



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, December 02, 2020

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Rick Scholl
Council President Doug Morten
Councilor Keith Locke
Councilor Stephen R. Topaz

MEMBERS ABSENT

Councilor Ginny Carlson

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator
Matt Brown, Assistant City Administrator
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder
Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Sue Nelson, Public Works Engineering Director
Rachael Barry, Government Affairs & Project Support Specialist

Crystal King, Communications Officer
Jacob Graichen, City Planner
Jenny Dimsho, Associate Planner
Bill Monahan, City Attorney
Tina Curry, Event Coordinator

OTHERS

Lynne Pettit
Paul Vogel
Brady Preheim
Tim Goodman

CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 1:00 p.m.

VISITOR COMMENTS - *Limited to five (5) minutes per speaker*

- ◆ Brady Preheim. The agenda lists a presentation from the Columbia County Economic Team (CCET). He is opposed to the request. The new director has done a better job than the previous one. However, Brady is unhappy that the director has falsely stated that Mike Seely approves and supports the Port Westward rezoning. That is a lie, and he should be terminated.

City Administrator Walsh pointed out that CCET Director Paul Vogel will be on later and can respond.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Comcast Franchise Agreement Discussion - *Matt/John*

1:03 p.m.

Assistant City Administrator Brown introduced Comcast representative Tim Goodman.

City Attorney Bill Monahan reviewed the expired franchise agreement. He has been working on revising it. A memo is included in the archive meeting packet listing the major changes.

- 10-year extension
- same franchise rate

- clarified language about responsibilities
- increase in insurance requirements
- allows for City to request a report of complaints

The current agreement includes a requirement for a customer service office in the City to be open 40 hours a week. It allows for relocating the office in the County with a 60-day notification to the City and customers. Comcast is requesting that requirement be removed. They propose to operate with less physical contact, as many are doing with COVID. Techs will help deliver equipment.

Councilor Topaz pointed out that the pandemic is temporary. Can the customer service office re-open following the pandemic? Monahan responded that the language is proposed by Comcast. Comcast has not made this decision lightly. They want to provide the best customer service they are able to, and are requesting the change. Not a lot of customers go into the office. Most consumers prefer contactless assistance.

Mayor Scholl pointed out that they were supposed to give a 60-day notice to both the City and customers to close the office and they did not do that. He had an issue and went back and forth to the office for a new equipment. If the office were not there, it would have taken more time. This is difficult for elderly who do not drive and need new parts. Service is going down to increase profit. It is not fair for notice to not be made and a public hearing to not be held.

Council President Morten concurred with Mayor Scholl. He is concerned about citizens who need help. He talked about the problems he has experienced with Comcast. He does not recall receiving a notice as a subscriber. Moving out of the City and County is a blatant breach of contract. He asked if Comcast is a member of the Joint Utilities Association of Oregon. They help resolve these kinds of disputes. He would like to see resolution before signing a new contract.

Comcast representative Tim Goodman spoke to the potential breach of contract. That is part of the current franchise if they tried to close it now. There are certain requirements that they must maintain, including the customer service office in the County. Right now, they are talking about a new franchise with that requirement going away. The store has been closed since mid-March because of COVID. If the franchise is renewed as proposed, they would likely close the office permanently. Mayor Scholl expressed his concern about them making that decision with the excuse of a pandemic. Tim responded that is not true. The proposal was done well before the pandemic hit. It is a business decision. In 2018, they averaged 16 visits a day and in 2019, there were 15 visits a day. That is not enough to remain open. There are many ways to do it now without going to the store. If they decide to close, they are required to notify jurisdictions and customers. He no longer has an office because of COVID.

Discussion of notice. Notice has not been sent because a permanent decision has not been made. The only notice that went out was the temporary COVID closures.

Mayor Scholl emphasized the need for quick service with so many customers having to work from home right now. Councilor Topaz added that older people need to meet with support face-to-face. They do not work as well over the phone.

Council President Morten expressed his disappointment that Comcast is only looking out for their financial impact and not their customers. He recommends passing it on to their Board that they will lose customers. Tim explained that technicians will go to houses and help. They are rated on their customer service. Their biggest initiative is to provide the best customer service. It is a business decision based on not getting the traffic in the store.

Discussion ensued about the store. Councilors emphasized the need for customer service and communication. Tim explained that the store would be open right now if it was not for the pandemic. A majority of stores have been closed. Staff has been very diligent about requesting data and information.

He is fairly certain that notice was sent about the temporary closure. Mayor Scholl went back to the fact that they could have stayed up and followed governor's orders. Tim responded that it was closed for employee and customer safety. Mayor Scholl represents all the citizens of Columbia County that will be affected. Councilor Topaz pointed out that this will close the customer service office as well as the stock of supply. Tim confirmed that techs are working out of their homes now. They receive equipment mailed to them or they pick it up.

Mayor Scholl asked if Tim has the authority to keep the store open. Tim responded that he does not. He emphasized that customers or Council can contact him directly if they have unresolved issues.

Tim acknowledged that the staff that is working hard for the City.

This is on tonight's agenda.

2. Enterprise Zone Sponsor Requests - *Paul Vogel, CCET Executive Director*

2:09 p.m.

Paul Vogel, CCET Director. The request is for the City, as a Zone Sponsor of the South Columbia County Enterprise Zone, to authorize an application by Cascades Tissue for a new Enterprise Zone exemption. This is for expansion of two new lines and 21 employees. They do meet and exceed the payroll requirements for a five-year exemption. A copy of the request is included in the archive packet for this meeting. CCET is glad to see the expansion. It is a \$14 million investment.

Council President Morten asked how the City of St. Helens benefits from this. Paul responded that the Cascade plants are interconnected. There is an application fee that goes into the betterment fund to partially support the CCET Management. This will add to the tax rolls and creates 21 new jobs. Benefits decrease if they do not sustain that employment number.

Paul addressed Brady's earlier comment. When the CCET Board voted in favor, he organized materials. He was given a letter that Mike Seely was no longer in opposition. Paul spoke with him and Mike voiced his concerns but said he is not opposed to industry. They have removed the bullet that was in an earlier memo.

Paul gave a couple CCET updates:

- Completed the award notifications for round four of the small business grants
 - approximately \$317,500 was awarded to St. Helens small businesses
 - 44 businesses were awarded
 - 98 applications were received
 - Almost half of the awards have not been responded to yet. People have to sign and return a form prior to the check being issued. He requested help from the City with communicating to businesses that the money has been awarded. Mayor Scholl will ask Communications Officer Crystal King to help communicate the money availability.
- Another grant will be released for almost \$1 million. They will have to award that money by the end of the year.

City Administrator Walsh added that this is included on tonight's agenda approval to sign. Enterprise Zones are one of the few tools in Oregon to support economic development. They are good to support.

Discussion of Opportunity Zones. Paul will create an explanation of them.

3. Bennett Building Improvements Update - *Matt/Jenny*

2:24 p.m.

Assistant City Administrator Brown reviewed the improvement proposal. There were concerns about the windows installed not meeting historic district guidelines.

Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho reviewed photos included in the archive meeting packet. Exterior modifications to buildings in the Riverfront District normally go to the Planning Commission, acting as the Historical Landmarks Commission, for architectural review. That did not happen, so they are working to correct it now. The new windows installed have architecture discrepancies. The City hired an architectural firm for guidance. She reviewed upcoming phases. The first phase will be to upgrade the windows to meet historic guidelines. They will be requesting approval at tonight's meeting to sign off on the \$40,000 upgrades.

Council President Morten asked where the money will come from. Brown responded that it will mostly come from utility funds since they operate from there five days a week. Council President Morten asked if the funds are in the budget. Brown said it was not specifically talked about during the budget discussion but there are funds in contingency. Councilor Locke asked what the entire budget is. Dimsho reported that it is approximately \$200,000.

Mayor Scholl asked if the windows are eligible for CRPUD rebates. Dimsho will look into that.

Councilor Topaz pointed out the parapet tile. Will it be removed? Dimsho confirmed that the tiles will be replaced after making the repairs.

Dimsho talked about historic landmarks.

Brown talked about the future use of the building. The idea is for Building, Planning, and Engineering to move into the building if Court moves to a new Public Safety Facility.

Councilor Locke expressed his concern that the building needs to be ready to change use in the future. This is on tonight's agenda for approval.

4. Discussion on City Properties to Potentially be Sold - *Jacob/Sue/Matt*

2:41 p.m.

Assistant City Administrator Brown reviewed the list and map of properties. A copy is included in the archive meeting packet.

City Planner Graichen explained that the best practice is to turn small pieces into City right-of-way if adjacent owners do not want to purchase them.

Council reviewed and discussed the property list.

1. Millard Road – consensus to retain to control what is developed on the property
2. 554 S. 12th Street – consensus to reach out to Communication Action Team (CAT) and Habitat for Community to build self-help housing; there are potential wetlands on the property
3. North of 484 S. 10th Street – consensus to reach out to Communication Action Team (CAT) and Habitat for Humanity to build self-help housing
4. S. 6th Street – consensus to retain it for future right-of-way
5. S. 2nd Street – consensus to retain for future parking
6. S. 2nd Street – consensus to retain for future parking
7. East of 440 S. 2nd Street – consensus to retain

Break - 3:18 p.m.

Discussion of the park land on Millard Road. It will be an amenity to whatever is developed on the adjacent property.

5. Update on RFPs for Riverwalk & S. 1st & Strand Streets Road & Utility Extensions - John

3:32 p.m.

City Administrator Walsh reported that submittals are due next week. Discussion of who will review the RFP submittals.

Riverwalk RFPs:

- City Administrator Walsh
- Public Works Director Zaher
- Public Works Engineering Director Nelson or Public Works Supervisor Elder
- Associate Planner Dimsho
- Parks & Trails Commission Chair Carmin Dunn
- Planning Commission Vice Chair Dan Cary
- Council President Morten
- Councilor Topaz
- Incoming Council members Jessica Chilton and Patrick Birkle, since they will not constitute a quorum until they are sworn in.

S. 1st and Strand Streets Road and Utility Extensions RFPs:

- City Administrator Walsh
- Public Works Director Zaher
- Public Works Engineering Director Nelson
- Public Works Supervisor Elder
- Mayor Scholl
- Councilor Locke
- Incoming Council members Jessica Chilton and Patrick Birkle, since they will not constitute a quorum until they are sworn in.

6. Strategic Action Plan Updates

3:47 p.m.

Brown reviewed updates.

- Business fee schedule update on tonight's agenda for approval.
- Towing contract with Drake's Towing on tonight's agenda for approval.
- Conducting polling regarding the Public safety Facility.
- An email was distributed from S&G with a survey following-up about the fiber company. It needs to be completed by December 9. Responding shows the Council is interested in proceeding.

7. City Administrator Report

3:50 p.m.

- Catching up after the Thanksgiving break.
- The Christmas Tree is up. It will be decorated with lights.
- Christmas Ships will be here December 12.
 - The docks will have limited access.
 - The captain's dinner will be catered by Wild Currant.
 - Santa will be on the top steps of the Courthouse with a drive-through candy shoot.
 - Parking will be available on the Waterfront Property and occupants are encouraged to remain in their vehicle.
 - They will observe safety protocols.
- Looking forward to having 2020 behind us!
- Time for department head evaluations.

- Communications Officer Crystal King is back part-time. Thank you to everyone who has been filling in for her. They are planning out the next quarter of communications.
- RFQs are due December 8.
- The builder is requesting an extension for the container homes on N. 7th Street. He recommends a six-month extension. No objection from Council.
- The franchise agreement with Waste Management for container drop boxes will be reviewed December 16.
- Building Inspector interviews are behind held on Monday. Last time, the interviews involved a community member. He reached out to Rich Bailey to have him participate.
- The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for the Food Bank held a bid opening yesterday and received four proposals. All of the bids were within budget. They are reviewing the low bidder submittals to verify it is complete.
- A lot has changed since the Comcast Franchise Agreement was renewed last time.

OTHER BUSINESS

Councilor Topaz encouraged Walsh to get a name tag for Christina Sullivan.

ADJOURNMENT – 3:58 p.m.**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne

Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl

Rick Scholl, Mayor