



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, April 13, 2026
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, April 13, 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 6:01 pm.

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

Also Present: Ursula Brandt, City Planner; Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Faustina Allen, Special Education Teachers at Highland Elementary; Chris Coleman, President and CEO of TC Habitat for Humanity; Sarah Dela Cruz, Special Education Teachers at Highland Elementary; Noah Keller, TC Habitat for Humanity Lead Project Manager and Global Engagement Manager; Rose Tuott, TC Habitat for Humanity Site Supervisor

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. **April Fair Housing Month.**

Accepting Proclamation: TC Habitat for Humanity. Chris Coleman, President and CEO; Noah Keller, Lead Project Manager and Global Engagement Manager; Rose Tuott, Site Supervisor.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed April 2026 as Fair Housing Month, and Councilmember Buesgens read the City's proclamation.

TC Habitat for Humanity President and CEO Chris Coleman expressed his gratitude for the recognition. He noted the partnership with TC Habitat for Humanity and the City and explained that there have been two projects completed in the City. He mentioned that the City has been committed to affordable housing and has been able to overcome obstacles. He stated he is honored to live in a Country where the Fair Housing Act is still a law. He noted that the work is not done, and it is only through partnership that the goal will be completed. He expressed his excitement that Habitat for Humanity would begin another project in the City.

B. Autism Acceptance Month.

Accepting Proclamation: Sarah Dela Cruz and Faustina Allen, Special Education Teachers at Highland Elementary.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed April 2026 as Autism Awareness Month, and Councilmember James read the City's proclamation.

Highland Elementary Special Education Teacher Faustina Allen explained that she works with many students on the spectrum. Highland Elementary Special Education Teacher Sarah Dela Cruz explained that they provide specialized lessons, accommodations in the classroom, and help students learn how to manage things throughout their day. Ms. Allen explained that Autism Awareness Month is a time to recognize and celebrate the diversity of human minds. Autism is not something that can be fixed, but it is a different way to interact with the world. Each person on the autism spectrum has unique strengths, perspectives, and talents that enrich the community. Ms. Dela Cruz shared that it is best to look at the autism spectrum as a circle where there are different parts of autism, such as sensory difficulties, proprioception difficulties, or other challenges. She added that they desire to move forward from autism awareness to autism acceptance by listening, learning, and creating spaces where everyone feels included and valued. She explained that showing kindness, patience, and challenging the stereotypes that people hear about autism can make a big difference.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James mentioned that community members gathered for civic engagement for the No Kings protest. She mentioned it was holy week, and she stopped by events such as the Good Friday Last Words drama at First Lutheran Church, and the community Eid at Silverwood Park. She added that she attended the speech showcase at the Columbia Heights High School. She stated she attended the EDA, the Council work session, the Planning Commission meeting, the League of Women Voters membership meeting, and the Metropolitan seminars on preparing Comprehensive Plans. She

mentioned that the Earth Day Cleanup for Central Avenue would be on Saturday, April 25th, starting at 9:00 am at the Columbia Heights library. She expressed excitement about the microloan program the EDA was working on and mentioned she has been speaking with business owners who are excited about the possibility of stabilizing their businesses.

Councilmember Buesgens stated she attended the HeightsNext board meeting, the Parks and Recreation meeting, the Friends of Kordiak meeting, the one-act play at Murzyn Hall, the No Kings march in St. Paul, and Cocoa with a Cop. She encouraged the community to clean up storm drains. She mentioned an article she read about the definition of the commons. She explained that she was encouraged to be reminded that commons are renewed by the younger generation, and to remain open-minded to the ideas of the younger generation.

Councilmember Deneen mentioned she attended the comedy fundraiser for mutual aid at Fixx Coffee, the No Kings rally, the library board meeting, the EDA meeting, and the Council work session. She noted that she took her nieces and nephews to Silverwood Park and noticed the art installations.

Councilmember Spriggs explained that he attended the second half of the Council work session and the No Kings protest in St. Paul.

Mayor Márquez Simula expressed her excitement about the microloan program for businesses. She mentioned she attended a neighbor's 99th birthday, who was a previous City Manager. She stated she attended the No Kings protest and participated in the League of Women Voters planning meeting. She noted she attended the Regional Council of Mayors meeting.

Councilmember James mentioned that on April 25th there could be a Heights Aid concert at The Central Mix, which will begin at 5:00 pm. Proceeds will go towards mutual aid. Four local bands will play, and all ages are welcome. She mentioned that \$10 is suggested to attend.

Mayor Márquez Simula noted that the library would host a mutual aid event on Saturday, April 25th, called 1,000 cranes. People will have the opportunity to fold origami cranes and donate money towards each crane that is made.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich explained that in response to the economic impact of the recent federal immigration enforcement actions, the City's EDA has created and is offering a forgivable microloan program for local businesses. More information can be found on the City's website. The City has already received nine applications. He mentioned that hydrant flushing is underway and residents may experience temporary discoloration in the water, which is normal and safe. He explained that residents can clear the discoloration by running cold water until it runs clear. Dates and locations of hydrant flushing can be found on the City's website.

City Manager Chirpich highlighted the upcoming events. He noted that on Friday, April 24th, the community is invited to attend the Arbor Day tree planting ceremony at 11:00 am near the basketball court at Huset Park East. On Saturday, April 25th, the City is hosting a free paper shredding event from 10:00 am until 12:00 pm at the Columbia Heights Recycling Center. The Police Department is hosting a

Drug Takeback Day event at the Public Safety building from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm on April 25th to collect expired and unwanted prescription medications. Mayor Márquez Simula added that throwing away medication can lead to water getting contaminated from landfills.

Mayor Márquez Simula noted that during the last Council work session, the Council discussed a social media policy update due to negative comments shared on the Transgender Acceptance Month Proclamation post. She explained that the City takes the concerns seriously and staff and the Council are working hard on a social media policy update.

COMMUNITY FORUM

There were no public comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember James asked about Item 10 and wondered if staff knew of other cities that had used LETAC and how their reviews were. City Manager Chirpich replied that he was unsure what other cities have used the new system and did not have feedback to share. Councilmember James explained that she was in favor of a number of the bills and highlighted biochar expenditures from the Public Works Department, and mentioned that it is a good investment. She pointed out the NOAH program fees and wondered if there was an update on how the program is being utilized. City Manager Chirpich replied that he does not have an update and did not believe there were any applicants yet.

Mayor Márquez Simula commented on item 11 and mentioned that the City has invited Better Futures to attend a Council meeting to share more about their business. She explained that Better Futures invests in people who have come out of the prison system and need to learn various work skills. She added that Better Futures is available for private companies.

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

- 1. Approve March Board and Commission Interviews, Special City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich
MOTION: Move to approve the March Board and Commission Interviews, Special City Council Work Session Meeting minutes.
- 2. Approve March 23, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich
MOTION: Move to approve the March 23, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.
- 3. Accept March 2nd, 2026, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the March 2, 2026, EDA meeting minutes.
- 4. Accept March 4, 2026, Library Board Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the March 4, 2026, Library Board meeting minutes.

5. Second Reading of Ordinance No. 1725, and Ordinance to Amend Chapter 9 – Land Use: 9.103 Definitions, 9.105 Nonconformities, 9.106 General Development Standards, and 9.107 Specific Development Standards

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Ordinance amendment No. 1725, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to approve the second reading of Ordinance 1725, being an ordinance to amend Chapter 9 – Land Use: 9.103 Definitions, 9.105 Nonconformities, 9.106 General Development Standards, and 9.107 Specific Development Standards, and to direct staff to send the summary ordinance for publication in the legal newspaper.

6. Second Reading of Ordinance 1726, Amending Chapter 5 Liquor Licensing and 5A Occupancy.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to close the public hearing and to waive the reading of Ordinance 1726, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to approve the second reading of Ordinance No. 1726, being an ordinance amending chapters 5 article V and 5A article III of the Columbia Heights City Code to amend the code sections regulating the City's liquor licensing and posting of buildings to prevent occupancy, and to direct staff to send the summary ordinance for publication in the legal newspaper.

7. Approval of Resolution 2026-027 a Rental Density Cap Exemption Renewal for 3800 3rd St NE.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-027, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-027, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 3800 3rd Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

8. Approval of Resolution 2026-028 a Rental Density Cap Exemption Renewal for 4942 7th St NE.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-028, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-028, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4942 7th Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

9. Approval of Resolution 2026-029 a Rental Density Cap Exemption Renewal for 4721 Chatham Road NE.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-029, there being ample copies

available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-029, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4721 Chatham Rd NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

10. Approval for Contract for Services with LETAC Policies360.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich – City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize the Police Chief to enter into a 5-year agreement with LETAC Policies360 to provide policy drafting and management services for the police department, with the associated costs included in the attached contract.

11. Approval of Three-Year Contract with Better Futures for Curbside Compost Collection.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize the City Manager to enter into a three year contract with Better Futures for compost collection.

12. Approval of Purchase Order for 2026 Hylander Center Gym Maintenance.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the purchase order to the Columbia Heights School District for the total amount of \$72,000 for Hylander Center Gym maintenance for 2026.

13. License Agenda.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for April 13, 2026, as presented.

14. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for April 13, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

15. 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 \$2,907,690.92.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinances and Resolutions

16. Consideration of Resolution 2026-026 a Variance for Reduced Parking Requirement for 999 50th Ave NE.

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

City Planner Brandt stated in 2016 the last remaining tenant, a dental office, vacated the property at 999 50th Avenue, resulting in the building remaining fully vacant to the present

day. Over the past decade, City staff have received multiple inquiries regarding potential redevelopment of the site; however, none have advanced to an approved or completed project.

City Planner Brandt noted that in 2022, A & A Properties acquired the subject property and initiated an evaluation of potential uses for the existing building. The applicant has engaged in ongoing discussions with City staff to identify site constraints and applicable regulatory requirements. Staff has advised that any proposed use would require the building to be brought into compliance with current building and fire codes, including accessibility requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the installation of an approved fire suppression system.

City Planner Brandt explained that based on these discussions, both staff and the applicant have concluded that establishing a viable use within the approximately 12,000 square foot building would present significant challenges. Specifically, compliance with applicable health and safety standards, in combination with the need to maintain a parking demand not exceeding 41 spaces, substantially limits feasible reuse options for the property.

City Planner Brandt stated that A & A Properties is requesting approval of a variance from the off-street parking requirements for the property located at 999 50th Avenue NE. The applicant is proposing to establish a café/restaurant (food service, full-service) within the existing building. For this use, City Code 9.106 (L), requires off-street parking equal to 30 % of the building's occupant capacity, which results in a requirement of 53 parking spaces. The subject property currently contains 41 parking spaces, resulting in a deficiency of 12 spaces. The applicant seeks a variance to allow a 12-space reduction in required parking, from 53 to the existing 41 parking spaces.

City Planner Brandt mentioned that the Zoning Ordinance requires the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing on the application for the variance and submit its recommendation to the City Council. The subject property is zoned GB (General Business), and the surrounding area is zoned GB to the east and north, with R-2B (One and Built as Duplex Residential) to the south and R-2A (One and Two Family Residential) to the east. The use of the property as a business and food service complies with the Zoning Code and is otherwise code-compliant.

City Planner Brandt explained that the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan guides the subject site as "Commercial" as well as the area to the south, east, and north, and the west as "Medium Density Residential". The proposed use and parking variance is consistent with the goals and intent of the Comprehensive Plan. The Planning Commission held the required public hearing on April 7, 2026. Staff presented the item and summarized the comments received from the public. No members of the public provided any comments during the public hearing. Following the public hearing, commissioners asked questions of both staff and the applicant and discussed the proposed variance. The Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend approval of the variance, including findings of fact and conditions outlined by staff.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if the applicant had a restaurant in mind. City Planner Brandt replied that the applicant has not moved forward with a timeline or restaurant because they are waiting for approval from the City. Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that Crisp and Green would be a great addition to the area. She asked that staff mention the idea to the applicant.

Councilmember Deneen expressed excitement about the possibility of having a restaurant in the area and stated she supports the project.

City Planner Brandt noted that the City received several positive comments regarding the project. She mentioned that there was one comment that expressed concern about traffic. Mayor Márquez Simula noted that her concern regarding traffic would be the frontage road.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to waive the reading of Resolution No. 2026-026, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to approve Resolution No. 2026-026, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights allowing a Variance for a 12 parking space reduction for 999 50th Ave NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

17. Consideration of Resolution 2026-019, Vacation of Existing Drainage and Utility Easement at 1515 44th Avenue NE.

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

City Planner Brandt stated that in 2025, Duffy Development Company, Inc was selected by Anoka County, the property owner of 1515 44th Avenue NE, to redevelop the lot into an affordable apartment building. The applicant approached staff to discuss possible options that would be compliant with the current City Code. During this discussion, the applicant noted that the lot had existing easements that, if maintained, would hinder the process of redevelopment. Upon review, the applicant and staff determined that the “utility and drainage easement” labeled Easement ‘B’ is the fire lane easement that allowed fire truck access around the assisted living facility on the adjoining property. A land survey was conducted it was determined that the constructed fire lanes are misaligned with the easements.

City Planner Brandt explained that staff have coordinated with City Engineering and the City Fire Chief to confirm the findings. Comments attached. Staff will continue to work to ensure that all requirements will be met in the redevelopment of the site for access to the buildings on the adjoining properties. Attached to the Agenda Packet is the plat and land survey identifying the easement to be vacated. Once approved, the applicant is responsible for filing the vacations with Anoka County.

City Planner Brandt noted that the Zoning Ordinance requires the Planning Commission to hold a public hearing on the application for the vacation of a street, alley, or other public right-of-way and submit its recommendation to the City Council. The subject property at 1515 44th Ave NE is zoned R-3 Limited multiple-family residential. The surrounding area is zoned residential, R-3 to the east, R-2A - two-family residential to the west, and R-1 - single-family residential to the south, with open space to the north.

City Planner Brandt mentioned that the City's 2040 Comprehensive Plan guides the subject sites as "High Density Residential" as well as the area to the east, "Low Density Residential" to the south and west, and "Park" space to the north. The Planning Commission held the required public hearing on April 7, 2026. Staff presented the item and summarized the comments received by the Fire Department. No members of the public provided any comments during the public hearing. Following the public hearing, commissioners asked questions and discussed the proposed easement vacation. The Planning Commission voted unanimously to recommend approval of the easement vacation, including findings of fact and conditions of approval outlined by staff.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember James, to waive the reading of draft Resolution No. 2026-019, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve Resolution 2026-019, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights, vacating the drainage and utility easement, easement 'B' at 1515 44th Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421, as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Meeting adjourned at 6:53 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary