



CITY COUNCIL MEETING

AGENDA SECTION	PUBLIC HEARINGS
MEETING DATE	MARCH 23, 2026

ITEM:	First Reading of Ordinance 1726, Amending Chapter 5 Liquor Licensing and 5A Occupancy	
<i>Presenting Item: Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director</i>		
DEPARTMENT: Community Development	BY/DATE: Mitchell Forney / March 10, 2026	
CORE CITY STRATEGIES:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Community that Grows with Purpose and Equity	<input type="checkbox"/> Engaged, Effective and Forward-Thinking	
<input type="checkbox"/> High Quality Public Spaces	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Resilient and Prosperous Economy	
<input type="checkbox"/> Safe, Accessible and Built for Everyone	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive and Connected Community	

BACKGROUND

At the March City Council work session, staff presented the proposed code amendments outlined below and received feedback from the Council that helped shape the ordinance now before you. Following that discussion, staff conducted additional research on food-to-alcohol sales ratios used by other cities when issuing liquor licenses. Staff found that many cities require higher food percentages than Columbia Heights currently requires (55%). However, communities such as Fridley, St. Louis Park, Richfield, and Anoka have adopted lower thresholds.

Staff identified St. Louis Park as the most appropriate comparison for Columbia Heights. Their approach maintains a food sales requirement while allowing greater flexibility for certain business models, particularly entertainment venues. Staff did not recommend removing the requirement entirely, as doing so would move the City closer to the regulatory structure used in Anoka. Instead, the proposed amendments introduce a tiered model that reflects the differing levels of alcohol service. Because intoxicating liquor has a greater intoxicating effect than beer or wine, a higher food sales percentage is required.

Staff are open to additional discussion regarding the final percentages. The proposed thresholds are based on the limited research conducted to date and are intended to balance regulatory oversight with economic development flexibility. The table below represents the required percentage of food sales by license type in each city.

CITY	Beer & Wine	Liquor
Fridley		40%
St Anthony Village		60%
New Brighton		60%
St Louis Park	24%	40%
Anoka		20%
Richfield		50%

CHANGES TO 5A OCCUPANCY VIOLATIONS

At the March work session, the Council also discussed a desire to amend the maximum allowable time period for tenants to vacate properties that have been posted as unlawful to occupy due to uncorrected property deficiencies that are the responsibility of the owner/landlord. The current maximum time period allowed by code is 45 days. The Council requested doubling the limit to 90 days. This amendment does not alter the City's ability to require immediate vacation of posted property if occupancy will cause imminent danger to the health or safety of the occupants.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT STATUS

The following summarizes the code amendments included in Ordinance 1726:

§ 5.503 Malt Liquor

- Adds the On-Sale Malt Liquor license to the City Code. The City has historically issued this license, potentially as far back as 2006, but it has not been formally codified.
- Allow restaurants, hotels, and theaters (live performance or movie) to obtain an On-Sale Malt Liquor License, provided that at least 30% of gross receipts are derived from the sale of food or non-alcoholic beverages.

§ 5.505 Intoxicating Liquor

- Allows theaters (live performance or movie) to obtain an On-Sale Intoxicating Liquor License, provided that at least 40% of gross receipts are derived from the sale of food or non-alcoholic beverages.
- Lowers the quantity of food required to be sold for all establishments from 55% to 40%

§ 5.506 On-Sale Wine Licenses

- Allows theaters (live performance or movie) to obtain an On-Sale Wine License, provided that at least 30% of gross receipts are derived from the sale of food or non-alcoholic beverages.

§ 5A.305 Posting to Prevent Occupancy

- Extends the maximum period in which tenants must vacate a property that has been posted as unlawful to occupy. The current maximum of 45 days is amended to 90 days.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommend closing the public hearing and setting the second reading of Ordinance 1726 for April 13, 2026.

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S):

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 set 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, for April 13, 2026, at approximately 6:00 P.M.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Ordinance 1726
2. Legal Proof of Public Hearing Notice