

COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2025
6:00 PM

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Present
Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson – Present
Attorney Marcia McNagy – Present

Council Members

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

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members present, except Jennifer Middleton. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance lead by Isabella and Eduardo Covarrubias.

MINUTES Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the October 14, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Tad Varga seconded the motion, Jennifer Romano, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold approved, Brent Bockelman abstained.

Dan Weigold made a motion to approve the October 28, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, Brent Bockelman, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold approved, Jennifer Romano abstained.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve the November 3, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, Brent Bockelman, Tad Varga and Dan Weigold approved, Jennifer Romano abstained.

Dan Weigold made a motion to approve the October 24, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-21 – 2026 SALARY ORDINANCE Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-21 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-21 an ordinance to be known as the 2026 salary range and benefit ordinance.

Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson explained the proposed changes. She pointed out that the hours for communications were changed to 2080 from 1952. Gary Parret noted that with the 5/2/5/3 schedule, 1952 hours was the average. It was questioned whether to pass the ordinance as is or to adjust back. Leslee Robinson suggested Council could pass the ordinance knowing that she would have the correction made for second reading.

Mike Shoda noted the maximum wage listed for his certified plant operator, who has two licenses, was a dollar less than the maximum for a street department equipment operator. He felt

they should at least be equal. Mayor Daniel advised he was comfortable with bumping that up, but at the end of the day, it was an ordinance so it would be up to the Council. Council members were in agreement to increase the maximum for water certified plant operator to \$33.

Brent Bockelman questioned whether this had already been reviewed by the department heads. Leslee Robinson advised that most of them had seen it. Mike Cook stated that he made changes to wastewater last year and tweaked it this year, so he was ok with the numbers.

Dan Weigold made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-21 with the two changes that have been mentioned as presented on first reading. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-22 – ELECTED OFFICIALS SALARIES Dan Weigold made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-22 by title only. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-22 an ordinance fixing the annual salaries of all elected officials for the City of Columbia City, Indiana, effective December 27, 2025 for the year 2026.

Mayor Daniel explained this ordinance was for elected officials and there was no change from this year to next year; there were no additional dollars set aside for elected officials in this ordinance.

Tad Varga made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-22 on first reading. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

FIRE DEPARTMENT QUARTERMASTER JOB DESCRIPTION Tom LaRue explained that all of their turnout gear has a 10-year shelf life, and they have to track every piece of it in terms of who has it and when it is expiring. He advised they also have to track all of their radios, pagers, and truck-mounted radios in the same way. He reported that Lance Beers currently does the radios and pagers, and Troy Knefelkamp handles all of the turnout gear. He advised that they get compensated an additional \$1,000 for doing that above and beyond what they normally do.

Mayor Daniel confirmed he was looking for approval of the Quartermaster position description. Chief LaRue advised he was.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the position description for Quartermaster. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

POLICE & FIRE POLICY CHANGE - OVERTIME AND COMPENSATORY TIME Tom LaRue explained in their policy manual regarding overtime and compensatory time, the Chief and Deputy Chief were exempt employees. He advised that the Fire Marshal and the Fire Trainer were also both day shift positions and this policy essentially allows for anything over 40 hours that they would get as overtime.

Brent Bockelman questioned a situation that would cause them to work overtime. Chief LaRue explained they may work fire runs or overtime was offered for full-time guys to come in and help with the Veterans Marathon, and then anything they work outside of their normal hours that they are needed for.

Gary Parrett advised that the Police Chief and Deputy Chief were the same as fire in that they were exempt employees. He explained for the non-exempt employees they had been working on a flex time schedule for when they would have to come in for court or work an event, but flex time had to be used and could not be saved. He stated that they have gone to a 14-day work schedule, and they can now get comp time and accumulate up to 80 hours. Mayor Daniel questioned how long they could bank the comp time. Chief Parrett advised they could bank it as long as they want. Mayor Daniel confirmed they could not go over 80 hours. Chief Parrett advised that was correct. Mayor Daniel confirmed with Tom LaRue that was the same for fire. Chief LaRue advised that was correct, but their maximum was 96 hours, which was 4 days.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve Policy 4.7 and 4.7.1 as presented. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

DEPARTMENT REPORT – FIRE Tom LaRue gave an update on Truck 107, advised that the new engine was coming in earlier than expected so Mike McGregor has been updating the equipment quotes, Rhys was researching new radios, Sierra Wireless stuff is up and running really well and he has been working on performance evaluations.

RESOLUTION 2025-23 – NORTHEAST INDIANA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AUTHORITY Dan Weigold made a motion to read Resolution 2025-23 by title only. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Resolution 2025-23 a resolution of the City of Columbia City, Indiana, approving of the appointment of the members of the Board for the Northeast Indiana Regional Development Authority.

Mayor Daniel advised this was a formality more than anything and reminded council members of the County Council's approval of a Regional Development Authority, which made the City eligible for READI dollars and other things that are under that grouping. He reported that the timeline for the Regional Development Authority is at that point where it needs to be re-upped by the different county and city members. He pointed out under the third whereas statement in the resolution that because we are a third-class city, we automatically became members of the Authority by virtue of the county councils. He shared that they have requested we give the blessing for the reappointment of the five current members of the Board, those being James Kahn, owner of Baker Street, Hoppy Gnome and multiple other restaurants, Jeff Turner, Bob Marshall, Andrew Briggs, and Gene Donaghy.

Brent Bockelman made a motion to approve Resolution 2025-23 as presented. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-24 AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 96 – PARKS Brent Bockelman made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-24 by title only. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-24 an ordinance amending Chapter 96, Parks Department of Title IX, of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Mayor Daniel shared he was looking through Section 96.06 (G) of our Code of Ordinances regarding Parks and noticed language in there about not swimming in our parks. He felt that could be a problem with having the aquatic center, so this just clarifies that it is okay to swim in

the city pool or the splash pad, but not necessarily in any of the ponds or other things like that.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-24 on first reading. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-25 – SUPPLEMENT TO THE CODE OF ORDINANCES Tad Varga made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-25 by title only. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-25, an ordinance enacting and adopting a supplement to the Code of Ordinances for the City of Columbia City, Indiana, and declaring an emergency.

Mayor Daniel explained this was our semi-annual adoption of the supplement to the Code of Ordinances that goes on the American Legal Publishing website that is accessible to everybody so that they can see the updated laws.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve Ordinance 2025-25 on first and final reading. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2025-26 – REZONE JBW PROPERTIES Nathan Bilger explained this was a rezoning request for one lot in the Tanglewood Subdivision on West Business 30. He advised it was currently zoned R-2, and the request was to rezone it to R-3 for the intention of constructing a four-unit townhome. He explained that R-2 allows for duplexes but does not allow for anything larger than that. He reported it went to the Planning Commission last week and received a unanimous unfavorable recommendation and has been forwarded to the Council. He advised he has tried to reach out to the petitioner to get more clarification on whether he wanted to withdraw or let it ride but there has been no response. He stated since it has not been withdrawn, the ordinance still needed to be adopted or denied.

Tad Varga assumed all of the signatures were either neighbors of that property or in the region. Nathan Bilger advised he had not checked every single one of them but most of them were neighbors in Tanglewood or on the north side of Dogwood.

Chip Hill reiterated that the Planning Commission voted against it and suggested the Council follow their recommendation. He advised it was heavily discussed; it would stick out very badly and it was not appropriate for spot zoning, as one of the residents mentioned. He advised they would be changing a residential district into a multi-multifamily district.

Dan Weigold noted there were setback issues as well and it just did not seem to fit.

Leslee Robinson advised the setback was a huge concern for her with being right there on Business 30. She noted that the driveway was going to be shorter and if there were multi-families who may have 2-3 cars in there, there was concerns for them trying to back out and then potentially parking along Business 30. She advised that she loved the idea and the concept but just not there.

Nathan Bilger mentioned that one other thing to consider was there were no restrictions in building two two-family dwellings on the lot under the existing R-2, so that could be a backup.

He noted that it was more cost effective for him to do one structure with four units rather than two structures, each with two units.

Leslee Robinson felt another issue was they were going to be rentals and would not be sold as individual townhouses.

Tad Varga made a motion to read Ordinance 2025-26 by title only. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson read Ordinance 2025-26, an ordinance amending the zoning classification of certain property from the R-2 two-family residential district to the R-3 multi-family residential district.

Brent Bockelman agreed to not go against the Planning Commission but did think it was a good idea and need to take a good look at places that would be suitable for it.

Tad Varga mentioned in just looking at the layout, it seemed like it fit oddly in that lot.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to deny Ordinance 2025-26. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS Mayor Daniel advised these appointments would go into effect January 1. He noted that Tad Varga and Scott Gates were the current Redevelopment Commission appointments.

Mayor Daniel confirmed with Tad Varga that he would like to continue serving. Tad Varga advised he would.

Mayor Daniel questioned if Council would just want to re-up Scott and Tad or have further discussion. Dan Weigold suggested they just re-up both.

Dan Weigold made a motion to re-up Scott Gates and Tad Varga to the Redevelopment Commission. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, Brent Bockelman, Jennifer Romano and Dan Weigold approved, Tad Varga abstained.

ARTS COMMISSION APPOINTMENT Mayor Daniel reported that Doug Egolf was up for reappointment at the end of the year. Jennifer Romano advised he has been a great asset to the committee, and he would like to continue serving.

Tad Varga made a motion to reappoint Doug Egolf to another term on the Arts Commission. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

TREE BOARD APPOINTMENT Mayor Daniel noted this was on the agenda by mistake.

PLAN COMMISSION REPORT Nathan Bilger reported that permit numbers for year to date for the city itself were not looking great but total number of permits were holding their own compared to the last couple of years, which were down from prior years. He advised single family dwellings were about half of where we have been in the last several years, a lot to do with

lot availability. He reported that Walmart was looking at doing an internal remodeling, probably after Christmas and then their small addition is still slated to happen after the remodeling. He shared that Valvoline, where Bob Evans was, is bidding out their contractors now and is the last step for them before they actually have the permit issued. He thought that would probably start moving around the first of the year, sometime in the spring at latest. He reported that there will be a comp plan steering committee meeting coming up at the beginning of December, so the executive committee has been continuing to meet. Mayor Daniel felt we would start to see the new goals and some of the new pieces of that puzzle coming together for that plan. He advised there will be a lot of feedback taken from the steering committee as to whether those goals were the right goals or if we need to move forward or move backward.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Chip Hill** – doing requests for proposals and qualifications on the amphitheater and the jail, RDC has asked him to do one on the Washington and Van Buren Street parking lot, still have paint and a little concrete work to do at the railroad for the trail. **Mike Shoda** – reported on main breaks that have since been repaired. **Gary Parrett** – update on the four new applicants, Halloween event was a success as well as the Tractor Supply Touch-A-Truck event in support of their Hometown Hero Program, Veterans Marathon went well and gearing up for the Lighted Christmas Parade that is on November 28th, hope to get the battery boxes installed for the tornado sirens in the near future. **Mike Cook** – update on the digester project.

YOUTH COUNCIL Zoe Meyers reported that they worked on their plans for their pickleball tournament, went to Autumn Trace and spent some time with the residents there and then after lunch took a tour of the new jail.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel gave department reports for Matt Heiden, Kelly Cearbaugh and Terry Wherry.

Mayor Daniel reported that on Friday and next Monday he would be traveling for AIM Regional Conversations talking about Senate Enrolled Act 1 and how it impacts revenue to local governments and specifically some of the changes that AIM is proposing, especially on the income tax side and some of the modernization of government side things. He advised that the last three days of next week, he will be in Salt Lake City at National League of Cities.

ARTS COMMISSION Jennifer Romano reported that the Arts Commission was putting together a historical Whitley County artists and creatives calendar. She advised the goal was to have that ready by Friday the 5th of December and will have some here at City Hall as well as other locations. She shared also on the 5th the Arts Commission will be partnering with the Historical Society and having an Arts Marketplace where local artists can set up. She advised there was no charge for that and if anyone was interested, they should contact her.

LIGHTED CHRISTMAS PARADE Jennifer Romano reported the Lighted Christmas parade will be November 28th and should contact her if anyone would like to participate.

RESIDENTIAL CHRISTMAS LIGHTING Jennifer Romano shared that it was not too late to decorate and get ready for the judging of Christmas lights. She advised they would try to judge

properties the week after Thanksgiving, if at all possible.

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

Attest:

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson