

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2025
6:00 P.M.**

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Present
Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson – Present
Attorney Marcia McNagny – Absent

Council Members

Brent Bockelman – Absent
Jennifer Middleton – Absent
Jennifer Romano – Present
Tad Varga – Present
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members, except Brent Bockelman and Jennifer Middleton present. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES Mayor Daniel noted a spelling correction under Chip Hill's report as well as requested clarification under the Mayor's report regarding the amphitheater at Eagle Park.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the September 23, 2025 meeting minutes as corrected. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

SWEARING IN OF NEW FIREFIGHTER – LANDON TIMM Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson performed the swearing in ceremony for new firefighter Landon Timm.

ORDINANCE 2025-13 – STORMWATER RUNOFF 2ND READING Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-13 by title only. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-13 an Ordinance Amending Chapter 156, Control of Post Construction Stormwater Runoff of Title XV of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-13 on second and final reading. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-15 – STORMWATER SYSTEM 2ND READING Tad Varga made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-15 by title only. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-15 an Ordinance Amending Chapter 56, Illicit Discharge and Connection to the Municipal Stormwater System, of Title V of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-15 on second and final reading. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-19 – CHAPTER 97 - STREET AND SIDEWALKS AMENDMENT

Dan Weigold made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-19 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-19 an Ordinance Amending Chapter 97, Streets and Sidewalks, of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Mayor Daniel explained for a long time we have been enforcing Indiana Code, or at least Indiana precedent, that individuals who own property have to maintain the right of way. He advised it was the opinion of both our Code Enforcement Officer, as well as our City Attorney, that we really needed to put that in our ordinances to solidify what we have been doing for years. He noted there was case law to back this up.

Gary Parrett wanted to make sure it designates going all the way to the street. Mayor Daniel read the definition spelled out in the ordinance. He mentioned to Chip that this would pertain to the discussions they have had regarding Hanna Street.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-19 on first reading. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

RESOLUTION 2025-16 CAPITAL ASSETS POLICY Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-16 by title only. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-16, a Resolution of the Common Council of the City of Columbia City regarding the Capital Assets Policy.

Leslee Robinson shared that we just had our 2023-2024 audit, and it was brought to our attention by the State Board of Accounts that the starting amount we use for fixed assets is \$1,000, which they said is extremely low. She reported that she reached out to our accountants, and they also agreed that it is very low and should be at least \$10,000. She requested approval to change the amount and also noted that anything under \$10,000 that she, or the department heads, feel need included as an asset they would have the approval to do so.

Tad Varga questioned if this would go on the balance sheet. Leslee Robinson explained this is just for what we list as a fixed asset.

Jennifer Romano confirmed it was not to go out and purchase anything. Mayor Daniel advised it was not; this was for what we already have that is valued at this amount or below that goes in our fixed assets program.

Tad Varga questioned if, when we would go for bonding or anything, would it count against us if those were not included. Leslee Robinson advised it would not. She stated that they asked the accountant several different questions and he said it may affect the depreciation a little bit when filing everything but based upon what we are up against currently at \$1,000, he said we would be silly not to increase the amount as nothing else would be affected by this. She advised it would be a lot less headache for the department heads and a lot easier for her office to track the assets.

Jennifer Romano questioned if the departments keep track of their own inventory. Leslee Robinson explained that the department heads are provided with an asset list that they are to be

updating and giving to Katie so that we can keep everything up to date. She stated they then have to upload that list into the Gateway for State Board of Accounts.

Tad Varga questioned if it was for insurance purposes so that they have those documented. Leslee Robinson advised that insurance was a little bit different because we have a blanket coverage.

Mayor Daniel explained more than anything else, it was really an accounting piece for the State Board of Accounts so that they can see the cash side and the property, or the fixed asset side, for what we have purchased that are long-term things.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Resolution 2025-16. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

RESOLUTION 2025-18 – BOT Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Resolution 2025-18 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Resolution 2025-18, a Resolution of the Common Council of the City of Columbia City, Indiana, Adopting Indiana Code 5-23 and Taking Certain Other Actions Related Thereto.

Mayor Daniel explained this was the resolution regarding the BOT that he talked about at the last meeting. He shared that, historically, the city has taken on the design-bid-build approach for procurement, meaning that we design a project, put it out for bid, and then build it. He explained that many times the builder is not an engineer and the way it may have been engineered does not exactly work and so now there is a change order that the city gets stuck with. He advised there are also timeline situations where a project may be extended because we are working with a lot of different individuals and it just becomes cumbersome. He noted that this resolution was to go the BOT route, which is build, operate, transfer and basically means the city will effectively make a request for qualifications and proposals, select a firm, negotiate with that firm, and then officially select a firm. He explained the selected firm would go through the design and come up with a maximum guaranteed price. He advised that anything over the maximum guaranteed price, that was not directed by us, the firm would eat the cost but anything under the maximum guaranteed price, we would negotiate how that savings would be split. He continued to explain that with the BOT process, the selected firm is able to go to individual contractors to get the best price for us, and certainly for them. He noted that one thing he really likes about BOT is that we can mandate the use of local contractors; we would have a lot more control over those pieces. He advised BOT is becoming a favored process with a lot of cities in Northeast Indiana because of the speed and flexibility of the process and certainly the no change order thing is a massive thing for us. He explained the first step of the process is that the Council pass a resolution adopting what Indiana Code says in the BOT process, which is what this resolution is.

Tad Varga questioned who would be the arbitrator in the negotiations to make sure that it is amiable and fair for both parties. Mayor Daniel explained that after we agree upon the guaranteed maximum price, there will be a contract written that will state all of that stuff from the outset, before anything is built. He stated that ultimately, both parties will end up benefiting from that savings, but the other side of that is we also do not want to cheapskate it either.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Resolution 2025-18. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

POLICY CHANGES UPDATES Gary Parrett shared that they have been working on some extensive policy changes for the police department, just trying to get things up to date. He reported that for the last two decades, they have worked a 28-day, 171-hour schedule and were changing their schedule to a 14-day, 80-hour work schedule. He advised they filled out the proper paperwork and filed it with the clerk's office. He read the changes under Section 4.4 Work Scheduling and noted that the Chief of Police will determine the actual work schedule. He reported that on October 1st, they transitioned to a 12- and 8-hour work schedule, and it is working well. He advised that coverage has improved, and the officers seem to be happier with the new structure. He added that they also made changes in the command staff and detective positions, which has created a fresh start and brought renewed energy to the department.

Chief Parrett explained the next policy change was regarding daylight savings time. He advised that it changed a year or so ago and had caused a lot of havoc throughout the department so were trying to get that squared away. He explained for the springtime change, any employee who is working during the spring daylight savings time change will be paid for actual work hours of 7 hours. He advised the second part of that policy he is going to ask Beth to change it to state, 'the Chief, the Deputy Chief or the designee may offer options to come in an hour early or an hour late or use personal, vacation, or flex time to make up that hour....'. He advised then with the fall time change, they would obviously be compensated for 9 hours.

Chief Parrett continued with Bereavement Leave changes. He explained that since they went to the 12-hour work schedule, they needed to obviously make it align with the 12 hours. He advised he did talk to Beth and Leslee on the number of days given so that it aligns with and makes sense with the 12-hour work schedule, so there will be a minor change there.

Police Department Report: Gary Parrett gave an update on the tornado siren installations and reported that he took the four applicants to Indianapolis for the psychological and the physical testing but there is a 10 to 14 day waiting process. He advised that the Public Safety Festival went well and were gearing up for the Skeleton Festival. He shared that Sergeant Calhoun submitted his letter of resignation and will be transitioning into the private sector for new employment opportunities; he requested permission from the Board of Works to open up a lateral process, which they granted. He advised he was working on other benefits like personal and vacation time to accommodate the 12-hour work schedule.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the policy changes as presented by Chief Parrett. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

RESOLUTION 2025-20 EXCESS LEVY APPEAL Mayor Daniel shared that we are a growing community, and as we have done in the past, we have the ability to do an excess levy appeal. He explained that basically says because of our growth, we should have some ability to flex that maximum growth quotient in our tax levy. He shared that Buzz Krohn's office put together the excess levy appeal but had to be accepted by the Council. Leslee Robinson advised we then have to get it submitted to the State Board of Accounts by October 20.

Mayor Daniel stated as a reminder, they do a three-year growth factor, and it depends on how the growth is. He noted that we obviously are a growing community, so we have some ability to flex that, especially now with the caps and the decrease in the amount of money we are going to have.

He advised it ends up being about an additional \$293,000, which is a big deal for us and is a little more than what we were expecting to lose. Leslee Robinson added that they just found out last Friday that we were eligible for this. She agreed that \$293,000 was a big deal and thus the reason why they made a call to push the adoption of the budget back to next Friday.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Resolution 2025-20 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Resolution 2025-20 Petition to Appeal for an Increase Above the Maximum Levy.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Resolution 2025-20. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

PLANNING COMMISSION AND TREE BOARD APPOINTMENT Jennifer Romano reported that she would be stepping off the Plan Commission and Tree Board so opens up a position to be filled. She noted there were some guidelines for the Plan Commission. Mayor Daniel advised that it needed to be an elected official or someone inside city government.

Dan Weigold mentioned that Leslee Robinson volunteered to fill the Plan Commission position unless someone else would like to serve.

Jennifer Romano advised anyone in Whitley County could serve on the Tree Board. Tad Varga mentioned that he had an idea of someone and would let Dan know.

Tad Varga nominated Leslee Robinson for the Plan Commission appointment. Dan Weigold seconded the nomination, nomination passed unanimously.

The Tree Board appointment was tabled until the next meeting.

ART COMMISSION APPOINTMENT This appointment was tabled until the next meeting

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Mike Shoda** – the booster station took a bad hit from the substation outage and blew up the VFD that runs one of the pumps and it also took out the SCADA system. He advised Peerless Midwest was able to get the pump replaced and he continues to work to get the SCADA back up. He reported they then had a fuse blow on well 8 but the electric department was able to change it out and get it back up running. He reported that SURF bored through a storm drain at South Whitley Street and Hanna but they are going to be responsible for the costs to repair it. He reported that Wigent's will be laying the water line on Jeffrey Drive, but his guys will do the taps. **Chip Hill** – had the ribbon cutting for the Blue River Trail and were moving ahead with the ADA compliance for the railroad crossing. **Matt Heiden** – Mother/Son event went really well again this year. They finished up JFL this weekend playing at the high school and some of his guys worked with the street department for a short piece of the trail. **Kelly Cearbaugh** – concrete crew helped with a 400 ft stretch of the trail in Columbia Shores, they finished limb pickup for the year and were starting to transition into leaf pickup. They received their certificate of approval letter from Purdue LTAP so that they can apply for Community Crossings projects and two of his guys have been helping wastewater clean lift

stations with the jet machine. **Tom LaRue** – Update on repairs to Truck 101 and Truck 107. He advised the Family Safety Festival went well and they were thinking of new ideas for next year.

Mayor Daniel shared reports from Mike Cook, Terry Wherry and Shawn Lickey.

YOUTH COUNCIL Anna Lortie reported that they talked about the plans for the city and asked the Mayor about all the rumors they have heard. She shared that they are learning about county government this year and took a pre-test, then played a game about what they learned based off of what they got wrong on the test. She advised for lunch they went to The Square and their service project was to clean up the trails.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel reported that he would be hosting the Mayors and Commissioners Caucus at the new high school. He advised work was being done in his office as a result of a water leak that created issues and was being paid for by insurance. He shared he would be out of the office Monday through Thursday for the AIM Ideas Summit which is the annual Cities and Towns Conference. He introduced Ryan Adamson who was elected to replace Jenny Middleton on December 1st, as the new Southeast District City Council member. He also reported that Stacey Petrovas was elected as our new County Commissioner.

ARTS COMMISSION Jennifer Romano reported that the Arts Commission was currently working on this year's calendar. She advised that this year they were doing historic artists of Whitley County so will be something new and different. She stated that they will have biographical sketches and are partnering with the museum on that.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTING CONTEST Jennifer Romano reminded people to start thinking about the municipal lighting contest. She advised decorations should be up by December 1st and if there were any displays that should be strongly considered to send her an email at jromano@columbiacity.net.

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Tad Varga reported that there were a lot of things going on, they finalized the swap of parking lots with the County; the lot at the corner of Line and Jackson for the parking lot the County had at the corner of Washington and Van Buren Street.

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

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson