



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, March 19, 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	Jose Castilleja, Police Sergeant
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Jeremy Howell, Police Sergeant
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Everardo Medina, Code Enforcement Officer
Joe Hogue, Acting Police Chief	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	

OTHERS

Dustin King	Kellie Jo Smith	Robert Braud
Brady Preheim	Steve Topaz	Ron Trommlitz
Reed Hjort	Greg Boswell	Jenni Gilbert
Richard Mason	Mitzi Ponce	

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

CLEARING CONFUSION AND SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

Mayor Massey addressed three items from the March 5 visitor comments:

1. Definition of news media: Mayor Massey explained that while public media law does not define representatives of news media, the City's news media policy adopted on February 19, 2025, implements guidance from the Attorney General's office.
2. Councilor bringing forward the police position: Mayor Massey clarified that any city councilor or the mayor may direct an item to be placed on the City Council agenda, as per Council Operating Rules and Procedures. In this instance, Councilor Gundersen requested the topic be added to the agenda.
3. Law firm representation: Mayor Massey confirmed that Jordan Ramis represents the City of St. Helens as a public agency but does not represent the school district or any of its individual board members.

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

- ◆ Dustin King, former police officer with the St. Helens Police Department (SHPD), here in support of Acting Police Chief Hogue. King began by making it clear that his words were his own and not influenced by SHPD. He expressed that SHPD was at a critical junction, reflecting on past missteps, particularly the improper hiring process of a former chief which led to ethical violations and a hostile work environment, causing numerous tenured officers, including himself, to leave.

He praised Hogue's 20 years of loyal service at SHPD, noting his wide-ranging experience as an investigator, patrol supervisor, and leader. King stressed Hogue's role in mentoring officers, asserting, "some have stayed, some have gone on to have extremely successful careers elsewhere due to his guidance." He highlighted Hogue's contributions to restoring the department's reputation and emphasized his respect among surrounding agencies. King argued there was no need for further evaluation and urged the Council to appoint Hogue as the permanent chief. He concluded by stating that Hogue embodies the ethical and professional leadership that the community demands.

- ◆ Kellie Jo Smith and Robert Braud. Advocated for the installation of bocce ball courts in City parks, highlighting the recreational benefits for the community. Smith introduced bocce ball by comparing it to shuffleboard or bowling but noted that it is played outside. She suggested that it could easily be installed into one of the parks. Braud, who plays bocce ball in the Special Olympics, also shared his enthusiasm for the sport, describing it as fun. They left informational flyers with the Council members to further promote their advocacy.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. Expressed strong support for Hogue's appointment, agreeing wholeheartedly with King who spoke earlier. He also took the opportunity to make a direct appeal for accountability, insisting that Mayor Massey owes City Administrator Walsh an apology. Preheim sharply criticized the Council's management of executive session access, asserting that they were in breach of executive session laws. He highlighted a recent decision by the Oregon Department of Ethics, indicating that the attorney's guidance was incorrect. He warned the Council of possible fines for denying access to news media representatives. Any repeated violations would be taken seriously by the Ethics Commission, which he suggested could result in escalating fines. He emphasized that the Council does not have the authority to independently determine who can attend these sessions.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Expressed concerns regarding freedom of speech and the limitations placed on public comment periods during City meetings. He referenced a quote from an American General, stating, "If any of my speech is taken away, then the dumb and silent will be led like sheep to the slaughter," as a metaphor for how speech limitations could lead to broader suppression of public expression. Topaz criticized the varying rules for public comment across different communities in Oregon, arguing that inconsistent speech regulations might conflict with federal law. He highlighted the issue of time restrictions on comments, stating that when someone is told their time is up, it effectively limits an individual's freedom of speech. He also pointed out that the rules around public comments, like needing to provide contact information, might deter people from expressing their views freely.
- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Discussed issues related to the 2MG water reservoir rehabilitation project. Trommlitz recalled an incident from April 2017, where Sue Nelson denied the reservoir was leaking 74,000 gallons a day. He criticized the engineering process, highlighting that the project relied on old photos and historical drawings without allowing interior access, which he considered a significant issue. Trommlitz pointed out the lack of concrete testing, attributing this to a failure of due diligence. He accused the City of misleading information, which led to future failures, emphasizing the importance of testing prior concrete surfaces to prevent such outcomes. Trommlitz expressed frustration over the lack of transparency regarding the Walker Consultants' report, which he suggested would have addressed the causes and responsibilities for the reservoir's failure, though he claimed his requests to view it were denied. Despite Walsh's claim of client privilege, Trommlitz argued that this was an abuse of public trust, designed to conceal

evidence and protect reputations. Additionally, he shared an incident from November 2022 where he was told to stop investigating the reservoir failure due to the risk of being sued. Trommlitz warned of potential litigation resulting from the City's apparent lack of oversight and accountability, mentioning a settlement agreement where Western Partitions was absolved of liability, despite Trommlitz's belief in the company's involvement in the failure.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

2. Review Draft Monthly Report to Council Template - *City Administrator John Walsh and City Recorder Kathy Payne*

City Recorder Payne presented a revised draft of the monthly report template for Council. The template was narrowed down based on management team discussions and includes sections on general operations, staffing changes, ongoing and upcoming projects, and important dates. Mayor Massey confirmed that department heads had reviewed and accepted the template. The Council agreed to implement the new template starting from the next meeting.

3. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

- Columbia Economic Team: Walsh highlighted the team's success in economic development, including industrial recruitment, local business support, and tourism efforts.
- Budget preparation: Walsh mentioned ongoing meetings with department heads to prepare for the upcoming budget proposal.
- Urban Renewal meeting: An upcoming meeting on April 2 will address administrative matters and budget amendments.
- DEQ meeting: Walsh reported progress on environmental issues related to Project Arcadia, with an expected transaction time in May.
- PGE and Business Oregon meeting: Discussions were held regarding a substation project at the mill, involving a potential \$15 million loan/grant.
- Union negotiations: Kick-off meetings for negotiations with both unions were mentioned.
- Compensation analysis: Walsh noted that a firm has been engaged to conduct a market analysis of wages and benefits.
- Central Waterfront Project: A special meeting will be held tonight to discuss the wastewater lagoon repurposing project.
- Riverwalk and street projects: Plans for a grand reopening celebration are in progress.
- Water caucus: City representatives will attend a meeting in Salem to advocate for resources for the reservoir and water capacity needs.

RECESS - 3:29 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION – 3:31 p.m.

- 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)

RECONVENE – 5:44 p.m.

DISCUSSION TOPICS - CONTINUED

1. Discussion of Police Chief Position - *Councilor Gundersen*

Mayor Massey disclosed a potential conflict of interest, noting that her husband is a police officer within the City of St. Helens. Councilor Gundersen suggested moving the discussion of the police chief position to an action item for the regular session. The Council members briefly acknowledged the procedural aspect of the discussion before transitioning the topic to the regular session.

ADJOURN – 5:45 p.m.

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