



# COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, February 05, 2025

## APPROVED MINUTES

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Jennifer Massey  
Council President Jessica Chilton  
Councilor Mark Gundersen  
Councilor Russell Hubbard  
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

### STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator	Joe Hogue, Acting Police Chief
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Jose Castilleja, Police Sergeant
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Johnathon Sprinzl, Police Officer
Crystal King, Communications Officer	Brandon Haflich, Police Officer
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	Sam Ortiz, Pretreatment Coordinator
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney

### OTHERS

Adam	Mitz	Amanda McFeron	Jennie Carnahan
Conor Delaney	Lynne Pettit	Jane Garcia	Ron Trommlitz
Joe	Jenni Gilbert	Kaelyn Cassidy	Sylvia Cole
KOIN	Marci Sanders	Lori Armstrong	Steve Topaz
Richard Mason	Jennifer Anderson	Brady Preheim	Jenn Dougherty
Michelle Millar	Anna Dahlman	Shawn Carnahan	Brent Keller
Steve Toschi			

### CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 3:00 p.m.

### VISITOR COMMENTS - Limited to three (3) minutes per speaker

- ◆ Steve Topaz. Discussed the importance of keeping accurate records during the City meeting. He began by invoking an old Greek thought, "Silence is a lie," to emphasize the significance of truthful and complete documentation. Topaz expressed concerns about missing information from a previous meeting in December, particularly regarding a discussion about stabilizing a significant embankment that involved the Council. He noted that part of the agenda seemed to be missing electronically, pointing to a lack of a reliable record of events. Furthermore, Topaz criticized a recent City Economic Opportunities Analysis, a lengthy document that mentioned mixed-use development on the Waterfront and substantial allocations for heavy industry. However, he noted that it failed to adequately account for contamination issues, citing a DEQ plan that limits the Waterfront's usage due to contamination that isn't being adequately addressed. Specifically, he mentioned a DEQ proposal for a costly remedy at the creosote plant site that would leave it unusable for commercial purposes. Additionally, he brought up concerns about overloaded sewage basins, aggravated by waste disposal practices that were not being properly addressed in the City's reports. Lastly, he highlighted inaccurate mapping in a City report, pointing out that landslide-prone areas under a specific lagoon were omitted. Topaz concluded by stressing the

responsibility of the council to ensure accurate information dissemination, aligning with his belief that "he who does not know the truth is a fool, yet who knows the truth and calls it a lie is a criminal."

- ◆ Brady Preheim. Brady addressed the mayor, questioning why there had not been a public apology issued to John. This was linked to a previous condemnation of John and Brady urged that an apology would actually be a demonstration of strength rather than weakness by admitting a mistake had been made. He also criticized the exclusion of KOHI radio from the media list, highlighting that they are the only local media remaining in the county. Brady pointed out that the Spotlight no longer has a location in St. Helens, and the Chronicle has closed, underscoring the importance of recognizing KOHI as a media entity.

Brady proceeded to question the status of the long-awaited report on Chief Greenway, emphasizing the need for its release and transparency. He argued that the mayor should be as accountable and transparent with Council matters concerning her actions as she expects of others.

Turning to fiscal matters, Brady expressed his opposition to the proposed police station, citing that it was an unaffordable item from the beginning. He noted the inflation factor and estimated the cost to potentially reach \$40,000,000, which he believes the City cannot afford. Instead, he advocated exploring cost-effective solutions to improve the existing police station, suggesting that more affordable options would be feasible with a fraction of the budget. Brady voiced his support for Chief Hogue's performance as interim and urged that the vacancy for the Chief of Police should be promptly announced, with Chief Hogue's position made permanent.

Brady then turned his attention to Council responsibilities, stating that he has no issue with the Council members receiving stipends but asserted that they should feel as though they earn them by adequately performing their duties. Finally, he expressed his full support for Habitat for Humanity, acknowledging their favorable reputation and his hope that the council would support their endeavors, particularly in building houses in the community.

- ◆ Lori Armstrong. Offered a prayer for the City Council members and the community, asking for guidance, protection, and blessings for the city and its residents.
- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Raised several issues during his comments, particularly focusing on the use of AI in searching for information related to the 2-million-gallon reservoir evaluation failure. Trommlitz expressed his dissatisfaction with the limited information that AI can present, drawing attention to notable discrepancies between the AI-fed information and what he personally understands about the situation. He criticized the City for relying on AI, which he perceives as more of a super search engine that presents only a fraction of what he believes to be the whole picture. Trommlitz underscored the importance of transparency and factual accuracy, emphasizing the need for due diligence akin to a doctor's thorough diagnosis before treatment—a level of scrutiny he believes was lacking in the reservoir project.

Moreover, Trommlitz questioned the City's approach to the reservoir's rehabilitation and subsequent legal matters. He detailed a timeline of events dating back to October 2016, when the City embarked on executing Kennedy Jenks' plan, addressing a leak that had escalated significantly over time. He recalled the City's hiring of WPI for investigative purposes, pointing out a lack of oversight during the work on the reservoir and raising concerns about an inspection process he feels was inadequate. By March 2022, Trommlitz cited substantial frustrations over restricted access to key documents like the Walker report, expressing that the City's refusal to release this information fosters distrust. He also highlighted his personal observations about the

project's processes and voiced disappointment about the lack of accountability and corrective measures.

- ◆ Shawn Carnahan, resident near the recently purchased School District property. Raised concerns about the recent actions of the School District on nearby property. He outlined specific issues related to the changes in the natural drainage field due to land disruptions. Carnahan explained that such disturbances had altered the natural water flow, causing it to redirect into residential properties instead of the intended route of Firlok Park Boulevard. This shift posed significant problems for the four houses, including his own, that are adjacent to the newly acquired School District property. The District's initial attempt to dismantle a security fence further exacerbated these challenges, violating the established boundary requirements. After his communication with City Planning, a resolution was reached to reinstall the fence, but Carnahan emphasized the need for ongoing vigilance. He asserted that the School District's actions demonstrated a lack of consideration for the existing residential area, and requested that the Council ensure a closer oversight by Planning officials regarding any future development on this wetland-designated property by the school district, in accordance with Oregon Department of State Lands regulations.
- ◆ Amanda McFeron, a long-time resident of the area, raised significant concerns regarding the water flow and topography issues connected to the potential police station development in the locality. She highlighted the challenges posed by the area's solid clay ground, which exacerbates drainage problems. Amanda explained that excessive water flow resulting from land disruptions can severely impact the functionality of private sewage systems, particularly drain fields. She shared personal experiences, noting the financial burden she endured when faced with a failing system. She stressed the importance of proper evaluation of the drainage impact on existing systems before proceeding with any further developments. Amanda urged the Council to thoroughly consider these factors to prevent displacement and significant expense for residents due to compromised drainage fields resulting from increased waterflow in the development area.
- ◆ Sylvia Cole, a neighbor to the previous speakers, shared her challenging experience with septic system issues. She recounted the difficulties she encountered when attempting to connect her property to the city sewer system. During her attempts to address her septic issue, she approached City Planners under the guidance of Erin O'Connell, only to be informed that connection to the City's infrastructure was not feasible. Sylvia highlighted the extensive and costly steps she had to undertake to resolve her septic challenges, despite having a perfectly viable home on a half-acre plot adjacent to the proposed new police station site. During these interactions, City Planners initially suggested annexation into the City, requiring a \$1,200 fee. Sylvia and her partner were advised that this would allow them to connect to the sewer, much like her neighbor, Amanda. However, after discussions and before finalizing their payment, City Planners reversed their stance, stating the City's infrastructure was inadequate for new connections. They were consequently directed to pursue connection via a neighboring property's sewer line, which Sylvia felt was not a viable or fair solution. Ultimately, Sylvia had to hire an environmental specialist and navigate several procedural obstacles, costing \$40,000 to fix her septic system and avoid her home being condemned. She urged the Council to carefully consider the potential impact increased water drainage from new developments could have on existing residential properties, emphasizing the importance of protecting the neighboring community from similar ordeals in the future.
- ◆ Marci Sanders, a small business owner in the Riverfront District and a board member of the St. Helens Main Street Alliance, expressed concerns during the meeting about the forthcoming closure of the intersection at S. 1<sup>st</sup> and St. Helens streets. She emphasized the significance of

ensuring accommodations for customers and staff to safely and conveniently access businesses during the construction phase. Sanders highlighted the struggle of retail businesses in the area, which have already been impacted by two years of ongoing construction. She urged the Council to prioritize making parking accessible and to clearly communicate how people can navigate the area during the closure. Marci also acknowledged some efforts to promote businesses during this period but emphasized the need for practical solutions to support local businesses and their patrons in maintaining accessibility in the Riverfront District.

- ◆ Steve Toschi. Commented on the proposed resolution concerning media attendance at executive sessions. He began by stating that he had carefully read both the proposed resolution and the 2024 Attorney General's updated basis for the law, which underscores the significance of transparency and legal adherence in council activities. Toschi expressed concerns about ensuring the public remains lawfully attuned to the Council's proceedings and shared his decision to withdraw his media credentials since TownTalk Cafe is not currently covering news. This gesture reflected his commitment to maintaining transparency and integrity, adding that he would reapply for credentials if TownTalk Cafe resumed news reporting in the future.

Toschi suggested the Council reconsider the requirement for an organization to have a staff as a criterion for qualifying as news media, emphasizing that dedication to news dissemination should take precedence over organizational size. He highlighted the importance of accommodating individuals or smaller entities dedicated to regular news reporting, recommending that the staff requirement might not be logically linked to an organization's capacity to qualify as accountable news media. This nuanced perspective aimed to foster a more inclusive approach to determining media representation in executive sessions.

Moreover, Toschi recommended including KOHI as an approved media organization under the categories delineated by the City, specifically under radio stations. He acknowledged KOHI's longstanding service and engagement with the city since 1940, noting the consistent news coverage provided for over two decades by Marty, who runs the station. Toschi speculated on the likelihood that the inclusion of KOHI was anticipated for discussion, urging the Council to consider this local media outlet appropriately in its decision-making process. Thanking the Council, Toschi concluded his comments, reinforcing his advocacy for accessible, transparent, and inclusive practices concerning media participation in city council executive sessions.

## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### **1. Employee Length of Service Recognition - Sam Ortiz (5 Years)**

Mayor Massey recognized Sam Ortiz for his service to the City. Ortiz started working with the City on January 13, 2020, as the Pretreatment Coordinator and continues to serve in that role.

### **2. Recognition of Police Officers Johnathon Sprinzi and Brandon Haflich for Successfully Passing their Probationary Period and Announcement of Training Opportunity for a Sergeant - Acting Police Chief Joe Hogue**

Acting Chief Hogue recognized Officers Johnathan Sprinzel and Brandon Haflich for successfully passing their probationary period. Hogue highlighted the challenges faced by these officers due to COVID-related delays in academy training and praised their perseverance and positive attitudes. He noted that both officers are now successfully patrolling on their own.

Acting Chief Hogue announced that Sergeant Jose Castilleja had been approved to attend the FBI National Academy. He emphasized the significance of this achievement, noting that only about 1% of officers in the United States are selected for this program.

**3. Annual Report from City Auditor - *Conor Delaney of Clear Trails CPAS***

Conor Delaney, senior manager in charge of fieldwork for the City's 2023-2024 financial audit, presented the annual audit report. Key points from his presentation included:

- The audit resulted in an unmodified opinion, which is the best opinion that can be provided on financial statements.
- The auditors found the City to be in compliance with state regulations regarding budget adoption and other financial matters, with only minor comments regarding a few over-budget line items in the general fund.
- The federal audit, required due to significant federal funding received by the city, was clean with no issues reported.
- Delaney highlighted upcoming changes in governmental accounting standards and provided comments on best practices, including a recommendation to ensure adequate staffing in the Finance Division to keep up with evolving regulations and compliance requirements.

Council members expressed appreciation for the comprehensive report and commended the Finance Division, particularly Finance Director Butsch, for their good work in supporting the audit.

**4. Financial Report for Second Quarter of Fiscal Year 2024-25 - *Finance Director Gloria Butsch***

Finance Director Butsch presented the financial report for the second quarter of the fiscal year 2024-25. She highlighted the addition of the tourism fund to the report due to increased community interest. Butsch noted that Spirit of Halloweentown performed well despite the short turnaround time, and the interfund loan used to open the account had been repaid more quickly than anticipated. She invited questions from the Council members and offered to add additional information to future reports based on their interests or community concerns.

**5. Annual Report from City Forester - *Brent Keller of Mason, Bruce & Girard***

Brett Keller presented the annual report on the City's forest management. Key points from his presentation included:

- The highlight of the 2024 forest program was the sale of the Section 20 timber sale, which is expected to generate approximately \$1.5 million in revenue over a two-year contract.
- Reforestation efforts were conducted in the first part of the year, with plans to continue in 2025.
- A pre-commercial thinning project is planned for 80 acres of 20–21-year-old trees.
- The current timber market shows strong prices, with expectations for continued strength due to limited supply.
- The city's forest management plan is being finalized and will be presented to the Council in the coming months.
- Keller discussed the sustainable harvest rate and current harvesting practices, noting that the City has been harvesting slightly above the sustainable rate in recent years.

Council members asked questions about replanting strategies, fire breaks, and balancing timber harvesting with recreational use of areas like Salmonberry. Keller addressed these concerns and expressed willingness to further discuss a formal plan for balancing various uses of the forest land.

**6. Request from Columbia County Habitat for Humanity - *Executive Director Jennifer Anderson***

Jennifer Anderson, Executive Director of Columbia County Habitat for Humanity, and Anna Dahlman, Construction Project Coordinator, presented a request to the Council. Anderson provided an overview of their organization's work, including:

- Home building projects
- Critical home repairs
- Ramp construction

- IDA (Individual Development Account) program management
- USDA loan packaging assistance

Anderson requested a 50% reduction in SDCs (System Development Charges) for their upcoming project in St. Helens, citing the small size of the planned house and the disproportionate impact of flat fees on smaller structures. She also asked for a waiver of the sidewalk fee in lieu, which the City has historically granted for Habitat projects.

The Council expressed support for Habitat for Humanity's work and agreed to move the request to the evening meeting for further discussion and potential action.

### **7. Semi-Annual Library Department Report - *Library Director Suzanne Bishop***

Library Director Bishop presented a comprehensive report on the Library's activities and achievements.

Key points included:

- Increased building visits, up 24% from the previous year
- Expansion of the makerspace and its growing popularity
- Diverse programming for all age groups, including youth services, adult programs, and special events
- Partnerships with community organizations and volunteers
- Upcoming projects, including the biannual genealogy conference and summer library challenge
- Staffing overview and recent training initiatives
- New services, such as the distribution of Narcan and small business resources

Council members expressed appreciation for the library's efforts and the comprehensive nature of the report.

### **8. Review Proposal from Mason, Bruce & Girard for Forestry Management Services - *City Administrator John Walsh***

City Administrator Walsh explained that a Request for Proposal (RFP) was issued for forest management services as a best practice. Mason, Bruce & Girard was the only respondent. Given their outstanding performance over the past 20 years, Walsh recommended approving their contract at the evening meeting. The contract is based on a time and materials fee schedule.

### **9. Discussion regarding Stipends for Council Members**

Contracted City Attorney Wigod provided information on conflict-of-interest rules regarding Council compensation. Key points included:

- Council members cannot vote on changes to their own compensation due to conflict-of-interest laws.
- Changes to Council compensation typically require a charter amendment or voter approval.
- The current stipend structure, which is indexed to the county commissioner's salary, does not present a conflict of interest when approving the budget as it is already established.

Mayor Massey clarified that she intends to donate her stipend to a nonprofit organization but is not seeking to change the overall structure of council compensation.

### **10. Review Proposed Changes to Executive Session Media Attendance Policy**

Contracted City Attorney Wigod presented a draft policy for executive session news media attendance.

Key points of the presentation included:

- Background on the state law regarding media attendance at executive sessions
- Explanation of the Attorney General's guidance on defining representatives of news media
- Proposed updates to the City's policy to incorporate the Attorney General's guidance
- New application process and timeline for media representatives seeking to attend executive sessions

Council members asked for clarification on certain points and expressed appreciation for the thorough research and presentation. No action was taken, as this was a draft for discussion.

**11. Report from City Administrator John Walsh**

Walsh requested to hold his report until the evening meeting due to time constraints.

**ADJOURN – 5:10 p.m.**

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- Real Property Transactions, under ORS 192.660(2)(e)
- Consider Information or Records that are Exempt by Law from Public Inspection, under ORS 19.660(2)(f)
- Consult with Counsel/Potential Litigation, under ORS 192.660(2)(h)

Respectfully transcribed by ClerkMinutes and submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne  
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Jennifer Massey  
Jennifer Massey, Mayor