



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION
City Hall—Shared Vision Room, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, February 02, 2026
6:00 PM

Mayor
Amáda Márquez Simula
Councilmembers
Connie Buesgens
Rachel James
Justice Spriggs
Laurel Deneen
City Manager
Aaron Chirpich

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Márquez Simula at 6:15pm.

Present: Mayor Márquez Simula, Councilmember Buesgens, Councilmember Deneen, Councilmember James, Councilmember Spriggs.

Also Present: Aaron Chirpich, City Manager; Jesse Hauf, IT Director; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Joe Kloiber, Finance Director; Will Rottler, Communications and Engagement Coordinator; Andy Splinter, Assistant Finance Director.

WORK SESSION ITEMS

1. Group Discussion: Share your best adventure or an adventure you are looking forward to having one day.

Mayor Márquez Simula led the group in an ice breaker discussion, asking about what their best adventure was or an adventure they are looking forward to having one day.

2. Update on Meter Reading and Responses.

Finance Director Joseph Kloiber introduced the item to the council and informed them of past practice and current updated practices that are leading to internal work being completed to establish a policy regarding the criteria for a city response to high meter readings in the City.

Mayor Márquez Simula inquired how residents are responding to this information. Assistant Director Splinter responded that it has been mixed responses, but it has been helpful in identifying water use issues that can cause damage to properties.

Councilmember James stated that she would like to see some additional education related to low level leaks and how the City responds. Director Kloiber confirmed that there will be a FAQ to help residents understand billing statements and how their water usage impacts this.

Councilmember Buesgens stated that she would like to see a presentation like this given to the Sustainability Commission and have a demonstration/display at the library to educate the public.

Councilmember Deneen inquired about the remaining meter change outs that are needed and making sure that we are deploying language services in our effort for compliance.

Director Kloiber and City Manager Chirpich confirmed that all resources available would be deployed to bring things into compliance.

3. 2026 Events Schedule.

Communications & Engagement Coordinator Will Rottler introduced the item to the council and reviewed the upcoming events schedule for 2026.

Mayor Márquez Simula would like to see the paper shredding event held in conjunction with Earth Day. Additionally, she would like a kids' area for the Arts and Info Fair, and to see if there is the possibility of a Valentines Day City Tour with the Fire Department. Additionally, she would also like to see a Ramadan or other multicultural type event. Councilmember Deneen would like to see drum karaoke continue with Klash Drums. Councilmember James inquired about music at Jamboree, and making sure that there is not admission fees.

5. Banners Along Central Ave NE/37th Ave NE/37th Place NE.

Communications & Engagement Coordinator Will Rottler introduced the item to the council and gave an update regarding the current banner program. He asked for feedback and guidance from the City Council regarding the design/placement of banners along Central Ave NE, 37th Ave NE, and 37th Place NE.

Mayor Márquez Simula would like some time to consider and look at what other cities do. Councilmember James, Deneen and Spriggs would like to see the space used as a coordinated community art space to promote the city. Councilmember Buesgens would like to see the banners changed each year with banners celebrating the diversity of the community on Central Avenue.

Councilmember Spriggs would like to see a "Welcome to Columbia Heights" sign at the southeast corner of the City where Lions Park once was.

Council direction was to proceed with making this a City based process and not individual organization / businesses. The council would like to see about adding national flags that represent the community mixed into the existing Columbia Heights Banners.

6. Employee Recognition Program / Updates to Sunshine Fund.

Communications & Engagement Coordinator Will Rottler introduced the item to the council and asked for feedback regarding the proposed new employee recognition program and updates to the City's Sunshine Fund.

Councilmember Deneen would like to see a gift card from a local business offered instead of a plaque. Councilmember James confirmed that this would be twice a year to coincide with the summer lunch and holiday lunch. Councilmember Spriggs would like to see the illness/hospitalization moved to one day instead of two for Sunshine Fund Related illnesses.

Council agreed to have staff review the proposed updates with the City's Employee Health & Wellness Committee so they can weigh in on the potential changes before proceeding.

7. Update On Metronet/T-Mobile Acquisition of USI.

IT Director Jesse Hauf introduced the item to the council and gave an update on the impact of the Metronet / T-Mobile Acquisitions of USI for the plans for internet connection in the City. He indicated that one of the bigger changes would be future branding of mailers for services coming from T-Mobile, and the work being completed within the City will be by Metronet and USI branded trucks.

Councilmember Buesgens stated her concerns about how staffing shortages will impact the work that will be completed. Director Hauf will make sure that there are conversations with the Communications Department for a project kick off / code red alert.

Councilmember Spriggs inquired about the reduced rates that are available. Director Hauf discussed that there are many qualifying provisions for reduced rates that will be available and that this information will be available on the city website once work is completed.

8. Listening Session Follow-up and Coalition Planning Update.

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the item to the council. He asked that a few additional action items be reviewed. One of the themes from the listening session was limiting access to City property for federal enforcement. Currently an ordinance is not the best method for limiting access (as it needs to be enforceable), the city has deployed strategic closures of parking areas throughout the city. City Manager Chirpich stated that this is a developing situation and at this time this is a practical way to thread the needle.

Councilmember Deneen would like to see a connection with the Friends of Kordiak Park and Anoka County Commissioner Meisner related to concerns with federal enforcement using the county park space.

Councilmember Spriggs would like to see a resolution passed in support of the eviction moratorium at a state level. Additionally he hoped to see the coalition of cities participate in the. Staff confirmed that they will prepare a resolution for the February 9, 2026, meeting.

Overall, the council would like to approve a MOU for proceeding with the Coalition of Cities at the February 9, 2026. A press release will be made in the upcoming days to bring forward the work that the coalition is doing to advocate for municipalities during this difficult time.

9. Assistant City Manager and Acting City Manager Planning.

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the item to the council and elaborated on plans for having a practical outline for proceeding with vacation / training / illness or other absence of the City Manager. For situations that involve public emergencies, operations would be delegated to the Police Chief.

He further elaborated that there is staff who can participate in helping with day-to-day administrative operations. These staff members who have desire to grow in their positions would be included in a soon to be formalized fellowship program. There will be additional pay offered for the position, it needs to be meaningful and beneficial to all.

Council was in favor of moving forward with the plan as proposed and getting more information related to this process.

10. City Manager Follow-up Regarding Previous Work Session Topics.

City Manager Aaron Chirpich introduced the item to the council to give a status on several items that the council has discussed at previous work sessions. One item to schedule for additional review in the future, prior to an ordinance going before the council is to listen to both tenant and landlord concerns related to changes to city code related to tenant protections.

The council was supportive of making sure that all parties impacted will be apart of the conversation at work sessions in the near future.

11. Council Corner.

The council reviewed the February calendar, notified each other of upcoming events and discussed proclamations for upcoming meetings.

Councilmember Buesgens would like to see work done related to fraud and crypto currency. Would like staff to dig into the locations that offer this service within the city and to see what can be done to reduce the harm caused by this type of fraud.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Márquez Simula adjourned the meeting at approximately 9:45pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary