

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
January 12, 2026

The January 12, 2026, the City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:02 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 20600 City Center Blvd. Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

The following Council members were present: Mayor Raymond Soliman, City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, City Treasurer Jamie Malloy, Alderman Scott Dyke, Alderman Angelo Deserio (via phone), Alderman Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, Finance Director Glenn Gehrke, Community & Economic Development Director Daniel Ritter, Public Works Director Gary Richardson, City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Mayor Soliman requested a vote to allow Alderman Deserio to participate remotely as he was out of town.

Alderperson Oberlin made a motion to allow Alderman Deserio to participate remotely. Seconded by Alderman Albert. Roll call: Ayes: Dyke, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal. Nayes: None. Abstain: Jefferson. MOTION CARRIED.

MAYOR

1. Consideration of Lockport Township Fire Protection District Request for Minor PUD Change to Allow Issuance of Full Building Permit for New Training and Maintenance Facility

Mayor Soliman introduced the request from the Lockport Township Fire Protection District for a minor PUD change. He explained that Fire Chief O'Connor had sent a letter on January 6th requesting an amendment to allow the fire district to proceed with their training facility construction on Division Street while IDOT approval was still pending.

Mayor Soliman noted, it has been a lengthy process in regard to the improvements and turn lanes, which slowed down the construction and this could take additional months for the Fire Department to begin construction.

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter provided technical details, explaining that the Fire District was looking for an approval to be able to start the foundation and the building work. He clarified that while the original PUD approval required IDOT approval before any building permits but going through the IDOT review process as well as just getting approvals and understanding what they want takes time with IDOT. He proposed an alternative condition that would still require

completion of all IDOT requirements but prior to occupancy rather than building permits and all of that has been reviewed and approved.

Fire Chief O'Connor addressed the Council, explaining the situation: "Essentially what we're doing, you can see in the correspondence back and forth, we did not anticipate the process with IDOT going so long, so it seems like a very reasonable requirement at the time when we agreed to this. Obviously, now we're at the point where all work has stopped."

Chief O'Connor detailed that they had a meeting that morning with IDOT and City Administration, noting that it was more a formality and really did not accomplish anything. He also mentioned they had advised IDOT that the traffic study included anticipated traffic for a gun range that was no longer part of the project, though IDOT seemed unmoved by this argument.

Alderperson Oberlin asked about the recommended action mentioning a new agreement. Director Ritter confirmed an ordinance with updated conditions would be presented at the next meeting.

Alderwoman Gazal expressed concern about IDOT delays affecting multiple projects, asking if there is anyone above who is managing these things since they are stopping a lot of our construction. Director Ritter acknowledged this was a common problem across communities.

Mayor Soliman added that Danny Rios from IDOT's District Office was on their Zoom call, showing all key players were involved but progress remained slow.

Chief O'Connor noted they had reached out to Senator Cappell and Representative Manley, "but to no end."

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

Mayor Soliman updated the Council regarding the 2026 Liquor & Tobacco Licenses.

- 42 Liquor Licenses
- 21 Tobacco Licenses
- 19 Video Gaming Licenses
- BYOB License

He stated that everyone was paid and compliance. He then thanked his Deputy Liquor Commissioner, Dave Stengele and the Mayor's Administrative Assistant, Marybel DeHaro. Also, thanked Administrative Clerk Sam Tilley and the Deputy Clerk Karen Kozerka.

CLERK

1. Community Room Policy Discussion

City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall turned the discussion over to the City Attorney Mike Stiff and City Administrator Blaine Wing. Attorney Stiff presented a memo outlining considerations for a community room policy, explaining they have discussed this several times but never landed on exactly what is wanted in the policy.

Attorney Stiff reviewed various policy considerations including eligibility, reservation processes, fees, and restrictions. He emphasized key decision points, such as whether it will be open to anyone or do they want to allow political or religious groups or not, which was a discussion that started at the last meeting.

Alderwoman Gazal initiated discussion about current practices, explaining that homeowners' associations had been using City facilities for meetings, with police unlocking doors. She expressed concern about the purpose of the room, stating that originally, we were going to open it to residents for small gatherings, which is why the kitchen was designed.

The discussion quickly focused on whether to allow parties versus limiting use to meetings. Alderman Kubal stated firmly, that is has been used for HOA meetings which is reasonable, and he does not think it would be appropriate to use it as a party room for children's parties or showers.

Several Council members agreed that given staffing limitations, the room should be limited to non-profit organizations and HOA meetings rather than private parties. Alderwoman Gazal noted that the issue is there is not enough staff to monitor the room if used for parties.

Extensive discussion followed about whether room reservations should require Council approval. Mayor Soliman commented that he thought having a policy would avoid everything having to come before the City Council and go straight to the Clerk's Office to reserve.

Clerk Vershay-Hall indicated she was comfortable making decisions for HOAs and non-profit organizations.

Alderman Albert preferred that the City Administrator's Office would oversee this.

City Attorney Stiff methodically went through policy elements, with the Council deciding:

- No partisan political events or religious activities
- No private social events (parties, showers)
- No fees or deposits for approved groups

- Users responsible for cleanup
- No alcohol allowed
- Hours limited to regular business hours

Alderman Cipiti suggested reviewing other communities' policies, specifically mentioning provisions for random checks by police. The discussion became quite detailed about enforcement and liability, with Attorney Stiff explaining the need for an indemnity agreement.

After extensive back-and-forth about specific language and provisions, City Attorney Stiff indicated he would draft a comprehensive policy incorporating the Council's decisions and bring it back for final review.

This item will be placed on the Consent Agenda.

TREASURER

There were no agenda items.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR

1. SWARM Presentation

City Administrator Blaine Wing introduced Mike Alesia from Alliant Insurance Services, the insurance broker for SWARM (Southwest Agency for Risk Management). Mr. Alesia explained that SWARM was created in 1982 as a cooperative insurance pool, with Crest Hill as a founding member.

Mr. Alesia provided a detailed overview of SWARM's insurance structure, explaining the layered coverage:

- SWARM has a primary insurance layer with Obsidian through the first ten million dollars with a 40-million-dollar aggregate.
- Second layer is a 5-million-dollar excess of ten million.
- Arch has the top layer of five million excess of 15 million.

So, SWARM enjoys a 20-million-dollar limit shared by its members.

Mr. Alesia explained the loss fund concept, which the loss fund is a pool of money that SWARM has, we have about sixteen million dollars, seventeen million dollars to pay all claims underneath the deductible. This meant that for major claims, the City would not pay directly - the loss fund would cover the retention amounts.

Alderwoman Gazal asked questions about coverage for elected officials, specifically about internal disputes. She asked if she were discriminated against internally, could she hire SWARM to defend her.

Mr. Alesia clarified that SWARM defends the City and its officials when sued in their official capacity but would not provide coverage for one elected official to sue another. This led to an extended discussion where Alderwoman Gazal pressed the point, saying, she was told at a meeting that SWARM would protect the officials against another, and they can eliminate something that was already in place to protect the elected officials against another.

The presenter explained various scenarios, confirming that SWARM provides defense when officials are sued from outside parties but not for internal disputes.

He stated clearly, "SWARM does not sue," when asked if the insurance would cover an official wanting to bring suit.

2. FY 2026 Budget Status & General Budget Presentation

City Administrator Blaine Wing presented the budget status, showing that the general fund had spent about \$8.1 million of its \$12.7 million budget, or 64%. He noted, "Typically, at this point in time, we normally would be around 67 percent so we're actually on budget and actually slightly under budget." The general fund reserve stood at a healthy \$13 million.

For enterprise funds (water and sewer), City Administrator Wing noted they were under budget but warned about unplanned maintenance costs, particularly for water pumps. The enterprise reserve fund held \$16 million.

When Alderwoman Gazal asked about the 3% difference, City Administrator Wing explained it represented about \$380,000 under budget. She immediately asked, "Is there a way we can take that money and put it into [a] project that we need, such as the street?"

City Administrator Wing explained these were unrestricted funds that could be allocated by Council and mentioned upcoming discussions about a general fund policy. He noted they were at about 110% of recommended reserves and would be developing a policy to potentially use some funds for one-time capital projects, like the plaza or Division Street improvements.

Finance Director Glenn Gehrke added important context about the revenue side, explaining that budget amendments are based solely on expenses, not revenues, and promised to provide revenue details at the next workshop.

3. Fiber Agreement Discussion with MetroNet and Ripple

Two fiber optic companies presented their proposals to bring high-speed internet to Crest Hill. Ben Rusick from MetroNet explained they would bring "100 percent fiber optic infrastructure into town for both residential and commercial use." He detailed their extensive presence in Illinois, having started 9 years ago in Romeoville and Plainfield.

Mr. Ben Ruzick from Metro Net emphasized the benefits: "Your traditional co-ax may have some fiber backbone, and then it's ultimately fed out by co-ax. With 100 percent fiber optic build, it's fiber all the way into the home." He noted that fiber internet had become one of the top three questions from homebuyers and mentioned studies showing home values increase 14-17% when fiber is available.

Mayor Soliman asked if this would be more expensive and Mr. Ruzick responded, stating that it would be less expensive.

Mr. Steve Maher from Ripple Fiber followed, explaining their plans for the entire Will County area, including Joliet and Crest Hill. He detailed their pricing starting at \$65 for five hundred megabits per second, with discounts available for those on public assistance. Both companies emphasized symmetrical upload/download speeds as a major advantage over traditional cable.

Council members expressed confusion about having two companies doing similar work. Alderperson Oberlin asked, "It seems kind of bizarre to me...I'm envisioning everybody digging up and laying all these fiber optics all over the City." Mr. Maher reassured her that the companies typically would not overbuild each other as it was not economically viable, comparing it to not having two electric providers.

It was asked if the customer service is in the United States and both companies have their customer service in the United States.

Technical questions arose about how different speeds could be delivered through the same fiber. The representatives explained it was controlled at the distribution points, not in the fiber itself. After both presentations, the Council agreed to place both agreements on the consent agenda for the next meeting.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to place this agenda item on the Consent Agenda.

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal.

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

4. Credit Card & Purchasing Policy Update Discussion

Finance Director Glenn Gehrke presented a revised credit card policy aimed at improving control and accountability. Alderwoman Gazal strongly opposed the expansion of credit card holders, stating she felt the credit cards should be managed by department heads and not have so many people with credit cards.

Director Gehrke explained the rationale: "What we're doing now is actually giving the credit card to the person. Now that person is specifically

controlled. It is their credit card. They're responsible for that." He described recent problems where charges could not be identified because cards were shared among departments, citing a specific incident where they had to contest a \$465 charge because no one could identify who made it.

Finance Director Gehrke stated that the preferred method would be a purchase order but in some circumstances a card is needed for an online purchase or if it is an emergency purchase. Director Gehrke stated that we want to keep the credit card purchases at a minimum.

Director Gehrke commented that individual cards with specific limits and names would provide better control than the current system of department cards with \$20,000 limits being passed around.

City Treasurer Jamie Malloy expressed skepticism about issuing more cards, warning about the challenges of recovering funds if employees misused cards and then resigned.

Alderman Oberlin strongly supported the proposal and commented that if something happens with one card, you can close that card immediately and it is not going to affect everybody.

Alderman Jefferson suggested suspending credit card use entirely until proper controls were in place.

Alderman Cipiti commented that there is still potential that the credit card will be handed off to someone else.

Alderman Dyke commented that no one is going to want their credit card with their name on it given to someone else and will be more cautious about the credit card.

Alderman Deserio feels this will be more proficient for the City.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote for the reorganization of the Credit Card with the correction to remove the sharing of the card in the Credit Card Policy.

Alderman Cipiti and Alderwoman Gazal passed originally and then Alderman Cipiti was undecided.

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Albert, Oberlin, Deserio, Dyke.

NAYES: Ald. Jefferson.

ABSTAIN: Ald. Gazal.

UNDECIDED: Ald. Cipiti.

ABSENT: None.

Mayor Soliman asked Alderwoman Gazal for her vote, after passing. Alderwoman Gazal stated that the Mayor had his votes, and she is still undecided and would like more time to think about this and vote at the

Council meeting. She then informed the Mayor that he cannot make her vote. Mayor Soliman stated that yes, he cannot force her to vote, but her job is to make a vote. Alderwoman Gazal commented that she knows she has a job, and she does not have to make a straw vote, and she knows her responsibilities and does not need to be told by the Mayor and the City Administrator what she needs to do. Alderwoman Gazal then stated she is abstaining.

This will be on the agenda Monday, January 19, 2026.

5. Updated Agreements with Azavar and SpyGlass

Administrator Blaine Wing introduced the topic of updated agreements with two firms, Azavar and SpyGlass, both involved in auditing City costs to identify potential savings. The City of Crest Hill's partnership with Azavar began in 2013, whereas SpyGlass has a history stretching back even further. These updated agreements promise to be more beneficial for the City, particularly noting that SpyGlass has adjusted their terms to reduce the return window from 36 months to a more favorable 12 months.

During the discussion, Alderperson Oberlin raised a concern regarding outdated information in the documents, specifically pointing out that the address listed was 1610 Plainfield Road, the former location of City Hall. Recognizing the error, Administrator Wing agreed that this needed to be corrected and committed to ensuring the documents would be updated to reflect the city's current address.

Administrator Wing elaborated on the engagement with these firms, highlighting that both Azavar and SpyGlass are strategic partners focused on scrutinizing various City expenses to uncover savings opportunities, such as telecommunications and utility audits. Through extensive negotiations, the City was able to secure terms that provide better returns, especially focusing on efficiency and financial prudence.

The conversation also touched on the mechanism through which these firms operate. Primarily, they analyze current expenditures and contracts, offering insights into overpayments or cost-saving opportunities that can then be leveraged to reduce overall municipal expenses.

The Council expressed its support for moving forward with these revised agreements, recognizing the value in continuing collaboration with Azavar and SpyGlass to optimize the City's financial management.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Gazal, Deserio, Dyke, Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal,

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Albert.

PASSED: Ald. Jefferson.

6. Request by City Council Member Discussion

City Administrator Blaine Wing presented a list of about ten topics that Council members had requested for future discussion. He noted he had not tracked who made each request as they came via various informal methods - sticky notes, hallway conversations, texts, etc.

Given the late time (approaching 10 PM), the Council agreed to table this item for a future meeting. Administrator Wing suggested that going forward, requests should be made formally during Council meetings or work sessions so they could be properly recorded by the Clerk.

Mayor Soliman asked if anyone had any objections to table this agenda item and having this at a future work session meeting. There were no objections.

7. Labor Attorney Selection Process Discussion

The City received eight proposals for labor and employment legal services. City Administrator Wing explained it had been more than a decade since the City selected a labor firm, and he could not find records of the previous process. He offered two options: have HR and Administration narrow to 3-5 firms for Council to interview or have him interview 3-5 firms and narrow to 2-3 for Council.

Administrator Wing outlined his approach, including creating a matrix evaluating firms' experience with local government, specific unions (MAP and Local 150), attorney availability, and hourly rates. He noted time was critical as labor negotiations with one union would begin in a couple of months. Alderwoman Gazal asked if the City Attorney could provide input, which was agreed to be appropriate.

Council members preferred having Administrator Wing conduct initial interviews and then bring the firm to Council.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

1. Discuss the Route 66 100th Anniversary Event, Budget, and Signage

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter presented plans for celebrating Route 66's 100th anniversary in 2026. He proposed installing 2-3 photo-opportunity signs similar to the existing one at City Hall, creating a scavenger hunt where people could win gift cards to local businesses.

Proposed locations included Merichka's Restaurant, the new Dunkin' Donuts/Quick Run on Route 66, and Prairie Bluff Golf Course. All locations had tentatively agreed to host signs.

Alderman Dyke asked to use the same sign for all locations to save money.

Alderman Cipiti suggested making signs unique to each location rather than generic Route 66 signs: "Merichka's is famous for the poor boy sandwich. Anyway we could have that on the sign. People getting a selfie with that and the attention that would bring to the restaurant would be, I think, greater than just the plain sign." He also asked about getting the host businesses to contribute financially.

Director Ritter explained that custom designs would increase both cost and timeline, and he doubted businesses would contribute without knowing the return on investment. He emphasized the signs would remain City property and could be relocated for future use.

Discussion about reusing the existing sign revealed it was too large for the gas station site. Several Council members felt it should remain at City Hall where it was popular for photos.

Budget discussions centered on whether to allocate \$40,000.00 or \$50,000.00. Director Ritter recommended \$50,000.00 to provide flexibility for the signs, promotional materials, website updates, and gift cards. He noted individual signs ranged from \$7,000.00 to \$20,000.00, depending on size and design.

Alderperson Gazal emphasized the significance of it being the 100th Anniversary of Route 66.

Alderman Albert pointed out Crest Hill's delayed response to Route 66 promotion, noting the State had given out millions for Route 66 promotion years earlier. He stated, "Some of these communities along Route 66 are very, very impressive with what they've done to promote tourism.

The Council supported a \$50,000.00 budget, though Alderman Dyke preferred \$40,000.00. Director Ritter agreed to solicit design preferences via email and pursue grants from Heritage Corridor and JADA to offset costs.

2. Text Amendments to the City of Crest Hill Zoning Ordinance, Code of Ordinances and Development Handbook with Respect to Regulations Governing Non-Conforming Uses and Structures, Court Reporter Requirements for Development Applications, and Parking Lot, Driveway, and Street Access Regulations

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter briefly explained these amendments addressed longstanding issues that had hindered development and created unnecessary variance requests. He specifically mentioned the court reporter's requirement for special use applications as an example of requirements that added cost and complexity.

The Planning Commission had unanimously recommended the amendments. Alderman Kubal responded, "If this will make it easier and more efficient to bring new business in, I'm all for it."

The item was approved for the next Council meeting agenda.

3. QuikTrip's Request for the Approval of a Fourth Amendment to the Purchase Contract for the Old City Hall Site

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter returned with yet another extension request for the QuikTrip purchase contract. He explained that IDOT issues had been resolved, and design amendments were made, but QuikTrip still needed to complete zoning approvals, including a driveway variance and subdivision request.

The timeline would have zoning items in February, City Council approval in early March, with closing within 30 days of zoning approval. The extension would be for 90 days or 30 days after zoning approval, whichever came first.

Director Ritter emphasized that this should be our last extension, correct unless there is an unforeseen circumstance.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote.

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Albert, Oberlin, Jefferson, Deserio, Dyke.

NAYES: Ald. Cipiti, Gazal,

ABSENT: None.

The informal vote passed with Alderman Cipiti maintaining his consistent opposition, stating "I'm going to be consistent on my vote on this and I'm a no."

Alderman Dyke raised a constituent concern about yard waste still at curbs past the collection deadline. This sparked brief discussion about whether Public Works should provide special pickups.

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter explained that other communities with leaf vacuum equipment could oversee this, but Crest Hill lacked such expensive machinery. It was noted that residents could still dispose of yard waste in regular garbage.

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Resident Linda Dyke spoke about the credit card issue, contrasting it with her church workplace where employees cannot make purchases directly. She stated her intentions is to FOIA monthly credit card statements to see what is being purchased with these credit cards because as a taxpayer, she feels she has a right to know.

Linda Dyke also questioned whether the Finance Department's three employees working 120 hours per week total could not properly monitor purchases, suggesting a time study might be needed.

Resident Stuart Soifer recommended the RAMP system for credit card controls, explaining how it provided immediate notifications and receipt requirements whenever purchases were made. He also noted that the Community Room policy should specify that all events must be open to the public since it is a taxpayer-funded facility, as is required at the library.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

1. 5ILCS 120/2(c)(2): The collective negotiating matters between the public body and its employees or their representative, or deliberations concerning salary schedules for one or more classes of employees.

Alderwoman Gazal made a motion to go into executive session for 5ILCS 120/2(c)(2). Seconded by Alderperson Oberlin. Roll Call: Ayes: Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke. Nays: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Executive session: 10:37 PM.

Alderperson Oberlin made a motion to reconvene from the executive session for 5ILCS120/2(c)(2). Seconded by Alderman Deserio. Roll call: Ayes: Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal, Dyke, Deserio. Nays: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Reconvened: 10:57 p.m.

There being no further business before the Council, and no action needed from the executive sessions, the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 10:57 p.m.

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

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR

DRAFT