

# CITY SCENE

City of Columbia City



## Celebrating America's 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

BY MAYOR RYAN L. DANIEL

Semiquincentennial. Hard to say, even harder to spell. Yet the meaning and celebration of the event will be hard to top! Columbia City and Whitley County are preparing to celebrate the semiquincentennial (or 250th) birthday of the United States with many different events showcasing our community's patriotism.

This year, the city is encouraging residents to decorate the exteriors of their homes with red, white, and blue decorations that can be seen both during the day and in the evening. This decorating contest will be judged beginning June 8, so get your decorations up now!

New veteran banners are up along State Road 9 and State Road 205 to honor some — although certainly not all — of our community's heroes. Thanks to the Historical Museum and the America 250 Committee for their work on this project. Art canvases will also be

displayed around the county, depicting the ideals of Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

On July 2, Columbia City Connect will host a Stars, Stripes, and Symphony event in downtown Columbia City (replacing the normal First Friday event) from 6:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.



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# Celebrating America's 250<sup>th</sup> Birthday!

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BY MAYOR RYAN DANIEL

During this free event, we will honor the men and women who have served our country with beloved patriotic music, historic readings, and special moments you won't want to miss.

On July 3, our community will continue the annual tradition of celebrating our independence at Morsches Park while adding a few unique twists this year. From 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., our parks department will host a celebration featuring food vendors, bounce houses, and music from The Band Cheyenne, with music starting at 7:00 p.m. Around 10 p.m., fireworks will light up the sky in a spectacular display celebrating America's 250th birthday! Trust me when I say you'll want to be at Morsches Park to see this in person.

Finally, on July 4, our community will open the 50-year-old time capsule that has sat in front of City Hall since 1976. The ceremony will begin at 1 p.m. in front of City Hall. Shortly after opening the time capsule, Whitley County will officially seal a new time capsule to be opened on America's 300th birthday in 2076. The Whitley County Historical Society will

collect letters from residents through June 12 for inclusion in this new time capsule.

Happy 250th Birthday, America. Columbia City is thankful to be the home of the free because of the brave. We hope all residents will join us in celebrating this semiquincentennial!

Until next time...





## The Parks' Busy Season is Here

BY MATT HEIDEN, PARKS SUPERINTENDENT

The Parks Department is very busy this time of year as we prepare for the bustle of summer. In preparation, we turn the water back on for the bathrooms and fix any problems that occurred while they were winterized. Additionally, all nets go back up, soccer fields are painted, and ballfields are groomed.

Soon, we will open Dreamland Pavilion, the old FOP building that was given back to the park. You will be able to reserve the Dreamland Pavilion online or in our office, with a goal of the pavilion reopening in November or December of this year.

The pool opened on Memorial Day weekend, and we look forward to another busy season as the weather gets warmer. We anticipate the new amphitheater will be under construction later this summer, which will make Eagle Park especially busy—please take care when driving through the park.

As always, we are very busy with baseball, softball, soccer, and the swim team. We are also holding meetings about football to prepare for the JFL season.

The Parks Department has once again reached out to Indiana Wild and Animal Grahams. Indiana Wild is an animal rescue in Warren, Indiana, and they will educate everyone about a variety of animals that they bring with them on June 23. Animal Grahams is based out of North Manchester, and they'll have animals for the public to socialize with on August 8. Both of these events will be free to attend.

July 3 will be the city fireworks celebration, as it is every year. We hope to see you there for family fun and entertainment before the fireworks show. We will also have food trucks and vendors, as in past years. We are excited to begin our busy summer!

## Service Line Inventory

BY MIKE SHODA, WATER SUPERINTENDENT

Over the past couple of years, the Columbia City Water Department has been working to collect a service line inventory for all service lines. This inventory includes both the customer side and the utility side of the service line running to the customer's home. During this inventory collection process, all identified lead service lines will be scheduled for replacement. These replacements will take place between 2027 and 2037 and will include all lead service lines from the water main to the inside of the customer's home, at no charge to the customer.

Columbia City has partnered with the GLO (Get the Lead Out) team through the EPA. GLO has assisted with several aspects of the inventory collection, including door knocking and the current task of potholing. Throughout the rest of the year, the Columbia City Water Department, along with assistance from GLO, will continue potholing the remaining 975 unknown service lines in town. This means that if we have not been able to physically identify the service line coming into your home, we will be potholing outside your home near the meter pit to identify the service line.

If you have any questions please contact the water department at 260-248-5118.

**“These replacements will take place between 2027 and 2037 and will include all lead service lines from the water main to the inside of the customer's home, at no charge to the customer.”**



# Fire Safety During Dry Weather

BY TOM LARUE, FIRE CHIEF

Summer is here, and if this summer follows recent trends, it will be hot and dry. Here are a few simple reminders to help keep our city safe.

Under dry conditions, summer activities such as grilling and setting off fireworks have the potential to cause large fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association, grills and fireworks cause thousands of fires every year. Always use caution when handling anything that produces heat or could produce a spark and take extra precautions during especially dry weather.

## Dry Weather Safety Tips:

- During dry weather, keep a fire extinguisher nearby when using outdoor cooking equipment, such as a grill.
- When finished with charcoal grilling, allow the coals to cool completely before disposing of them in a metal container.
- If a burn ban is in effect and you have questions, call the fire department to inquire about which activities are included in the restriction.
- Never throw a lit cigarette out the window of a vehicle. It could land on dry grass or be blown into dry vegetation and start a fire.

# Staying Green

BY LESLEE ROBINSON, CLERK-TREASURER

We all love to see a beautiful green lawn, but many people worry about what will happen to their water and sewer bill if they water their lawn during those “dog days of summer” when we have little to no rain. We’ve got you covered with our Summer Sewage Program!

This automatic program caps your sewage costs during the billing months of July, August, September, and October. The cap is based on your water usage between March 12 and April 12. You will still pay for the water you use, but your sewage charges will be capped. If your usage during the Summer Sewage Program does not reach the cap, you will only be charged for your actual usage.

Don't forget to keep that beautiful green yard mowed so you don't end up with a grass violation.

Speaking of green, we also offer paperless billing and FREE direct withdrawal of your utility bills from a checking or savings account through our office. Stop by our office or give us a call at (260) 248-5100 to get set up. Save time, money, and trees.

# Spring Momentum in Columbia City

BY CHIP HILL, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

Columbia City is buzzing with progress this season as several long-anticipated projects move into their next chapters. From neighborhood improvements to arts-driven revitalization, the city is leaning into growth that strengthens both community life and local identity.

## Phase Three of Westgate Subdivision Moves Forward

Phase three of the Westgate subdivision is officially underway, bringing with it a series of infrastructure upgrades designed to improve safety, accessibility, and long-term livability. Residents can expect widened roads, new curbs, and added sidewalks, creating a more walkable and connected neighborhood. These enhancements reflect the city's commitment to thoughtful development that supports families, encourages outdoor activity, and prepares the area for future expansion.

## Eagle Park Amphitheater Set to Break Ground This Summer

One of the most anticipated additions to the community is the Eagle Park Amphitheater, with construction expected to begin this summer. The venue will serve as a new hub for concerts, performances, school events, and community gatherings. With its central location and flexible design, the amphitheater is poised to become a signature destination—bringing arts, culture, and entertainment to residents of all ages.

## Baker Park: A Hidden Gem Poised for an Artistic Transformation

The Columbia City Arts Commission has set its sights on one of the city's most tucked-away treasures: Baker Park. Long considered a hidden oasis, the park is now the focus of an ambitious vision to transform it into an art lover's utopia. Plans include curated installations, creative landscaping, and interactive art experiences that invite visitors to explore, linger, and connect. The initiative aims to blend natural beauty with artistic expression, elevating Baker Park into a cultural destination unlike anything else in the region.

## First Fridays & Farmers Market Return

With the warmer weather, two beloved traditions have recently begun for another vibrant season. First Fridays once again brings music, food, vendors, and family-friendly fun to downtown, energizing the heart of the city each month. Meanwhile, the Farmers Market offers fresh produce, handmade goods, and a chance to support local growers and artisans. Together, these events continue to strengthen community ties and celebrate the creativity and resilience of Columbia City's residents.



## WCCS Welcomes a New Superintendent: Dr. Trent Lehman

BY ASHLEY BUCKLES, MAYOR'S EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT



Whitley County Consolidated Schools has a new superintendent joining the school corporation. Dr. Trent Lehman hails from Berne, Indiana, but he has quickly fallen in love with our community. From our small-town values to our growth mindset, Dr. Lehman feels that Whitley County is exactly the type of community he is eager to serve.

Dr. Lehman and his wife, Cathy, have been married for 31 years. They are proud parents of five children, and he will soon become a grandfather in October. He has a long history with basketball, having won a national championship at Grace College before coaching high school basketball for several years. To this day, Dr. Lehman still enjoys playing basketball weekly.

During his time at Grace College, Dr. Lehman studied biology and met his wife, Cathy. After graduation, he taught high school science at Eastern Greene High School near Bloomington, Indiana, and later at Speedway High School. In 2002, he led his team at Speedway to a basketball state title, which continues to be one of his most memorable accomplishments. After several years of teaching, he accepted an assistant principal position at Norwell High School.

He took a hiatus from administration after his wife miraculously recovered from a heart condition and he felt called to become involved with Athletes in Action, through which he traveled the world sharing the Gospel. He eventually returned to school administration and served as principal at Blackhawk Christian School and later at South Adams.

Dr. Lehman decided to further his education at Indiana State University, where he earned his Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. He was subsequently hired as superintendent at Bloomfield and later Southern Wells. When the superintendent position in Columbia City became available, Dr. Lehman's friends, Scott Moore and Rex Schrader, encouraged him to apply, ultimately leading him to his current position.

When asked about his most memorable moment as an educator, Dr. Lehman shared that while serving as principal at South Adams, he helped expand dual-credit and AP courses at the school. During his tenure, the school also achieved 4-Star School status on four separate occasions, meaning it ranked among the top 25% of schools in the state in four major categories. In addition, the high school earned recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School. Dr. Lehman shared that he is very goal-oriented and enjoys celebrating accomplishments as goals are achieved.

Finally, Dr. Lehman shared the most important lesson he would offer others: put God first. He encourages people to live by Biblical principles. He also noted that throughout his worldwide travels, he observed that people simply want to feel valued and important. His advice is to listen to others, make eye contact, value their opinions, and take a genuine interest in who they are.



# 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*

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

*3rd Tuesday of the Month*

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

*4th Monday of the Month*

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

Please check the City of Columbia City's Facebook page or [columbiacity.net](http://columbiacity.net) for meeting changes.

Meetings can be viewed live on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/@cityofcolumbiacityindiana](http://www.youtube.com/@cityofcolumbiacityindiana)