



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, February 23, 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, February 23, 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; Holly Tuhake, 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 Deneen, seconded by Councilmember James, to approve the Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James stated the Council has done advocacy work with legislators since the session began. There are a lot of bills that are impacting the City. She added that she is working with the League of Women Voters to update the statement on immigration. She noted that she is working with residents who are providing mutual aid. 1,000 orders of groceries have been delivered in the

community. The community has made about 100 rent payments for people, and there are still 800 requests in the queue that need rental support. She mentioned that she is working on a coalition with other leaders to work on the just cause for evictions in Minnesota. She noted that it was Ramadan and the Lunar New Year last week.

Councilmember Buesgens stated she attended the League of Minnesota Cities legislative update, the HeightsNext Board meeting, the Valentine Parade with the Fire Department, the Fire Relief Association meeting, and volunteered at the HeightsNext pet bed event. She expressed her pride in the Council and how they have been handling the ICE surge.

Councilmember Deneen stated she attended the meeting for the Comprehensive Plan amendment for the 4300 Central Avenue property, and the neighborhood watch meeting led by the Police Chief. She added that she went to the HeightsNext pet bed event and thanked the volunteers who led the event. She explained that she was a part of planning events for the upcoming CoHi Con event, which will take place at Murzyn Hall on March 14th. She stated she signed onto a letter supporting an assault weapons ban bill.

Councilmember Spriggs mentioned that he attended the meeting for the Comprehensive Plan amendment for the 4300 Central Avenue property, the League of Minnesota Cities legislative preview, and the Minnesota Environmental Health Tracking Bio Monitoring Advisory panel online meeting. He stated he signed onto the letter supporting assault weapons to be banned. He encouraged the community to reach out to the City if they know someone who was taken by ICE and they do not know where they are, because they would be happy to help locate them.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that the Council is united on helping the community through the ICE surge. She expressed her appreciation for the relationship with the School Board and School District. She added that there have been meetings with faith groups as well. She explained that the ICE activity is decreasing in the community, but there are other ICE surges in other parts of the Country. She added that there are for-profit detention centers that are being built around the Country to house people. She expressed her gratitude for the Fire Department putting on the Valentine's Day parade, and for the Police Department for sticking together during the ICE surge. She noted that there have been many voices speaking at the Capitol from Columbia Heights testifying on behalf of education. She added that she has a meeting with Governor Walz and other mayors to discuss safer cities and a coalition, and to get funding from the State to get through this.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich stated the Comprehensive Plan amendment for the property at 4300 Central Avenue is underway. The final date to complete the online survey is Friday, February 27th. The survey can be found on the City's Facebook page and the City's website. The community is invited to attend the first Public Hearing for the project, which is scheduled during the Planning Commission meeting on Tuesday, March 3rd at 6:00 pm. The Boards and Commission applications deadline is February 28th. Questions can be directed to the City Clerk by calling (763)-706-3611. Applications can be found on the City's website, and interviews for the openings will be held in the afternoon and early evening on March 5th and March 6th. There is one opening for the Planning Commission, one opening for the

Library Board, three openings for the Parks and Recreation Commission, seven openings for the Sustainability Commission, and one opening on the Charter Commission.

City Manager Chirpich noted that the annual Arbor Day tree sales are coming up, and there will be nine varieties of trees and 60 trees available for purchase. Each tree is \$50, and households are limited to two trees. Orders can be placed on the City's website starting on Monday, March 2nd.

1. City Manager Response to February 9, 2026, Community Forum Concerns.

City Manager Chirpich noted that a resident asked if there was utility relief due to immigration enforcement activity in the City. He noted that there is a late fee waiver for hardship and payment plans available for those who need them. He encouraged residents to reach out to the City if there is a significant hardship.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that the reason there are seven Sustainability Commission spots open because their terms are up and some will reapply.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Holly Tuhake, City resident, stated she owns Heights Coffee Bar and noted that there is a City-owned lot behind the building. She wondered if it was possible to have a little park that included benches and trees, because it is a central location that people could go to. She mentioned she watched the video about the Rainbow site development and explained that if the site should be close to the sidewalk and there could be pedestrian entry, it would change the feel of the City. She encouraged the City to make the Top Value liquor store more obvious that it is City-owned to encourage more community members to support the business instead of going to other liquor stores. She wondered if it would be possible to have a municipal grocery store in the Rainbow site or within the municipal liquor stores.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

Mayor Márquez Simula thanked the Charter Commission for their work on the recall language in the Charter.

1. Approve February 9, 2026, City Council Meeting Minutes.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the February 9, 2026, City Council meeting minutes.

2. Accept October 7, 2025, Planning Commission Meeting Minutes.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to accept the October 7, 2025, Planning Commission meeting minutes.

3. Second Reading of Ordinance 1723, Amending the Columbia Heights City Charter Regarding Recall Petitions.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Ordinance 1723, there being ample copies

available to the public.

MOTION: Move to approve Ordinance No. 1723, 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.

4. Approval of Resolution 2026-013, Awarding the Contract for Library Boiler Replacement to Northland Refrigeration Inc. and Amending the 411 Budget.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-013, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-013, awarding the Library Boiler Replacement to Northland Refrigeration Inc. based on their low, qualified, responsible bid, not to exceed \$56,887.50, authorizing staff to enter into the related agreement, and appropriating an additional \$8,000 to the 2026 budget of Government Buildings Fund 411 for the increase over 2025 estimates.

5. Approval of Contract for Professional Services for 2026 Street Program - Municipal State Aid (MSA) Street Mill & Overlay Engineering Services.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Motion to award the 2026 Streets Program – Municipal State Aid (MSA) Street Mill & Overlay Engineering Services to Bolton & Menk, Inc., based on their low, qualified, responsible bid, not to exceed \$48,720, and authorize the staff to enter into the related agreement.

6. Rental Occupancy License for Approval.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the property listed for a rental housing license for February 23, 2026, in that it has met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

7. Review of Bills.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

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 \$2,025,536.74.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Deneen, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 6:26 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary