

Meeting of: COLUMBIA HEIGHTS CITY COUNCIL AND THE COLUMBIA HEIGHTS BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Date of Meeting: December 5, 2019  
Time of Meeting: 7 pm  
Location of Meeting: Library Community Room  
Purpose of Meeting: Special Meeting

City Council Present: Mayor Schmitt, Councilmembers Murzyn Jr, Novitsky, Williams, and Buesgens

Board of Education Present: Chair John Larkin, Vice-Chair Naty Severson, Clerk Laura Palmer, Treasurer Lorien Mueller, and Director Hala Asamarai.

Board of Education Absent: Director Molly Lewis

City Staff Present: Kelli Bourgeois-City Manager, Kevin Hansen-Public Works Director/City Engineer, Aaron Chirpich-Community Development Director, Ben Sandell-Communications Coordinator, and Nicole Tingley-City Clerk/Council Secretary.

School District Staff Present: Kathy Kelly-Superintendent, Dawn Hoium-Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and the Board of Education, and Bryan Hennekens-Director of Technology, Security Services and Building Operations.

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Donna Schmitt and School Board Chair John Larkin. The pledge of allegiance was recited.

2. Welcome and Introductions

All present members of the City Council, all present members of the Board of Education, Superintendent Kelly, and City Manager Bourgeois introduced themselves.

Councilmember Novitsky shared that he would like to add a public comment portion to the agenda.

Councilmember Buesgens stated she was not in favor of adding one noting that this meeting is just for sharing information and that the two bodies can always have another meeting.

School Board Member Mueller commented that since the public comment is not on the agenda that was already publicized adding it later changes the direction.

Councilmember Williams commented that the School Board and City Council have met many times. Novitsky asked when the last meeting was.

School Board Chair Larkin answered that there has not been a joint meeting since he has been on the board so it was more than 7 years ago. Larkin also commented that he agreed with Buesgens and Mueller regarding adding public comment portion to the meeting agenda.

To come to a determination concerning adding a public comment portion, all present members of both bodies were polled with answers as follows:

- Councilmember Novitsky: yes to having a public comment portion
- Councilmember Williams: yes to having a public comment portion
- Councilmember Murzyn: no to having a public comment portion
- Mayor Schmitt: yes to having a public comment portion
- School Board Chair Larkin: no to having a public comment portion
- School Board Vice Chair Severson: no to having a public comment portion
- School Board Member Palmer: no to having a public comment portion
- School Board Member Mueller: no to having a public comment portion
- School Board Member Asamarai: no to having a public comment portion

It was determined that a public comment portion would not be added to the meeting agenda.

Mayor Schmitt stated that residents can always talk to individuals members after the meeting.

School Board Member Mueller stated that the School Board will be having an open forum at their December 17<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting. School Board Member Palmer added that the School Board will also be hosting a Listening Session on January 15.

### 3. Presentation of School District Building Projects

Director of Technology, Security Services and Building Operations Hennekens provided an overview and updates for the capital projects approved with a bond referendum during the 2018 election. Those projects include a band room addition at the high school, updates and remodel to the Performance Arts Center, gym stage remodel at the high school, and remodeling and additions at North Park Elementary School. The projects at the high school are anticipated to be finished in early 2020 and the work at North Park Elementary School will be finished in time for the 2020-2021 School Year.

Hennekens also provided a brief summary of other capital projects currently being completed at the school district that were not included in the bond referendum. These included: North Park Elementary School Roof, work on the high school track, new windows at Valley View Elementary, stadium painting, pool improvements, and security enhancements at multiple buildings.

Councilmember Buesgens asked if there was going to be an open house for the band addition and the performing arts center. Superintendent Kelly stated that there would be along with a ribbon cutting.

School Board Member Mueller inquired about the projects staying on budget. Hennekens stated that the projects are on budget and that there are contingencies built in.

Mayor Schmitt asked if a new library is included in the renovations at North Park Elementary. Hennekens stated that there is and showed where it would be located.

### 4. Transportation Projects

Public Works Director/City Engineer Hansen provided an overview of the City's 5 year Capital Improvement Plan for city streets. Hansen noted that they would be continuing to work on Central Ave Safety south of 47<sup>th</sup>. In addition construction on 46<sup>th</sup> Ave will be completed in 2021 as a State Aid Project. Construction on Jefferson Avenue from 41<sup>st</sup> to 44<sup>th</sup> Ave is also included.

Hansen then discussed a couple of MnDOT (state) road related projects in Columbia Heights. Hansen shared that traffic signal installation on 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue is delayed until 2020. He also discussed that 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue between University and Central Avenues is anticipated to be reconstructed in 2022 or 2023. At this time it is anticipated that the road will go from a 4 lane road to a 3 lane road with room for streetscape.

Hansen noted that the City will be partnering with the City of Minneapolis to reconstruct 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue between Central Ave and Stinson Blvd in 2023. He noted the project would cost around \$10 million.

Next, Hansen discussed street projects for 2020. Hansen explained that the City is divided into 7 zones for street projects and that in 2020 and 2021 work would be completed in zone 4. In 2020 3 alleys will also be reconstructed. Furthermore, the City will be working on Safe Routes to School in 2020. Finally, in 2020 MnDOT will start an 18 month long safety audit with a focus on pedestrians on Highway 47 (University) and Highway 65 (Central).

School Board Member Mueller thanked Hansen for his consideration of sidewalks and kids walking to school. She also asked him what other funding sources are used for transportation besides grants. Hansen responded that the City does have funding in the City budget and that special assessments are used for local streets and alleys as grants are not available.

School Board Chair Larkin commented that he liked the idea of enhancing 40<sup>th</sup> Ave. Hansen replied the City is also looking into narrowing other roadways.

## 5. Economic Development

Community Development Director Aaron Chirpich shared updates regarding major development projects occurring in Columbia Heights. Chirpich stated that a Senior Living facility was approved by the City Council this past fall on the vacant lot across from Huset Park. Chirpich noted that they will be coming back to the City Council with a smaller 32-unit concept due to soil issues found on the site. Additionally, Chirpich stated that Prodeo Academy, a K-8 public charter school is being built on the previous Oak Hill Baptist Church site and is expected to be open for the 2020-2021 school year. Lastly, Chirpich discussed the mixed use development project on 40<sup>th</sup> and Central where the NE Business Center currently is. This reconstruction would be a 6-story building with 5 stories of apartments and a first level City Hall and café.

Next, Chirpich provided an overview of the City's Façade Improvement Grant program. Chirpich shared an example of a business that received a security camera from the program in which the camera footage was useful.

School Board Member Vice Chair Severson thanked Chirpich for their work.

## 6. City and School District Liaisons

The City Council and School Board had a discussion regarding the roles of the City Council Liaison to the School Board and the School Board Liaison to the City Council. It was stated by members of both bodies that a mutual understanding is needed.

School Board Chair Larkin and School Board Member Mueller commented on the functions and role of the School Board Liaison to the School Board. It was noted that it is seen as someone who can share information

about the school district and be a point of contact for the City Council and that how it is carried out changes with each individual.

Councilmember Novitsky stated that he has appreciated Mueller coming to City Council meetings to share what it is happening at the school district. Novitsky shared his frustration regarding the agenda of the meeting. He commented that the purpose of the meeting which was to discuss the letter written from the school board after he declared he was the school board liaison at a school meeting. He asked why an individual school board member did not talk to him if there was a concern.

Councilmember Murzyn Jr. stated he was someone who requested this meeting to receive clarification regarding this letter written by the school board. He noted the letter was vague.

School Board Member Mueller commented that the members of a School Board can only communicate as a board. She also noted that the letter was to ask if the City had any policies regarding the role of a City Council Liaison to the School Board.

Mayor Schmitt stated that Superintendent Kelly and City Manager Bourgeois should have had a conversation there was an issue with the role. She also commented that the letter questioned Novitsky's ability to be the liaison.

School Board Members answered that the letter was not questioning the person, but instead the role.

School Board Chair Larkin stated that the board thought it should come from the parallel body to the City Council which is the School Board. It was clarified that individual school board members can have informal individual conversations but cannot speak for the board.

School Board Member Mueller asked if the City had a definition for the role of a liaison.

Mayor Schmitt answered that the role is defined in the City Council Handbook that was adopted by the City Council. She stated that it is not very specific in that each individual makes the role unique. Schmitt added that generally it is not the job of a liaison to make comments, but rather listen and hear what is going on. Liaisons share with the rest of the City Council what is happening with groups in which they are liaisons to.

Buesgens stated that she was very glad the two bodies gathered and had this conversation.

The City Council and the School Board decided to start having a joint annual meeting and provided direction to City Manager Bourgeois and Superintendent Kelly to set-up a date for mid-next year. In addition, direction was provided to have copies of each body's liaison policy to each other.

Councilmember Murzyn Jr. noted that all elected officials should make it clear what role they are in at a meeting right away.

7. Adjourn

Mayor Schmitt and School Board Chair Larkin adjourned the meeting at 9:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



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Nicole Tingley, City Clerk/Council Secretary