



**Request for Proposals for Legal Services
City of Columbia Heights, Minnesota**

August 10, 2026

Request for Proposals for Legal Services City of Columbia Heights, Minnesota

Issued: August 10, 2026

Proposals Due: August 31, 2026

Submit Proposals To: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

Email: achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov

Address: City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421

Introduction

The City of Columbia Heights is seeking proposals from qualified law firms or attorneys to provide legal services to the City. The City invites proposals for one or more of the following service tracks:

1. Civil legal services / City Attorney services.
2. Prosecution services.
3. Labor and employment legal services.
4. A combined proposal for two or more of the service tracks.

Firms may submit for one service track, multiple service tracks, or all three tracks. If a firm proposes more than one track, the proposal should clearly identify the attorneys, staffing plan, fee structure, and scope for each service area.

The City's current legal services provided by Barna, Guzy & Steffen, Ltd. will conclude in November 2026. The City intends to complete the RFP process in time to allow for City Council review, finalist interviews, contract approval, and any necessary transition.

City Background

Columbia Heights is a Minnesota home rule charter city located in Anoka County, adjacent to Minneapolis. The City serves a diverse population of approximately 21,000 and provides a full range of municipal services.

The City Council is composed of the Mayor and four Councilmembers. The City Manager is responsible for daily administration and implementation of Council direction. The City Attorney provides legal advice and representation to the City Council, City Manager, departments, boards, and commissions.

Proposed Schedule

The following schedule is tentative and may be modified by the City.

- RFP issued: August 10, 2026
- Deadline for questions: August 24, 2026
- Proposals due: August 31, 2026
- Staff review of proposals: September 3-4, 2026
- Finalist interviews with City Council: September 28, 2026, at 4:30pm
- Council direction on selection: October 5, 2026
- Council Contract Approval: October 12, 2026
- Contract start date: November 01, 2026
- Current legal services conclude: October 31, 2026

RFP Contact and No-Contact Rule

To ensure a fair and consistent process, all questions regarding this RFP must be directed to:

Aaron Chirpich

City Manager

City of Columbia Heights

achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov

Firms submitting proposals should not contact the Mayor, City Councilmembers, City staff, board or commission members, or City consultants regarding this RFP except through the designated contact. Unauthorized contact may be considered by the City during proposal evaluation.

Questions and answers may be shared with all known interested firms if the City determines the information is relevant to the RFP process.

Scope of Services

Track 1: Civil Legal Services / City Attorney Services

The City seeks civil legal counsel with broad Minnesota municipal law experience. Services may include, but are not limited to:

- Advising the City Council, City Manager, department heads, staff, boards, and commissions.
- Attending regular and special City Council meetings and work sessions, Charter Commission, Planning Commission meetings and other meetings as requested by the City Manager.
- Advising on Minnesota Open Meeting Law, Minnesota Government Data Practices Act, conflicts of interest, ethics, and public records.

- Drafting and reviewing ordinances, resolutions, contracts, agreements, legal opinions, correspondence, policies, and procedures.
- Advising on City Charter, City Code, statutory authority, Council procedure, and municipal governance.
- Advising on land use, zoning, subdivision, planning, development, redevelopment, housing, economic development, tax increment financing, and public finance matters. *Specialized legal counsel related to economic development, tax increment financing, and EDA/HRA matters is provided by the City's EDA/HRA attorney
- Reviewing development agreements, joint powers agreements, franchise agreements, leases, easements, real estate documents, procurement documents, and public improvement contracts.
- Advising on code enforcement, licensing, nuisance abatement, administrative citations, and related enforcement procedures.
- Advising on litigation risk and representing the City in civil matters not handled by insurance-appointed counsel or other special counsel.
- Coordinating with the League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust, bond counsel, labor counsel, prosecution counsel, and other special counsel as needed.
- Providing legal updates or training to Council, boards, commissions, and staff when requested.
- Conduct regular office hours in Columbia Heights (City Hall and Public Safety) for approximately three to four hours per week (e.g. one morning per week). The City will give significant preference to a firm willing to offer regular office hours in the City of Columbia Heights Offices.

Track 2: Prosecution Services

The City seeks prosecution services for criminal, traffic, ordinance, licensing, code enforcement, and related matters within the City's jurisdiction. Services may include, but are not limited to:

- Prosecuting petty misdemeanors, misdemeanors, gross misdemeanors, traffic matters, ordinance violations, licensing violations, property maintenance violations, and other matters assigned by law or agreement.
- Reviewing reports, citations, charging decisions, diversion options, plea negotiations, and case strategy.
- Appearing at arraignments, pretrials, contested hearings, court trials, jury trials, probation violation hearings, restitution hearings, expungement proceedings, and appeals as applicable.
- Advising police, code enforcement, licensing staff, and other City staff on prosecution-related matters.
- Communicating with victims, witnesses, law enforcement, court administration, defense counsel, and City staff.
- Providing legal training or updates to police and enforcement staff when requested.
- Coordinating prosecution and civil enforcement approaches when matters overlap.

Track 3: Labor and Employment Legal Services

The City seeks labor and employment counsel for general advice, policy review, employment matters, labor relations, and related representation. Services may include, but are not limited to:

- Advising on employment law, workplace policies, employee discipline, investigations, personnel matters, disability accommodation, leave issues, wage and hour issues, and employment risk.
- Advising on collective bargaining, labor relations, grievance handling, arbitration, mediation, and unfair labor practice matters.
- [Participate in in-person collective bargaining negotiations.](#)
- Reviewing employee handbooks, personnel policies, employment agreements, separation agreements, memoranda of understanding, and collective bargaining agreements.
- Advising on public-sector labor statutes, civil service or charter-related employment provisions if applicable, as well as workplace compliance.
- Representing the City in employment-related litigation, administrative proceedings, arbitration, or other contested matters when requested.
- Coordinating with civil counsel, insurance counsel, and City staff as needed.

Proposal Format and Required Content

Proposals should be clear, concise, and organized in the order listed below. If proposing for more than one service track, please clearly separate responses by track where appropriate.

A. Title Page

Include:

- RFP title.
- Firm name.
- Office address.
- Primary contact name, title, email, and phone number.
- Service track or tracks proposed.
- Date of submission.

B. Transmittal Letter

Include a signed letter stating:

- The firm's interest in providing legal services to the City.
- The service track or tracks proposed.
- The firm's understanding of the City's needs.

- The name of the attorney authorized to bind the firm.
- Confirmation that the proposal will remain valid for at least 120 days after the proposal deadline.

C. Firm Background and Municipal Experience

Provide:

- Firm history and overview.
- Number of attorneys, paralegals, and support staff.
- Office locations.
- Areas of legal practice.
- Municipal law experience.
- Experience with Minnesota home rule charter cities or comparable Minnesota cities with populations between 15,000 and 25,000.
- Current Minnesota municipal client list, including services provided to each client.
- Former Minnesota municipal clients within the last five years, if any.
- Description of the firm's familiarity with League of Minnesota Cities resources, League of Minnesota Cities Insurance Trust coordination, Minnesota municipal associations, and other municipal law resources.

D. Proposed Staffing

For each service track proposed, identify:

- Proposed lead attorney.
- Backup attorney or attorneys.
- Other attorneys who may provide services.
- Paralegals and support staff.
- Role of each proposed team member.
- Years of municipal experience for each attorney.
- Relevant education, licenses, certifications, and professional memberships.
- Current municipal clients served by each proposed attorney.
- Availability and expected response time.
- Approach to continuity if the lead attorney is unavailable.
- Whether the City will have direct access to the lead attorney and backup attorneys.

Include resumes or biographies for all key attorneys and staff proposed for the City.

E. Communication and Service Approach

Describe:

- How the firm manages day-to-day legal requests.

- Expected response times for routine, urgent, and emergency matters.
- Preferred communication methods.
- Availability for office hours, in-person meetings, virtual meetings, phone calls, and email.
- Approach to agenda review, meeting preparation, and follow-up.
- Approach to written legal opinions and informal advice.
- Approach to keeping the City informed about legal developments including monthly summary updates for council review.
- Approach to managing cost, avoiding unnecessary work, and using lower-cost staff where appropriate.
- Approach to working with the City Manager, City Council, department heads, boards, commissions, and other City consultants.

F. Experience and Qualifications by Subject Area

Describe the firm's experience in the following areas, identifying specific attorneys where applicable:

- Minnesota municipal law.
- Minnesota home rule charter city governance.
- City council procedure and parliamentary process.
- Minnesota Open Meeting Law.
- Minnesota Government Data Practices Act.
- Records retention and public records.
- Conflicts of interest and public ethics.
- Ordinance and resolution drafting.
- City code interpretation and enforcement.
- Land use, zoning, subdivision, planning, variances, conditional use permits, interim use permits, and appeals.
- Development, redevelopment, housing, economic development, tax increment financing, and public finance.
- Public improvement projects, special assessments, easements, right-of-way, and real estate.
- Contracts, procurement, professional services agreements, construction contracts, joint powers agreements, leases, and franchise agreements.
- Code enforcement, nuisance abatement, administrative citations, licensing, and property maintenance.
- Civil litigation, claims management, insurance defense coordination, and risk management.
- Criminal prosecution, if proposing for Track 2.
- Labor and employment law, collective bargaining, grievances, arbitration, investigations, and workplace compliance, if proposing for Track 3.

G. Conflicts of Interest

Provide:

- A list of current clients that may create an actual, potential, or perceived conflict with representing the City.
- Identification of any current or recent representation of developers, contractors, property owners, businesses, public agencies, or other parties with matters before or involving the City.
- Identification of any representation of other local units of government with overlapping or adjacent jurisdiction.
- A description of the firm's conflict-checking process.
- A description of how conflicts would be disclosed, managed, waived, or resolved.
- Any personal, professional, or financial relationships between proposed attorneys and City elected officials, staff, or key stakeholders, if known.

The City reserves the right to determine whether a conflict is acceptable, waivable, or disqualifying.

H. References

Provide at least three municipal references, preferably Minnesota cities. For each reference, include:

- City or public agency name.
- Contact person.
- Title.
- Phone number.
- Email address.
- Services provided.
- Dates of service.
- Population and form of government.

I. Insurance, Licensing, and Certifications

Provide:

- Confirmation that all proposed attorneys are licensed and in good standing to practice law in Minnesota.
- Professional liability insurance coverage limits.
- General liability and other applicable insurance coverage, if any.
- Disclosure of any malpractice claims, professional discipline, or ethics complaints involving proposed attorneys within the last five years, including status and outcome.

- Any certifications, municipal law training, prosecution credentials, labor/employment credentials, or other relevant qualifications.

The selected firm will be required to maintain insurance acceptable to the City during the contract term.

J. Fee Proposal

Provide a complete fee proposal for each service track proposed. The City encourages firms to provide one or more of the following options:

1. Monthly retainer.
2. Hourly-rate-only structure.
3. Combination retainer and hourly-rate structure.
4. Alternative fee proposal.

The fee proposal must include:

- Monthly retainer amount, if proposed.
- Services included in the retainer.
- Services excluded from the retainer.
- Hourly rates by attorney, paralegal, and support staff.
- Meeting attendance rates, if different from hourly rates.
- Rates for office hours, routine work, litigation, prosecution, labor/employment work, and special projects, if different.
- Billing increments.
- Minimum charges for phone calls, emails, meetings, and other work, if any.
- Reimbursable expenses.
- Administrative charges.
- Legal research charges.
- Travel charges.
- Copying, mailing, filing, court, and technology charges.
- Proposed annual rate increases, if any.
- Proposed fee schedule for three years.
- Sample billing statement.
- Process for estimating costs on major projects or litigation.
- Process for notifying the City before significant unbudgeted work is performed.

Proposal Submission Instructions

Submit one electronic PDF copy of the proposal to:

Aaron Chirpich

City Manager

City of Columbia Heights

achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov

Proposals must be received no later than 4:30 p.m. on August 31, 2026.

Late proposals may not be considered. The City is not responsible for technical issues, delivery failures, or delays.

Public Data and Confidentiality

All proposal materials submitted to the City will be handled in accordance with the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act. Proposers should clearly identify any information they believe is nonpublic, confidential, trade secret, or otherwise protected from disclosure and explain the legal basis for that classification.

The City will make the final determination regarding data classification. Proposers should not submit sensitive or proprietary information unless it is necessary for the City's evaluation.

Evaluation Criteria

The City may evaluate proposals based on the following criteria:

- Experience providing legal services to Minnesota municipalities, home rule charter cities, or comparable municipalities with populations between 15,000 and 25,000.
- Qualifications, experience, and demonstrated municipal expertise of the proposed lead attorney and backup attorneys.
- Depth, qualifications, and availability of attorneys, paralegals, and other support staff.
- Demonstrated experience in the legal subject areas and services identified in this RFP.
- Understanding of municipal operations, governance, and public-sector legal needs.
- Overall fit with the City's needs and preferred working style. This includes approach to communication, accessibility, and responsiveness.
- Ability to provide practical, timely, clear, and actionable legal advice.
- Approach to identifying, disclosing, managing, and resolving potential conflicts of interest.
- Quality and relevance of municipal references and demonstrated client satisfaction.
- Adequacy of professional liability insurance coverage and overall risk-management practices.

- Competitiveness and clarity of the proposed fee structure, including cost transparency and overall value to the City.
- Ability and capacity to provide one or more of the service tracks identified in this RFP.
- Eligibility for certified small business evaluation preference.
- Interview performance, if selected as a finalist.

The City is not required to select the lowest-cost proposal. The City intends to select the proposal or proposals that best meet the City's needs, cost and other factors considered.

Review and Selection Process

City staff will review proposals and may request clarification or additional information from proposers. Staff will recommend finalists for interviews by the City Council.

To receive small business preference, the proposer must provide documentation demonstrating that its Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), DBE or Targeted Group Business (TGB) certification is current and active as of the proposal submission deadline. The City reserves the right to verify certification status with the applicable certifying authority before applying the preference.

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The City anticipates that selected finalists will be invited to interview with the City Council. Interviews may occur at a work session, special meeting, or other properly noticed meeting. The City may also conduct staff interviews, reference checks, and follow-up discussions.

After interviews, the City Council may advise the City Manager to:

- Select one firm for all legal services.
- Select separate firms for different service tracks.
- Direct staff to negotiate with one or more firms.
- Request additional information.
- Reject all proposals.
- Reissue the RFP.
- Take other action in the City's best interest.

Final selection will be determined by the City Manager, and contract approval will be made by the City Council.

Contract Term

The City anticipates an initial contract term of three years, with the option for renewal by mutual agreement. The City may consider a different term based on proposals received and Council direction.

The selected firm or firms will be required to enter into a written professional services agreement acceptable to the City.

City Reservation of Rights

The City reserves the right to:

- Reject any or all proposals.
- Waive informalities or irregularities.
- Request additional information.
- Interview any proposer.
- Negotiate scope, fees, and contract terms.
- Select one firm for all services or separate firms by service track.
- Modify, suspend, or cancel the RFP process.
- Reissue the RFP.
- Award a contract in the best interests of the City.
- Decline to award a contract.

Issuance of this RFP does not obligate the City to award a contract or pay any costs incurred by proposers in preparing proposals, attending interviews, or participating in the selection process.

Required Proposal Checklist

Each proposal should include:

- Title page.
- Transmittal letter.
- Identification of service track or tracks proposed.
- Firm background.
- Municipal law experience.
- Minnesota municipal client list.
- Experience with Minnesota charter cities or comparable cities.
- Proposed lead attorney.
- Backup attorneys.
- Support staff.
- Resumes or biographies.
- Availability and communication practices.
- Subject-area experience.
- Conflict disclosures and conflict procedures.
- Municipal references.
- Insurance information.
- Licensing and standing confirmation.
- Required disclosures.
- Fee proposal.

- Sample invoice.
- Any proposed contract terms or exceptions.

Optional Attachments Requested From Proposers

Proposers may include:

- Sample municipal client communication or legal update.
- Sample billing statement.
- Sample monthly retainer description.
- Sample conflict disclosure form.
- Proposed service transition plan.
- Proposed first 90-day work plan.
- Training topics available for Council, boards, commissions, or staff.