



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, March 09, 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, March 09, 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 Deneen; Councilmember Spriggs; Councilmember James

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Sarah Godfrey, ISD 13 Representative; Pam Haupt, ISD 13 Representative; Veronica Johnson, City resident; Christopher Vee, City resident; Julienne Wyckoff, 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 Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve the Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. **Women's History and International Women's Day Proclamation.**

Accepting Proclamation: Julienne Wyckoff

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed March 2026 as Women's History Month, and March 08, 2026, as International Women's Day, and Councilmember Deneen read the City's

proclamation. Mayor Márquez Simula announced that the first woman mayor of Columbia Heights, Julienne Wyckoff, would accept the proclamation.

Ms. Wyckoff thanked the Council for the proclamation and explained that women have contributed a lot to history. She introduced her friend Veronica Johnson and explained that Ms. Johnson was working on the Equal Rights Amendment in St. Paul for the State of Minnesota. Ms. Johnson mentioned that there would be a rally at the State Capitol at 10:00 am.

B. School Breakfast Week Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: ISD 13 Representative

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed March 2-6, 2026, as National School Breakfast Week, and Councilmember Spriggs read the City's proclamation.

C. Developmental Disability Awareness Month Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: ISD 13 Representative

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed March 2026 as Developmental Disability Awareness Month, and Councilmember James read the City's proclamation.

Sarah Godfrey, ISD 13 Representative, and Pam Haupt, ISD 13 Representative, accepted the proclamation. Ms. Haupt thanked the Council for the proclamation and explained that it emphasizes the importance of a healthy breakfast every day. She noted that all meals are free for families. Ms. Godfrey thanked the Council for the proclamation and for the continued support.

D. Tibetan Uprising Day Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Tenzin Lhamo

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed March 10, 2026, as Tibet Day and read the City's proclamation.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James noted that the legislative session began, and she has been supporting some letters and supporting a bill that would allow local control over firearm regulations and ban assault weapons and high-capacity magazines. She added that she signed onto a letter with the National League of Cities that would urge Congress to support local governance of housing supply. She stated she attended the City's singing resistance and an Iftar dinner put on by American Muslims for Palestine. She stated she attended the EDA and work session meeting and mentioned that the Council has been working on commission interviews. She noted that the community mutual aid fund has been selected through the Wilson Foundation to receive matching donations up to \$500,000.

Councilmember Buesgens stated she attended the MWMO executive meeting, the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, and volunteered with Blooming Sunshine Garden. She noted that she is working with the Council to interview candidates for the commissions. She added that she attended a HeightsNext board meeting. She invited the community to a HeightsNext event called CoHi Con on Saturday from 10:00 am until 12:00 am. She mentioned that there is a small fee to enter, and there will be pizza, coffee, and vendors, and it will be at Murzyn Hall.

Councilmember Deneen mentioned that she attended the singing resistance event with Councilmember James, the Library Board meeting, the EDA meeting, the work session meeting, a planning meeting for CoHi Con, and volunteered with Every Meal. She noted that she attended the boards and commission interviews with the Council.

Councilmember Spriggs stated he attended the Iftar dinner, the EDA and work session meeting, and the boards and commissions interviews with the Council. He mentioned that he provided written testimony to the Housing Finance and Policy Committee. He noted that the Multicultural Advisory Committee meeting with the Police Department would be tomorrow at City Hall at 6:30 pm.

Mayor Márquez Simula noted she was interviewed on The Gaily Show. She added that during the Rotary meeting, there was a discussion about how everyone had been impacted by ICE. She stated she attended the Safe Cities meeting with Governor Walz's staff. She mentioned that she attended the Sounds of Black History Celebration event and the Iftar dinner. She stated she has an art show on Thursday night at 6:30 pm at the Johnsville Library in Blaine. The City is still working on rapid mutual aid. She mentioned that she is going to attend a meeting for the Human Rights Commission.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich stated the Police Department has started a new program for a security camera registry. Residents and business owners can register their personal security cameras with the City's Police Department. If a crime occurs, the Police Department would be able to quickly see the location and be able to request the footage from the property owner. Registration is available on the City's website. The 2026 spring and summer recreation program registration is open, and there are several new offerings. Details can be found on the City's website.

City Manager Chirpich noted that the 2026 Business and Outstanding Citizen of the Year nominations are open, and the deadline to submit nominations is March 31st. Residents can learn more and submit nominations on the City's website. The property tax statements from the County will go out this week. He explained that during the March 2nd work session, a project was discussed, and there was supposed to be a Public Hearing during the Council meeting. After staff discussed the item with the City Attorney, it was determined that there needs to be more time to pursue some additional due diligence, and the City might need to consider changes to the City's rental licensing code to accommodate the unique situation.

5. City Manager Response to February 23, 2026, Community Forum Concerns.

City Manager Chirpich mentioned that there were two speakers at the previous Community Forum who are City residents and the owners of Heights Coffee Bar. He mentioned that the

comments were around ideas about a parklet across the street from their business in the City's surface parking lot. Staff is interested in looking into the concept. The speakers also had ideas around the Alatus redevelopment site and suggested having the buildings closer to the sidewalk to accommodate pedestrians. Staff agree with the comments and are working to have buildings closer to the sidewalks. The speakers expressed a desire for more City branding at the Top Value Liquor store because it would bring in more customers, as there is pride in the City. He explained that it has been something that has been discussed in the past, and staff are happy to workshop the idea with staff at Top Value Liquor. The speakers suggested having a municipal grocery store at the Alatus site or offering small grocery offerings at the City's liquor store. Staff have done some research and will continue having the discussion. Community Development staff reached out to the speakers about the ideas, and the speakers expressed interest in being a part of the Comprehensive Planning committee.

Councilmember James mentioned that there is a special election on April 14 for ISD 13, and more information can be found on the Columbia Heights School District website. Councilmember Buesgens added that there is a School Board forum on Monday at 5:30 pm.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Christopher Vee, City resident, stated he has a rental property in the City. He explained that there was a live-in boyfriend with the woman who was renting the house. The boyfriend and the woman got into a fight, and the police asked the renter to leave the property. He explained that he was given the option to bring the boyfriend back to where he was originally from in Chicago. He noted that he helped pack up the boyfriend's items and drove him down to Chicago. He stated that a few months later, he received a phone call from the Police Department saying that the boyfriend had broken into a liquor store, and he had to explain that the boyfriend no longer lived in the rental house. He added that the neighbor to his rental property puts stuff in the rental property's yard and the alley. He mentioned that on a separate occasion, someone broke into the garage, and it scared the tenants. He added that he is getting letters from the City asking to clean the garbage in the area. He stated that the garbage is not from his tenants and he would like to work with the City. He expressed his frustration that he is trying to do the right thing by contacting the Police Department, but it does not seem like they do much in such situations.

Mayor Márquez Simula replied that staff would follow up.

Councilmember Buesgens asked Mr. Vee if he has security cameras on his property. Mr. Vee replied that the neighbor north of him has a security camera and is willing to send the videos.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- 1. Approve February 23, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.**

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the February 23, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.

- 2. Approve March 2, 2026, City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the March 2, 2026, City Council Work Session meeting minutes.
- 3. Accept December 3, 2025, and January 28, 2026, Park & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept December 3, 2025, and January 28, 2026, Park & Recreation Commission Meeting Minutes.
- 4. Accept February 2, 2026, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the February 2, 2026, EDA meeting minutes.
- 5. Accept February 4, 2026, Library Board Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the February 4, 2026, Library Board meeting minutes.
- 6. Approval of Resolution 2026-014, Amending the 2026 Fee Schedule.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-014, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-014, amending the 2026 City Fee Schedule to create a dedicated Mobile Food Preparation Vehicle Operational Fire Permit at \$100.
- 7. Approval of Resolution 2026-015, Adopting the Anoka County 2025 Hazard Mitigation Plan.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-015, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-015, adopting the Anoka County 2025 Hazard Mitigation Plan
- 8. Approval of Resolution 2026-016, Comprehensive Plan Review Committee Resident Appointments.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-016, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-016, appointing Jeremiah Bohn, Jodi Cheisler, Mark Miernicki, Rina Rivera, Angie Heitz, Nicole Peterson, and Degha Shabbeleh to the 2050 Comprehensive Plan Review Committee.
- 9. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for March 9, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

10. License Agenda.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for March 9, 2026, as presented.

11. Review of Bills.

Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich

MOTION: Move that in accordance with Minnesota Statute 412.271, subd. 8 the City Council has reviewed the enclosed list of claims paid by check and by electronic funds transfer in the amount of \$1,361,179.83.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

12. First Reading of Ordinance 1724, Amending the Columbia Heights City Charter Regarding Mayoral Oversight of the Police Department.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

City Manager Chirpich explained that at the January 15, 2026, Columbia Heights City Charter Commission Meeting, the commission held a second reading of the changes proposed to the City Charter regarding mayoral oversight of the Police Department to better align the role with current practice, shifting oversight to the duties of the City Manager. During this Charter Commission meeting, the following summary was approved.

SUMMARY:

CHAPTER 2 – FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Removal of the language related to “appointment, control, and direction of all police officers of the city”

Section 10. THE MAYOR. The mayor shall be the presiding officer of the council, and shall exercise all powers and perform all duties conferred and imposed upon the mayor by this charter, the ordinances of the city, and the laws of the state. A president pro tempore shall be chosen who shall serve as president in the mayor’s absence, and who shall, in the mayor’s absence, exercise all powers and perform all duties conferred and imposed upon the mayor by this charter, the ordinances of the city and the laws of the state. In the absence of both the mayor and the president pro tempore, the council member with the most seniority (as determined by consecutive uninterrupted years of service to date) shall exercise and perform said powers and duties. The mayor shall ~~have the appointment, control, and direction of all police officers of the city, and shall~~ be recognized as the official head of the city for all ceremonial purposes, by the courts for the purpose of serving civil processes, and by the governor for the purposes of the military law. In the event of a vacancy in the office of mayor, whether by death, resignation, or any other cause, the council shall order a special election to fill the vacancy for the unexpired term except in the case of a recall, the vacancy shall be filled in the manner provided by this charter.

CHAPTER 6 – ADMINISTRATION OF CITY AFFAIRS

Removal of the language related to duties “except the police department and enforcement of the laws pertaining to said department shall be under the sole control of the mayor”

Section 53. POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE CITY MANAGER. Subject to the provisions of this charter and any regulations consistent therewith which may be adopted by council, the city manager shall control and direct the administration of the city's affairs, ~~except that the police department and the enforcement of the laws pertaining to said department shall be under the sole control of the mayor.~~ The city manager's powers and duties shall be: (a) To see that this charter and the laws, ordinances and resolutions of the city are enforced; (b) To appoint and, except as herein provided, remove the city clerk, all heads of departments, and all subordinate officers and employees in the departments, all appointments to be upon merit and fitness alone; (c) To exercise control over all departments and divisions of the city administration created by this charter or which may be hereafter created by the council except as herein provided; (d) To attend all meetings of the council, with the right to take part in the discussions but having no vote; but the council may at its discretion exclude the city manager from meetings at which the city manager's removal is considered; (e) To recommend to the council for adoption such measures as the city manager may deem necessary for the welfare of the people and the efficient administration of the city's affairs; (f) To keep the council fully advised as to the financial condition and needs of the city, and to prepare and to submit to the council the annual budget; (g) To prepare and to submit to the council for adoption an administrative code incorporating the details of administrative procedure, and from time to time to suggest amendments to the same; and (h) To perform such other duties as may be prescribed by this charter or required of the city manager by ordinances or resolutions adopted by the council.

Councilmember Buesgens explained that she is happy to see the Ordinance updated and thanked the Charter Commission.

Mayor Márquez Simula opened the Public Hearing. There were no public comments.

Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember James, to close the public hearing and waive the reading of Ordinance 1724, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that she supports the charter update because it reflects how the City government works.

Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember James, to set the second reading of Ordinance No. 1724, being an ordinance amending the City Charter of Columbia Heights, for March 23, 2026, at approximately 6:00 pm. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Meeting adjourned at 6:58 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary

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