



COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION

Monday, January 29, 2024

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Rick Scholl
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

MEMBERS ABSENT

Council President Jessica Chilton

OTHERS

John Walsh, City Administrator Rachael Barry, Government Affairs Specialist
Kathy Payne, City Recorder Gloria Butsch, Finance Director
Lisa Scholl, City Recorder Ed Trompke, Contracted City Attorney

CALL SPECIAL SESSION TO ORDER – 9:09 a.m.

RESOLUTION

- 1. Resolution No. 2000:** A Resolution to Submit the Electors of the City of St. Helens the Question of Adoption of a 5-Year Local Option Levy Not to Exceed the Amount of \$0.52 Per \$1,000 of Assessed Property Value for Police Protection Services Staffing Beginning Fiscal Year 2024-2025

The purpose of this meeting is to consider a levy in the amount of \$0.52 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Contracted Attorney Ed Trompke explained that Oregon law allows a local option levy for a period of not more than five years for specific purposes. In this case, it's for law enforcement protection services at \$0.52 per \$1,000. If the resolution and ballot title are approved, the notice will be published in the newspaper followed by a seven-day period the public has to challenge the ballot title in Circuit Court. The County Elections official said today is the last day to get it to the newspaper and make deadlines. Once the court process is over, City Administrator Walsh will sign the SEL form and send it to County Elections official, who adds it to the ballot.

In response to Councilor Hubbard's question about cost, Walsh responded that the only cost to the City is newspaper advertising charges. There is not an additional cost since it's in the Primary Election.

Discussion of tax generated and whether it is enough. It will generate around \$600,000 per year and fully funds three officers. A lower rate will be more likely approved than a higher rate.

Councilor Hubbard is concerned that this doesn't seem to solve the problem. They should be able to find the funds and not do the levy. It's last minute and affects the citizens for a long time. Adding it to the utility bill would make it immediate, which he would prefer if there was a mechanism for hardships and for it to sunset.

Mayor Scholl prefers \$0.69 per \$1,000 and sending it to the voters. He pointed out that there will be a jail levy at the same time.

Discussion of levy versus utility fee.

Councilor Sundeen thanked Colleen Ohler for working on this. He wants to make sure everyone has had time to look this over thoroughly and not to rush it. Mayor Scholl agreed. They thought it was too late but Colleen got it done. The \$0.52 per \$1,000 would show they're not asking too much. This would help close the gap of retirees and allow them to adjust the budget. They have already given them the ability to hire two officers immediately. He is hopeful for industry and Waterfront redevelopment to have a supportive tax base.

Mayor Scholl said it would be a mistake to not put it out to the voters during a Primary election. Policing is going to continue to get more expensive and be unaffordable for cities.

Councilor Hubbard asked what happens if the levy fails. Councilor Gundersen said it could be added to the utility bill. Walsh said a levy allows voters to show their support of the police. Not all levies pass on the first try. They will have another opportunity to go out for a levy in November if this fails. Councilor Gundersen agreed with the increase to \$0.69 per \$1,000 and if that doesn't pass, they can add to utility bill. Walsh added that there is a natural increase for population growth. Councilor Sundeen asked where \$0.69 per \$1,000 came from. Walsh explained that the \$0.52 per \$1,000 was based on \$200,000 per officer. Councilor Gundersen said a lower number has a better chance of passing but he doesn't want to be too low.

Motion: Motion made by Councilor Gundersen to modify the resolution to \$0.69 per \$1,000.

Discussion of the benefits of a levy, such as citizens having a vote of where their money is going and giving the City a chance to address the upcoming police retirements.

Finance Director Butsch reported that the \$0.69 per \$1,000 would generate approximately \$800,000 in taxes that would fund either four entry level officers fully equipped or the opportunity to hire laterals. At \$0.52 per \$1,000, they probably wouldn't be able to hire three laterals. In response to Councilor Sundeen, the levy would generate about the same amount as the \$15 utility fee.

Trompke explained how owners of rental units would pay for a levy based on the assessed value and then pass it on to renters. If it's a utility fee, every user would pay the same amount regardless of income. Discussion ensued.

Motion died due to lack of second.

Mayor Scholl read Resolution No. 2000 by title. **Motion:** Motion made by Councilor Gundersen and seconded by Mayor Scholl to adopt Resolution No. 2000.

Discussion. Councilor Sundeen believes the original motion is more appropriate.

Vote: Nay: Mayor Scholl, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Hubbard, Councilor Sundeen

Councilor Sundeen said the \$0.69 per \$1,000 is more appropriate and it allows voters the opportunity to have a say. He talked about his hesitation and wanting to give community members the best deal. People see the need and will likely support it.

Motion: Motion made by Councilor Gundersen and seconded by Councilor Sundeen to amend Resolution No. 2000 from \$0.52 per \$1,000 to \$0.69 per \$1,000. **Vote:** Yea: Mayor Scholl, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Sundeen; Nay: Councilor Hubbard

Mayor Scholl believes voters will approve this. It's unfortunate that funding was affected by industrial businesses leaving. He talked about projects that help bring the highest quality of living to the city. Policing will continue to get more expensive.

Councilor Sundeen wants to look at filling immediate needs as well. Mayor Scholl confirmed that staff was directed at the last meeting to begin the process to fill two positions.

Mayor Scholl read amended Resolution No. 2000 by title.

Trompke clarified if Council approves, the consensus is to instruct staff to modify the exhibits to reflect the changed amounts.

Motion: Motion made by Councilor Sundeen and seconded by Councilor Gundersen to adopt Resolution No. 2000 as amended. **Vote:** Yea: Mayor Scholl, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Sundeen; Nay: Councilor Hubbard

Councilors Sundeen and Hubbard voted yea to give voters the opportunity to have a say.

Councilor Hubbard voted nay due to not having enough information.

Mayor Scholl agreed that this needs to go to the voters. He encouraged citizens to support the levy and officers. Staff will work on this and submit it to the County.

Trompke reviewed the process. Mayor Scholl thanked him for his help and working over the weekend. He is glad they made the deadline and will be able to send it to the voters.

Councilor Sundeen talked about the need for communication about the public safety fee to explain what it is, why it's used, and its benefits. People may have been more receptive to it if they understood.

NOTICE OF PROPOSED BALLOT TITLE

- 2. Approve Notice of Proposed Ballot Title for Creation of Police Protection Services Staff Funding Local Option Tax

Trompke clarified that an approval would incorporate the changes made in the adopted resolution.

Motion: Motion made by Councilor Gundersen and seconded by Councilor Sundeen to approve the notice of proposed ballot title as amended. **Vote:** Yea: Mayor Scholl, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Sundeen; Nay: Councilor Hubbard

Councilor Hubbard voted nay due to not having enough information.

Mayor Scholl apologized for missing the last meeting. He watched it and wished he could have been there. He's proud of the work they do together. They have fine officers who work hard every day.

Councilor Sundeen thanked Colleen Ohler for seeing the need and taking the initiative. Mayor Scholl agreed.

City Recorder Payne apologized for saying it was too late for the May election. Looking at the elections calendar, it's not due to the County until March 21. Moving this quickly shows that the Council is taking initiative.

ADJOURN – 10:10 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne
 Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl
 Rick Scholl, Mayor