

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL PFAS & CIVIL SERVICE MEETING
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
February 23, 2026

The February 23, 2026, the PFAS & Civil Service Meeting was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 5:30 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, Alderman Darrell Jefferson (via phone), Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Alderman Jefferson is attending the meeting remotely due to illness. No Council members had objections. City Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall made sure that Alderman Jefferson could hear the meeting and that everyone could hear Alderman Jefferson.

Council Members Absent were: Alderman Nate Albert.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, Public Works Director Gary Richardson, Police Chief Ed Clark.

MAYOR

1. Civil Service Information

Mayor Soliman opened the special meeting by presenting information about the civil service referendum that will appear on the March 17th ballot. Mayor Soliman explained that the City was seeking voter approval to abolish the civil service commission for non-sworn positions while transitioning police hiring to a board of police commissioners. Mayor Soliman stated that this meeting is for informational purposes only and “any of the elected officials here have to remain neutral in regard to this topic. We are allowed to give information in regard to this topic,” but that City Administrator Blaine Wing will be free to talk about civil service, along with Police Chief Ed Clark, who are both not elected officials.

Mayor Soliman gave the background of the City of Crest Hill to the people in the audience who may be new to Crest Hill and first time at a meeting. He stated that Crest Hill was incorporated as a City on January 22, 1960, and for about four years had a volunteer police department. In 1965, the City of Crest Hill formed a civil service commission, consisting of three individuals for the hiring, interviewing and the disciplining of employees in the City of Crest Hill. Back in 1965, almost every community in the state of Illinois had civil service commissions. Today, there are three non-home rule communities that still use civic service commission, and Crest Hill is one of the three. Civil Service has served Crest Hill well over the years stated Mayor Soliman, but it has become outdated, antiquated and most municipalities now have fire and police boards.

City Administrator Blaine Wing stated that most Crest Hill residents should have received their City newsletter by now and noted that the civil service commission referendum item was featured on the front page of the newsletter, with the referendum question listed in the bottom right-hand corner. City Administrator Wing explained that early voting is happening now and goes all the way up until the actual voting date of March seventeenth. City Administrator Wing emphasized that information about the referendum was available on the City's website at www.cityofcresthill.com/civilservice, including a frequently asked questions document.

City Administrator Blaine Wing detailed the key differences between civil service and the proposed alternative system. Under civil service, Administrator Wing explained, the City must conduct formal testing processes for all positions, which involves significant costs. City Administrator Wing stated, "It's actually potentially cheaper as right now when we're going through the civil service process, we have to do all these tests and there's cost to doing these tests, compared to we would only be posting positions and we're not required for all the same level of the tests, as we're asking for certifications, training, education and those sort of things. Currently, there's a cost to the actual testing, so the Mayor is correct that there is not a cost with this referendum, there actually could be a cost savings if we go to what about 97% of municipalities in the state of Illinois are, which are non-civil service for both our police and our non-sworn."

For non-sworn positions, the alternative would involve the HR department posting positions with specific qualifications like CDLs or wastewater certificates. City Administrator Wing described the process: "The most common one is that an HR department, through the director would, again, make sure that all the job descriptions are updated when we have a position... The job posting would be listed on the City's website along with some other positions."

Police Chief Ed Clark then addressed the sworn officer positions, explaining the benefits of transitioning to a board of police commissioners. He emphasized, "We would have the ability to conduct and maintain a lateral list." Police Chief Clark explained this would allow the police department to recruit experienced officers from other agencies who have at least two years of experience, are in good standing with their agency and are up to date on their certifications. He further explained that the lateral list would help when there are experience gaps in the department with officers leaving the department and many young officers coming in and the more seasoned officers would help with training and those things that are important and help us compete with the other agencies that surround Crest Hill.

Aldersperson Oberlin highlighted a critical competitive disadvantage, stating, "Chief, currently, the other municipalities who do not partake in civil service, they have actually taken some of our officers and we don't have the ability to do the same thing, so this would give us the same ability that they are getting now by we get them, we train them and then they go somewhere else and we don't have the luxury of doing the same thing right now. But this would afford us that luxury." Police Chief Clark answered, "Absolutely correct."

Resident Judith Toke-Ksiazak asked, "Who decides who's going to go through all of the applications and things like that? Will that be another set of people that will be appointed by the Council or is it the Council itself that would be doing that?" City Administrator Wing responded that for the police board, it would be a Mayoral appointment with Council consent for three individuals, similar to the current civil service commission structure. He noted that typically there would be a call-out through the website for interested applicants.

Alderman Mark Cipiti asked about the non-police hiring process, to which Blaine explained that Council would need to decide whether to give hiring authority to department directors, the city administrator, or require Council approval. Alderwoman Claudia Gazal emphasized the need for planning, saying, "I believe this should be on the next agenda so we can discuss it and we can come up with a plan since it's on the ballot. So, in case it passes, we should have plan B right away." City Administrator Wing cautioned that they should wait for the election results and potentially new labor attorneys before finalizing plans, explaining, "You don't want the outgoing firm to provide advice and direction and then a new firm provide different or alternative advice and direction."

2. PFAS Update

Mayor Soliman opened the PFAS discussion by acknowledging the seriousness of the situation while emphasizing, "We as a City of Crest Hill did not create this problem but we are forced to deal with it. And this is not a problem that only exists in the City of Crest Hill, but this is a problem that exists throughout the United States and in the entire world." Mayor Soliman explained that this meeting will give an update on what the City has looked into. City Engineer Ron Wiedeman will give a presentation with facts about what can be done.

Mayor Soliman reminded attendees that those interested in detailed background could view the May 5, 2025, City Council meeting on YouTube, which featured a one-hour presentation. Mayor Soliman reaffirmed the City's commitment: "Our solution to the PFAS problem always was and always will be ascertaining and acquiring Lake Michigan Water." He noted they had been working on this for four years with a delivery date in fall 2030, stating, "We are still on time with the delivery of Lake Michigan Water to all our residents and businesses within the City of Crest Hill."

Mayor Soliman detailed the infrastructure progress, explaining that millions had been spent over four years, with major construction expected in 2027-2028. He described, "Coming right down Gaylord Road is where the 66-inch pipe is going to come from Romeoville to Crest Hill. And then down Caton Farm Road, we are in the process of starting to build a 2,500,000-gallon water tank." Mayor Soliman also stated that property that we purchased at Caton Farm Road and Oakland Avenue will be our emergency back-up just in case anything ever happens from Lake Michigan, but in all these years there's never been a problem. Chicago services five million people in the suburbs with Lake Michigan water. They have all the facilities and again because of the quantity of water the PFAS in Lake Michigan is undetectable."

Mayor Soliman stated that the EPA notified Crest Hill in April 2025 that PFAS numbers were slightly elevated in City water, the City had an informational meeting on May 5th with City Council and then another informational meeting on June 30th with the Public Works department. At that time, Mayor Soliman explained that he asked the residents of Crest Hill for patience so the City could look into options for the PFAS removal. Dealing with the EPA is a slow process and just takes time. The meeting today will go over some of the options for the PFAS removal.

City Engineer Ron Wiedeman delivered a comprehensive technical presentation. He began by reviewing the City's water supply system, explaining, "Our existing water supply, as we had mentioned, last year is we're all on shallow wells, which were called the cerulean dolomite aquifer. These shells are relatively shallow. Our wells are 200 to 450 feet deep."

City Engineer Wiedeman highlighted the PFAS testing results, showing that wells 1, 4, 7, and 10 had elevated levels. He noted some encouraging trends: "Well 1 highlighted there, the PFOA. You can see that when it was done in 2021, we're at 15. And then we did it again last summer, we were at 9, which is still above the 4, but there's a change."

City Engineer Ron Wiedeman presented five alternatives the City had studied:

Alternative 1: Remove affected wells from operation Engineer Wiedeman explained this approach involved strategic well management: "Basically, we're saying we can shut down 1 and 4 or only use 1 and 4 during a real peak time... This one here just requires our system, our operators to run our system a little differently than they have in the past."

Alternative 2: Install treatment systems at affected wells He detailed four treatment technologies investigated (reverse osmosis, anode exchange, fluoro-sorb and granular activated carbon) emphasizing that all would require IEPA pilot studies taking 12-18 months. For granular activated carbon, which the City favored, he explained, "This one is one that has been on the market for quite a long time... This is the one that from our perspective, if we were going to get into one of these treatment technologies, this is the one where we would start."

Alternative 3: Point-of-use treatment systems This option of installing reverse osmosis in homes was deemed prohibitively expensive. Engineer Wiedeman noted, "We started running the cost for this. It could be as much as 6,000,000 dollars for the initial installation. That doesn't include the maintenance of it."

Alternative 4: Purchase water from another system Engineer Wiedeman explained the regulatory challenges: "One of the rules that IEPA has is you can never blend water from one system to another system. So, if we went to Joliet, we would have to shut our wells down completely and only get water from Joliet." City Engineer Wiedeman stated that the Crest Hill would also need to negotiate with Joliet about cost of the water as a customer, not a resident, and this could be quite a costly option.

Alternative 5: Drill deeper wells City Engineer Wiedeman noted the trade-offs: "We would not have to worry about PFAS, but when you go for deep wells, you have to worry about radium. So, you solve one problem, you get another problem." Engineer Wiedeman concluded by explaining the Council's October decision to pursue Alternative 1 immediately while beginning a pilot study for carbon filtration at wells 7 and 10. He stated, "What we proposed to Council was alternate 1 start this spring. Start blending our water, shut down the wells that we have the higher PFAS readings in. Start doing more testing."

Aldersperson Oberlin stated that people should do their own research because PFAS is not just in our water and that it comes in so many things, like non-stick cookware. There is a reason PFAS are called the "forever chemicals" and we need to be educated about these things.

Resident Sheldon Latz from Lincoln Avenue asked about PFAS exposure through shower vapors. City Engineer Ron Wiedeman responded, "What I can tell you is PFAS is in the air and as soon as you walk outside, you're breathing it... PFAS hasn't been tied to a specific thing...It affects everybody different."

Aldersperson Tina Oberlin added context about PFAS origins: "I think they don't have enough research on it currently... the research initially started when a lot of firemen were developing cancer in big amounts, and it was because their suits were made with these chemicals and the foam they use to fight these fires contain PFAS."

Judith Toke-Ksiazak asked if Crest Hill is mixing water. City Engineer Ron Wiedeman explained that blending would begin once a well under repair came back online in March, and the carbon filter pilot study would start in summer following the RFP process. When asked about chlorination, Public Works Director Gary Richardson explained they were transitioning from gas to liquid chlorine and would implement 24-hour monitoring with Lake Michigan water.

Alderswoman Claudia Gazal stated that she put a reverse osmosis filtration system in her house and it was expensive. Mayor Soliman added that if a resident wanted to look into a filtration system for their home, to make sure that it is EPA approved and has carbon in it. He also commented that an under the kitchen sink filter/system may be a cheaper option for residents.

Resident Tony Cempel from Crestwood Drive asked about water mixing, prompting City Engineer Wiedeman to clarify the current situation: "Our water always gets mixed because our water comes out of our wells and goes into our system... we have not shut down wells 1 and 4 at this particular time because with the other wells not working and us getting them, we wouldn't have enough water supply for the city."

Resident Judith Toke-Ksiazak stated that another option is to add mineral drops to your water if you drink it. She also suggested an on-the-counter system that has filters and would be a little less cost.

Mayor Soliman concluded by reiterating patience while emphasizing action: "Trust me, I know that everybody is waiting for the Lake Michigan water and that is going

to be a tremendous improvement to the quality of our water when it does get here. In my mind, they can't get here fast enough." He noted this represented the largest investment in Crest Hill's history and would add to home values. Alderwoman Gazal inquired about previously discussed pitcher filters for residents. City Engineer Wiedeman confirmed this had been evaluated but would cost approximately \$2 million with no available grants, stating, "There are zero grants for any of this. IEPA is not giving any grants out for PFAS treatment with pitchers."

PUBLIC COMMENTS

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Soliman adjourned the special meeting at 6:58 p.m., noting that work session would begin after a 10-minute break for those transitioning between meetings.

The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Approved this ____ day of _____, 2026.

As presented _____

As amended _____

CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR