

**COMMON COUNCIL
TUESDAY, JULY 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 6:02 p.m. All stood to say the Pledge of Allegiance.

MINUTES Jennifer Romano pointed out a spelling correction under Chip Hill's department.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to approve the June 23, 2026 meeting minutes as corrected. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT There were no public comments.

ORDINANCE 2026-27 - REZONE – 105 N. WALNUT ST. RHOADES AUTOMOTIVE

Nathan Bilger, Planning Director, was present to discuss the rezone request. He explained that the property at 105 N. Walnut Street was currently zoned residential, and the request was to rezone it to general business for the purpose of expanding the business northward. He shared that one of the zoning commitments that the Plan Commission discussed was the need for having a fence on the west side of the property which would put a buffer for the remaining homes. He reported that this comes with a favorable recommendation and if the rezone goes through, they will still need to have developmental plan approval as well as a potential variance situation and encroachment of some sort, so there will be additional review opportunities if this progresses forward.

Tad Varga mentioned the highlighted side yard setbacks but thought it had been altered and questioned if there was a different request. Nathan Bilger explained that the staff report that is marked up is reflective of the 2016 modified zoning commitments but because those commitments were specific to that lot they are now no longer needed. He explained because the zoning minimum is 10 ft. it was basically a duplication of what the code already requires and then as mentioned before the fence requirement got shifted.

Jennifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2026-27 by title only. Brent Bockelman seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Ordinance 2026-27 an ordinance amending the zoning classification of certain property from the R-1 single family residential district to the GB general business district.

Ryan Adamson made a motion to approve Ordinance 2026-27 on first reading. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

AMPHITHEATER - EXECUTION OF LEASE Lisa Lee with Ice Miller was present serving as our bond counsel for the amphitheater project. She shared that the city has been going through the BOT or Build, Operate, Transfer process in order to determine the engineer, construction and the guaranteed maximum price for the project. She reported that the Council authorized circulation of a taxpayer petition, which is required by statute and has been accomplished, and then at the June 23 meeting, Council received the certified taxpayer petition, adopted a resolution of need, as well as preliminarily approved the lease agreement. She advised that the lease agreement is with the Columbia City Building Corporation, which is a newly formed corporation with Attorney McNagny being the Incorporator and Mayor Daniel determining who sits on it. She explained that the Corporation is simply to be the issuer of the bonds, and they then lease the project to the city. She noted that school corporations are always using building corporations as their leasing entity. She advised that we have to do this as a lease instead of a straightforward bond issue just because of the size of the project. She explained that at this meeting we would be holding a public hearing, which notice was provided at least 10 days ago, and then will ask for Council to consider adoption of Resolution 2026-25, which approves the final lease agreement. She shared that if it is approved then she will be coming back to the August meeting with more of the actual bond financing numbers as we should be much, much closer to the guaranteed maximum price. She advised that we do not want to sell the bonds until we know exactly what is needed to construct it so as not to sell more than we need. She stated that if the GMP is ok with Council then we will move forward towards a bond sale and closing.

PUBLIC HEARING – AMPHITHEATER LEASE AGREEMENT Mayor Daniel recessed the Council meeting and opened the floor for the public hearing regarding the lease and the amphitheater itself.

Hearing no comments or questions, Mayor Daniel closed the public hearing and resumed the Common Council meeting.

RESOLUTION 2026-25 EXECUTION OF LEASE – AMPHITHEATER Mayor Daniel requested that Lisa Lee talk a little bit about the reasons why city hall and the MSF are a part of this.

Lisa Lee explained that the reason the lease is not considered debt is because the court considers it an operating cost; you can only pay for something if you are actually using it. She shared that during construction, normally you would have to borrow the interest amount because there is a bond purchaser who will be closing on a certain date and will want to be paid interest every 6 months. She stated that because the amphitheater would not be complete, and we cannot legally make lease payments, those funds would have to be borrowed. She explained that under this financing structure, if we lease other city assets during construction, we would not have to borrow that money. She stressed that we want to avoid capitalized interest, where we would be paying interest on interest. She advised that those two assets, the City Hall building and Maintenance Service Facility, would only be leased during construction and would then be released as soon as the amphitheater is completed. She reported that the total debt service

difference between having capitalized interest and not having capitalized interest was \$820,000.00 so during the 12 to 18 month construction period we could save that kind of money by leasing those two assets.

Ryan Adamson clarified we would be leasing those assets to ourselves. Lisa Lee advised we would, but they do have to be conveyed to the Building Corporation so that they can then lease it back to the city. She noted that in the lease agreement, as well as the trust indenture, it states that those two assets will be released upon completion of the amphitheater. She shared that although the amphitheater itself will technically be owned by the Building Corporation while the bonds are outstanding, they can only convey it, and are required to do so, when the bonds are paid off. She advised that they do not have the option to sell it or do anything else with it; it is a city asset.

Lisa Lee reported that the lease rental payments during construction look to be somewhere around \$320,000.00 annually and then full lease rental payments upon completion were anticipated to be somewhere around \$630,000.00 to \$634,000.00 annually. She advised it would be paid from general revenues of the city and understood we were looking to use Food and Beverage Tax funds. She explained that if we would do a general revenue pledge, it would allow for flexibility at every budget session.

Mayor Daniel noted that the numbers Lisa was talking about is with zero sponsorship and zero grant monies, but they are working really hard to bring that number down significantly. He hoped to have a package of some sort in roughly a month. Lisa Lee advised that they would have to approve maximum numbers.

Dan Weigold reiterated that the Food and Beverage Tax can only go to Eagle Park. Mayor Daniel advised that was correct; it can only be used for the construction of Eagle Park, it cannot be used for staffing, maintenance or anything like that.

Lisa Lee advised with respect to the lease agreement, they were asking Council to approve the execution of it, which will then start a 30-day objection period. She stated that Council can still put the brakes on at any point until the bonds are actually sold. She shared that they anticipate having the guaranteed maximum price for the August meeting so then all of the numbers will be based on the GMP. She explained if we get to the sale of the bonds, then we will have to match the debt service on those bonds to the lease rentals, so will lower the lease rentals to match what is actually paid.

Lisa Lee also discussed the pledge ordinance that is to be introduced, which states that we will pledge any legally available revenues, and to the extent those revenues are not available we would put on a property tax if we had to. She explained that Baker Tilly, as the city's municipal advisor, has to show Ice Miller, as the city's bond counsel, that they fully expect the city has at least 125% coverage, if not more, of the debt service so that it is reasonable to conclude that the city would never levy that property tax to pay the debt. She advised this was so that she can give the opinion that this is not a controlled project and is not subject to petition, remonstrance or referendum, and Baker Tilly has given that assurance. She expected Baker Tilly to maybe be at the next meeting to discuss this before asking Council to approve the bond issue. Mayor Daniel thought they were planning to be at an upcoming meeting. He shared that he wanted to make

sure it was crystal clear that he would not vote for or support a project that would raise taxes. Lisa Lee agreed with that statement but stressed that we do want the best interest rates we can get. She explained that if we would only pledge general any legally available revenues, the bond purchaser pool is much smaller and interest rates are higher because if we do not have enough general revenues, then bonds are not getting paid off. She explained that the property tax is a backup so that a bond purchaser will give the best interest rate that they can. Ryan Adamson confirmed this was essentially a guarantee. Lisa Lee advised it was. She shared that this would be sold competitively and thought they would go for a rating so it would go out to the entire country of potential investors to try to get the best possible interest rate.

Mayor Daniel asked Lisa Lee to explain why it was important to do all of this before having a guaranteed maximum price. Lisa Lee explained that the lease financing process was a long process. She shared that a traditional bond issue can be done in about 60 days, but lease financing is closer to 6 months. She explained that when we get the GMP and execute the BOT agreement, they will want to start construction as quickly as possible, which the city would want as well because we want to get it done, release the city hall and the municipal buildings and get on with just financing the amphitheater itself.

Jennifer Romano appreciated the proposed timetable for all of this; that they can see just how comprehensive all of these steps are in the process.

Brent Bockelman made a motion to read Resolution 2026-25 by title only. Jennifer Romano seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Resolution 2026-25 a Resolution of the Common Council of the City of Columbia City approving execution of lease.

Brent Bockelman made a motion to approve Resolution 2026-25. Dan Weigold seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

ORDINANCE 2026-26 COLUMBIA CITY BUILDING CORPORATION Jennnifer Romano made a motion to read Ordinance 2026-26 by title only. Tad Varga seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously. Deputy Clerk Treasurer Sally Wherry read Ordinance 2026-26 an Ordinance of the Common Council of the City of Columbia City, Indiana, pledging general revenues to lease rental bonds of the Columbia City Building Corporation.

Dan Weigold made a motion to approve Ordinance 2026-26 on first reading. Ryan Adamson seconded the motion, motion passed unanimously.

DEPARTMENT REPORTS **Nathan Bilger** – subdivision north of Walmart is going through tech review but hopefully will be under construction by this fall. **Terry Wherry** – cameras down at Eagle Park, all equipment out of the jail except one server rack. **Chip Hill** – thanked electric department for grinding stumps, continue to work with INDOT and Lisa Lee on the parcel north of Walmart, spraying weeds downtown, working in Ohki Alley, had Daniel Landscape do some landscaping at the pickleball courts. **Kelly Cearbaugh** – limb pickup, thanked Jason Wells for helping with the time capsule, busy with 50/50 sidewalks. **Tom LaRue** – update on new fire truck, Truck 107 in Indianapolis for repairs, preparing for 4-H fair. **Mike Shoda** – IDEM

inspection went well and have just a few things to fix but nothing to do with water quality. **Mike Cook** – notice of last phase of the SCADA project, completed 30-day sampling period and awaiting results. **Shawn Lickey** – working behind the old Walgreens building, stump grinding, fuel pumps at MSF have been removed and have to do some remediation around the area, working on some electrical engineering for the area by the aquatic's facility, set the transformer for the high school CTE building, had north substation tested and was recommended for an oil change on the transformer and tap changer. **Gary Parrett** – officer updates, Stars and Stripes event and fireworks went well, preparing for the 4-H fair and Wheels of Whitley County event, Officer Crabtree put on training event for our officers, Dispatch running well.

MAYOR REPORT Mayor Daniel reported that he attended the Indiana League of Municipal Clerks and Treasurers conference, which is where Leslee is at, and gave a welcome speech at the luncheon. He advised that from an AIM perspective they are still working on LIT and MUST meetings. He shared that everything 4th of July and America 250 went wonderfully. He reported on the opening of the time capsule and thanked Jennifer Romano for her assistance. He advised that the employee appreciation luncheon was held and had a great turnout. He reported that the amphitheater is taking up a lot of time and is working with Lisa Lee on several things. He shared that he will be at the Indiana Conference of Mayors Tuesday through Thursday of next week.

ARTS COMMISSION Jennifer Romano shared that Art at the Museum was scheduled for August 1 – October 30 and they were working on some display pieces for that.

TIME CAPSULE Jennifer Romano reported that the items in the box are currently going through the accession process. She shared that prior to opening day they were unsure what they were going to be dealing with. She stated that things in about the top third of the box were very nice and dry-ish but further down there was a lot of mold and condensation that had built up over the years so there will be a period of time where they just let everything dry out. She advised that once they get to a point where everything is dried out, they will put together a display.

SIDEWALK ART Jennifer Romano reported that they were in need of volunteers to help repair the sidewalk mural by Ohki Alley and need to have that done before the end of the month or sooner.

MUNICIPAL PATRIOTIC DECORATING CONTEST Mayor Daniel reported that the Bienhoff family at 410 E. Van Buren was the grand prize winner of the lighting contest. He advised that the Biggs family, Beitzel family and the Schaefer family also won awards.

REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION Tad Varga reported that they have three different firms interested in working with us on the future of the old jail. He also reported that they were able to get a couple appraisals for the old Smith Brothers property and then working on establishing the two TIF districts, north of Walmart and apartment complex past Kroger. He advised they also approved a façade grant for downtown.

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

Attest:

Mayor Ryan Daniel

Deputy Clerk Sally Wherry