



CHARTER COMMISSION

Columbia Heights City Hall, 3989 Central Ave NE, Shared Vision

Thursday, October 16, 2025

7:00PM

MINUTES

Call to Order

Roll Call/Status of Membership

Members Present: Matt Abel, Kathy Ahlers, Wolid Ahmed, Larry Betzold, Christine Brown, Ben Harris, Bill Hugo, Leo James, Veronica Johnson, Carolyn Laine, Julie Rose, Frost Simula, Gregory Sloat, Marsha Stroik, Sue Wiseman

Also present: City Attorney Travis Lutz, City Manager Aaron Chirpich, City Council Liaison Justice Spriggs

Approval of Agenda

Motion to approve by Abel, second by Johnson. Motion passes.

1. Approval of July 17, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve by Wiseman, second by Brown. Motion passes.

Correspondence

Letter from League of Minnesota Cities with suggestions around the form of petitions, forwarded by City Manager Aaron Chirpich.

Old Business

2. Second Hearing of Charter changes on Recall and related areas

The motion included the following changes:

Changes to Chapter 2 Form of Government:

Section 9 – (first hearing on July 17, 2025)

~~Notwithstanding anything to the contrary herein, any vacancy resulting from a recall election or from a resignation following the filing of a recall petition shall be filled in the manner provided in such case.~~

Changes to Chapter 5 Initiative, Referendum and Recall:

Section 41 – (first hearing on January 16, 2025)

If the council shall fail to pass the proposed ordinance, or shall pass it on in a form different from that set forth in the petition and unsatisfactory to the petitioners, the

~~proposed ordinance shall be submitted by the council to vote of the electorate at the next election occurring not more than three months after the date of the final action by the council, and if no otherwise scheduled election is to be held within three months from such date, then the council shall call a special election to be held not less than thirty nor more than forty five days from such date soonest date that conforms with state law.~~

Section 44 – (first hearing on January 16, 2025)

~~In the latter case the council shall immediately order a special municipal election to be held thereon within not less than thirty nor more than forty five days from the action of the council calling it at the soonest date that conforms with state law.~~

Section 47 – (first hearing on October 17, 2024)

Right of Recall. The people of the City of Columbia Heights hereby reserve to themselves the right and power to remove from office at any time any or all of the elected officers of the City for malfeasance or nonfeasance in office in accordance with state law. For this purpose, the word ‘malfeasance’ means the performance of an act in their official capacity that is unlawful or wrongful, and the word ‘nonfeasance’ means the failure to act where there was a duty to act. The exercise of this power shall be designated as “the recall.”

Section 48 – (first hearing on January 16, 2025)

Signatures must be from eligible voters who are on active status on the Statewide Voter Registration System at the time of the petition verification.

Section 50 – (first hearing on January 16, 2025)

~~The council shall at its next meeting, by motion, provide for the holding of a special recall election not less than thirty nor more than forty five days thereafter, provided that if any other municipal election is to occur within sixty days after such meeting, the council may in its discretion provide for the holding of the recall election at that time at the soonest date that conforms with state law.~~

Section 52 – (first hearing on July 17, 2025)

~~Unless the officer whose removal is sought shall have resigned within ten days after the receipt by the council of the completed recall petition, the form of the ballot at such election shall be as near as may be: "Shall A be recalled?" the name of the officer whose recall is sought being inserted in place of A, and the electors shall be permitted to vote separately "Yes" or "No" upon this question. The ballot shall also contain the names of the candidates to be voted upon to fill the vacancy, in case the recall is successful, under the caption: "Candidates to fill the place of A, if recalled." But the officer whose recall is sought shall not be a candidate upon such ballot. In case a majority of those voting for and against the recall of any official shall vote in favor of recall, such official shall be thereby removed from office, and in that event the candidate who receives the highest number of votes for that office shall be elected thereto for the balance of the unexpired~~

~~term. a vacancy shall be declared and shall be filled as set out in Section 9 of this charter. If the officer sought to be recalled shall have resigned within ten days after the receipt by the council of the completed recall petition, the form of ballot at the election shall be the same as nearly as may be, as the form in use at a regular municipal election.~~

Motion by Ahlers, second by Brown.

Roll call vote:

Ayes (15): Abel, Ahlers, Ahmed, Betzhold, Brown, Harris, Hugo, James, Johnson, Laine, Rose, Simula, Sloat, Stroik, Wiseman.

Motion passes, unanimous.

New Business

3. Motion on Mayoral duties and term

Motion by Stroik to handle changes to duties and term separately, second by Harris.

Motion passes.

Regarding the Mayoral duties, President Laine gave a summary of other charter cities, their classes, and how each class of city typically selects their police chief, and clarified the duties of the mayor under a weak mayor system. President Laine also clarified that the last police chief that was hired was done through a consulting firm with direct input from the City Council. City Manager Aaron Chirpich further described how the Columbia Heights Police Department has evolved over the past 104 years and his daily interactions with police.

The proposal included the following changes:

Section 10. The Mayor

The mayor shall ~~have the appointment, control, and direction of all police officers of the city, and shall~~ be recognized as the official head of the city for all ceremonial purposes, by the courts for the purpose of serving civil processes, and by the governor for the purposes of the military law.

Section 53. Powers and Duties of the City Manager

Subject to the provisions of this charter and any regulations consistent therewith which may be adopted by council, the city manager shall control and direct the administration of the city's affairs, ~~except that the police department and the enforcement of the laws pertaining to said department shall be under the sole control of the mayor.~~

Roll call vote

Ayes (10): Ahlers, Brown, Hugo, James, Johnson, Laine, Rose, Simula, Stroik, Wiseman

Nays (5): Abel, Ahmed, Betzhold, Harris, Sloat.

Motion passes first hearing.

Regarding the Mayoral term, President Laine proposed returning the mayor's term to four years in alignment with similar charter cities in Minnesota, and noted the advantages of such a change. A 2023 memorandum from outgoing City Manager Kelly Bourgeois also recommended

changing the mayor's term to four years for continuity, efficiency, and stability in working with city staff and the public at large.

Motion by Harris to table.

Adjournment

Motion by Abel, second by Wiseman.

Meeting adjourned at 7:57pm.