MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
CITY COUNCIL OF CREST HILL
WILL COUNTY, ILLINOIS
August 24, 2026

The August 24, 2026, 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 Clerk Christine Vershay-Hall, 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, and Alderman Joe Kubal.

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

MAYOR
There were no agenda items.

CLERK
There were no agenda items.

TREASURER
There were no agenda items.

CITY ADMINISTRATOR

1. 2026 Employee Handbook Summary of Proposed Updates – Part 2 – Policy Recommendations
City Administrator Blaine Wing introduced Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Ashley Monroe and the City's Labor Attorney, Melissa Wolf, who presented the second installment of proposed employee handbook updates. Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe explained that this session was a continuation of the July 27th work session, which had addressed legally mandated changes. The current presentation focused on ten staff- and council-driven policy recommendations requiring Council direction before formal drafting. The following items were discussed:
High Deductible Health Plan (HDHP) and Health Savings Account (HSA)
Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe proposed offering a high deductible health plan paired with a health savings account as an optional benefit for employees ahead of the January health insurance renewal. She clarified this would be entirely at the employee's expense and would simply expand the range of available benefit options.
Insurance Opt-Out Benefit A voluntary opt-out incentive was proposed, whereby employees who elect coverage under another plan could receive a cash stipend in lieu of City-provided health insurance.

Flexible Work Program (Pilot) Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe introduced a proposal for a temporary flexible work pilot applicable exclusively to a defined list of salaried, FLSA-exempt management employees, including the Police Chief, Deputy Chiefs, Finance Director, Community and Economic Development Director, Building Commissioner, Public Works Director, Public Works Superintendents, Engineering Director, Assistant City Administrator/HR Director, and the City Administrator (subject to Mayor approval). The pilot was proposed to run through April of 2027.

The stated purpose was to provide a formal policy framework for occasional, pre-approved remote work in limited circumstances—such as when an authorized training bookends the end of the workday, or when an employee has a medical appointment that makes returning to the office impractical. Assistant Administrator/HR Director Monroe emphasized that this would not function as a standing or regular schedule, and that any authorized remote work would require advance supervisor approval, a stated purpose, and demonstrated productivity.

Alderperson Oberlin questioned the need for a formal policy, citing previous abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic, including an often-referenced instance of a City employee collecting pay while performing work for another employer. Alderperson Oberlin expressed deep skepticism based on that prior experience, stating that accountability had been severely lacking and that such a policy would be very difficult to monitor. Alderman Jefferson and Alderman Cipiti noted that salaried employees already possess inherent schedule flexibility and questioned why a formal policy was necessary. Alderwoman Gazal asked if salaried employees were not able to work from home, as she knows former employees who worked from home on a regular basis. She raised the concern that the policy, without clear disciplinary provisions, could be easily abused or misapplied.

City Administrator Blaine Wing provided real-world examples from his own experience, noting that the City's current personnel manual technically requires the 40-hour workweek to be performed on City premises—a restriction he had been enforcing literally with department directors despite the impracticality of doing so in certain situations. He also referenced a prior experience at another municipality where a policy violation was confirmed via social media documentation and resulted in formal discipline, including suspension. Attorney Melissa Wolf argued that a clear written policy would actually improve accountability compared to the current ambiguous state.

Finance Director Glenn Gehrke noted that the prohibition on outside employment during working hours is already addressed in Section 5.9 of the handbook, and indicated that while he personally prefers to be present with staff, he could see the value of occasional flexibility.

Alderman Dyke requested that staff compile remote work policies from comparable municipalities and talk about it in another work session. City Administrator Wing and Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe will return with sample policies from peer communities and a more detailed proposal, rather than drafting language at this stage. In the interim, Council indicated comfort with City Administrator Wing exercising reasonable managerial discretion on an informal basis.

Overtime Payment Language Clarification Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe noted that confusing passages regarding overtime payment raised at the prior work session would be revised and reformatted with illustrative charts to improve clarity, as recommended by the labor attorney.

Confidentiality Policy Update A new paragraph was proposed to be added to the confidentiality section of the handbook to explicitly address employees who are present during, or have access to, executive session materials or other privileged information—whether in audio or written form. Alderperson Oberlin confirmed the intent covered printed materials as well, not only verbal communications. Council was supportive of the update. Discussion also briefly addressed the protocol for Council members wishing to review executive session recordings which must occur at City Hall.

Personnel Evaluation Form Update Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe proposed adding the current personnel evaluation form to Section 16 of the handbook and establishing a standard anniversary-based evaluation cycle.

Safety and Equipment Policy Updates A proposed addition to Section 9 (Safety and Equipment Use) would establish a process for employees to seek approval before bringing personal electrical appliances—such as space heaters, mini-refrigerators, or microwaves—into City facilities. Alderwoman Gazal asked for more details. Finance Director Gehrke explained that the primary concern has been space heaters tripping circuit breakers, as multiple devices on the same circuit can exceed capacity.

Workday Hours / Clock-In and Clock-Out Policy A substantive discussion arose regarding Section 4.24 of the handbook, which governs work hours. Council members noted that the current handbook language authorizes an 8.5-hour workday with a 60-minute meal period, which is internally inconsistent. Alderman Dyke pointed out the 60-minute lunch period should be either reduced to 30 minutes or the total workday extended to 9 hours, and also noted the policy fails to specify that the meal period is unpaid. Alderman Cipiti noted that employees are required to punch out for lunch, which creates further complications if paid break time is being tagged onto an unpaid lunch period.
Alderperson Oberlin raised a fundamental concern about why employees were being permitted to work schedules different from those established by Council, and whether that practice was consistent with existing policy. Finance Director Gehrke clarified that his department's earlier-start schedule was an operational decision made to allow staff uninterrupted time for complex work—such as accounts payable, payroll, and utility billing preparation—before the public-facing hours began. He noted that full staff coverage is maintained from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with reduced staffing in the final hour, and that on high-traffic billing days the early shift is suspended and all staff work the full 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. schedule.

Alderwoman Gazal raised concern about whether current scheduling practices could expose the City to legal liability on equal-treatment grounds. Attorney Wolf clarified that varying work arrangements across departments for legitimate operational reasons does not constitute unlawful discrimination, as it does not target a protected class. However, she confirmed that the policy should be clarified in writing to provide consistent direction.

Alderman Cipiti and Alderman Jefferson both expressed that administration should bring forward a specific draft policy recommendation—rather than seeking direction from Council on undefined language—so that Council could react to a concrete proposal.

Artificial Intelligence Use Policy Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe briefly noted this item would be addressed at a subsequent session.

Travel & Meal Reimbursement Update This item was listed with the other items on the slide presentation, but not referenced during the meeting.

Mayor Soliman called for consensus, and Council agreed that City Administrator Wing, Assistant City Administrator/HR Director Monroe, and Labor Attorney Wolf should return with written draft policy language on the outstanding items for review at a future work session.

2. Elected Officials Compensation Discussion

City Administrator Wing presented an overview of a proposed restructuring of elected official compensation, which he prefaced with context regarding the City's current meeting schedule and open meetings requirements. He noted that this presentation was prepared the same day and had not been included in the Friday packet.

Meeting Schedule Context City Administrator Wing proposed, for future Council consideration, a shift from the current four-to-five meetings per month to a three-meeting model (two Council meetings and one work session per month), with a reserved fourth slot for special or as-needed meetings. He argued the change would allow more time for implementation of Council directives and reduce the administrative burden of continuous meeting preparation. He noted that any schedule change would be delayed until May 1, 2029, to avoid affecting current Council compensation mid-term.

Alderman Cipiti expressed concern that consolidating two work sessions into one was logistically impractical given the current volume of business and anticipated growth. He noted that work sessions frequently run three to four hours and questioned how the same scope of work could be accomplished in half the meeting time. Alderman Albert expressed a willingness to hear the full proposal before concluding. Alderwoman Gazal voiced concern over receiving materials to review during the meeting and not having time prior to the meeting to review. City Administrator Wing acknowledged the concern and indicated no decision was needed that evening.

Open Meetings Act and Ad Hoc Committees City Administrator Wing advised that beginning January 1, 2027, ad hoc committees are anticipated to be subject to full Open Meetings Act compliance, including public notice, agendas, minutes, and record retention. This, he noted, would be relevant to the compensation structure, as committee meetings would effectively function like formal public meetings.

Compensation Proposal City Administrator Wing proposed transitioning from the current per-meeting compensation model to a flat monthly stipend of $900 per month (approximately $10,800 annually) for Aldermen, which would encompass all Council meetings, work sessions, committee meetings, constituent engagement, meeting preparation, and community participation. Under the proposed model, deductions would apply for unexcused absences: $250 per missed council meeting, $100 per missed work session, and $50 per missed committee meeting.

Alderman Dyke raised Ordinance 1263, which provides for compensation for Council "committee meetings," and noted that, per the Ordinance language, Aldermen appear to have been entitled to payment for committee meetings that they have not historically received. City Attorney Mike Stiff acknowledged he was not present when the Ordinance was drafted and would need to research the matter, particularly the definition of "committee meeting" as intended in 2005. City Administrator Wing committed to having the City Attorney Stiff research the historical intent of that provision and provide a legal opinion.

Alderperson Oberlin suggested that given the anticipated delay in implementation (to 2027 or 2029), a monthly stipend of $1,000 rather than $900 might be more appropriate to account for ongoing inflation. Alderman Cipiti noted that a 2% annual compounding increase since 2005 would have brought the current Alderman compensation to approximately $8,624, and that accounting for actual CPI, the inflation-adjusted figure would be even higher. It was noted that Alderman compensation has not been adjusted since 2005—a 21-year gap.

Discussion also addressed whether the compensation change should be implemented on a staggered basis (applying to the four seats up for election in May 2027 first, with the remaining seats following in 2029) or uniformly for all positions effective May 2029. Alderman Dyke expressed a preference for a uniform effective date to simplify payroll and ensure equity. City Attorney Stiff noted that the staggered approach is traditional and legally straightforward, while a fully deferred uniform date is permissible but less commonly used. No final determination was made; Council directed staff and the City Attorney to return with a formal written proposal, comparative information on how other municipalities have implemented similar changes, and research on the committee meeting compensation question, with a decision needed by October 28, 2026.

City Intern Kishae White then presented a comparative compensation analysis drawing from data compiled by Administrative Assistant Marybel and contacts with neighboring municipalities. The survey excluded the four largest communities (Joliet, Bolingbrook, Plainfield, and Romeoville) to maintain population comparability. Key findings were as follows:

- The average annual mayor compensation among comparable communities was approximately $19,713, with Crest Hill's Mayor compensation falling near the median.
- Alderman compensation at Crest Hill was among the lowest of the compared communities.
- Crest Hill's City Clerk and City Treasurer compensation ranked highest among the surveyed communities, in part because several municipalities do not have a separately elected Treasurer.
- Several comparable communities (including Shorewood and Lockport) have built-in annual CPI or flat-percentage increases for elected officials.

City Attorney Stiff advised that a built-in CPI or percentage increase, while practiced by other municipalities, carries some legal risk of challenge but is defensible, as it has not been challenged at peer communities. Alderwoman Gazal asked about compensation for Special Work Session/City Council Meetings (when there are interviews) in the new compensation materials. Finance Director stated that Special Work Session meetings are currently paid at $55 per meeting and a Special City Council meeting (that an action is needed to be taken) are paid at $200 per meeting. In the proposed scenario, it would be included in the monthly stipend amount. Mayor Soliman expressed that his compensation appeared appropriately positioned near the median and did not advocate for an increase to the mayoral salary. He suggested the Council consider public perception before finalizing the Alderman stipend figure. Several Council members responded that the proposed increase, while significant in percentage terms, is justified by the years of stagnation and reflects the time and effort involved in the role.

<u>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT</u>

1. <u>Plan Commission Recommendation for Text Amendments to Chapter 15.12 Sign Code of the Crest Hill Code of Ordinances (Application of City of Crest Hill)</u>

Community Development Director Dan Ritter presented the Plan Commission's recommendation for a comprehensive update to Chapter 15.12 (Sign Code) of the Crest Hill Code of Ordinances. He explained that the Sign Code had become outdated and internally inconsistent over time as provisions were added on an ad hoc basis. The update involved reorganizing the code into clear, logical sections; adding sign design standards (including a prohibition on pole signs and a preference for monument signs with solid masonry bases); providing additional flexibility for temporary signage; updating definitions; and clarifying non-conforming sign provisions and variance procedures.

Director Dan Ritter noted that existing non-conforming signs may remain in use and be maintained without change; the new standards will apply to new signs and to signs requiring substantial replacement (defined as damage exceeding 50% of replacement value). He acknowledged this transition approach means the improved streetscape will emerge incrementally, primarily through redevelopment.

Director Ritter credited City Planner Atefa Ghaznawi for conducting the initial comparative sign code research and acknowledged the Plan Commission for substantive feedback over two public meetings (July 9 and August 13).

Alderman Albert asked about storm damage to a non-conforming sign. Director Ritter stated that if the damage exceeded 50% of replacement value, the sign should be brought up to the current standards. Alderperson Oberlin raised a question about whether variance procedures remained available under the revised code. City Attorney Stiff confirmed that the updated code simply references the existing variance procedure in the Crest Hill Zoning Ordinance (Section 12.6) rather than duplicating that language, making the process cleaner and more consistent. Alderperson Oberlin expressed support for preserving the variance option for unusual circumstances.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve the Plan Commission recommendation for text amendments to Chapter 15.12 Sign Code of the Crest Hill Code of Ordinances (Application of City of Crest Hill)

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

2. <u>Plan Commission Recommendation for Preliminary and Final Plat of Subdivision, Special Use for Outdoor Recreational Plaza and Public Park/Playground; and Multiple Variations Requested from the Crest Hill Zoning Ordinance with Respect to Real Property Located at 20590-20660 City Center Boulevard in Crest Hill, Illinois (Application of the City of Crest Hill – Crest Hill Commons)</u>

Director Dan Ritter presented the Plan Commission's unanimous recommendation of approval for the preliminary and final plat of subdivision, special use designation, and associated variations for the Crest Hill Commons park development at City Center Boulevard. He explained that the current single parcel would be subdivided into four lots: a City Hall/Police Department parcel, an overall public plaza parcel, a Park District parcel (wholly surrounded by City-owned land and conveyed pursuant to the previously approved intergovernmental agreement with the Park District), and a remaining northern parcel. The special use and variations were necessitated by the fact that the B-3 zoning district standards do not contemplate publicly owned recreational facilities or multi-owner configurations of this nature. All applicable cross-access and cross-parking easements are included in the plat.

Alderperson Oberlin had a question regarding the lot numbering on the plat map for lot #3 and #4, stating that it was confusing. It was clarified by Director Ritter that the playground is within the other area and surrounded by the City plat.

Mayor Soliman conducted an informal vote to approve the Plan Commission Recommendation for Preliminary and Final Plat of Subdivision, Special Use for Outdoor Recreational Plaza and Public Park/Playground; and Multiple Variations Requested from the Crest Hill Zoning Ordinance with Respect to Real Property Located at 20590-20660 City Center Boulevard in Crest Hill, Illinois (Application of the City of Crest Hill – Crest Hill Commons)

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

Alderwoman Gazal asked if the City was offering a reduction to residents on the cost of the permit fees for work needing to get done from recent storm damage. Director Ritter said that our permits fees are minimal, just to take care of the cost of staff to do the inspections so fees cannot be waived or reduced.

ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT
There were no agenda items.

PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
There were no agenda items.

POLICE DEPARTMENT
There were no agenda items.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT

1. Draft Residential Utility Billing Assistance Pilot Program Discussion
City Administrator Blaine Wing and Finance Director Glenn Gehrke presented a draft two-part Residential Utility Billing Assistance Pilot Program, developed collaboratively by the Administration, Finance, and Public Works Departments with input from the City Attorney. The program was prompted by an increasing number of residents contacting Council members and utility billing staff to request payment plans and fee waivers, particularly in connection with significant billing events such as continuous flow (water leak) situations. The City currently doesn't have any payment plan options.

Part 1 – One-Time Late Fee Waiver: Eligible residential account holders who have not previously received a waiver could apply for a one-time waiver of accumulated late fees. Finance Director Gehrke noted that chronic late payers would be excluded, as payment histories are tracked. For accounts held by tenants, landlords—as the account holders of record—would be notified, as they bear ultimate responsibility for the balance.

Part 2 – Utility Payment Plan: Residents experiencing an unforeseen financial hardship could apply for a structured repayment plan for past-due balances, with a maximum term of 12 months. Staff would work individually with each resident to establish a payment schedule consistent with their financial capacity. Critically, participants must simultaneously remain current on ongoing utility charges; any missed payment—whether scheduled or current—would result in immediate removal from the program and reversion to standard collection procedures, including potential service shutoff.

City Administrator Wing noted that authority to approve payment plans would be tiered: the Utility Billing Supervisor for balances between $100 and $1,000; the Finance Director for balances up to $5,000; and the City Council for amounts exceeding $5,000. Alderwoman Gazal requested that the Finance Director be added as an approval authority at all tiers up to $5,000, which Finance Director Gehrke agreed to accommodate.

The pilot program would be effective upon adoption through December 31, 2026, and would automatically expire unless extended by Council action. Staff would provide regular progress reports and a final summary report at the program's conclusion to Council, including data on the number of waivers requested and approved, payment plans established, default rates, and staff recommendations for continuation or modification.

Alderman Cipiti noted that with only two billing cycles before the December 31 expiration, meaningful data would be limited, and suggested extending the pilot by at least two additional months. City Administrator Wing indicated a February 28, 2027, end date could be considered. Alderperson Oberlin requested that progress reports be made available to Council well before the expiration date so that a decision on extension could be made with sufficient information. Finance Director Gehrke indicated he could provide biweekly updates if desired.

Alderman Cipiti emphasized the importance of the written request requirement in the one-time waiver conditions, and Finance Director Gehrke agreed that while many requests would be received by phone, every effort would be made to obtain written documentation—including through email—to protect the City's records and prevent future disputes. Alderman Jefferson asked if something can be added to the water bill itself stating that there was a one-time fee waived, so it's noted for all parties concerned. Director Gehrke stated that was a good idea, and it would all depend on how much room there is on the bill for the notation. He stated he would look into it. Alderman Jefferson also asked about the period of time that we are looking to recapture the funds in a Utility Payment Plan and how it's going to be structured. We don't want to put anyone in a financial bind if they are already late. Director Gehrke stated that the City will be working with the residents on an individual basis. The City's goal is for the residents to succeed on this program.

Council expressed broad support for the program and directed staff to bring a formal resolution to the September 8, 2026, City Council meeting for a vote.

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

Alderman Cipiti asked City Administrator Blaine Wing if the meeting was being recorded and/or live streamed. Administrator Wing stated that it was being televised live through AT&T and Comcast and being recorded so it can be posted on the City's YouTube page. Alderman Cipiti asked if there was a problem with streaming live to YouTube. Administrator Wing stated that the City is currently experiencing issues with using the microphones with the recording equipment. There was a power outage, and it is unclear if that outage damaged a portion of the equipment used for live recordings. Staff is currently working on this issue.
Alderwoman Gazal asked for the topic of a permanent solution for the audio video issues be brought up as a future topic of discussion. She stated that HR should not be addressing the problems we are having with the A/V system. Administrator Wing stated that staff has been working on a request for proposal so that the City has the information for Council to discuss. Administrator Wing stated that there is a search for a company that could also provide professional A/V service for the City. Administrator Wing also stated he has been in contact with our local university and once our system is upgraded to modern equipment, the university could provide students who could assist once we have our equipment running.

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

The meeting adjourned at 10:38 p.m.

Approved this____day of________________, 2026.
As presented____________
As amended___________

____
CHRISTINE VERSHAY-HALL, CITY CLERK

____
RAYMOND R. SOLIMAN, MAYOR