



**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**City Hall—City Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE**  
**Monday, August 07, 2023**  
**6:00 PM**

**Mayor**  
*Amada Márquez Simula*  
**Councilmembers**  
*Connie Buesgens*  
*Kt Jacobs*  
*Rachel James*  
*Justice Spriggs*  
**Interim City Manager**  
*Kevin Hansen*

---

**MINUTES**

The following are the minutes for the Work Session Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00pm on Monday, August 7th, in City Council Chambers, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

**CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:05pm

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula; Councilmember Buesgens; Councilmember Jacobs; Councilmember James; Councilmember Spriggs

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Police Chief; Renee Dougherty, Library Director; Mitchell Forney, Community Development Coordinator; Kevin Hansen, Interim City Manager; Erik Johnston, Police Captain; Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary; Dan O'Brien, Assistant Fire Chief. Kelli Wick, Human Resource Director, Diane Myer, Resident; Charisma Chase, Resident

**WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. Top Valu Liquor Store III: Preliminary Design Options.**

Presentation of facility analysis by Jonathon Loose Wold Architects; additional square footage overview, master planning for liquor store three.

Councilmember Buesgens inquired if the employees have a preference for Plan 1 -3.

Finance Director Kloiber stated that the Staff thinks all options are an improvement because they do not want to go up and down the stairs. He also stated that from a budgetary standpoint all three options are very similar. This is not funded by tax dollars but by liquor store sales: there would need to be an internal loan from the City for approximately two to three years. The work is not seasonally dependent and could be done in the winter.

Councilmember James does not like option 1 and prefers options 2 and 3. Councilmember Jacobs agreed.

Councilmember Spriggs inquired about the correlations between storage space and sales.

Finance Director Kloiber stated that it was hard to project these metrics.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired about how the municipal cannabis store could be worked into the space.

Director Kloiber addressed this issue by stating that this needs to be added into the master plan, with the change in the cannabis law. The other two stores do not lend themselves to being designed to allow for a separate physical entrance. He is not sure that the City wants to be in this business, and if the Council wants to do this in the future.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired if this was something that could be added on, as this is something that we will be facing in the future.

Councilmember Buesgens thinks this is a good idea and that we should plan for the future, and that we may need to look into using the basement as storage or as a selling space for a cannabis dispensary.

Director Kloiber stated that there will be more information coming to the Council about design and budget in the future.

**2. City Budget Orientation.**

Finance Director Kloiber gave a high-level overview of the City Budget process and what information will be given to the Council going forward leading to the resolution approving the 2024 budget.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that the second meeting in September is the meeting where the final budget is established. She also inquired about getting additional historical information going back further than ten years for tax increases that have occurred in Columbia Heights.

**3. Rental Licensing Update.**

Assistant Fire Chief Dan O'Brien gave an update on the new licensing system roll out from Anoka County and inquired about holding out for the incentive-based process and what correlates with staff time. The timeline for this rollout has been postponed for the foreseeable future. During the time that we are waiting for the roll out staff would be able to conduct additional research on hot topic items such as illegal rentals and code enforcement updates.

Councilmember Buesgens wants to follow through on communicating and enforcing illegal rentals.

Councilmember James is in favor of holding out for the new implementation, she is curious about the standard for illegal rentals and wants that to be further quantified.

Councilmember Jacobs would like to continue in a path that rewards good landlords.

**4. Discussion on the Public Use of Cannabinoids.**

Community Development Coordinator Mitchell Forney led the conversation for the Council on this item. Staff would like guidance overall on the definition of public place as well as smoking/vaping and intoxicants (cannabis and alcohol) in public places. Additionally does the Council want to have City dispensary, how many licenses does the City want to issue?

Councilmember James stated that she is interested in the public nuisance aspect of smoking or vaping of tobacco and cannabinoids in public spaces. She would like to look at alcohol at a different time.

Councilmember Jacobs stated that she wants any product that produces an odor to be banned. She would like to see restrictions in parks and nearby areas with children. She would like to see permits for alcohol use in the parks as well as cannabis. She is in favor of having two or three dispensaries in the City and not having a City owned dispensary. She has a problem with limiting public use of a substance and also selling the product as a City.

Councilmember Buesgens agreed with banning any type of smoking. She would like to have a City owned municipal cannabis store.

Councilmember Spriggs stated that he is in favor of municipal cannabis, and not allowing smoking and vaping in public spaces. He would like to limit secondhand smoke exposure.

Finance Director Kloiber addressed that the primary purpose of Municipal Liquor is the control / compliance process for the Community. If the City were to be in the business of selling cannabis there would be a lot of competition, but this would be a way to be in control of the regulatory process.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she is not in favor of smoking or vaping in parks but does not want to limit smoking on sidewalks. She is in support of a municipal cannabis store.

Consensus from the Council was that the ordinance would be updated to reflect no smoking or vaping in public places.

**5. City Hall Art Policy.**

Interim City Manager Hansen led the discussion on this topic. Overall direction is needed to establish a policy for art to be placed in City Hall. He inquired if the Council is interested in reestablishing the City Art Commission again and using the commission as a starting point for art at City Hall and then in the Community as a whole.

Overall, the Council is interested in reestablishing the commission with appropriate funding and making sure that there is appropriate staff support.

**6. City Hall Meeting Room Policy: Central Place.**

Interim City Manager Hansen led the discussion of this topic. The Central Place room is the only room available at City Hall for rental to the community, and it is available during business hours on a first come first served basis.

**7. Additional State Bonding Request: City Parks.**

Interim City Manager Kevin Hansen led the conversation about additional state bonding requests that would be prepared and submitted to the legislature regarding Huset Park. He would like to get the additional bonding requested ASAP.

The council was supportive of moving forward immediately.

**8. City Council.**

Human Resource Director Kelli Wick at the request of Mayor Márquez Simula compiled information in the packet for Council's review related to City Department Head thoughts on the pros and cons of hiring internally or externally for the City Manager Position. The mayor stated that she was ready to take a vote on how the council wants to proceed with the process of hiring a City Manager.

Councilmember Spriggs, James and Mayor Márquez Simula stated that they are in favor of using an outside firm to search for an external candidate for City Manager. Councilmember Buesgens and Jacobs opposed.

Director Wick stated that she will work together with Hansen to get proposals for firms for the Council to review to move forward with the external hiring process. The process for getting proposals for search firms could take up to six weeks.

Councilmember James asked that the job description be sent to Council again.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm

Respectfully Submitted,



---

Sara Ion, City Clerk