



# City of Columbia, Missouri

## Meeting Minutes

### City Council

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Monday, March 9, 2026  
6:00 PM

Work Session

City Hall  
Conference Room  
1A/1B  
701 E. Broadway  
Columbia, MO

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#### I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:00 p.m.

**Present:** 7 - Buffaloe, Foster, Waterman, Peters, Carroll, Sample, and Elwood

**This item is open to the public:** City Communications Discussion

**Attachments:** [Presentation](#)

Sydney Olsen, Engagement & Public Communications Manager, presented information on the upcoming Communications department. The department will serve as a strategic hub for all City communications. The following divisions will be organized in this department: creative services, marketing, engagement/public communications, and contact center. She noted that this was not a centralized model - communications staff in other departments will still stay in those departments. She reviewed the goals of the new department, including enhancing external communications, public relations, crisis and reputation management. She emphasized consistent messaging and supporting departments in telling the City's story.

Council member Nick Foster asked for an example of maintaining consistency with various departments. Sydney emphasized the importance of recognition to ensure the messaging is immediately recognizable to residents. She clarified that Communications wouldn't edit content, but would provide assistance through templates and consistency through branding. Goals also included external storytelling, streamlined internal communications, content strategy, and brand alignment.

Sydney shared information on the proposed City newsroom model, which would have the organization operate as an internal media organization. She highlighted a proposed strategic communications plan. She emphasized using feedback from the annual survey, Community Summit, etc. as well as sharing how the City is using the feedback. She emphasized working with all City departments and being a resource to them.

She highlighted the need for a citywide crisis communication plan, noting that improvements have been made including tabletop exercises. The Mayor asked about the role of Council in communications, as well as the expectations especially related to crisis communications. Council member Valerie Carroll asked about having a staff member that reports to Council on communications - she referenced the Council Corner videos and ways for Council to be involved in those. De'Carlon Seewood, City Manager, noted the two public information specialists and noted that one could ensure communication with the City Council.

Sydney emphasized internal communication, specifically with improving communication from city leadership and staff. This would be employee recognition as well as two way communication. She also discussed Coffee with the City Manager and the positive feedback received from that.

Mayor Buffaloe asked about engagement, noting information from the Contact Center would be useful for other departments. Sydney noted a planned strategic plan related to engagement to ensure they are working in tandem. Foster asked about how easily this would move forward after Sydney leaves. De'Carlton noted that steps were being taken to ensure there is a foundation for the new director. He noted that departments do a great job responding to current issues, but work still needs to be done on proactive communication.

Council member Betsy Peters asked about the timeframe and how success will be measured. De'Carlton noted the first step is hiring the director, ideally to have that position filled by July. He stated a goal was for City Council to be involved. Communications touchpoints will be ongoing with Council as well as department directors to ensure what is being done is working or if a pivot is needed. Mayor Buffaloe expressed a need for realistic expectations to be shared with Council.

Stephanie Brown, Special Projects Manager, provided some information on a planned call tree for the general City phone line.

**This item is open to the public:** Motion for the City Council to go into closed session to discuss:

- Hiring, firing, disciplining or promoting of particular employees by a public governmental body when personal information about the employee is discussed or recorded pursuant to Section 610.021(3) RSMo.

- Individually identifiable personnel records, performance ratings or records pertaining to employees or applicants for employment pursuant to Section 610.021(13) RSMo.

**At approximately 6:40 p.m., Mayor Buffaloe made a motion for the City Council of the City of Columbia, Missouri, to immediately go into a closed meeting in Conference Room 1A/1B of City Hall to discuss the hiring, firing, disciplining or promoting of particular employees by a public governmental body when personal information about the employee is discussed or recorded pursuant to Section 610.021(3) of the Revised Statutes of Missouri, and individually identifiable personnel records, performance ratings or records pertaining to employees or applicants for employment pursuant to Section 610.021(13) of the Revised Statutes of Missouri. The motion was seconded by Council Member Foster.**

**This item is closed to the public:** Closed meeting in Conference Room 1A/1B

At approximately 6:42 p.m., the City Council went into closed session in Conference Room 1A/1B pursuant to RSMo Sections 610.021(3) and (13).

## II. OTHER ITEMS COUNCIL MAY WISH TO DISCUSS

None.

## III. ADJOURNMENT

The closed meeting adjourned at approximately 7:54 p.m.

