



Columbia City Council Budget Workshop Minutes Tuesday, June 9, 2026

Call to Order

The Columbia City Council conducted a Budget Workshop on Tuesday, June 9, 2026 at City Hall (Mayor's Conference Room), 1737 Main Street, Columbia, South Carolina 29201. The Honorable Daniel J. Rickenmann, Mayor called the meeting to order at 1:16 p.m. and the following members were present: The Honorable Edward H. McDowell, Jr., The Honorable Will Brennan, The Honorable Tina N. Herbert, Mayor Pro-Tempore, The Honorable Peter M. Brown, The Honorable Tyler D. Bailey, and The Honorable Sam P. Johnson. Also present were Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager and Ms. Erika D. Moore Hammond, City Clerk. This meeting was advertised in accordance with the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager congratulated Mayor Rickenmann on being the newly appointed second vice president of the US Conference of Mayors.

Councilor Johnson noted that the role reflects the Mayor's years of service to the organization. He emphasized that the Conference is one of the most influential municipal voices in the nation and this leadership position will elevate the City's presence nationally.

Invocation

The Honorable Edward H. McDowell, Jr. offered the invocation.

Adoption of the Agenda

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager took a moment of personal privilege to wish a happy birthday to both Ms. Erika Hammond, City Clerk and to Ms. Ebony Kelly, Office Manager.

Upon a motion made by Mr. Brennan and seconded by Mr. Bailey, Council voted unanimously to adopt the agenda as presented.

City Council Discussion

1. Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Special Revenues — Ms. Missy Caughman, CPM, MPA, Assistant City Manager / Strategic Initiatives & Innovation
 - *Hospitality Tax Fund*
 - *Accommodations Tax Fund*
 - *Tourism Development Fee*
 - *Liquor Permit Rebate*

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager explained that City Council would be continuing their budget workshop next week and participating in the first public hearing on the budget this evening.

Ms. Missy Caughman, CPM, MPA, Assistant City Manager / Strategic Initiatives & Innovation reviewed the special revenue funds and noted that the Hospitality and Accommodations Tax Advisory Committees provide allocation recommendations. She reported that the hospitality tax remains the largest revenue source with a proposed Fiscal Year 2026/2027 budget of \$17.4 million, while transfers to the general fund remain at \$4.8 million and debt service at \$2.3 million. She also summarized the Hospitality Tax Advisory Committee's review of 70 applications, and approval of \$2.3 million in funding. She presented the accommodations tax with a proposed \$3.9 million budget, detailing its allocations and noting \$872,000 in debt service. Finally, she outlined the tourism development fee and liquor permit rebate, including major funding requests, pending allocations, and continued use of liquor rebate funds for historic preservation.

Ms. Teresa Wilson, City Manager clarified that a recent legal review confirms that public funds, including the liquor permit rebate, cannot be used for private benefit, such as improvements to private residences. She emphasized that all City-administered funds must support tourism-related or public purposes, noting that eligible uses include parks, recreation, and capital improvements.

There was discussion about the status of Trustus Theatre's capital funding campaign and historic property designation.

2. Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Proposed Special Revenue Allocations

- *Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee Recommendations — Mr. Hal Stevens, Committee Chair*
- *Hospitality Tax Advisory Committee Recommendations — Ms. Amy Beth Franks, Hospitality Tax Advisory Committee Chair*
- *Line-Item Agencies — Ms. Missy Caughman, CPM, MPA, Assistant City Manager / Strategic Initiatives & Innovation*

Mr. Hal Stevenson, Chair of the Accommodations Tax Advisory Committee reported that the committee received presentations from Experience Columbia and Lake Murray Country in May. He noted the longstanding 85/15 funding split between the two organizations, which the committee recommends continuing. Final allocations total \$2,398,596 for Experience Columbia and \$432,832 for Lake Murray Country, with any overage distributed at the same proportions.

Mayor Rickenmann noted that the committee may be asked to meet again if additional funding becomes available.

Ms. Amy Beth, Chair of the Hospitality Tax Advisory Committee reported that the committee recommended funding in the total amount of \$4,612,025. She thanked Councilor Johnson for attending the meetings and noted that the committee takes its responsibility seriously, emphasizing that they aim to be good stewards of public funds.

Mayor Rickenmann thanked the committee, noting the significant time and effort required to review 70 applications. He said it was encouraging to see 11 new applicants and that funding for more than half of them demonstrated that the process is working as intended.

3. Midlands Authority for Conventions, Sports, and Tourism — Mr. Bill Ellen, President & CEO/ Experience Columbia

Mr. Bill Ellen, President and CEO of Experience Columbia provided an overview of the authority and its three entities: the Convention Center, the Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Regional Sports Council. He explained that each entity submits funding requests through different revenue sources tied to their operations. He emphasized the significant economic and marketing impact of these funds, citing recent high-profile sporting events and increased national visibility. He reported funding requests of \$3 million for the Convention Center, \$2.4 million for the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), and \$100,000 for the Sports Council. He thanked both committees for their work and expressed gratitude for the City's ongoing support.

Ms. Kelly Barbrey, Vice President of Marketing and Communications of Experience Columbia reported continued tourism growth, with visitation rising to 17.3 million and visitor spending increasing to \$1.9 billion. She noted strong performance across the Convention Center, Experience Columbia Sports, and the CVB, including increases in events, room nights, and economic impact. The Visitors Center served more than 6,500 walk-ins and generated \$16,000 in merchandise sales. She highlighted successful marketing efforts such as national media coverage, the TODAY Show feature, and Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) partnerships. She also shared two proposed initiatives for next year: partnering with Placer AI for improved visitor analytics and adding a Satisfi Labs AI chat tool to enhance visitor information services.

Mayor Rickenmann noted the continued growth in tourism, emphasizing that more visitors are discovering the area's assets and contributing to increased activity, including higher lodging demand and overall tourism impact.

Councilor McDowell commended the team for their work promoting the city, noting continued growth in tourism and increasing interest in Columbia. He emphasized that their efforts help elevate the city's profile.

There was discussion about Banana Ball coming to Columbia; partnership with the marketing of Three Rivers; ad purchases; hosting the US Conference of Mayors; and a strategy for promoting new opportunities in the City.

4. Capital City / Lake Murray Country Regional Tourism Board — Ms. Vickie Davis, Executive Director

Ms. Vickie Davis, Executive Director of Capital City Lake Murray Country reported ongoing efforts to promote the four-county region by connecting experiences that keep visitors in the area longer and attracting new audiences. She noted continued use of Placer AI and an economic impact study running through December. Marketing efforts remain strong, with a focus this year on Columbia's Food and Wine Festival. She highlighted shared marketing plans with the City and noted that fishing events continue to drive significant visitation, with crews staying locally. She added that AI tools are recommending Finlay Park and Soda City as key visitor attractions.

Councilor Brennan suggested absorbing the two requests for liquor rebate permit funds into the hospitality tax fund since both organizations already have line-item funding. He emphasized the need to continue prioritizing parks and recreation capital improvements through the liquor rebate program, noting past success with projects like the Owens Field renovations. He added that directing these funds toward neighborhood quality-of-life improvements remains an effective and appropriate use of the program.

There was discussion about applying funds to other capital needs; investing in irrigation; and the average liquor rebate amount per year.

There was consensus to discuss the external requests at the June 16, 2026 Budget Workshop.

Executive Session

Upon a motion made by Ms. Herbert and seconded by Mr. Brown, Council voted unanimously to enter into Executive Session at 2:34 p.m. for the discussion of **Item 5**.

Upon a motion made by Mayor Ricknenmann and seconded by Ms. Herbert, Council voted unanimously to amend **Item 5** to include the Vista Business Improvement District (BID).

5. Discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements pursuant to S. C. Code §30-4-70(a)(2)

*Washington Square Retail Spaces
Vista Business Improvement District (BID)*

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 3:40 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Erika D. Moore Hammond, MMC, CPM
City Clerk