



# City Council Handbook

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## CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW AND RESOURCES

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the exciting position as an elected official of the Columbia Heights City Council. You will find that a leadership position in municipal government can be both rewarding and challenging. This handbook has been created to assist in your transition to this position. It will provide an overview of Columbia Heights and its government, as well as your primary responsibilities, and how elected and appointed officials, with the assistance of staff, can work together in the most efficient and effective way to best serve the Columbia Heights community.

The City Council handbook is offered as a resource to City officials to provide information about the opportunities and topics related to their role and to local government. In addition to information found in this handbook, council members are encouraged to work with the city manager for additional guidance and input. City Manager Aaron Chirpich can be reached at [achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov](mailto:achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov) or 763-706-3609.

### RESOURCES

The following publications are available online or in the Administration Department.

#### League of Minnesota Cities (LMC)

[www.lmc.org](http://www.lmc.org)

The League of Minnesota Cities provides information, education and training to elected officials and staff. LMC has an annual conference that provides an opportunity to connect with other member cities to learn how they have handled opportunities and issues. Throughout the year, the LMC provides legislative updates on the upcoming session and the implications of any new legislation. They hold a risk management seminar every year and other seminars and sessions as needed. If resources exist and personal schedules allow, council members are encouraged to attend LMC's local, state and national conferences.

#### League of Minnesota Cities Handbook for Minnesota Cities

<http://www.lmc.org/page/1/handbook-for-mn-cities.jsp>

The League of Minnesota Cities (LMC) assists cities by lobbying, providing training and serving as a resource for cities. The LMC handbook provides information about council member roles and responsibilities, laws regulating council action and special council requirements.



### **Columbia Heights City Charter**

[https://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/government/city\\_charter.php](https://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/government/city_charter.php)

Columbia Heights is a charter city, as authorized by Minnesota Statutes Chapter 410 (available online at <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=410>). Columbia Heights' City Charter is the City's constitution approved by citizens that establishes the City's form of government. Columbia Heights is organized in the council-manager form (see chapter 2 of this handbook). Through charters, citizens design their city's form of government. The Charter Commission is responsible for maintaining a responsive and efficient charter. The Chief Judge of District Court appoints Charter Commission members, who meet periodically to review the city charter, discuss issues affecting the charter and makes recommendations for changes to the City Council and the public.

### **Columbia Heights City Code**

[http://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/government/city\\_code.php](http://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/government/city_code.php)

The city code is a collection of ordinances that establishes the City's laws and regulations. Examples of topics covered within the city code include, but are not limited to: administration, city organization, city management, roles of officers and administrative departments, mayor and council member salaries, council meeting procedures, roles and responsibilities of various committees within the city organization, licensing requirements and regulations, public safety, planning and zoning, and city financing.

### **City of Columbia Heights Personnel Policy**

[Personnel Policy](#)

The personnel policy provides general city information and policies for employees.

### **Columbia Heights Intranet (HeightsNet)**

<https://colhgts.sharepoint.com/>

Columbia Heights' intranet provides a variety of helpful information, resources and forms (such as reimbursement forms).

### **Minnesota State Law**

<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/>

Minnesota state law establishes many rules and regulations for Minnesota cities.



#### **Metro Cities**

<http://www.metrocitiesmn.org/>

Metro Cities serves as a voice for metropolitan cities at the Legislature and Metropolitan Council, to influence state legislation affecting metro area cities, and regional policies that accommodate the needs of metro area cities. Metro Cities lobbies and monitors the Metropolitan Council, and represents cities before the Legislature and Executive Branch.

#### **National League of Cities (NLC)**

<http://nlc.org/>

The National League of Cities advocates and promotes cities and towns, provides programs and services, keeps leaders informed of critical issues, strengthens leadership skills by offering numerous training and education programs, recognizes municipal achievements, partners with state leagues and provides opportunities for involvement and networking. This organization has an annual conference (in Washington D.C. in the spring and a fall conference in various locations) that focuses on lobbying and federal issues that impact cities and information about national policies.

#### **Other**

A number of professional associations and private firms provide training on a variety of City-related topics. More information is available from the city manager who can be contacted at 763-706-3609 or [achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov](mailto:achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov).

## **CHAPTER 2: FORM OF GOVERNMENT**

### **COUNCIL-MANAGER PLAN**

Columbia Heights' City Charter establishes the council-manager plan as the City's form of government. The form of city government became popular at the turn of the century as part of the movement to reform and remove corruption from city organizations.

The council-manager plan combines the political leadership of elected officials with the managerial experience of an appointed official. The council is the policy making and legislative body; and the city manager is responsible for administration of the City.

Discretionary powers of the City are vested in and executed by the City Council and are subject to initiatives, referendums and recall powers of the people. The City Council oversees City administration, but exercises power through the city manager. The city manager is responsible for day-to-day city operations and is directly responsible to the City Council.

Additional information about other forms of city structure can be found on the [LMC website](#).



## MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

The City Council is composed of a mayor and four council members. All of the council seats are at-large (citywide) seats. The mayor and all council members represent all members of the community equally, not any specific ward or district.

### Council Member Terms

All council member terms are four years. Terms are staggered so only two council members are on the ballot at one time. The mayor term is two years. The mayor seat is on the ballot during each general election. Terms expire on the first Monday in January after the November election. The number of terms a council member may be elected to serve is unlimited.

Candidates may file for election or re-election in the even numbered years (i.e. 2026, 2028).

## SOURCES OF CITY AUTHORITY

The U.S. Constitution does not mention cities. However, cities are influenced by the federal government indirectly through state governments and directly through participation in federal funding programs.

The Minnesota State Constitution authorizes the Minnesota legislature to provide for the “creation, organization, administration, consolidation, division and dissolution of local government units and their functions, for the change of boundaries thereof” (Minnesota constitution article XII, section 3, available online at <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/constitution/>). The legislature provides general formation of cities; more specific details are included in the city charter and code. Additional City powers may be broadened or restricted by state statute. The legislature does provide cities some discretion over policy areas as long as they are consistent with state statutes.



## CHAPTER 3: CITY COUNCIL

The City Council includes the mayor and four council members. Each must be eligible to vote in Minnesota, registered to vote in the City and a resident of the City. Council members must live within the City limits when elected and continue to reside here during their full term. Each person on the council, including the mayor, has one vote.

### COUNCIL ROLES

#### Mayor

The mayor serves as the presiding officer of the council. The mayor is recognized as the head of City government for ceremonial purposes (examples: open houses, ribbon cuttings, citizen certificate presentations), by the courts for purposes of serving civil processes, and by the governor for purposes of the military law. If the mayor cannot participate at a meeting, or is otherwise unavailable, the president pro tempore assumes all the mayor's duties. The mayor also directs the Police Department as established by the City's charter.

#### Council President

The council president is designated annually by a majority vote of the council. The council president acts as the presiding officer over meetings in which the mayor is unable to participate and assumes all other roles of the mayor in their absence.

#### City Council

All City powers are vested in the City Council, except as otherwise specified by law or the Columbia Heights City Charter. The council ensures all obligations and duties imposed on the City by law are implemented. Since the City Council exercises its authority or takes action as one body, individual council members cannot act on behalf of the City.

The City Council is also the organization's legislative body. Council members approve the tax rate, adopt the budget, and set the City's vision. The council provides leadership for the community by identifying issues or opportunities and then implementing goals and strategies to solve issues. Council members focus on City policies, the City vision, ordinances, and intergovernmental affairs. Some examples include land use development, comprehensive planning, capital improvement projects, and strategic planning. The City Council gives the city manager the authority to implement policy through direction of operations and execution of strategic plans.



The city manager is responsible for the City's administrative duties, and Council members should communicate directly with the city manager regarding items related to city employees, inquiries, or other city topics. City staff execute council policies and directives given to them by the city manager and provide information to keep the council informed. The city manager and department directors provide staff direction and guidance through the chain of command.

#### **Stay informed and involved**

A key to success is to know the roles of the City Council and city staff. Council members receive a lot of information from a variety of sources. To be better prepared, it is recommended that council members learn about current issues, past issues, legislation and any other information which can be helpful to them. Opportunities to learn about the council and City include, but are not limited to:

- Attending council meetings.
- Watching council meetings available via links on the City's website.
- Participate in city functions and events outside of regular city council meetings and work sessions.
- Talk with the city manager who can direct you to department heads as needed.

## **CHAPTER 4: CITY MANAGER**

### **CITY MANAGER'S ROLE**

The city manager serves the council and community as the chief administrative officer of the City and brings local government projects and programs to citizens on the council's behalf. The city manager prepares the budget, recruits, hires, and supervises department directors, and is the council's chief advisor. Citizens and council members rely on the city manager to provide unbiased and objective information while presenting both sides of an issue and information about long-term consequences.

The city manager is appointed by the City Council and directs all city staff. See Columbia Heights' City Charter chapter 6, section 53 for the powers and duties of the city manager.

Since the city manager is the staff member hired by the council, it is important that requests for information or community issues be brought directly to the city manager. The city manager is in the best position to provide a response because many issues involve multiple departments, or work may already be in progress.



If a council member wishes to influence actions, decisions, recommendations, workloads, work schedules, or staff priorities, that member must work with other council members to do so as a matter of council policy. The full city council retains the authority to accept, reject, or amend staff recommendations on policy matters.

## COMMUNICATION

The need for regular communication between the city manager and council is essential to maintain open communication within the organization. The council establishes policy and programs, and the city manager executes council actions. The city manager keeps the council informed and is sensitive to council issues. Similarly, council members need to keep the city manager up to date on constituent concerns and future issues.

The city manager provides information between council and city staff. The city manager is responsible for communicating the city's position about policy matters to outside agencies on the council's behalf. Sharing timely information with the council is one of the city manager's highest priorities. The city manager:

- Ensures council members receive copies of correspondence that will assist them in policy-making.
- Provides other documents to the council on a regular basis, such as monthly or bi-monthly status reports, executive summaries and other information vital to the council member's position.
- Holds work sessions and study sessions to provide detailed presentations about beneficial information.
- Schedules council/staff meetings to focus on topics and enhance information exchange.
- Encourages presiding council member (either mayor or president pro tempore) to meet with the city manager prior to the council meeting to review agenda items.
- Has an open-door policy so individual council members can meet with the city manager on an impromptu and one-on-one basis.

## PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Like many other city managers, Columbia Heights' city manager belongs to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), a professional and educational association for city administrative officers that was founded in 1914. ICMA's mission: "to strengthen the quality of local government through professional management." The city manager is subject to ICMA's professional code of ethics and the 12 ethical principles of personal and professional conduct.



## CITY COUNCIL EVALUATION

The full city council conducts the city manager's review annually during a closed city council meeting and provides a summary report to the public during the next city council meeting. This evaluation helps ensure city goals are achieved and provides direction and guidance to the city manager. The city manager may be evaluated regarding city council relationships, public relations, effective leadership of staff, fiscal management, communications, personal traits, and intergovernmental affairs.

All city council questions or comments should be directed to the city manager at 763-706-3609 or [achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov](mailto:achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov).

## CHAPTER 5: CITY STRUCTURE

### RESTRICTIONS ON STAFF POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

The City of Columbia Heights is a nonpartisan local government. Professional staff formulates recommendations in compliance with council policy and are not influenced by political factors for the good of the organization and the community as a whole.

### CITY DEPARTMENTS

The city manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of the City and supervises the organization through division directors. There are eight city departments:

#### Administration

As city manager, Aaron Chirpich acts as the director of the administration department. This department is responsible for providing citywide human resources and labor relations services as well as cable television franchise administration, legal services oversight, elections administration, data practices management, records retention oversight, City communications, and city council support services.

#### Community Development

Mitchell Forney is the community development director. This department consists of building inspections, planning, zoning, economic development, and business licensing.

#### Finance

Joseph Kloiber is the finance director. This department is responsible for the City's finances, accounting, payroll, insurance, and liquor operations.

#### Information Technology

Jesse Hauf is the information technology director. This department is responsible for managing and supporting the City's technology infrastructure and data security.



### **Fire**

Dan O'Brien is the fire chief. This department is responsible for providing fire protection, emergency medical assistance, fire safety, and education, as well as inspections and property maintenance enforcement.

### **Library**

Renee Dougherty is the library director. The library provides free access to informational and recreational materials, technology resources, and educational programming.

### **Police**

Matt Markham is the police chief. This department is responsible for public protection, programs to prevent crimes, and community-oriented policing.

### **Public Works**

~~Kevin Hansen~~ David Cullen is the public works director ~~city engineer~~. This department is comprised of Streets, Parks, and Utilities. Public Works also oversees citywide refuse management.

### Engineering and Facilities

~~Rochelle Widmer is the engineering and facilities director. This department provides services for public improvement projects and provides~~ facility maintenance for all city buildings and grounds.

### **Recreation**

Keith Windschitl is the recreation director. The Recreation Department is responsible for providing recreation and senior citizen programming in the city.

## **CHAPTER 6: SUPPORT, TECHNOLOGY, AND LEGAL COUNSEL**

### **SUPPORT**

#### **Staff Support**

Staff support is provided in response to requests from the City Council as a whole. Requests for information, service-related needs, or policy positions should be considered as an item for the City Council meeting agenda. Staff will complete work within an established timeline of the Council when directed by Council action, supervised by the city manager. To request support, contact the city manager at 763-706-3609 or achirpich@columbiaheightsmn.gov.



### **Mailboxes**

Council members receive conference materials, mail other correspondence during meetings and in their mailboxes at City Hall.

### **Meeting Materials**

The ~~draft~~ City Council meeting agenda and packet is delivered via e-mail on the ~~Thursday~~Wednesday prior to the meeting. ~~The final City Council meeting agenda and full packet is delivered to City Council members via e-mail on the Friday prior to the meeting.~~

### **TECHNOLOGY**

To enhance council members' service to the community and their ability to communicate with staff and the public, the City provides meeting facilities and office equipment for City business. The City provides technological equipment with necessary software, internet, and e-mail capabilities. Use of personal computer equipment may make its contents subject to public disclosure and review. Please contact the City Manager if you have any questions or concerns relating to technology.

Use of technology such as computer, internet and e-mail, cell phones, desktop phones, iPads and digital equipment must be done with integrity and be able to withstand public scrutiny. Refer to the Information Security Policy on the intranet for details.

### **Public Record**

City emails involving council members and members of advisory boards and commissions are public records (with very few exceptions as stated by the Minnesota Data Practices Act. A helpful resource is available through the League of Minnesota Cities:  
<http://www.lmc.org/media/document/1/datapractices.pdf>.

### **Public Information**

Email or text messages not considered public record may still be public information. Those interested in copies of these items must file a public disclosure request. Requests for private data or information outside of the scope of a council member's role should be routed to the city manager.

### **LEGAL COUNSEL**

Legal counsel for the City is through the city attorney. The city attorney is the legal advisor for the council, its committees, commissions and boards, the city manager and all city officers and employees with respect to any legal question involving an official duty or any legal matter pertaining to City affairs. General city attorney legal responsibilities include:

- Provides civil and criminal prosecution services to the City.



- Provides legal assistance necessary for formulation and implementation of legislative policies and projects.
- Represents the City's interest, as determined by the City Council, in litigation, administrative hearings, negotiations and similar proceedings.
- Prepares or approves ordinances, resolutions, contracts and other legal documents to best reflect and implement the purposes and intentions of the City Council; and
- Keeps City Council and staff apprised of court rulings and legislation affecting the legal interests of the City. The city attorney represents the City Council as a whole and not individually.

## CHAPTER 7: COMPENSATION

### CITY COUNCIL COMPENSATION

Council salaries are set by ordinance (must be adopted at least six months before the election). Salary increases are effective the first meeting in January after the November election.

Mayor:	\$1,250 per month	\$15,000 per year
Council Members:	\$ 900 per month	\$10,800 per year

City council members are eligible to participate in the City's medical, dental, and life insurance programs. The City contributes the same monthly amount towards council members' insurance benefits as it does to non-union employees. Please see the human resources director for the current contribution schedule.

#### Reimbursement for Travel Costs

When traveling for official city business the mayor and council members are eligible for reimbursement of actual lodging expenses and the following amounts for mileage and meals:

Mileage and meals (refer to HeightsNet for current rates).

~~Meals:~~

Travel expense vouchers are available on HeightsNet or from the city clerk. Receipts must be fully itemized for purchases to be reimbursed. Please see Travel Policies for additional information.

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## **PAYROLL INFORMATION**

City council members are paid on the same pay schedule as regular employees. Pay days are bi-weekly on Fridays with the first payday in January. Payroll is automatic, there are no time sheets necessary. Newly elected city council members must complete the following enrollment items before the year's first pay period:

- W-4
- I-9 document (additional documents need to accompany this, i.e. passport or drivers' license and social security card)
- Direct deposit form
- Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA) membership election form
- Online insurance and benefit enrollment

To complete the necessary paperwork, please contact the human resources director at 763-706-3608.

### **Public Employees Retirement Association Benefit**

Elected officials have the opportunity to be a member of the Public Employees Retirement Association (PERA). A membership election by public officials form must be completed even if one chooses not to become a member. The City will pay the employer's share and the council member or mayor so electing membership will have the employee's share deducted from their salary. Upon becoming eligible, council members are able, but not required, to purchase prior service credit as is allowable by statute by paying the employee's share. Upon such payment to purchase prior service credit, the City will pay to the Association a matching amount as provided by law.



## **CHAPTER 8: TRAINING AND TRAVEL POLICY FOR CITY COUNCIL, CITY BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS**

### **TRAINING BUDGET**

The City Council has an annual training and education budget as well as an in-town and out-of-town travel budget to be used for training opportunities from resource organizations listed on pages 1-3. Lobbying efforts are not funded through this allocation.

### **TRAVEL INFORMATION/POLICIES**

#### **Travel involving an overnight stay**

Give prior notice to city manager before traveling on overnight business explaining the trip's purpose, travel dates, and other details. Doing so creates open lines of communication between council members and the city manager.

If you need assistance in making conference registration or travel plans, please contact the city clerk at 763-706-3611 or [sion@columbiaheightsmn.gov](mailto:sion@columbiaheightsmn.gov). Registering and making travel plans through the city clerk allows for direct payment of these costs by the city instead of council members making payment and submitting for subsequent reimbursement.

#### **Travel Expenses**

Audit standards require a fully itemized claims form for expense reimbursement along with any unexpected portion of the advance, to be submitted to the city manager's office within 15 days of the close of the authorized travel period for which the expenses have been advanced.

Transportation costs are reimbursed at the rate for the most reasonable means of transport. For example, if an elected or appointed official chooses to fly first class, the city reimburses the coach rate and the official pays the difference.

Hotel/motel accommodations are reimbursed at the single-room rate per person. Government or discount rates should be used wherever possible.



### **Policies**

All requests for reimbursement must be made on the approved Travel Expense Voucher located on HeightsNet. Itemized receipts must accompany all reimbursement claims.

- Meal costs for official functions (political or professional organizations) are paid at full actual costs.
- There is no reimbursement for alcoholic beverages.
- Expenses are not reimbursed for spouses, guests, those not employed by the City, or other persons not authorized to receive reimbursement under this policy or state regulations.
- Reimbursement may be claimed by one person for several employees or officials eating together. Please list all names on the reimbursement claim form.
- Incidental expenses (i.e. telephone, parking, taxis, buses, rental cars) are reimbursed. Use the travel expense voucher form and include any receipts. To request approval for rental cars, submit the travel authorization form to the city manager's office..
- Personal vehicles may be used for City business. As stated above, mileage for business use is reimbursed at the Internal Revenue Service's allowable mileage rate. This rate is shown on the Travel Expense Voucher.
- Report eligible expenses on a travel expense voucher form within 15 days after the trip. Attach receipts for expenses claimed and submit to the city manager's office.

For assistance with the above contact the city clerk at 763-706-3611 or [sion@columbiaheightsmn.gov](mailto:sion@columbiaheightsmn.gov).

## **CHAPTER 9: COMMUNICATIONS AND MEDIA RELATIONS**

### **COMMUNICATIONS**

As elected officials, council members have a responsibility to communicate information to the public. Communicating accurate, timely and professional information is important to ensuring the quality and credibility of information being provided to the public.

#### **Public Record**

Communications (electronic or written) involving city council members and members of advisory boards and commissions are public records (with a few exceptions as stated by the Minnesota Data Practices Act - <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/>). <https://www.lmc.org/resources/data-practices-analyze-classify-and-respond/>



Communications not considered public record may still be public information (i.e. e-mail, text messages). Those interested in copies of these items must file a public disclosure request. Requests for private data or information outside the scope of a council member's role should be routed to the city manager.

#### **Align with Minnesota Open Meeting Law**

Information posted or responded to should be done in alignment with the open meeting law. More information about the open meeting law is available through the Minnesota Data Practices Office at <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/meetings/>. Another resource is the League of Minnesota Cities Informational Memo on Meetings of City Councils at <https://www.lmc.org/resources/meetings-of-city-councils/>.

Council members should generally act with caution when using electronic means to communicate with one another. If a council member wishes to share information with other members, do so through the city manager. Materials relating to agenda items for City business (including email) must be provided to the public at the meeting.

Council members must be cautious about email or social media communications shared among three or more council members:

- Example of an open meeting law violation: A council member posts a comment on a Facebook page about a proposed ordinance. A second council member comments that they agree, and a third council member clicks the "like" button.

#### **Citizen questions, comments and concerns**

It's important that council members direct citizen questions, comments, and concerns to the appropriate staff: [info@columbiaheightsmn.gov](mailto:info@columbiaheightsmn.gov) email address, or to the Ask a Question/Report a Concern form on the City's website. Doing so ensures requests are routed to the appropriate department or staff person and holds them accountable to ensure that proper follow-up is made and the task is completed. In addition, since some requests cover multiple departments, there may be a request history that will be useful as staff works to resolve the issue.

#### **Written Correspondence**

City council members often need to write letters to citizens, businesses, or other public agencies. City letterhead, note cards, and envelopes are available for city business use. Contact staff in the Administration Department for these items. Written letters and memoranda received by the City, addressed to a council member or the council as a body, are forwarded via email if received in electronic format, or photocopied and provided to all council members with a copy kept on file.



### **Electronic Communications**

Generally, the Columbia Heights City Council receives agenda materials, background information and other meeting information via email. Contact the city manager if there are questions about these items.

### **Social Media**

Since social media is an effective and frequently chosen communication tool among the public, the City of Columbia Heights has official Facebook pages.

## **COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR E-MAIL AND SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Public Perception**

City council members are public officials representing the City of Columbia Heights and its policies and perspectives.

### **Official versus Individual Perspectives**

Since the public connects city officials to the City of Columbia Heights, it's important to clarify official perspectives from individual perspectives.

It is advised for council members to separate official and private citizen roles. When presenting information on behalf of the City of Columbia Heights, identify the role of being an elected official for the City. When presenting individual perspectives, clarify that those viewpoints are not representative of the City of Columbia Heights but are personal opinions. Personal social media account names should not be tied to the City.

### **Public Information**

Any published content, written or electronic (email, for example), may be considered public information or covered under the Minnesota Data Practices Act. Informal messages not related to a public official's role, such as meeting reminders, telephone messages, and informal notes are not public record.

### **Large Outreach**

Information posted on social media is public and will remain online for a long time. Since both email and social media posts can be quickly shared with other audiences, it is important to post professional messages and avoid political comments.



### **Discoverability**

Generally, email is not removed from the system even if deleted. Email is discoverable in litigation, making it essential to use it cautiously. When seeking legal advice or to discuss matters of pending litigation or other “confidential” City business, ensure e-mails are sent to only those intended because the attorney-client privilege protecting the document from disclosure may be waived.

### **MEDIA RELATIONS**

#### **Media Inquiries**

Council members are encouraged to refer all media inquiries to the city manager prior to discussing and voting on an item. After a vote has been taken, individual council members may comment on their decision. It is understood that individual council member decisions may not be reflective of the council’s majority vote.

Following these guidelines is important to the democratic process because it helps avoid creating the public perception that a vote or decision has been made on a topic before all the information has been presented to the City Council. That perception could discourage the public from engaging in the democratic process and could have negative legal implications for the City.

#### **City Manager’s Role**

The city manager communicates on the City’s behalf in interviews, publications, news releases, on social media sites and related communications. The city manager is in the best position to provide a response because many issues involve multiple departments, or work may already be in progress. Often, the communications coordinator or the appropriate department director will handle interviews and communications on behalf of the city manager.

#### **Good to Know**

When the media calls about:

- **Upcoming agenda items, issues, or discussion topics:** wait to provide information until the topic is voted on. This communicates that a decision has not been made and allows the public process to work by keeping the topic open for citizen input. If a council member discusses the issue with media before a decision is made, there is a potential that the public may be confused about the council’s direction. This may create a public perception that a vote or decision has been made on a topic and discourage the public from engaging in the democratic process.
- **Routine or public information:** i.e. a meeting time or agenda. Provide media with the information and notify the city manager of the request.



- **Other information:** i.e. city personnel, potential litigation, controversial issues, an opinion about a City matter, or if unsure of the type of question. It is recommended to work with the city manager on these topics. The city manager typically works with staff on these issues and can present the discussion scope or topic.
- **Media response:** If an answer isn't readily available, a good response to media inquiries is "I don't have all the information about that. Let me find out and I'll return the call." Don't forget to get the respective media's name, contact information, and deadline so a response can be provided.

## CHAPTER 10: CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

### GENERAL

The City Council decides public meeting times and places. Currently, the council meets the second and fourth Monday of the month at 6 pm and holds a work session on the first Monday of the month at 6:00 pm. Regular meetings are held in the City Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE. Work sessions are held in the Shared Vision Room at City Hall. If a legal holiday occurs on one of these Mondays, the council meeting will be held the next business day. All meetings are held in compliance with Minnesota's Open Meeting Law. All regular and special meeting dates and times are posted on the city website. [http://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/calendar\\_app/index.html](http://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/calendar_app/index.html).

All regular City Council meetings are live broadcast, recorded, and re-broadcast on public access television (Comcast channel 16 and CenturyLink channel 8052) and archived and available live streaming on the City's website.

Meeting agendas and minutes for all City Council meetings are available on the [City's website](#).

#### Quorum

To legally conduct business at meetings, the city council needs a quorum (majority) of members present. At least three city council members constitute a quorum.

### TYPES OF MEETINGS

#### Align with Minnesota Open Meeting Law

The City Council and any committee, subcommittee, board, or commission that makes or recommends decisions to the City Council are subject to the Minnesota Open Meeting Law:

<https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/meetings/>, <https://www.lmc.org/resources/meetings-of-city-councils/>



Communication regarding City business among three or more council members should only take place at an open meeting or a meeting lawfully closed pursuant to Minnesota statute. Committee quorums depend on the number of people on the committee.

Council and committee members should generally act with caution when communicating face-to-face or through written or electronic correspondence. If a council member wishes to share information with other members, this should be done through the city manager. Materials relating to agenda items for city business (including e-mail) must be provided to the public at the meeting.

#### **Regular Meetings**

The Columbia Heights City Council convenes regular meetings twice each month. At the first meeting of the year, the council:

- Designates an official newspaper.
- Assigns committee duties to members.
- Appoints a Council President.
- Reviews operational policies and guidelines if necessary and makes necessary changes.
- Works on other organizational business as deemed necessary.

#### **Agenda**

The council packet contains an agenda with information about each agenda item. Packets are available [online](#) on the Friday before the meeting.

Council members wishing to discuss an item at a work session or request action on an item at a council meeting should request the city manager place the item on the agenda. Council members can also make a brief report about a meeting or event at a meeting without prior notice. This report should occur during the Council and Administrative Reports portion of the meeting.

#### **Special Meetings**

Special meetings are any meeting other than a regular meeting and can be scheduled by the mayor, any two council members, or the city manager with at least three days' notice to the other members. These meetings could be scheduled to address additional business, budgets, or other pending items the council was unable to discuss at a regular meeting or need to address before the next regularly scheduled meeting.

Any special meeting must comply with Minnesota's open meeting law. Council members are notified of special meetings at least three days before the meeting, and written notices are posted at least three days before the meeting. Those who have filed a written request for notice for special meetings must also be notified.



### **Closed Meetings**

The Columbia Heights City Council *may* meet in a closed meeting:

- To consider strategies for labor negotiations under the Public Employer Labor Relations Act;
- To evaluate the performance of an individual the council has authority over (i.e. the city manager);
- To review information considered attorney-client privilege with the city attorney or city attorney designee;
- To discuss the purchase or sale of property;
- For security briefings

Meetings *must* be closed for:

- Preliminary consideration of allegations or charges against an individual the council has authority over (i.e. the city manager);
- Portions of meetings that include:
  - Data that would identify alleged victims or reporters of criminal sexual conduct, domestic abuse, or maltreatment of minors or vulnerable adults;
  - Internal affairs data relating to allegations of law enforcement personnel misconduct or active law enforcement investigative data;
  - Educational data, health data, medical data, welfare data, or mental health data that are not public;
  - An individual's medical records governed by certain sections of Minnesota law

To hold a closed meeting, the City Council must follow Minnesota's open meeting law procedures. All closed meetings (except those closed as permitted by the attorney-client privilege) must be electronically recorded at the public body's expense. Unless otherwise provided by law, recordings must be preserved for at least three years after the meeting date.

If a closed meeting is to evaluate an individual's performance, this individual's name must be announced before the closed meeting. If this individual requests an open meeting, advance notice must be provided so he/she can make an informed decision about opening the meeting.

### **Work Sessions**

Work sessions provide an opportunity for council members to discuss items that may be future agenda items or for informational purposes. Several work sessions are held about the City's budget before its finalization and levy at the end of the year. Work sessions are typically held each month on the first Monday at 6 pm. The agenda and related items are posted online in the same location as the regular city council meetings the Friday before the work session.



Work sessions are held in a less formal atmosphere, using a consensus-building approach. No formal action is typically taken at the work sessions.

#### **Emergency Meetings**

The City Council has authority under the City Charter and Minnesota State Statute to call emergency meetings for items that require immediate council consideration. For example, a meeting may be called to declare a local emergency if there is a state of emergency, such as a natural disaster.

### **CHAPTER 11: ADVISORY BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES, AND TASK FORCES**

The City of Columbia Heights has advisory boards, commissions, committees, and task forces that the public serve on. Every member of the City Council is appointed to serve in a liaison capacity on one or more of these boards, commissions, committees, and task forces.

#### **REPRESENTATION BY CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS**

City council members act as liaisons to facilitate communication between the City Council and the various citizen groups, government committees, and boards. City council members acting in a formal liaison capacity with outside citizen groups and other elected bodies should represent themselves as a member of the City Council body as a whole. If a personal belief is contrary to the City Council body's belief, the liaison should either withhold comment or participation or should make it known to the outside group that they are speaking or acting as an individual and not as a representative of the City Council.

City council members are also appointed as liaisons to city commissions and boards. The liaison helps to increase the City Council's familiarity with the membership, programs, and issues of the boards, commissions, committees, and task forces. In fulfilling their liaison assignment, members may communicate topics that the council would like discussed to the advisory body chair through the staff liaison.

City council members are not voting members of the advisory bodies and are generally not actively participating members of the advisory boards. Rather, they provide a link between the City Council and the advisory boards to transfer and clarify information between the two entities. In interacting with the boards, commissions, committees, and task forces, the council member should reflect the council's views as a body. It is not the role of the liaison to attempt to direct or influence discussion by sharing personal opinions rather than representing the City Council's position. When asked for their opinion, council members should share it with the advisory body, but council members should generally not be part of the group discussion.



## **APPOINTMENT TO AND ATTENDANCE AT BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES, AND TASK FORCES**

### **Appointment to boards, commissions, committees, and task forces**

Appointments to boards, commissions, committees, and task forces are typically made at the first meeting in January. The mayor will inquire about what liaison appointments are desired by each member and will submit recommendations to the full council to fill the various boards, commissions, committees, and task forces. The full city council will vote to confirm the appointments.

### **Attendance at boards, commissions, committees, and task forces**

If a council member cannot attend their assigned advisory body meeting, they should notify the city manager to see if another council member is available to fill in. If a council member fails to attend four meetings in a year and fails to notify the city manager that they will be absent, the city council may consider assigning another member to that position for the remainder of the year.

All representative positions held by the mayor or a city council member on a board, commission, committee, or task force, whether an appointment or liaison position, will terminate when the member's service in elected office terminates.

## **STAFF RELATIONSHIP TO ADVISORY BODIES**

The city manager assigns and directs staff to advisory bodies. Staff support and assistance may be provided to advisory boards, commissions, and task forces. While staff may work closely with advisory bodies, staff members remain responsible to immediate supervisors and the city manager. Members of commissions, boards, or committees are responsible for the advisory body. The chairperson is responsible for committee compliance with city code and/or committee bylaws. Staff members assist the advisory body chair to ensure appropriate compliance with state and local laws and regulations.

Advisory bodies make recommendations to the city council through adopted council agenda procedures. When an advisory body wishes to correspond with an outside agency, the City Council must review and approve the communication.

## **COMMITTEES AND COMMISSIONS BY ORDINANCE**

Columbia Heights City Code includes committees and commissions established by ordinance (sections 3.301 through 3.314—

[https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/columbiahts/latest/columbiaheights\\_mn/0-0-0-404#JD\\_Ch.3ArticleIII](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/columbiahts/latest/columbiaheights_mn/0-0-0-404#JD_Ch.3ArticleIII)).



#### **Park and Recreation Commission**

Consists of seven regular members who reside in the City, and meetings are held at 6 pm on the fourth Wednesday of each month at Murzyn Hall. The Park and Recreation Commission supervises and controls the use of public parks, recreation, and senior citizen programs in the City, including parks, parkways, playgrounds, recreation fields and buildings, and all related public service facilities. The Commission also recommends improvements for parks and has the authority to make reasonable administrative rules and regulations, including setting fees and governing public use of parks and buildings.

#### **Planning and Zoning Commission**

Consists of five regular members and meetings are held in the city council chambers at 6 pm on the first Tuesday of the month. The commission prepares and maintains a [Comprehensive Plan](#) for the physical development of the City. The Commission also serves as the Board of Appeals and Adjustments of Variance and Appeal Cases. Another commission function is as an advisory board to the City Council on matters pertaining to Conditional Use Permit applications and zoning amendments.

#### **Sustainability Commission**

Consists of nine members and meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month at city hall. The commission was established in 2023 to raise awareness and promote sustainable practices within the community. Implementing these sustainable practices will aid the City in reducing the environmental impact of human activities. The Sustainability Commission will also bring together different perspectives and expertise to ensure that sustainability initiatives are responsive to the community's needs and concerns.

#### **Library Board**

Consists of five regular members who are residents of Columbia Heights. Meetings are held in the history room of the library at 5:30 pm on the first Wednesday of the month. The Library Board supervises and controls policies, programs, use and physical plant of the city library, including all lands and equipment, and the setting of service levels and manpower. The board also recommends improvements for the library and makes administrative rules and regulations, including the setting of fees, governing public use of the library and its facilities, and is subject to the direction and authority of the City Council.

#### **Youth Commission**

The purpose of the Columbia Heights Youth Commissioner program is for the youth of Columbia Heights to serve as a non-voting member on select City Boards and Commissions. These positions aim to inspire and bring new ideas from a youth perspective, create an educational environment for youth looking to expand their knowledge of government and leadership functions, and provide experience-building opportunities for area youth seeking increased community and government engagement.



## COMMISSIONS CREATED BY STATUTE

### Charter Commission

The Charter Commission must have not more than fifteen and not less than seven members, who are appointed by the Chief Judge of Anoka County District Court. They are appointed for four-year terms. Charter Commission meetings are held quarterly on the third Thursday of the month at 7 pm at City Hall. The city charter enables the City of Columbia Heights to be a self-governing city under the municipal home rule provisions of the Constitution and Statutes of Minnesota. The Charter Commission is charged with keeping the city charter current under procedures authorized by state statutes §410.05 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=410.05>) and §410.12 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=410.12>).

### Economic Development Authority

The Economic Development Authority consists of the five city council members and two additional appointed members. The EDA meets at 5~~6~~ pm on the first Monday of every month at City Hall. The EDA provides financial and technical assistance and resources to residential, commercial, and industrial interests to promote health, safety, welfare, economic development, and redevelopment.

### Housing and Redevelopment Authority

The Housing and Redevelopment Authority membership consists of the five city council members and does not meet regularly.

## CHAPTER 12: OPEN MEETING LAW AND DATA PRACTICES OPEN MEETING LAW

With only a few exceptions, city council meetings, including committees, subcommittees, board, and commission meetings, are open to the public. The open meeting law ensures the public is fully informed about decisions made by elected officials and also ensures the public's right to participate in City Council actions. More information about the open meeting law is available through the Minnesota Data Practices Office at <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/meetings/>. Another resource is the League of Minnesota Cities Informational Memo on Meetings of City Councils at <https://www.lmc.org/resources/meetings-of-city-councils/>.

Whenever the council meets, the following information should be available to the public:

- Date.
- Time.
- Location.



The public should be able to:

- Be present and watch the meeting.
- See how council members vote on issues.
- Receive printed information the council has at the meeting.
- Have a summary of council minutes.

Any scheduled gathering of the city council or committee must give proper notice and be open to the public. Chance meetings and social gatherings are excluded; however, council members cannot discuss or receive information on official business in private social gatherings.

There are few exceptions to the open meeting law and specific requirements regarding notice and subject of closed meetings. Strict adherence to these requirements is necessary to avoid violating the statute. The city attorney should be consulted when the council considers conducting a closed meeting.

Council members who intentionally violate the provisions of the open meeting law are subject to personal liability up to \$300 in civil penalties per single occurrence. Government entities are prohibited from paying these penalties for council members. If a council member has three or more intentional violations, the result is forfeiture of the right to serve on the city council. Examples of potential violations are:

- Chamber of Commerce gatherings with council members;
- Planning sessions with staff.
- Neighborhood land use gatherings.
- Commenting or “liking” social media posts; and
- E-mail chain creating a serial meeting.

### **MINNESOTA’S DATA PRACTICES ACT**

Minnesota’s Data Practices Act gives public access to city records and data to balance the public’s right to know with respect for individual privacy. The act presumes that government data are public and accessible for inspection and copying unless a federal law, state statute, or temporary classification of data notes otherwise. Since there are significant penalties for willfully releasing private and confidential data, council members should contact the city manager when there are questions about what information is public and private.

In addition, a city that violates any provision of the Data Practices Act is liable for any damage caused by the violation. The person damaged may bring action against the City to cover damages, plus costs and reasonable attorney fees.



- More information about the Minnesota Data Practices Act is available through the Minnesota Data Practices Office at <https://mn.gov/admin/data-practices/>
- The League of Minnesota Cities provides helpful information about data practices online: <https://www.lmc.org/resources/data-practices-analyze-classify-and-respond/>.

#### **Public or Private**

Data is classified into categories to define confidentiality. These categories assist the city in deciding whether and to whom data can be released.

#### **Public Record**

Communications (electronic or written) involving city council members and members of advisory boards and commissions are public record (with a few exceptions as stated by the Minnesota Data Practices Act).

Communications not considered public record may still be public information (i.e. email, text messages). Those interested in copies of these items must file a public disclosure request. Requests for private data or information outside the scope of a council member's role should be routed to the city manager for assistance.

#### **Elected Officials and Financial Disclosures Required by State Statute**

The disclosure of financial information of elected or appointed officials required by state statute, which are filed with the City, are classified as public data on individuals.

#### **Personnel Data**

Some personnel data of city employment applications, present and past employees, members of advisory boards and commissions, volunteers, and independent contractors is public. Public personnel data:

- Name
- Salary
- Contract fees
- Pension
- Fringe benefits
- Expense reimbursements
- Job title and job description
- Education, training and previous work experience
- Terms of any administrative or judicial agreement
- Work location and work telephone number
- Time records



- Date of first and last employment
- Existence and status of any complaints or charges against an employee
  - *Note: actual complaint circumstances are not public, whether or not the charge or complaint resulted in disciplinary action. The final disposition of any disciplinary action, with the reasons the action was necessary and information documenting those reasons are public when a final disposition is made. Final disposition also includes resignation when the resignation occurs after the final decision of the city or arbitrator.*

The following is public and refers to former or current applicants; either for employment or an appointment to an advisory board.

- Veteran status
- Relevant test scores
- Rank on eligibility list
- Education, training, and work availability

#### Private Record

Some examples of private data include:

- **Applicants for city positions.** Names are private except when certified as eligible for employment and considered a finalist by the city manager. A finalist is someone called in for additional interviews but has not been chosen for the position.
- **Appraisal data:** confidential until released or until the property is sold.
- **Arrest data, response data, and investigative data.** Classified as public information once the investigation is closed and charges are filed.
- **Elected officials' correspondence.** The Data Practices Act states that correspondence between individual community members and elected officials is private; however, it can be made public by the sender or recipient.
- **Property complaints.** Complaints to the city of Columbia Heights that are ordinance violations are confidential data. For example, if a neighbor reports another neighbor is in violation of an ordinance, the name of the complainant cannot be disclosed.

## CHAPTER 13: CODE OF CONDUCT

The mayor and council members are dedicated to promoting the values and integrity of local government and democracy and are committed to governing efficiently and effectively. After taking the oath of office as a city council member, they agree to conduct themselves in accordance with the following code of conduct:

- The professional and personal conduct of council members must be above reproach and avoid the appearance of impropriety. Members should refrain from abusive conduct, personal



charges, or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of other council members, boards, commissions, staff, or the public intended to disrupt and not further the City's business.

- Council members must abide by applicable state laws, city ordinances, and other doctrines relating to the conduct of a council member, including, but not limited to, conflict of interest, data practices, and the open meeting law.
- Council members must maintain the confidentiality of information concerning property, personnel, or legal affairs of the city. They shall neither disclose confidential information without proper legal authorization nor use such information to advance their personal, financial, or other private interests.
- A council member must not use the official position to secure special privileges or exemptions for themselves or others.
- Each member must support maintaining a positive and constructive workplace environment for City staff, private citizens, and businesses dealing with the City. Council members will recognize their roles, as delineated in the city charter, city code, and state statutes, and in individual dealings with city staff.
- No member shall, except as specifically permitted by Minnesota statutes, accept or receive any gift of substance, whether in the form of money, services, loan, travel, entertainment, hospitality, promise, or any other form under circumstances in which it could be reasonably expected to influence the member in the performance of the member's official duties or intended as a reward for the member's official actions.
- Members of the council will not testify in their capacity as a council member before any other board, commission, administrative officer, or agent of the federal government, the state of Minnesota, or any county or other municipal corporation, including cities, except as provided. Exceptions to the policy:
  - If the member is testifying in such capacity pursuant to a lawfully issued subpoena;
  - In the event the council has designated the member or members to act as a spokesperson for the council as a whole to explain the majority vote or council's position.
- Council members serve as a whole when representing the official policies and positions of the City Council. If speaking as an individual citizen, it is important to share that it is the individual person's perspective being presented and not that of the City or the council. In addition, council members must refrain from testifying orally or in writing as to any quasi-judicial matter being heard, or having the possibility of being heard by the council.



## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Generally, state law prohibits public officers from having a personal financial interest in a sale, lease, or contract that they are authorized to make in their official capacity. A “public officer” would include a mayor, council member, board member, etc.

An interested officer should disclose his or her interest at the earliest stage and abstain from voting or deliberating on any contract in which he or she has an interest. There are some exceptions to the general prohibition on contracting with city officials defined in state law. To help determine if a conflict exists, consider the:

- Nature of the decision being made.
- Nature of financial interest.
- Effect of the individual interest on the outcome of the decision by the council.

Another conflict of interest situation may occur when the official’s personal interest is so distinct from the public interest that the member cannot be expected to represent the public interest fairly in deciding the matter. Some common areas are planning and zoning issues, public improvements, special assessments, licenses, land purchases, and street vacations. Some other areas are church memberships, family associations, and club memberships.

To use any exception to the conflict of interest law, detailed procedures must be followed. State statutes and the city attorney should be consulted on these procedures.

## INCOMPATIBLE OFFICES

Generally, individuals in elected office are prohibited from holding incompatible offices. The city attorney should be consulted on concerns about elected officials holding two separate offices. Columbia Heights city council members cannot hold any other city office or paid city employment during their tenure as council members. A former member of the City Council cannot be employed by the City until one year after the term they were elected for has expired.

## GIFTS

Elected and appointed “local officials” may not receive a gift from any “interested person.” An “interested person” is a person or representative of a person or an association who has a direct financial interest in a decision that a local official is authorized to make. If a public official knowingly accepts a gift, the official may be guilty of a gross misdemeanor.

Some commonly encountered exceptions to the gift law include lawful campaign contributions and food or beverages given at a reception, meal, or meeting the official has been invited to attend. If there is ever any question about accepting or declining a gift, the best option may be to decline.



## LIABILITIES

The City of Columbia Heights carries personal liability insurance policies on elected officials, appointed officials, employees, and officers. The City defends a person who is performing job duties and is not guilty of malfeasance in office, willful neglect of duties, or acting in bad faith.

## ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Ethical leadership is vital to the functioning of the City and to maintaining the public's trust and confidence in the City and the democratic process.

### Key traits of ethical leaders

- **Recognize that ethical questions may be complex.** As a result, they are willing to seek and accept the advice of knowledgeable officials such as the city manager, city attorney, or City staff.
- **Understand that ethical conflicts are inevitable and should be dealt with forthrightly.** Elected officials are human and citizens of their community. On occasion, it is expected that they will have needs or roles in their private lives that conflict with public office obligations. Ethical officials are open about potential conflicts of interest and follow applicable rules for disclosing and dealing with the conflict (such as refraining from voting on a particular issue) to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.
- **Are driven by fairness.** The most ethical council members recognize that many City decisions will have adverse as well as positive outcomes, and they therefore strive to make the best decision as defined by its ultimate fairness to all concerned. This often means making impartial decisions on the merits of the issues alone while disregarding personal allegiances. It can also mean taking into account the interests of citizens who are not present or who have not otherwise commented, but who are nonetheless affected by a decision. Ethical officials try to make decisions in the best interest of all in the community, not just those who show up at a meeting or protest the loudest.

**Know the importance of conscientious and ethical government as a value.** Ethical council members do not use their office or authority for revenge, prestige, or personal gain. Ethical council members recognize that government is a human institution. As a result, the human motivations of those in government will determine whether the government is effective or ineffective, good or bad, ethical or unethical. Ethical council members care enough to make a positive difference and act accordingly.



## CHAPTER 14: RULES TO GOVERN BY

### LAND USE LAWS

The Municipal Planning Act grants cities the authority to regulate land use and provides the framework and road map all cities must follow. Cities regulate land use through three basic tools:

- Comprehensive plan;
- Zoning ordinance (including zoning map);
- Subdivision ordinance.

Although cities are not required to adopt all three tools in municipal planning, each tool serves a separate and essential purpose. These tools harmonize and interact in important ways to protect and promote sound City development.

First, the comprehensive plan helps the City look to the future and guides current development in administering its zoning and subdivision ordinances. The subdivision ordinance regulates land division into smaller lots and creates blocks and neighborhoods with safe streets, appropriate environmental features, and character. Finally, the zoning ordinance regulates the use and density of city zones such as commercial, residential, and industrial purposes, both segregating and combining uses where appropriate to prevent congestion, environmental impacts, and other negative human health impacts.

A zoning map divides the community into different land uses to assist the City in planning and permitting future growth and redevelopment. There are 13 different categories for zoning, each with specific standards.

### PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS

There are two types of public improvements: petitioned and City-initiated. A petitioned project occurs when a citizen or citizens who own 35 percent or more of the affected property sign a petition asking the City to make the improvements. A City-initiated project is an improvement identified by the City. A City-initiated project requires a 4/5 vote of the council, whereas a petitioned project only requires a simple majority.

#### Process for improvements

- The City notifies all affected property owners.
- A meeting is held before the first formal council meeting to provide information to the property owners.
- The first council meeting is the project feasibility hearing, where citizens present their opinions about the project.



- The second council hearing is the assessment hearing that establishes the property owners' costs for the project.
- If the cost of the completed project is less than the assessment, property owners are notified, and the correct amount is assessed. No property assessment is certified until the project is completed. This is in accordance with Minnesota statutes, chapter 429 (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=429>), which explains the complete process in detail.

## LICENSES AND PERMITS

The City has the authority to license and require permits for activities within its jurisdiction. Licensing and permitting regulates activities and provides oversight for inspection to protect the public interest. The City exercises its police power to protect and promote the public's health, welfare, and safety through the licensing process. More information about licenses and the licensing process can be found in chapter 5 of the Columbia Heights City Code, available online at [https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/columbiahts/latest/columbiaheights\\_mn/0-0-0-1183](https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/columbiahts/latest/columbiaheights_mn/0-0-0-1183).

## CHAPTER 15: FINANCIAL ASPECTS

The City of Columbia Heights charter specifies responsibilities and procedures for the City's financial administration. The charter establishes the calendar year as the fiscal year. The city manager strictly enforces the budget provisions.

### BUDGET AND TAX LEVY

In early June all division heads submit proposed operating budgets to the Finance Department for the fiscal year commencing January 1. The operating budgets include proposed expenditures and the means of financing them. The city manager and finance director then meet with all of the division heads to review their budget proposals after which the city manager prepares the city manager's budget. *Council members are encouraged to share budget ideas and requests with the city manager and affected division heads by the spring of the prior budget year.*

Before Sep 30, the City Council adopts the proposed budget either as proposed, or as adjusted by the city council, and certifies the proposed general and EDA property tax levies to the county auditor in accordance with Minnesota statutes.

In December, the City Council holds a public budget hearing to present the final budget and property tax levies to citizens and property owners for comment. By Dec25 the final budget is legally adopted and certified to the county.



## FINANCIAL STATEMENT

City finance staff prepare the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) which is a financial report explaining the financial status of the city and the sources of revenues and expenditures. The CAFR is audited annually through an audit by a certified accounting firm. The audit must be in compliance with all state requirements.

The audit preparation process begins in January each year and runs through approximately June. The auditors are usually on site examining financial materials, for about a week in February or March. The CAFR is prepared following this examination. After the audit, the CAFR is presented to the City Council. This usually occurs in June or July.

### **Bonds**

One of the ways in which the city can finance large capital projects is by issuing bonds. In general, a city can issue bonds for any authorized expense, which is not a current expense. The use of bonds for acquisition, development, construction, or improvements of capital assets is allowable.

A city can issue bonds for public improvements in which they will gain revenue. They can purchase police, fire, and street equipment. This type of bond must be short term.

A city can also issue conduit bonds for the benefit of private entities. In these scenarios, the City issues the bonds and loans the proceeds to the private entity. The private entity is solely responsible for repaying the loan and all associated debt service and costs related to the loan transaction. Because the City is not responsible for any loan repayment, the bonds have no effect on the City's credit rating, nor do the bond amounts count against the City's statutory borrowing limits.

## CHAPTER 16: STANDARDS OF APPEARANCE

Business casual dress is encouraged when city council members conduct city business, and business formal attire is recommended when representing the City at formal functions. City logo wear may be appropriate at many functions and is a good way to promote and show pride in our community. For more information about city logo wear please contact the community engagement specialist at 763-706-3614.



## CHAPTER 17: LEAVING OFFICE AND VACANCIES

### LEAVING OFFICE

Upon completion of service to the community, please return equipment acquired during the term. Examples include computers, copies of the Columbia Heights City Code, key cards, etc.

### VACANCIES

There are several reasons a vacancy may occur on the City Council. These include an election deemed to be invalid, a death, resignation, removal from office, or a council member may move outside the city. Medical reasons or illness could also prevent a council member from attending meetings. When the absence extends beyond three months, the council has the authority to remove the current member and appoint a new member. Another reason for removal would be any council member who does not perform their duties and responsibilities in good faith.

The process for filling a vacant seat is established in the Columbia Heights City Charter, section 9, available online at [http://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/document\\_center/Government/Updated%20City%20Charter%20CT%202016.pdf](http://www.columbiaheightsmn.gov/document_center/Government/Updated%20City%20Charter%20CT%202016.pdf).

## APPENDIX I

### AGENDA AND MEETING PROCEDURES

#### Agenda Preparation

The city manager is responsible for the format and preparation of the council agenda. This includes all items for consideration, charter requirements, state law, and bylaws.

All items to be included on the agenda or the city manager's report should be submitted to the city manager by 4:30 pm on the Monday preceding the meeting date.

#### Order of business

The mayor presides over city council meetings. In the absence of the mayor, the council president shall preside. Council meetings begin promptly and are held in the following order:

1. Mission Statement
2. Call to Order / Roll Call
3. Pledge of Allegiance
4. Approval of agenda



~~5. Community Forum~~

~~5. Proclamations, Presentations, Recognition, Announcements, Guests~~

~~6. City Council and Administrative Reports~~

~~6-7. Community Forum~~

~~7-8. Consent Agenda~~

~~8-9. Public Hearings~~

~~9-10. Items for Consideration~~

~~10. City Council and Administrative Reports~~

11. Adjournment

#### Call to Order – Presiding Officer

The mayor (or council president) calls the meeting to order. If the mayor arrives after the meeting has begun, the mayor resumes duties once business on a particular topic has been concluded. At any meeting where the mayor and the council president are not present, the council appoints the most senior council member to preside over the meeting.

#### Pledge of Allegiance

The City Council, staff, and audience stand and recite the pledge of allegiance.

#### Mission Statement

The mission statement is provided on the agenda for reference by city council members, staff, and the public. The mayor may choose to read it at the meeting, but it is not required.

#### Approval of the Agenda

All official council meetings are open to the public and the media in accordance with Minnesota’s Open Meeting Law. Approval of the agenda makes this official.

#### ~~Community Forum~~

~~This is a time when members of the public may address the City Council about any topic that is not on the regular agenda. Generally, individuals address the City Council, but the City Council does not take formal action on items raised during the community forum. The City Council may direct staff to follow up or add the item to an upcoming agenda.~~

#### Proclamations, Presentations, Recognition, Announcements, Guests

This is the opportunity for the mayor and city council to recognize special events, groups, awards, and make announcements for upcoming activities to the audience present and those watching the meeting via cable broadcast.

#### City Council and Administrative Reports



The city council members are given an opportunity to share with the other members information they have received that would benefit the group, discuss meetings they have attended, and give updates on other relevant topics. The city manager and city attorney are also provided an opportunity to make a report immediately following the city council reports.

#### **Community Forum**

This is a time when members of the public may address the City Council about any topic that is not on the regular agenda. Generally, individuals address the City Council, but the City Council does not take formal action on items raised during the community forum. The City Council may direct staff to follow up or add the item to an upcoming agenda.

#### **Consent Agenda**

The consent agenda includes routine or noncontroversial matters that need minimal deliberation. A motion to approve the consent agenda cannot be debated, but a council member may remove a consent agenda item and have it placed on the regular agenda for debate and action immediately following its approval.

The consent agenda includes approval of the previous meeting's minutes, which once approved become the official meeting record.

#### **Public Hearings**

Public hearings ensure due process by protecting an individual's right to be heard on a matter prior to governmental action. Due process encourages objective decision-making by providing those interested in the City's decision with an opportunity to be heard.

Generally, there is no dialogue between council members, staff, or the public during the hearing. Council members may ask questions of those addressing the council to clarify a fact, but any statement by a council member for anything other than to pose a question on the matter being considered may be ruled out of order by the mayor or presiding officer.

After new facts and information have been presented to the City Council, the hearing may be closed. Once the public hearing is complete, council members make a motion and debate the matter under consideration.

#### **Items for Consideration**



This is the part of the meeting where items that require action but not a formal public hearing are presented to the city council. Generally, the appropriate staff person presents the item, city council members ask questions of the staff person, discuss the topic amongst themselves, and when they have all the information necessary, they take formal action on the item.

#### **City Council and Administrative Reports**

The city council members are given an opportunity to share with the other members information they have received that would benefit the group, discuss meetings they have attended, and give updates on other relevant topics. The city manager and city attorney are also provided an opportunity to make a report immediately following the city council reports.

#### **Adjournment**

When there is no further business, adjournment formally concludes the meeting.

#### **VOTING**

Generally, city council actions pass or fail by a majority vote of the council. A majority is determined by the number of council members present at a meeting. Certain actions, such as an un-petitioned street project, require an extraordinary majority or 4/5 vote of the whole council.

#### **Procedure**

The votes of council members on pending actions are conducted as voice votes unless any council member requests a roll call vote be taken. The presiding officer shall also call for a roll call vote whenever a voice vote is unclear regarding the disposition of the action before the council.

If a roll call vote is called, the council secretary will call for the vote in consecutive order, beginning with the council member who is seated to the far right of the mayor. The presiding officer always votes last.

#### **Abstention**

Council members may abstain from voting on a particular agenda item. If a council member does not vote, it is recorded as "Abstain: [name]" and is considered a no vote.

#### **PROTOCOL AND RULES OF DECORUM**

##### **Protocol**

The following information is from the League of Minnesota Cities and is available online at <https://www.lmc.org/resources/handbook-for-minnesota-cities-chapter-7-meetings-motions-resolutions-and-ordinances/>. The following list includes the more common motions.



**Motions:** formal method of bringing business before the city council and stating propositions on which the council will have to make a decision. Motions can be made only by city council members or the mayor.

**Requires a second:** motions that have a “yes” must be seconded by a council member before they can be considered. The motion-maker may not second his/her own motion. By seconding a motion, a person does not necessarily indicate favor of the motion.

**Can interrupt a speaker:** motions that have a “yes” can be made at any time during a council meeting. They may be made even while another has the floor and is speaking.

**Debatable:** a “yes” means the council can discuss the motion’s merits. A “no” means no discussion is allowed, and the motion must be voted on as soon as it is made and seconded.

**Amendable:** motions can be changed by amendment. Motions with a “no” must be voted on in the same form the motion was originally made.

**Vote required to pass:** tells whether the motion requires a simple two-thirds majority for passage.

**Can be reconsidered:** indicates whether or not a motion that was once passed or defeated by the City Council can be considered again later in the meeting.

#### **Rules of decorum**

While the City Council is in session, the members must preserve order and decorum. A council member must neither, by conversation or otherwise, delay or interrupt the peaceful proceedings of the council nor disturb members while they are speaking. A member must never refuse to obey the orders of the presiding officer.

No person or city council member should address the council without first being recognized by the presiding officer. Council members should only speak twice regarding any matter for a maximum of five minutes per time unless the entire city council consents to additional time. Council members should also limit their remarks to the matter at hand.

City staff are expected to observe the same rules of order and decorum as the city council members.

Please see the document titled “City of Columbia Heights Bylaws of Procedures and Decorum” for additional information and details regarding city council procedures, expectations, and decorum.



### Other Rules of Decorum

Other guidelines ensure city council meetings emphasize the importance of business being conducted professionally. Council members and staff:

- Work to preserve appropriate order and decorum during all meetings;
- Address council members as *council member*, followed by last name, such as “Council Member Smith,” and staff by their title followed by last names, such as “City Manager Jones;”
- Discourage side conversations, disruptions, interruptions, or delaying efforts;
- Inform the presiding officer when leaving a meeting;
- Limit disruptive behavior;
- Recognize that those on the City Council, staff, advisory board chairs, or designated representatives and those authorized by the presiding officer shall be permitted to sit at council or staff stations.

## APPENDIX II

### INDEX OF COMMONLY USED TERMS

**Abatement:** A complete or partial cancellation of a levy imposed by a government. Abatements usually apply to tax levies, special assessments, and service charges.

**Abatement of Nuisance:** The elimination of a situation that endangers public health, safety, and welfare.

**Abstention:** The decision of a member not to vote on an item. An abstention is counted as a no vote. This is contrasted with the situation where a member is disqualified from voting, where such member is not counted in determining the item’s passage.

**Accounts payable:** A liability account reflecting amounts on open accounts owing to private individuals or organizations for goods and services received by a government (but not including amounts due to other funds of the same government or to other governments).

**Accounts receivable:** An asset account reflecting amounts owing on open accounts from private individuals or organizations for goods and services furnished by a government (but not including amounts due from other funds of the same government).



**Affirmative action plan:** State and federally mandated plans to attract, recruit, hire, promote, retain, transfer, and train women and minority employees involving the setting of goals and procedures in written plans.

**Amortization:** Gradual reduction, redemption, or liquidation of the balance of an account according to a specified schedule of times and amounts.

**Annuity:** A series of equal money payments made at equal intervals during a designated period of time.

**Appeal:** Private individuals, a group, or an agency may take the decision of a governing body to a higher authority for review of that decision.

**Appraise:** An estimate of the value of property. If the property is valued for taxation purposes, the less-inclusive term "assess" is substituted for this term.

**Appropriation:** A legal authorization granted by a legislative body to make expenditures and incur obligations for specific purposes.

**Assessed valuation:** A valuation set upon real estate or other property by a government as a basis for levying taxes.

**Assessment:** The process of determining the worth or the market value of land and buildings for taxation purposes.

**Assets:** Resources owned or held by a government that has monetary value.

**Audit:** A methodical examination of resource use that concludes in a written report of its findings. An audit tests management's accounting system to determine the extent to which internal accounting controls are both available and being used.

**Audit report:** The report prepared by an auditor covering the audit or investigation.

**Bid:** An offer to sell something or perform work pursuant to specifications.

**Bill:** A term used to denote a law or statute passed by certain legislative bodies.

**Blight:** Social and/or physical decay of the community.



**Bond:** A written promise to pay a specified sum of money, called the face value or principal amount, at a specified date or dates in the future, called the maturity date(s), together with periodic interest at a specified rate.

**Budget message:** Explanation of the budget in fiscal terms and in terms of work programs. It outlines the proposed financial policies of the government entity for the ensuing fiscal year, describes any important features of the new budget, and indicates any major changes for the current year in financial policies, expenditures, and revenues, along with the reason for changes. Includes a summary of the government entity's debt position.

**Building code:** A set of regulations governing building construction.

**Building permit:** An official document issued by a city, township, or county that grants permission to a contractor or private individual to erect a building or make an improvement to an existing structure.

**Bulk regulations:** Zoning ordinance restrictions on the density, height, location, and lot coverage of buildings.

**Callable bond:** A type of bond that allows the issuer to pay the obligation before the stated maturity date by giving notice of redemption in a manner specified in the bond contract.

**Capital budget:** A plan of proposed capital outlays and the means of financing them.

**Capital Improvement Program (CIP):** A program of when, where, and how much a city plans to invest in public services over the next five to ten years.

**Cash:** An asset account reflecting currency, coin, checks, postal and express money orders, and banker's drafts on hand or on deposit with an official or agent.

**Certificate of occupancy:** Official notice that a building is in accord with the building and housing codes and may be used or occupied.

**Charter:** A document setting forth the principal functions and organization of a city or corporation.

**Comprehensive plan:** The plan depicting the proposed use of land in the city, guiding the adoption of zoning regulations, etc.



**Conditional use permit:** A conditional use permit allows a development in a zoning district where the specifics of the proposed development are subject to review to determine the suitability of the development as proposed. A conditional use permit cannot be denied simply to prevent the use.

**Consent agenda:** Items on the City Council agenda requiring council action. These items are usually non-controversial and are acted on together with one motion.

**Contract:** A contract, for purposes of bidding laws, is an agreement for the sale or purchase of supplies, materials, equipment, or the rental thereof or the construction, alteration repair or maintenance of real or personal property.

**Debt:** An obligation resulting from the borrowing of money or from the purchase of goods and services.

**Debt limit:** The maximum amount of gross or net debt that is legally permitted.

**Debt Service fund:** A fund established to account for the accumulation of resources for, and the payment of, general long-term debt principal and interest.

**Deficit:** (1) The excess of the liabilities of a fund over its assets. (2) The excess of expenditures over revenues during an accounting period; or, in the case of proprietary funds, the excess expense over income during an accounting period.

**Delegation:** The process of allowing someone to perform a task that the council is authorized to perform, such as conducting a hearing. A proper delegation must be made under the terms that define and instruct the person exercising the delegated power.

**Density:** The number of buildings, offices, or housing units on a particular area of land.

**Depreciation:** (1) Expiration in the service life of fixed assets, other than wasting assets attributable to wear and tear, deterioration, action of the physical elements, inadequacy, or obsolescence. (2) The portion of the cost of a fixed asset other than a wasting asset, which is charged as an expense during a particular period.

**Due process:** Due process means that a person's property interests cannot be affected without being advised of the basis upon which the adverse action is taken and the opportunity to be heard regarding the matter in a particular forum.

**Easement:** A right to use property owned by someone else, usually for a specific purpose.



**Eminent Domain:** The power of a government to acquire private property for public purpose.

**Encumbrances:** Commitments related to unperformed (executory) contracts for goods and services.

**Enterprise fund:** A fund established to account for operations (a) that are financed and operated in a manner similar to private business enterprises – where the intent of the governing body is that the costs (expenses, including depreciation) of providing goods or services to the general public on a continuing basis be financed or recovered primarily through user charges; or (b) where the governing body has decided that periodic determination of revenues earned, expenses incurred, and/net income is appropriate for capital maintenance, public policy, management control, accountability, or other purposes.

**Entitlement:** The amount of payment to which a state or local government is entitled as determined by the federal government under an allocation formula contained in applicable statutes.

**Environmental Impact Statement:** An impact study representing the combined efforts of many professionals such as biologists, environmentalists, planners, engineers, etc., and concentrating on the likely impact on the local environment that a certain project might be expected to have.

**Equal protection:** Equal protection is a constitutional law concept that all people receive the same protection of the law. That is, similarly situated people are treated similarly without regard to their race, creed, color, etc.

**Fee:** Recoupment of costs by the city as opposed to obtaining revenues in excess of costs of providing the service or regulating the activity (i.e. liquor license). A fee in excess of the costs of regulating or providing service is a tax.

**Fiscal Year:** A 12-month period to which the annual operating budget applies and at the end of which a government determines its financial position and the results of its operations.

**Franchise:** A right or privilege officially granted to a person or group by a government.

**Frontage:** The part of a lot that touches a road, street, or watercourse; usually expressed as a specific amount, such as 100 feet of road frontage.

**Fund:** A fiscal and accounting entity with a self-balancing set of accounts recording cash and other financial resources, together with all related liabilities.



**General fund:** The fund used to account for all financial resources except those required to be accounted for in another fund.

**General obligation bond:** A bond secured by the general revenues of the City such that the City may be required to levy to make the payments required pursuant to the terms of the bond.

**Gift (ethical purposes):** Means money, real or personal property, a service, loan, a forbearance, or forgiveness of indebtedness, or a promise of future employment that is given and received without the giver receiving consideration of equal or greater value in return (Minnesota Statutes §10A.071 - <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/?id=10A.071>).

**Grants:** Contributions of gifts of cash or other assets from another government or public entity to be used or expended for a specified purpose, activity, or facility.

**Harassment:** The action of repeatedly annoying or tormenting another individual.

**Hearing:** A hearing (in the context of a city council meeting) is the opportunity to voice one's opinion to those making a decision.

**Home rule charter:** A home rule charter city has its powers and structure determined by an election of its citizens in adopting a charter, as opposed to a statutory city whose structure and powers are prescribed by state statute.

**Improvements:** Facilities that aid in land development. Improvements include streets, sewer and water lines, curbs, sidewalks, streetlights, fire hydrants and street signs.

**Initiative:** The process established by the charter whereby citizens place a proposed ordinance on the ballot. Initiative and referendum only apply to certain ordinances regulating conduct or establishing a procedure and may not be applied to administrative council actions.

**Interested person:** A person or representative of a person or association that has a direct financial interest in a decision that a local official is authorized to make.

**Investments:** Securities and real estate held to produce revenues in the form of interest, dividends, rentals, or lease payments. The term does not include fixed assets used in governmental operations.

**Joint powers:** Units of government may enter into joint powers agreements to do almost anything that any one of the governmental bodies can do. Examples include joint police or other services among cities.



**Judgment:** An amount to be paid or collected by a government as the result of a court decision, including a condemnation award in payment for private property taken for a public use.

**Land use:** A broad term used to classify land according to present use and suitability for future uses, such as housing, open spaces and parks, commercial, industrial, etc.

**Land use and development controls:** Codes, resolutions, and ordinances enacted by local communities, townships, and counties under the authority of state enabling legislation. Such controls are designed and intended to be used for the protection of public health, safety, and welfare.

**Lawful gambling:** Lawful gambling refers to activities licensed by the state of Minnesota. Paddlewheels, tip boards, pull tabs, bingo, and raffles are the only permitted activities. All other forms of gambling are illegal.

**Levy:** (verb) To impose taxes, special assessments, or service charges to support governmental activities. (noun) The total amount of taxes, special assessments, or service charges imposed by a government.

**Liabilities:** Debt or other legal obligations arising out of transactions in the past, which must be liquidated, renewed, or refunded at some future date. This term does not include encumbrances.

**License:** A permit to engage in an activity. Also may refer to real property whereby a person is permitted to use or occupy real property.

**Meeting:** Where a quorum of a governing body is present, and information is received or discussed relating to matters that will come before the governing body, or an action is taken with respect to matters that might come before the governing body.

**Motion:** An oral action of the city council that is recorded in the minutes but is otherwise not formally set forth in written form.

**Municipal bond:** A bond issued by a state or local government.

**Non-conforming use:** A land use that does not comply with the ordinance of a zone it is in or does not comply with other land use regulations.

**Nuisance:** The use of land or behavior that brings harm or substantial annoyance to adjacent property owners or the public in general.



**Obligations:** Amounts which a government may be legally required to meet out of its resources.

**Ordinance:** A formal legislative enactment by the governing board of a city. If it is not in conflict with any higher form of law, such as a state statute or constitutional provision, it has the full force and effect of law within the boundaries of the city to which it applies.

**Parcel:** A lot or group of lots under a single ownership.

**Parliamentary procedure:** Following the rules and customs of the council on how a meeting is conducted. The official process to accomplish city business.

**Planning and zoning commission:** An official body appointed by the governing body of a city, township, or county responsible for making the comprehensive plan. In addition, the planning and zoning commission makes recommendations to the governing body about the zoning ordinance and zoning decisions, on subdivisions, and general planning matters.

**Plat:** The map of a subdivision, showing the number and dimensions of lots, public rights of way, and easements.

**Police power:** The power of a city to establish penal ordinances that prohibit conduct, adopt zoning regulations, remove nuisances, and otherwise provide for the health, safety, and welfare of the community and its citizens.

**Publish:** Publishing a notice requires placing the item in the city's official newspaper for the specified period of time and in the specified form.

**Quorum:** The number of individuals necessary to transact business. A quorum is less than all of the members and is generally the number required to adopt an item, usually a simple majority of the body's members.

**Referendum:** A referendum is accomplished by the petition of the electorate to have an ordinance submitted to an election before it may become effective.

**Resolution:** A written action of the council adopted by voice vote of the council that records and sets forth the action taken by the council.



**Revenue bond:** A bond that is secured by the stream of payments received from some particular project or undertaking as opposed to the general revenues of the city.

**Right of way:** The right to cross over property. A right of way usually refers to public land on which a street is built. The right of way includes not only the street but also the land between the street and the sidewalk.

**Right to know:** Legislation requiring employers to advise employees regarding hazardous materials in the workplace.

**Setback:** The distance required to locate a building from a road, property line, or other building.

**Special assessment:** The levying of a charge against property that has received a benefit from a particular project or activity undertaken by the city. The special assessment becomes part of the funding mechanism to defray the project's cost.

**Special district:** A special unit of local government created to provide a specific service, such as water and sewer and fire protection.

**Special service district:** A special service district is a district authorized by special legislation that allows for the imposition of service fees for services rendered in the district. It is available for use in industrial, commercial, or public utility applications.

**Statute:** A written law enacted by a duly organized and constituted legislative body.

**Stormwater:** Any flow occurring during or following any form of natural precipitation.

**Subdivision:** The legal separation of a parcel of land into lots for future sale and/or development.

**Substandard housing:** A broad classification for housing condition, rated in degrees of major and minor, which indicates that a certain dwelling unit is deficient for general use.

**Surety bond:** A written promise to pay damages or to indemnify against losses caused by the party or parties named in the document through nonperformance or defalcation.

**Tax:** A tax is a charge levied against property or an activity. Cities may only impose taxes pursuant to specific statutory authorization.



**Tax increment financing:** A development tool whereby the taxes generated by a development or redevelopment are used to pay the project costs incurred by the city. The additional taxes generated by development are used to reimburse the city's project costs.

**Tax lien:** Claims which governments have upon properties until taxes levied against them have been paid.

**Tax rate:** The amount of tax stated in terms of a unit of tax base.

**Taxes:** Compulsory charges levied by a government for financing services performed for the common benefit.

**Tract:** Land under single ownership or control.

**Variance:** The decision to alter the provisions of a land use ordinance, usually on a single piece of land.

**Vote:** At a council meeting, the formal decision on an item. Votes may be taken by roll call or by voice, but the minutes of the meeting must reflect how each member voted.

**Zone:** An area or areas of the town where certain land uses are permitted, and other uses are prohibited by the zoning ordinance.

**Zoning:** A regulatory approach to land use that defines what types of buildings, activities and construction may occur in a district. For example, single-family residential, commercial, light industrial, etc.

## APPENDIX III

### TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PUBLIC SERVICE

- Speak the majority vote (rather than personal vote) of the City Council to avoid confusing the public.
- Learn about the City, its history, operations, finances, City ordinances, charter, and policies.
- Devote sufficient time to the office and to studying the present and future problems of the community.
- Save energy and time by setting priorities. Governing a city requires a team effort. Be a team player.



- Use caution when making public decisions because they represent the community. Be careful not to allow personal experience to influence decisions and focus on what the community needs as a whole. Take budget preparation seriously because it influences the next year as well as the future years.
- Make decisions based on public policy and be consistent. Treat similar situations similarly and avoid favoritism.
- Be proactive. Focus on ways to prevent problems. Find the long-term public interest of the community rather than focusing on the demands of special interest groups.
- Be thoughtful when making decisions and be careful not to rush to judgment.
- Embrace change. Look for ways to be responsible through new ideas from the community, staff, the public, and other council members.
- If not sure of an answer to a question, it's okay to say "I don't know the answer," then find the answer to that question within a reasonable time limit. Providing correct information is important. The city manager can generally be very helpful.
- Remember that most decisions and actions require the approval of the governing body, and this takes a majority vote.
- Keep in mind that council members have legal authority as a governing body member only when the governing body is in legal session.
- Keep other council members and the city manager in the communication loop about topics because this puts everyone on the same page.
- Participate in official meetings with the dignity and decorum fitting those who hold public trust.
- Personal dress and courteous behavior at meetings help create an environment for making sound public decisions.
- Conduct official public meetings with some formality and follow rules of procedure. Formal meetings expedite the process and tend to promote better decision-making.
- Ask questions.
- Be active. Vote yes or no on motions. Respect an official position and share it as the voice of one City Council.
- Respect the letter and intent of the open meeting law. Be trusted by not repeating information under any circumstances unless there is a professional reason to do so.
- Retain competent key employees, pay them well, trust their professional judgment, and recognize their authority and responsibilities.
- Focus on policy-making and allow the city manager to work with the City's day-to-day operations. Work within the system by directing businesses and people to city staff as appropriate (such as suppliers and vendors). Direct contact with governing body members should be with the governing body as a whole.
- Be accountable for policies and decisions made.
- Be positive and ask the right questions. "How can we do this?"



- Learn to evaluate recommendations and alternative courses of action. Request options and encourage imaginative solutions.
- Focus on the long-term future of the City to avoid taking short-term gains at the expense of long-term losses.
- In determining the public interest, balance personal rights and property interests, recognize that decisions must be made with the best interest of those involved in mind.
- Focus on the total development – physical, economic, and social – of the community.
- Keep in contact and cooperate with federal, state, county, and school officials. Cities must work within the intergovernmental system to be effective.
- Get to know officials of neighboring and similar size cities. Visit other cities, particularly those with a reputation for being well-run.
- Listen to fellow council members and the public to better understand what they are trying to say.
- Keep constituents informed and encourage citizen participation.
- Remember what’s said privately and publicly can often be seen as news. Be friendly and deal effectively with the news media and represent the city council as one voice. Consult with the city manager if you have any questions or need help. Be careful about rumors. Check them out and help clarify any false information.
- Take care in those appointed to boards and commissions to ensure they are capable and representative of the whole community.
- Use manuals, guides, and other technical assistance and information. Attend workshops and conferences to grow.
- Time management can help balance City service with other priorities. Establish personal goals and objectives.
- Focus on the future, and try to leave the City better than when first becoming a council member.
- At least once a year, schedule a governing body discussion to review processes and procedures. Ask “How are we doing? How can we do things better?”
- Be enthusiastic about public service and the privilege to serve and make it a fun and rewarding experience.
- Be a leader, as well as part of the team of elected and appointed officials who were selected to make the city an even better place to live.
- Celebrate! Good things do happen. Let the public share those successes.

*Source: League of Kansas Municipalities, 1990*