



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, June 08, 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, June 08, 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; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Ray Muno, Columbia Heights Pride Committee; Luis Sacta, City Business Owner; Suzanne Sancilio, Co-Lead NE Metro Be SMART for Kids

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

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. National Gun Violence Awareness Day Proclamation

Accepting Proclamation: Suzanne Sancilio, Co-Lead, NE Metro Be SMART for Kids

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed June 05, 2026, as Gun Violence Awareness Day, and Councilmember James read the City's proclamation.

Co-Lead of NE Metro Be SMART for Kids, Suzanne Sancilio, accepted the Proclamation. Be SMART is a national non-profit and nonpartisan program that stresses the importance of secure gun safety and puts the responsibility on parents and adults within the home to keep guns secured and ammunition stored separately. She explained that they host resource tables, give out free gun locks, and talk to parents about the importance of keeping their guns secured from kids.

B. Pride Month Proclamation

Accepting Proclamation: Ray Muno, Columbia Heights Pride Committee

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed June 2026 as Pride Month, and Councilmember Deneen read the City's proclamation.

Columbia Heights Pride Committee member Ray Muno accepted the Proclamation and thanked the Council. The City's pride celebration will be on September 12th since there are over 50 pride celebrations in the metro area in June.

C. Immigrant Heritage Month Proclamation

Accepting Proclamation: Luis Sacta and Family

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed June 2026 as Immigrant Heritage Month and read the City's proclamation.

Business Owner Luis Sacta accepted the proclamation. He expressed his pride in the City's support when immigrants were affected the most. He thanked the Council for the love they expressed to immigrant communities and for creating a space where people can share their cultures.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James highlighted the City-wide garage sales. She noted that she attended the EDA meeting, the Council work session meeting, the Twin Cities North Business Council connect meeting, and spoke at the Columbia Heights High School ninth-grade civics class.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that she volunteered at the Blooming Sunshine Garden and encouraged community members to help water or weed on Tuesday evenings at 5:30 pm. The garden is free for everyone, and people can pick the fruits and vegetables that they need and leave the rest for others. She stated she attended the Parks and Recreation Commission meeting, and she planted flowers at Murzyn Hall with the Beautification Committee. She added that she attended the Fire Department's pinning ceremony, the initiation of the new fire truck, the retirement party for Kelli Wick, and the Cops and Fitness event.

Councilmember Deneen noted that she attended the EDA meeting, the Council work session meeting, the Library Board meeting, the promotional ceremony at the fire station, the push-in ceremony for the new fire truck, and some garage sales during the City-wide garage sales.

Councilmember Spriggs stated he attended the EDA meeting, the Council work session meeting, the City-wide garage sales, and the Music in the Park event.

Mayor Márquez Simula reviewed the topics from the Council work session meeting and noted that a representative from the Attorney General's Office showed the Council the Attorney General's Office website and the resources available. The municipal consent will be coming up for the MnDOT Central Avenue reconstruction project. The Council had an ongoing discussion regarding ALP, and Fire Chief O'Brien requested Council direction on the comprehensive study for the 2027 Fire Department budget. She added that during the work session, the Council discussed the Just Cause update and legal considerations, and transitioning to a City-administered 18-day early voting.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated she attended the Operation Pollination meeting. She thanked community members for helping pull invasive species out of Silver Lake. She noted that she spoke at a civic class at the Columbia Heights High School and attended the Fire Department's push-in ceremony. She added that she attended the HeightsNext board meeting and met with the City Manager.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich stated CenterPoint Energy has a construction project that began today and will plan to replace around 1,100 gas meters throughout the City, with the heaviest concentration beginning in the southwest quadrant of the City. The project consists of relocating residential gas meters from inside the homes to outside and upgrading meters to models with enhanced safety features, and replacing natural gas lines with more resilient modern materials. Project updates can be found on the City's website. The Art and Info Fair is on Wednesday, June 17th, from 4:00-7:00 pm at Huset Park West. Community members can meet with City staff and a wide range of community partners. There will be free ice cream, a magic show, and free henna.

City Manager Chirpich provided information on the City's recent banner project. The Public Works Department installed new banners along Central Avenue and 37th Avenue NE. The banners celebrate the City's global community and the many cultures and traditions that make the City unique. The flags are featured across nine banner designs that welcome visitors and celebrate the diverse community. The Municipal Consent Public Hearing is on June 16th at 6:00 pm at City Hall in Council Chambers. It is the public's opportunity to see where the design and layout for the corridor will be displayed.

COMMUNITY FORUM

There were no Community Forum comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Márquez Simula requested that Item 10, "Service and Contract Cancellation with Flock Safety," be removed from the Consent Agenda for further discussion.

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

- 1. Approve May 26, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the May 26, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.
- 2. Accept April 6, 2026, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the May 4, 2026, EDA meeting minutes.
- 3. Accept May 6, 2026, Library Board Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the May 6, 2026, Library Board meeting minutes.
- 4. Consideration of Resolution 2026-036 Approving a Single Family Rental Exemption Renewal at 4538 4th Street NE**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-036, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-036, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4538 4th Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.
- 5. Approval of Resolutions 2026-037 and 2026-038 Requesting Funds from the Anoka County HRA and Transferring Said Funds to the EDA for the Purchase of 4217 Central Ave.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolutions numbered 2026-037 and 2026-038, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to approve Resolution No. 2026-037, a resolution requesting funds from the Anoka County Housing and Redevelopment Authority to support economic development activities within the City of Columbia Heights.
MOTION: Move to approve Resolution No. 2026-38, a resolution transferring \$305,000 of ACHRA grant funds from the City of Columbia Heights to the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority for the purchase, abatement, utility work, and demolition of 4217 Central AVE NE.
- 6. Approval of Resolution 2026-039 to Accept MN Office of Justice Program Hiring Grant.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-039, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-039 accepting the Minnesota Office of Justice Program grant for police hiring in the total amount of \$50,000 and authorize and direct the execution of the grant agreements.

7. Approval of Resolution 2026-40, Authorizing The Pursuit Of 2026 Local Regional Solicitation Funding for the 44th Avenue Multimodal Improvements Project.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-040, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-040, authorizing the pursuit of 2026 local Regional Solicitation funding for the 44th Avenue Multimodal Improvements Project.

8. Authorization to Purchase Replacement Dump Truck and Equipment.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Motion to approve the purchase of a new 2027 cab and chassis dump truck through Transwest Trucks under State Contract #T-647(5) in the amount of \$141,751.52, and the associated upfit equipment through Towmaster under State Contract #S-863(5), for a total project cost not to exceed \$346,907.52, fund 431.3121.45150.

9. Authorization to Purchase Replacement Toro 5910.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Motion to approve the purchase of a Toro 5910 mower from MTI Distributing through the State of Minnesota cooperative contract (#284699) in the amount of \$167,188.98, fund 431.5200.45180, and to authorize retention of Unit 0240 for use as a backup and supplemental mowing unit.

10. Service and Contract Cancellation with Flock Safety. (Removed)

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich/City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve termination of services with Flock Safety and direct staff to take the steps necessary to cancel all contracts with Flock Safety formally to ensure non-renewal in 2027, and direct staff to make final payments to Flock Safety that are owed under the current contracts, and to direct staff to coordinate the immediate disconnection and removal of all Flock Safety ALPR camera's in operation in the City in connection with the current contracts.

11. License Agenda

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for June 8, 2026, as presented.

12. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for June 8, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

13. 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 \$1,468,159.26.

ITEMS PULLED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA

10. Service and Contract Cancellation with Flock Safety.

City Manager Chirpich noted that the community has expressed concerns regarding privacy and data sharing. The City reviewed its automated license plate reader program and contract with Flock Safety at a recent town hall meeting and a work session. During the June work session, the Council directed staff to take the steps necessary to terminate services with Flock Safety and cancel the contracts.

City Manager Chirpich stated in May of 2024 that the City executed two contracts with Flock Safety to provide automated license plate reader (ALPR) cameras in various locations throughout the City. The first contract pertains to seven fixed location cameras, and the second contract pertains to five flex cameras that can be moved depending on the needs of the City. In total, both contracts covered the installation and ongoing software support for twelve cameras. The initial term for both contracts, fixed and flex, was 12 months, with 24-month automatic renewals if the contracts were not terminated 30 days or more ahead of the completion of the first 12-month term. The expiration of the first 12-month terms for both contracts took place in May of 2025, and the contracts auto-renewed for successive 24-month terms. The City is now in the third and final year of service specified in the original contracts.

City Manager Chirpich explained that to ensure that the contracts are not auto-renewed in May of 2027, the City must terminate the contracts in writing at least 30 days before the end of the current contract terms. Staff recommend approval of terminating services with Flock Safety, effective immediately, and ask that the Council direct staff to initiate cancellation of the service agreement/contracts to ensure that the service is discontinued and that contracts do not auto-renew in May of 2027.

City Manager Chirpich stated the City-owned flex cameras were taken down last Friday. Bags were placed over the Flock Safety-owned cameras. The City has been assured by the crime analyst at the Police Department that the log-in is no longer functioning, and data sharing has been shut down. The City informed Flock Systems in writing that the City does not intend to renew or auto-renew its contracts, and has received a confirmation that the information was received.

Councilmember Buesgens acknowledged the horrific experience that the City went through with Operation Metro Surge. She added her understanding of the intense emotions that community members are feeling. She explained that when faced with a challenging decision, she likes to look at the facts, while acknowledging the emotional weight. She added that she would be commenting on the company Flock, and not the ALP's. She noted that through her research, she found evidence of cameras being hacked, but not data. Flock is applying to bid for the FBI. She expressed concern that Flock would try to share data with the FBI even though the City would own it. The contract is a living contract, which means it could be changed at any time. Operation Metro Surge and the administration

have cost the City, because in canceling the third year of the contract, it costs tax payers \$45,000. In addition, the Police Department is losing a great tool to fight crime in the City. She explained that she is angry that the administration has cost the City and has caused harm. She acknowledged the resilience of her immigrant neighbors.

Councilmember James thanked the City Manager and Chief of Police for the work they have done. She stated she supports the City ending the contract with Flock because public safety should not come at the expense of privacy, civil liberties, and community trust. The automatic license plate reader cameras collect and store information about thousands of people who are not suspected of committing any crime, which creates a system of mass surveillance in the City. The City can invest in safety, the social worker program, police officers, and other ways that prevent crime, without forfeiting the 4th Amendment rights.

Councilmember Spriggs thanked staff for moving quickly on the item and the community for using their voice. There was extreme impact and harm that was done to the community during Operation Metro Surge. There are concerns with Flock, the company, and other cities having issues with their service and data hacks. He expressed his support for canceling the contract to ensure that people's civil liberties and 4th Amendment rights are protected. He explained that the Council is making sure that there is trust between the community and public safety.

Councilmember Deneen expressed concern regarding the contract. There could be items in the contract that are changed without the City being notified, and this should not be something that the City is entering into. She stated the City needs to review the process for how contracts are being reviewed before they are signed. She thanked staff and the Police Department for moving quickly, and the community members for taking the time to share their opinions.

Mayor Márquez Simula shared that after listening to residents, reviewing the information provided, and carefully considering all of the concerns that were raised, she would be voting to cancel the Flock Safety contract. New technologies will continue to emerge that can help law enforcement solve crimes. The Police Department needs tools to investigate crimes and keep residents safe, but the City must protect privacy and data. There are community members who support keeping the cameras. She stated she respects their opinion.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve termination of services with Flock Safety and direct staff to take the steps necessary to cancel all contracts with Flock Safety formally to ensure non-renewal in 2027, and direct staff to make final payments to Flock Safety that are owed under the current contracts, and to direct staff to coordinate the immediate disconnection and removal of all Flock Safety ALPR camera's in operation in the City in connection with the current contracts. 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 6:50 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary