

From: Kendra Ellner and Ryan Kadet, Consulting Planners

Subject: 2050 Columbia Heights Comprehensive Plan Project Update

Meeting Date: November 10, 2026

Project Overview

Since April 2026, Planning staff and HKGi have been working collaboratively through initial milestones of the planning process for the 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update. Activities have included community engagement and direction for key topics in the draft plan informed by City staff and stakeholder meetings. The key direction topics within the 2050 Comprehensive Plan Update that most directly align with the work of the Sustainability Commission are the Climate and Natural Systems chapters. These are new plan elements required as part of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan and will need to be thoughtfully integrated into the City's updated policy framework, goals, and implementation strategies. This memorandum serves as a brief project update in preparation for the presentation at the meeting where these topics will be discussed in more depth and opportunities for your feedback will be requested.

Round 1 Community Engagement Efforts

A Comprehensive Plan is intended to be a community-driven document that reflects the current and future needs, priorities, and vision of the community. To date, the project has primarily focused on round 1 of the engagement process, which was designed to identify a broad range of current issues, opportunities, and community perspectives.

The approach to community engagement includes project information and engagement activities hosted on an online engagement platform that is accessible from the City website. Participants were able to provide feedback through an interactive mapping exercise and complete a community survey. Project promotion has included yard signs placed throughout the community, social media posts, news blasts, postcards and other printed materials designed to increase public awareness and participation. The print materials have been available in both English and Spanish. The online engagement platform offers translation services to the users' preferred language.

The consultant team has also coordinated closely with the City's Park System Plan consultant, Mend, to maximize outreach opportunities through shared community events and online engagement efforts. Feedback and engagement results have been exchanged between the project teams to support a coordinated planning approach and help inform both initiatives.

Round 1 community engagement efforts concluded in September, and the attached engagement summary handout has been prepared to report back and distill the feedback from participants. Feedback gathered from this phase will establish the foundation for the 2050 Comprehensive Plan and guide the development of future goals, policies, and implementation strategies.

800 Washington Avenue North, Suite 207
Minneapolis, MN 55401

Key Directions for the 2050 Plan Update Process

Key directions are important topic focus areas that guide and frame the plan update in a way that is tailored to the City's goals and policy interests. They are used as tools to aide in prioritization of activities and effective implementation of the Plan. As a requirement from the Metropolitan Council, two new elements have been added to be part of the 2050 Comprehensive Plans: Climate and Natural Systems. During the meeting you will have the opportunity to advise on key directions for these elements.

Climate & Natural Systems Planning

The Climate element is intended to create local alignment with the regional goal of mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting communities to climate impacts. This includes inventorying of greenhouse gas emissions and identification of emission reduction strategies. It also addresses vulnerabilities to climate hazards – extreme heat and localized flooding – and identifies strategies for mitigation and adaptation. This element also addresses improving local food systems.

The Natural Systems element identifies opportunities to protect, restore, and enhance natural systems and creates a framework to integrate these opportunities into future city development. This includes mapping terrestrial and aquatic systems, commonly protected areas, and ecologically significant and sensitive areas to identify the City's primary opportunity areas for protection and improvement.

At the meeting there will be an interactive component for you to provide your feedback to prioritize strategies that will meet the minimum requirements, are a good fit for Columbia Heights, and will have support for implementation after the Comprehensive Plan is complete. The intent of this discussion is to refine the list of possible strategies that will be presented to the public as part of future rounds of engagement. Strategies will be identified for each of the following categories:

- Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction
  - Energy Use (Residential and Non-residential)
  - Transportation
  - Solid Waste
- Climate Adaptation
  - Extreme Heat
  - Localized Flooding
  - Local Food Systems
- Natural Systems Protection & Improvement

Next Steps

Over the next few months the consulting team will be consolidating all the information and feedback received from stakeholder groups including the Sustainability Commission to frame elements in the plan. Following completion of round 1 community engagement and the focused stakeholder discussions, HKGi will provide another project update to the Council in early 2027. This update will summarize the community engagement findings, highlight all the key policy directions, and present preliminary recommendations for the 2050 Comprehensive Plan.

Attachments

1. Community Engagement Summary Handout

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

The City of Columbia Heights conducted Phase 1 of community engagement from June to September 2026 for the 2050 Comprehensive Plan update. Engagement activities included in-person events, online survey and an interactive map. Phase 1 community engagement focused on taking the pulse of the community by asking residents to share broadly about their current perspectives of the City and aspirations for the future.

Who we heard from

- Over 70 residents at in-person pop up events:
  - » Jamboree at Huset Park
  - » Monarch Festival at Kodiak Park
  - » Art and Info Fair at Huset Park
- Online engagement
  - » Online Survey: 584 comments from >200 respondents
  - » Interactive Map: 425 pins from >100 respondents





Over 1,000 total comments!

What We Heard

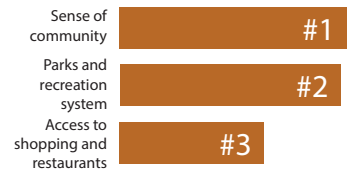
Community comments shared in person and online provided insight that will inform different sections of the 2050 Comprehensive Plan.

All responses were categorized by themes. The charts below summarize and rank the most common responses based on the relevant Comprehensive Plan topics, City's most valued aspects, and anticipated future challenges.

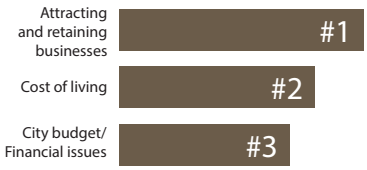
Top Responses by Planning Topic



Most Valued City Aspects



Upcoming Challenges



Columbia Heights' Greatest Asset



ON THE MAP

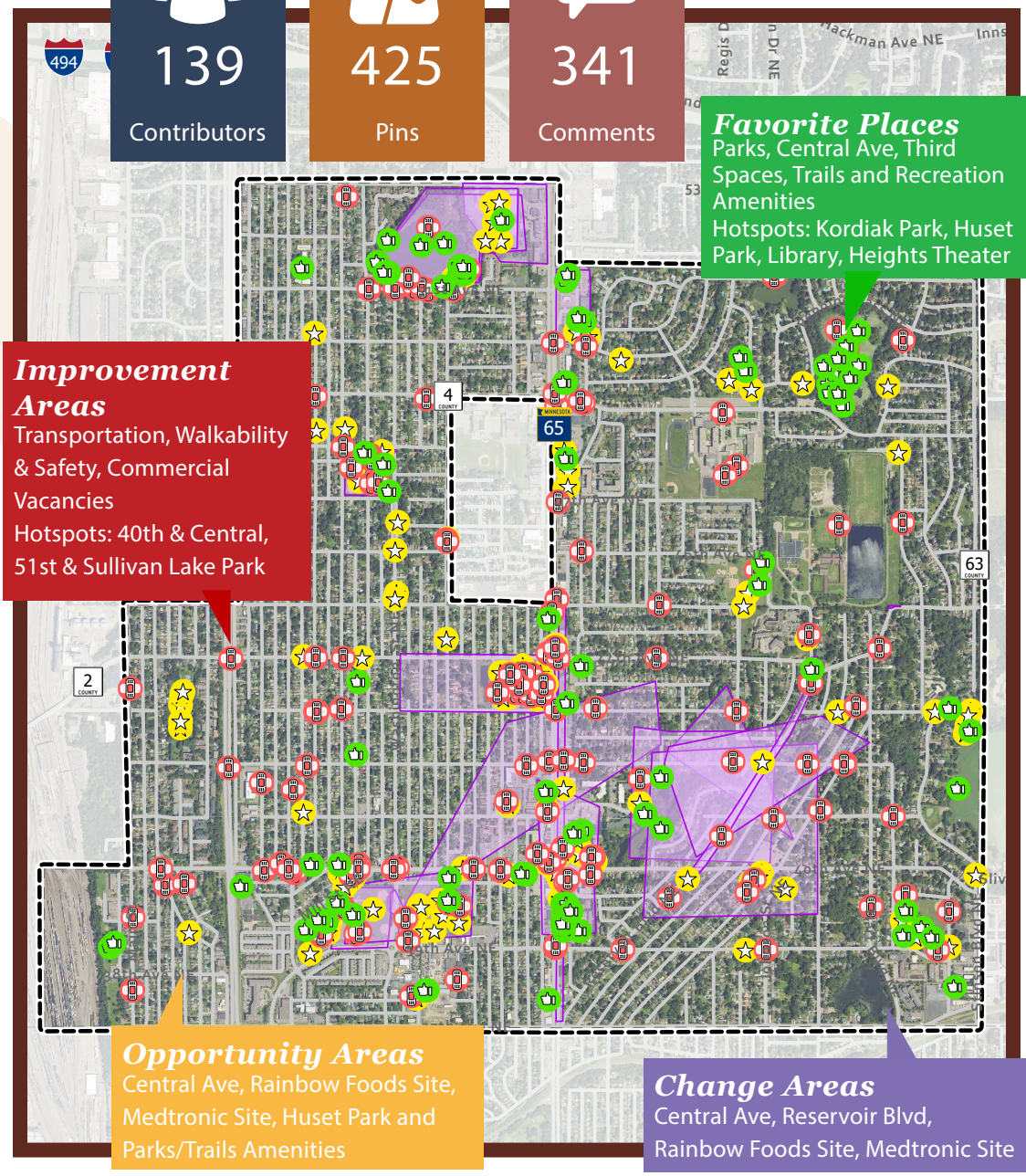
The online interactive map asked respondents to identify favorite places, improvement areas, opportunity areas, and areas for future development or redevelopment (change areas). In total the map received 425 responses from over 100 residents.

Respondents shared ideas for the future, favorite locations within the city, and spaces where they envision growth and improvement.

139 Contributors

425 Pins

341 Comments



Responses by Type

Favorite Places	102
Improvement Areas	154
Opportunity Areas	149
Change Areas	20

Key Themes

A Community-Oriented City

Diversity of community, businesses, amenities, and housing (types and ownership) is highlighted by residents as an important asset to the city.

Related Plan Topics:

Land Use · Housing · Economic Development

A Well-Connected City

Residents value safe walking, biking and driving access to local destinations and proximity to the metro while retaining the benefits of living in a smaller city.

Related Plan Topics:

Transportation · Parks & Trails · Economic Development

A Beautiful City

Responses show appreciation for parks and recreation amenities, and support for redevelopment and improvement opportunities along key corridors.

Related Plan Topics:

Parks & Trails · Land Use · Transportation