

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
April 13, 2026

The April 13, 2026, the City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:00 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 Deputy Clerk Karen Kozerka, 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, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, Public Works Director Gary Richardson, Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Ashley Monroe, City Attorney Mike Stiff, Community & Economic Development Dan Ritter, Finance Director Glenn Gehrke, Attorney Jason Blumenthal, and Attorney Mike Bersani (via phone 7:42-8:13pm).

MAYOR

There were no agenda items.

CLERK

There were no agenda items.

TREASURER

There were no agenda items.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

1. Discuss Bernie's Chapter Bites & Bevs Liquor License Request

Mayor Ray Soliman introduced Bernadette "Bernie" Soto, who had contacted the City 3-4 weeks prior seeking a liquor license. Mayor Soliman stated that Crest Hill doesn't have anything like Bernie's Chapter and it would be a destination point for many people. Mayor Soliman explained that after meeting with Ms. Soto and reviewing her concept, it appeared to fall into a gray area between a bistro and restaurant license. Since the City's bistro licenses are currently capped at seven with no availability, staff were recommending raising the cap from seven to eight to accommodate this unique upscale establishment.

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter explained that this concept was quite different from typical gaming cafe requests the City regularly receives. He noted that the Bernie's Chapter proposal included a full menu of food and an upscale interior concept, distinguishing it from traditional gaming cafes. The establishment would feature six gaming units like other bistros but would focus primarily on elevated food service.

Ms. Soto presented her vision for an upscale establishment featuring curated small plates, charcuterie boards, truffle fries, and other elevated appetizers which may change depending on what the community gravitates toward. She emphasized that

gaming would be secondary, positioned in the back of the establishment, with the focus on creating an intimate, mood-lit atmosphere described as a “home away from home experience.” The proposed hours would be 9 AM to midnight or 1 AM. Ms. Soto expressed interest in a location at 2357 Plainfield Road, which has been vacant for several years, and submitted a letter of intent (LOI) for that space. Ms. Soto clarified that while gaming would generate revenue, her concept was genuinely different from typical bistros that offer free food primarily to encourage gambling. She planned to charge for quality food items and create a true dining experience.

Mayor Soliman stated that her request was for six gaming units and not a full liquor license, stating that Ms. Soto is only interested in beer, wine and a couple of hard liquors for some special drinks.

Alderman Claudia Gazal questioned why the Council was being asked to increase the bistro cap if this wasn't classified as a bistro, emphasizing that regardless of the elevated concept, it remained fundamentally a bistro operation. She stressed the importance of transparency and consistency in licensing classifications. Mayor Soliman stated that Bernie's Chapter would be a bistro, not a restaurant, because of the gaming.

Director Dan Ritter clarified that the establishment met technical requirements for a restaurant license, but the gaming component placed it in a gray area. He explained that the Council maintains discretion over gaming cafe licenses and approving this concept wouldn't create a precedent requiring approval of traditional gaming cafes.

Alderman Claudia Gazal asked Ms. Soto if she would consider opening up this establishment without the gaming. Ms. Soto responded that she would consider it because gaming isn't going to be the focus of her place.

Alderman Mark Cipiti asked if gaming would be the majority of her profits. Ms. Soto answered that she wasn't sure, not knowing the future, but if she were to guess it would be 60/40 split between gaming and food/beverage. She stated that it was difficult for her to say since her concept is different from a traditional gaming bistro since the traditional bistro doesn't sell food or drinks. Alderman Cipiti stated that looking at her menu that there weren't a lot of high-ticket items. Ms. Soto responded that she understood, but it doesn't take into consideration the liquor part of the revenue. Alderman Cipiti then stated that the bar looked substantial in the rendering photos and asked how many seats she intended on having at the bar. Ms. Soto answered that she was thinking about six to eight chairs. Alderman Cipiti asked if it was going to be just beer and wine. Ms. Soto answered that she was going to have spirits as well, like a canned white claw or something similar. Lastly, Alderman Cipiti stated that in Ms. Soto's proposal there is not a location yet. Ms. Soto stated that she submitted an LOI as of last week for 2357 Plainfield Road and she is waiting for a response. She stated that the space has been vacant for some time and could use some ramping up in that area. She also stated that she hoped that they would get back to her with something positive because she would like to change that around if she is able. Alderman Cipiti stated his concern about that location as there were already a few bistros in the vicinity.

Aldersperson Tina Oberlin asked Director Ritter if there could be a different license created because of the hybrid concept. Director Ritter stated there were different requirements for specific liquor licenses. He did state that a different license category can be created but referred the question to City Attorney Mike Stiff. Attorney Stiff advised that while the City Council could create different license categories, this concept appeared more aligned with existing bistro classifications. He recommended treating it as a Class K license (bistro) rather than creating confusion with restaurant licensing.

Alderman Dyke asked how it works when a restaurant wants to remove a couple of tables and include the gaming machines. He wanted to know if there is a limit of how many gaming machines they can put in. Mayor Soliman stated that the limit is six gaming machines for everybody. Alderman Dyke stated that even Beggars Pizza has gaming in it, so where does one draw the line with it. Director Ritter stated that Beggars does have a few tables in there and a big kitchen with which to do catering orders there.

Alderwoman Gazal asked how many employees she anticipates needing for operations. Ms. Soto stated that she thought two to three employees would work to start. Alderwoman Gazal stated that she would be okay if the City changed the H liquor license to something else, but not a bistro license. Director Ritter asked what the specific difference would be for this venture. He has had this issue in other communities, and it gets confusing when there are so many different liquor licenses invented for particular concepts. It made sense to simply raise the cap from seven to eight since this is a concept which differs from the traditional gaming cafes.

Alderman Nate Albert supported the concept as bringing something unique to Crest Hill that does not currently exist in surrounding communities. He viewed it as an entrepreneurial venture that could revitalize an underutilized space. Alderman Albert stated that he doesn't see the need to add another license class, but raising the cap from seven to eight seemed logical. Mayor Soliman stated that if the cap is raised to eight and if Ms. Soto doesn't succeed, then the cap can be reduced back to seven.

Alderwoman Gazal stated that this shouldn't be advertised as a bistro because it's not. Residents will not go to another bistro. City Attorney Stiff stated that the vernacular being used might be confusing for Councilmembers as it is not a bistro license, but it is a Class K liquor license that would be needed. Alderwoman Gazal asked if Director Ritter talked about the eating tax with Ms. Soto. Director Ritter stated that he had not since they are not there yet, but he talks to all new business owners.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve the proposal of a K liquor license for Bernie's Chapter if she decides to go forward with liquor license approval and increase the K liquor license cap for the City of Crest Hill from seven to eight.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSTAIN: Alderman Cipiti.

ABSENT: None.

Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter provided a brief update on Route 66 signage, reporting that three signs are in production and should arrive before the end of April. The signs will be located at Prairie Bluff Golf Course, Merichka's, and the Shell/Dunkin' Donuts on Route 66, with plans to launch the accompanying website once signs are installed.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR

1. Updated Agreement with Comcast/Xfinity for Internet Services

City Administrator Blaine Wing presented a proposal to update the City's Internet services agreement with Comcast Xfinity. He explained that the City had engaged consultant Spyglass to review all telecommunications services (voice over IP, cell phones, and Internet) to identify potential cost savings and service improvements. The immediate need arose from Strand Engineering's requirement for at least one gigabyte of bandwidth at the West wastewater treatment facility for supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) services, expected to be operational by June or July 2026. Comcast indicated that significant equipment installation would be required, necessitating a 36-month agreement.

Administrator Wing reported that a usage analysis conducted with IT consultants AIS revealed that several public works locations and well houses were operating beyond normal utilization, requiring speed upgrades from their current levels to meet operational needs. The only building recommended to remain on its current 5-year contract (with 24 months remaining) was City Hall, which houses both City offices and the police department.

A significant discovery was that Comcast had been overbilling the City \$1,200 per month (\$2,200 instead of the contracted \$1,100) for City Hall services. Spyglass verified this billing error against the contract, and Comcast was working to provide credits, in the form of \$1,200 monthly credits over the 36-month term of the new agreement.

The proposal involves transferring \$11 million from general fund operations (\$5 million from general fund, \$6 million from home rule taxes) to capital projects, and \$6 million from water/sewer operations to water/sewer capital projects. These transfers would fund infrastructure projects including the required Internet upgrades.

Alderman Tina Oberlin inquired about the billing error timeline, and Administrator Wing explained that Comcast typically only provides credits going back 6 months, despite the contract clearly showing the lower rate. He attributed the error to COVID-era installation rush and administrative oversights.

Administrator Wing noted that similar cost-saving initiatives had already been implemented with Verizon, reducing phone service costs from \$55 to \$36 per month per line, saving approximately \$12,000 annually.

Mayor Soliman called for an informal vote to update the agreement with Comcast/Xfinity for internet services for the west wastewater treatment plant and for other locations in the City.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

2. Forensic Audit Discussion

City Administrator Blaine Wing stated, "On page nineteen if the Deputy Clerk could phone in, we will have one attorney joining us by phone and we also have another attorney through SWARM joining us here in person. I'll just start up and allow the attorneys, I don't know who is going to go first, to kind of talk but I'll start up the conversation and allow them to both introduce themselves. As a background, on March 2, 2026, during that Council meeting our City Treasurer Jamie Malloy distributed packets of information for Council and others relating to the Crest Hill Events Committee. Within a few minutes it was verbally noted that there was some private information contained within some of those documents that was not redacted and at the City Attorney's direction those packets were requested to be given to him, that's Mike Stiff. A redacted version of the packet is now since been provided to Council and also made available on the City's website. As our SWARM-assigned attorneys have continued to go through this overall process and in response they are providing tonight their recommendation for moving forward with a forensic audit and that information that they have provided to me is in tonight's packet. And I will hand it over to the attorneys to really explain where they're at in the process and their recommendation because this is not coming from me, this is coming from the attorneys."

After Deputy Clerk Karen Kozerka added the attorney to the meeting remotely via phone, making sure he could hear everybody and everybody could hear him, he responded, "Mike Bersani, attorney." Then present at the meeting in person was, "Jason Blumenthal, attorney. Nice to be back in front of all of you, Mr. Mayor and Council members. Mike Bersani is on the phone as he indicated today. We received at the last time we were here we got direction to look at possible options for a forensic audit for the Special Events Committee of Crest Hill. I will let Mike talk more about that in particular, but this is our recommendation based on that direction we received at the last meeting. Mr. Bersani?"

Mr. Bersani explained, "Yes, I think the Administrator's memo to the Council is pretty self-explanatory. We have worked with Ketchum, who is a forensic accountant, in the past on both litigation and non-litigation matters in our practice representing other municipalities and local governments and it's a firm that would be very qualified to take on this project if the Council so choose. If you wanted to move forward with this, we need to define a scope of work as well so we can make that direction to Ketchum." Mr. Blumenthal stated, "So with that, I think that we are looking for direction on what you as a Council would like to see from us and if this is what you would like to do."

Alderman Gazal stated, "I would like to say something for the record. Also, Alderman Jefferson and I requested a forensic audit for a while. That same day

you requested that as well, is that correct? It's for the record." Alderman Jefferson responded, "Yes." Alderman Jefferson stated, "I have questions about the entire process that is unfolding. I'm not saying anybody is doing anything wrong or anything but the lack of inclusion just from the fact that your firm was hired without coming before the board and normally that's the way we, you know, things come before the Council before it's enacted. I'm not familiar with this Ketchum firm. I know five forensic audit firms along Michigan Avenue in Chicago, two on Jackson Boulevard in Chicago and one on Canal Street and it doesn't seem like we sent anything out to anyone to see if they would pick this up and I just have a little concern about the transparency, the openness, the inclusion, the lack thereof of all of that is a very big concern to me. I'm not saying that anybody is guilty of anything, I know we get in our personal feelings, but my job is to ensure that the process is legit." Mr. Blumenthal said, "Mike, I will start on the first question and please add in anything. In regard to the how we're assigned that we are panel counsel for your insurance pool and that's how we get assigned through your insurance agency. So, just for that process that's how our firm is selected. Mike, is that fair? Is there anything you want to add to that portion?" Mr. Bersani included, "No, no, that's exactly, that's exactly correct and for what it's worth historically our firm has been Crest Hill's attorney through SWARM, the risk pool for many years, probably close to twenty years. So, it's not unusual for counsel assigned to a matter as part of a SWARM assignment to come forward with recommendations on how to proceed so this is part of that recommendation. If it is City Council's desire to go in a different direction or to get more proposals, certainly we can do that, that is not an issue. We were asked to come forward with the recommendation of a firm that we thought was qualified and this firm is certainly qualified if you want to proceed with this investigation of the events committee and that's what we did." Alderman Jefferson asked, "How far back are we talking, with the events committee?" Mr. Blumenthal answered, "That there is the question tonight, is what would that scope be for, if a forensic audit would occur, so that would be at your discretion as to what you're thinking, time frame." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "I would like to touch on what he said, I understand his point. What he's, I think, correct me if I'm wrong, Darrell. The SWARM obviously represents the City no matter what, I mean that's what we have, like you said, for over twenty years but the way I feel is we were never notified that this is who we're going to contact. Usually, things come to the Council. Council are you okay to go with this direction because this happened right now. We just got an email all of a sudden the SWARM they're going to contact us, they're going to question us, and this is the part that I think he's referring, that I'm referring to. Well, no one asked us if this is the procedure we want to take because it was already given to us in an email saying this is the direction that we're going. So, that is the part I want to clarify for myself that nobody asked Council is this the direction you want to go. All of a sudden we're getting these emails from Mike Bersani that you know, he's going to be starting this investigation and all that. So, we're all put in this position, you know?" Mike Bersani responded, "Yes, that's not, that's not accurate. This is what we're doing now is coming to the Council asking you, do you want to investigate this committee? If you do..." Alderwoman Gazal clarified, "I'm talking about from the beginning, Mr. Bersani, from the beginning when the initial email came, do you want to go with the SWARM or do you want to go with someone else. The Council was not given that option. Correct, Blaine? You just sent an email saying this is who we have." City

Administrator Blaine Wing answered, "Correct. SWARM is already covered so there's no cost, compared to utilizing our municipal attorneys or hiring another firm which would cost money." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "Yes, but the Council never approved that. That is what Darrell was trying to say and I concur with him." Administrator Wing answered, "I guess yes, no. Council approves our risk management and so when something triggers our risk management is who is covered first because it's in essence already paid for." Alderwoman Gazal replied, "Yes." City Attorney Mike Stiff added, "The City is obligated to notify SWARM of a potential claim, so what happened the night of March 2nd was there was a claim that was made and the claim was then submitted to SWARM as the City is obligated to do. They need to put the insurance people on notice as soon as practicable of a claim, so that's what Blaine did on Tuesday morning the 3rd. And SWARM then took that claim and assigned counsel as they do in the normal course whether it was a lawsuit that actually came in and got served on the City and Blaine tendered it or whether there was just a verbal claim as what was made on the night of March 2nd."

Alderman Jefferson asked, "So we're at this point now where we're considering a forensic audit?" Mr. Blumenthal answered, "Yes, and that was our understanding at the last meeting we were given direction to find a forensic auditing firm that we've used historically or that we felt would be able to do this process. The question here would be the scope. However, as Mr. Bersani indicated, if you guys are looking for a different firm or want other proposals that is one hundred percent fine. This is just a firm we're aware of and we've used in the past and know is able to accomplish this task that you guys were looking for." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "Well, just for the record, I did send an email to the City Administrator that I personally prefer somebody on the outside that has no ties to the City or our attorneys or nobody so this way they don't say oh we're playing games, we tweaked it, the Mayor had his hands in it, Councilman has, that was my perspective of how I would like to see it, but again in the end is the majority rules in here. Just my opinion, that's how I felt." City Attorney Mike Stiff added, "And I can state just for the record, I mean I know, Claudia, you just mentioned the City Attorneys, you probably included me but you're also including Mr. Bersani." Alderwoman Gazal responded, "I did." City Attorney Still went on, "Mr. Bersani has worked with Ketchum. I have never worked with Ketchum. I don't know them from Adam. I have never worked with them. And so, there is no affiliation, just for the record, between me, my office and Ketchum." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "I totally understand. I just, again for the record, I would like to clarify that cause I don't want something to happen later to say oh the Council knew about they knew this company and so-and-so and for some reason we've all been dragged into this, you know. So, to me just be clear and straight forward and transparent from the beginning. Who needs to vote, needs to vote, who needs to abstain, needs to abstain, who needs to be present, needs to be present but that was like my intention in the beginning to be like, okay are we. I just feel more comfortable having somebody on the outside. That nobody knows nobody. That's me, but I'm only one player. And again, I appreciate everything you've done, your interviews and everything. It was very nice. It's nothing personal with you." Mr. Blumenthal responded, "Trust me, there is no offense, we're here for you guys." Alderwoman Gazal stated, "We've just been going down this road for a long time, and I'm tired myself of being dragged

in all this and the questioning and constantly the people want to know about my committee so.” Mr. Blumenthal stated, “Sure and again, that’s what tonight is, to hear from you guys on what that next step would look like and what you would want to see. So, if the majority would like to look for other options that’s perfectly fine, we just need direction and a scope for what that would look like and what you would desire.” Mayor Soliman asked, “Could I ask if anybody on City Council has any knowledge or dealings with Ms. Ketchum?” All Council members stated, “No.” Mr. Bersani asked (via phone), “Are you asking just the Councilmen or us?” Mayor Soliman responded, “I was just asking the City Council. That was the concern.” Mr. Bersani answered, “Okay, thank you.” Mark Cipiti stated, “I don’t have any knowledge or experience with them, but I have to agree with Alderman Jefferson, and I would rather have a different firm, nothing personal to Jason or Mike. Just someone that doesn’t have any ties to City Attorney SWARM per se through this process so far. Just to guarantee one hundred percent someone coming that doesn’t have any connections or past experience. But I definitely think we need to do it. You said this is a forensic audit of the events committee?” Mr. Blumenthal responded, “That was our understanding of the desire of the Board was, yes.” Alderman Cipiti stated, “It seemed like, but this came out of the March 2nd meeting Treasurer Malloy’s packet, which was really more specific than events committee. It was, seemed to be mostly pertaining to past City picnics. I understand it was under the events committee umbrella, but it was specifically for picnics. Correct? The material.” City Treasurer Malloy answered, “Yes, it was for picnics.” Alderman Cipiti asked, “So, it would only be a forensic audit of those, that material?” Mr. Blumenthal answered, “Again, that would be at the discretion of what this Council would like and what that scope would be. So, that’s the direction that is needed tonight.” Alderman Cipiti responded, “Got you.” Alderwoman Gazal stated, “To me, if you’re going to do a forensic audit about the committee, you do the committee from the day it started until today’s when I’m on it. You do it all because you can’t pick and choose, you’ve just got to do everything. That’s to me.” Alderman Jefferson agreed, “That’s the knowledge I have about a forensic audit, that it goes back to inception and comes forward with all documents, not just pertaining to what the treasurer presented goes back to the day of inception all the way up to present. And, in a way, Ms. Ketchum is new because apparently no one here has had any dealings with her. I just couldn’t research and find her. A public firm should be able to, you should be able to google them and get something, and I wasn’t able to bring that up on my computer, but you know the scope of the forensic audit and how far back it goes those are two things that I’m very much interested in, regardless of who does it. The integrity of the forensic audit means a lot. Not just to me. We got a whole City of twenty plus thousand people that it means a lot to so that is my deepest concern.” Alderman Kubal asked, “Tonight, Ray, we’re just going to decide whether we’re going forward, correct? And what the scope is going to be? Is that what we’re going to look at here tonight?” Mayor Soliman responded, “We’re hoping to pick somebody.” Alderman Kubal stated, “My opinion is, I agree with Claudia. I’m tired of all of this stuff and I think my vote would be it all stops tonight. I’ve heard enough of it. I don’t need this to go forward.” Alderwoman Gazal said, “That’s not what I said.” City Attorney Stiff stated, “I don’t think that’s what Claudia said. Claudia wants a forensic audit, and she wants it to go back to the beginning of the events committee and go through today’s date as opposed to stopping at some point

before Claudia and Darrell took over.” Alderwoman Gazal stated, “And I would like to see two names that we can, names and prices and we go from there. Minimum two names.” Alderman Kubal added, “I just see that this is a pretty old issue, several years ago. It’s come up here all of a sudden from several years ago and I don’t particularly care to see the City spending more money on this particular topic. That’s my opinion.” Alderman Cipiti stated, “We need to do the audit. There’s already been so many questions raised by many people, residents included, and if there’s any impropriety or any use of City taxpayer dollars that is not done in the appropriate way then it should come to light and it should be dealt with. To say we’re not going to look at it, I don’t think is responsible for us as elected officials.” Alderman Kubal responded, “I’m like it’s not responsible to spend twelve thousand dollars on this right now either. That’s just my opinion.” Alderman Cipiti responded, “We spend a lot of money on legal fees, Joe, on a lot of different things.” Alderman Kubal stated, “We don’t have to here.” Alderman Cipiti said, “Pardon?” Alderman Kubal restated, “I said my opinion is we don’t have to here.” Alderman Jefferson stated, “I can tell you whether we spend the money or not, this isn’t the end of it. I can guarantee you that. So, we either spend the money here or we spend the money later.”

Mayor Soliman stated, “Okay. Based on what I’m hearing from some of the City Council members, I’m looking at it that we have a couple of options here tonight. One we could take the recommendation of our three attorneys and do a vote on Sarah Ketchum or the other part that I was hearing I could offer a compromise that we have a recommendation from Mr. Blumenthal, Mr. Bersani and Mr. Stiff if I can have two volunteers from City Council to go out and find another firm then we bring both firms back here and we interview them and the City Council will pick one of the two. I’ll open it up for discussion to Council on that recommendation.” Alderman Dyke stated, “I’ve never been involved in a forensic audit or know of anyone that has. Mr. Jefferson there says he knows the firms and has had experience so I would think he would be the person who would help lead us to maybe another firm to bring in to compare to.” Alderwoman Gazal stated, “I believe the City Administrator should find someone and bring them to us and we’ll go from there.” Alderman Dyke said, “Or the Administrator, like you say, have him bring somebody else. I don’t know if he’s dealt with any audits of this type before.” Administrator Wing responded, “I have not, but through the City Manager, Manager, Assistant Administrator Association, I can ask other managers and administrators if any communities have and then get a list of firms. I’d be happy to share that or ask what their experience was, positive as well as potentially an hourly rate or cost.” Alderman Dyke stated, “All right, sounds good.” City Attorney Stiff stated, “And I would ask is the Council interested in still considering Ketchum and having the administrator get one more additional firm or are you looking at having multiple choices, besides just Ketchum?” Alderman Jefferson answered, “Ketchum is on the table. I just couldn’t find anything. I don’t know if it’s a firm name or what. I just couldn’t find. I found a bio, but I didn’t find anything about what.” Mayor Soliman asked, “Did you get the information, Darrell? Did you get the information that was in the packet?” Alderman Jefferson replied, “Let me see, I think I did.” Mayor Soliman asked, “Do you have two different versions here?” Alderman Jefferson stated, “I have to be honest, if this was in the packet, I overlooked it.” Mayor Soliman stated, “I mean it just wasn’t a name, there was information.” Mr. Bersani added, “I can tell

you, I can add a little bit more color on her. So, Sarah Ketchum used to work with the Kendrick Group. You can find them, I think, if you google them. That was acquired by HKA Global, which is another firm, and then she went out on her own. That's her history. She's got a great deal of experience coming from those bigger firms. That's on her resume." Alderman Jefferson stated, "Okay. I mean I would be okay with maybe coming for at least one other firm, so that you know." Administrator Wing stated, "Again, I not familiar with any but I'm happy to reach out to the association and see if anybody comes back and if I get two or three, reach out to them and get pricing." Alderman Cipiti added, "Well, the Mayor was proposing two people on Council could volunteer. Could you work with Darrell? He says he knows half a dozen." Alderman Jefferson replied, "Well, no, I the ones I know would disqualify themselves because of their relationship with me. So, we would have to find someone independent of my personal relationship." Administrator Wing stated, "Okay, I would be happy to work, I guess, to exclude the ones because I might end with names that Darrell would say they are already going to decline because he knows them. I'm happy to do that or work with anybody." Mayor Soliman stated, "My suggestion was an either or. Either we vote tonight on Ketchum, or we go and find another one to bring in and then sit down and interview and." City Attorney Stiff added, "I mean just sitting here it sounds like Mark, Darrell, Scott, and I guess Claudia there's four in favor of that. What does the rest of Council think about getting another name?" Alderman Albert stated, "Honestly, this resume I see in front of me is sufficient for what the scope of work that we're looking to have done. I just, at the end of the day, I'm not sure if this is, um, I think the results of this forensic audit are going to tell us everything that we already, kind of, already know. There's Council people that have been sitting up here since the events committee was first established in 2009 or 2010, whatever it is, and I know there's been questions along the way. I just find it a little interesting that here we are several, several years later, seventeen years later and we're talking about this, so I'm all in favor of supporting this group that's been presented by the SWARM attorneys." Alderman Jefferson stated, "Well, I'll tell you what, we can do a vote on Sarah Ketchum. I mean, from what I read the qualifications appear to be legitimate enough. It looks very similar to people I know." Mayor Soliman asked, "Angelo, any comments?" Alderman Deserio answered, "I would be in agreement that we pursue Sarah Ketchum. They're recommended by SWARM; there's no connection between any member on this Council. I would agree with going with Sarah Ketchum." Mayor Soliman asked, "Anything else you want to add, Scott?" Alderman Dyke replied, "No." Mayor Soliman stated, "All right, well it's only a straw vote, let's do a straw vote for taking the recommendation of our SWARM attorneys, excluding Mike, Mike Bersani and Jason and then Mike Stiff was involved with this search too so let's do a straw vote to hire Sarah Ketchum for a forensic counting audit. Scott?" Alderman Dyke replied, "Yeah." Mayor Soliman Asked, "Angelo?" Alderman Deserio replied, "Yes." Mayor Soliman asked, "Darrell?" Alderman Jefferson replied, "Yes." Mayor Soliman asked, "Claudia?" Alderwoman Gazal answered, "I don't know, I don't care." Mayor Soliman asked, "You don't care?" Alderwoman Gazal answered, "I don't know anymore, this is so confusing, but I would ask that you and Tina abstain from this vote." Mayor Soliman asked, "Does Tina vote or no, Mike?" City Attorney Stiff answered, "Well, I do not think..." Alderperson Oberlin responded, "I'll do you all a favor and just abstain, okay?" Mayor Soliman asked, "Mark?" Alderman Cipiti responded, "I would

prefer to have an option of either Ketchum or another firm, if we could get another one.” Attorney Stiff responded, “So, no as to Ketchum?” Alderman Cipiti stated, “So, no.” Alderman Albert asked, “Claudia, were you a no because you want more firms?” Alderwoman Gazal responded, “Yea, and I don’t care. I mean, whatever. Just the majority, like I said, the majority, I always majority rules.” Alderman Albert stated, “I guess I’m the same way; I will go along with the majority of Council. If they want to interview, if they don’t.” Alderwoman Gazal stated, “Hopefully we can put an end to all of this.” Mayor Soliman asked, “Joe?” Alderman Kubal answered, “It sounds like everybody wants to move forward with this, I think it’s, I don’t think it’s the right idea. We’ve wasted money before on some of these little projects, but if we’re going to go forward with it, I’m fine with Ketchum. I’m fine with SWARM’s recommendation.” Alderman Albert stated, “Since we’re talking about forensic audits and this is you know, I don’t think at least since I’ve been on Council we’ve ever done one. I don’t know if we’ve done one with anybody else on the Council, but I’ve gotten more questions regarding this building and the finances behind that and we, you know, that’s the forensic audit that I would like to see get done.” Alderwoman Gazal stated, “I would like to include that as well.” Alderman Cipiti stated, “We can do that one too. I agree.” Mayor Soliman said, “Okay, we got one, two, three, four for Ketchum. One abstained.” Attorney Stiff added, “I think you’ve got five. Joe said even though he didn’t think you should go forward, if everybody else is, he’s okay with Ketchum so that’s.” Mayor Soliman stated, “Okay, Nate and Claudia are yeses then also?” Alderwoman Gazal answered, “Yea.” Mayor Soliman said, “Okay. Okay.”

Jason Blumenthal asked, “So can I clarify then? We’ll move forward with Ketchum, as you’re indicating. I just want to real quick discuss the scope one more time. I know we have the proposed scope in the background in Blaine’s memo. However, I want to clarify what a Council member just indicated are we looking to expand it to something else or is what that initial scope sufficient?” Alderman Albert stated, “I think it’s two totally different topics, but I. Yeah, it’s something that can be revisited at the next Work Session or sometime.” Mr. Blumenthal stated, “I understand. I just wanted to make sure that was not the, I understand. We’ll stick with this, that’s perfect. The scope that was proposed though, is that sufficient and obviously we indicated from the beginning to today, is that a fair assessment of what the Council desires?” A couple of Council members stated, “Yes.” Mr. Bersani responded, “Could you state, Jason, what that scope is going to be then, just so it’s clear?” Mr. Blumenthal responded, “Yes. The proposed phase one efforts are fact finding and information gathering. The first is develop and provide document request(s). Second is perform information gathering with counsel and client personnel. Third is review relevant documents, including project files; financial records; committee information; among others. The fourth is assess financial records and historical City Committee records to determine records availability. Fifth, to conduct communications with counsel, including discussion of initial findings and observations. So, that would be phase one. And then upon completion of phase one, we would come back to you, or Ketchum would come back to you, and I mean we’ll be present, but to talk about next steps and anything that might have to occur from there.” Mr. Bersani asked, “And, timewise, going back to the beginning of the committee? Is that the Council’s desire to the present date or how far forward in time?” Alderman

Jefferson stated, “Well, that’s my desire, but I can’t speak for everyone else.” Attorney Stiff said, “Well, Claudia and Darrell have expressed that it go from inception through the present. Is anybody on the Council against that scope? Or anybody that voted or is in favor of going forward. I know, Tina, you abstained.” Attorney Stiff went on, “So it sounds like, Mike Bersani, from the inception through the present.” Mr. Bersani answered, “Okay.” Mr. Blumenthal stated, “I believe that’s all the direction we need then on this matter.” Mayor Soliman answered, “Okay.” Mr. Blumenthal stated, “Thank you, guys.” Mayor Soliman stated, “So, we’re done?” Mr. Blumenthal responded, “Unless the Council has anything else for us, I think we have our marching orders, and we’ll move forward with that.” Mayor Soliman said, “Okay. Thank you, Mike Bersani and Jason.”

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

There were no agenda items.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT

1. Discuss an Ordinance Amending the Budget Ordinance for the Fiscal Year Beginning May 1, 2025, and Ending April 30, 2026, for the City of Crest Hill for the transfers of interfund balances within the City's budget

Finance Director Glenn Gehrke presented a proposed budget amendment involving internal transfers between various city funds. He explained that the city’s auditors recommended these transfers to address negative balances discovered in the fiscal year 2025 audit.

The transfers include moving \$5 million from the general fund and \$6 million from home rule taxes to capital projects, as well as \$6 million from water/sewer operations to water/sewer capital projects. These moves would eliminate negative balances in various accounts while having no effect on the city’s overall financial position.

Director Gehrke specifically mentioned that \$477,800 would address the invalid TIF Weber project, where expenses remained after revenues had to be returned when the TIF district was deemed invalid. The transfers move money between savings accounts to ensure all funds maintain positive balances.

City Administrator Blaine Wing clarified that this type of budget amendment is common, with most municipalities conducting quarterly reviews to move money from savings to operational accounts for infrastructure and project spending. The auditors specifically requested this cleanup during their last review.

Alderswoman Claudia Gazal inquired whether the auditor's recommendation was in writing, and Director Gehrke confirmed it came out of the fiscal year 2025 audit as a cleanup request, though not a formal write-up.

City Attorney Mike Stiff noted that while he didn't prepare this particular ordinance, staff has template ordinances for routine matters to minimize legal costs. He will review the document before the formal City Council meeting.

Administrator Wing explained that the City typically uses templates for routine matters during work sessions and consults attorneys for the formal City Council meetings when needed, as part of cost control measures. He noted they would also be presenting the upcoming fiscal year budget with a public hearing and adoption scheduled for April 20th.

Mayor Soliman called for an informal vote on the recommendation of finance an Ordinance amending the budget ordinance for the Fiscal Year Beginning May 1, 2025, and Ending April 30, 2026, for the City of Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No Members of the public came forward to address the Council.

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)(21) Discussion of minutes of meetings lawfully closed under this Act, whether for purposes of approval by the body of the minutes or semi-annual review of the minutes as mandated by Section 2.06.

Aldersperson Oberlin made a motion to go into executive session for 5ILCS 120/2(c)(1) and 5ILCS 120/2(c)(21). Seconded by Alderman Deserio. Roll call: Ayes: Dyke, Deserio, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal. Nays: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Executive session: 8:23 p.m.

Aldersperson Oberlin made a motion to reconvene from the executive session for 5ILCS 120/2(c)(1) and 5ILCS 120/2(c)(21). Seconded by Alderman Deserio. Roll call: Ayes: Kubal, Albert, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Jefferson, Deserio, Dyke. Nays: None. MOTION CARRIED.

Reconvened: 9:47 p.m.

There being no further business before the Council, the meeting is adjourned.

The meeting adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Approved this ____ day of _____, 2026.

As presented _____

As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR

DRAFT