

COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, APRIL 22, 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 – Absent
Tad Varga – Present
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members except Jennifer Romano present. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES Mayor Daniel noted a spelling correction under the Columbia City Connect discussion. Leslee Robinson noted additional spelling and grammatical errors as well as a date correction for the sewer meeting.

Leslee Robinson made a motion to approve the March 25, 2025, meeting minutes as corrected. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

EASTERSEALS OF NORTHEAST INDIANA Stacey Duell, Vice President of Community Support, and Vickie Lootens, Chief Development Officer, with Easterseals of Northeastern Indiana were present to give an update on their programs and to talk about their partnerships within the community. She noted they continue to have staffing challenges and were currently in a marketing campaign for employment that showcases everything about the jobs they have available.

Vickie Lootens expressed a sincere ‘Thank You’ to the city and county for supporting them over the years. She shared that it was important to be able to continue providing services to those that are in need in this wonderful community.

Mayor Daniel noted that he has been Mayor for 14 years and felt there has continually been a staffing shortage in the Group Living section. He questioned what that looks like for them going forward. Stacey Duell explained with the closure of three sites, the staff that were at those sites will move to other sites, which will give them a much better opportunity to fill those sites completely. She advised they were the pay leader in the industry in this area, paying \$17 - \$18 an hour for DSP wages, but it still is not enough. She explained that when dealing with reimbursement through Medicaid, they have to live within that reimbursable rate. Vickie Lootens added that they continue to work on the long term and how they can provide benefits to the employees, as well as continue to look for different revenue streams so they are not totally reliant on federal funding, but it is a challenge. She felt in the nonprofit world, they truly were fighting the good fight every day and will continue to because they believe in their mission. She felt with

the larger network, they have more resources, which was a long term strategy as well. She advised they do have subs that will come from other locations to help out; they are definitely trying new things from 14 years ago but are always open to suggestions.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATEMENT OF BENEFITS Dale Buuck, EDC President, was present to discuss Compliance with Statement of Benefits for DOT America, JV Investments and B R Real Estate.

Michael Venturini, DOT America President, was present to give an update. He shared a little background and advised they were the only company in the United States that does all the coatings under one roof, and it is all done here in Columbia City. He reported that they have been growing year after year for the past 10 years; they did a building expansion a few years back which was a \$3,000,000 investment and the City was gracious enough to give them an abatement on that. He advised they have a project coming up where they are going to need to hire another 35 by October. He shared that the plan is to invest another \$2,000,000 and when they are successful at that, in the first quarter of 2026, they will have to hire another 35 employees, essentially going from about 64 to 130 employees in the span of a year.

Mr. Venturini shared that they actually have one of their large OEM's moving business away from their parent company in Rostock, Germany and moving all the business back here stateside to be coated here in Columbia City. He stated that is what they have always wanted; however, is a little odd because they now will be competing with the "hand that feeds us" a little bit so to ask them to invest in DOT America while taking business away from them is a little different. He explained that is what the customer base here in the U.S. wants and is why they opened a facility here. Their goal is to keep investing and continuing to grow. He expressed a sincere thank you for all the continued support. He advised it would not have happened and is very difficult to ask for money to be sent over to the U.S., let alone Columbia City, to start this small project and make it grow. He shared that the support of the Council, with the tax abatements and everything else, helps him to argue for that continued investment and when the state and the city show that continued support, it goes miles for them.

Tad Varga advised he has been looking at these reports for at least 10 years. He stated that DOT does everything you say you are going to do and overachieve that. He shared that our community is blessed to have you.

Mayor Daniel added that DOT has continued to grow, continues to invest, continues to hire and felt in a lot of ways was a model company for our community. He shared, speaking personally, but as felt he was speaking for the Council in that we are happy to continue being a great partner with DOT America.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve DOT America 2022-6 Real Property, DOT America 2017-23 Real Property, DOT America 2014-15 Real Property, DOT America 2021-20 Personal Property, DOT America 2017-24 Personal Property, DOT America 2014-15 Personal Property, JV Investments 2015-21 Real Property and B R Real Estate 2018-3 Real Property and find them in compliance and grant an additional year of abatement where applicable. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

Dale Buuck noted that this would be the last year for the JV Investments abatement so was a very small percentage and B R Real Estate was able to re-up their tenant's leases there.

Mayor Daniel advised that none of those abatements brought any question to him personally. He noted that all of those companies have grown and have fulfilled their commitment plus some to the city.

FENCE CODE AMENDMENT – NATHAN BILGER Nathan Bilger, Planning and Building Director, was present to discuss a proposed amendment to the fencing code. He advised it was kind of unusual to bring a code amendment to Council but since the discussion started here, he wanted to discuss the current options that he expects to be presenting to the Planning Commission. He reviewed the current code which allows front yard fences of any type up to 3 feet, and with chain link the code gives you a bonus of up to about 4 feet and just wanted to make sure that was clear. He advised in terms of addressing the comments from last time, option 1 was to insert a transparency rule which would allow transparent fences up to 4 feet in the front yard. He noted some concerns, potentially about chicken wire or cattle fences being transparent and not being what we want to see in front yards, but they are allowed right now up to 3 feet. He advised we usually do not have a problem with it, but it is a valid thing to look at. He explained option 2 comes from the Planning Commission's discussion at their last meeting where they discussed in length the far reaches of do nothing versus something far more extensive dealing with historic code. He noted that was well beyond what Council wanted to see and for expediency, they were keeping it pretty narrow and consistent. He explained that option 3 is just simply inserting a “open decorative” option along with chain link so if you have “open decorative” fencing or chain link, they would be given the height bonus plus it tightens down cattle fencing as not decorative. He suggested that any of these could be molded together.

Nathan Bilger explained that option 4 was not really an option, but it deals with the question of material and if we want to insert more code about the actual fencing materials. He shared that they have had a handful of questions over the years about materials and so this is an attempt to address some of those questions as well as head off the question of chicken wire and cattle fence in the front yard.

Nathan Bilger noted one thing about option 2 in terms of allowing everything at 4 feet, he has been checking other codes, and it seems to be pretty common that most do not have a difference for front yard fences; they just allow fences at 4 feet, period, and do not make any other distinction. Tad Varga questioned even if you cannot see through the fence. Nathan Bilger advised many of them, yes. He noted that there were some that have the transparency option or the standard but many of them in Indiana just say fences up to 4 feet are allowed and then rely on the visibility triangle restriction to make sure that visibility is seen at the intersections. He explained the triangle already prohibits anything between 2 feet and 8 feet so even 3 feet in that area is already prohibited.

Jennifer Middleton advised she was definitely leaning towards the open decorative verbiage over the transparent. She stated that we want the visibility but ‘transparent’ to her could be anything. Tad Varga agreed and felt like it was the option that made the most sense.

Jennifer Middleton felt it would be good to include all the building materials allowed, just so it is more clearly defined for people to know what they can and cannot do. Nathan Bilger stated that he wanted to make sure it was clear that right now we already allow any type of fence up to 3 feet so if we are scrapping that part of the code as it is written now, then we are really diving into

the material options and some of these other pieces. Dan Weigold shared that he could see maybe going with 4 foot for situations with those who have dogs that could probably jump over a 3 foot fence so can see why some individuals may want that. He was unsure about how much we want to prohibit individuals from doing things on their own property. He advised he did not want to be too restrictive but at the same time want it to look nice as well. Tad Varga agreed and felt that option 3 lends itself the most to giving more options to people without being too restrictive.

Nathan Bilger encouraged the Council to share any comments with any Plan Commission members. He advised the next meeting was on the 5th and was planning on making this public as of Wednesday or Friday.

I haven't. I can't remember when when you absolutely have to make it public for that. 10 day notice. And then if you'll indulge me, I have. Actually I have two other things real quick. Following up on the comment about housing permits for our department of all types across the county out and have the city specifically right now are about the same as they were in 2018, which was a pretty busy year if you remember, but not nearly as busy. As the last several years that said, we're about half in where we were in 2018 with single family dwellings. So if that's your metric, we are not there. We are about the same as last year though, which was a pretty low year. So I don't think I'm telling you anything you didn't already know or expect, but there is investment going on. There's still permits going. It's just not new housing. So and then the final thing was just a reminder that Columbia City Connect is hosting 2 historic downtown tours on the 3rd. Saturday the 3rd at 10:00 and 11:30, beginning at the courthouse gazebo and depending on who's there depends on the route and what buildings and the length and so on. So.

Is that the one we're participating in?

About the perch mayor from Columbia City connect this tour tour. I think we may be participating in that meaning the it's the final thing if. That's different. That's different. Oh, walking to. I'm sorry. I'm sorry, OK?

No, no, this is just a historic walking tour. Yeah. Yeah. No, it's OK. They've got so much stuff going on. It's great. Yeah, it's great. That is a different thing. That's window clings, which hopefully will be ready by then. But yeah, it'll be ready in May. So thank you.

OK.

OK.

And again, let me know if there's anything you.

Thanks.

Appreciate it.

OK, one last thing before we go to department reports, so. The City Redevelopment Commission is looking at putting together a new tip district in that kind of north of Walmart. That potential development up there and the idea is obviously trying to capitalize on the development and the infrastructure cost and some of those. Things so Long story short, is that in order to create the TIF district up there, we have to have our economic Development Commission really recreate it. If you will. We have had one in the past. Individuals have their terms have expired. We've not refilled those because there's really not a need for it consistently. The Academic Development

Commission is really there to kind of create the economic development areas, if you will, of the Community as well as it can finance economic development projects. I don't anticipate the EDC will do that. It is different than the with the county EDC just to be real clear, those are two separate things, even if they may have similar initials. So with that being said, the colonies of the Economic Development Commission is made-up of 1 member appointed by the mayor, one member appointed by the County Council and one member appointed by the Common Council. So because this is really focused on kind of TIF, I've asked Tad if he would be willing to serve for you. However, it is your decision, but I think it would make sense to have Chad because of the Redevelopment Commission connection. I think that makes sense. But again, it's up to you. So I wanted to request your appointment for that Economic Development Commission. I have to go. To the County Council at their. Next meeting to get their get their. Appointment, if we will, but. It's a 3 member board and the Common Council members term is a 2 year term.

So.

Have had before the city's economic development.

OK. Motion by Dan, seconded by Jenny. Further discussion all those in favor of the usual sign, Dan, Jenny and Leslie approve to add. Abstains. I'm assuming. Yes. Thank you. Thank you for that. I didn't. Not trying to put. You up against the? Wall there but. It was one of those. Where we were told by Ice Miller like, hey, you need to have this before we can create a TIF district for you and said, OK, well, we'll try to get on that. So with that.

Took a nap. Sorry. So FYI, Arbor Day is this Friday. We'll be planting a tree at a little turtle I am interviewing currently for the community engagement specialist of the trail. We just approved the first payout for that that is moving very fastly. It should be done no later. Then July 25th, the skate park is wrapping up. They should be done with the actual skate park Friday.

Well, you talked about the trail development like you did in border work, so that they know what street issues and other things like that please. I know you are. You did a great job.

That's where you lying back. So if anybody contacts you, we will be closing within the next two to three weeks. Main Street will go down to 1 Lane and there'll be a signal with like a cross arm. So you it will be.

But.

Point. They are putting a pedestrian island in Main Street because that is where the trail is going to cross over Main Street, so there will be a little discomfort. I feel like clumsy is used to discomfort because we do it every year, but there will be a little discomfort for pedestrian island to be placed in Main Street. This island. I know a lot of people say the street is very narrow there and dot has approved it. It should slow down traffic and give pedestrians a place safe place. Not get hit.

Where? Where specifically you're talking about? What's that? Where specifically are?

Morning.

You Spencer and Main Street by the dairy barn.

OK.

Gotcha. Thank you.

And it's going to be on the. North side of that intersection, right. Crossing at the gas station side, not the other side, OK.

Yes, yes, yes.

That makes sense, everybody.

Yep.

Should have pulled up a map. I'm sorry.

Well, you were put on the spot.

All that is left.

Eagle park. Oh, OK. Eagle Park is Eagle Park skate park. Should be wrapped up Friday. We do have sidewalks that tie into the skate park that we are trying to. Well, just to go get in. We've got grass seed. Everything we're looking to do a grand opening the first week of June, so I'll keep you updated on that. I don't think I have anything else.

You know.

Thank you.

The.

Yeah, just a couple of things here. I've had a couple of guys, Matt, come over and ask me if we could lend him my hand trying to get the baseball dugouts back to Morris Park, helping get them finished. He ran into a little bit of a pickle there. I had Tony and Jason back are doing concrete work in the dugouts and they just finished pouring the last one today. So all the concretes done in it. And I just wanted to give those guys a shout out because I think they helped a lot and a lot of hard work back there. They had to bug you. A lot of the concrete back could you can get trucks back there to it. So shout out to them guys, Jason Wells and Tony little for their work back there on that and then. Had a pre construction meeting today. With AZ Engineering and Burks Construction, they're going to be doing our paving throughout town this year through our Community crossings grant. Application that we got. Mayor said it on it a little bit today too. I think their start date is going to be like somewhere around May 12th and hopefully be done by the end of July, so. There's 44th St. segments and 3388 ramps that will be under construction, so. The trail going through town, plus that there's going to be a lot, lot of stuff going on this year in town, so.

That's all.

Question of Kelly. Thank you, Matt.

As Kelly said, they came over helped us out with the the dugouts and at the current pace the roofs are on. Also, thanks to Kelly for giving me a recommendation of an Amish crew to have the roast put on, they put in, they put on all four roasts. And just a day and a half, well, it's actually just. So our current timeline, we should be ready for ball games on Monday the 28th, so that was very helpful. New pickleball courts had some flaws we found over the winter fall and

those areas will be addressed and. Will be done by the end of May the 1st of June, fixed by the company.

That is warranty work, just so you're aware.

And the next big thing that we have on our. Plate is to start. The pool, getting it ready where? A little behind on that because of the dugouts, but we'll pick up and and take off and and get that ready for it to be open as Memorial Day weekend.

About a month away. Question, Matt.

Thank you, Mike. My staff met with a representative for Alma, which is some of the automated valves that we have in our facility. We've had one that kept blowing fuses and when they opened it up.

They.

Had it burned boards and Myers in it, so they disassembled that and then they took it back. And. Sent it back on. And waiting on a quote to see what repairs will be for that, we'll also to replace our secondary scum pump. You ordered. That and that was delivered yesterday. I got a hold of contacted power plant services out of Portland. They service our plugged boiler and they worked out a a contract with them that went our digesters down. Having all the repairs and everything done that they're going to. Come in and look at. Our boiler. Inspect it, clean it, tune it for natural gas and then we'll come back when the cold weather. And it's back up and running again and then tune it. On to methane, because it's a dual dual fuel. System. If you remember, we complete our long term control plan which was under agreed order by them a couple of years ago and I just received a. Letter on Monday that they completed the level of control review. Basically what they they just looked at all the data that we've submitted so far to see if what. We did worked. They had 10 different items that they're not happy with. So I'm doing my best to address those, to try to get that taken care of. So I've been working on that.

The question the Mike. Thank you mate. Marshall, you still here?

Yeah, well, I didn't realize this is Rosie. Last night and.

It is.

I just want to mention that we've been together how many years? 27 yeah, 27 years I think. Not as long. As you've been here. But anyway, my word I would have at least had a bouquet. Of flowers or so. Crown of some nature, but I just it's been unbelievable. So thank you for being. A wonderful friend, my dear.

I'm gonna miss everybody.

That's God. I'm gonna have fun sitting at home watching him on the video and texting Leslie saying no.

I'm gonna need extra sticky notes. To get it, yeah.

Yes, obviously appreciate Rosie and all the work that she's done, she's not going good. It's not goodbye. She's not leaving. But she's transitioning to the new role. Where while Leslie moves into the court treasurers role. But. Yeah. Appreciate. Appreciate everything you've done and

friendship that you've had with me and the, you know, when I ran for mayor and you guys probably have heard this as well. But when I ran for mayor, I was told many times, many times, that the mayor didn't run the city. Rosie Coyle. The city and many times and many times that has been absolutely correct and so I appreciate you. And I'm not going to do a big speech because I know you're not leaving. But but I appreciate you and your partnership so. A couple of other reports that I will there's no good way to transition to this, so a couple other reports from some of the other department heads. Gary said that that all three of the applicants for of applicants and candidates, if you will, for the Police Department have been approved through public safety, medical and now they're getting. With the. Tornado sirens at three different locations. The FOP Lodge deployed drive in Lincoln Way. Those motors have burned up for some reason, and so they're kind of investigating that, but trying to get those back up and running right now, they had radar and Lidar recertification coming up in in May on May 8th and the county wide. Training the emergency vehicle operation. That's the one where they block off Tower View drive and do the different courses and stuff that's happening on May 4th. So if you're in that area, you'll have to find alternative ways to get to and from Van Buren St. or to and from Hannah St. basically so. Let's see. Fire the three candidates for fire have been approved and they start May 5th. They're going to be working Monday through Friday for 8 hours a day for two weeks to kind of get the training under their belts, and then they'll be assigned two different shifts at that point in time. They're working on Sierra. Wireless.

Asked me about.

The Sierra wireless things to make sure they're operational, that's been fixed on 101. They're looking at 1:02 and they're on 107 because there's always a truck that has issues, 107 is the problem now and that is, it's leaking somewhere around the turret. And so our mechanic, Adam, is working to get that. Fixed. We have 4 guys right now taking certified fire investigator course that should end this month and the SCBA bottles are being still sent in small batches for hydro testing. Terry had said that he received quotes on on a DC and I forget what the DC stands for, so I apologize. I still don't remember what that stands for, you told me, but I don't remember. It obviously is not super critical. Obviously completed drilling on concrete walls. With the city jail to try to get the wiring going on that we'll talk about the jail thing in front. Of you here. At the. Moment and SOS and CHIP and him and the electric department kind of continue working on plans at the at Eagle Park there. Couple other things to note is that the is that Gary Gary is going to be having medical procedure. So if you have any issues for police purposes, talk to Deputy Chief Chris and he can he can kind of help you out during that during at least the next maybe week or two weeks. And then Tom is out as well, not for the same reason, but for a different reason for vacation. So anything talk to Toby on? In front of you, I placed the package from Mock Park Group. Mock Park was the group that did our feasibility study for the jail project. The thing you really need to maybe know about that is really kind of twofold #1 is the initial estimate is in there. And then I stuck the second X estimate in there. The first estimate came back at almost \$9 million and I said absolutely no way are we doing that project. That cannot be a realistic number. So they did a new estimate. It's in there. It's around. I think 5.5 million. It does not mean that we can do it or we're not going to do it or whatever it is more in there just for your information. You may also remember that we engaged Baker Tilly and Ice Miller to kind of look at what options are on the table. Obviously we're not going to go and do anything without your approval. Concurrence on that, but I did want to get those that document in front of you so that you could digest it. Feel free to send me questions by e-mail or whatever, or call or whatever as

you find things along there. Again, the idea of the jail is. To make something that's going to be long lasting for our Police Department to create some entrepreneurship type space and also to. Some kind of an indoor playground or something of quality of life amenity in downtown. I will tell you that the number, the, the new number of five point whatever million does not include the playground equipment and things like that. So we're looking at all those things. We have not said, you know, yes, we're moving forward with any of them.

Yes.

We're just digesting right now. So I just want you to know that when I when after we got the initial numbers, I went to mock Park and I said this is not realistic.

Can you find?

Ways to make it work at a lower number and so you will see that the outline of the building attached to the. Better at the very back of the of the packet. That new yes, that new packet has a different outline. It's a couple of walls that were maybe saved that we could. Use air, HVAC locations, things like that. Things that we're not going to change the actual usage, but we'll save a bunch of dollars and reuse what's already there. So digest it. I'm still digesting it myself, but I wanted to at least get in front of you so that you knew. Kind of what was going on. OK. Think. Last thing I have this oh did. He did? He cut out. Didn't want to stick. Last couple of things, I'll say tomorrow is administrative professionals day. So I want to thank my assistant, Ashley Buckle, for all the hard work she does to keep me in line youth councils on Thursday and Friday. I have heard round table down 5, so next couple days are a little a little busy, but next week on Monday and Tuesday. We had some comprehensive plan stakeholder interview with some different groups, which I think is going to be that will be a lot of good information for the. Comp plan team comp plan. Planners, if you. Will. And the steering committee won't meet until after. Yeah, I don't know that we have made that date yet.

I don't know that we've made that date yet, so I think you and Jennifer on that. Yeah, so otherwise.

So. OK, anyway.

All right.

Yeah, it's probably. It's probable. So and then I don't want to steal Thunder here, but I believe the plan is on Saturday, May 3rd. At 10 AM that we're going to do Leslie and Brent swearing in here at City Hall. So you are invited to come to that. I imagine they'll be probably less than an hour. But. But but we're swearing in into their new positions. So excited. For that.

Back. Sorry, go back Dan.

I guess my keyword for Rosie is respect. You know, I've been here since 1987, and when I started working with City and had I played softball for you with a number of years and. I've had the less time, so we're just watching. Thanks for that. And they had the privilege of going with Sean down to. Go down into a coal mine. And see how our energy is generated, one of the. Most incredible experiences that I've had had to go like that with Leslie and Sean and workers, and I would just off how clean that was and how, you know, they we went down into the mine and, you know, the whole harvested transferred over to the plant to see how it's turned into electricity and. I I don't know. I I'm still in awe of how that works. And finally. I'm just very thankful that

y'all invited us to go. I I highly recommend that for anybody to take advantage to see how that actually works and just blows my mind how somebody knows how to do that. Very grateful for having that opportunity.

10.

I don't have anything, but Rosa, you know, you could always just.

Come sit in the audience. Yeah. Yeah, and.

Jones and for the action.

Then just drive your whole car.

Over and you sit.

Here.

And somebody in the audience.

Now that you guys aren't doing but.

We'd love to have you back, that's all.

I have not.

OK, I'm gonna have a little stool between Marsha and Rosie. But no, I heard with them on the and I'd like to thank him for inviting us. They were huge. And and getting us down there and just showing us really amazing things, if you guys can get to it, I would highly recommend going and like dancing once in a lifetime experience and not stop looking about it since I got home, so I don't do anything super cool but and I'm not letting Rosie go anywhere for a while. So she. You and I are gonna be together for a while and then ready to learn.