



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, May 11, 2026
6:00 PM

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

MINUTES

The following are the minutes for the Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00 pm on Monday, May 11, 2026, in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

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

Absent: Councilmember Deneen

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; David Cullen, Public Works Director; Don Grand, Utility Maintenance; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Ben Lund, Utilities Superintendent; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Jon Perkins, Parks Foreperson; Jason Piehn, Police Sergeant; Daniel Abebaw, City resident; María Alvarado, City resident; Christian Peña, City resident; Denise Roberts, Owner of Rail Werks Brewing Depot; William Roberts, Owner of Rail Werks Brewing Depot; Brenna Zeimet, Mutual Aid Group of Columbia Heights Representative

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 Spriggs, to approve the Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. Business of the Year Award.

Award Recipient: Rail Werks Brewing Depot

Mayor Márquez Simula read a statement regarding Rail Werks Brewing Depot and presented the Business of the Year Award to Rail Werks Brewing Depot.

Owner of Rail Werks Brewing Depot, Denise Roberts, explained that the work they do is for the customers and the staff, and they seek to provide a safe space. Owner of Rail Werks Brewing Depot, William Roberts, added that they have lived in the community for over 30 years, and the community means a lot to them. He noted that the goal for Rail Werks Brewing Depot was for the community.

B. Citizen(s) of the Year.

Adult Recipient: María Alvarado

Mayor Márquez Simula read a statement regarding the accomplishments of María Alvarado and presented her with the Citizen of the Year Award.

City resident María Alvarado thanked the community for the work they have done. She expressed her gratitude that the community came together. She explained that she has been wanting to be more connected to her neighbors. She expressed her fear of rejection as a Hispanic during Metro Surge. She noted that the award shows her that there are great people in the community. She thanked her family for their support.

Group Recipient: Brenna Zeimet on behalf of the Mutual Aid Group of Columbia Heights

Mayor Márquez Simula read a statement regarding the accomplishments of the Mutual Aid Group of Columbia Heights and presented Brenna Zeimet on behalf of the Mutual Aid Group of Columbia Heights with the Citizen of the Year Award.

Ms. Zeimet thanked the community for their work during Metro Surge and their continued work to create a safe environment for people. She mentioned that there were thousands of rides that were given to people to get to work, and thousands of bags of groceries that were given out. She expressed her pride in how the community showed up and explained that how the community showed up is what love looks like.

Youth Recipient: Christian Peña

Mayor Márquez Simula read a statement regarding the accomplishments of Christian Peña and presented him with the Citizen of the Year Award.

Mr. Peña thanked those who are in his life and emphasized the help his father gave him for his mental health. He acknowledged a fellow student who helped with protests during Metro Surge. He expressed that it was difficult to see people persecuted just because they are a different race or have a different skin color. He noted that he decided to take a standby acknowledging the prejudice that people face. He added that he knew he needed

to take a stand after witnessing an ICE agent taking someone from a restaurant. He encouraged the community to take a stand on what they believe in.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that the City has the awards in order to highlight the people in the community and to remind people that there are beacons of light in the City. She encouraged residents to nominate people each year.

C. Bike Month Proclamation

Accepting Proclamation: Daniel Abebaw

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed May 2026 as Bike Month, and Councilmember Spriggs read the City's proclamation.

City resident, Daniel Abebaw, accepted the Proclamation. Mr. Abebaw explained that the leaders in Minnesota and across the Country cannot always adopt what is right, but pressure can. He explained that when a pipe bursts, you do not negotiate with it, but instead you hold pressure on it to stop the burst. On January 23, 2026, thousands of Minnesotans marched on the streets outside in -40 degree temperatures. It was a march that was not organized formally by leaders in power, but it was a raw, undeniable call to action. They applied pressure, and in turn, the entire nation felt it.

Mr. Abebaw mentioned that Columbia Heights was not built for the people who currently live in the City. The road designs were sparked in the late 1800s and again during World War II. The City was moving factory workers in and out of plants as quickly as possible for industrial growth and transit. The infrastructure assumed that everyone would drive everywhere instead of walking or biking. He explained that throughout high school, he biked the streets every day because he felt like he needed to make a statement on something that was not taking action.

Mr. Abebaw explained that he knows the streets of the City and knows the areas where the shoulder of the road disappears. He added that when he was 14 years old, he had to throw his bike into the grass because a driver did not see him on the shoulder and drifted into him. He mentioned that he thought the conditions would improve over time. He explained that he was biking home from school and was sideswiped and knocked down by a speeding car due to non-existent shoulders. A minute later, a vehicle swerved and caused him to have to get off the road into a ditch, and he was partially impaled by a branch. He referenced an article from 2023 that noted there is only one bike lane in the City, and it is on Reservoir Boulevard. Cities like Richfield have implemented over 24 infrastructure improvements for pedestrians and cyclists. MnDOT recognizes Central Avenue and Highway 65 as a high-injury network. He explained that the century-old design has not been updated because of cost, convenience, and resistance to change.

Mr. Abebaw stated that this winter, he witnessed people afraid to even leave their homes because it was unsafe, and people could disappear. He added that safety is more than infrastructure. Streets are only safe when every person walking it believes they have the right to be there. He explained the Proclamation means something to him because he rides

the streets every day, and it is a right of belonging. He explained that he would like to see roundabouts on Central Avenue because it would make commuting time shorter and roads safer. He added that he wants protected pedestrians and bicycle pathways separated from traffic by boulevards, not painted lines. He stated he would like to see improved signals and shorter crosswalks. He pointed out that the improvements cost money. Curb extensions are about \$5,000 each. Full intersection upgrades are around \$100,000. Continuous boulevards cost even more. Safe streets for all, grants, school funding, and many programs exist. The 40th Avenue pop-up park showed the community what a reimaged street could look and feel like. Minneapolis's complete street corridor showed what is possible and that people matter more than traffic speed. He noted that the community needs the Council to decide loudly, formally, and on the record that Columbia Heights is done waiting.

Mr. Abebaw stated that there are students who are riding their bikes to school on roads that are the same as when their grandparents were students. There are elderly people who will not cross Central Avenue because they know it is not safe. He explained that he is asking the Council to make a genuine, long-term promise.

D. Police Week Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: City of Columbia Heights Police Department.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed May 11—16, 2026, as National Police Week, and Councilmember James read the City's proclamation.

Sergeant Piehn accepted the Proclamation and thanked the Council for the acknowledgement and the Proclamation. There have been 314 law enforcement officers who have been killed in Minnesota. He thanked the Council for acknowledging the officers who have been killed.

E. Public Works Week Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: City of Columbia Heights Public Works Department.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed May 17—23, 2026, as National Public Works Week, and Councilmember Buesgens read the City's proclamation.

The Public Works staff accepted the Proclamation. Public Works Director Cullen thanked the Council for the Proclamation. He explained that the Public Works Department is typically unnoticed until something goes wrong. He noted that streets are plowed, water flows, and the parks are maintained due to the hard-working people in the Public Works Department. The recognition rightfully belongs to the crews and staff. They are the ones who are out in the snow at 3:00 am, responding to water main breaks, fixing problems, maintaining equipment, and caring for the parks. The work the crews and staff do is often dirty and unnoticed, but it matters. He expressed his pride and gratitude that the staff and crew do for the City every day.

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James stated she attended the funeral for Fire Captain Tony Cuzzupe. She expressed her pride in the community and explained that during the EDA meeting, they heard about the success of the microloan program to support businesses in the community. She thanked the Community Development staff for their diligence in helping keep businesses in the City, doing site visits to businesses, working with partners for documentation, and allocating the funds quickly. She mentioned that the Council has been working with the community regarding flock cameras. She added that she had a meeting with Anoka County Commissioner Meisner to discuss the Anoka County work session, where they discussed the drone as a first responder program. She mentioned that the Council had a work session regarding the topic and encouraged the community to watch the recording. She stated she attended the high school play and scholarship award ceremony. She noted that she volunteered with the Columbia Academy Junior Achievement Program. The school district stands to lose between \$3.6 and \$4 million in compensatory aid, which would be about a \$1,000 per student cut. She noted that she reached out to her legislators and encouraged the community to reach out to the school district to receive additional information. She stated she attended the send-off for Erik Johnston.

Councilmember Buesgens explained that she attended a HeightsNext planning meeting to plan the events for 2026. She thanked Councilmember James for organizing the Central Avenue cleanup and for the volunteers who showed up. She added that she volunteered with other garden volunteers to clean the community garden. She added that she attended the boards and commission reception awards, a landlord meeting, the bus transit meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, the Lions hygiene drive, the visitation for Anthony Cuzzupe, and the local government meeting. She mentioned that she attended the 2050 Comp Plan kickoff and encouraged the community to provide feedback.

Councilmember Spriggs noted he attended the EDA meeting, the Council work session, and the 2050 Comp Plan kickoff. He mentioned that he met with Councilmembers from Plymouth about flavor tobacco bans.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned she attended the Highland Lake Association meeting, the State of the State address, and the funeral services for Fire Captain Tony Cuzzupe. She stated she met with the Met Council to discuss Metro Surge and how it affected the City's businesses, and what resources are needed. She explained that the City Manager and she attended the Congresswoman's annual district five mayors' lunch. She noted she attended the Regional Council of Mayors meeting. She mentioned that the Polish community held its yearly bike ride last Saturday. She explained that she missed a number of events and meetings due to being sick. She expressed her gratitude to Erik Johnston for the work he did in the City.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich stated the City would host a flock townhall meeting on Thursday, May 14th at City Hall at 6:00 pm. The meeting will be live-streamed and on cable channel 16. Community members can submit questions online through the City's website. Representatives from the Anoka County Sheriff's office and Commissioner Meisner will be in attendance to provide additional information on the County-wide license plate reader initiative. There is a Memorial Day on Monday, May 25th at 11:00 am at the World War II Memorial at Huset Park West. The City has launched a new staff appreciation

program called the New Heights Award. The New Heights Award provides an opportunity for the community to recognize the exceptional work of the City's employees that may go unnoticed. The categories include customer service, creative solutions to solve a complex problem, demonstration of integrity in trying circumstances, improved efficiency that benefits the workplace and/or the community, and providing services that go above and beyond their job responsibilities. More information and submissions can be found on the City's website.

COMMUNITY FORUM

There were no Community Forum comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Márquez Simula noted that item 4, "License Agenda," was removed from the Consent Agenda. City Manager Chirpich added that the item is expected to be on the Consent Agenda during the next Council meeting.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

1. **Approve April 27, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich
MOTION: Move to approve the April 27, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.
2. **Approve April 27, 2026, Local Board of Appeals and Equalization Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich
MOTION: Move to approve the April 27, 2026, Local Board of Appeals and Equalization meeting minutes.
3. **Accept April 6, 2026 Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the April 6, 2026, EDA meeting minutes.
4. **License Agenda.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for May 11, 2026, as presented.
5. **Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for May 11, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.
6. **Review of Bills.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move that in accordance with Minnesota Statute 412.271, subd. 8 the City

Council has reviewed the enclosed list to claims paid by check and by electronic funds transfer in the amount of \$1,190,834.76.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Meeting adjourned at 7:11 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary

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