



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, January 12, 2026
6:00 PM

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

MINUTES

The following are the minutes for the Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00 pm on Monday, January 12, 2026, in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota

WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Deneen; Councilmember Spriggs; Councilmember James

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Travis Lutz, Assistant City Attorney; Niila Hebert, Board Chair of Sweet Potato Comfort Pie; Stacie Kvilvang, Ehlers, Inc. Senior Municipal Advisor; Rose McGee, President & Founder, Board Director of Sweet Potato Comfort Pie;

MISSION STATEMENT

Columbia Heights is a vibrant, healthy and connected City. We are here to actively support the community, deliver equitable services, build and strengthen connections, improve upon our past, and uphold our successes. We strive to be better and ensure Columbia Heights is a great place for everyone, today and in the future.

A. Columbia Heights City Council and Staff Norms.

While we are accountable to each other for these norms, the Mayor and City Manager will help us adhere to them with respectful reminders and reinforcement as needed.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

A. Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service Proclamation.

Accepting Proclamation: Rose McGee, President & Founder, Board Director of Sweet Potato Comfort Pie.

Mayor Márquez Simula proclaimed January 19, 2026, 2026 as Martin Luther King Jr. Day and read the City's proclamation.

President and Founder, Board Director of Sweet Potato Comfort Pie, Rose McGee, expressed her gratitude for the acknowledgement of the work that they do. She introduced the Board Chair, Niila Hebert. She mentioned that they were featured at the Timberwolves game. She added that they will be celebrating their 40th anniversary of the National Holiday of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. She added that she remembers marching in support of making Martin Luther King Jr. Day a National Holiday. She explained that she is interested in doing what Dr. King called people to do, which is to uphold the community. She explained that there are volunteers who come in to help with the pies.

Ms. Hebert explained that Sweet Potato Comfort Pie is more than a sweet treat. The organization brings community connectivity and empathy. She added that there are courageous conversations while enjoying a sweet treat. She invited the Council to the MLK service event at the Golden Valley Country Club on January 18th. More information can be found at www.sweetpotatocomfortpie.org.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember James noted that the City has been under strong enforcement from ICE and other federal agencies. She explained that every day it feels like an onslaught. She shared resources for the community. She noted that Senator Kunesh is taking reports of unlawful actions and detentions. Representative Feist and Representative Koegel are working with the ACLU on how to support residents. There was communication with the City's Congressperson on how they can help people who have been detained. She thanked community members who have been helping care for neighbors. She explained that she feels like the federal government is looking to silence the people's dissent in the City. She reminded community members that they have a right to protest and observe. She noted that people in the City look out for each other and care about immigrant neighbors. She added that community members need to stay safe and protest peacefully, and continue to say that it is not acceptable in the City. ICE and DHS must leave Minnesota immediately. She added that the City is doing everything it can and encouraged residents to reach out to her if they have questions, ideas, or would like to help.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that many Hispanic families attended the Santa cocoa and cookies event, and it was nice to see families smiling and feeling safe. She mentioned that she has had neighbors kidnapped. She thanked those who are helping the community and asked people to be safe and peaceful because the administration is looking for an excuse to come down on the State even harder. She stated that we would get through this and win.

Councilmember Deneen thanked Mayor Márquez Simula for holding events where people could stand in solidarity and reflect on how community members can be there for each other. She reaffirmed that the City stands with its neighbors no matter where they come from. She added that their cultures bring

light, beauty, and strength to the City. She noted that the City stands with those who are feeling scared. She thanked the helpers and volunteers who had been out day and night helping their neighbors. She thanked those who refused to give in to fear and chaos. She urged community members to be safe, record, and be vigilant. She explained that it can be dangerous for someone being detained if the area is escalated.

Councilmember Spriggs agreed with the comments from the Council and explained that he has been proud to live in Columbia Heights and to see the response from community members showing up for their neighbors. He agreed with Councilmember Buesgens' comments on the Country getting through this time and noted that there have been tumultuous times in the Country's history, but people have gotten through them. He explained that it is important that people stay involved in order to keep the community strong.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that typically, the Council reports are a time where the Council can share how they have been involved in the community, and connect with different businesses and non-profits. She added that the Council likes to know what they are each working on in the community, and the community can remain resilient by being connected with each other. She noted that 200 people attended the training on awareness of being someone who can respond when they observe ICE or be present at the schools. She noted that there is mutual aid and encouraged community members to reach out to the Council if they would like to volunteer. She explained that there are many people who are afraid to leave their houses and have relied on neighbors and friends to get groceries or gas in their cars. She added that many people who are afraid are legal citizens. She noted that Native Americans are being detained, and they are not immigrants. She stated that it is about skin color and profiling. She noted that the School District and School Board have done a lot of work to make sure families and students are safe. There are food shelves at all of the schools. She added that the School District is helping give students rides to and from school. She mentioned that many people have wondered why she has not done a press release during this time and explained that she does not want to put a microscope on the City. She noted that she will be taking time to thank the Police Department because the Police Department, Fire Department, and EMS are there for the community members. Many of the police officers are Columbia Heights High School graduates, and they have a heart for the City. She asked that there could be a minute of silence in memory of Renee Good, who was killed at the hands of a ICE agent, and for all of the people who have died in ICE custody.

Report of the City Manager

City Manager Chirpich noted that the City has launched a new Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAH) program in partnership with the Minnesota Center for Energy and Environment. The City has launched a new loan program for property owners for two-plus-unit rental residential buildings. The naturally occurring affordable housing loan program is designed to help property owners make improvements to unsubsidized affordable housing units in the City. More information can be found on the City's website.

City Manager Chirpich explained that the City is continuing its efforts to plan for the Sullivan Lake Park improvements. There is an online survey, and the City is partnering with ISG, which is the City's consultant planning team for the future design of the park. Last week, the City hosted an open house

to connect with the community, and an online survey is open through Friday, January 16th. He encouraged residents to visit the City's website or Facebook page to take a survey regarding the improvements.

City Manager noted that there is a town hall meeting coming up regarding the winter parking regulations, on January 27th from 6:00-7:00 pm at City Hall. It is an opportunity for the community to learn more about snow plowing operations and ticketing and towing procedures in the City, as well as ask questions and provide feedback.

2. City Manager Response to December 8, 2025, Community Forum Concerns.

City Manager Chirpich explained that there were two residents who spoke during the previous meeting. The first resident expressed concerns about the Gould Avenue and Peters Place parking area. The resident was concerned about snowplowing operations, ticketing, towing, and parking violations. Since the snow emergency was enacted, there have been 248 vehicles towed City-wide and 995 citations related to winter parking violations. The City is actively enforcing infractions. He thanked the Police Department for actively enforcing winter parking. The Public Works Department has reported that streets are clearer this year to plow. The City will work to continue to try to improve the conditions on Gould Avenue and Peters Place. The resident asked a question about opening the City library parking area for public or permit parking. Staff are not recommending permit parking at the library since the municipal parking ramp is across the street.

City Manager Chirpich noted that a resident expressed concerns related to parking on one side of Monroe Street. It is an area that the City shares with Hilltop. One side of the street has been marked as no parking for several years. The resident expressed concerns regarding litter due to increased parking in the vicinity. Citations for littering are issued to the property owner. He mentioned that staff would need to do more research, but they are not recommending a robust enforcement of littering since it would only impact the affected residents. Staff will continue to monitor and do research.

Councilmember James thanked the Public Works staff for their work on plowing the streets. She expressed her appreciation to the Police Department for enforcing winter parking. Mayor Márquez Simula added that it is helpful to hear the numbers of how many tows and citations there have been. She mentioned that towing costs vehicle owners \$400, which is why the Council did not want to do a lot of towing because it can cause hardship on people. She explained that the Council is trying to balance the concern that streets need to be cleared and the cost of towing. She stated that the goal is for compliance so that the streets can be plowed. City Manager Chirpich

COMMUNITY FORUM

There were no community comments.

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember James stated she was excited that the City was renewing the contract with Canvas Health Social Worker. She asked if the total amount was the total cost for two social workers or if it was supplemented by grants. City Manager Chirpich replied that one of the social worker positions is grant-funded.

Mayor Márquez Simula expressed her gratitude that the Police Department gave the City an additional year to be able to put the upgraded Public Safety lockers in the budget. She noted that the lockers have been around for about a decade and are in need of being upgraded.

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

- 1. Approve December 8, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to approve the December 8, 2025, City Council meeting minutes.
- 2. Accept December 3, 2025, Library Board Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the December 3, 2025, Library Board meeting minutes.
- 3. Accept October 6, 2025, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the October 6, 2025, EDA meeting minutes.
- 4. Accept November 10, 2025, Special EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the November 10, 2025, EDA meeting minutes.
- 5. Accept December 1, 2025, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to accept the December 1, 2025, EDA meeting minutes.
- 6. Approval of Resolution 2026-01, Designating Official Depositories for the City of Columbia Heights.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-01, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-01, designating the official depositories for the City of Columbia Heights.
- 7. Approval of Resolution 2026-02, Accepting Certain Donations Received by the City of Columbia Heights.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-02, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-02, accepting donations received by the City of Columbia Heights.
- 8. Adopt Resolution 2026-03, Designating City Council Liaisons and Council President Appointments for 2026.**
Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-03, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-03, appointing a Council President as well as Liaisons to City Boards & Commissions and External Boards.

9. Adopt Resolution 2026-04, Approving the Council Handbook for 2026.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-04, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-04, approving the 2026 City of Columbia Heights City Council Handbook.

10. Consideration Resolution 2026-05, for a Rental Density Cap Exemption for the Property at 4129 7th St NE.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-005, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2026-005, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4129 7th Street NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

11. Consideration of Resolution 2026-09, Final Payment to the City of Minneapolis for 37th Avenue and 37th Place Reconstruction Project from Central Avenue to Stinson Boulevard.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-009, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-009 accepting the work for the 37th Avenue and 37th Place Reconstruction project, City Projects 2110 and 2306, authorizing the final payment of \$1,045,229.17 to the City of Minneapolis, and amending the project budget in the amount of \$285,551 in net change orders approved by the City Manager under the City's purchasing policy.

12. Authorize Payment of Eureka Construction Work Order #031, to Correct a 37th Place Stormwater Improvement in the amount of \$38,414.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize payment of Eureka Construction Work Order #031, to correct a 37th Place stormwater improvement in the amount of \$38,414.

13. Renewal of Canvas Health Social Worker Contract.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich – City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize the City Manager and/or Police Chief to enter into an updated agreement with Canvas Health to provide two full-time mental health professionals to co-respond with police officers to individual in crisis calls for a cost of \$137,000 annually.

14. Authorization to Purchase and Outfit Police Vehicle

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich – City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize the Police Chief to purchase one 2026 Ford Utility Police Vehicle from the MN CPV vendor for \$48,100, and to expend up to \$34,900 for the outfitting and setting up of this vehicle for patrol use for a total cost of \$83,000.

15. Approval of Public Safety Locker Replacement

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich – City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize the Deputy Police Chief to purchase Space Saver lockers and installation from Mid-America Business Systems in the amount of \$161,855.24, and to contract for removal and electrical work as outlined above for a total cost of \$171,952.

16. Approve 2026 Public Works Blanket Purchase Orders for Deicing Salt, Fuel, and Bituminous Asphalt.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to authorize the issuance of blanket purchase orders for calendar year 2026 for de-icing salt, fuel, bituminous asphalt, and refuse carts, in amounts consistent with the adopted 2026 Public Works budget.

17. Approve Public Works 2026–2029 Three-Year Contract for Roll-Off Material Disposal Services.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the award of the Public Works 2026–2029 three-year roll-off material disposal contract to Walters Recycling and Refuse.

18. Designation of Legal Newspaper for 2026.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to designate Life as the City of Columbia Heights official legal newspaper for 2026.

19. License Agenda.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed on the business license agenda for January 12, 2026, as presented.

20. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval.

Presenting Item: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for January 12, 2026, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

21. Review of Bills.

Presenting Item: City Manager Aaron Chirpich

MOTION: Move that in accordance with Minnesota Statute 412.271, subd. 8 the City Council has reviewed the enclosed list of claims paid by check and by electronic funds transfer in the amount of \$2,646,775.78.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Ordinances and Resolutions

22. Consideration of Resolution 2026-007, Sale of Bond Series 2026A.

Presenting Item: Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director

Community Development Director Forney stated at its December 8, 2025, meeting, the city council adopted Resolution 2025-93 setting forth the January 12th, 2026, sale of bond series 2026A. The City's municipal advisor, Ehlers Inc., will obtain interest rate proposals for these bond sales from the financial markets prior to the meeting. At the 6 pm council meeting, city staff and consultants will present verbal and written reports summarizing the proposals. Typically, a recommendation will be provided to the council to accept the lowest bid and affirm the sale.

Community Development Director Forney introduced Ehlers, Inc. Senior Municipal Advisor, Stacie Kvilvang.

Ms. Kvilvang presented to the Council the \$7,490,000 in general obligation tax increment finance funds. It is the refinancing of the 2023 temporary bonds that the City had. She explained that part of the process is having the City go through a rating process. The City is rated by Standard & Poor's. S&P affirmed the City's AA rating with a stable outlook for the City. The rating is based on the financial strength that is characterized by balanced operations and robust reserves that the City has. She noted that they conducted the sale this morning and received four bids. The lowest responsible bidder is KeyBank in Ohio with a true interest cost of 5.1%.

Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-007, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

*Motion by Councilmember Deneen, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to adopt Resolution 2026-007, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights awarding the sale of taxable general obligation tax increment refunding bonds, series 2026a, in the original aggregate principal amount of **\$7,490,000**; fixing their form and specifications; directing their execution and delivery; providing for their payment; authorizing the execution of documents in connection therewith; and providing for the payment of bonds refunded thereby. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.*

23. Consideration of Resolution 2026-008, Approving the Development Assistance Agreement for 4300 Central Ave Ne.

Presenting Item: Mitchell Forney, Community Development Director

Community Development Director Forney mentioned that the item has been discussed in dept in the EDA meeting and encouraged community members to refer to the EDA minutes to see a list of questions that were asked during the meeting, and the discussion the EDA had.

Community Development Director Forney stated that over the last several months, the City Council and the Economic Development Authority (EDA) have been working with Alatus to extend the loan terms for the 4300 Central Avenue redevelopment project, transition from temporary to permanent tax increment financing (TIF) bonds, and pledge project-generated TIF revenues to repay the reissued bonds. At this meeting, the City Council will review bids and consider approval of the bond sale associated with this effort.

Community Development Director Forney noted that, as part of the transition from temporary bonds to permanent TIF bonds, state law requires the City and the developer to enter into a Development Assistance Agreement (DAA). The attached Development Assistance Agreement establishes the framework under which the City's financial assistance is provided and sets clear expectations related to project timing, coordination, and performance. The agreement is intended to work in tandem with the City's existing loan to the developer to mitigate financial risk associated with issuing permanent bonds while continuing to support the redevelopment of this key site.

Community Development Director Forney explained that the Development Assistance Agreement outlines the overall project scope, which includes a multi-phase, mixed-use redevelopment of the approximately 12-acre site at 4300 Central Avenue NE. Phase 1 consists of a market-rate/workforce housing apartment development with structured parking. A future Phase 2 may include senior housing and/or commercial uses, depending on market conditions and project feasibility.

Community Development Director Forney stated the agreement also documents the public assistance being provided, including the issuance of approximately \$7.635 million in permanent TIF bonds (Series 2026A). These bonds will refinance the previously issued temporary TIF bonds and cover the bridge loan used for the acquisition of the property. The agreement requires the developer to repay this loan through private financing, and it establishes clear remedies for the City should the developer fail to meet required financing or construction milestones.

Community Development Director Forney mentioned that key development deadlines are included in the agreement, such as obtaining necessary approvals and permits, commencing construction of Phase 1, and achieving substantial completion. These benchmarks are critical to ensuring the project continues to move forward in a timely manner and that TIF revenues are generated as anticipated.

Community Development Director Forney noted that to further protect the City's financial interests, the agreement requires the developer to enter into an assessment agreement that establishes a minimum taxable market value for the property. This provision helps safeguard projected TIF revenues that will be used to repay the bonds. The agreement also outlines standard developer obligations, including payment of EDA administrative costs, compliance with zoning, environmental, and permitting requirements, maintenance of insurance, timely payment of property taxes, and construction of the project in accordance with approved plans.

Community Development Director Forney stated that overall, the Development Assistance Agreement serves as the primary risk-management tool for the City and EDA as the project moves forward. It clearly defines roles and responsibilities, establishes enforceable deadlines, and provides the City with the ability to suspend assistance or pursue loan and mortgage remedies if project obligations are not met. This structure allows the City to continue supporting redevelopment of the site while maintaining appropriate fiscal safeguards.

Councilmember James explained that this is an opportunity for the City to mitigate the risk of the City offering the loans and to help the contract go forward.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember James, to waive the reading of Resolution 2026-008, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember James, to adopt Resolution 2026-008, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights approving a development assistance agreement with the Columbia Heights Economic Development Authority and Alatus Columbia Heights II LLC. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary