

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, APRIL 14, 2026
6:00 P.M.**

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 – Present
Daniel Weigold – Present

The Columbia City Common Council met in regular session with all members present. Mayor Daniel called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the March 24, 2026 meeting minutes as presented. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT There were no public comments.

COLUMBIA CITY CONNECT PRESENTATION Niki Keister with Columbia City Connect was present to give an update on their accomplishments from 2025. She reported that they were designated through Indiana Main Street and affiliated with the National Main Street Center, which means their work follows a proven, nationwide approach to strengthen downtowns through economic development, historic preservation, and community engagement. She shared that Columbia City Connect was one of more than 1,600 Main Street communities across the country and focus on creating experiences, supporting businesses, and giving people more reasons to come downtown. She reported that 2025 was a year of growth and momentum; one of their standout projects for 2025, and her personal favorite, was Windows into History. She explained that the project was funded through grants from Indiana Humanities and Indiana Landmarks, and it brought local history to life through storefront displays and was launched with a walking tour with esteemed local historians as the guide. She advised that it received regional attention and was a great example of how we can combine history, storytelling, and walkability to create a meaningful downtown experience. She reported that they also hosted a steamroller party as part of First Fridays and was funded by the Indiana Arts Commission. She shared that it was a really unique, large-scale public art experience that drew people in, not just locally, but from outside the community. She went on to report that in May, they introduced the Launchpad, which is their youth entrepreneurial market. She explained that they offered free booth spaces for young families, giving them a chance to sell products, test ideas, and gain real-world experience. She reported that they also partnered with the Columbia City Lions Club to grow Wheels of Whitley County. She shared that what started as a First Friday feature expanded in 2025 to a standalone event. She felt the growth just shows strong community interest and allows them to create a larger economic and tourism impact. She reported on another new event in 2025, which was the flower crawl. She explained that this encouraged people to visit multiple downtown businesses in a fun, interactive way. And then finally, they made progress with the downtown wayfinding signage. She advised that these signs help visitors better navigate downtown and discover businesses in key locations. She felt that overall, these efforts increased visibility, brought more people downtown, and created new opportunities for engagement but most importantly, they continue to build momentum for long-term economic vitality.

Niki Keister reported for 2026, they had a new initiative called Foodie February. She advised it was a month-long event to support local restaurants during a slower time of

year. She shared that they had a great response with over 800 receipts turned in, and even News Channel 15 came out to cover it with multiple live news segments. She felt it was a fun but intentional way to get people dining locally.

Niki Keister also proudly shared that Columbia City Connect was awarded National Main Street status. She explained that this recognition reflects the strength and consistency of the work happening here at the local level, from events and business support to historic preservation and community engagement. She stated that it means we are meeting national standards in how we approach downtown development as well it helps position Columbia City for additional opportunities, including increased visibility, stronger partnerships, and access to funding and resources that can continue to move our downtown forward.

Niki Keister reported that they are introducing a new event this year in honor of America's 250th called Stars, Stripes and Symphony and will be held on Thursday, July 2nd. She explained that this event is designed to be a large-scale community experience that brings people together downtown to celebrate our nation's history through music, performance, and storytelling. She shared that the event will feature patriotic musical performances by the Whitko Marching Band, Indian Springs Middle School Choir, a Dixieland Band, and the Whitley County Choir. She advised that it also will include civic readings and character performances, including Churubusco's fifth grade students reciting the preamble to the Constitution, the Harold Company Performers presenting the Declaration of Independence, Mrs. Abigail Adams reflecting on the founding of America, and President Abraham Lincoln delivering the Gettysburg Address.

Niki Keister reported that they have also introduced a new tool called Manage My Market for First Fridays which helps streamline vendor registration on the back end, making it easier and more efficient to manage events. She added that on the guest side, it allows them to create interactive maps so visitors can easily find vendors, activities, and businesses they are looking for. She advised that it was a big step forward for their organization and the event itself. She thanked the Council for their continued support of Columbia City Connect.

CORRECTED ORDINANCE 2025-27 – VACATION OF PUBLIC WAY Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Corrected Ordinance 2025-27 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Corrected Ordinance 2025-27 referencing Ordinance Number 2025-27 Vacation of Public Way.

Attorney McNagny explained that this was an ordinance she did not prepare so did not realize the legal description was incorrect. She advised she included the correct legal description and addressed a few other little technical things that she felt should be addressed.

Mayor Daniel noted that one of the questions he and Attorney McNagny had was with the Ballard's neighbor, Mr. Clifford, in that we did not have anything in writing regarding him waiving his 50% piece of the property. He explained that property owners on both sides are entitled to 50% of the property. He advised that he talked to Mr. Clifford to get his perspective on it, and he wanted to waive his rights to it so that was included in writing with the corrected ordinance.

Attorney McNagny suggested to declare this an emergency, only because the Ballard's were waiting to move forward to get things done. She noted that it has been a while because they already went through this process before it was realized the legal description was wrong.

Dan Weigold made a motion to declare an emergency and approve corrected Ordinance 2025-27 on first and final reading. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion.

Ryan Adamson, Tad Varga, Jennifer Romano and Dan Weigold approved, Brent Bockelman opposed.

ORDINANCE 2026- 9 REZONE 304 N. MAIN STREET Nathan Bilger, Planning Director, was present to discuss the rezone request for 304 North Main Street to move from R1 single-family zoning to R2 two-family zoning. He reported that the applicant was requesting this primarily to allow for a duplex. He shared that the house on the property has been in existence since about 1880 and in the 1940's, as best as they can tell, was split into multiple apartments. He advised that the most recent previous owner used all 4 apartments essentially as one, which by using the home as one functional unit, removed the grandfathering it had under the legal nonconformance as 4 units under the R1 zoning. He explained that the applicant was requesting to change it from 4 units to just 2 units, which the R2 zoning reflects that and also reflects the development standards of the overall area a little bit better. He stated that even though most of the area is single family in terms of use, the actual lots there better line up with R2. He advised that this does come to the Council with a unanimous favorable recommendation from the Plan Commission. He noted that there was one condition that might be worth exploring, more in terms of how we deal with it, whether it be a zoning commitment or let it stand as a condition. He explained the condition was that it would be for no more than the duplex use, keeping it from being further carved up with variances or anything like that.

Tad Varga confirmed the home was multiple units and now the owner wants to go to double. Nathan Bilger advised that was correct. He explained that while the previous owner used the home essentially as one family, they never took out the extra kitchens and did very minimal work to remove the structural component of it being separated out into multiple units. He advised the applicant was looking to take out, or at least remove the additional units, and just take it down to two apartments, effectively creating a duplex out of it.

Tad Varga confirmed that the exterior was not going to change on the house, just what needs done inside to make it usable for 2 families. Nathan Bilger advised that was correct.

Nathan Bilger shared that a parking question came up at the Plan Commission. He reported that there were at least 5 paved parking spaces on the site currently and the parking requirement would be 4, so they meet that requirement.

Elmer Schrock of Lagrange, Indiana and owner of the property was present to further explain the rezone request and to answer any questions.

Mr. Schrock explained that he has made over \$100,000 worth of improvements to the home. He advised they removed a meter, so it now has two meters but there were still three kitchens intact. He shared that a lot of homes have two kitchens, so one of the units would have two kitchens. He advised that no one was living there at the moment and had tried to sell it a couple years ago.

Tad Varga questioned how long he has owned the property. Mr. Schrock advised he bought it in 2017. Ryan Adamson questioned if the home has been single family since owning it. Mr. Schrock shared that there was a brief moment of about six months that there was someone living in the back unit when a family was in the front, so there was an overlap a little bit. Ryan Adamson questioned if since 2018, the home has been single family and there has not been two units rented in the same building. Mr. Schrock advised there was a friend of the family that stayed in the back part, but the doors were open and they were living as one.

Mr. Schrock added that the house was built for two families. He explained that Dr. Kitchcart built it back in 1880 for him and his butler, so from the get-go, it was built for two residences.

Mayor Daniel opened the meeting for public comment.

Gary Kessie of 107 East Jefferson Street reported that he shares a property line with Elmer's house for about 80 feet. He shared that he has been there for over 26 years and has seen a lot of folks come and go. He mentioned that most owners have taken very good care of the place, but the renters normally do not. He shared that he was also representing the people immediately around this property who were not able to attend for various reasons, and they all want it to stay as a one family unit. Mr. Kessie did not think there was common sense involved in wanting to change it to R2, unless it was for the betterment of the neighborhood, and just did not see where it would make it better. He shared that they really care about their neighborhood and thought he had heard Elmer mention in their last meeting, that his intent was to change it to R2, sell it and leave town. He stressed that they were the ones living there, the neighbors, and did not see where it was relevant.

Kimberly Slucher of 181 North Lexington Drive was present and shared that she has the home listed for sale. She advised that Elmer has turned the home into a beautiful place; pristine, clean, and absolutely gorgeous 3,000 square feet home. She shared that the home is laid out easily for two families with multiple entrances and exits. She stated that it has been listed for approximately five months, but it was just not selling as it sits and, in her professional opinion, to go back to how the home had been, was the ideal way for it to go.

Mayor Daniel questioned Ms. Slucher if her reason that she believed the home was not selling was because it was listed as R1 instead of R2. Ms. Slucher felt that was one of the reasons. She advised it was set up to have more than one family live in it, so when someone comes to see it, they immediately think, on the positive, maybe they could have a family move in with them and be a multi-generational home but on the negative, some of the kitchens need taken out.

Mayor Daniel questioned how this was not spot zoning. Nathan Bilger explained that spot zoning with negative connotations means that you are giving undue preferential treatment to a particular landowner that you would not give to others in the same condition. Whereas a spot of zoning means there is something particular about a piece of ground that warrants it being treated differently. He shared that in this case, the fact that we have a historic residence on the property might be that distinction. He advised that we have other similar spots of zoning in the city and pointed that out in the staff report where we have R3 among R2 or even R1, so it is difficult to make that distinction.

Brent Bockelman shared that he has struggled with this one; being a staff member in the Planning and Building Department he sees a little bit more than what others do. He advised that this was also in his district so he has neighbors that have legitimate concerns on what negative effects a rezoning like this would have. He shared that he stands with his constituents and understands their concerns, but at the same time struggles with what part of these concerns can truly be addressed by zoning. He advised that rezoning was not necessarily going to reduce the fact that it could still be a rental. He shared that he understands the history of it being multi-family and knew individuals who lived there. He noted that the historic use, the concerns, the fact that the current owner, in his opinion, did not seem to follow the rules that were in place and ownership itself were all things he was weighing out, trying to determine which part of it should have an effect on rezoning.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2026-9 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Ordinance 2026-9 an Ordinance Amending the Zoning Classification of Certain Property from the R-1 Single-Family Residential District to the R-2 Two-Family Residential District.

Dan Weigold made a motion to accept Ordinance 2026-9 as presented. Dan Weigold, Jennifer Romano and Tad Varga approved, Brent Bockelman and Ryan Adamson were opposed.

Brent Bockelman advised he would like to fulfill the commitment of the two-family restriction if this carries through and questioned Mr. Schrock what actions were going to be taken to eliminate it from being used as it is set up now for three. He noted that even though the third meter has been turned off, it is still located there so it has the potential padding for three locations in the home. Mr. Schrock advised the meter was intact, but the box was empty and has no breakers. He explained if it did sell, the new homeowner would have to bring in a licensed electrician to rewire the box and connect the meter. He advised that he condensed the wiring from the three boxes to two boxes. Jennifer Romano questioned if he would have to get a permit to hook the third meter back up. Mayor Daniel was thinking the same; if there was still a third meter at the property, and it is one of our electric meters, then the natural reaction should be that we need to pull the third electric meter off the house so that it does not create a scenario of being able to add more. Dan Weigold advised it was already described in the ordinance that they cannot have more than two renters in there.

ORDINANCE 2026-10 – CORRECTION TO ORDINANCE 2026-3 Tad Varga made a motion to read Ordinance 2026-10 by title only. Jennifer Romano seconded them motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Ordinance 2026-10, an ordinance correcting Ordinance Number 2026-3, an Ordinance Amending the Rates and Charges for the City of Columbia City Municipal Water Utilities.

Attorney McNagny advised this should be pretty straightforward and requested it be done on an emergency basis because they want to start the new rates in May, just as originally approved. She explained that there was some confusion on the base rate that Baker Tilly was supposed to calculate the minimum rates on. She advised they based it on a rate that was one penny higher and so they have gone back and recalculated the rates, as exhibit A shows. She noted that this was just for the minimum rates, all of the other rates that were passed are correct. She advised the correction was for a penny less based upon the correct calculation. She reported that she has been in touch with Baker Tilly, and since the rate is going down, she did not think we needed another public hearing.

Ryan Adamson made a motion to approve Ordinance 2026-10 on an emergency basis. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

STORMWATER SUPERVISOR JOB DESCRIPTION REVISION Mike Shoda stated that we currently have a Stormwater Supervisor, but in the future if we would replace him, he was not concerned that the individual have a WT3 or a DSL to be hired. He explained he would like to revise the description to say that they would need to get their WT3 in 5 years and their DSL in 2 years.

Mayor Daniel confirmed that the WT3 and the DSL licenses were specific for drinking water systems, not necessarily for storm water systems. Mike Shoda advised that was correct. He stated that they would like the individual to have experience with excavators, someone who does stormwater work and water both.

Jennifer Romano questioned if it would change the compensation once they get those licenses. Mayor Daniel advised they would get a bump within the current pay range for that position.

Brent Bockelman made a motion to approve the position description for Stormwater Supervisor. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

UTILITY OFFICE JOB DESCRIPTION REVISIONS Mayor Daniel referenced the letter from Clerk Treasurer Leslee Robinson regarding the utility office department

position descriptions in that they have not been updated for over 20 years. He pointed out which was the old job description, and which was the new one.

Brent Bockelman mentioned that it appeared we were just taking out some antiquated terminology, no major changes.

Dan Weigold confirmed the ranges would not change. Mayor Daniel advised that was correct.

Brent Bockelman made a motion to approve the Head of Maintenance, the Deputy Clerk Treasurer, Customer Service, Custodian, Accounts Payable Clerk, Bookkeeper, Utility Billing Clerk, and Cashier. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Nathan Bilger** - Comprehensive Plan should be up for public review tomorrow or Thursday and will be at the Plan Commission for formal public hearing at their May meeting, Walmart is adding a dedicated grocery pickup area on the northeast corner by the current auto area, Five Below was permitted for a remodel at the Old Family Dollar, had three different minor plats before the Plan Commission, historic walking tour that the museum and Columbia City Connect are putting on May 2 at 10:00 a.m. **Mike Shoda** - flushing hydrants, Ethan Sievers passed both his DSL and WT3 so have another operator now. **Chip Hill** – thanked street and electric department for tree trimming, RFP for the jail was approved, awarded Community Crossings funds to finish up Westgate Phase 3, downtown cleanup from 9 to 11 Saturday morning. **Matt Heiden** - shut off the grinder pumps due to flooding, getting the fields back in shape for the weekend, draining pool to fix tile, lost an employee last week so are now down two employees, starting fencing at dog park, April 25th is opening day. **Terry Wherry** - finished working on the Tantalus move from REMC to the Tantalus Cloud, working with Shawn and SOS to install door controllers and cell phone boosters at the MSF, working with Toby Fralick and SOS to get AP access points in the fire department. **Mike Cook** – changed some valves out, having to start biomonitoring testing over due to delay with sample delivery. **Tom LaRue** - update on Truck 107 repairs. **Gary Parrett** – Officer Janssen and Bedwell are in their solo phase of field training, Officer German, Officer Blocher, and Officer Didion are scheduled to graduate the academy on the 24th, co-hosted a basic car seat training for law enforcement with the county sheriff's department and the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, hosted several interns with Whitley County Consolidated School in dispatch and police department, celebrating Telecommunication week.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel reported they had a great meeting with our insurance broker, Gibson, and to date we are doing really well and running below cost. He shared that he had a meeting with Chip and Carl Siler from the Redevelopment Commission and are working on soil remediation stuff regarding the Smith Brothers property. He reported that an individual was taking over the Veteran's Marathon. He gave an update on the US 30 project as well as repairs made to our pedestrian island.

ARTS COMMISSION Jennifer Romano reported that the Columbia City Arts Commission is supporting several different activities in the community this year; one being the Fine Arts program at Columbia City High School. She shared that CCHS Fine Arts Department is presenting Radium Girls this Friday and Saturday at 7:30p.m. She advised they were also working with the Whitley County America 250 Committee and are sponsoring a mural project. She reported that they were sponsoring a whole county project but are doing their own thing with the Columbia City part of it. She advised that there will be information on their Columbia City Arts Commission Facebook page and are putting out a request for a proposal to local artists who might want to complete the piece.

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Tad Varga reported that the LML property testing has finally been approved, he noted this has been ongoing for at least 10 years.

Jennifer Romano questioned how soon until there could be potential development. Tad Varga explained there was another property adjacent to it that they were working on, the Smith Brothers property. He advised they were working on that because they feel it was probably more attractive if those properties were fused together.

MUNICIPAL UNIT STRATEGIC TASK FORCE Mayor Daniel shared there was a new task force developed by the legislature to get people talking about income tax things among the different units. He advised it was called MUST and stands for Municipal Unit Strategic Task Force and calls for the fiscal bodies to be a part of it. He explained that they are supposed to meet this year to talk about income tax amounts and percentages, how it is going to be distributed, and all those things and the county auditor is trying to arrange these meetings. He advised that he would send more information about the MUST meetings and would like to have a little bit more conversation about it at the next meeting.

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

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Attest:

Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry