

**COMMON COUNCIL  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 13, 2024  
6:00 PM**

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Present  
Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle – Present  
Attorney Marcia McNagny – Present

**Council Members**

Jennifer Middleton – Present  
Leslee Robinson - Present  
Jennifer Romano – Present  
Tad Varga – Present  
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members present. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MINUTES** Mayor Daniel noted under the Water Rate Ordinance discussion the word Columbia was missing from the City of Columbia City.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the July 23, 2024, meeting minutes as corrected. Tad Varga seconded the motion all voted unanimously.

**REZONE ORDINANCE 2024-15: 1<sup>ST</sup> READING** Carl Bitler and Matt Shipman were present to discuss the rezone request. Matt Shipman explained that Carl is the Principal of Bitler Investment Venture. He advised he did not necessarily want to or need to give a long speech like he did at the Planning Commission but wanted to make sure to answer any questions that Council may have. He explained that this property is just South of town, at the entry point of the town. He shared that the main things they talked about at the Planning Commission were just a little bit about the comp plan and how the comp plan was contemplating maybe the high school shifting and some commercial property being down on that part of town but then the school corporation ended up buying all that commercial property and it is a big field now. He explained that they believe this fits within the idea of the comp plan to generate some commercial development that really will be an attractive entryway to the City and hopefully provide a destination for all the parents and kids who go back and forth through there three or four times a day to the high school. He advised this property really was not a particularly good use for residential because of the lay of the land and all the traffic. He advised at this point the property is just for sale and there were no concrete plans but wanted to express that this property would be much easier to market to somebody who would be looking to do the kind of development they were looking at.

Mayor Daniel mentioned at the Plan Commission the question of what kind of business they were looking toward came up and felt it was safe to say it would be commercial retail of some sort. He shared that while there was no development plan in place, there was an interest in doing something probably food related. Matt Shipman advised that was very much the idea they were looking at. He advised one of the neighbors had a question about what was going to go in there and mentioned we could not put in a C & R Plating for example. He advised the zoning was really set up for retail and Carl has met with a lot of people really just trying to find that right fit. He advised Carl intends to own the property, he has had a long-term relationship with that property and would like to continue to land lease it and then be the landlord.

Mayor Daniel felt it might be beneficial for the Council to get to know Mr. Bitler and his background since this is something he does and is his area of expertise. Mr. Bitler shared his investment management background, experience and his motivation in this area. He advised for this particular site, they have looked very seriously at a small food mart, a physical therapy enterprise, the kind of restaurant that parents and kids

can go to after games and events at the high school.

Jennifer Romano advised she liked the sound of what was being said at this meeting more than what she heard at the Planning Commission meeting. She shared her concern with that property is that it is the gateway to our community and would like something nice there; not discount establishments or duplication of things we already have.

Dan Weigold felt we have an opportunity to make it a new entrance to the City in a positive way. He felt the wooded areas that are there currently were not very attractive in his opinion.

Tad Varga reiterated that is the first impression for people coming into town for the very first time and it is extremely important.

Mayor Daniel felt the members who have spoken, were really focused on how this is going to make the entry way to Columbia City welcoming and beautiful. Mr. Bitler also added and to meet necessary needs. He shared, unfortunately for him, the site and land available is so constrained. Matt Shipman expressed that it may trigger the next thing and mentioned that next thing is not that far behind because people want to build amenities and houses next to the things that they go to and use every day.

Leslee Robinson shared that the property was close to where her parents live and questioned how long they have owned the property and why now? Mr. Bitler shared his family has owned the property for over 50 years. He noted the critical question of why now, in referring back to when he talked about cycles of cities, years ago they internally did not feel like it was quite ready yet. He advised there was not a high school, there was not the increased traffic on SR 9; he reported it was still predominantly commercial trucking traffic, but it is changing. He shared what has been going on in the last 10 years has motivated them to now. Leslee Robinson advised she grew up in that area and was excited that they were finally ready to make an investment in that area and felt it was definitely an area that has been undervalued for a long time. Matt Shipman further explained that what Carl was saying is that traffic counts drive so much of this; the traffic counts were not there before but now they are.

Leslee Robinson reiterated, again, that she too wants to make sure it is going to be a business that is sustainable there.

Mayor Daniel explained the concept of changing the property from R-1 to GB is what was in front of Council. He advised this was not necessarily the development plan, but a rezone request from residential to general business.

Jennifer Romano made a motion read Ordinance 2024-15 by title only. Leslee Robinson seconded the motion, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-15 an ordinance amending the zoning classification of certain property from the R-1 Single Family Residential District to the GB General Business District.

Dan Weigold made a motion to accept Ordinance 2024-15, an ordinance amending the zoning classification for certain property from R-1 Single Family Residential District in the GB General Business District as presented. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, all voted unanimously.

**PUBLIC HEARING FOR RATE ADJUSTMENTS** Mayor Daniel recessed the Council meeting and opened the floor to a public hearing regarding the rate adjustments for all utilities.

Hearing no comments or questions, Mayor Daniel closed the public hearing and restarted the Common Council meeting.

**ORDINANCE 2024-10: ELECTRIC RATE ADJUSTMENT – 2<sup>ND</sup> READING**

Jennifer Middleton made a motion to read Ordinance 2024-10 by title only. Leslee Robinson seconded the motion, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-10 an ordinance amending the rates and charges for the City of Columbia City Municipal Electric Utility.

Mayor Daniel advised nothing changed from last time, but rather the addition of Exhibit B which talks about the Tracker.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-10 on second and final reading. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, all voted unanimously.

**ORDINANCE 2024-11: WATER RATE ADJUSTMENT – 2<sup>ND</sup> READING**

Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2024-11 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-11 an ordinance amending the rates and charges for the City of Columbia City Municipal Water Utility.

Leslee Robinson made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-11 on second and final reading. Tad Varga seconded the motion, all voted unanimously.

**ORDINANCE 2024-12: WASTEWATER RATE ADJUSTMENT – 2<sup>ND</sup>**

**READING** Jennifer Middleton made a motion to read Ordinance 2024-12 by title only. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-12 an ordinance amending the rates and charges for the City of Columbia City Municipal Sewer Utility.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-12 on second and final reading. Jennifer Middleton seconded the motion, all voted unanimously.

**ORDINANCE 2024-13: STORMWATER RATE ADJUSTMENT – 2<sup>ND</sup>**

**READING** Jennifer Middleton made a motion to read Ordinance 2024-13 by title only. Leslee Robinson seconded the motion, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-13 an ordinance amending the rates and charges for the City of Columbia City Municipal Stormwater Utility.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-13 on second and final reading. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, all voted unanimously.

**ORDINANCE 2024-16: TEST KITCHEN – 1<sup>ST</sup> READING** Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2024-16 by title only. Jennifer Middleton seconded the motion, all voted unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2024-16 an ordinance establishing a Test Kitchen Fund for the City of Columbia City.

Rosie Coyle explained because of the way in which our Community Engagement Specialist would like to run the kitchen, we need to be able to collect money and bill people for the use of the kitchen. She advised she asked Attorney McNagny to write up an ordinance establishing a fund specifically for the test kitchen.

Mayor Daniel explained the Test Kitchen is also being referred to as the Shared Kitchen but either way the goal is to have a place where individuals, who are culinary entrepreneurs, can rent space. He advised we would also have some cooking courses. He noted that this would be a non- reverting fund.

Jennifer Middleton made a motion to approve ordinance 2024-16 on first reading. Tad Varga seconded the motion, all voted unanimously.

**DEPARTMENT REPORTS** Shawn Lickey – update on the Rolling Hills and Jefferson Street project, done with stump grinding and will be seeding, making

improvements to old Warner Electric building as well as the Penguin Point building to get them ready for the next tenants, Osmos was in town testing poles, he was in New York City two weeks ago with IMPA attending some bond rating meetings – he reported that we have completed almost \$5,000,000 worth of projects in the last 6 - 8 years without bonding. **Kelly Cearbaugh** – reported on patching and concrete work. **Tom LaRue** – new truck 105 at Cops Gear, guys taking the NFP 1403 live fire instructor class, he will be doing mass casualty planning training and ethanol training, Family Safety Day went very well, shed built that was approved for the training facility, built a prop for fire hose and also received a grant for a hose to be put into that training prop. **Mike Shoda** – hope to be able to turn the last filter on after tomorrow, main break out in Eagle Glen on a 12-inch water main. **Mike Cook** – update on forced main project, still waiting on our permit modification to come in for cyanide but are still testing, CSO audit is August 21<sup>st</sup>.

**MAYOR REPORT** Mayor Daniel gave reports for Matt Heiden, Gary Parrett, Chip Hill and Terry Wherry.

Mayor Daniel reported that he attended the Midwest America Federal Credit Union groundbreaking for their new building. He advised he participated in a road funding round table and will be speaking to the Whitley County Retired Teachers Association. He advised he will be at the Indiana Conference of Mayors down in Madison, Indiana but will be available by text, phone and e-mail. He reported he will be at a FIRSST Task Force Committee meeting on the fourth Tuesday and may not make it back for Board of Works or Council meetings so Dan Weigold will run the meetings. He shared that there has been a proposal put out by one of the three gubernatorial candidates regarding property taxes which does bring a lot of concern to cities and towns and wanted Council to be aware.

**ARTS COMMISSION** Jennifer Romano reported they were planning the Whitley County Studio Art tour for September 7<sup>th</sup>.

**TREE BOARD APPOINTMENTS** Dan Weigold reported they had a couple Tree Board appointments that were due to expire. He advised Jennifer Romano and Jeffrey Bleijerveld were both interested in being reappointed to the Board.

Jennifer Middleton made a motion to reappoint those two members to the Tree Board. Tad Varga seconded the motion, Leslee Robinson, Jennifer Middleton, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold voted unanimously and Jennifer Romano abstained from her position but voted in favor for the appointment of Jeffrey Bleijerveld.

**REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION** Tad Varga reported the RDC met and basically discussed how everything they are working on was in a holding pattern.

Mayor Daniel explained the Redevelopment Commission has a Revolving Loan Fund program and because it has not been used for a while they were working to revise it so that it is more accessible and more competitive.

Having no further business to come before the Council, Mayor Daniel called the meeting adjourned.

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Mayor Daniel Ryan Daniel

Attest:

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Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle