



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, May 04, 2026
5:00 PM

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 pm by President Spriggs

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Members present: Laurel Deneen; Rachel James; Justice Spriggs; Marlaine Szurek

Members absent: Connie Buesgens; Lamin Dibba; Amáda Márquez-Simula

Staff present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director; Sarah LaVoie, Administrative Assistant; Emilie Voight, Community Development Coordinator; Ursula Brandt, City Planner

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CONSENT AGENDA

1. Approve financial reports and payment of bills for March 2026 – Resolution No. 2026-14.
2. Approve the minutes of the regular EDA meeting of April 06, 2026.

Motion by Deneen, seconded by Szurek, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. All ayes of present. MOTION PASSED.

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-14

A RESOLUTION OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF COLUMBIA HEIGHTS, MINNESOTA, APPROVING THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2026 AND THE PAYMENT OF THE BILLS FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2026.

WHEREAS, the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority (the “EDA”) is required by Minnesota Statutes Section 469.096, Subd. 9, to prepare a detailed financial statement which shows all receipts and disbursements, their nature, the money on hand, the purposes to which the money on hand is to be applied, the EDA's credits and assets and its outstanding liabilities; and

WHEREAS, said Statute also requires the EDA to examine the statement and treasurer's vouchers or bills and if correct, to approve them by resolution and enter the resolution in its records; and

WHEREAS, the financial statements for the month of March 2026 have been reviewed by the EDA Commission; and

WHEREAS, the EDA has examined the financial statements and finds them to be acceptable as to both

form and accuracy; and

WHEREAS, the EDA Commission has other means to verify the intent of Section 469.096, Subd. 9, including but not limited to Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports, Annual City approved Budgets, Audits and similar documentation; and

WHEREAS, financial statements are held by the City's Finance Department in a method outlined by the State of Minnesota's Records Retention Schedule,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Board of Commissioners of the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority that it has examined the referenced financial statements including the check history, and they are found to be correct, as to form and content; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the financial statements are acknowledged and received and the check history as presented in writing is approved for payment out of proper funds; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED this resolution is made as part of the permanent records of the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority.

ORDER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Passed this May 4, 2026

Offered by: Laurel Deneen

Seconded by: Marlaine Szurek

Roll Call: All ayes of present. MOTION PASSED.

President

Attest:

Secretary

BUSINESS ITEMS

3. Façade Improvement Grant Report for Nikhom Spa (3986 Central Ave NE).

Voight noted that the report pertains to the 2026 Façade Improvement Grant application for Nikhom Spa (3986 Central Ave NE). The tenant, Nikhom Spa, recently opened a new massage and spa business in a suite that had previously been used for a massage business under a different owner. The tenant is applying for grant funds to furnish and install new signage on the existing awning in order to reflect the change of business. Photos of the existing conditions and renderings of the proposal have been included in the Agenda Packet.

Voight stated the applicant was able to receive two bids for the work, amounting to \$4,743.98 (Canvas Craft) and \$8,961.47 (BMS). This sets them up for a grant amount of \$2,371.99. Community Development staff recommend funding this project in full as the signage will reflect the building's new occupancy and help attract and orient customers. This is the fourth Façade Improvement Grant application in 2026. If this Façade Improvement Grant were to be approved, it would leave \$26,978.82 remaining in the annual program budget.

Motion by James, seconded by Deneen, to waive the reading of Resolution No. 2026-15, there being ample copies available to the public. All ayes of present. MOTION PASSED.

Motion by James, seconded by Deneen, to approve Resolution No. 2026-15, a Resolution of the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority, approving the form and substance of the Façade Improvement Grant Agreement, and approving authority staff and officials to take all actions necessary to enter the authority into a Façade Improvement Grant Agreement with Nikhom Spa (3986 Central Ave NE). All ayes of present. MOTION PASSED.

RESOLUTION NO. 2026-15

A RESOLUTION OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY OF COLUMBIA HEIGHTS, MINNESOTA, APPROVING THE FORM AND SUBSTANCE OF THE FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT AGREEMENT, AND APPROVING AUTHORITY STAFF AND OFFICIALS TO TAKE ALL ACTIONS NECESSARY TO ENTER THE AUTHORITY INTO A FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT GRANT AGREEMENT WITH NIKHOM SPA (3986 CENTRAL AVE NE).

WHEREAS, the City of Columbia Heights (the "City") and the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority (the "Authority") have collaborated to create a certain Façade Improvement Grant Program (the "Program"); and

WHEREAS, pursuant to guidelines established for the Program, the Authority is to award and administer a series of grants to eligible commercial property owners and/or tenants for the purposes of revitalizing existing storefronts, increasing business vitality and economic performance, and decreasing criminal activity along Central Avenue Northeast and in the City's Business districts, pursuant to a Façade Improvement Grant Agreement with various property owners and/or tenants; and

WHEREAS, pursuant to the Program, the City is to coordinate a surveillance camera monitoring program by placing surveillance cameras on some of the storefronts that are part of the Program for the purposes of improving public safety in and around the Central Business District; and

WHEREAS, the Authority has thoroughly reviewed copies of the proposed form of the Grant Agreement.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that, after appropriate examination and due consideration, the Authority

1. approves the form and substance of the Grant Agreement, and approves the Authority entering into the Agreement with Nikhom Spa (3986 Central Ave NE).
2. that the City Manager, as the Executive Director of the Authority, is hereby authorized, empowered, and directed for and on behalf of the Authority to enter into the Grant Agreement.
3. that the City Manager, as the Executive Director of the Authority, is hereby authorized and directed to execute and take such action as they deem necessary and appropriate to carry out the purpose of the foregoing resolution.

ORDER OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

Passed this May 4, 2026

Offered by: Rachel James

Seconded by: Laurel Deneen

Roll Call: All ayes of present. MOTION PASSED.

President

Attest:

Secretary

4. Pledge of Allegiance Discussion.

Voight reported that during the February 2026 EDA meeting, the Commission asked staff to look into whether reciting the Pledge of Allegiance was listed in the EDA Bylaws or any other City guiding documents that might require its inclusion as part of the monthly meeting order of business.

Voight stated that, in response to the Commission's request, staff provided a brief informational update during the March meeting. As stated in that update, the EDA Bylaws do not mention the Pledge of Allegiance, nor do they include it in the order of business for meetings. The Pledge is not referenced in the City Charter, nor is it referenced in the City Code. Based on records of past EDA meetings, the EDA has typically included the Pledge as part of its proceedings since approximately 2003. Prior to 2003, records of EDA meetings suggest that the Pledge was sometimes recited, but not during every meeting, and with varying regularity. Staff is of the opinion that the EDA Board of Commissioners has the discretion to decide whether the Pledge is recited as part of its monthly meeting proceedings.

Questions/Comments from Members:

Deneen stated she would like to forego reciting the Pledge of Allegiance since it is not done for any other meeting besides the City Council meeting.

James offered that the Pledge of Allegiance could be said during the January meeting when officers are voted on, but not said during the rest of the meetings throughout the year.

Szurek wondered what was wrong with honoring the flag, and stated it does not take long to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Deneen expressed her appreciation of the separation between church and state. She mentioned that when there is a pledge that references God, it can go against the separation. Szurek expressed her opinion that that she did not understand the perspective because in her opinion the country was formed because of what God led the people to do and there is nothing wrong with honoring the flag. She stated she would like to continue to say the Pledge of Allegiance at each meeting.

Spriggs explained that there was a lot of attention on Saint Louis Park when they removed the Pledge of Allegiance from city meetings, and he would like to be mindful of that, especially since the City has had the spotlight on it recently. He added that he would not want the community to think that the topic is the priority for the EDA. He noted he is less inclined to make the change due to potential negative attention on the City that could harm people. Deneen explained that she was not suggesting the change to the City Council meetings since it would draw more attention than removing the Pledge of Allegiance for the EDA.

James explained that other boards and commissions do not do the Pledge of Allegiance, but she did not feel strongly one way or another.

Spriggs summarized that the EDA's consensus is to keep the Pledge of Allegiance in the meetings for now.

Szurek pointed out that it would be good to get feedback from the other commission members. James suggested tabling the item until the other EDA members were present. The EDA members agreed and the item will be tabled until the first meeting of 2027.

BUSINESS UPDATES

a. Purchase of 4217 Central Ave NE.

Voight noted that the property at 4217 Central Avenue is currently used as a rental property and is coming up for sale. Staff were given the opportunity to speak with the owner and walk through the site with the idea that the EDA may want to purchase it. She noted that the purchase of the site closely aligns with the intent of the Commercial Revitalization Program. The house recently had a new roof and siding put on. She explained that she walked the property with the City's inspector and agreed that it would be a good fit for the Commercial Revitalization Program and could be purchased, demolished, and prepared for commercial redevelopment. Staff put forth a contingent offer with the contingency being the EDA's approval. Staff and the homeowner agreed on a purchase price of \$225,000, which is the same price as the property the EDA most recently purchased on Central Avenue in 2024.

Forney added that staff's idea would be to use the ACHRA levy to fund the purchase. The ACHRA levy

currently has about \$600,000 in the fund. He noted that staff would like to know if the EDA would be interested in purchasing the property.

Voight pointed out that the exterior of the house has been updated, but the interior needs a lot of work. She added that staff spoke with the owner about the potential of the neighbors also eventually wanting to sell their properties.

Questions/Comments from Members:

James asked if the driveway would be included. Voight agreed that the driveway to the north would be included. James mentioned that it would be difficult to have much paved area on the site due to the City's limits on impervious surface. Forney replied that impervious surface percentage requirements only apply to residential lots.

Spriggs expressed his support for purchasing the property. He asked what the owner thought the neighbors would do in the future. Voight replied that the owner thought that the neighbor to the north had done a lot of work on the property and would not be inclined to have the EDA purchase the property. The property to the south may be interested in the EDA purchasing the lot in the future.

The EDA agreed that they were interested in purchasing the 4217 Central property. Forney replied that staff would work on continuing the negotiation with the owner and then bring the purchase agreement to the EDA.

Szurek asked if the owner was happy with what the EDA offered and the intent of purchasing the property. Voight replied that the owner was happy with the negotiation. Forney added that the owner would like to keep some items like the windows and AC units.

b. Economic Support Microloan Program Update.

Voight stated that the Economic Support Microloan Program was launched. The application period was open for two weeks. She noted that staff worked with MCCC to do in-person, online, and postal mail outreach in the City and received 38 applications, and 29 of the applications passed the initial eligibility review. She noted that MCCC would begin to reach out to eligible businesses that applied to give them information about the next steps and what documentation would be needed. Applicants will have about two weeks to submit documentation. She mentioned that there were a few businesses that reached out after the application deadline, asking to apply. She explained that staff decided that businesses could not apply after the deadline, but businesses would potentially be eligible to apply if there was funding remaining or the EDA wanted to do anything additional.

Questions/Comments from Members:

James suggested that the EDA discuss doing a second round opening for a wait list for businesses that did not apply before the deadline. She asked what type of businesses applied. Voight replied that she verified each business that applied. She added that the businesses that applied included auto shops,

restaurants, professional services, beauty and hair services, and retail businesses.

c. NOAH Loan Program Update.

Voight stated that the Community Development team went to the City landlord meeting on April 20th. She mentioned that she gave a presentation about the NOAH program to ensure that landlords were aware of the program and the updates since the program was launched. There were more than 20 people in attendance, and one duplex is currently moving forward with the inspection portion of the application. Forney added that staff are reviewing the program for any inefficiencies and will go back to the EDA if there are any changes.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Deneen, seconded by James, to adjourn the meeting at 5:31 pm. All ayes. MOTION PASSED.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah LaVoie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Sarah" and last name "LaVoie" clearly distinguishable.

—
Sarah LaVoie, Recording Secretary