



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, March 23, 2026
6:00 PM

Mayor
Amada 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 23, 2026, in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Council President James called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Present: Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Deneen; Councilmember Spriggs; Council President James

Absent: Mayor Márquez Simula

Also Present: Ursula Brandt, City Planner; Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Chris Polley, City of Columbia Heights Library Board Member; Jodi Rehlander, Minneapolis Minx, Columbia Heights Resistance Singers.

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

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. Transgender Day of Visibility.

Accepting Proclamation: Jodi Rehlander, Minneapolis Minx

Council President James proclaimed March 31, 2026, as Transgender Day of Visibility and read the City's proclamation.

Minneapolis Minx representative Jodi Rehlander accepted the proclamation and explained that she was representing the Minnesota Minks Women's tackle football team. She explained that there have been transgender members who have joined their team. Last year, there were struggles with the league that the team was in because the league followed the executive order regarding transgender participation for women's athletics. The team is in a new league where transgender people can fully experience a season without worrying about what state they are in, and what laws might allow or not. She thanked the Council for the proclamation and support of transgender people.

Council President James introduced the singing resistance movement. Jamie introduced the group and explained that the movement is to highlight empathy for the oppressed, hope, and song. The choir sang a song in recognition of the valuable contributions of the queer and trans community in the City.

B. Library Week.

Accepting Proclamation: Chris Polley, City of Columbia Heights Library Board Member.

Councilmember Deneen proclaimed April 19-25, 2026, as National Library Week and read the City's proclamation.

Library Board Member Chris Polley accepted the proclamation. He thanked the Council and noted that the library is an invaluable resource. He explained that the library has become a place where everyone can gather, connect, and read good books.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember Buesgens stated she attended the MWMO board meeting, the Columbia Heights Academy play, the School Board forum, the CoHi Con event, the mutual aid fundraiser, and a community class on how to make hill mounds.

Councilmember Deneen mentioned she helped organize the CoHi Con event. She added that she attended the special election School Board candidate forum, and noted that the special election would take place on April 14th. She mentioned that she attended the mutual aid fundraiser and the Hops for Hunger fundraiser for SACA. She noted that tomorrow there would be an event called Co Heights Comedy Night at Fixx Coffee at 6:00 pm, and all of the donations would go towards mutual aid.

Councilmember Spriggs stated he attended the mutual aid fundraiser and watched the School Board forum. He mentioned that he had a check-in meeting with the City Manager about current priorities and planning for the future.

Council President James stated she attended the City Day on the Hill event, where she was able to hear about proposed bills that would impact the City. She noted that she met with Senator Kunesh and explained that she is supporting the bonding request for the new public works building. She mentioned that she was able to hear from the State Budget Management Office about their outlook for the next biennium. She stated she attended the Metropolitan Council's Regional planning webinar, which was for local elected officials to learn about the Comprehensive Plan process. She added that she participated in the Police Department's annual iftar with the cops. She explained that she attended the Columbia Heights Academy play and the mutual aid craft fundraiser. She mentioned that she spent last week in Washington, D.C., with Mayor Márquez Simula to attend the Congressional Cities Conference with the National League of Cities. During that time, they were able to meet with the State elected officials to discuss the City's priorities.

Report of the City Manager

IT Director Hauf updated the Council that the Police Department launched its residential and business camera registration program, which allows property and business owners to register their security cameras with the Police Department. Registering cameras provides investigators with the camera's location and the property owner's contact information. If a crime occurs in that area, police officers will be able to easily see that there is a camera nearby and be able to contact the property owner to request the footage. The program is voluntary, and the Police Department does not have direct access to the registered cameras or the footage. Property and business owners can register on the City's website or by calling the Police Department at 763-706-8100.

IT Director Hauf noted that nominations for the City's Outstanding Citizen and Business are due on Tuesday, March 31st. Nominations can be submitted on the City's website, and paper copies can be found at City Hall.

IT Director Hauf explained that the Arbor Day tree sale is underway. Trees are currently \$50 each and include delivery. Residents are limited to two trees per household, and more information can be found on the City's website.

3. City Manager Response to March 9, 2026, Community Forum Concerns.

IT Director Hauf recognized the frustration of illegal dumping in the City. The City has taken several approaches over the years to address the issue, including a program for free removal of bulk items, but it was discontinued due to misuse of the program. Staff are interested in exploring potential solutions and recognize that there is no simple fix. He encouraged the community to visit the City's website to learn more about what resources are available on how to dispose of bulk or excess trash. He added that residents should report illegal dumping to the Police Department. In addition, the Police Department encourages residents to install cameras where the dumping is occurring repeatedly. The Police Department confirmed that there was a call in September 2025 at the specific address mentioned in the previous meeting about illegal

dumping, and the issue was resolved. The Police Department will continue to train officers on how to handle dumping situations. He explained that he visited the alleyway behind Tyler Street and noticed contributing factors and communicated it with the Public Works Department. City Manager Chirpich shared information with landlord meetings, and staff provided the property owner's contact information to the Police Department liaison to share at future landlord meetings. He added that he spoke with the property owner, and the property owner reiterated that he wants to work with the City. The situation highlights that the City needs a multifaceted approach that works together with the City, residents, and property owners.

COMMUNITY FORUM

There were no community comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Council President James requested to remove Item 2, "Second Reading of Ordinance 1724, Amending the Columbia Heights City Charter Regarding Mayoral Oversight of the Police Department," from the Consent Agenda for further discussion.

Council President James thanked everyone who applied and interviewed for the boards and commissions. Councilmember Deneen highlighted the RFP process that staff did and noted that it was well done. She added her excitement about the Brick-by-Brick program.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented with Item 2 removed for further discussion. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

1. **Approve March 9, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Move to approve the March 9, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.
2. ~~**Second Reading of Ordinance 1724, Amending the Columbia Heights City Charter Regarding Mayoral Oversight of the Police Department.**~~
~~*Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director*~~
~~MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Ordinance 1724, there being ample copies available to the public.~~
~~MOTION: Move to approve Ordinance No. 1724, being an ordinance amending the City Charter of Columbia Heights, and to direct staff to send the summary ordinance for publication in the legal newspaper.~~
3. **Adopt Resolution 2026-017, Appointing Board and Commission Members.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-17, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-17, appointing City of Columbia Heights Board and Commission Members.
4. **Consideration of Resolution 2026-020, 2026-021, 2026-022, 2026-023 Approving Rental Density Cap Exemption Renewals for the following properties: 1234 44th Avenue**

NE, 1426 Parkview Ln NE, 3912 Tyler Street NE, 1122 40th Avenue NE.

Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-020, 2026-021, 2026-022, and 2026-023, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-020, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 1234 44th Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-021, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 1426 Parkview Ln NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-022, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 3912 Tyler Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-023, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 1122 40th Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

5. Consideration of Resolution 2026-024, Approving a Rental Density Cap Exemption Renewal for 4302 2nd Street NE.

Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-024, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-024, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4302 2nd Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

6. Consideration of Resolution 2026-025, Approving a Rental Density Cap Exemption for 5035 University Ave NE.

Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-025, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-025, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 5035 University Ave NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

7. Approval of the Native Vegetation Management Contract.

Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director

MOTION: Motion to award Professional Services Agreement to Landbridge Ecological in the amount of approximately \$35,362.06 allocated from the Stormwater fund 604.9600.4400.

8. Annual Declaration that the City of Columbia Heights Does NOT Waive the Monetary Limits on the Municipal Tort Liability under Minnesota Statutes, Section 466.04.

Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director

MOTION: Move to declare that the City of Columbia Heights does not waive the monetary limits on the Municipal Tort Liability under Minnesota Statutes, Section 466.04.

- 9. Approval of Parks Master Plan Planning Consultant Agreement.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Motion to award the 2026 Parks Master Planning Project to Mend based on their low, qualified, responsible bid, not to exceed \$71,140, and authorize staff to enter into the related agreement.
- 10. Approval of Softphone Services Contract and Purchase of Related Hardware.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Motion to authorize the City Manager to enter into a three-year contract with Lumen for Zoom softphone services with a total contract value of \$87,462.88, and to approve the purchase of related phone hardware from PDS and Amazon in the amount of \$49,000.00.
- 11. Award Contract for Professional Services for the MSC Soil Borings and Environmental Analysis, Project No. 2411 to Braun Intertec.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Move to award the professional services contract for conducting soil borings and environmental analysis for the MSC Building, Project 2411, to the firm of Braun Intertec, based upon their proposal dated March 17, 2026, for a not-to-exceed fee of \$37,985, appropriated from Fund 411-52411-3050.
- 12. License Agenda.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for March 23, 2026, as presented.
- 13. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for March 23, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.
- 14. Review of Bills.**
Presenting Item: Jesse Hauf, IT Director
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 \$1,667,217.64.

ITEMS PULLED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA

- 2. Second Reading of Ordinance 1724, Amending the Columbia Heights City Charter Regarding Mayoral Oversight of the Police Department**

Council President James proposed to move the second reading to April 6th at 8:00 pm so the entire Council could be available. Councilmember Buesgens agreed.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to move the second reading of Ordinance 1724, Amending the Columbia Heights City Charter regarding mayoral oversight of the Police Department to April 06, 2026, at 8:00 pm. All ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

15. First Reading of Ordinance 1726, Amending Chapter 5 Liquor Licensing and 5A Occupancy.

Presenting Item: Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director

Community Development Director Forney stated at the March City Council work session, staff presented the proposed code amendments outlined in the Agenda Packet and received feedback from the Council that helped shape the ordinance. 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.

Community Development Director Forney noted that 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.

Community Development Director Forney explained that 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.

Community Development Director Forney stated 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.

Councilmember Deneen thanked staff for doing the research in order to work with the community. Council President James expressed her excitement to work with the City's local business community and thanked staff for including the posting to prevent occupancy.

Council President James opened the public hearing. There were no public comments.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to close the public hearing and to waive the reading of Ordinance 1726, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, 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 pm. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinances and Resolutions

- 16. First Reading of Ordinance No. 1725, and Ordinance to Amend Chapter 9 – Land Use: 9.103 Definitions, 9.105 Nonconformities, 9.106 General Development Standards, and 9.107 Specific Development Standards.**

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

City Planner Brandt stated during the February 4 Planning Commission Meeting, staff brought forward four areas in the Zoning Code to be updated with the goal of adjusting the Zoning Code to better reflect community needs while promoting consistency in future development and being in compliance with State and Federal laws and other city ordinances. Planning Commission held a Public Hearing on the proposed zoning text amendment on March 3, 2026, and gave a positive recommendation (6-0) as presented.

City Planner Brandt reviewed the current status. She noted the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), passed in 2000, and mandates that religious assemblies and institutions be treated at least as well as non-religious assemblies and institutions. The City's zoning code restricts "religious facilities/places of worship" to residential zones with a conditional use permit, while allowing "auditorium/places of assembly", "banquet hall", "club or lodge", "theater-live performance", and "theater – movie" in commercial zones. This creates a conflict with RLUIPA.

City Planner Brandt explained that staff is recommending the code be updated to add "religious facilities/places of worship" as permitted with a conditional use permit in General Business (GB) and Central Business District (CBD). Based on Planning Commission comments, staff is also recommending updating the specific development standards associated with "religious facilities/places of worship" to include requiring a transportation management plan to address off-street parking, traffic control, and the impact of the facility on surrounding roadways.

City Planner Brandt reviewed the current status of non-conformities. State Statute 462.357 Subdivision 1e states: "Except as otherwise provided by law, any nonconformity, including

the lawful use or occupation of land or premises existing at the time of the adoption of an additional control under this chapter, may be continued, including through repair, replacement, restoration, maintenance, or improvement, but not including expansion". The City's zoning code does not allow for "replacement" and is therefore in conflict with the State Statute. Staff is recommending amending 9.105 Nonconformities (C) Nonconforming Structures (4) Repair and maintenance to include replacement that does not increase the nonconformity in any way.

City Planner Brandt mentioned that multiple-family dwelling, when above a first-floor commercial use, the City's zoning code permits "multiple-family dwelling, when above a first-floor commercial use" in the Central Business District (CBD), but restricts "single-family dwelling, when accessory to a commercial use" to the Limited Business (LB) district with a conditional use permit. Staff is recommending changing the allowed use to "single and multiple family dwelling, when above a street-level commercial use" in the Central Business District (CBD) to allow single apartments above commercial uses. Staff is recommending the language to be changed from first floor to street level to account for properties that have lower levels that exit out into parking lots.

City Planner Brandt stated on November 24, 2025, that the City Council adopted Ordinance 1720 regarding Chapter 5.3 Tobacco Regulations. 9.103, 9.106, and 9.107 in the Zoning Code need to be updated to reflect the changes.

Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to waive the reading of Ordinance No. 1725, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to set the second reading of Ordinance 1725, being an ordinance to amend Chapter 9 – Land Use: 9.103 Definitions, 9.105 Nonconformities, 9.106 General Development Standards, and 9.107 Specific Development Standards, in the City of Columbia Heights for April 13, 2026, at approximately 6:00 pm. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

17. Consideration of Resolution 2026-018 Approving a Comprehensive Plan Amendment for 4300 Central Avenue from Commercial and Park to Transit Oriented Development.

Presenting item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

City Planner Brandt stated the City of Columbia Heights is initiating a Comprehensive Plan Amendment for two properties located at 4300 Central Avenue NE. Currently, the 2040 Comprehensive Plan guides the future land use for the property on the east side adjacent to Central Avenue as 'Commercial.' The city-owned parcel on the west side along Quincy Avenue, which contains a stormwater pond, is designated as 'Park.' This site previously operated as a shopping mall before falling into disrepair more than a decade ago. As a result, the property at 4300 Central Avenue was sold and the buildings demolished. Over the last decade, various redevelopment efforts have been pursued, but no project has come to fruition due to market fluctuations.

Community Development Director Forney reviewed the history of the site. From the late 2000s through the early 2010s, this property operated as a shopping center and was home to a variety of businesses over the years, including the last establishments being: Rainbow Foods, Slumberland, Ace Hardware, Dollar Tree, and Meineke Car Care. By 2015, the property had fallen into disrepair and was not well-maintained, leading many of the businesses to close. In 2016, the site was purchased by Hy-Vee. The City worked closely with Hy-Vee's development team to create a framework for a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to support redevelopment; however, ultimately, no project moved forward.

Community Development Director Forney explained that in 2021, the property was sold to the developer Alatus, who proceeded to demolish the remaining structures and clean up the site to prepare it for future redevelopment. The City utilized the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) framework previously developed with Hy-Vee to begin mortgage-bond structuring and contract negotiations with Alatus.

Community Development Director Forney noted that since then, Alatus has been evaluating a range of mixed-use development concepts for the site. The concepts have considered incorporating apartments, commercial uses, single-family homes, and townhomes or rowhouses. At this time, there are no formal plans or upcoming development applications. The future project is also expected to address stormwater, sewer, sidewalk, and roadway improvements, as there are major infrastructure improvements needed in the surrounding neighborhood. When a formal redevelopment proposal comes forward, it will likely require a rezoning and additional land-use approvals. Updating the Comprehensive Plan's future land use guidance is an essential first step to enabling a viable redevelopment pathway.

Community Development Director Forney stated the City's current 2040 Comprehensive Plan guides the eastern portion of this property for "Commercial", limiting the site only for nonresidential uses such as retail, office, and service-oriented businesses. To make future mixed-use redevelopment possible, the City is proactively initiating this land-use guidance change to "Transit Oriented Development". The proposal to re-guide the site as "Transit Oriented Development" will allow significantly greater flexibility for the opportunity for both residential and commercial uses. Areas guided as TOD have an expected mix of uses of 85% residential and 15% commercial, and a density of 25 to 65 units per acre. The site is well-suited for a re-guidance to a TOD designation, as several properties along the Central Avenue corridor are already guided similarly. In addition, the corridor is slated for a major MnDOT-led reconstruction project proposed for 2028, which may include the planned F-Line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route. These factors, combined with evolving market conditions and the property's long-term vacancy, provide the support for a Comprehensive Plan Amendment. Providing greater land-use flexibility will help facilitate redevelopment, strengthen the City's tax base, and introduce new residential and commercial activity.

City Planner Brandt noted that the current property owner and developer, Alatus, is working collaboratively with the City to prepare redevelopment concepts that align with the City's vision and respond to current market needs. The concepts that are being

explored for the site include a mix of commercial and residential uses. Since the site's current 'Commercial' and 'Park' future land use designations do not allow residential uses, a Comprehensive Plan Amendment is necessary to provide greater flexibility and support the redevelopment of mixed-use on the site. The proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment would re-guide the site from its current 'Commercial' and 'Park' designations to a single future land use designation of 'Transit Oriented Development' (TOD). The stormwater pond is included in the Comprehensive Plan Amendment as it may be relocated on the property as part of the redevelopment project.

City Planner Brandt noted that areas guided as TOD anticipate a mix of 85% residential and 15% commercial uses, with a density range of 25- 65 units per acre. It is estimated that redevelopment of the site could result in an additional 275 to 500 households and 650 to 1,700 people. Analysis of the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment included consideration of whether the City's forecasts need to be updated. With the release of Imagine 2050, the City is required to conduct its evaluation using the 2050 Comprehensive Plan forecasts shown below. According to the MN State Demographer, the City is estimated to have 8,872 households in 2024. The forecasts assume the addition of approximately 728 households by 2030. Given that both the development of this site and the Medtronic will be phased over a number of years and that the City is beginning its Comprehensive Plan Update process, revisions to the 2050 Comprehensive Plan forecasts are not deemed necessary.

City Planner Brandt stated that, given similar land use designations along Central Avenue, this site is a strong candidate for TOD re-guidance. There is also a planned MnDOT reconstruction project proposed for 2028, including the addition of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) F-Line. These factors, along with evolving market conditions and the property's long-term vacancy, support a Comprehensive Plan Amendment to transit-oriented development. Additional information is provided in the March 3, 2026, Planning Commission packet.

City Planner Brandt noted that the Planning Commission held the required public hearing on March 3, 2026. Staff presented the item and provided an overview of the community engagement process, which included a neighborhood meeting on February 18, 2026, and a public survey. Two members of the public spoke at the Planning Commission meeting. They raised concerns related to stormwater, sanitation, and taxes. Following the public hearing, commissioners asked questions and discussed the proposed amendment. The Planning Commission then voted unanimously to recommend approval of the Comprehensive Plan Amendment, including the findings of fact and conditions outlined by staff in the meeting packet.

City Planner Brandt explained that, subsequent to the meeting, a two-question public survey, the neighborhood meeting presentation, and Planning Commission public hearing information were made available on the City's website, along with an informational post on the City's Facebook page. While the Facebook post generated more than 250 comments, as of February 25, 2026, only 46 responses have been received on the survey. Overall, many

respondents expressed concerns about the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment allowing residential uses on the site. A common sentiment has been that the City already has a sufficient number of apartment developments, and that additional apartments would worsen traffic patterns. The preference is for maintaining the property as a commercial use, particularly for a grocery store, indoor recreation, or other retail-focused uses.

Councilmember Spriggs asked City Planner Brandt to explain what the Metropolitan Council is and why the City needs approval of the plan. City Planner Brandt explained that the Metropolitan Council is the authority that regulates things in the metro area, including stormwater, sanitation, and transportation. They require certain densities. They require a new plan every 10 years to meet the growing demands in the City.

Councilmember Buesgens asked what the timeline was after the plan was submitted to the Metropolitan Council. City Planner Brandt replied that it would be 60 days. She added that there would be a contingency plan if a developer made a proposal before the Metropolitan Council approved the Comprehensive Plan amendment.

Council President James thanked the community for providing feedback and noted that she is excited to have the flexibility to move the site to transit-oriented. She added that there will be a housing shortage, so the change would help adapt the site to make housing available. She asked if the Comprehensive Plan amendment would apply to any developer interested in the site. City Planner Brandt replied that it would apply to all developers.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-018, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve the adoption of Resolution 2026-018, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights, which approves the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment for the properties at 4300 Central Avenue to Transit Oriented Development and directs staff to submit the amendment to the Metropolitan Council. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

New Business and Reports

18. Consideration of Sustainable Purchasing Policy.

Presenting Item: Ursula Brandt, City Planner

City Planner Brandt introduced Sustainability Commissioner Bri LaPlante. Sustainability Commissioner LaPlante stated she has been on the Sustainability Commission since 2023. She explained that over the past year and a half, the Sustainability Commission has worked closely with City staff to develop a Sustainable Purchasing Policy. This policy is intended to move the City forward in incorporating sustainability into its purchasing and procurement practices while also supporting the City's GreenStep Cities goal of achieving Step 3 in 2026.

Commissioner LaPlante noted that the Sustainability Commission began this work by reviewing the City's current purchasing policy and evaluating sustainable purchasing policies used by other communities. Using these examples, the Commission developed a framework that integrates sustainability considerations into the City's existing purchasing practices. Staff then reviewed the draft policy and provided feedback to ensure that it would align with operational workflows and be practical for implementation across departments.

Commissioner LaPlante explained that, unlike a traditional purchasing policy that immediately changes procurement requirements, this Sustainable Purchasing Policy is designed as a guiding framework. The policy establishes focus areas, reporting expectations, and long-term goals that will allow City staff and the Sustainability Commission to gradually integrate more sustainable practices into purchasing decisions over time. This approach allows the City to advance sustainability goals while ensuring staff have the flexibility to transition practices in a manageable and effective way.

City Planner Brandt stated at its March 10 meeting that the Sustainability Commission voted to recommend that the City Council approve the Sustainable Purchasing Policy. While purchasing procedures are typically implemented administratively, staff felt it was important to recognize the significant work completed by the Sustainability Commission and City staff by formally presenting the policy to the City Council for consideration. Council acknowledgment also helps reinforce the City's commitment to sustainability initiatives and the GreenStep Cities program.

Community Development Director Forney mentioned that this is the last step of the GreenStep Cities program and will be presented at the League of Minnesota Cities Conference. Councilmember Buesgens thanked staff for their work. Councilmember Deneen thanked staff and the Sustainability Commission and recognized the hard work they did. Councilmember Spriggs thanked the Sustainability Commission.

Council President James asked what the training and implementation guidelines were. Community Development Forney replied that the policy ensures that there is annual reporting to make sure that the policy is implemented. The policy highlights a training plan for new employees. There are many things the City is doing, but for items that are not done yet, staff will work with the Sustainability Commission to implement the policy.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to approve the Sustainable Purchasing Policy as presented and direct staff to amend the City's existing Purchasing Policy to incorporate the Sustainable Purchasing Policy and its appendices. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried 4-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:12 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary

DRAFT