



CITY COUNCIL MEETING
City Hall—Council Chambers, 3989 Central Ave NE
Monday, August 14, 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 Meeting of the City Council held at 6:00 pm on Monday, August 14, 2023, in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 3989 Central Avenue, Columbia Heights, Minnesota

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; Aaron Chirpich, Community Development Director/ Assistant City Manager; Jim Hoeft, City Attorney; Sara Ion, City Clerk; Cliff Johnson, City resident; Barbara Delaria, 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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

CONSENT AGENDA

Councilmember Spriggs requested that Item 5 “Second Reading of Ordinance 1685, Establishing a Detached Single-Family Dwelling Rental Density Cap”, be removed from the Consent Agenda for further discussion.

Motion by Councilmember Jacobs, seconded by Councilmember Spriggs, to approve the Consent Agenda as presented with Item 5 removed for further discussion. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

- 1. Approve the July 5, 2023 City Council Work Session Meeting Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to approve the July 5, 2023 City Council Work Session meeting minutes.
- 2. Approve the July 12, 2023 City Council Corner Meeting Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to approve the July 12, 2023 City Council Corner meeting minutes.

- 3. Approve the July 24, 2023 City Council Meeting Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to approve the July 24, 2023 City Council Work Session meeting minutes.
- 4. Approve June 5, 2023, Regular EDA Meeting Minutes.**
MOTION: Move to approve the June 5, 2023, Regular EDA meeting minutes.
- 5. Pulled from the Consent Agenda for further discussion "Second Reading of Ordinance 1685, Establishing a Detached Single-Family Dwelling Rental Density Cap."**
- 6. License Agenda.**
MOTION: Move to approve the items as listed on the business license agenda for August 14, 2023 as presented.
- 7. Rental Occupancy Licenses for Approval**
MOTION: Move to approve the items listed for rental housing license applications for August 14, 2023, in that they have met the requirements of the Property Maintenance Code.
- 8. 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 \$5,621,903.22.

ITEMS PULLED FROM THE CONSENT AGENDA

- 5. Second Reading of Ordinance 1685, Establishing a Detached Single-Family Dwelling Rental Density Cap.**

Community Development Director/Assistant City Manager Chirpich stated the rental density cap has been an ongoing discussion for the Council. It establishes a cap on the number of single-family rental licenses that would be allowed in the City with approximately ten percent allowed within the City. The discussion has centered on issues the City has with corporate ownership of single-family rentals.

Councilmember Spriggs commented that he would be voting no due to not feeling comfortable with some of the points of the ordinance. He expressed his concerns on the ordinance since many renters tend to be people of color and lower income and worried that it would send the message that the City does not want them there. He explained an argument is that lowering rentals can help stabilize the housing market or that too many rental properties can devalue homes. He added that there are ten percent or greater rental single-family homes on his street and you would not be able to tell the difference in rentals vs. owned homes. He stated buying a house is not necessarily the best step for everyone given all of the costs associated with them and sometimes, moving into a rental property can be a better option for people.

Councilmember Spriggs noted the ten percent cap still allows a lot of areas within the City to receive rental licenses since it is by street and not area. He added that he is concerned that there

will be an increase in illegal rentals that will occur because of this and it will require more Staff time and resources so he does not believe it is beneficial of their time. He suggested having stronger tenant protections such as security deposit limits and tenant relocation assistance. He encouraged the City to look into how to give the people more affordable ownership opportunities and to address the housing shortage. He noted his understanding on what the City is trying to do but he does not believe it is the best path.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated she had similar concerns as Councilmember Spriggs, particularly with Staff needing to improve the application process and inspections. She added that it should be looked at every year to ensure it is the right fit for the community.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Jacobs, to waive the reading of Ordinance No. 1685, there being ample copies available to the public. All Ayes, Motion Carried 5-0.

Motion by Councilmember Buesgens, seconded by Councilmember Jacobs, to adopt Ordinance No. 1685, being an ordinance amending chapter 5a article iv of the Columbia Heights City code to regulate rental density for detached single-family rental dwellings and direct staff to send the summary ordinance for publication in the legal newspaper. 4 Ayes, 1 Nay, Motion Carried 4-1. Ayes: Buesgens, Jacobs, James, and Márquez Simula. Nay: Spriggs.

CITY COUNCIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Report of the City Council

Councilmember Jacobs stated she attended the Kiwanis meeting and shared that they will be celebrating the 40th year of their recycling project for the City on September 19, 2023 from 9 am to 12 pm. She added she attended the event at Jimmy's Pro Billiards, noted all of the changes that have occurred there, and encouraged the community to support the business. She did 13 resident reach outs.

Councilmember James noted she attended Music in the Park, National Night Out with Councilmember Spriggs, the Crest View Community appreciation BBQ, and the League of Women Voters annual meeting. She noted there will be a summer social on August 21, 2023 with Senator Mary Kunesh speaking on the Read Act. She commented on the recently passed Ordinance No. 1685 and expressed her hope that the City could work on tenant protections and other opportunities to make the City a great place for renters.

Councilmember Spriggs noted he continues to work with residents at the Legends and attended National Night Out parties with Councilmember James. He met with City engineer's to discuss safety and plans for Central Avenue. He was able to meet with the CEO of USI, which is an internet business hoping to expand to Columbia Heights. He also met with Minneapolis Councilmember Jason Chavez to discuss common issues they see in their cities and how to partner in the future. He attended the library board meeting and the EDA work session.

Councilmember Buesgens mentioned she attended the Metro Council Housing Economic Development meeting, Music in the Park, National Night Out parties with Captain Matt Markham, the potluck garden party at Blooming Sunshine Gardens, the dress rehearsal of the play *Rumor*, and the Sustainability Commission meeting as a liaison. She read a statement expressing her disappointment with the lack of transparency in hiring a City Manager. She noted a credible source stated that a current Councilmember reached out to say the current interim manager was a part of a “good ol’ boy club” and the Council needs to get rid of him. She stated she was upset that a Councilmember would say that because it is not true and that Councilmember said conflicting comments during a recent work session meeting. She added that the mayor would not allow discussion on the topic during the work session and noted the point of a work session was to have discussion. She explained she did not understand the reasons behind Councilmember Spriggs and Mayor Márquez Simula decision to hire an outside City Manager since there was no discussion. She stated the Council should explain their true reasons on hiring an outside City Manager and encouraged the Council to ask themselves “what is the current Interim City Manager not doing that led them to change their decision to do an outside hire?” She added the process must be transparent, but it has not been.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that the item was discussed at the Council Corner which is a public meeting. Councilmember Buesgens replied that Councilmember Spriggs was not in attendance and it was not the time for discussion because it was a report. She added that Mayor Márquez Simula would not allow discussion because it was too heated with too many emotions and would not allow the Human Resource person to speak. Mayor Márquez Simula mentioned that she spoke with the Human Resource person ahead of time and they had explained they only needed to send the information. Councilmember Buesgens stated Mayor Márquez Simula did not allow a space for discussion. Mayor Márquez Simula replied that it was not accurate and she had asked if anyone needed additional information to make a decision. Councilmember Buesgens disagreed.

Councilmember James agreed that transparency is the most important thing when it comes to the hiring process of a City Manager. She expressed her appreciation of using the language of going through a search process instead of looking for an internal or external hire that invites internal and external people to apply. She noted the only opportunity the Council has to hire someone to represent the residents is the City Manager. She added she is committed to a long process to ensure the best person gets hired.

Councilmember Jacobs clarified that the Council Corner was intended as an informal way for the Council to meet and discuss items that would not be covered in a work session. She stated she had mentioned her concern about having the item on the agenda since it was already on a work session agenda. She noted that Councilmember Buesgens took full responsibility for requesting the item to be added to the agenda. She added that Council Corner is not a mandated meeting.

Mayor Márquez Simula stated that it is an important decision and she met with the Mayor of Burnsville and other mayors to ask how their cities hired their city manager and what process they used. She expressed her excitement to hear from the Council what they are looking for in the position and felt that the process was transparent. She apologized to Councilmember Buesgens that she did not feel that it was transparent. She noted she was following the guidance of the City Manager and HR Director

Mayor Márquez Simula explained she attended the Heights Next Garden tour. The Monarch Festival has been rescheduled to August 24, 2023. She also attended the Blooming Sunshine Garden potluck and National Night Out events.

Report of the City Manager

Community Development Director/Assistant City Manager Chirpich reviewed the upcoming City events:

- August 15, 2023 from 5-7 pm – Cone with a Cop
- August 17, 2023 from 5-7:30 pm – City Hall open house
- August 18, 2023 at 8:30 pm – Movie in the Park and will be showing E.T. The event is sponsored by the Sister Cities and will be at Huset Park West.
- August 23, 2023 from 6:30-8 pm – Music in the Park is sponsored by North East Bank and will be at Huset Park East.
- August 24, 2023 from 5-8 pm – The Monarch Festival at Kordiak Park
- August 25, 2023 at 8 pm – Movie at the park will be showing Black Panther and will be at Huset Park East.

Mayor Márquez Simula added that there will be a Friends with Kordiak meeting with the Anoka County Parks on Wednesday, August 16, 2023 from 5:30-6:30 pm.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Cliff Johnson, City resident, stated he had comments regarding the Ordinance No. 1685 and explained he would like to see it enhanced further. He noted on his block there are 18 out of 60 properties that are some sort of rental property and have a license. Out of the 18 rentals, 8 are single-family homes with the rest being duplexes or fourplexes. He added that it is a lot of density for one area and asked if it would be considered when figuring out the density caps. He explained the density issues are things such as garbage and parking. He stated there will need to be more Staff involvement in order to have the licenses issued. He asked the Council to fine tune the ordinance later in order to take into account all of the new large rental properties coming into the City.

Barbara Delaria, City resident, stated she had an abatement last year and as far as she is aware, she has cleaned and done everything on the violation papers. She was told to clean up the weeds, shrubs, and cut the grass. She asked why she was charged for the City to clear out split wood in the abatement. She noted she spoke with the Mayor and Fire Department and was told she should have called but she thought she was complying and did not have questions, which is why she did not call. She asked the Council what she was supposed to do. She mentioned that she had some bundles and split wood that needed to be cleaned up but it was not \$650 worth. She asked what meeting she is supposed to be at.

Mayor Márquez Simula replied that she did not know what meeting that would be. She asked Ms. Delaria to stay at the end of the meeting in order to discuss what steps need to be taken moving forward.

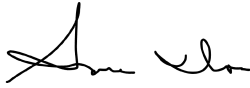
Councilmember Jacobs apologized to Ms. Delaria for not getting back to her.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Meeting adjourned at 6:41 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Sara Ion, City Clerk/Council Secretary