

**COMMON COUNCIL  
TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026  
6:00 PM**

Mayor Ryan Daniel – Present  
Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry – Present  
Attorney Marcia McNagny – Present

**Council Members**

Ryan Adamson – Present  
Brent Bockelman – Present  
Jennifer Romano – Present  
Tad Varga – Absent  
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members except Tad Varga present. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

**MINUTES** Brent Bockelman made a motion to approve the February 24, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Ryan Adamson seconded the motion, Ryan Adamson, Brent Bockelman and Dan Weigold approved, Jennifer Romano abstained.

**WC CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & VISITOR CENTER ANNUAL UPDATE** Jennifer Esterline was present representing the Whitley County Chamber of Commerce to give an update on the past year's events. She shared that the Whitley County Chamber of Commerce has worked hard to support economic growth, strengthen community connections, and promote Columbia City and the surrounding county as a vibrant place to live, work, and visit. She reported that one of their biggest successes was hosting the largest Jeep event in the region this past May at Paige's Crossing. She advised they welcomed over 300 jeeps and even had a couple come down from Canada. She reported that they also hosted a very successful Chamber golf outing, bringing together 25 teams and more than 50 local businesses. She shared that promotion of our area remains one of their key priorities and each year they print thousands of visitors' guides. She advised that these guides highlight local attractions, businesses, dining, recreation, and events, helping to tell the story of Whitley County. She reported that the Chamber works closely with many local events and community traditions. She stated that over the past year, they helped support activities such as the Skeleton Festival, the Lil' Pumpkins on the Square, and numerous other celebrations throughout the county. She reported that in addition to the events and promotions, the Chamber is actively involved in community leadership. She advised they currently sit on four different boards, including organizations that support our youngest residents and our senior population, from Children's First to the Council on Aging. She shared that they also assist with the city's comprehensive planning efforts and local economic development initiatives, ensuring the voice of our business community and residents are represented.

Jennifer Esterline reported that their work extends beyond the local level. She advised that the Chamber regularly attends legislative reviews, state house functions, the Defense Summit Child Care Coalition meetings, and discussions surrounding the local food movement. She advised that

they were able to consult with and develop the Test Kitchen over at the Marshall Building, and she personally became certified as a state and Serv-Safe food instructor to assist the community in becoming trained certificate holders. She stated that this also supports our food servers in our school district, local eateries, and food service establishments.

Jennifer Esterline stated that in looking ahead to the summer of 2026, the Chamber will be taking on an exciting new role as the leadership of the Whitley County Farmers Market. She advised the goal is to bring back a stronger and more vibrant Saturday morning market for both residents and visitors. She reported that as part of that effort, she will also serve as the registered SNAP and WIC representative for the Whitley County Farmers Market. She advised that this was an important step in making sure families across our community, especially those that may not always be represented, have fresh and locally grown food and healthy options.

Jennifer Esterline noted that the Chamber's vision was simple; to cultivate a vibrant community of Whitley County with local engagement, the attractions to attract talent and organizations and embrace growth. She shared that they all, the Board and herself, appreciate the partnership they have with the City of Columbia City and look forward to continuing to work together to build our community forward.

**ORDINANCE 2026-8 – AMENDMENT TO CHAPTER 100** Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2026-8 by title only. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Ordinance 2026-8 an ordinance restating and amending Chapter 100 of Title IX of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Columbia City, Indiana.

Mayor Daniel reminded Council that this was the ordinance that adds in the opportunity for fees to be assessed for downtown events. He shared that the Board of Works had a fair amount of conversation about those fees and felt they were still in the development process. He felt the Board was generally in agreement on a per block standard fee. He advised that he and Ryan Adamson also had conversations about police protection. He shared that the Board of Works came up with the idea that maybe before the next council meeting, have individuals get together to hammer out some of those minor details about public safety where we effectively mandate in some form police protection at events. He advised as events and our community grows, it makes sense to have some layer in which there is mandated protection, and this ordinance provides the opportunity for the Board of Works to establish some of those fee schedules.

Jennifer Romano questioned if there was a plan where these fees would be posted. Mayor Daniel advised they would be part of the actual street closure permit.

Jennifer Romano questioned if there has been comments from any of the groups or organizations who put on events. Mayor Daniel shared that there has been some conversations from Brent from an Old Settler's standpoint and we know that First Fridays has had conversations with the clerk's office. He mentioned that JoAnn Bird was at the Board of Works and gave some really good comments from a downtown business perspective. He advised that they have not talked to everybody but have started to try and figure out what the general sense is.

Dan Weigold shared that things have changed where safety is more of an issue. He noted that we have had situations in the past, and the potential is always there. He felt it was a good idea to take precautions because we just never know when something crazy is going to happen.

Mayor Daniel felt it was a scenario where it takes into account the current situation, both financially as well as safety. He felt it also creates the kind of incentive where if you are going to take up multiple blocks, then you need to make sure you are filling them, because it is not necessarily helpful for the downtown businesses. He did not think, by any means, we were trying to make up 100% of the costs incurred to the city, but at least something to help offset some of those costs. He explained that this stems from the fact that during a past First Friday event, we had some issues with the bathroom that created a lot of work for our custodian staff. He stressed that we were not trying to get more money out of the event organizers but are trying to take the totality of the situation into account.

Ryan Adamson questioned if Council would vote this forward or would it go back to the Board of Public Works. Mayor Daniel explained this ordinance is just codifying the fact that there is a fee structure of some sort that the Board of Works would then create. Ryan Adamson questioned if once the fee structure is established, if it would come back to Council. Mayor Daniel advised that once the fee schedule is set, then it is done. He explained the reason why it is put in this way is because in the past we have had fee structures put into the ordinance and then every time we change the fees, we have to change the ordinance so instead, put that on the administrative board, which is the Board of Works, so it can be adjusted regularly rather than it being codified into an ordinance.

Ryan Adamson questioned if the Board was in an agreement, as far as law enforcement goes, that cost would be implemented in this. Mayor Daniel advised the Board had that conversation and were in agreement that whatever figure is determined that it would somehow be incorporated into that fee structure. Ryan Adamson stated that he did not want to vote on it and then it get lost. Mayor Daniel advised that his plan was, by the next Board of Works meeting, to have a structure the Board can vote on.

Ryan Adamson made a motion to approve Ordinance 2026-8 on second and final reading. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

**DEPARTMENT REPORTS** **Shawn Lickey** – update on outage at West substation due to a raccoon, North substation is going to be tested in two weeks, update on Washington D.C. conference, getting quotes to repair the MSF roof and guttering, starting interviews for our open position next week. **Mike Shoda** – continue with the lead line replacement program, fan for the aeration tank should be back next week. **Chip Hill** - wrapping up the closeout for phase 1A of Eagle Park which included the skate park structure and pickleball structures, continuing to work with developers on the jail. **Matt Heiden** – broke up the concrete path to the four main fields to fix a water line that busted at the end of the season last year, have the pickleball nets out at the aquatic center and the basketball courts are open, baseball practices start at the end of March with opening day on April 25th. **Terry Wherry** - door controllers installed on the front doors at the jail, worked with SOS over the weekend to get certifications installed into our firewall so it continues to operate properly, met with Shawn and Matt to look at putting gas pumps in at Morsches Park, building a new NVR recording device for the security camera system. **Kelly**

**Cearbaugh** - talked with Pat Connor today from Purdue, LTAP about taking classes to become Pacer Raider Certified, pairing up with Shawn's department to cut trees, continue to run the sweeper and hopefully get some alleys graded as soon as it dries up. **Gary Parrett** – update on new officers, worked with EMA on the Indiana severe weather tornado siren testing, received a resignation letter from Officer Campbell. **Mike Cook** - started cleaning the UV structure and will reinstall UV bulbs in the next couple of weeks, cleaned the EQ basin and ordered the chemicals for that structure, first quarter ARV inspections for the Steel Dynamics force maintenance taking place. **Tom LaRue** – radio presentation at next Council meeting.

**800 Radio discussion** – Ryan Adamson questioned Gary Parrett if he was going to replace their radios as well and if so, were they going to do it in coordination with the fire department. Gary Parrett shared that he talked to Tom about getting in on his bid. Tom LaRue reported that they talked to ERS, and they advised that there were no discounts; we would have to get huge amounts before qualifying for any discounts. Ryan Adamson questioned what was considered 'huge amount'. Tom LaRue advised he would have Toby Fralick report on that at the next meeting.

Mayor Daniel questioned if that was for replacing the dual band radios that we already have or just getting more. Gary Parrett advised it would be to replace them.

Dan Weigold questioned if these new radios will communicate with the Next Gen 911 that is being pushed on everyone. He advised that the county GIS is preparing their GIS data for this Next Gen 911 and wondered if these new radios will communicate statewide the way the state is dreaming that it will. Tom LaRue could not recall the details and advised that Toby Fralick spearheaded all of this. Ryan Adamson thought the answer was yes.

Gary Parrett advised he did talk with Motorola a couple years ago and they obviously have the newest and greatest radios and have been working with our radios now.

**Tom LaRue report continued** – update on Truck 101 repairs, breathing air compressor is operational and listed on Shop Garage site for sale, their new compressor will be here sometime in April, Kyle Francis started state certified Fire Officer Strategy and Tactics class.

**YOUTH COUNCIL** Lilly Joseph was present representing the Youth Council and reported on their activities from their last meeting.

**ORDINANCE 2026-9 – AMENDMENT TO VACATION OF PUBLIC WAY – BALLARD**  
Mayor Daniel tabled this until the next meeting. Attorney McNagny shared there was a problem with the legal description.

**MAYOR REPORT** Mayor Daniel reported the final comprehensive plan steering committee is scheduled for tomorrow at 1:00 p.m. and shared that at the first council meeting in April the comprehensive plan update draft will be coming in front of the council. He reported that the State of the City address is on Friday at the library and is being hosted by the Whitley County Chamber of Commerce. He stated that he will be heading to Washington D.C. on Friday evening for the National League of Cities Conference and will be back on Wednesday. He reported that

AIM has their annual legislative webinar wrap-up session on Thursday if anyone is interested and then there will be a ribbon cutting for A Hope Center at their new location downtown on Friday the 20th.

**ARTS COMMISSION** Jennifer Romano reported that the Columbia City Arts Commission is sponsoring Columbia City High Schools art show for grades K to 12 on March 21<sup>st</sup> and all funds raised through that event go to provide scholarships to students.

**CITY WIDE TRASH PICKUP** Discussion took place on the parameters, rules and regulations of the city-wide trash pickup days. Mayor Daniel noted that residents are able to start putting items out two weeks prior to junk pickup.

**CONCRETE BARRIERS** Ryan Adamson advised that he talked with Tom LaRue about coming up with a map where they would feel comfortable if they had to get apparatus in or out of an event.

Dan Weigold questioned if we had concrete barriers. It was advised that we do not. Ryan Adamson did not think that should fall on the city to provide and would be a cost to the people hosting the event. He shared that there were companies that can drop them off and then pick them up. He advised he was safety minded but was also cognizant of the fact that the taxpayers do not need to fund those kinds of things. He stated that he was all for festivals but felt if someone wants to host one then they should pay for it.

**EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT – ED SCOTT** Ed Scott, Director of Emergency Management Office and Homeland Security for Whitley County, was present to share that one of his goals was to get more involved at the local level in all four of our cities and towns. He advised the idea behind it is to familiarize everyone with his department. He shared that they are a resource for everyone and want to make sure that is known.

**PUBLIC COMMENT AT MEETINGS** Mayor Daniel advised that last time after having conversations about the rules and etiquette during meetings, he got to talking a little bit with Leslee afterwards and wanted to make sure the council was okay with it, but felt public comment should probably be at the beginning of the meeting rather than at the end of the meeting.

Council was in agreement with moving public comment to the beginning of the meeting.

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

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Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

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Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry

