



Columbia City Council Work Session Minutes Tuesday, August 4, 2026

Call to Order

The Columbia City Council conducted a Work Session on Tuesday, August 4, 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 1:05 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.

Invocation

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

Adoption of the Agenda

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

City Council Discussion

1. Main Street District Lighting Project — Mr. Matt Kennel, President & CEO / Main Street District

Mr. Matt Kennel, President and CEO/ Main Street District shared an update on the Main Street Lighting project. He highlighted support from City Council and the Darnall W. and Susan F. Boyd Foundation, Inc. He explained that engineers determined that the structural differences between the 1200 to 1500 block of Main Street and the 1600 block made the original lighting plan unfeasible. While the initial concept received public support, maintenance has been challenging. He presented a revised solution that focuses on the district's landscaping and historic architecture, with Phase 1 aimed at illuminating the canopy. Over the past several months, collaboration with the Boyd Foundation, Public Works Department, and a quality lighting vendor has led to a design that highlights the signature hardwood trees while enhancing the nighttime experience. He noted that team members have conducted hands-on evaluations, often visiting the area around 10:00 p.m. to assess the lighting.

2. Columbia Traffic Signal Analysis — Ms. Lori Campbell, District Traffic Engineer / SCDOT

Ms. Lori Campbell, District Traffic Engineer/ SCDOT described the need for a project to adjust the traffic signals in the Columbia area, which has not been done in the past 25 years. The old signal settings have made it difficult to update the system and add features

like green arrow signals. The goals of this new project are to improve pedestrian safety and make the necessary upgrades. An inventory was done on 140 traffic signals, with a specific focus on 36 intersections that are low-volume roadways. The project will also include intentional pauses in the timing to help reduce speeds. The area affected will be around Huger Street, Elmwood Avenue, Harden Street, and Blossom Street. Through this inventory, cost estimates for the project have been developed, and there will be a separate budget for enhancements. Within the findings, it was determined that most of the intersections did not meet the warrant for signalization.

There was discussion about the definition of "running free"; car detection at intersections; coordination of intersections; interaction with city staff for pedestrian priority areas; painting streets with reflective surface painting; detailing the signal removal process; intentional timing of lights close in proximity to each other; operational implications for four-lane streets; considerations of pedestrian upgrades within budget initiatives; battery backups; construction of crosswalk on Elmwood; and the lack of lighting off the highway leading to Elmwood.

Mr. Robert Anderson, Director of Public Works suggested convening a meeting with relevant departments including Public Works, Police, Fire, and Planning to review the 36 signals, as well as others owned by the city. He recommended evaluating which signals might be removed, which should receive pedestrian upgrades, and considering bike lane improvements. The results of this meeting would be brought back for committee discussion, taking into account funding limitations and a phased approach to implementation.

3. City of Columbia Artificial Intelligence Initiatives — Ms. Sylvia White, Chief Information Officer

Ms. Sylvia White, Chief Information Officer provided an update on the current initiatives involving artificial intelligence (AI) within the municipality. She outlined the definition of AI as technology that performs tasks usually requiring human intelligence, such as reasoning, problem-solving, and content creation. She highlighted examples of narrow AI, generative AI, and predictive AI. She emphasized that these technologies are intended to enhance, rather than replace, human roles. She explained the development of an acceptable use policy for AI, which will be incorporated into the Employee Handbook and will undergo future refinements. She reported that the Code Enforcement Department has established its own focused policy for personnel. She also discussed potential use cases for AI across departments, including Code Enforcement, Engineering, and Water Customer Service.

There was discussion about human oversight for use within Code Enforcement; image storage; software already in use; timeline for evaluating the effectiveness of programs in the pilot stage; data showing impact and the return on investment so far; and safeguards for procurement contracts.

Executive Session

Upon a motion made by Ms. Herbert and seconded by Mr. Brown, Council voted unanimously to enter into Executive Session at 2:36 p.m. for the discussion of **Items 4** through **6**.

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

- *CRC 911 Communications Agreement*

5. Receipt of legal advice relating to matters covered by attorney-client privilege pursuant to S.C. Code §30-4-70(a)(2)
 - *Residential intensification within the Historic Preservation Overlay District*
 - *120 Clemson Road*
 - *Vista Business Improvement District*
 - *Relocation of Municipal Court*
6. Receipt of legal advice relating to a pending, threatened or potential claim pursuant to S.C. Code §30-4-70(a)(2)
 - *Russell Burgess v. City of Columbia*

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Erika D. Moore Hammond, MMC, CPM
City Clerk