

City Council Meeting Minutes

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025 – 6:00 PM
COLUMBIA CITY, CITY HALL – 1840 SECOND STREET
CITY OF COLUMBIA CITY, COLUMBIA COUNTY, OREGON

AGENDA ITEM 1

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL:

CONVENED:

Mayor Alex Reed called the Regular Meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mayor Alex Reed
Council President Rob Forman
Councilor Gordon Thistle
Councilor Connie Quick
Councilor Lyle Bluhm

COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

None.

ALSO PRESENT:

Helen Johnson, Office Supervisor/Administrative Assistant
Micah Rogers, Public Works Superintendent

ATTORNEY PRESENT:

None

A quorum was present, and due notice had been published.

AGENDA ITEM 2

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

Helen explained that the May city newsletter advertised a public hearing this evening to discuss water and sewer rate increases, anyone who is present and wishes to provide their input will be allowed. The official public hearing will be at the next City Council meeting on Wednesday, June 18, 2025, which is a special night due to the Juneteenth holiday.

Joe Turner of 2920 Sixth Street stated he thinks it is reasonable to raise rates 3 to 5% every 5 years to maintain operator costs. He even feels it is reasonable to consider a 5% increase per year for 5 years to pay for major projects. But a 15% increase in one year is a major expense and should have been on the May ballot for everyone to vote on.

The Mayor and Council expressed their sympathy and frustration with the increases as well as explaining that over the last several years lack of rate increases caused insufficient funding to cover expenses, and this is needed to catch up and hopefully future increases will not be as high. It was also explained the city purchases water from St. Helens, and they also treat our sewer, which does affect our expenses/rates as well.

Kit Gardes of 1830 Seventh Street stated she had gone to the recent St. Helens City Council meeting, and they are discussing raising their water rates, but have not made their decisions yet. She asked if they chose not to raise their rates, would that outcome affect our potential rate increase. Helen Johnson explained that even if St. Helens does not increase, we still need to increase.

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Robert Campbell of 2105 The Strand, a water committee member for 25 years, explained with the projects that happen here, the city borrows money or receives grants to help pay for them. He commented some of our projects are larger in scale than most towns our size can manage without those grants or very low interest loans. We do not enjoy the economic scale of Portland or cities that are much larger to help with the cost. He commented that sometimes things come up or regulations force us to do things that cost us a lot of money, and we must adjust.

AGENDA ITEM 3 CITIZEN INPUT:

None

AGENDA ITEM 4 COUNCIL REPORTS:

- 4.1 Audit Committee:** Chair Forman reported the committee met on May 6, 2025. The minutes were submitted to Kim and will be in the next council packet. He stated they did their usual review of checks with a new tool. It was a cheat sheet created to save the committee time with their reviews. Most of the vendors are repeats and the cheat sheet helps identify what the vendor does for the city. Chair Forman stated the committee also had a couple of formal requests: 1) because of concern outlined by the previous auditor's questioning the effectiveness of the committee, the committee is asking council to explain their purpose and provide more direction to improve communication and effectiveness, 2) be included in the distribution of council minutes, 3) when the committee is seeking council input on a specific topic, they will make the request to be added under new business on the agenda for the next council meeting. This will provide the council with time to review the matter and be able to provide better feedback and quicker decisions.

Chair Forman then shared some additional comments from audit committee members that were not audit related, but more citizen input. 1) Concerns around using personal names/information in emails used by the city instead of positions. He explained the concern is when someone leaves a position, emails can get lost. It was recommended to discuss at the next council meeting. 2) In relation to the recent water leak to also put information on the website as well as Facebook. It was discussed communicating with citizens in a future newsletter to look at the City News section of the website for this type of information. 3) Also, in relation to the recent water leak, it was asked if there was a documented post incident report to consider any improvements or changes. Councilor Quick said she would bring it up at the next hazard mitigation planning group meeting if appropriate.

The next audit committee meeting is scheduled for September 25, 2025, at 2:30 p.m.

Mayor Reed asked to discuss the purpose and direction of the audit committee, asking Chair Forman what they do currently. Chair Forman explained they have standard operating procedures they follow and that includes reviewing checks, looking at invoices, reviewing expense vs budget report, etc. Mayor Reed asked how often the committee has found errors. Chair Forman said never.

- 4.2 Hazard Committee:** Chair Quick stated the committee continues to get everything lined up for the upcoming Celebration and Prepare Fair. She asked if anyone had any new ideas or specific requests to let her know. A hook and ladder fire truck was requested. Micah Rogers also mentioned having the signup information for emergency alerts setup as has been done at previous prepare fairs.
- 4.3 Parks Committee:** Chair Bluhm reported the main topic discussed at the last meeting was the update of the Parks Masterplan and how the process will take time. He also stated the recent decision to use available funds to place some park benches, and a few other items have been placed on hold, as the updated plan could affect future park purchase and needs. Micah Rogers stated at the next

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meeting on May 20th that the representative of the company hired to update the plan will be there to discuss with the committee the process they go through creating an updated Parks Masterplan. Micah Rogers also said another representative from the company will be onsite to walk each of the parks. He explained the process as he understands it will include meetings and surveys to gain as much citizen involvement and feedback as possible.

4.4 **Streets Committee:** No report. Next meeting scheduled for September.

4.5 **Water & Sewer Committee:** No report. Public hearing next month on water and sewer increases.

AGENDA ITEM 5

CONSENT AGENDA:

- 5.1 Bills paid with check numbers 35441 through 35482 during the month of April 2025.
- 5.2 Expense vs Budget Report for the month ending April 2025.
- 5.3 Combined balance sheet for the month ending April 2025.
- 5.4 Minutes of the April 17, 2025, Regular City Council Meeting.
- 5.5 Activity Report from the Chief of Police for the month of April 2025.
- 5.6 Activity Report from the City Administrator for the month of April 2025.
- 5.7 Activity Report from the Public Works Superintendent for the month of April 2025.
- 5.8 Minutes of the February 18, 2024, Audit Committee Meeting.

THE COUNCIL APPROVED THE CONSENT AGENDA BY UNANIMOUS ROLL CALL VOTE.

AGENDA ITEM 6

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

6.1 **Permit Application for Structure in Unimproved Right of Way as applied for by James Koenig and Christy Sanders of 1535 4th Place.**

The Council reviewed and discussed the memo from Helen Johnson outlining the feedback from CRF&R and Columbia River PUD. The Council agreed with the concerns from CRF&R and agreed to approve the permit application if the rock landscaping is moved closer to the property owner's property line and extends no further than the fence located at 450 M Street that has an approved and recorded permit to occupy the right of way. Also, prior to preparation and recording of the permit, the property owners need to restore the right of way to its prior condition.

MOVED (QUICK), SECOND (THISTLE) AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE RIGHT OF WAY PERMIT WITH THE ADDED CONDITIONS MENTIONED ABOVE.

AGENDA ITEM 7

NEW BUSINESS:

7.1 **Council Bill No. 25-1000: An Ordinance Extending the Suspension of Processing and Issuance of Floodplain Development Permits for a Period of 365 Days or Until a Model Ordinance is Adopted, Whichever Occurs First; Declaring an Emergency; Effective June 1, 2025.**

MOVED (QUICK), SECONDED (THISTLE), AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY TO DECLARE AN EMERGENCY.

MOVED (FORMAN), SECOND (BLUHM) AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADOPT COUNCIL BILL 25-1000 STARTING JUNE 1, WITH THE EMERGENCY CLAUSE.

Helen reviewed and discussed with the Council the memo from Lauren Scott, City Planner dated May 15, 2025. On page 4 Lauren had two questions she wanted to ask the Council. One was what types of community involvement or outreach methods would Council like to prioritize for engaging participation in the process. The Council discussed in addition to the

required notice and mailing requirements, using the newsletter to encourage attendance at public hearings. The second question asked comes from the model code regarding who is considered a qualified professional to review floodplain permits. The model code qualifications would limit the number of private sector habitat biologists in the area and could be expensive to secure and possibly difficult to find. Should the City consider reducing the years of experience required for biologists and/or consider allowing licensed engineers who certify and design low impact developments or green infrastructure in floodplain areas? At this time, the Council was not comfortable making any type of recommendation on this topic. They want to wait and see how some other communities address this issue.

7.2 Intergovernmental Agreement for Permit Data Compilations Services between Columbia County and the City of Columbia City.

MOVED (FORMAN), SECOND (THISTLE) AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE SIGNATURE OF THE IGA WITH COLUMBIA COUNTY FOR PERMIT DATA SERVICES.

7.3 Endorsement Protocol Proposal.

Council President Forman proposed establishing a written protocol for any candidate, individual or group requesting Council's endorsement. He offered to draft guidelines to be reviewed and discussed at the next Council meeting.

7.4 Permit Application for Structure in Unimproved Right-of-Way as applied for by Sophie & Alan Martinson of 1945 The Strand.

Helen discussed with Council this specific request and the general terms of this type of permit. The Council recommended approval of the proposal with the conditions. The conditions limit the height of the garden bubbler and nature statue to a maximum of four feet and if the bubbler and nature statue are to be lit, the lighting must be indirect and not affect adjacent homes and/or traffic on adjacent streets.

MOVED (FORMAN), SECOND (QUICK) AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE RIGHT OF WAY PERMIT WITH THE ADDED CONDITIONS MENTIONED ABOVE.

7.5 Council Bill No. 25-1001: A Resolution determining a nuisance exists and requests the City abate the nuisance at 1630 Second Street.

MOVED (THISTLE), SECONDED (FORMAN), AND CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADOPT COUNCIL BILL NO 25-1001.

AGENDA ITEM 8

OTHER BUSINESS:

8.1 Mini Mart drainage issue.

Helen Johnson and Micah Rogers provided the Council with history associated with stormwater concerns at the Mini Mart. They explained that their system is not connected to collect, filter and disperse stormwater properly. The City has had multiple communications over the years about what is needed and how to resolve the situation. The Council directed another violation letter to be sent providing a specific deadline for resolution and if not addressed properly the City will be submitting complaints to both ODOT and DEQ regarding the violation.

8.2 Lignetics Dust Pollution.

Mayor Reed asked about the status of the dust pollution concerns from the pellet plant operated by Lignetics on the Port of Columbia County property in Columbia City. Helen Johnson advised the Council, there have been improvements made to the processes and

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new equipment installed to minimize the pollutants. The situation is still being monitored and has not been finalized or completely resolved.

AGENDA ITEM 9 ADJOURNMENT:

9.1 There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting adjourned at 7:37 pm.

APPROVED:

Alexander Reed
Mayor

ATTEST:

Helen Johnson
Office Supervisor/Administrative Assistant