

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

The October 12, 2026, City Council Work Session was called to order by Mayor Raymond R. Soliman at 6:30 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 (Arrived at 6:33 p.m.), Alderman Angelo Deserio, Alderwoman Claudia Gazal, Alderperson Tina Oberlin, Alderman Mark Cipiti, Alderman Nate Albert, and Alderman Joe Kubal.

Also Present were: City Administrator Blaine Wing, Assistant City Administrator & HR Director Ashley Monroe, Police Chief Ed Clark, City Engineer Ron Wiedeman, and City Attorney Mike Stiff.

Mayor Soliman noted for the record that he received a message from Alderman Jefferson stating that he was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

1. 5ILCS 120/2(c)(29): Discussion between internal or external auditors and the City's audit committee, finance committee, or equivalent body concerning internal control weaknesses, potential fraud risk areas, known or suspected fraud, and fraud interviews conducted in accordance with generally accepted auditing standards.

Alderman Cipiti made a motion to go into executive session for 5ILCS 120/2(c)(29). Seconded by Alderman Deserio. Roll call: Ayes: Deserio, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal. Nays: None. Absent: Jefferson, Dyke. MOTION CARRIED.

Alderperson Oberlin stated for the record that she was excluding herself from the executive session.

Executive session: 6:32 p.m.

Alderman Cipiti made a motion to reconvene from the executive session for 5ILCS 120/2(c)(29). Seconded by Alderwoman Gazal. Roll call: Ayes: Dyke, Deserio, Gazal, Oberlin, Cipiti, Albert, Kubal. Nays: None. Absent: Jefferson. MOTION CARRIED.

Upon returning from Executive Session, Mayor Soliman stated that no additional action was necessary from the Executive Session.

Reconvened at 7:15 p.m.

The October 12, 2026, City Council Work Session was formally opened at 7:15 p.m.

## MAYOR

### 1. Richland School District 88A Referendum Presentation

Dr. Phil Robb, Superintendent from Richland School District 88A, presented information on the district's November 3 ballot question. He stated that he was not advocating for or against the referendum and was providing information only. He noted he has been with the district 18 years, including as director of finance and human resources, and is in his third year as superintendent.

Superintendent Robb explained that voters will be asked whether to increase the district's limiting rate by 39 cents. If approved, the increase would generate about \$1.78 million in additional operating revenue starting in May 2027. The money would support people, programs and services, and would not be used for new construction or facility projects. He distinguished a limiting rate referendum, which provides ongoing operating revenue, from a building bond referendum, which funds major construction. The district last sought a limiting rate increase in 1997. Voters approved building bonds in 2002 (junior high addition and mid-gym) and 2005 (elementary building and library). The district has since completed asbestos abatement, added classrooms, completed multi-million dollar roof work, increased safety and security, and reduced the tax rate through bond refinancing, all without a referendum.

On comparisons, Superintendent Robb stated that Richland has the third lowest limiting tax rate among Lockport 205 feeder districts and would remain third lowest if the question passes. Among Will County elementary districts, Richland is currently fifth lowest of 21 and would remain well below the midpoint if the question passes.

Superintendent Robb attributed the request to revenues not keeping pace with the cost of required services. Regular transportation, special education transportation and private facility tuition are mandated categorical programs whose costs exceed inflation while state reimbursement has fallen: Regular transportation: 80 percent in 2023, estimated at 68 percent this year. Special education transportation: 81 percent in 2023, estimated at 55 percent this year. Private facility tuition: 98 percent in 2023, estimated at 63 percent this year. Salaries and benefits make up only 51 percent of district expenses, compared with a typical 65 to 75 percent. That leaves fewer areas where costs can be reduced without affecting children.

Dr. Robb said the district has already made more than \$650,000 in staffing reductions this school year. It restructured administration, increased class sizes, reduced intervention and social work supports and support staffing, and eliminated summer school. It also negotiated transportation costs, compared insurance vendors, and postponed staff computer replacements. Some of those actions only defer costs to future budgets. If the referendum fails, the Board of Education would need to determine further reductions for the 2027-2028 school year. Those under discussion include significant staffing reductions and elimination of all after-school athletics and

activities. If it passes, the revenue will restore some, but not all, of the reduced staffing, programs and supports, and would help maintain athletics and activities. How long the revenue would keep the budget balanced depends on future state funding, student needs and operating costs. The district plans to balance its budget by 2027-2028.

Superintendent Robb described the tax calculator on the district's referendum website (d88a.org). He explained that the Will County fair cash (market) value, found on the property tax bill or at willcountysa.com, should be used rather than Zillow, Redfin or realtor.com estimates. Community meetings are scheduled for Saturday (October 17, 2026) at 10 a.m. in the Richland media center, Tuesday, October 20 at 5 p.m. in the media center, and Thursday, October 29 at 6 p.m. at the Crest Hill branch of the White Oak Library. Short-form videos will be posted online.

Alderperson Oberlin thanked Superintendent Robb for his dedication to the school and its children. Alderman Albert thanked him for the education effort and stated that the decline in state reimbursement needed to be highlighted and was not the district's fault. Mayor Soliman said he has known Superintendent Robb for many years and that he would not be presenting unless there were a serious need. He stated that strong schools serve Crest Hill, that a community is only as strong as its school districts, and that loss of extracurricular activities such as sports, theater and band would harm students who rely on them. Mayor Soliman acknowledged that referendums are difficult and no one wants taxes raised, but said he believed the community's residents have a duty to ensure the next generation has that foundation with extracurricular activities and everything else to form their lives going forward. They will be the leaders going forward.

**CLERK**

There were no agenda items.

**TREASURER**

There were no agenda items.

**CITY ADMINISTRATOR**

1. **Legal Opinion-City Council Committees**

City Administrator Blaine Wing declared that his first agenda item was about the legal opinion the City Attorney has provided to Council. City Administrator Wing stated that if the Council wished to proceed going forward from October 1, 2026, no action was needed. If the Council wished to look back retroactively, it might need to discuss waiving the City's attorney-client privilege so that City Attorney Mike Stiff could speak openly on this matter. City Attorney Mike Stiff explained that the privilege belongs to the Council, and he could not ethically waive it. He offered to discuss his written legal opinion in open meeting if the Council chose.

Alderwoman Gazal favored an open discussion “so we don't hide anything,” and City Attorney Stiff confirmed there was nothing illegal involved.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to hold the discussion openly.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Jefferson.

City Attorney Stiff reported that Alderman Dyke had brought to the City's attention that the compensation ordinance, passed in 2003 and fully in effect for all Council members in 2005, provides for payment for attendance at committee meetings. Committees existed at that time, and he found no minutes showing the intent of the 2003 Council beyond the literal language. His opinion was that Council members should have been paid for committee meetings attended since 2005, and that the City should comply going forward.

For the period of City Administrator Wing's tenure, staff can tally committee meetings and attendance and make payments. For earlier years, City Attorney Stiff said each Council member would need to decide whether to make a back pay claim. A claimant would need reliable documentation of the date, nature and attendance of each committee meeting, to be reviewed by staff. He explained the doctrine of laches, which functions like a statute of limitations and has led courts to cut off back pay claims at some point. He could not identify a specific number of years. Disputed claims could go to an Attorney General opinion or to a mandamus action in court. He noted that a Council member cannot have their pay increased or decreased during a term, so declining a look-back would amount to waiving a past-due amount. He suggested members take time to consider the issue rather than decide that evening.

Alderman Oberlin, one of the longest-serving members, said she had no problem going forward only, or not being paid at all, because she had always understood the work was unpaid. City Attorney Stiff responded that because the ordinance says, “shall pay,” the City should pay members going forward. Members who do not want the money could return it or donate it, and the look-back could be waived. Alderman Cipiti stated that the decision on back pay should be individual, that he was not comfortable saying colleagues should not be compensated for past meetings they can document, and that the burden of proof lies with the claimant. City Attorney Stiff agreed and said members interested in a claim should speak with City Administrator Wing. Alderman Albert asked for confirmation that members would be paid for committee meetings going forward, and City Attorney Stiff confirmed this is his legal opinion and that the next budget cycle must account for the added cost.

City Administrator Wing described how staff is implementing the opinion. Committee meetings are being noticed under the Open Meetings Act, with agendas posted at least 48 hours in advance, attendance taken, minutes

prepared and approved at the next meeting, and executive session available where an exemption applies. The first such meeting was the Events Committee on October 2. After minutes are approved, documentation goes to the Finance Director for payment. Alderwoman Gazal noted that approved minutes should be provided to the Clerk, and City Administrator Wing agreed that staff will hand them over.

City Attorney Stiff outlined the compensation transition under the recently adopted ordinance. Members whose terms end in 2027 move to \$1,000 per month for all meetings and other work, and the remaining members follow after 2029, so that all members are on one schedule. Alderman Cipiti asked that the number of committees and the distribution of members be reviewed for fairness, since committees are mayoral appointments. City Attorney Stiff said a companion memorandum is being prepared. A formal committee policy is expected to come to the Council, with the Mayor's committee reappointments taking effect January 1. City Administrator Wing said staff is reviewing committee composition in other communities, including chairs, co-chairs, alternates and resident members, and suggested the Council discuss committee structure in December. Several communities use committees of three or five so two elected officials do not constitute a quorum.

Alderwoman Gazal asked whether she could be paid for only one of her committees. City Administrator Wing responded that the ordinance says "shall," that liaison positions are not committees and might offer a way to restructure assignments, and that members could donate payments. Alderwoman Gazal also asked whether continuing committee work outside posted meetings would constitute paid meetings. City Attorney Stiff advised that a member working with a staff member would not be a committee meeting. Two members of a two-member committee, however, would constitute a quorum, and members should avoid discussing committee business among themselves outside a posted meeting. In the interim, members should route communications through staff. Alderwoman Gazal suggested adding a brief committee update to the work session agenda, since committee reports currently occur only at regular council meetings, and no objection was voiced. No formal action was taken.

2. Finalize Updates to the City of Crest Hill Employee Handbook

Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Ashley Monroe distributed two sheets of proposed language reflecting the only changes since the prior draft: Section 4.2 (workday) and new Section 7.12 (health insurance opt-out), the latter revised in coordination with labor attorney Melissa Wolf. Staff hoped to bring the handbook to the Council for consideration at its next meeting.

Section 4.2 (workday): Alderwoman Gazal asked whether the proposed language applies to all employees. Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe explained that employees may request altered hours, but a job-related reason, a defined timeframe for review, and a mutual written agreement of the supervisor and personnel officer would be required.

Supervisors previously had sole authority. The language closely mirrors Local 150 contract provisions (Section 7.3 sets an 8:00 to 4:30 day), although the union contract does not require reasons or timeframes. City Administrator Wing added that union contracts supersede the handbook, that the policy covers Local 150 and non-union employees (including non-union employees in the Police Department), and that the two police bargaining units have separate schedules and upcoming negotiations. Alderwoman Gazal stated that the goal is equal treatment of all staff in response to prior complaints, with departmental management left to supervisors. Alderperson Oberlin and Alderman Cipiti emphasized that agreements must be written and kept on file, and Alderperson Oberlin said, “We need to write things down and keep them.” Staff agreed and noted that the changes would take effect January 1, with HR and directors responsible for compliance. Alderman Cipiti asked that written agreements be filed with HR, and staff agreed this is a best practice.

Meal and break periods: Alderman Dyke raised concern that the proposed language describing an 8.5-hour day “including up to a 60 minute meal/break period” could cause confusion. He suggested language stating that employees receive a 30-minute lunch plus two separate 15-minute breaks, or alternatively a plain one-hour lunch. Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe explained that Section 4.6 addresses breaks and meals. The Local 150 contract provides a 30-minute unpaid lunch and two paid 15-minute breaks that may be combined with approval. Employees may combine breaks with lunch by arrangement with their supervisor, who must ensure coverage. She agreed to provide the meal-period section to the Council.

Alderperson Oberlin objected that employees on paid breaks should remain available on-site, and she questioned whether the City would be liable if an employee on paid time were injured off-site. She stated she was not happy with the language. Alderman Cipiti asked how current practice works. City Administrator Wing and Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe responded that supervisors discuss arrangements with employees and that no supervisor has reported a problem recalling someone. They also said that a policy permitting combined breaks helps protect the City, and that staff would ask the labor attorney to opine on liability and workers’ compensation. Alderman Dyke asked how staff would know whether breaks are being abused. City Administrator Wing replied that the City is small, cameras and badges can verify time, and time theft would be handled through discipline. Alderwoman Gazal said supervisors and department heads should have discretion to grant a full hour.

On timekeeping, Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe and City Administrator Wing reported that the City uses a mix of electronic and manual time entry, and Public Works still uses paper punch cards. They said staff will bring a proposal for an electronic time system to the Council with Finance. Staff will relay the Council’s comments to the labor attorney and return with recommendations.

Tuition reimbursement (Section 10.4): Alderman Cipiti recommended striking the tuition reimbursement section for non-bargaining employees, based on past experience. City Attorney Stiff recalled prior litigation the City lost, in which several policy requirements were not followed by staff no longer with the City and the City paid bills directly. He said the policy can serve as a tool to develop talent but that following it is essential. Alderwoman Gazal and Alderman Cipiti favored revisiting the policy, including options that would require employees to stay for a period or repay the City. Alderperson Oberlin said taxpayer money should not fund moves to other jobs. City Administrator Wing noted that no funds are budgeted for non-union tuition reimbursement, so any request would currently be denied, and that he has supported well-structured programs elsewhere. The Council consensus was to leave the section in the draft and have staff return with updated options. Staff indicated annual handbook updates would occur around March, ahead of the May 1 fiscal year.

3. Authorize a Health Insurance Opt-Out Incentive Program for 2027

Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe explained that the proposed Section 7.12 language ensures the opt-out program runs through the budget process, so that Council approves the program and a budget exists for the waiver incentive.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote for adding the Insurance Opt-Out Incentive.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Jefferson.

4. Discussion of Hiring Recruiting Firm for Inspector Positions

City Administrator Wing reported that Crest Hill and at least six other nearby communities are struggling to fill building inspector positions. One position is vacant, and the other inspector has given notice and will leave in about a week. Staff is pursuing five approaches: shifting duties to other employees and the consultant (plan review would go entirely to the consultant), hiring temporary employees, using contractual firms, devoting more HR resources, and engaging a recruiter. The City's current recruiter, who has done most recent City searches, is aware of about 50 qualified candidates in the area. Her fee is normally \$19,000 per position, or \$17,100 for one position with a 10 percent repeat-client discount through December. The discounted fee for two positions is approximately \$22,000. Staff is also pursuing one outside applicant who submitted materials that day, which could reduce the need to one search. Other communities are allowing up to 24 months to obtain certain certifications. The current salary range is \$66,731 to \$80,000, and the recruiter may recommend a higher range, which staff would bring to the Council with comparable data.

Alderwoman Gazal asked that the recruiter be given clear parameters, and that the Building Commissioner's compensation be considered fairly relative to the inspector. She praised the Commissioner's workload and

noted he is delaying surgery to help the City. City Administrator Wing said the Commissioner's range is part of a review expected in December. Alderperson Oberlin asked about exit interviews. Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe reported one was completed and the second is scheduled, and Alderperson Oberlin said she wished to discuss her own conversation afterward. Alderwoman Gazal asked about interim help, and City Administrator Wing referred to the temporary staff, contract firm and consultant options.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to authorize the recruiting firm for one position, and for two if needed.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Jefferson.

City Administrator Wing reminded the Council of The Seasons groundbreaking the following day, October 13, at 11:00 a.m., expected to last 20 to 30 minutes.

#### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

There were no agenda items.

#### **ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT**

1. Resolution Approving an Amendment No 1 to the November 3, 2025, Professional Services Agreement by and Between the City of Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois and Strand Associates which Increases the Contract Amount by \$15,900.00 for a New Amount of \$44,800.00

City Engineer Ron Wiedeman requested an additional \$15,900 for Strand Associates so that Strand can be present for the startup of the new chemical feed system, at Public Works' request. The original schedule called for completion by March 31, and Strand's construction coordination through May and June used the available hours. Public Works has coordinated with the contractor since June. Alderperson Oberlin noted the memo stated a new amount of \$44,800 while another document stated \$49,800. City Engineer Wiedeman confirmed the resolution is correct at \$49,800 and said the memo would be updated.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve a resolution approving an amendment No 1 to the November 3, 2025, Professional Services Agreement by and Between the City of Crest Hill, Will County, Illinois and Strand Associates which increases the Contract Amount by \$15,900.00 for a New Amount of \$49,800.00.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Jefferson.

The City Engineer also reported that the Caton Farm Road widening and resurfacing from Oakland Avenue to Broadway Street has a new schedule. Work is to begin Monday,

weather permitting, and take all week. The Police Department, school districts and fire district were notified, and the schedule will be posted on social media. One lane will be open during working hours, and both lanes will reopen at the end of each working day.

### **POLICE DEPARTMENT**

1. **Request to Approve Bid for One New Motorola M500 In Car Camera**  
Police Chief Ed Clark requested approval of a quote from Motorola for one new M500 in-car camera system, replacing an older model in a vehicle being replaced under a budgeted purchase. The City already has four M500 units. The system offers panoramic focus, a fixed 4K front view, built-in infrared for the rear seat, and one terabyte of storage. The total, including the cloud system, is \$12,243.04. The Police Department is working with its grant company to seek grants for future purchases.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve a request to approve a bid for one new Motorola M500 In Car Camera.

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

NAYES: None.

ABSENT: Ald. Jefferson.

### **PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**

There were no agenda items.

### **FINANCE DEPARTMENT**

There were no agenda items.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

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

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 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