MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
July 27, 2026

The July 27, 2026, the City Council work session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 7:01 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 Darrell Jefferson, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Joe Kubal.

Absent were: Alderman Angelo Deserio, Alderman Nate Albert.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, Assistant City Administrator & HR Director Ashley Monroe, Community & Economic Development Director Dan Ritter, City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Mayor Soliman stated that he received messages from Alderman Albert and Alderman Deserio. They were unable to be at the meeting.

MAYOR
Mayor Soliman shared the sad news of the passing of Jeanne Juricic, age 94, a long-time and well-respected resident of Crest Hill. A moment of silence in her honor is planned for the August 3rd meeting. Mayor Soliman asked that Council and the public keep her family in their prayers.

CLERK
There were no agenda items.

TREASURER
There were no agenda items.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR
City Administrator Blaine Wing noted that the meeting was being broadcast live on the City’s cable channel and YouTube channel as part of an ongoing test of the broadcast systems.

1. 2026 Employee Handbook Updates – Part 1 – Legal Recommendations
   City Administrator Wing introduced this item as Part 1 of a two-part handbook update process. Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Ashley Monroe presented with special labor attorney Melissa Wolf of Storino, Ramello & Durkin participating by telephone. No members of the Council objected to her joining via telephone and Attorney Wolf confirmed she was also able to view the meeting via the City’s YouTube channel.

Assistant City Administrator Monroe explained that the updates were divided into two parts, with Part 1 focusing on legal recommendations driven by changes in state and federal law. She provided an overview of the affected sections. Attorney Wolf added that many of the changes are non-discretionary, as they codify statutory benefits that the State of Illinois already requires the City to provide to employees. The handbook updates simply bring the document current with existing law.

Alderman Dyke raised three issues: (1) that Section 4.2 regarding an 8.5-hour workday no longer reflects current practice and should be updated to reflect a 30-minute meal period; (2) that the overtime calculation example in Section 4.8 or 4.9 appeared to contain a mathematical error, converting 6 hours of overtime into 14; and (3) that language permitting employees to combine break and lunch periods could be difficult to administer and monitor. Assistant City Administrator Monroe acknowledged all three points and committed to returning with a corrected and improved example in the next meeting or two.

Alderman Cipiti raised questions about the seven-minute timekeeping rule, specifically whether it created ambiguity around expected start times. Attorney Wolf clarified that the seven-minute rule is a threshold established by the labor board for rounding purposes, intended to prevent the accrual of uncompensated overtime, and that it does not diminish the employer's authority to enforce scheduled start times. Alderman Cipiti expressed a preference for a more standardized, policy-based approach to start times across departments rather than leaving enforcement solely to department head discretion.

Alderwoman Gazal raised questions about the inconsistency of timekeeping systems across departments. Assistant City Administrator Monroe explained that Public Works currently uses a paper-based punch system, while City Hall staff use an online system and the Police Department uses a separate system. City Administrator Wing clarified that the City implemented a software system approximately eight years ago that did not extend to Public Works, and that finance and HR are currently evaluating a unified vendor solution to bring all departments onto a single platform, anticipated to be presented to Council in the fall. Administrator Wing noted that the current vendor contract expires at the end of February of the following year.

Alderman Jefferson raised questions about the seven-minute rule in the context of approved overtime, and whether employees are permitted to begin work prior to their shift without supervisor approval. Attorney Wolf confirmed that overtime calculations begin at the end of the scheduled shift, and City Administrator Wing confirmed that the policy itself is intended to prohibit employees from clocking in early without approval.

Alderwoman Gazal expressed concern that certain non-union employees had been permitted to alter their work schedules, while union employees and other non-union employees had not been afforded the same flexibility.

She described receiving complaints from employees who felt excluded from schedule changes granted to colleagues. Alderperson Oberlin echoed the concern, noting that City Hall hours of operation were established for a reason and that regularly adjusted individual schedules could undermine service delivery. City Administrator Wing explained that the current employee handbook provides department directors with an hour of flexibility in either direction for non-union employees, and that union employees' hours are governed by their collective bargaining agreements and cannot be unilaterally changed by the City. Attorney Wolf confirmed that any changes to hours of work for union employees must be negotiated at the bargaining table. Administrator Wing noted that the expired Local 150 contract currently governs those employees, and that negotiations are forthcoming.

Alderwoman Gazal requested that Attorney Wolf specifically review the language in Section 4.2 regarding the workday and any flexibility provisions, to ensure equal and consistent treatment of all employees. Attorney Wolf agreed to do so and to work with City staff to implement policy direction from the City Council. City Administrator Wing indicated that the operational scheduling discussion would be part of Part 2 of the handbook update, anticipated for an August work session.

2. <u>Executive Conference Room Use Policy Discussion</u>
City Administrator Wing presented a draft policy for the use of the executive conference room for Council executive sessions. The policy, drafted by City Attorney Mike Stiff at the direction of the Council, designated the executive conference room as the preferred location for executive sessions, with six enumerated exceptions permitting use of an alternative location, including: attendance exceeding the 20-person occupancy limit, extreme temperatures, equipment failure, health-related concerns, severe weather, and other practical considerations. Under the policy, the decision to invoke an exception would rest with the Mayor, in consultation with the City Administrator and City Clerk.

Alderwoman Gazal questioned the need for a formal policy, noting that practical exceptions seemed like common sense. Alderman Cipiti also stated he did not see a need for the policy, expressed confidence that common sense should govern when the room is not used, and indicated that any decision to deviate from using the room should require a Council vote rather than being left to the discretion of the Mayor and two staff members. He noted that the purpose of the room had been clearly established when the building was constructed.

City Attorney Stiff explained that the policy reflects the Council's prior direction to use the room and provides a written framework for handling exceptions. Administrator Wing noted that without a policy, the authority to determine the meeting location would default entirely to the chairperson of the meeting under Robert's Rules of Order.

Alderman Jefferson stated he did not wish to diminish the Mayor's authority and that the matter was largely one of common sense. He ultimately indicated a willingness to vote in favor of the policy to move forward. Alderman Dyke expressed support for having a documented framework that establishes the room as the primary location and identifies exceptions.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote on implementing the executive conference room use policy.

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

Administrator Wing indicated the item would be placed as a discussion item—not on consent agenda—on the August 3rd meeting agenda.

3. <u>Reactivate Meter/Hardship Program</u>
City Administrator Wing provided background on the smart meter transition program. Approximately five years ago, the City had over 70 properties that had not converted to smart meters. A carrot-based meter hardship program was offered for approximately five months, reducing that number to approximately 30. A fee-based disincentive was subsequently added for staff to manually read non-smart meters. A resident on a fixed income had recently requested access to the expired hardship program.

Administrator Wing recommended reactivating the meter hardship program through the end of 2027 to further reduce the number of remaining non-smart meters. City Administrator Wing noted that a vendor capable of completing the work for $300 had already been identified by the resident.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to reactivate the meter/hardship program.

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Cipiti, Oberlin, Gazal, Jefferson, Dyke.
NAYES: None.
ABSENT: Ald. Albert, Deserio.

4. <u>Draft Confidential Policy for Elected & Appointed Officials</u>
City Administrator Wing introduced the draft confidentiality policy for elected and appointed officials, prepared by City Attorney Stiff based on best practices recommendations discussed at the prior work session. City Attorney Stiff noted that two items from the prior draft had been removed—provisions relating to an individual's authority to bind the City financially and the direction of staff by Council members—as those topics were deemed more appropriate for a different policy context. The cell phone usage section had been significantly revised and moderated from the prior draft per the Council's direction.

Alderwoman Gazal asked whether notetaking on personal phones would constitute a recordable act. City Attorney Stiff advised that notes taken on a personal phone could become a public record subject to FOIA, and recommended the use of City-issued tablets when possible. He confirmed that the prohibition on recording pertained only to executive sessions, and that recording open public meetings is not prohibited.

Alderwoman Gazal also asked whether the policy should be extended to City staff and department heads. City Attorney Stiff noted that the policy references annual training for staff who handle confidential information and indicated that a parallel provision in the employee handbook would be advisable.

Alderman Jefferson expressed reservations about several aspects of the policy, including the concept of "court enforcement," noting he had not encountered such language in prior confidentiality frameworks. He questioned the overall necessity of the policy given his prior professional experience with confidential matters and the oath of office already taken by elected officials.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote on the draft confidential policy for elected & appointed officials.

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

Mayor Soliman indicated the item would be placed as a discussion item—not on consent agenda—on the August 3rd meeting agenda, with a noted correction to the first line of the policy to include appointed officers alongside elected officials.

5. <u>Naming the Plaza/Park – Draft Name: Crest Hill Commons</u>
City Administrator Wing explained that City staff is preparing to apply for a grant of up to $600,000 for the property located between City Hall and the library, commonly referred to as the plaza or park. A formal name is required for grant applications and letters of support. The first grant application is due at the end of August, making timely naming essential.

Community and Economic Development Director Dan Ritter presented the proposed name, Crest Hill Commons, noting that several alternatives had been considered, including City Center Plaza. Director Ritter recommended avoiding the word "park," both to distinguish the space from park district uses and to allow for flexibility in naming sub-features such as a bandshell or playground within the broader commons area. He noted that New Lenox had used a similar "commons" concept for a comparable civic space. He emphasized that the name was not permanent and could be revisited in the future.

Council members expressed general support for the name "Crest Hill Commons," with several noting it had a strong identity for the City and left room for sub-naming of individual features.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote on the name Crest Hill Commons for the area between City Hall and the library.

AYES: Ald. Dyke, Jefferson, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal.
NAYES: None.
ABSENT: Ald. Deserio, Albert.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

1. Direction on Zoning Ordinance Use Amendment – Data Centers

Community and Economic Development Director Dan Ritter presented a request for Council direction on how to address data centers within the City's zoning ordinance, noting that the topic had been raised by Alderman Cipiti at an earlier meeting in July. The current zoning code does not define or address data centers, and Director Ritter indicated that any data center application received today would at a minimum require a special use process.

Director Ritter acknowledged that public opinion and research on data centers is deeply divided on questions of noise, water usage, electricity demand, and community benefit. However, he noted that Crest Hill's available land inventory makes suitable siting extremely difficult, as most developable parcels are either along major commercial corridors or adjacent to residential areas. He recommended that staff be directed to define data centers in the zoning ordinance and prohibit them in all zoning districts, while leaving open the possibility of revisiting that prohibition if circumstances or technology change.

City Attorney Stiff noted that legal research would be conducted to confirm the City's authority to enact such a prohibition, drawing on a precedent from discussions with neighboring communities. Director Ritter noted that the state is also considering regulation of data centers at the state level, and indicated the zoning amendment would be brought forward through the Plan Commission public hearing process alongside other pending use changes.

A brief discussion addressed water usage concerns, with City Attorney Stiff referencing the experience of Minooka, which recently approved a data center that ultimately transitioned to electric cooling, eliminating water use concerns.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to direct staff to conduct additional research and prepare draft amendments to the zoning ordinance defining data centers and prohibiting their use in all zoning districts, for consideration at a future Plan Commission public hearing.

AYES: Ald. Kubal, Cipiti, Oberlin, Jefferson, Dyke.
NAYES: None.
ABSENT: Ald. Albert, Gazal, Deserio.

Director Ritter stated that he will be working with City Attorney Stiff on the topic of tarped vehicles to get some information drafted and brought before Council in the future.

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
There were no agenda items.

POLICE DEPARTMENT
There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

1. Update on Jasmine Ditch Cleanup Project
City Administrator Blaine Wing presented this item on behalf of Public Works Director Gary Richardson, who was absent due to storm-related issues at his residence. City Administrator Wing reported that the City has received at least two proposals to address vegetation cleanup in the Jasmine Ditch area, both of which are understood to come in under the $20,000 City Administrator spending authority threshold. The work is proposed in two phases, with Phase 1 focused on removal of plant material, to be followed by Phase 2 addressing underlying drainage and piping issues as directed by the City's engineering consultant.

City Administrator Wing explained that the cleanup effort is being pursued simultaneously on three fronts: (1) legal proceedings to acquire ownership of the property through condemnation, as the land appears to have been abandoned by a defunct private entity; (2) engineering analysis through Christopher Burke Engineering, with $44,000 already approved by Council for Phase 2 study; and (3) the proposed vegetation cleanup. Administrator Wing acknowledged that the City does not currently own the property but noted that the City has previously undertaken similar actions under a health and safety rationale, and that legal risk is relatively low under those circumstances. He confirmed that proper insurance coverage would be required of the selected contractor.

Alderman Cipiti asked for confirmation that both proposals were under $20,000 and that vegetation removal would encompass the full, green-shaded area on the map provided, from Gaylord to the outfall. City Administrator Wing confirmed both points and noted that temporary easements from a small number of adjacent residents would be needed for equipment access, and that those residents had indicated willingness to cooperate once ground conditions allow.

Alderman Jefferson asked whether the City could use eminent domain to acquire the property rather than attempting to purchase it. City Administrator Wing confirmed that condemnation is precisely the legal process underway, noting that if there is no identifiable owner to compensate, the City would petition the court directly.

A resident addressed the Council during this item, describing significant ongoing flooding impacting her property, including an incident that occurred the same day as the meeting. She expressed frustration with the pace of the City's response, described dead wildlife and deteriorating conditions along the ditch, and specifically requested the removal of boulders that she stated were placed by the City approximately 10 to 15 years ago and in her view contributed to the growth of vegetation and the worsening of drainage. She also requested that there be a drainage plan going forward. City Administrator Wing acknowledged the resident's concerns and indicated that the boulders and related structural issues would be evaluated as part of the engineering phase.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to direct City Administrator Wing to utilize his spending authority to work with the Public Works Director to select one of the two proposals and proceed with Phase 1 vegetation cleanup.

AYES: Ald. Oberlin, Cipiti, Kubal, Dyke, Jefferson, Gazal.
NAYES: None.
ABSENT: Ald. Albert, Deserio.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT
There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC COMMENTS
Resident Linda Dyke of Kelly Avenue addressed the Council regarding the executive conference room policy. She expressed concern about the conditions in the lobby hallway where members of the public are currently asked to wait during executive sessions, noting that it is cold in winter and that she has safety concerns about being in an unsecured, open hallway. She requested that if the policy requires the public to wait outside the Council chambers during executive sessions, provisions be made for the comfort and safety of those waiting.

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:24 p.m.

Approved this____day of________________, 2026.
As presented____________
As amended___________

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CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

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RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR