



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, March 17, 2021

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Rick Scholl
Council President Doug Morten
Councilor Patrick Birkle
Councilor Stephen R. Topaz
Councilor Jessica Chilton

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator
Matt Brown, Assistant City Administrator
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder
Brian Greenway, Policy Chief
Jacob Graichen, City Planner
Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Rachael Barry, Government Affairs &
Project Support Specialist

Margaret Jeffries, Library Director
Bill Monahan, City Attorney
Sue Nelson, City Engineer
Jenny Dimsho, Associate Planner
Crystal King, Communications Officer
Sharron Darroux, Engineering Project Manager
Christina Sullivan, Community Dev. Admin. Assist.
Michele Karmartsang, Library Assistant
Tina Curry, Event Coordinator

OTHERS

Judy Thompson Matthew Kahl
Greg Cohen Peter Hicks
Autumn Oliver Danny

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

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

- ◆ Judy Thompson. She spoke about the proposed Public Safety Facility. She thanked Assistant City Administrator Brown, Police Chief Greenway, staff, and police officers for all of their time and commitment to the project and making many opportunities for citizens to learn about the proposal. The financial choices to make this happen are a bond or utility fees. Her family will be impacted by either choice. Her family agrees that they need to retire the current decaying, dysfunctional, unsafe police station and move forward with a new facility that will better serve law enforcement, municipal services, provide community meeting space, and serve as a disaster center. They must be prepared for population growth. They are not overly enthused about an increase in property taxes or utility fees, but the monthly fee will cost less than a bond, which would increase their monthly mortgage payment. The bond falls on the shoulders of property owners and the utility fee will include more people and businesses to help with the monthly cost. As population and business growth occurs, there is a potential for the monthly fee to decrease. Perhaps there could be a rate scale for small businesses to help reduce the financial impact. If money were tight, she would much prefer making arrangements to pay the City's bill rather than her monthly mortgage payment. She understands the City will provide additional funds to help

citizens with utility services. This is a need for a new Public Safety Facility. It will only cost more money if they delay. She encouraged Council to listen to feedback.

- ◆ Dylan Gaston, President of St. Helens Police Association. (Read into the record by Assistant City Administrator Brown.) *I write this letter on behalf of the St. Helens Police Association. We have long appreciated the outstanding relationship that we have with the Council. We pride ourselves on our flexibility and adaptability. We want to make our stance on our current, deplorable, Police Department facilities, known.*

Our goals have always been the same: to keep people safe, help civilians and connect with the community. Those goals have become exceedingly difficult to meet with our current working conditions. Our current building is unsafe, unsanitary, and unfit for the job of police work.

Our agency does not have the ability to become accredited due to so many subpar and outdated elements of the building. In fact, our current building does not even meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements which unfortunately makes our Police Department look indifferent to many of our most vulnerable residents. Currently, a citizen with a physical disability may not even be able to physically enter our facility to provide a statement. St. Helens Police Department personnel want our facility to be accessible and welcoming to all of our citizens.

Additionally, due to the lack of space in the building, victims of a crime must use the same, and only, interview room as our suspect's use. This room is cramped, sterile, and does not put a victim at ease. Instead of offering them a safe and comfortable place to disclose their story to officers, they must sit in a tiny room that makes them feel as if they themselves are the suspect. The door to this room is not soundproof and faces directly onto our main office hallway where people often pass by. This is not acceptable.

Our current building does not provide us with the opportunity to properly test dangerous drugs or for officers to decontaminate. We do not have gender-specific locker rooms allowing for necessary privacy. We do not have nearly enough workspace, not to mention room to social distance during the Covid-19 pandemic. While we are on duty, we do not have a secure area to store our personal vehicles or all of our patrol vehicles. Our office does not have the proper IT infrastructure to easily investigate cases with large digital evidence files. There is no briefing room area for officers to discuss their shift and cases that does not also double, triple, or quadruple as space for another use. This is inefficient and leads to frequent interruptions.

We have no dedicated training space so that officers can take classroom and reality-based training to improve themselves professionally. In today's current national movement calling for police reform, this deficiency seems particularly egregious. How can our officers improve, evolve, and grow to be the best in their profession if they are not given the training space and tools necessary to practice and learn?

While we have high hopes for improved working conditions, I do not think what we are asking for is unrealistic or unreasonable. Our hope is to have a building that does not put citizens at risk. A building that allows for victims to feel safe and comfortable. A building that has the ability to host community events and for officers to better connect with the people they serve. Without a doubt, the people that reap the most benefit from an updated facility would be the citizens themselves. The primary reason that we support an updated facility is because we want to deliver the most professional police services as possible to our citizens.

While the community is our top priority, improved working conditions would also be immensely appreciated by our officers, many of whom live in the city. Improved conditions would

undoubtedly help with recruitment, retention, and longevity of officers. It would allow for officers to once again take pride in the building that they spend much of their time working out of.

We support the recommendations made to the City Council by the Public Safety Facility Ad-Hoc Committee. This group, made up of St. Helens community members, recognized that it is past time for a new facility and urged the Council to create a fund to secure the money needed for construction. We ask the Council to take their recommendations seriously and approve the public safety fund.

We write this letter to ask the City Council: what is your plan? What will you do if you chose to send the funding to a vote and it does not pass?

I, and all of our members, eagerly look forward to further discussions and finding out how we can improve our working conditions. We are anxiously awaiting the council's guidance to find out how we can assist the city in making an updated, professional, working environment a reality for our officers.

We fully realize what kind of investment we are asking of the Council, so we do not take this matter lightly. That being said, we are comfortable making this request as we think the community is worthy of that kind of investment. On behalf of the St. Helens Police Association, I want to thank all of you for your time and consideration.

- ◆ Columbia County Republican Central Committee. (Read into the record by Mayor Scholl.) *A majority of our Executive Committee recently attended a presentation by Police Chief Greenway and Matt Brown regarding the need for a new police station and public safety facility and we agree that the current police station is grossly inadequate and outdated.*

We believe that providing public safety is one of the primary functions of government and that our law enforcement officers should be provided the resources they need to assure safety of citizens' persons, homes, business, and other property.

After deliberation and a unanimous vote of our Executive Committee, we support the formation of a Public Safety Fund by the City of St. Helens Council for the sole purpose of building a new public safety facility as presented. We also encourage you to form a robust citizen oversight committee to help assure those funds are used prudently and solely for their intended purpose.

We also encourage you to seek the most cost-effective method of funding for this facility and to pay off any debt incurred for its construction early should a windfall or public safety grant(s) be secured by the City of St. Helens. Should funding debt service be secured through a fee on local utilities, we strongly urge you to establish a non-cancellable sunset provision to that fee so that it is only used for its intended purpose of building aforementioned facility.

We have included a copy of our Board Resolution supporting this project for your reference. (Copy included in the archive packet for this meeting.)

Sincerely on Behalf of Columbia county Republican Central Committee. (Copy of signed document included in the archive packet for this meeting.)

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Employee Length of Service Recognition

1:10 p.m.

Two employees have reached milestones in their employment with the City of St. Helens. The following individuals will receive a certificate and pin.

5 Years

Michele Karmartsang started working for the St. Helens Public Library on March 4, 2016 as a part-time Library Assistant, where she still serves the patrons of the Library.

Roger Stauffer began working for the City on March 14, 2016 as the City's Building Maintenance Utility Worker where he serves today.

Congratulations, Michele and Roger, and thank you for your service!

Library Director Jeffries spoke of Karmartsang's extra work during the pandemic.

2. Presentation of Plaque to Greg Cohen, Outgoing Planning Commission Member

1:14 p.m.

Mayor Scholl presented outgoing Planning Commission member Greg Cohen with a plaque for his 18+ years of service.

Greg expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to serve citizens. It has been an honor and privilege.

3. Senior Center Semi-Annual Report - *Manager Kathy Innocenti*

Kathy Innocenti reviewed her report. A copy is included in the archive packet for this meeting.

- Expressed her appreciation of Roger Stauffer.
- Senior Center and Top Notch Thrift Store are doing well.
- Financials are stable.
- Since the last report, they have obtained about \$153,000 through 12 different funding and grant sources.
- Big expenses coming up
 - Store delivery truck needs to be replaced.
 - Copier/printer was replaced.
 - Commercial freezer was beyond repair. The Board voted to have a walk-in freezer and cooler combination installed. They will do a fundraiser in April to help fund it.
- Prepared and served 50,000 last year. They are on track to exceed that this year.
- An employee who worked at both the Senior Center and Top Notch tested positive for COVID. They had substitute kitchen workers from Community Action Team (CAT) help. They closed the store for two weeks. Fortunately, there were no additional cases.
- The Senior Center is closed, except for preparing and delivering meals.
- AARP is on site doing tax preparation through April 15.
- They had a drive-thru holiday dinner sponsored by Schultz Financial. They gave meals to members who normally visit the Senior Center.
- There was a death and resignation on the Board. Two new Board members were added.
- All of the exterior doors were re-keyed to be the same.
- Setting up a system to accept credit cards for donations and meal cards.
- Top Notch is open three days a week and donations are coming in.

4. Public Works Department Semi-Annual Report - *Public Works Director Mouhamad Zaher*

1:23 p.m.

Public Works Director Mouhamad Zaher reviewed his report. A copy is included in the archive packet for this meeting.

Councilor Chilton asked if Public Works has a designated staff member to apply for grants and perform communications. Zaher responded that Communications Officer King does communications for the entire City. There is no one specific person for grants. They work together as a team to apply for them.

Council President Morten has received calls about the reservoir leak. What is the status of the leak? Zaher has researched the issue. There is a problem with the project vendor, and they did not deliver what they agreed to in the contract. The City is taking legal action against the vendor. The next step is to meet with the legal team. They will need to replace the existing tank or repair it.

Mayor Scholl asked about the Campbell Park project. City Engineer Nelson reported that it has not been awarded. They are currently negotiating with contractors. They are also trying to resolve some unstable soil issues before they can proceed with the pad construction.

City Administrator Walsh addressed Councilor Chilton's question about communications and grants. King is the central point of contact, which has been a successful strategy. Grants are usually done by the department. Government Affairs and Project Support Specialist Barry and Associate Planner Dimsho help with many of the grants. The City has been very successful with grant funding.

5. Review Proposed Bench Donation on River Street

1:50 p.m.

Council President Morten reported that the request was from the Lions Club for a set of two benches to be placed adjacent to each other. Council reviewed the submitted plans and requested placement areas. A copy is included in the archive packet for this meeting.

Discussion ensued. It was the consensus of the Council to place the benches at the 1st choice placement request. It will be on tonight's agenda for a motion.

6. Review Concept Designs for Sand Island Campground Picnic Shelters and Cabins - John/Jenny

1:58 p.m.

Associate Planner Dimsho reviewed the design proposal. A copy is included in the archive packet for this meeting. The City has a lease agreement with Brad Hendrickson to operate campsites on Sand Island. Lower Columbia Engineering submitted an application on behalf of Brad to install two picnic shelters and six cabins. As the property owner of Sand Island, the City is required to sign off approving the concept. She is seeking Council's authorization. They will need to make sure the proposal is on the City's portion of land and not Oregon Division of State Land's (DSL) portion. There are also technical details to work out for the floodplain. That will be handled through the land use process.

Council President Morten asked about the lease agreement for building and structures. Does the City assume those buildings when the lease sunsets? Walsh responded that the lease agreement requires that structures come to the City for approval. If the lease is terminated, the City would have to purchase the structures from the campground. Travel Oregon recently released funding for these types of projects. It is possible that public money can help offset some of those costs. The proposal is likely to be very popular during the summer and is a good amenity.

Councilor Topaz asked if the Island is always a flood plain. Are there different rules? Graichen explained that he worked with Lower Columbia Engineering to comply with the flood plain maps. The proposed locations were selected because of their elevation. The entire island is not a flood plain. Council President Morten does not think the City needs to worry about that since they are not covering the insurance.

Councilor Birkle asked about electricity on the Island. Dimsho confirmed there is no electricity or water service on the Island. The plans are conceptual at this time.

Councilor Chilton is concerned about starting this right now. It is still a new thing. They should look at numbers and make sure it is profitable. She would like to hear more about funding and how the City will pay for it. Walsh reported that the Campground LLC is paying for it themselves. Mayor Scholl added that Travel Oregon recognizes that people are traveling from other areas to the Island as a destination. Walsh

added that the business plan is being modeled after Stub Stewart State Park and Fort Stevens, which are in high demand. Camping is very popular right now with COVID.

Mayor Scholl likes the design. It will be on tonight's agenda for a motion.

7. Discussion regarding Covenant to Bind Property for N. 7th Street Affordable Housing Project - *Jacob*

2:11 p.m.

Graichen reviewed the report. A copy is included in the archive packet for this meeting. The subject area is currently four separate pieces of property. They need to bind the properties into one property. He reviewed proposed drawings of the development.

Councilor Topaz spoke of the recent parking rules that were added for duplexes. Does that effect this parking? Graichen said those State rules do not apply to this type of development. Discussion ensued about parking. The proposal meets parking standards. There is opportunity for additional on-street parking.

8. Strategic Action Plan Updates

No updates to report.

9. City Administrator Report

2:20 p.m.

- Receiving requests for parks and field reservations. Subject to COVID guidelines, does the Council want to begin accepting reservations? Consensus of Council to begin taking reservations.
- Waterfront projects beginning in April. Each project will have a Technical Advisory Committee, which will include a core of staff members and two optional council members. Councilors should contact him if they want to participate. Councilor Topaz expressed that he wants a councilor involved the whole time. This is getting too staff heavy and sometimes the staff has a difficult time interconnecting projects. Mayor Scholl argued that staff is doing a fantastic job moving the project along. Discussion ensued.
- There is a resolution on tonight's agenda for application of a low interest loan to design and construct the Riverfront District public infrastructure.
- There will be an ordinance on the April 7 meeting to create a Public Safety Fund for the Public Safety Facility. There would not be a fee associated with it. The fund would be created by resolution later.
- Will begin monthly public forums on the third Wednesday of each month. The April 21 public forum will be a Waterfront update. He asked Council for suggestions for future public forum topics. One can be about the Public Safety Funding. Mayor Scholl would like to discuss the funding in-person, possibly in June. Walsh talked about the potential cannabis tax increase being dedicated to the Police Department, which could pay for a very large portion of the facility.
- There has been interest in the Waterfront from developers. He thanked Councilor Chilton for visiting the site and reviewing the plans.
- Working with St. Helens Mainstreet on the Memorandum of Understand (MOU) and branding. They meet on the 4th or last Tuesday of the month.
- Monitoring the American Recovery Act. The City will receive funding with limited restrictions. Could be a real opportunity to look at projects to move forward.
- Travel Oregon has a grant right now. The City had submitted earlier for a shuttle to help with Sand Island transportation, but they may try again to help the existing public/private partnership.
- Monitoring 4th of July and what will be allowed. Mayor Scholl said he has been talking to the former fireworks committee and they are willing to sit down and discuss what is involved. He asked for volunteers. It is a lot of work.

- Reviewed legislative updates
 - SDC study for affordable housing
 - Infrastructure
- South County Coordination meetings this week to review Highway 30 corridor improvements. Discussion ensued above a railroad overpass.

OTHER BUSINESS

None

ADJOURNMENT – 2:42 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