

**COMMON COUNCIL**  
**TUESDAY, MARCH 25, 2025**  
**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 6:01 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MINUTES** Jennifer Middleton made a motion to approve the February 25, 2025, meeting minutes as presented. Tad Varga seconded the motion. Jennifer Middleton, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold approved. Jennifer Romano and Leslee Robinson abstained.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the March 11, 2025, meeting minutes as presented. Leslee Robinson seconded the motion. Jennifer Romano, Leslee Robinson and Dan Weigold approved. Jennifer Middleton and Tad Varga abstained.

**JON GOTZ: ANNUAL MS4 REPORT** Jon Gotz was present to review the annual MS4 report with Council. He shared that he was contacted by IDEM's Stormwater Coordinator for the MS4's and advised we would be audited again this year. He felt we were in relatively good shape, but there were a few things noted in our last audit that we need to make sure we have followed through with.

Mr. Gotz reported we were in the third year of the current MS4 permit. He shared that IDEM has been considering developing tiers based on population and the type of MS4 entity so that they can make allowances for smaller communities as they recognize that smaller communities do not have the budget and staffing that the larger communities do.

Mr. Gotz shared they had proposed changes to some of the stormwater ordinances that were supposed to have been done in 2024 but are running a little bit behind on that. He explained, in the meantime, the State legislature has proposed a couple of bills that might affect some of the ordinances and was not quite sure how those were going to pan out yet.

Mr. Gotz reported they did a water characterization report in 2024, which had to be updated and still needs to be posted on the webpage. He shared it continues to look like we are seeing some benefits, as far as reductions in E-coli from the Long Term Control Plan and will keep an eye on that. He reported for the Public Education Outreach participation there were a few things that could be improved upon in that program to get more public education out and get the public

more involved. He shared they may try to do something at First Friday's again this year. He reported they have stepped up a little bit, in cooperation with Austin Babb, Pretreatment Coordinator, with trying to make sure restaurants were responding to the grease ordinance and doing what they need to do to keep their grease traps maintained. He advised there has been issues with grease clogs in the sanitary sewer, but it seems like we are getting more cooperation as far as them turning in reports about maintenance on their grease traps. He reported there really were not many changes for the Illicit Discharge Detection Elimination ordinance and are in pretty good shape with that. He noted that we do need to update our MS4 map and hope to get that done soon. He shared that Construction Site Stormwater Runoff control has slowed down a little bit but may be picking up again as far as development and projects. He reported they did inspections at 13 sites last year and had several that were completed so will be filing notice of termination from the IDEM permits. He advised the Post Construction Program continues to grow; he thought we were up to about 17 sites that will be participating in that program this year. He advised each site that has a detention basin, or some other kind of water quality structure, is supposed to have an annual inspection so are having them do a checklist and return it to us so we can keep on track with that as far as reporting to IDEM. He shared that as far as Municipal Operations go, we are in pretty good shape, and the main thing is we need to be a little more diligent about documenting the things we are doing as far as operations that help improve stormwater.

Attorney McNagny advised she was working on revised ordinances and had a couple questions she would be in touch with Jon on.

**NIKI KEISTER: COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT ANNUAL REPORT** Niki Keister, Director of Columbia City Connect, was present to talk about what they have been up to. She shared that their 2024 annual report was out and was pretty proud of the work that they were able to do. She shared that one of the new initiatives was a Downtown Interior Historic Tour where they were able to go up on the second floors of a lot of the buildings in our downtown. She advised they were able to see renovated ones, like JoAnn Bird's Airbnb, they were able to see newly renovated apartments, and they were also able to see some that were not renovated, which was neat because she felt it spurred a lot of exciting ideas. She reported they were able to go for a tour inside the Courthouse, the Thomas Marshall House and the Haunted Jail gave a not haunted tour. She advised for First Fridays, one exciting new thing was the BMX stunt show. She shared that they gave out 250 helmets to kids.

Niki reported that in 2025, they are going to host a youth entrepreneurial market called The Launchpad which will be held during First Fridays. She explained it will be located in the art alley between the government center and Reinholt's Furniture. She advised students can come and set up a booth for free and sell the things that they have made. She reported a Steamroller party is happening in September.

**TAMELA TINCHER – REQUEST FOR CHANGE IN FENCE CODE** Tamela Tinchler of 202 N. Line Street was present to discuss a proposed change to the fencing code. She explained they were looking into getting a fence and the current code is written so that a fence cannot be over three foot tall unless it is a chain link fence. She shared that based on standards right now, she could put a four-foot chain link fence in her yard but unfortunately that would not look the best. She advised she was proposing an iron rod fence; the visibility with an iron rod fence would

be the same as the chain link fence. She explained they were nowhere near the sidewalk; they were about 12 feet away on one side and 15 feet on the other side. She shared that she has talked to other people in town who have chain link fences in their front yard and the reason they do is because of the code. She expressed that she does not feel, especially with her house being an older home, that chain link is going to look very well and would not be a good selling point. She explained she needs a four-foot fence because she has dogs who, unfortunately, are jumpers. She shared that she has been measuring the height at which they jump, and four-foot would be fine but at three-foot they were pushing it. She advised she was just looking into a change to the code; she was not sure why we were pushing chain link fence versus an iron rod fence that would look much nicer. She explained instead of going the route of getting a variance, she was pushing to make a change to the code.

Mayor Daniel explained at the last Board of Works meeting, they approved a four-foot iron fence in her side yard, because of how the property is and where the house is, the side yard is actually on Line Street. He shared that in talking to Tamela, he felt she had a good point; do we have an interest in continuing to have chain link fences in our front yards across the city, or as long as there is some visibility, like an iron rod fence that you can still see through, does that make sense to include in the subdivision code. He noted that when it comes to right of ways or any kind of encroachment into the right of way it still has to be approved by the Board of Works. He felt that the Council had two options; the first option would be to leave the code as is and have Tamela go through the variance process and get approval from the BZA or the other option would be to recommend to the Planning Commission to revisit this ordinance and to consider other materials or types of fences. He advised that was why he asked Tamela to come and talk about her situation, as this ultimately is an ordinance issue.

Jennifer Romano felt it made sense to have other options. She added that she did not like the look of chain link fence.

Tad Varga agreed it would be a substantial upgrade.

Mayor Daniel felt the idea was that the Council would formally, or informally, suggest to Nathan Bilger and the Planning Commission, through our Planning Commission members, that the code be revisited in that regard. He advised the issue is already on the next Planning Commission agenda but felt it would be helpful to have a little guidance from the Council. He questioned if it was the consensus of the Council to recommend to the Planning Commission to make some modifications to what the appropriate materials are for fencing in a front yard. Council was in agreement.

**DEPARTMENT REPORTS** **Gary Parrett** – update on hiring process, Officer Ewing has been released to solo eval through his FTO process, Sergeant Crabtree selected as the 2024 Drug Recognition Expert of the Year by the State of Indiana, filed a Victims Assistance Affidavit with the Whitley County Prosecutors office to replace 2 tires that were damaged in a pursuit, assessing two of the tornado sirens that are having issues. **Mike Shoda** – relocated water main at the building on Radio Road that the school bought, replaced lead lines. **Chip Hill** – trail is coming along very quickly as is the Skate Park, update on hiring process for the Community Engagement Specialist position. **Kelly Cearbaugh** – Noah Pletcher passed his CDL test, helping the electric department cut trees, helped with the dugouts at the park, company coming in to grind leaves, starting to get 50/50 sidewalk applications in, running the sweeper as much as they

can. **Matt Heiden** - most of the bathrooms will be opening, working to get the dugouts done, softball in full swing with the first tournament the weekend of April 19. **Mike Cook** - meet tomorrow with the engineer on the force main project, CSO operational plan is in the hands of IDEM for review, staff repaired the gate on the headworks facility, update on digester, employee passed test to move to Class 2 operator, installed UV bulbs, pig demonstration. **Tom LaRue** - still working on the Sierra Wireless issues, update on hiring process, air packs in for repair, April 15<sup>th</sup> Forge Fire will be in to start the repair on the training facility, 4 guys training to become Certified Fire Investigators, Chris LaRue retired.

**MAYOR REPORT** Mayor Daniel shared the electric department report from Shawn Lickey.

Mayor Daniel reported he would be going to Indianapolis again to talk to legislators on behalf of the Mayors and Commissioners Caucus of Northeast Indiana. He shared that Rosie, he and Beth had a meeting with Gibson to go over the health insurance claims for this year. He met with Jim Johnson, who is the new Whitley County Council on Aging Executive Director, to talk about the additional things the Senior Center would like to do in our community. He shared that he would be in an all-day training on Thursday with EMA and then will be hosting the Mayor's Roundtable on Friday for Northern Indiana.

**TREE BOARD** Jennifer Romano reported the Tree Board met and are planning Arbor Day activities in April. She advised they are also working on creating a door hanger for residents where a City tree is planted that will share instructions on how to take care of that tree.

**SEWER BOARD** Leslee Robinson reported the Board met last week and will meet again on April 15<sup>th</sup>. She shared at that meeting they will have a public hearing and 2<sup>nd</sup> reading of the ordinance that will impose a fee of \$100 per day for those who have not connected.

Having no further business to discuss, Mayor Daniel called the meeting adjourned.

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Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

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Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle