



COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION

Monday, March 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
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder
Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney

OTHERS

None

CALL SPECIAL SESSION TO ORDER – 5:30 p.m.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Discussion regarding Council Governing Policy

Overview of Current Governing Policy

Contracted City Attorney Ashley Wigod provided an overview of the City's current Council Governing Policy and form of government. She explained that St. Helens has a council-manager form of government, which is common for cities with populations over 2,500. In this form, the Council retains decision-making authority while delegating administrative responsibilities to a city administrator.

Wigod presented a document comparing St. Helens' current governing policy to recommended changes. She noted that the City's current policy differs slightly from a typical council-manager form in areas like hiring, firing, and supervision responsibilities.

Hiring Process

The Council discussed potential changes to the hiring process for department heads. Currently, the Council hires department heads, but the recommendation was for the city administrator to select candidates for Council confirmation.

Mayor Massey expressed concern about completely relinquishing control over department head hiring. The Council debated the merits of having the city administrator select candidates versus the full Council being involved in interviews and selection.

Councilor Gundersen suggested trusting the city administrator to conduct the process and present a candidate, while still allowing Council confirmation. City Administrator John Walsh noted the challenges of finding qualified applicants in the current job market.

Supervision and Discipline

The Council agreed that they should not be involved in employee disciplinary actions or terminations due to potential legal risks. Mayor Massey stated she did not want Council participating in those processes to avoid exposure to employment lawsuits.

Performance Evaluations

There was extensive discussion about implementing a more robust and consistent performance evaluation process. Council President Chilton emphasized the importance of having regular evaluations, noting they had not been happening consistently.

The Council debated whether to specify evaluation criteria in the governing policy or keep it more general. They discussed potentially using 360-degree reviews and having Council input on evaluation criteria.

City Administrator Walsh explained some of the challenges in conducting frequent evaluations with his current workload. The Council recognized the need for additional Human Resources support to properly implement and maintain an evaluation system.

Human Resources (HR)

The Council identified a need for dedicated HR support, either through hiring an HR manager or contracting with an outside firm. They discussed the potential benefits of having HR expertise to handle evaluations, policy updates, and other personnel matters.

Mayor Massey and others expressed interest in exploring options for HR support, recognizing it as a potential way to reduce liability and ensure consistent personnel practices. Walsh agreed to gather information on HR firms and options to present to the Council.

Next Steps

Wigod summarized the key points of agreement:

- The legal recommendations were generally acceptable with some modifications
- Performance evaluation language would be updated to have the city administrator evaluate department heads, with Council determining evaluation criteria
- Evaluations would occur at minimum annually for all employees
- Wigod would research standardized evaluation criteria used by other similar-sized cities
- Walsh would gather information on HR support options

The Council agreed to move forward with updating the governing policy based on the discussion, with Wigod to draft a revised version for review.

OTHER BUSINESS**ADJOURN – 6:55 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