



**CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE**  
**Tuesday, September 05, 2023**  
**6:00 PM**

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

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## **MINUTES**

The following are the minutes for the Work Session Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00pm on Tuesday, September 5th, in the Shared Vision Conference Room, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota.

### **CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL**

Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:04pm

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

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Police Chief; Aaron Chirpich, Assistant City Manager and Community Development Director, Mitchell Forney, Community Development Coordinator; Kevin Hansen, Interim City Manager; Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary; Sulmaan Khan, Interim City Engineer; Joseph Kloiber, Finance Director; Ryan Smith, Building Official; Mary Granlund, City Resident.

### **WORK SESSION ITEMS**

**1. Discuss Residential Time of Sale Program.**

Assistant City Manager / Community Development Director Chirpich introduced this item. Time of Sale Program has been brought up by the Council as something that is a priority, and there are two ways to implement the program internal or external staffing. Chirpich recommended that money be budgeted for the program internally and that this person be supervised and trained by our exceptional Building Official Ryan Smith.

Community Development Coordinator Forney further presented information on the process of inspecting for health and safety issues and the various levels of inspections. It was noted that City Staff would not be able to complete sewer inspections.

Building Official Smith was present to speak about the importance of inspections and reviewed photos of the concerns that he often sees. Overall, there was a focus on life safety concerns that can be caught and corrected with this program. He noted that electrical issues are reviewed and followed up by the State Inspector.

Councilmember Jacobs inquired if the Cities listed are similar in size. She inquired about the type of infractions that would prohibit sale of the property, and how often there is severe level of infractions. She inquired if this type of inspection covers the one required by the mortgage or insurance company and questioned where the liability lands. She stated that would be more comfortable having an inspection that is independent and not part of the City because of enforcement, follow-up and liability concerns.

Assistant City Manager Chirpich stated that the most relevant City listed in the supporting documents would be Robbinsdale and Hopkins as far as size and age of housing stock. He stated that the contracts and inspections language is vetted to make sure that there is no liability to the City, and we are weighing the benefit to the City overall. This theme transcends the market, and the scope of what Staff is proposing is to address the volume of issues that the Building Official is seeing.

Building official Smith stated that he finds serious infractions weekly.

Coordinator Forney stated that there are some insurance and mortgage companies that accept this inspection, as the person completing the inspection is a Building Official.

Councilmember James thinks that the inspection price point is low and would consider a graduated scale for multiple units. She is in favor of this being completed by a City Building Inspector. She would like to think more about the Sewer Inspection.

Interim City Manager Hansen stated that the sewer inspection component is important because of clay tile pipes, and damage that has occurred to the joints and root intrusion.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she would like to hire a city inspector to increase the quality of our housing stock.

Councilmember Spriggs stated that he supports all of this because of his personal experience with these issues. He feels the pros outweigh the cons, particularly with the single-family rental density cap.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she is in favor of Staff's recommendations.

Assistant City Manager Chirpich stated that he appreciated Council's direction and that there will be public hearings and further discussions around this issue as we move forward with hiring an additional staff member to execute this program.

**2. Safe Streets For All Citywide Safety Action Plan Request For Proposal Discussion.**

Interim City Engineer Khan presented information on the status of the SSFA action plan. The city is in the beginning stages of putting together an RFP for a consultant. He reviewed the scope of the work and the expectations for what is most impactful. This is a \$200,000 federal grant with a \$50,000 local grant.

Mayor Márquez Simula is interested in the data for narrowing lanes with paint, adding one side of the street as a bike lane. She would also like a roundabout at First Lutheran Church. She likes the idea of all the public outreach that will occur.

Councilmember Jacobs likes the LSI idea where only pedestrians are moving.

Councilmember James would like to see if all uncontrolled intersections can be eliminated. She would like to see a memorable campaign used for this outreach initiative.

Councilmember Spriggs would like to have a specific sidewalk plan posted to the city website.

Councilmember Buesgens is excited to use this study to go for funding and grants for art. She feels that neighborhoods do not feel safe because of the speed of vehicles. She wants to find a way to address the neighborhoods as well as the main roads. She would like to have meetings in the parks and have commission members and council members go out into neighborhoods and speak to people about what their concerns are.

Interim City Manager Hansen addressed that there is not specifically funding for sidewalks in this plan, but there can be areas identified that would benefit from sidewalks and bikeways. The purpose of this plan is to go after even more funding and grants once opportunities are identified. This program is at least a twelve-month process and will include PEL study information as well.

Interim City Manager Hansen stated that we cannot act on the RFP until the grant is signed on a federal level and this could take up to two months or longer. Interim City Engineer Khan also confirmed that there is also the need for the NEPA authorization by MNDOT on behalf of FHWA and this would need to be completed for the process to begin as well.

### **3. School Resource Officer Contract Discussion.**

Police Chief Austin presented information on the status of the SRO Contract. There has been a lot of attention on this topic, and there may be a special session called at a State Level to address the issue. The council should know by the next meeting if there will be a special session, he has been meeting with the Superintendent and the City Attorney regularly. He hopes that we can get back to SRO business.

Mayor Márquez Simula clarified that the SRO's are on a temporary 30 day reassignment.

Chief Austin clarified that the contract does allow for this to occur. The contract is still in place.

Councilmember Spriggs clarified that there is a 90 written notice that needs to be given to the School District.

Chief Austin stated that there would be written notice, but cancellation can occur immediately.

Councilmember James asked if payment on the contract would still need to occur.

Councilmember Buesgens also clarified payment as well as the role of an SRO.

Chief Austin clarified that payment does not occur during the reassignment or if the contract is canceled. He further clarified the role of the SRO beyond simply the job

description. The connections that the SRO officers make with the students and faculty are truly what is important and impactful.

Councilmember James is confused about why LMC is so delayed in responding to this issue. She also inquired about training that could occur to be in compliance with the law as written.

Chief Austin stated that this was not a city specific item and was an oversight that was not caught by LMC. For a small agency such as Columbia Heights it is very hard to train just to SRO restrictions versus a patrol officer. For most agencies this is a temporary assignment, there are a lot of risks that are to be considered.

Councilmember Jacobs does not like the use of the word “any” in the legislation.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired what additional information would be needed prior to completion of the contract.

Chief Austin stated that he hoped the special session would allow for direction on training and guidance.

**4. Overview of Proposed 2024 Budget.**

Finance Director Kloiber gave an overview of what the budget process will look like over the next several months. He reviewed the City Manager budget that was sent to the Council via email on August 28, 2023 and also posted to the City website. The overall numbers / increases in taxes are close to what occurred in 2023, due to there being a decrease for a second year in the metro area subsidy. Kloiber noted that most cities in Anoka County have also experienced this same issue. Because of this decrease in fiscal disparities being given to the City for a second year, the portion paid by local property owners will increase to 14.2%. Director Kloiber also reviewed LGA, Bond Finance as well as potential projects.

Councilmember Buesgens inquired if there would ever be a time where the fiscal disparities equation would be recalculated.

Director Kloiber stated that he was not sure, but there will be a time when it likely needs to change.

Interim City Manager Hansen stated that October and November Work Session Meetings will have presentations by specific departments.

**5. City Council.**

**Discussion Regarding Capturing Majority Decisions in Council Minutes.**

Councilmember Jacobs would like to capture council consensus statements and votes regarding commitments to the community. She does not feel that this is a huge request from staff.

Assistant City Manager Chirpich further clarified that there should be clear direction given to staff at Work Session meetings as votes do not occur, and only direction / consensus on moving an item forward to a council meeting for a formal vote occurs.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that she will make sure at the conclusion of topics that direction is given to staff.

**Council Dedicated Office Space**

Mayor Márquez Simula thanked staff for the information on how to reserve Council Office – Room 116. The Mayor would like to have a bookshelf for the office to display important items from the community while meeting with constituents.

**Scheduling Coffee with Council**

Councilmember James would like to start to schedule coffee with Council in Central Place.

**Ranked Choice Voting**

Mayor Márquez Simula shared a letter from LMC related to ranked choice voting with the other Councilmembers and asked if any of the other Councilmembers would be interested in signing on in a letter of support for ranked choice voting for Columbia Heights.

**ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:56pm

Respectfully Submitted,



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Sara Ion, City Clerk