



**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE**  
**Monday, March 02, 2026**  
**6:00 PM**

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**Mayor**  
*Amáda Márquez Simula*  
**Councilmembers**  
*Connie Buesgens*  
*Rachel James*  
*Justice Spriggs*  
*Laurel Deneen*  
**City Manager**  
*Aaron Chirpich*

## **MINUTES**

### **CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Márquez Simula at 6:10pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula, Councilmember Deneen, Councilmember James, Councilmember Spriggs.

Absent: Councilmember Buesgens

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Mitch Forney, Community Development Director; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Dan O'Brien, Fire Department Chief; Brad Roddy, Fire Department Assistant Chief; Myah Grimm, HOME-Line Attorney; Mike Dahl, HOME-Line Public Policy Director; Cecil Smith, President and CEO MN MHA; Marty McDonough, MN MHA Director of Government Affairs; Tom R., Rental Property Owner.

### **WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**2. Group Ice Breaker: What is your appreciation language in the workplace?**

Mayor Márquez Simula led the group in an ice breaker discussion, asking participant what their appreciation language is in the workplace.

**3. Just Cause Tenant Protections Follow-up.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the item to the council and gave additional context that there has been council consensus to strengthen city code related to tenant protection. Direction was last given to staff at the January 2026 work session and staff wanted to make sure that there was a full conversation involving representatives from the MN Multi Housing Association and HOME-Line. He introduced meeting participants from each group and brief presentations were given. Following the presentations there was short rebuttal from each group as well as council questions.

Councilmember James inquired about the calls that tenants have made to HOME-Line related to non-renewal concerns. Attorney Grimm gave an example that she recently had a tenant that did not know why her lease was not going to be renewed and was unsure why. This happens to many tenants that call for assistance.

Councilmember James inquired if there were specific questions that MN MHA had for the council. The organization clarified that they are concerned about cure period and what additional parameters for just cause would be adding unnecessary extended waiting periods to the statutory requirement, and that this can cause a hostile living environment for other tenants as well as a hostile work environment for property employees.

Councilmember Spriggs asked about the 2021 St. Paul legal case and injunction related to just cause provisions and the reasons that St. Paul City Council rescinded their ordinance. HOME-Line noted that it could not speak to what the potential litigation would have entailed if the ordinance as not rescinded. MN MHA noted that Judge Magnuson made clear in a preliminary injunction that the landlords had shown a likelihood of success on their claims.

Following the presentation and discussion, council gave staff direction on how they would like to move forward with a proposed just cause ordinance. There was a focus on not creating a longer cure period but also making sure that landlords do need to give a just cause for their lease not being renewed. Additionally, council inquired what concerns the City Attorney had given the lack of precedence on an ordinance of this nature. Council also stated that they want to make sure that if they move forward with an ordinance it respects landlord rights related to the rental of single-family homes, owner occupied duplexes, and multifamily buildings.

Staff will partner with the City Attorney to bring additional details and concerns forward while drafting a just cause ordinance, taking into consideration the recent work completed by St. Paul and Minneapolis. This work will bring forward unintended consequences for tenants and landlords and will continue with a partnership with MN MHA and Home-Line.

**4. Overview of Proposed Provisional License for 3932 Central Ave NE.**

Fire Chief Daniel O'Brien introduced the item to the council and gave a brief overview of the concerns at the property at 3932 Central Avenue NE. He stated that the new owners of the property had not followed the proper process for licensing after taking over ownership of the building from the previous owner who had vacated all renters from the property. He added that there will likely be a public hearing related to this property at one of the upcoming March Council Meetings and that he has been working with the City Building Official as well as the City Attorney related to bringing the property into compliance prior to licensing.

Councilmember Deneen stated that she has concerns about the property suffering from collapse and does not want the City to be in a position where we have licensed a property that should not have been occupied. She had additional concerns with structural support and life safety issues regarding the building's proximity to the impending road construction and redevelopment that will occur on Central Avenue.

Councilmember James and Spriggs were concerned about the structural concerns, but also the living conditions that this creates for potential renters. Councilmember Spriggs clarified that he wanted there to be a focus on health safety as well as life safety.

City Manager Chirpich clarified that Staff will have more information for the council at an upcoming meeting after continued discussion with the City Attorney. Staff will continue to give notice to the tenants about upcoming public hearings related to the property, and to

also see if HOME-Line can touch base with the tenants of the property regarding their rights.

**5. Discussion Regarding Adoption of the 2025 Anoka County Hazard Mitigation Plan.**

Fire Chief Dan O'Brien introduced the item to the council and had a brief conversation that the plan included in the packet has been approved by the State of Minnesota as well as Anoka County. Once the plan is approved by the Council it will allow the City to receive reimbursement from the Federal Government related to disasters that occur in the community.

Staff will prepare Resolution 2026-015 for the council to review at the next council meeting so that the 2025 Anoka County Hazard Mitigation Plan can be officially adopted.

**Additional Fire Department Updates.**

Fire Chief O'Brien also informed Council that there will be an upcoming update to the fee schedule related to Fire Department inspections of food trucks.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked about the current status of licensing food trucks, and Community Development Director Forney mentioned that there are going to be an update to the fee schedule to make sure the business licensing is equitable related to the operation of food trucks in the City.

Fire Chief O'Brien also brought forward concerns regarding the potential for an upcoming rental revocation for Clifton properties.

Mayor Márquez Simula and Councilmember James wanted to loop back to tenant protections related to license revocation evictions. City Manager Chirpich informed council that currently the fire department works closely with individuals and families impacted when a landlord has their license revoked and does not move to immediately file eviction paperwork if the tenant is actively looking for a new place to live.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she wants to make sure that we urgently address extending the period for tenants to find new housing when a landlord / property owner loses their rental license.

**6. Comprehensive Plan Review Committee Resident Appointments.**

Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director gave a brief overview of the status of the Comprehensive Plan Committee and appointing the community members that have applied to serve. Staff recommended appointing the seven community members whose applications were included in the packet for the council's review.

Mayor Márquez Simula would like to see an option to include additional people who want to serve on the committee as the work continues as well as additional ways to engage the community in the process.

Council consensus was to have staff prepare a resolution for the March 9, 2026 City Council

Meeting approving the recommended appointments of community members as well as the board and commission members who want to participate.

**7. Code Amendments to Chapter 5.5 Liquor and Beer.**

Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director gave a brief overview of the status of an update that is needed to liquor and beer sales in city code so that movie theaters and performance theaters can have the option to serve liquor and beer with a valid license.

Councilmember James inquired whether there was a concern related to candy and snack sales not being substantial enough to overcome the proposed update to the ratio of food to liquor sales. She would like to see additional follow-up related to the food sales vs. alcohol sales to make sure that there is the right percentage written into code for all businesses in the community.

Council consensus was to move forward with the proposed amendments recommended by staff and to make sure that the percentage is correctly aligned with the needs of the community and businesses.

**8. Yes to Homes Discussion.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council. He clarified that staff's perspective is that this is an issue related to municipal (local) control and that we can meet the needs of our community specifically. He additionally clarified that we always have room to improve for our residents and to create the housing that is needed in the community. He stated that LMC is going to be working with the "Yes to Homes" organization to find more common ground between the need to retain local control to do what is right for our community.

Councilmember Spriggs stated that he feels LMC is wrong on the issue, and that there are some cities that will opt out of doing what is needed related to housing concerns because they feel that other cities are addressing the issue. He stated that he feels all communities should shoulder the burden equitably and not be able to pick and choose what options they want to implement in their city.

Councilmember James mentioned that she felt that there is still an element of local control that will be kept in place going forward if the proposed bill were to progress through the legislature. She feels that there is not a level set playing field for Columbia Heights and that the City is already doing what is called out in the proposed legislation. She also expressed concern about how this legislation plays into the current comprehensive planning that is underway.

Council consensus was to spend time reviewing the proposed legislation, and for staff to make sure that we continue to be as nimble as possible taking into consideration what will be needed related to the comprehensive plan updates as well as requirements from the metropolitan council related to the redevelopment of Central Avenue. Individual council members will support proposed legislation as they see fit.

**9. Municipal Regulation of Crypto / Virtual Currency Kiosks.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council and City Clerk Ion gave supporting information related to concerns that having a Crypto Currency Kiosk available within the City could cause for vulnerable residents. Currently the closest kiosks are in Hill Top and St. Anthony and there are approximately five fraud cases that have occurred in the past year that Columbia Heights Residents have reported to the Police Department.

Councilmember James inquired if there was ever a reason that a resident would need to use one of these kiosks. City Clerk Ion gave the council information that nearly all crypto related transactions occur via web-based platforms and not via kiosks in the community. These kiosks charge a 30 to 40% transaction fee and are almost exclusively used to scam vulnerable people.

Council feedback was to proceed with an ordinance outlining a complete ban on crypto currency kiosks in the City of Columbia Heights and partnering with the City of Hilltop to see if they are taking any action on this issue as well.

**10. City Manager Follow-up Regarding Previous Work Session Topics.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the item to the council to give a status on several items that the council has discussed at previous work sessions. The items reviewed were the status of developing banners for the Central Avenue Corridor, participation in the Tibet Fest that New Brighton will be hosting, upcoming City Charter Updates proposed by the Charter Commission as well as the process for upcoming Board and Commission interviews.

**11. Council Corner.**

The council reviewed the March calendar, notified each other of upcoming events and discussed proclamations for upcoming meetings.

Mayor Márquez Simula brought forward several items that she would like to see the council discuss at upcoming work sessions. These topics included EDA meeting structure and updates to the agenda, procuring a Somali flag to display for a proclamation at the end of June, procuring a "we are family" flag to support immigrants in the community, having a resource for community based events notices, getting updates on current abatement projects, discussing food / produce sales at the Municipal Liquor Stores, rebranding updates for City owned liquor stores, Spring side walk cleanup for awareness / safety for the community.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:30pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary

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