



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, January 08, 2024
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 Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00 pm on Monday, January 8, 2024, in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue NE, Columbia Heights, Minnesota

WELCOME/CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

Mayor Márquez Simula called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm

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

Also Present: Lenny Austin, Chief of Police; Andrew Boucher, City Planner; Aaron Chirpich, Community Development Director/ Assistant City Manager; Kevin Hansen, Interim City Manager; Scott Lepak, City Attorney; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Joe Kloiber, Finance Director; Dan O'Brien, Assistant Fire Chief; Charlie Thompson, Fire Chief; Kevin Reich, MWMO Executive Director; Derek Batiste, City resident; Laurel Deenen, City resident; Dirk Schmitz, City resident

MISSION STATEMENT

Columbia Heights is a vibrant, healthy and connected City. We are here to actively support the community, deliver equitable services, build and strengthen connections, improve upon our past, and uphold our successes. We strive to be better and ensure Columbia Heights is a great place for everyone, today and in the future.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all,"

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve the Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

PROCLAMATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, RECOGNITION, ANNOUNCEMENTS, GUESTS

- A. MWMO (Mississippi Watershed Management Organization) Informational Presentation.**
MWMO Executive Director Kevin Reich explained that the MWMO has a joint powers authority in the State. The joint powers are made up of seven jurisdictions. All of the members represent taxing entities and are elected officials and therefore can act as an independent special unit of government with a purpose that is guided by the State law. Local government units need to be configured within watersheds and are nature derived.

While Columbia Heights does not directly touch the Mississippi River, the City's built environment does touch it which includes structures and infrastructure. He noted it is important to address how to mitigate the impacts of those areas in order to improve the water quality of the river. This is done through collaborative partnerships and goals. The goals include design, policy making and class participation.

Mr. Reich noted that they are currently working to decrease the impacts of salt. He added that the sidewalks in front of City Hall are heated in order to help reduce the impact of chlorine on the river. He explained that there are a number of challenges being a City that is urban by the river. In many projects, rain water is able to be collected and then soaked into the earth. However, during the library project, that was not an option. A mechanism was created in the back of the building to help with the filtration process. Another example of helping to improve the rivers water quality is the 37th Avenue project through pedestrian, multimodal and environmental friendly sidewalks and stretches of roads.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked how community members who are interested in learning more about the MWMO could get involved. Mr. Reich replied that people can contact the MWMO at any time and go to the website to learn more information. He noted that there is a committee that overviews the grant programs and are always looking for more participation with that. They are program water stewards for water quality where people can do direct action.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked if people can stop by the MWMO. Mr. Reich replied that people can make an appointment at any time. It is a public building and people can stop by between 9 am- 3pm. He noted if people would like an informative discussion of what the facility is, to call in advance.

Councilmember James noted that the MWMO works with the water quality for the lakes within the districts. She asked how the MWMO works with the lakes in Columbia Heights. Mr. Reich replied that they have not done a lot of work with standing bodies of water because the work is emphasized on the Mississippi River.

Councilmember Buesgens thanked Mr. Reich and mentioned that he does good work in the community.

Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that the MWMO building is gorgeous and innovative.

Interim City Manager Hansen noted that Columbia Heights joined the MWMO in 2012 and that it has been a great partnership. He added that the educational resources are also a key part in the partnership. The library is also able to additional educational resources.

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember James noted an amendment to the December 11, 2023 City Council Meeting Minutes on page 14, item 24, is missing the "City Manager" title for Community Development Director/Assistant City Manager Chirpich's title. She asked to amend paragraph 1, 2 and 3 to reflect the change in title.

Councilmember James referenced item 14, page 64 of the Agenda Packet, “Animal Services to a Veterinary Firm,” Review of Bills, and asked what it was for. Police Chief Austin replied that the charge was for a contract with Pet Central. Councilmember James asked if the City owned any animals or if it was for animals that were picked up. Chief Austin replied for animals that were picked up. Mayor Márquez Simula asked if it was an annual fee. Chief Austin replied that it was.

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

1. **Approve December 11, 2023 City Council Meeting Minutes.**
Motion: Move to approve the December 11, 2023 City Council meeting minutes.
2. **Accept November 14, 2023 Sustainability Commission Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to accept the November 14, 2023 Sustainability Commission minutes.
3. **Accept the November 8, 2023 Youth Commission Meeting Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to accept the November 8, 2023 Youth Commission meeting minutes.
4. **Accept December 6, 2023 Library Board Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to Accept the Library Board Minutes from December 6, 2023.
5. **Consideration of Resolution 2024-03, Designating official depositories for the City of Columbia Heights.**
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2024-03, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2024-03, being a resolution designating official depositories for the City of Columbia Heights.
6. **Adopt Resolution 2024-04, Accept Certain Donations Received by the City of Columbia Heights.**
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution 2024-04, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2024-04, being a resolution accept certain donations received by the City of Columbia Heights.
7. **Adopt Resolution 2024-05, Designating City Council Liaison and Council President Appointments for 2024.**
MOTION: Motion to waive the reading of Resolution 2024-05, there being ample copies available to the public.
MOTION: Move to adopt Resolution 2024-05, Appointing Liaisons to City Boards & Commissions and External Boards.
8. **Adopt Resolution 2024-06, Designating Election Judges and Election Judge Salaries for the 2024 Municipal Special Election.**
MOTION: Move to waive the reading of Resolution No. 2024-06, there being ample copies available to the public.

MOTION: Motion to adopt Resolution No. 2024-06, approving the designation of elections judges and election judge salaries for the 2024 Municipal Special Election.

9. Designation of Legal News Paper for 2024.

MOTION: Move to designate Life as the City of Columbia Heights official legal newspaper for 2024.

10. Public Works Blanket Orders for 2024 Purchases.

MOTION: Move to authorize staff to process blanket purchase orders in an amount not to exceed the 2024 budget amounts for:

- De-icing salt for salt/sanding operations.
- Fuel (unleaded and diesel) for City vehicles.
- Bituminous asphalt for patching/paving city streets and alleys.
- Curb stop and service repairs for delinquent accounts and foreclosed properties.

11. Capital Equipment Replacement of Unit #250: 4x4 7.3 Liter Cab and Chassis.

MOTION: Move to authorize the purchase of one (1) 2024 Ford F-550 XLT 4x4 7.3 Liter cab and chassis of the State of Minnesota Purchasing contract from Midway Ford in the amount of \$67,421.67.

12. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval.

MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for January 8, 2024, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.

13. License Agenda.

MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for January 8th 2024, as presented.

14. Review of Bills.

MOTION: Move that in accordance with Minnesota Statute 412.271, subd. 8 the City Council has reviewed the enclosed list to claims paid by check and by electronic funds transfer in the amount of \$2,680,493.27.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

15. Consideration of Resolution 2023-76, and 2023-77 regarding the revocation of the license to operate rental units within the city of Columbia Heights against the rental property at 4144 Quincy Street NE for failure to meet the requirements of the Residential Maintenance Codes.

Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien noted this item was the first of two public hearings but would need to go through the public hearings separately because it is a procedural matter. He noted that the Council tabled this item during the November 27, 2023 meeting. He noted since that meeting, the property owner sold the property on December 19, 2023. The new owners were legally noticed for the meeting and their responsibility for the item. At least one of the tenants is still occupying the property prior to the property being sold. The new

property owners have not applied for a rental license but have until January 18, 2024 to do so.

Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien noted that rental licenses automatically terminate 30 days after the sale of a property it is not transferred to an eligible property owner licensee. During the November meeting, it was presented to the Council to consider revocation due to failure to correct violations. The violations included to have all electrical wiring inspected by the City electrical inspector and have proof that wiring is properly installed and approved. This was completed to the inspector's satisfaction. An additional violation included to install hardwire smoke alarm in the basement and shall be installed by a local contractor. This has also been satisfied. The property is licensed as a duplex rental property but inspectors noticed a third unit had been added and that multiple families were occupying the property. The third unit was required to be removed and would not be allowed to be legally converted to a triplex. The property owner was required to remove any remaining unpermitted plumbing in the basement and bathroom area and properly cap all copper water pipes in the basement kitchen area.

Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien stated that inspectors have performed a number of inspections on the property since November 2023 and all of the violations have been corrected and resolved.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if the third unit was removed and the tenants were no longer living in the third unit. Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien replied that the unit was removed and there were no tenants were occupying the third unit.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if all violations had been satisfied from the November 2023 City Council meeting. Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien replied that they were satisfied.

Councilmember Spriggs asked why the property was sold. Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien replied that he knew that the property owner was interested in selling the property but did not know it was to be so soon.

Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien mentioned that if the Council does not want to approve the revocation then they need to vote against the motion.

Councilmember Jacobs asked if the item could be tabled until January 18, 2024 to see if the new property owners apply for the rental license. Councilmember Buesgens noted that the revocation was in regard to the license if the new property owners choose to transfer the license.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked what the Staff recommendation was. Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien replied that the Staff recommendation would be not to revoke the rental license.

Mayor Márquez Simula opened the public hearing. There were no public comments.

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to close the public hearing and waive the reading of Resolution 2023-76, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Buesgens, to adopt Resolution 2023-76, being a Resolution of the City Council of the city of Columbia Heights approving revocation, pursuant to City Code, of the rental license listed. All Nays, Motion Failed 0-5.

Assistant Fire Chief O'Brien noted that the second revocation was due to failure to correct violations by failing to remove an exhaust fan and fixing exposed electrical wiring. All of the violations have been corrected. The Staff's recommendation would be to not revoke the rental license

Mayor Márquez Simula opened the public hearing. There were no public comments.

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to close the public hearing and waive the reading of Resolution 2023-77, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to adopt Resolution 2023-77, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights approving revocation, pursuant to City Code, of the rental license listed. All Nays, Motion Failed 0-5.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

16. Authorize the Purchase of a Station Alerting System (PHOENIX G-2 ALERTING SYSTEM) and Associated Installation Costs for the System in the Fire Department.

Fire Chief Thompson explained that during the October 2, 2023 budget work session, he presented to the Council about an alerting system. He brought the item back to the Council after it was budgeted under the Capital Expenditure for 2024. He noted that that the current system can be unreliable due to the pager in the system. If the pager is taken out of the cradle, then the system cannot be controlled.

Fire Chief Thompson stated that the Phoenix G-2 Alerting System would provide a number of solutions. The dispatch advantages of the system are that it is a digital system and is fast. This would help with the wellness of the dispatchers since the information would come to them digitally. It is a triple redundant system so if a portion of the system went down, the entire system would not go down with it. The alerting system would increase the situational awareness in first responders by using a clear, concise language every time. He mentioned that the current pager is loud and can cause stress. The new system would reduce stress and anxiety. The new system would have lights that would gradually come up as well as have a speaker that would have noise gradually increase. In addition, there are screens that can provide updated information which helps first responders have a clear idea of what the mission is when they arrive on scene.

Fire Chief Thompson mentioned that he received the final quote on Friday and was shocked at the increase in price. The budget was for \$75,000 for the system. The new estimate is \$85,905.05. The difference in quotes is due to the installation cost. The installation cannot be contracted out to a different company. The other increase in cost is due to the controller box for the system. He recommended to the Council to continue to proceed with the purchase and installation since it will allow for large improvements.

Councilmember James noted that as a resident, she would like the upgrade in order to have more safety and resiliency in the City.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that during the work session, all of the Councilmembers spoke about how happy they were to be moving forward with the department and wanted the public to know what improvements were coming to the department. She noted the importance of having the same quality as other surrounding cities.

Interim City Manager Hansen explained that the motion should include an amendment to the approved budget.

Motion by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Jacobs, to authorize the Mayor and Interim City Manager to enter into an agreement with US Digital Designs for a G-2 fire station alerting system and installation and amending the budget to the total of \$85,905.05. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Ordinances and Resolutions

17. Consideration of a Rental License Exemption for 4721 Chatham Rd NE

City Planner Boucher stated on December 14, the owner of 4721 Chatham Rd NE, reached out to the Community Development Department requesting an exemption from the single-family rental density cap. Attached to the Agenda Packet is the letter that Staff received. Section 1 of Ordinance 1685, which established the single-family rental density cap, states that:

“If the number of detached single-family dwellings rental properties meets or exceeds the permitted number of rental properties per defined block on the effective date of the ordinance from which this section is derived, a property owner may request a temporary license to allow an additional rental property for that block. The City Council may grant or deny a temporary license in its sole discretion. Persons requesting a temporary license must make an annual application to the City. No property owner shall hold a temporary rental license for the same property for more than two consecutive years.”

City Planner Boucher added that as it is the homeowners’ right to appeal to the Council. Staff brought forth the appeal along with supporting documents for discussion and review. If approved, Resolution 2024-001 would grant a temporary rental license exemption to the homeowner with a few additional requirements. The homeowner is required to complete the license application process within three months from the passage of the resolution. This puts a limit on how long they can take to bring the house into rental compliance if

needed. The temporary rental license will be valid for one year from the date that the license is approved. This provides the homeowner and tenant the ability to rent the home for a full one-year lease. After the term of the temporary license, the persons requesting a temporary license must make an annual application to the City. No property owner shall hold a temporary rental license for the same property for more than two consecutive years.

Applicant Derek Batiste shared that his grandfather was the County Auditor for Anoka County and the house has been in the family since it was built. He explained that his grandparents passed the house down to him after they passed away. He will be moving to Oregon with his partner but would like to keep the property in Columbia Heights to keep it in the family.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned that Mr. Batiste will need to go through the rental license application process and it is not guaranteed that the Council will approve it. She added that after the one year license, he would need to apply for a rental license after that and it would only last two years. Mr. Batiste explained that he would be willing to move back to the City when the rental license expires. He mentioned that he would take out an equity loan in order to do any repairs that are needed to pass the inspection.

Councilmember Jacobs asked who has been staying in the house the past year. Mr. Batiste replied that he has been partially living in the home and will have the neighbor check the house anytime he has to be away for an extended amount of time.

Councilmember Jacobs asked about the average period of time that the house has been occupied in the past year. Mr. Batiste replied less than six months.

Councilmember Jacobs expressed her concern that typically when the Council is asked to reconsider the Ordinance, it is due to a hardship in life and she does not see that in Mr. Batiste's case. An additional concern is that there is no finite timeline of when the house could be fully occupied without renting it out.

Mr. Batiste explained that his mother would like to return to the house because she has recently been through a divorce and does not make enough money to live in the area.

Councilmember Spriggs stated he would classify having a new child as a form of hardship. He added that he would deny an application if someone had the intent to simply make a profit off of it. He mentioned that he believes this would be within the guidelines for an exemption to the Ordinance.

City Planner Boucher stated Staff recommends approving resolution 2024-001, a resolution approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4721 Chatham Road NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421.

Mayor Márquez Simula agreed with Councilmember Spriggs' comments regarding the situation being within the guidelines for an exemption and that it would provide Mr. Batiste two years to get affairs in order.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to waive the reading of Resolution 2024-001, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to adopt Resolution 2024-001, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights approving the single-family rental exemption request for the rental application at 4721 Chatham Road NE, Columbia Heights, MN 55421. 4 Ayes, 1 Nay, Motion Carried 4-1. Ayes: Spriggs, Buesgens, James, Márquez Simula Nay: Jacobs.

18. Consideration of Resolution 2024-02, being a Resolution to Authorize Participation in Xcel Energy Partners in Energy Program.

City Planner Boucher stated Xcel Energy Partners in Energy provides communities in Colorado, Minnesota, and Wisconsin services through a two-year commitment to develop an energy plan and assistance with implementing that plan, understanding a community's unique energy needs and priorities, and tailors its services to complement each community's vision. By working with citizens, businesses, and even their own government facilities, a community can shave dollars off utility bills, promote renewables, drive resource conservation or contribute toward greenhouse gas reduction goals. Partners in Energy helps address the challenge of identifying local priorities and then structures a path that leverages all resources available.

City Planner Boucher added that the Energy Action Planning application describes how Partners in Energy helps gather stakeholders to develop and implement energy action plans to address local energy challenges and priorities with actionable and equitable strategies and resources. If the City is accepted as a community, there will be a scoping meeting to help determine the pathway that best aligns with the community's interests and capabilities. This program is offered at no cost to participant communities with the expectation that Xcel Energy provides staff and financial resources during the planning and implementation phases as well as the City/community provides staff time and financial support to implement strategies.

City Planner Boucher mentioned that once accepted into the Partners in Energy Program, Xcel Energy will organize preliminary kickoff meetings to build the framework to launch energy action planning workshops. They anticipate six to eight weeks for preparation, and 20 to 26 weeks for development of the plan. Following the plan development, the City will collaborate for 18 months to implement the strategies. The plan will outline actionable strategies that may include promotional outreach, education, events, PR to help guide the project implementation and bring tools and resources to help overcome implementation barriers.

City Planner Boucher explained that ideally, a champion from the community will be identified who will help smooth the process of developing an Energy Action Plan and rolling out implementation. Community engagement specialists will help lead workshops and empower the team with resources and energy expertise. Over the first six months of working together to develop the action plan, it may require up to 100 hours of time from your Partners in Energy champion. A group of local participants will need to be identified and get involved in developing the plan.

City Planner Boucher stated throughout the planning and implementation, they will leverage the City's existing communications channels, such as city website, social media, press media, newsletters, or cable channels. Xcel Energy resources are there to support and provide tools and help throughout the process—but it is the community that owns the plan. The program also serves as an Inflation Reduction Act resource for residents, businesses, local governments, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, and tribes to access individual and business tax credits, residential rebates, grants for the creation of new programs and projects, and direct pay tax credits for local governments to access for clean energy, commercial clean vehicles, alternative fuel infrastructure, etc. Other areas of focus include building efficiency, electrification, renewable energy, and EV fleet and charging infrastructure. The City of St. Louis Park utilized the program to create their Climate Champions program, which offers cost-sharing for different buildings in their community (e.g. business, multifamily, and residential) to support energy efficiency and renewable energy improvements.

City Planner Boucher noted at the January 2, 2024 Council Work Session, Staff were given direction to review the 2040 Comprehensive Plan and 2018 Solid Waste Management Policy regarding community goals for energy, sustainability, environmental justice, and climate actions. Goals for social equity, community and land use, healthy foods, energy, and waste were included in the application as defined in the above plans.

City Planner Boucher added that Staff recommends that the Council adopt Resolution 2024 – 002 authorizing staff to submit the Partners in Energy application before the January 15, 2024, deadline.

Mayor Márquez Simula asked if the City would hear back around March. City Planner Boucher replied that he would assume that the City would be able to start working through the program after the application is submitted.

Councilmember Buesgens asked when work in the program would begin. City Planner Boucher explained that the application would be due on January 15, 2024 and they would start working in the program shortly after that. He added that he would return to the Council with more information about when the program would begin after the application was submitted.

Councilmember Buesgens expressed her excitement about the program. Councilmember James thanked Staff for updating the goals. Councilmember Spriggs agreed and added his excitement about the community aspect of the project and being able to collaborate more.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Jacobs, to waive the reading of Resolution 2024-02, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Spriggs, seconded by Councilmember Jacobs, to adopt Resolution 2024-02, being a Resolution of the City Council of the City of Columbia Heights approving the Partners in Energy Program. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember Jacobs mentioned that she attended the listening session tours with Metro Transit, and the City holiday lunch. She reminded the community that beginning January 1, 2024 new regulations are offering protection for renters and tenants such as mandatory 24-hour notice before entering for a non-emergency item. Regulations can be found by going to the State of Minnesota Renter's Rights. She attended the funeral of Captain Markham's daughter with Councilmember Buesgens. She also facilitated three resident reach outs.

Councilmember Spriggs stated he attended the Santa City Tour. He signed onto two letters which included a letter urging President Biden and Congress to pass a durable cease fire in the Middle East and a letter for the Minnesota Housing Partnership urging the Minnesota Congress members for policy changes to expand the low-income housing tax credit and to increase funding for housing homeless prevention programs. Additionally, he has provided a written update on what is happening in the City to the School Board. He connected with the three legislators to discuss priorities for the City. He attended the Library Board meeting, the EDA meeting, and the Work Session.

Councilmember James noted that she attended the Holiday Train and volunteered with the SACA toy giveaway. She attended the City Staff holiday luncheon. She met some St. Anthony city leaders along with Mayor Márquez Simula to hear about their plans for a community center. She had a meeting with the Anoka County Commissioner to hear about the County's tax levies and their priorities for 2024. She had a meeting with a Crest View board member regarding what is happening in Columbia Heights and their goals. She went to the Neighborhood Watch update meeting and got with the consultant regarding the City Manager search process. Her children were able to ski through the Columbia Heights Parks and Recreation program. She attended the EDA and Work Session meetings. She signed onto the letter that Councilmember Spriggs mentioned regarding the housing programs. She read a paragraph from the cease fire letter to President Biden and Congress, noted the letter is available to share, and that she is standing with other elected officials to call for a cease fire. She thanked the Staff for all they did in 2023.

Councilmember Buesgens explained that she attended the Holiday Train, Mississippi Watershed Management Organization meeting, Sustainability Commission as a Council liaison, the high school band concert, Columbia Heights Fire Department pancake breakfast, Sue Chapman's retirement party from Public Works, the Parkview Villa Christmas dinner, and Matt Markham's daughter's funeral.

Mayor Márquez Simula expressed her condolences to Mark Markham's family for the passing of his daughter. She stated she attended a Governor's meeting for the Latinx community leaders, Youth Commission meeting, Staff holiday luncheon, and Shop with a Cop. She has toured a lot of local development sites and local businesses. She attended a meeting along with Councilmember James with St. Anthony city leaders regarding the possibilities for collaborating. She added that she attended a housing meeting with a local housing advocate, Sue Chapman's retirement party, the Parkview Villas holiday party, the Silverwood neighborhood holiday party, the Columbia Heights booster's holiday party, and the Regional Council of Mayors holiday lunch at the Westwood Hills Nature Center, which is the first zero net building in the State of Minnesota. She explained that she is now a member of the Regional Council Mayor Executive Team and attended the first meeting. She also signed the letter that Councilmember Spriggs and Councilmember James signed regarding the cease fire in the Middle East and added that she would post the letters on her social media pages. She invited Senator Kunesh, Representative Feist, and Representative Koegel to the next City Council meeting. She also met with the Crest View Director for updates on their property.

Report of the City Manager

Interim City Manager Hansen stated there would be a meeting tomorrow regarding the comprehensive plans for the Metronic site. There will be presentations by the consultant in the Council chambers and then there will be break outs to hear from the community. The fourth annual Snow Blast is on February 3, 2024 at Huset Park from 4-7 pm. City offices will be closed on Monday due to Martin Luther King Jr. day.

Interim City Manager Hansen noted the Fire Department has ordered new equipment for the fire truck and delivery is still on schedule. The City is doing a cooperative study with Anoka County regarding 40th Avenue. One public meeting has been held and designs have been updated because of it. An additional open house will be held mid-February after the Council has a chance to see the designs and provide input.

Interim City Manager Hansen mentioned that the City has been working on a grant for the Safe Streets for All and are working with consultants. The Council will review and approve a consultant in February. The City received a Safe Roads to School grant a number of years ago. A consultant was hired at the end of 2023 and have completed the survey and preliminary design. The next step is to meet with the City of Hilltop and then come back to the Council in February for the final review and authorization to seek bids. The City is planning on it being a 2024 improvement project.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Dirk Schmitz, City resident, stated that in his opinion Columbia Heights has a small town feel but local employment and services are disappearing. According to Chapter 5 in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan, the City has lost 725 jobs since 2015 and that does not include lost employment and services from the old Rainbow site. The Comprehensive Plan states that the City should increase by 900 more residents by 2040. He believes the City could surpass that due to the addition of 400-600 units at the old Rainbow site, not including the new units above City Hall or the Legends. He asked why the consultants and Staff believe the Medtronic site should be rezoned for high-density housing instead of other commercial endeavors that could increase business and jobs to residents. He read that one option for

the Columbia Heights southwest industrial area is to change half of it to high-density housing. He asked where the City thinks a large employer or business would have the area to operate in the City, where residents would be able to walk or bike to if services are lost in the City, what the current Staff and City Council were planning on doing for the future of Columbia Heights, and how will the City keep a small town feel in 2040.

Laurel Deenen, City resident, thanked the Council for doing the Xcel program. She asked if there were any thoughts on how to convert grants to local businesses who are currently in older buildings that are aging poorly to do green initiatives within the City. She expressed her concern regarding the current aging buildings and how to encourage those buildings to become more carbon neutral.

Mayor Márquez Simula explained that it is standard for staff to investigate citizens' concerns and gather follow up information to respond at the next City Council meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to adjourn. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:28 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary