

WINTER 2025. VOL 6. ISSUE NO. 7.

CITY SCENE

City of Columbia City

A Year in Review

BY MAYOR RYAN L. DANIEL

As the leaves fall off the trees and snow begins to fall from the sky, we prepare to say goodbye to another year and hello to a fresh start. I would be remiss if we didn't look back on the 2025 calendar year. While not a complete and exhaustive list, it's clear our community has been busy with the expansion of services, loads of private investment, and too many events to count!

In January, we hired the city's first deputy fire chief, Toby Fralick, welcomed Five Lakes Coffee to town, and our electric department set new light poles at Eagle Park.

In February, we held the annual Father-Daughter Dance, welcomed Impact-X Performance Fitness to the community, launched the new Parks Department website, and welcomed some new police officers.

In March, we welcomed Casa Balbina, cut the ribbon on the Ferrell Group's new building, and saw significant work on the Blue River Trail extension.

In April, we welcomed Columbia City Bridal, cut the ribbon on Midwest America FCU's new



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A Year in Review

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BY MAYOR RYAN DANIEL

building, and unofficially renamed the city “Beaver, Indiana” for one day. We also welcomed 1897 BBQ to downtown Columbia City.

In May, we welcomed Leslee Robinson as our new Clerk-Treasurer and Brent Bockelman as our new Northeast District City Councilman. We also welcomed Cibo Ristorante, cut ribbons on businesses’ building improvements, and opened the much-anticipated skate park.

In June, we kicked off the America 250 celebration, cut the ribbon on BABE’s new location, hosted an Indiana Wild event, fixed a broken sewer main on West Jefferson Street, and welcomed some new firefighters.

In July, we finished the Jefferson Street force main project, and our new code enforcement coordinator position began his work. The GLO (Get the Lead Out) team walked neighborhoods and new downtown wayfinding signs were installed in our downtown, thanks to Columbia City Connect.

In August, we started the “Five Fast Facts” videos on Facebook, cut the ribbon on the new Mission 25 building, began the digester repair and cover replacement project, and completed over \$1.5 Million in paving across the city.

In September, we started live streaming all city meetings on YouTube, held the Family Safety Festival downtown, and flushed fire hydrants across the city.

In October, we cut the ribbon on the Blue River Trail extension, hosted the Mother-Son Halloween Carnival, and held Trick-or-Treat on Halloween night.

In November, we hosted the Annual Veterans Marathon and Heroes 5K.

In December, our fire department will continue the 100+ year old tradition of Santa handing out bags of candy on Christmas eve, as well as wrapping up work on the city’s comprehensive plan.

As we look forward to the year ahead, I want to thank you for your consistent commitment to building a future together! Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all! Until next time...



Winter Fun with the Columbia City Parks Department

BY MATT HEIDEN, PARKS SUPERINTENDENT

The Parks Department is very excited for the growth of Eagle Park, which will continue to have more activities that will help families stay connected. The Skate Park has been a great addition and has been steadily busy since its opening.

The Parks and Recreation Department is hosting cookies with Santa at the Morsches Park pavilion on December 19th from 5:30pm-7:30pm. There will also be a reindeer for all to see.

The 2026 Father/Daughter Dance will be coming up on February 6th and 7th. Tickets go on sale in the Park Office located at 400 North Whitley Street on January 2nd. The cost for a ticket will be \$25.00 per person, and the event will once again be held at the Whitley County 4-H Center. We will be selling a total of 800 tickets, and they usually sell out quickly.

Online baseball and softball registration for 2026 will begin on January 26th. Registration in our Park Office will begin on February 9th. All baseball and softball registrations will stop on March 7th. If you have questions regarding summer baseball and softball, please visit our website at www.columbiacityparks.us or call the Parks Office at (260) 248-5180.

Winter Fire Safety Tips

BY TOM LARUE, FIRE CHIEF

The holidays are right around the corner, and I want to wish all a Happy Holiday Season. Here are a few reminders for all of you to follow.

Smoke Alarms:

Installation and Maintenance:

- The “Get Alarmed” campaign initially focused on smoke alarm distribution, and now emphasizes the importance of proper installation, inspection, and replacement after 10 years.

Fatal Fires:

- About two-thirds of fatal fires nationally occur in homes without working smoke alarms, according to the Get Alarmed campaign.

Smoke Alarm Placement:

- It's crucial to have smoke alarms on every level of the home, inside bedrooms, and outside sleeping areas, according to the Get Alarmed campaign.

Heating Safety:

Space heaters:

- Space heaters are a common cause of winter fires. Keep them at least three feet away from anything that can burn and never leave them unattended.

Chimneys:

- Have chimneys inspected and cleaned annually to prevent chimney fires.

Other Heat Sources:

- Ensure all heating equipment is properly installed and maintained and never use a stove or oven to heat your home, according to Indiana State fire safety information.

General Fire Safety:

Candles:

- Keep candles at least three feet away from anything that can burn and never leave them unattended.

Holiday Decorations:

- Artificial and real trees should be placed at least three feet away from any heat source. Consider using electronic menorahs, advent wreaths, or other religious candleholders.

Fire Drills:

- Practice fire drills with your family, including two ways out of every room.

Cooking Safety:

- Stay in the kitchen while cooking, and don't leave stovetops unattended while in use.

“About two-thirds of fatal fires nationally occur in homes without working smoke alarms.”



Reflecting on an Eventful Year

BY CHIP HILL, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

What a year 2025 has been! From sun-drenched mornings at the farmers market to electric evenings at First Fridays, our city was bursting with life, color, and community spirit. It felt like every corner of town had something happening — and people showed up in full force to enjoy it all.

First Fridays turned downtown into a vibrant gathering place, filled with music, food trucks, local art, and the warm chatter of friends and neighbors. Whether you came for the live bands or just to soak up the atmosphere, there was no denying the energy in the air.

The farmers market brought fresh produce and handmade goods every weekend, becoming a summer staple. Local vendors thrived, families filled their baskets, and the scent of flowers, baked goods, and seasonal fruits filled the air.

Old Settler Days was once again a highlight, bringing tradition and celebration together with parades, carnival rides, and community pride. Generations gathered to remember the past while making new memories together.

But this year wasn't just about events — it was also about growth and new opportunities for play and connection.

The brand-new skatepark became an instant hit, buzzing with skateboarders, scooters, and spectators every day. Right alongside it, new pickleball courts at Eagle Park opened up a fun, fast-growing sport to even more residents. From early morning matches to evening games under the lights, pickleball quickly became the talk of the town.

Another huge milestone was the opening of the Blue River Trail extension to the WCCS Campus. This long-anticipated connection made it easier — and more scenic — to walk, run, or bike between neighborhoods and campus. It's not just a path; it's a symbol of how our community is moving forward, sustainably and together.

And let's not forget the dozens of other activities offered throughout 2025 — community concerts, youth sports leagues, art workshops, movie nights, fitness classes, and more. There was something for everyone, and this city proved it knows how to come alive.

As we look ahead to winter, let's take a moment to celebrate what we've built together. This year showed what's possible when a community shows up, supports one another, and embraces the season with open arms.

Let's keep that momentum going.

Let's make next year even better.





Ensuring Water Safety

BY BRAXTON GOODMAN, WATER SUPERVISOR

Recently, the city received many calls regarding discoloration of water. Historically, when water has a brown or reddish color, the culprit is rust. Rust is most often caused by sediment buildup in pipes. While rusty water is typically harmless to your health, it can result in an unpleasant taste and in extreme cases, stain laundry and fixtures. Please note, the minerals causing the discoloration are not a safety concern like with lead.

Rest assured, we take appropriate steps to ensure our water is safe to drink. Columbia City Water Department tests the water quality daily. There are five separate tests performed daily, to ensure we are in compliance with EPA/IDEM standards. Specifically, the iron test that is performed daily ensures that our water is within EPA/IDEM guideline of 0.30 mg/L (SMCL)*.

The Columbia City Water Department will flush the water hydrants once a year. By flushing the hydrants, the pipes are scaled with an increased water flow, which breaks up sediment and removes them through the hydrants. While we are improving the water quality through hydrant flushing, you may see a temporary change in the color of your water due to stirred up minerals and sediments.

*SMCL means Secondary Maximum Contaminant Level, a non-enforceable guideline for contaminants in drinking water that may cause aesthetic or cosmetic effects, not direct health issues.

Our New Councilman: Brent Bockelman

BY ASHLEY BUCKLES, MAYOR'S EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT



The City's Common Council has a couple new faces, including Brent Bockelman. Since Leslee Robinson moved into the Clerk-Treasurer role in May, Brent was voted in to take her place on the council. As a Whitley County native, Brent may be a familiar face to many and with a family history in politics, it was natural for Brent to take on this new position. He has been active in our community in a wide variety of roles, and he is excited to make an impact in his newest role as councilman.

Brent, along with his wife, Cindy, and two daughters, Nataley and Kendal, have lived in city limits for the past 20 years. Brent graduated from Columbia City High School in 1992. He proceeded to work at More Farm Store for 20 years, and most recently started working as a Whitley County employee for the past four years in the Planning and Building Department. As a county employee, he works for the county's Plan Commission, Board of Zoning Appeals, and the Redevelopment Commission.

Brent's stepfather, Bill Overdeer, was a Whitley County councilman for over 30 years, so Brent witnessed the impact someone can have by holding political office. Community involvement was intertwined in Brent's upbringing, which led him to view community as a whole and to always focus on the "big picture". Later in life, as he watched his children grow up, he realized he wanted to be included in the decisions that make Whitley County a great place to live. Subsequently, he took on a variety of roles, including: board member of his church, Vice President of the Old Settlers Association (he will be president in 2027), a member of Ducks Unlimited, and Board Director for The Magical Meadows. He also is on the City's Tree Board and the Regional Sewer and Water District. As a councilman, Brent wants our community to stay a kind and loving place for people to live, and he also wants the City to provide great services while being fiscally responsible.



When asked who had the most influence on his life, Brent lovingly said, "My stepdad, Bill Overdeer. He was 'dad' and helped me love the outdoors. He introduced me to hunting and fishing, which I fell in love with. He taught me to love family and was always there for me. He chose to be my dad, even when he didn't have to be".

Finally, Brent shared his many accomplishments in life: a happy marriage, happy and healthy children, and relationships with family. He also shared that he went back to school later in life and received his bachelor's degree in business management and marketing from WGU.

Brent certainly has led a fulfilling life and he undoubtedly isn't finished leaving his mark on Columbia City. As one of our newest councilmen, Brent is just getting started.

MONTHLY CITY MEETINGS

1st Monday of the Month

Plan Commission | 7:00pm
Whitley County Government Center

1st Tuesday of the Month

Arts Commission | 5:00pm
Council Chambers | City Hall

1st Tuesday of the Month

Board of Zoning Appeals | 7:00pm
Whitley County Government Center

2nd Tuesday of the Month

Redevelopment Commission | Noon
Council Chambers | City Hall

2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the Month

Board of Works | 5:00pm
Council Chambers | City Hall

2nd & 4th Tuesdays of the Month

Common Council | 6:00pm
Council Chambers | City Hall

3rd Tuesday of the Month

Tree Board | 6:00pm
Council Chambers | City Hall

3rd Tuesday of the Month

Housing Authority | 5:00pm
Council Chambers | City Hall

4th Monday of the Month

Park Board | 6:00pm
Park Office | Whitley Street

Please check the monthly calendar on the City of Columbia City's Facebook page or at www.columbiacity.net for meeting changes.

Meetings can be viewed on YouTube at www.youtube.com/@cityofcolumbiacityindiana