

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2025
6:00 PM**

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Present
Deputy Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle – Present
Attorney Marcia McNagy – Absent

Council Members

Brent Bockelman – Present
Jennifer Middleton – Present
Jennifer Romano – Present
Tad Varga – Present
Dan Weigold – Present

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

MINUTES Jennifer Middleton made a motion to approve the August 26, 2025, meeting minutes as presented. Tad Varga seconded the motion, Brent Bockelman, Jennifer Middleton, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold approved, Jennifer Romano abstained.

ORDINANCE 2025-11 JOINT PLANNING AND BUILDING FEES AND CHARGES – 2ND READING Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-11 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2025-11, a joint ordinance amending the schedule of fees for the Columbia City/Whitley County Joint Planning and Building Department.

Mayor Daniel noted that the County already approved the ordinance.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-11 on second and final reading. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-12 AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 95 – NOISE CONTROL Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-12 by title only. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle read Ordinance 2025-12, an ordinance amending Chapter 95, specifically in reference to Noise Control, of Title IX of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Mayor Daniel noted that this was the Jake Bread ordinance that was brought up which focuses on compression brakes that have been modified.

Jennifer Middleton made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-12 on second and final reading. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

JON GOTZ – MS4 PERMIT CHANGES Jon Gotz with the Whitley County Soil & Water Conservation District was present to discuss upcoming ordinance changes. He explained that the new MS4 general permit requires the city's ordinances, for construction stormwater, to contain the requirements of the construction stormwater general permit. He advised there were some things in the current ordinance that need to be revised and then we would conform with the permit requirements. He stated that there were some things in the current ordinances that were also outdated as well as the state legislature has passed some bills that limit what local units can do when it comes to construction stormwater, erosion, and sediment control. He advised we were supposed to have had our

ordinances updated in July of 2024 but obviously have not met that. He reported that we had an audit by the MS4 Coordinator for IDEM at the end of July, and she noted that we were deficient on that so need to send a schedule back to her for getting the updated evidence in place.

Mr. Gotz explained that we have a stormwater development manual that has technical standards but the approach he was taking was to limit the requirements of the construction stormwater general permit. He shared that his idea was to limit how much of that he put in the ordinance because the permit changes every five years, which would mean we would have to change the ordinance every five years. He felt since the manual was included by reference in the ordinance, that we could put a lot of that in the stormwater development manual and do a lot less formal updates on that as things change.

Dan Weigold confirmed it was not going to cost us anything, except for the construction site. He mentioned they might have to come up with different ways of handling the runoff from their construction site. Mr. Gotz did not see any big changes as far as what they are actually doing on the sites. Mayor Daniel noted that ultimately, when someone goes to build or develop on a site, they already have to pull a stormwater permit, and we have set that schedule. He advised this was more of just how we navigate the state and federal mandates that have come down in regard to our ordinance and our technical management. Mr. Gotz felt that was pretty fair and advised there were some additional requirements in the construction stormwater general permit, but they really are not changing the way we run our program that much. Dan Weigold felt when things happen, it usually adds cost to somebody. Mayor Daniel noted that if we do see that cost come up, we can come back to our ordinance and look at the permitting fees that are part of that.

Brent Bockelman confirmed with Mr. Gotz that the things that will be changing most often are being put 'in reference to' in the ordinance so that the ordinance will stay valid, while the changes will be made in the manual that they are reviewing. Mr. Gotz advised that was his goal; to put those requirements in the manual so we can change those informally and do not have to go through the formal process of changing the ordinance every five years.

Mayor Daniel noted that the ordinance was in the Dropbox for review and will be on the agenda at the next two meetings. He advised if there were any questions to direct them to Mr. Gotz.

ARTS COMMISSION APPOINTMENT Jennifer Romano reported that they have an opening on the Arts Commission. She recommended appointing Taylor Ford, who is a dance instructor, works with children and would be a great match to fill the spot left by Becky Walter on the commission.

Jennifer Middleton made a motion to appoint Taylor Ford to the Arts Commission. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

TREE BOARD APPOINTMENT Mayor Daniel explained that prior to Brent Bockelman joining City Council, he had appointed him to the Tree Board as a mayoral appointment. He advised that since he has joined council, it creates a little bit of a blur between the executive and legislative. He shared that, in the meantime, an individual has stepped off the Tree Board who was a council appointment so is recommending, if Council was accepting of it, to move Brent to the unexpired term of the individual who is leaving, and then he will reappoint someone for the new term that Brent is effectively vacating. He felt it made more sense to move Brent over to the legislative appointment, which Brent was willing to do.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Brent Bockelman to fill the unexpired term of Larry Walter. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, Jennifer Middleton, Jennifer Romano, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold approved and Brent Bockelman abstained.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Terry Wherry** – power issues at Eagle Park, met with Andrea and Melinda to go over equipment needs for moving to a cloud-based software. **Shawn Lickey** – continue pole replacements, working on getting quotes for a new tree truck. **Chip Hill** – update on trail, moving forward with Phase 3 of Westgate. **Mike Shoda** – Peerless was out to clean Well 9 and will be back to video to make sure it is good enough but if not will do additional work on it, patched areas where storm drains had to be repaired, replacing lead lines. **Gary Parrett** – update on hiring process, First Friday and Movie on the Square were successful, preparing for Prism Fest and the Public Safety Festival, hope to have the tornado sirens installed tomorrow, Rachel Eppenbaugh is doing well in dispatch as the new second shift lead, Code Enforcement Coordinator Scott Leatherman continues to do an excellent job engaging with residents regarding ordinance violations, Deputy Chief Anderson spent the day at Walmart today delivering safety presentations to all of their employees on all shifts, Sergeant Wooldridge submitted his letter of resignation and will be going to the state police. Mayor Daniel shared department reports for Tom LaRue, Kelly Cearbaugh and Mike Cook.

MAYOR REPORT - FORMER JAIL UPDATE Mayor Daniel shared, as mentioned in the past regarding the former jail, that the project came back at about \$7 million, so have taken a step back and talked to the county commissioners to see if they want it back. He advised they do not want it back so has talked to the Redevelopment Commission about the idea of going after a request for proposal for development of that property. He shared that it could be by a private developer, maybe a public-private partnership or maybe it would be something where we can still lease a portion of that space for the police department. He advised we do not want to put up too many walls as it is a prime location in the downtown TIF District that really could offer some opportunity there. He felt with the financial implications happening in the state right now, that we have to be really careful about what projects we invest in. He shared that the Redevelopment Commission seems to be pretty excited about the opportunity and have appointed an RFP Committee; however, it was important to get Council's blessing before they run with that project.

Brent Bockelman questioned if the committee that was brought together would more so be researching potential options. Mayor Daniel stated that the RFP Committee would put together a proposal that was fairly open-ended to see what is out there but would still allow for input on the direction we want to go.

Mayor Daniel asked for consent from Council to have the Redevelopment Commission move forward. Council members were in agreement to move forward.

Jennifer Romano felt it was a good idea and that it was important for that spot to be used in an attractive and beneficial way. She expressed that we have a big opportunity and a responsibility for that to be something nice.

Brent Bockelman felt we would be missing out on an opportunity if we did not open it up for some public input and public participation.

Jennifer Romano appreciated not wanting to spend \$7 million on a project that was not originally started by the city.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel gave an update on the budget process. Rosie Coyle advised the public hearing was scheduled for October 14. He reported that he sat through an AIM webinar regarding creative municipal revenue sources, knowing that the budget is going to be tight because of Senate Enrolled Act 1. He shared that a large group of Mary Raber third graders will be touring City Hall on Friday.

ARTS COMMISSION Jennifer Romano reported on the Studio Art Tour.

TAD VARGA REPORT Tad Varga reported he met with Chris Judy to discuss the Food and Beverage Tax and helping us with the collection of those restaurants that are not collecting. He advised he also talked to him about signage on US 30 regarding the jake breaks

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Tad Varga reported, in terms of the old LML property, there were just a few things that need to be done but it has passed all the testing. He advised there were some things the state was requiring them to do. He reported the Redevelopment Commission was swapping the Jackson & Line Street property with the county for the parking lot further down on Van Buren Street.

Tad reported that the Smith Brothers property did not turn out as bad as they expected after doing the phase two testing. He advised they will be moving forward on that in figuring out pricing and everything for the Redevelopment Commission to look at taking that over.

Tad advised they awarded a couple facade grants, and the school came in and gave a great presentation of all the things that they are doing with the trades in our community with students.

JENNIFER MIDDLETON - RESIGNATION Jennifer Middleton shared that she has been given an opportunity to move outside of the city limits so will be resigning as a city council member in December. She expressed that it has been a great pleasure working with the team; her passion has always been growing Columbia City and making it better. She advised she will be sad to leave council, but ultimately this will be better for her family.

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

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

Deputy Clerk Treasurer Rosie Coyle