



**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE**  
**Monday, January 05, 2026**  
**6:00 PM**

---

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

## **MINUTES**

### **CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Márquez Simula at 6:08pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula, Councilmember Buesgens, Councilmember Deneen, Councilmember James.

Absent: Councilmember Spriggs.

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Mitch Forney, Community Development Director; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Dan O'Brien, Fire Chief; Rochelle Widmer, City Engineer; Chris Bower, MNDOT; Matt Thibert, MNDOT; Alicia Valenti, Metro Transit; Tracy Fosmo, Metro Transit; Dale Gade, MNDOT.

### **WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. Group Ice Breaker.**

Mayor Márquez Simula led the group in an ice breaker discussion, asking about “A time when participants felt proud of something the City of Columbia Heights accomplished—or a value or practice the city consistently upholds. What was that experience, and how did it make you feel?”

**2. MnDOT: Layout Recommendations for Central Avenue Corridor (Continued from April, May, June and December 2025 Work Sessions).**

City Engineer Rochelle Widmer introduced Chris Bower and Matt Thibert with MNDOT to present information on the proposed updates on the Central Avenue corridor redesign, including proposed roundabouts, pedestrian signals, park impacts and storm water management strategies.

Councilmember James sought clarification that the pedestrian bridge would remain at 49<sup>th</sup> and Central. Bower did confirm that but also informed the council that there would be some at grade crossings available at this intersection. Councilmember James indicated that she was concerned about students using the at grade crossing. Additionally, she was concerned about access for the business on 42<sup>nd</sup> and asked if there will be U-turn options available at 41<sup>st</sup> and 43<sup>rd</sup>. Bowers did speak to the businesses about access, and indicated that overall, the business owners were not overly concerned.

Councilmember Deneen asked for additional information for the pedestrian signal at 52<sup>nd</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup>. Bowers stated that it would be green much of the time, except for when the crossing is activated by a pedestrian wanting to cross. City Engineer Widmer inquired if

two pedestrian crossings so close to one another would be an issue. Bower stated that this is still in design, and more information would be coming as they continue working on the project.

Councilmember Buesgens inquired if the crosswalks on Central would be raised. Bower stated that more than likely the raised crosswalk would occur at the roundabout, and that MNDOT is currently in the process of building their first ever raised crosswalk this year. Councilmember Buesgens would also like to see art in the project. She also indicated her concerns about the bus lane and how often the lane is painted. Alicia Valenti, with Metro Transit stated that the bus lanes are painted every 5 years.

City Manager Chirpich read concerns that were submitted by Councilmember Spriggs related to the bus lane and the use of the lane by vehicles. Valenti addressed the request for bus pull outs instead of a dedicated bus lane and clarified that there was a need for both standard and rapid metro transit access and stops. Bower further elaborated that the work MNDOT is doing to slow speeds and improve safety will help impact these concerns. There are further tools in the toolbox that can occur outside of the design process. This would be something like signal timing and other practical elements.

Bower stated that MNDOT plans on returning to the Council related to the Municipal Consent items for storm water and Central Avenue design in the next few months. There is a public hearing component to this, and they ask that the City assist in scheduling.

Mayor Márquez Simula would like to make sure that we proceed with caution and have consistent messaging because this can / could be a touchy subject for residents and we want to make sure that we take all actions in a transparent manner and make the process as accessible as possible.

In closing Bower also highlighted the cooperative construction agreement costs that could impact the City's budget in years to come. Councilmember Buesgens inquired about the extension of the funds for the project and asked that staff reach out to Colleen Brown related to confirming the extension of the grants that were approved for sidewalks and lighting in the Central Ave corridor. Bowers also informed the council that there is another round of regional solicitation that is coming up that the city can apply for.

### **3. Medtronic Development Update.**

Community Development Director Mitch Forney introduced the topic to the council and gave a status update, informing the council that in mid-December, Lincoln Avenue Communities notified Community Development staff and the City's bond counsel that they would no longer be proceeding with an application for MMB bonds. The developer cited concerns from capital investors regarding the financial risk associated with a master-planned development, particularly given the uncertainty surrounding the timing and feasibility of a future market-rate building. Under the proposed structure, the developer would have been responsible for acquiring the land associated with the market-rate component without a guaranteed development timeline.

While this decision does not preclude Lincoln Avenue Communities from returning at a later date with a revised proposal, the decision not to apply for MMB bonds removes the project from the current bond waiting list and eliminates the project's ability to maintain its decertified Qualified Census Tract (QCT) designation.

**5. Just Cause Tenant Protection.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council and indicated that staff hope to update city code to further focus on sections that can be enhanced to protect tenants. This is a good entrance point for implementation to give the tenants the ability to follow up on their rights. It strengthens the position of tenants, and this is something that is being worked on at a state level as well. Fire Chief O'Brien also spoke to some key points regarding the direction needed from the council.

Council direction was to have staff work on an ordinance that would be applied to all rental properties in the city, so that it is consistent across all property types. The council would like additional strengthening of the eviction notice process and that any updates also focus on just cause protection.

**6. Ratio Request for Use of City Hall External Parking Lot.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council, explaining that the Ratio management company would like to use several exterior city hall perimeter parking lot spaces for their staff, and would pay a set fee for the use of the spaces. Council feedback was that they support the partnership. Staff will prepare a parking license agreement for approval by the council at an upcoming meeting.

**7. Review and Confirm Council Liaison Assignments for 2026.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council. The council provided direction to staff regarding the designation of board and commission liaisons, council president and other external board liaisons for 2026. Staff will prepare a resolution for approval on the consent agenda at the January 12, 2026, City Council Meeting.

**8. Designation of Legal Newspaper for 2026.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council. The council provided direction to staff to proceed with preparing a consent agenda motion to make The Life the City's legal newspaper for 2026 at the January 12, 2026 City Council Meeting.

**9. Review and Approve Council Handbook Updates for 2026.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council, stating that the updates reflected to the Council Handbook for 2026 included in the packet for review were administrative in nature to update department directors and to reflect the recent updates to the council meeting agenda. Council gave staff direction to prepare the handbook as presented for formal approval at the January 12, 2025 City Council Meeting.

**10. Review and Confirm Board and Commission Application Period and Interview Times, and Approve 2026 Application Form and Interview Questions.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council, and Clerk Ion reviewed

the proposed updates to the application, minor edits to the interview questions as well as proposed dates in March to complete interviews. Council gave staff direction to proceed with the application, questions and proposed dates as presented in the packet.

**11. Review and Confirm Local Board of Appeals and Equalization (LBAE) for 2026.**

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the topic to the council, and Clerk Ion reviewed the dates available to schedule the Local Board of Appeals and Equalization Meeting. Council confirmed that they would like to proceed with a first-choice hearing date of April 26, 2026, and second choice date of May 4, 2026.

**12. Council Corner.**

The council reviewed the January calendar, notified each other of upcoming events and discussed proclamations for upcoming meetings.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:15pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

---

Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary