



City of Columbia, Missouri

Meeting Minutes - Final

City Council

Thursday, May 15, 2025
10:00 AM

Council Retreat

Old Kinderhook Hotel
678 Old Kinderhook Dr.
Camdenton, MO. 65020

I. BREAKFAST AND NETWORKING (9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.)

II. CALL TO ORDER (10:00 a.m.)

The meeting was called to order at approximately 10:00 a.m.

Present: 6 - Buffaloe, Foster, Waterman, Peters, Carroll, and Sample

Absent: 1 - Meyer

III. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The retreat began with Mayor Buffaloe welcoming attendees and thanking staff. She encouraged the group to take advantage of the time to be able to disconnect from the day-to-day and to reconnect with each other. She then introduced the facilitator, who reviewed the agenda and meeting norms. Next, members of the City Council and staff introduced themselves by sharing their expectations for the retreat and something they are excited about. Common themes included learning from one another and strengthening relationships.

IV. DAY 1 TENTATIVE TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

Setting the Stage

Council members were asked to come prepared to share "what they believe" about the future of Columbia. This exercise is loosely based on the "This I Believe" essay format initiated by Edward R. Morrow on National Public Radio in the 1950s.

Future of Columbia Discussion

After the elected officials shared their beliefs, staff reflected upon themes they heard, including optimism, a spirit of collaboration, and a shared commitment to Columbia's success. The facilitator encouraged the group to continually reflect upon their shared experiences as they move forward.

Communicating Together

The group then spent time in small groups discussing the following prompts: 1. What is your preferred mode of communication? Is it different when you give information vs. when you receive information? 2. What does the Council need from staff to be effective? 3. What does staff need from Council to be effective? Discussion Preferred modes of communication vary depending on urgency and topic. For more sensitive topics, a number of participants prefer verbal communication, which can help avoid misinterpretation of tone in written documents. A few staff noted that follow-up emails after phone calls are useful, particularly if the conversation was about data. They also discussed challenges of navigating an ever-evolving media landscape, and the need to

constantly battle misinformation from social media. When discussing what Council and staff need from each other, the group agreed on the principles of 1) assume good intent, and 2) no surprises. Informal “heads ups,” even when passing each other in the hallway, can be very valuable and minimize surprises. Council members noted they appreciate when staff is direct with them. They also noted that, even if they have already asked staff a question and have the answer, they may sometimes repeat the questions on the dais in the interest of transparency to the public. Some Council members prefer short, bullet-point summaries at the beginning of Council memos summarizing main points. Staff offered to serve as advisors and help prepare members of Council for interviews. The group highlighted that both Council and staff are on the same team.

Over lunch, the group then discussed their norms for communication; originally established in 2023 and revised in December 2024, shown below:

- Agenda items should be sent to the City Clerk by noon on Mondays (if pulling off Consent). Responding to fellow Council members should take place within a day
- If all Council members are copied on an email regarding a specific ward, whoever replies will copy only the Mayor so she’s aware that someone has responded
- If emails are received regarding citywide issues, the Mayor will respond but others may respond if they have the capacity
- The Mayor is open to meeting on a regular basis with Council members if they ask
- Requests for memos and FYI reports (i.e., two pages) are reasonable to ask for, but larger, more in-depth requests should be brought up under Other Business and the majority of Council members will need to agree that it’s worth spending the staff hours on to produce
- Use the “Council Inquiry” email to make requests for Department Directors. Council members may call department heads directly to ask specific “quick” questions.

The group discussed the challenges presented by the Monday noon deadline, especially regarding answering Council questions. Some Council members noted they would be fine with answers to questions as they are available; others prefer to receive one communication with consolidated information. The group agreed that moving forward, questions would be organized by agenda item, not by Council member. City Manager De’Carlon Seewood added that the department directors work to answer questions using a Google Doc, and once the questions are answered and organized by agenda item, staff will share a PDF version with Council. Council members will also highlight which questions are most pressing. Council will continue to be mindful of staff’s time and resources, and staff will be transparent about the time and resources required to address some requests. The group also discussed the Council Inquiry email system, which goes to the City Manager’s office. Seewood mentioned that the organization is exploring alternatives to SeeClickFix.

Governing Together

In December, the Council discussed stipends for elected officials to make the role more accessible, as well as examining possibilities for changing the dates and/or times of Council meetings. Budget Analyst Lekel Lyons and Management Fellow Peyton Oliver have since conducted research on these topics, looking at the practices of 24 peer cities.

Stipends

The average Council salary of Columbia’s peers was \$15,003; the average mayoral salary was \$25,693. The City of Fort Collins, Colorado had the highest paid elected officials, at \$41,600 for Council members and \$62,400 for the Mayor. Fort Collins’ current compensation was passed by a ballot initiative in 2022. The City of Boulder, Colorado passed a ballot initiative that raised council salaries to 40% of Area Median Income (AMI) and 50% for the Mayor; this change will take effect December 2026. Two cities (College

Station, Texas and Springfield, Missouri) do not offer any stipends or salaries for Council members; these were not included in the calculated averages.

The Council decided to table this item until a later date, especially in consideration of potential budget cuts across the organization, and so that they may have more time to digest the research.

Meeting Dates, Times, and Public Comment

Staff then presented research on peer cities' meeting times, dates, and structure - especially as it relates to public comment. Most cities begin their meetings between 6:00 and 7:00pm. Most also do not allow for comment on Old or New Business. Five cities have virtual meetings but do not allow for public comments virtually. A few cities have different models for public comment, including a set 30- or 60-minute period at the beginning of meetings to allow for public comment on any agenda item; after that period, public comment is closed and the rest of the meeting proceeds. The Council will consider piloting off-week Monday work sessions starting in September or October. If piloted, the Council will discuss how the meetings are working during their December check-in meeting. Next, the Council discussed their meeting dates. After some discussion, the group acknowledged the problem they are trying to solve is a short period of time between agenda publication and meetings themselves. There are pros and cons to changing the meeting dates; some worry that this will not solve the root problem. Some members of Council expressed interest in moving Council meetings to Tuesdays but there was no consensus. The idea of off-week Monday work sessions may help relieve some time pressures related to reports and resolutions.

Council Budget

Next, City Clerk Sheela Amin provided a brief presentation on the Council budget for FY26 and asked for Council guidance on three items.

As the organization is facing budget reductions, the Council noted it would be prudent of them to reduce their own budget, especially because the community engagement and newsletters line item was underutilized last budget year. The Council discussed ways to supplement community engagement, and highlighted Let's Talk Local as a successful program. Mayor Buffaloe also noted it will be important for Department Heads to be direct about clarifying "wants" vs. "needs" with upcoming budget requests.

The group discussed internal (ex: onboarding) versus external (ex: national conferences) training for the City's boards and commissions. Amin shared a spreadsheet that contained line item budget requests from the boards and commissions, which the Council will review following the retreat. The Council will provide policy guidance to staff on how to prioritize board and commission training at a later date.

Speed Dating with Department Directors

For the rest of the afternoon, members of Council rotated among different groups of department directors for a "speed dating" exercise, in which staff briefly shared their departments' current challenges and initiatives. Following the exercise, Mayor Buffaloe captured a few high-level themes from the activity:

- Staff tries to be thoughtful in determining the best way to bring items to Council, and it will be important to develop consistent processes across departments.
- Most departments are concerned about staffing and budget impacts.
- Departments discussed the need for consistent onboarding and training, including crossdepartmental training.
- Directors also discussed how to best continue to support the community, especially given local and federal budget cuts. Other Council members noted that hearing all of the

needs of the organization and community was impactful. They highlighted their determination and trust in staff to forge ahead.

Closing - Six Word Slam - Again

As Day One wrapped, each member of staff reflected on the day. Their parting thoughts, a mix of short phrases and complete observations, are captured below:

- Inspirational positivity
- We are resilient people and passionate
- Shared vision for community
- Collaboration and partnership
- We have lots of work to do
- It's clear that we all care about doing our best job for the community, and we should remember we all shared that good intent
- We have a shared vision, and also share our burdens. Nobody is alone. We can celebrate success together and help each other.
- This is a great way to build trust and get to know one another as people
- Partnership and pragmatism
- The day re-affirmed that we support one another and are stronger together; I know my colleagues have my back
- Today was a glimmer of hope because we are a group of people who can bring meaningful solutions to people who are hurting
- I now have a deeper appreciation for the mass of information Council needs to consume regularly
- I appreciate our ability to talk about challenges
- Mix of optimism and nervousness about future
- "Speed dating" reinforced our need to be innovative and agile
- Spending time with departments you may not regularly work with was great and beneficial
- Amidst a barrage of uncertainty and change, I have felt lately more disconnected as a member of this group. But the longer I sat here, I was reminded we have the people in this room to do this job. It changed my perspective today.
- I realize how well we "gel" as team
- Today reinforced that we have so many good project ideas, but not nearly enough resources to do them all. We need Council's help prioritizing across the organization.
- Feeling encouraged and inspired by passion of each individual for what they do, despite challenges
- Collaboration with different departments
- We are finding a way forward together

City Manager De'Carlon Seewood closed the day by highlighting that everyone agrees on a vision for Columbia to grow and be successful, expressing appreciation for the conversations that took place.

V. DINNER AND NETWORKING

VI. DAY 2 TENTATIVE TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

Setting the Stage

Community Summit Report & Strategic Plan

Attachments: [2025 Community Summit Report](#)
[Strategic Plan Flyer](#)

Next Steps

Closing Remarks

VII ANY OTHER ITEM COUNCIL MAY WISH TO DISCUSS

None.

VIII ADJOURNMENT

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