

MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
January 5, 2026

1. **OPENING OF MEETING**

The regular meeting of the City of Crest Hill was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Boulevard, Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

2. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited in unison.

3. **ROLL CALL**

Roll call indicated the following present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Jamie Malloy, Alderman Scott Dyke, Alderman Angelo Deserio, Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert, and Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, Police Chief Ed Clark, Finance Director Glenn Gehrke, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, Interim Employee Relations Manager, and City Attorney Mike Stiff.

4. **CITIZEN/SPECIAL REQUEST/PUBLIC HEARINGS**

No citizens or special requests were heard.

5. **PUBLIC COMMENT FOR AGENDA ITEMS ONLY:**

No one approached the podium to make public comments on the consent agenda items.

6. **CONSENT AGENDA:**

Mayor Soliman asked if any of the Council members wished to have any items removed from the consent agenda for further discussion. No agenda items were removed.

Mayor Soliman proceeded to read the consent agenda items:

- 6A. Approve the Minutes of the Work Session Meeting Held on December 8, 2025.
- 6B. Approve the Minutes from the Regular Meeting Held on December 15, 2025.
- 6C. Approval of the Regular and Overtime Payroll from December 1, 2025, through December 14, 2025, in the Amount of \$288,948.14, and Approval of the Regular and Overtime Payroll from December 15, 2025, through December 28, 2025, in the Amount of \$300,228.26.

6D. Approval of the List of Bills Issued through January 6, 2026, in the Amount of \$1,014,592.65.

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

Alderwoman Gazal made a motion to Approve the Consent Agenda. Seconded by Alderman Deserio. Roll Call: Ayes: Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal. Nayes: None. MOTION CARRIED.

7. REPORTS & COMMUNICATIONS FROM DEPARTMENTS & ELECTED OFFICIALS

7A. MAYOR'S REPORT:

Mayor Soliman reported that all liquor and tobacco licenses had been reapproved for 2026. He indicated he would have more information regarding the list in the upcoming work session.

7B. CITY CLERK'S REPORT:

1. Approve the Use of the Community Room for the Will County Board Democratic Caucus Meeting for Wednesday, February 18, 2026, and Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 5:30 pm.

City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall requested Council approval for the Will County Board Democrat Caucus to use the community room on February 18 and March 18, 2026, at 5:30 pm.

City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall requested Council approval for the Will County Board Democrat Caucus to use the Community Room on February 18 and March 18, 2026, at 5:30 pm. The request sparked a lengthy discussion among the Council members. Mayor Soliman recommended against approving the motion, emphasizing that a policy had been discussed several months ago regarding the use of the Community Room and expressing that allowing political events might "open a can of worms."

Council members recalled a previous work session where City Attorney Mike Stiff had drafted a policy, but that discussion had not reached a conclusion. Mayor Soliman and others felt it would be prudent to wait for the policy to be finalized.

Alderperson Oberlin, initially a supporter, decided to withdraw her motion, citing the need for a concrete policy. The absence of this policy led to divergent opinions on whether to allow the caucus to use the community space.

There was speculation concerning why the agenda item was being considered before reaching a final agreement on the policy. City

Attorney Stiff mentioned that specific uses, like those by political groups, could fall outside the policy's scope, depending on the finalized rules.

Alderman Jefferson voiced frustration over what he perceived as inconsistencies, noting that the Community Room had been made available to other groups without dispute, suggesting he saw a double standard at play.

Alderwoman Gazal made a motion to Approve the Use of the Community Room for the Will County Board Democratic Caucus Meeting for Wednesday, February 18, 2026, and Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 5:30 pm. Seconded by Alderman Jefferson. Roll Call: Ayes: Jefferson, Gazal. Nays: Deserio, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke. MOTION FAILED.

7C. CITY TREASURER'S REPORT:

Treasurer Jamie Malloy thanked Alderwoman Gazal for putting up and taking down the Christmas decorations. She also thanked Director Gary Richardson and Eric from the Public Works Department for sending staff to help bring down the decorations.

7D. CITY ATTORNEY:

1. Approve Ordinance Amending Title 2 (Administration and Personnel), Chapter 2.92 (Actions Against the City) of the Crest Hill City Code of Ordinances.

Attorney Mike Stiff presented an ordinance to amend Title 2, Chapter 2.92 (Actions Against the City) of the City Code. He clarified that there had been some confusion about when this item would be brought forward, stemming from a previous discussion. At the December 8th work session, there was an informal vote indicating support for repealing the ordinance. However, the minutes also suggested the final decision would be postponed until after a presentation from SWARM. The confusion was increased due to conflicting recollections about whether the Council had agreed to table the decision until after SWARM's presentation, which was slated to provide further explanation on insurance aspects related to the ordinance.

Alderman Cipiti commented that we need to have all the information prior to making the vote. He also commented that the minutes were perfectly clear, and the final decision was to be postponed until SWARM could provide further explanation to make the vote.

Administrator Wing confirmed that there would be a SWARM presentation on January 12th, 2026.

Alderman Albert made a motion to approve the ordinance amending Title 2 (Administration and Personnel), Chapter 2.92 (Actions Against the City) of the Crest Hill City Code of Ordinances. Alderperson Oberlin seconded this motion.

The discussion that followed was animated and pointed, with differing beliefs about whether it was appropriate to move forward without additional context from SWARM.

Alderman Jefferson voiced his frustration, suggesting that personal agendas might be interfering with sound policymaking. He emphasized that the ordinance had been in place for over 50 years and had been rarely used, implying that its immediate repeal might not be urgent. He also reiterated that the informal vote was simply a non-binding consensus and should not substitute for due diligence. He then commented that we need to discuss the real reason why we are doing this and who we do not want to pay attorney fees for.

Alderman Albert argued in favor of the ordinance's repeal, stressing that its current form would obligate taxpayers to cover an individual's legal expenses, a scenario he found untenable. He pointed out that all required information for making an informed decision was already available, and thus there was no need to defer the vote until after the SWARM presentation.

Mayor Soliman asked the City Attorney if the motion fails, is it done or is there a chance to bring it back for further discussion after the presentation January 12th. Attorney Stiff commented that he believes it can be brought back, after the SWARM presentation. Mayor Soliman asked if it would pass tonight, could it still be brought back later to repeal. City Attorney Stiff noted that a new version of the ordinance could be drafted in the future if the Council deemed it necessary.

The current ordinance was described as "obsolete and archaic," indicating a need for updating to better align with current operational and legal standards.

Alderman Albert made a motion to Approve Ordinance Amending Title 2 (Administration and Personnel), Chapter 2.92 (Actions Against the City) of the Crest Hill City Code of Ordinances. Seconded by Alderperson Oberlin. Roll Call: Ayes: Oberlin, Albert, Kubal, Deserio, Mayor Soliman. Nays: Jefferson, Gazal, Cipiti, Dyke. MOTION CARRIED. Ordinance #2044

Mayor Soliman was asked to vote, and he commented that he did not feel a week would make a difference but with the discussions he felt it is in the best interest now to vote yes.

7E. CITY ADMINISTRATOR:

1. Approve a Resolution Designating and Appointing Public Works Director Gary Richardson as the Alternate Delegate to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to the Grand Prairie Water Commission.

City Administrator Blaine Wing presented a resolution to appoint Public Works Director Gary Richardson as the alternate delegate to the Technical Advisory Committee for the Grand Prairie Water Commission.

Alderwoman Gazal made a motion to Approve a Resolution Designating and Appointing Public Works Director Gary Richardson as the Alternate Delegate to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to the Grand Prairie Water Commission. Seconded by Alderman Dyke. Roll Call: Ayes: Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal. Nays: None. MOTION CARRIED. Resolution #1373

2. Approve the Civil Service Testing Company Agreement for a Total Amount of \$9,000.00.

Interim Employee Relations Manager Dave Strahl presented an agreement with a Civil Service testing company for \$9,000.00. He explained that the City's previous testing method, which required paying a per-participant fee and utilizing JJC as the test site, was no longer available due to the Company's change in their business model to a subscription service.

Several Council members voiced concerns about the expense, particularly considering an upcoming referendum in March which could potentially eliminate Civil Service requirements, thereby making the agreement unnecessary.

Council members questioned why the decision was being rushed without enough time for a work session discussion. Interim Manager Strahl clarified that the \$9,000.00 agreement was necessary to comply with Civil Service rules, as several existing position lists had expired and any delays could lead to candidates losing interest. The application period for two administrative and clerical positions closed on December 19th, and further postponement risked compromising the integrity of the recruitment process.

Administrator Wing commented that we can see what other Civil Service communities are using for their vendor, but this would place the liability onto the City.

Alderman Cipiti asked why this was not a discussion earlier, so they are not having to be faced with making a quick decision without having a work session discussion. Interim Manager Strahl stated that the last time we used the test with E-Skill and JJC was in 2023 and since then there has been no reason to work with them between then and now. Now, it is time to create a new list and when Interim Manager Strahl contacted E-Skill and JJC, he learned that they no longer do that business model anymore.

Alderman Albert made a motion to Approve the Civil Service Testing Company Agreement for a Total Amount of \$9,000.00. Seconded by Alderman Kubal. Roll Call: Ayes: Oberlin, Albert, Kubal, Deserio, Mayor Soliman. Abstain: Gazal, Cipiti. Nayes: Dyke, Jefferson. MOTION CARRIED.

There was discussion about whether the motion was carried with only four affirmative votes. City Attorney Stiff advised that with abstentions counting as nays, it was a 4-4 tie, which required the Mayor to break the tie.

3. 2025 Highlights

Administrator Wing presented highlights from 2025 across City departments:

Administration:

- Hiring of several department heads was completed to strengthen the administrative team.
- A Civil Service referendum was successfully placed on the ballot for March 17, 2026, addressing the potential elimination of Civil Service requirements.
- Significant ADA improvements were made to enhance accessibility within the Council Chambers.
- The Council agenda was streamlined with the addition of a consent agenda, allowing more efficient meetings.
- A grocery tax was approved and is now in effect, contributing to City revenues.

Finance:

- The Finance Department received several prestigious awards, including the Certificate for Achievement for Financial Excellence for the fiscal year ending in 2024.
- Coordination with the Intergovernmental Benefits Plan Committee (IBPC) resulted in an extension of benefits that aligned the City's health plan with an annual plan, freezing rates and realizing savings for both employees and the City.

Clerk's Office:

- A successful shred event was organized to cater to community needs for safe document disposal.
- The ongoing food drive in the lobby continued to support local charitable efforts.
- The hiring of a new Administrative Clerk, Linda, which she started her duties at the beginning of the year.

Community Development:

- The department saw the onboarding of a new director and two new inspectors to fortify operational capabilities.
- Liquor license hours were adjusted to better facilitate business attraction and retention.
- A total of 831 building permits were issued, marking the highest number since 2008.
- Code enforcement efforts increased, with 1,198 citations issued—more than double the average of the past decade.

Engineering:

- The creation of an interactive online construction status webpage improved transparency and information accessibility for ongoing projects.
- Updates to sewer and water tap fees were completed, enhancing infrastructure financing.
- 4,440 feet of water main were replaced, extending the lifespan of the City's water system by approximately 50 years.
- The City completed the resurfacing and rehabilitation of 3.6 miles of City streets.
- An interim review of PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) was conducted as part of the City's transition to Lake Michigan water.

Police:

- Initiated the City's first-ever school resource officer program to enhance safety in local schools.
- New 9mm firearms and a red dot sighting system were purchased using task force funds.
- The department was awarded the gold standard from Lexi pool for excellence in policy.
- Numerous community engagement events were hosted, including Neighbors' Night Out, Cop on the Rooftop, and the Polar Plunge.
- The department acquired four new squad cars, funded through grant assistance.

Public Works:

- Water letters were issued addressing the presence of lead pipes in the community, aiding public health and safety.

- The City received a Project of the Year award from the APWA Southwest Branch for environmental projects valued under \$5 million, specifically for the East Wastewater Treatment Plant's phosphorus removal upgrades.
- Transitioned to a new Public Works Director, ensuring leadership continuity and operational efficiency.

4. Discussion of Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Job Advertisement, Salary Range and Job Description.

Administrator Wing presented information regarding the proposed Assistant City Administrator/HR Director position. This included details about the job advertisement, a salary range proposed to be between \$140,000 and \$180,000, and the job description. The aim of the position was to consolidate administrative duties and human resources responsibilities into a single role, which was argued to be more cost-effective compared to maintaining separate roles. Administrator Wing emphasized that this would streamline operations and potentially reduce costs in the long run, while also addressing any HR needs consistently.

Alderman Cipiti asked if the budget could support these positions? Administrator Wing commented that the current HR position will cover 85% of this and the new temporary HR position through MGT, and if there is no overlap and we stick with the 40 hours per week we will be on target with our budget.

Alderwoman Gazal expressed her concern over the proposed salary range, questioning whether the range was justifiably high for the City's size and needs. She was worried about the financial implications of hiring at such a pay scale, especially in comparison to towns like or larger than Crest Hill. In response, Administrator Wing elaborated that the proposed salary fell within the standard range for similar positions within the Chicagoland area, considering the size and demands of Crest Hill. Furthermore, he pointed out that the current HR tasks, which are being managed by a consultant averaging around 35 hours a week, demonstrated the workload necessitating such a position.

The discussion over the salary also touched on regional benchmarks, with Administrator Wing stating that there are assistant positions elsewhere in the Chicagoland area with salaries comparable to the one proposed, sometimes even exceeding the compensation for the main City Administrators in other localities. Despite this explanation, there was still discomfort from Alderman Cipiti, who voiced his disagreement based on a comparison with nearby cities like Joliet. Alderman Cipiti felt that Crest Hill should not pursue salary figures comparable to those of larger neighboring localities that might operate with different economic frameworks and population scales.

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion.

Alderman Albert made a motion to Approve the Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Job Advertisement, Salary Range and Job Description. Seconded by Alderperson Oberlin. Roll Call: Ayes: Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Deserio, Gazal, Oberlin. Nayes: Cipiti, Jefferson. MOTION CARRIED.

Alderwoman Gazal requested to have several department heads' salaries reviewed since they are way behind compared to the salaries of the new hires, and she feels we need to take care of the people who have been here.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that the administrator's report from two weeks ago stated no names for requests because the administrator lost the names, but there is a specific item on the report regarding changing the City Clerk and the City Treasurer positions from elected to appointed and she wanted to know who requested that since it is an elected official position.

Alderman Albert commented that he requested that topic since there are many municipalities that have appointed City Clerks and City Treasurers.

Alderwoman Gazal commented that she is shocked that the City Attorney is not advising the Council to not get involved in the movement of offices since there is a legal situation happening with an attorney and commented that the Council should not be involved any longer since there is an attorney.

She also commented that she took offense to the report talking about the elected officials fulfilling their assigned responsibilities. She stated that she has worked here for eighteen years and has gone above and beyond but no one is perfect. Administrator Wing apologized but commented that he has no authority and the Council has the only authority. Alderwoman Gazal commented that we keep moving backwards when we should be moving forward.

Alderwoman Gazal then commented for the record that she will not be making any decisions on something where there is an ongoing legal situation.

Alderman Jefferson commented that he is not in support of just making the Clerk and Treasurer appointed, it should be all three, Mayor, Clerk, and Treasurer. These positions were created when the City of Crest Hill was created including the Mayor, so if you are going to do this it should be done to all three positions.

7F. PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT:
There were no items to report.

7G. CITY ENGINEER:
There were no items to report.

7H. POLICE DEPARTMENT:

There were no items to report.

7I. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT:

There were no agenda items.

Alderwoman Gazal mentioned that she had learned a Dollar General store was planned for the former bank property at the corner of Larkin and Plainfield Road. She expressed concern about the proliferation of dollar stores and asked if the City could limit such establishments. City Administrator Wing explained that while zoning and permitting requirements might address issues like inadequate parking, restricting specific types of businesses on private property would be difficult unless the City purchased the property. Administrator Wing stated that he would investigate this.

8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

There was no unfinished business.

9. NEW BUSINESS:

There was no new business.

10. COMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS:

1. Approval of an Ad Insertion Agreement with Shaw Media for the 2026 Heritage Corridor Travel Guide.

Alderman Dyke presented information about the annual ad in the Heritage Corridor Travel Guide. He explained that for \$850, the City could place a quarter-page ad in two publications with a combined distribution of 60,000 copies. He recommended using the 2024 ad design for 2026 with updates, including mention of the 100th anniversary of Route 66.

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion.

Alderman Dyke made a motion to Approve an Ad Insertion Agreement with Shaw Media for the 2026 Heritage Corridor Travel Guide. Seconded by Alderwoman Gazal. Roll Call: Ayes: Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti. Nays: None. MOTION CARRIED.

11. CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS:

Council members expressed appreciation for the accomplishments of 2025 and wished residents a happy new year.

Alderwoman Gazal specifically mentioned that Venezuela had become free on January 3, which was meaningful to her as she was born there.

12. PUBLIC COMMENT:

No one approached the podium for public comment.

13. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

1. 5ILCS 120/2(c)(1): The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the public body or legal counsel for the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee of the public body or against legal counsel for the public body to determine its validity.
2. 5ILCS 120/2 (c)(11): Litigation, when an action against, affecting or on behalf of the particular public body has been filed and is pending before a court or administrative tribunal, or when the public body finds that an action is probable or imminent, in which case the basis for the finding shall be recorded and entered into the minutes of the closed meeting.

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion to go into executive session on 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1) and 5ILCS 120/2 (c)(11).

Alderperson Oberlin made a motion to go into executive session on 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1) and 5ILCS 120/2 (c)(11) at 8:24 p.m. Seconded by Alderwoman Gazal. Roll Call: Ayes: Kubal, Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert. Nayes: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Mayor Soliman asked for a motion to reconvene from the executive session on 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1) and 5ILCS 120/2 (c)(11).

Alderperson Oberlin made a motion to reconvene from the executive session on 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1) and 5ILCS 120/2 (c)(11) at 10:21 p.m. Alderman Deserio. Roll Call: Ayes: Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal. Nayes: None. MOTION CARRIED.

POSSIBLE ACTION FOLLOWING EXECUTIVE SESSION:

1. Possible Adjustment of Employee Compensation

Administrator Wing commented that after having the closed session discussion there would need to be an adjustment to the salary range for the current City Engineer from \$107,926.00 to \$149,312.00. This would result in an increase of \$12,000.00 and still provide the \$6,000.00 stipend, giving a grand total of \$141,100.00 effective January 6, 2026, with changing the title to Director of Engineering.

Motion by Alderwoman Gazal made a motion to increase the City Engineer's salary and change the title to Director of Engineering. Seconded by Alderperson Oberlin. Roll Call: Ayes: Deserio,

Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke. Nayes: None.
MOTION CARRIED.

2. Possible Relocation of a Physical Office

City Attorney Mike Stiff commented that this would be a motion to relocate the City Treasurer's Office from City Hall to the Public Works building on Oakland Avenue and for Administrator Wing to make the directions given to him in the executive session.

Motion by Alderman Albert made a motion to Approve the Relocation of the City Treasurer's Office from City Hall to the Public Works Building. Seconded by Alderman Deserio. Roll Call: Ayes: Oberlin, Albert, Kubal, Deserio, Mayor Soliman. Nayes: Jefferson, Gazal, Cipiti, Dyke. MOTION CARRIED.

3. Possible Authorization of the city Administrator and/or City Attorney to Negotiate a Possible Settlement.

No action was taken.

14. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business before the Council, and no action needed from an executive session, a motion for adjournment was in order.

Alderman Albert made a motion to adjourn at 10:25 p.m. Seconded by Alderman Dyke. Roll Call: Ayes: Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson. Nayes: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Approved this _____ day of _____, 2026.
As presented _____
As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR