



CITY COUNCIL MEETING

AGENDA SECTION	CONSENT
MEETING DATE	JUNE 22, 2026

ITEM:	Approve Actions of the Columbia Heights Volunteer Relief Association		
Presenting Item: Aaron Chiprich, City Manager			
DEPARTMENT: Fire		BY/DATE: Dan O’Brien / June 22, 2026	
CORE CITY STRATEGIES: (please indicate areas that apply by adding an “X” in front of the selected text below)			
_Community that Grows with Purpose and Equity		x_Engaged, Effective and Forward-Thinking	
_High Quality Public Spaces		_Resilient and Prosperous Economy	
_Safe, Accessible and Built for Everyone		_Inclusive and Connected Community	

BACKGROUND

The Columbia Heights Volunteer Relief Association is a governmental entity established under Minnesota law to receive and manage public funds, including state aid and supplemental state aid used to provide retirement benefits for firefighters and other emergency first responders. While affiliated with the Columbia Heights Fire Department, the Relief Association operates as a separate entity governed by its own Board of Trustees.

The Board of Trustees includes municipal representatives and is subject to reporting and oversight requirements from the Minnesota Office of the State Auditor and other state and federal agencies. The Relief Association is required to maintain its own financial accounts and serves an important role in helping communities recruit and retain experienced firefighters by providing retirement benefits.

SUMMARY OF CURRENT STATUS

The Relief Association periodically updates its bylaws to reflect operational needs and changes in state law. Any bylaw amendment must be approved by a vote of the Relief Association membership.

On December 3, 2025, the Columbia Heights Volunteer Relief Association membership approved an amendment to its bylaws removing the age requirement for deferred members to receive their pension distribution. This amendment aligns the bylaws with changes enacted through the 2025 Omnibus Pension and Retirement Bill, signed into law by Governor Tim Walz on May 25, 2025.

Effective January 1, 2026, Minnesota law permits distributions from defined contribution retirement plans to be made as soon as practicable following a firefighter's separation from service, rather than requiring the firefighter to have attained age 50 before receiving benefits.

The proposed bylaw amendment was approved by both the Board of Trustees and the general membership of the Relief Association. The final step in the process is approval by the Columbia Heights City Council, which retains final authority over Relief Association bylaw amendments.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends approval of the bylaw amendment adopted by the Columbia Heights Volunteer Relief Association to ensure compliance with current Minnesota law and to allow eligible deferred members to receive retirement distributions following separation from service as authorized by state statute.

RECOMMENDED MOTION(S):

MOTION: Move to approve the amendment to the Columbia Heights Volunteer Relief Association Bylaws as approved by the Columbia Heights Volunteer Relief Association Board of Trustees and general membership.

ATTACHMENT(S)

Columbia Heights Volunteer Firefighters Relief Association Defined Contribution Retirement Plan