



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, December 17, 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	Shanna Duggan, Recreation Manager
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Matthew Smith, Police Chief
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Douglas Treat, Police Lieutenant
Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director	Terry Massey, Police Officer
Sharon Darroux, Engineering Manager	Jose Castijella, Police Sergeant
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney
Crystal King, Communications Officer	

OTHERS

Peter Olsen	Adam St. Pierre
Alexis Krupa	Brady Preheim
Steve Topaz	Eddie Dunton
Brandon Treadway	Jenn
Brittany Hummel	

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

CLEARING CONFUSION AND SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

1. Response to December 3 Visitor Comments

Mayor Massey read a statement and requested it be put in the record.

“I want to address a repetitive public comment that is NOT FACTUALLY ACCURATE regarding the release of the redacted Band report and supplemental report. To be clear and on the record, I am personally not withholding, suppressing, or preventing the release of either of the referenced reports.

The City takes transparency seriously and also has a legal obligation to protect information that is confidential under applicable law. The reports referenced are presently associated with active litigation. Because of that, they are subject to attorney client privilege, attorney work product protections, and public records law exemptions. When those protections apply, the City HAS A DUTY NOT to disclose the materials, until the legal basis for withholding no longer exists.”

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

- ◆ Adam St. Pierre. Expressed gratitude to Chief Smith and Lieutenant Treat for their dedicated service. He commended Treadway Events & Entertainment for their timely appearance to provide a report on the City's tourism activities, and addressed criticisms levied at Treadway for not

presenting earlier, explaining that those who have experience in business understand the necessity of allowing at least a 30-day period to compile accurate financial numbers. He pointed out that two days, as previously suggested, wouldn't suffice, and that Treadway's timing was indeed logical given the standard payable periods in business operations. St. Pierre further noted that preliminary numbers suggested an increase in revenue compared to previous reports despite adverse weather conditions during the last two weekends of the event season. He concluded by cautioning against the criticisms directed at Treadway, especially those comparing its performance unfavorably to that of previous contractors, encouraging the Council to remember to request comparable data from 2023 before making judgments.

- ◆ Brady Preheim. Addressed what he saw as inaccuracies in St. Pierre's earlier analysis regarding the financial performance of Treadway Events. Preheim argued that the reported apparent success was misleading, emphasizing that if the additional \$5 fee charged on every ticket sale were to be adjusted out of the equation, the City would have seen a decrease in ticket sales compared to previous years. He pointed out that the perceived revenue increase was largely due to this fee rather than an organic rise in attendance numbers. He went on to highlight a particular concern regarding the City's budget. He noted that the Council had anticipated transferring \$465,000 into the General Fund from revenue generated by these events, a projection he believed was overly optimistic and would not bear out in reality. According to Preheim, this discrepancy would lead to a significant budgetary shortfall estimated at \$300,000. He urged the Council to critically assess and rectify this financial oversight, questioning the prudence of such financial planning given the disparity between expectations and actual revenue generation. Preheim went on to voice his dissatisfaction with the Council's handling of labor relations, specifically criticizing the delay in renewing contracts for union employees. He alerted the Council to the fact that police and other essential municipal workers have been operating without an updated contract for six months, a situation he deemed as gross negligence on the Council's part. He remarked on the Council's decision to propose cost-of-living pay freezes without having reached formal agreements with the unions, predicting potential financial repercussions that could further stress the City's already stretched budget.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Addressed the Council concerning perceived inaccuracies within the previous meeting minutes. He elaborated on specific instances where he believed his comments were either misrepresented or completely omitted from the official record. Topaz specifically mentioned that there appeared to be misunderstandings related to his discussions about the architect's cost on the original plan for the police station, which the minutes inaccurately implied were in reference to the cost of the new station; he clarified that he had not yet seen those. Additionally, he recalled being told that others had commented on his statements regarding the police, but found no such remarks in the minutes or upon reviewing the YouTube recordings of the meeting. This gap led him to question the reliability and thoroughness of the documentation process. Furthermore, Topaz raised concerns regarding the legal standing of minutes transcribed from YouTube recordings, pondering whether they could be deemed legally binding in court, given that their control might potentially fall to third parties, thereby making them susceptible to manipulation. He questioned whether transcriptions derived from YouTube could carry the weight of a certified legal document in contractual or formal judicial settings. Topaz expressed these concerns with an overarching message about the necessity of accuracy and integrity in official records, and concluding that when inaccuracies persist, they risk transforming from mere errors into deliberate misrepresentations.

DISCUSSION TOPICS**2. Employee Length of Service Recognition - Matt Smith (5 years) and Doug Treat (5 years)**

Councilor Sundeen presented the length of service recognition for two Police Department employees:

- Police Chief Matt Smith, who started as a police officer on July 20, 2020, became detective the following month, and rose through the ranks from corporal to sergeant before becoming police chief in August 2025.
- Lieutenant Doug Treat, who began as a police officer on July 20, 2020, was promoted to corporal the next month, then to sergeant two months later, and became lieutenant in August 2025. Councilor Sundeen noted that Treat had previously served as a St. Helens police officer from 1996 to 2002.

Councilor Sundeen thanked both officers for their expertise and professionalism, and City Administrator Walsh added his appreciation for their service.

3. Report from Events Management Contractor Treadway Events & Entertainment - Brandon Treadway

Brandon Treadway and Brittany Hummel presented a comprehensive report on the Spirit of Halloweentown event. Key points included:

- Approximately 50,000 attendees (paid and free).
- Several celebrity appearances including Kimberly J. Brown, Daniel Kountz, Emily Roeske, Phillip Van Dykes, J. Paul Zimmerman, and Jackson Rathbone.
- Weather challenges during the last three weekends affected attendance.
- Programming improvements including a gift shop, alien experience, reptile exhibit, trolley film tour, and themed bar.
- 70 vendors participated (increased from 40-45 last year).
- Vendor feedback indicated weather affected sales but they appreciated roaming performers and celebrity attendance.
- Local businesses requested the gift shop close one day per week during Halloween season to help drive sales to other shops.
- Consumer feedback showed 77.8% were first-time visitors versus 22.2% returning visitors.
- Media coverage included over 290 direct press mentions, with Architectural Digest being a significant addition.
- Partnership with VetTix provided 2,000 free tickets to service members and first responders.
- A logistical issue encountered with the tram, which only had a 3-gallon gas tank. This limitation required frequent refueling and ultimately led to the decision to use a trolley, which offered more extended coverage and better protection from the weather.
- Financial summary showed gross revenue higher than 2024 but expenses also increased substantially.
- Total revenue was approximately \$419,000, which includes the impact fee collected on ticket sales.

Mayor Massey and councilors expressed appreciation for the Christmas lights and overall Spirit of Halloweentown event improvements. Council discussion touched on:

- Reducing vendor numbers for next year.
- Implementing tiered ticket pricing to improve accessibility.
- Concerns about pricing becoming too expensive for local residents.
- Questions about the future operation of the gift shop during off-season months.
- Concerns about the tram and water taxi.

Treadway indicated plans for an online store using their existing Shopify system rather than keeping the physical gift shop open year-round.

4. Presentation by Keller Associates on St. Helens Reservoir Siting Study Update - Keller Consultants Peter Olsen and Alexis Krupa

Peter Olsen and Alexis Krupa presented an update on the reservoir siting study. They explained:

- The existing 2MG reservoir has been removed from service.
- There is a storage deficiency indicated in the Water Master Plan.
- Geotechnical challenges at the previous site prompted exploration of new locations.
- The study began with 11 potential sites, with three sites excluded for being in the high-pressure zone and one excluded for being the existing tank location.
- The remaining eight sites were evaluated and narrowed to four final options (renamed sites 1, 2, 3, and 4).
- Each site was analyzed for pipeline connections, environmental impact, hydraulics, geotechnical conditions, and constructability.
- Public engagement included an open house where property owners were invited to discuss concerns.
- Site 2 emerged as the recommended location due to favorable geologic conditions, shorter pipeline connections, public acceptance, and lower construction costs.

Council discussion centered on wetlands mitigation for Site 2 and construction impacts on nearby subdivisions. Council President Chilton expressed preference for Site 3, noting it had fewer wetland concerns and better road access, while Councilor Hubbard emphasized the importance of geologic stability and the property owner's willingness to sell as key factors for Site 2.

Next steps include finalizing the study, presenting to Council in January, beginning property acquisition, securing funding, and moving to design phase.

5. Quarterly Reports from City Departments/Divisions - Communications & Recreation (Informational)

Communications Officer Crystal King reported on Communication's activities, highlighting the launch of a new weekly library newsletter. She explained that the newsletter content is relatively easy to manage as much of the programming is repetitive and can be copied from week to week. Council inquired about King's recent coverage of Planning Commission meetings, with City Administrator Walsh noting this was a temporary measure due to staff vacancies.

Recreation Manager Shanna Duggan reported on the department's programs, including:

- Four after-school programs serving approximately 150 children.
- Year three of a 5-year grant cycle.
- Upcoming basketball season involving about 300 St. Helens children, plus participants from Scappoose and Vernonia.
- Graduation of participants from a 17-week "Parents in Recovery" series in partnership with Columbia Health Services.
- Employment of six high school students through grant funding.

Duggan and several councilors expressed interest in establishing a Youth Council in 2026, with Mayor Massey noting this was among her goals for the coming year.

6. Review New Proposed Job Description for Public Works Operations Manager - Public Works Director Mouhamad Zaher

Public Works Director Zaher presented a new job description for a Public Works Operations Manager position. He explained:

- This position represents the culmination of a five-year strategic restructuring plan for the department.
- The position would have no net impact on the budget due to reallocation of existing duties.
- The role would create a single point of contact for leadership on operational matters.
- This would allow Zaher to focus more on multi-million-dollar projects.
- The position would be open only to internal candidates to encourage growth within the organization.

Council discussion focused on ensuring the position wouldn't create excessive workload and confirming that the role represents a reorganization of duties rather than additional responsibilities. Mayor Massey expressed appreciation for the inclusion of experience as an alternative to formal education in the job qualifications.

7. Review Request for Leak Adjustment at 135 N. 7th Street - *City Administrator John Walsh*

City Administrator Walsh presented a leak adjustment request exceeding \$1,000. He explained:

- A full adjustment would credit \$8,892.
- A standard adjustment (for two months) would credit \$6,968.
- The leak occurred in February, but repairs weren't completed until September/November.
- City policy requires leak adjustment requests within 45 days.

Council discussion centered on the timeliness of the request, with concerns expressed about the significant delay between leak discovery and repair. The Council noted that the property was vacant during this period, and the water was turned off after the leak was discovered. The Council appeared hesitant to approve the full adjustment due to the delay in reporting and repairing the issue.

8. Review AFFF Nationwide Class Action Settlement Contingent Fee Agreement - *City Attorney Ashley Wigod*

Contracted City Attorney Wigod joined remotely to discuss the AFFF (firefighting foam) nationwide class action settlement. She explained:

- A nationwide class action lawsuit against chemical manufacturers resulted in a \$13 billion settlement fund.
- All public water systems nationwide are eligible to file claims.
- The law firm Baron Budd, P.C., litigated and forced the settlement.
- The agreement is a contingency fee with no out-of-pocket costs to the City.
- Any recovery would not be expected until late 2026 or 2027.

Council expressed support for proceeding with the agreement, seeing no downside to participation.

9. Review Amendment No. 3 to the Purchase and Sale Agreement for property located at 1300 Kaster Road between the City of St. Helens and Arcadia Holdings, LLC

City Administrator Walsh explained that Amendment No. 3 to the Purchase and Sale Agreement with Arcadia Holdings finalizes details for the sale of the paper mill property, with closing anticipated on Friday. The amendment addresses:

- Final legal description updates
- Easements
- Seller finance documents
- Operating covenants including use of the City's effluent clarifier and water intake system
- Fire suppression obligations
- Transfer rights

Walsh noted that more details would be discussed in the upcoming executive session.

10. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

- The agenda for the evening's regular session includes contract extensions for Treadway Events, an amendment to the Business Oregon financing contract, and approval of various service agreements.
- Christmas Ships event was very successful and has grown significantly over the years.
- Human Resources services RFP received 13 proposals with interviews conducted for the top three candidates.
- The Planning Commission approved the Conditional Use Permit for the police station.
- The City has taken possession of the Columbia Boulevard site for the police station.
- Kelly Street contract and ground lease for 1771 has been completed.
- Parks & Trails Commission is working on master planning.
- Union bargaining is progressing.
- Millard Road development is facing challenges with wetland buffers and gravity flows.
- Space needs analysis for the Wastewater Treatment facility is in progress.
- Walsh has been assigned to the League of Oregon Cities Water and Wastewater Committee.
- Meeting with Senator Merkley's representative identified potential funding opportunities.
- DEQ meeting regarding stormwater permitting was productive, with DEQ receptive to reducing fines.
- Meeting with Romano Capital regarding riverfront development shows promising shared vision.
- City food drive collected nearly a ton of donations.

Walsh concluded by thanking the Council for their leadership and dedication during a challenging year with complex decisions and fiscal challenges. He highlighted the reservoir project, riverfront development, streets utility work, and police station as major accomplishments for the community.

Mayor Massey added that it has been a successful year, expressing her hope that improvements have been made for staff morale and bandwidth and noting the importance of understanding life's work balance priorities while maintaining momentum on other City projects.

ADJOURN – 5:24 p.m.**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- Labor Negotiations, under ORS 192.660(2)(d)
- Real Property Transactions, under ORS 192.660(2)(e)
- Exempt Records/Confidential Attorney-Client Privileged Memo, under ORS 192.660(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