



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, October 18, 2023

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Rick Scholl
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
Crystal King, Communications Officer
Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director
Brian Greenway, Police Chief

Evin Eustice, Police Sergeant
Matt Smith, Police Corporal
Jeremy Howell, Police Officer
Dylan Gaston, Police Detective
Adam Reathke, Police Officer
Bill Monahan, Contracted City Attorney

OTHERS

Steve Topaz	Ron Trommlitz	Stephanie Patterson
Eddie Dunton	Michael Sykes	Jennifer Massey
Steve Toschi	Paul Vogel	Jennifer Shoemaker
Jane Garcia	Adam	M. Millar
Art Leskovich	Erin Salisbury	JK
Melanie Olson	Brady Preheim	John Krueger
Eric Smythe	Jenni Gilbert	Scott Jacobson
Drew Layda		

CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 2:00 pm

PRESENTATION ON POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF INDUSTRIAL BUSINESS PARK

John Krueger, Colliers Site Expansion Services, presented an overview of the company via PowerPoint slides, printed copies of which he distributed to the Council at the beginning of the meeting and took back at the end of the meeting. Due to the proprietary nature and global competition of solar and green energy, the potential development would be referred to as "Project Sprint." Key items highlighted included the global nature of the company, the manufacturing of solar panels, and the three steps to make their final product, the second and third of which they were talking about doing in St. Helens which would be to manufacture solar cells and panels. They were looking to site 1.75 and 2.5 million square feet of space and looking at close to \$1.5 billion of investment for the two plants.

Questions from the Council were addressed as follows:

- Project Sprint hoped to see production development in 18-24 months; they would have to move quickly, which was why they liked a collaborative community.
- As many materials as possible would be sourced in the U.S. and possibly locally.

- They estimated the majority of the 1500 employees needed would be hired in the first year of operation of the plant and a second hiring within 24 months of opening.
 - They were working on a wage survey to determine wage ranges for a variety of skill sets.
 - For the skill sets needed, some semi-conductor experience would be nice with more warehouse-based manufacturing on the cell side and some experience working around equipment. Advanced distribution experience would be great. They were looking for specific skill sets around engineering, quality control, manufacturing, process flow, and appropriate handling of the raw materials.
- Normally, advancement was necessary and they would tie advancement into training programs including when working with the Governor's Office and Business Oregon.
- What the company would bring to the community and state could help each achieve their respective goals, including helping the City on the power issue.

City Administrator Walsh was excited about what the project could do for the region and the state as well as for the opportunity to turn the City's finances around quite a bit.

Mayor Scholl spoke about the history of having the workforce in St. Helens, especially with the four former mills. There were about 50,000 people available and about 700 acres of industrial property, but the problem was the power issue and the mills are no longer here.

Mr. Krueger thanked the Council for the opportunity, adding if anybody would like further information, they should not hesitate to call his cell phone anytime.

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

- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Mr. Trommlitz talked about the leaking 2-million-gallon water reservoir, the numerous repairs that were made on it, and the neglect of the City and Kennedy Jenks, noting the improvement of 32,000 gallons was double the original loss of 16,000 gallons.
- ◆ Eric Smythe. Deputy Fire Chief Smythe, Columbia Fire and Rescue, announced the open Fire Board Director position and explained why a member of the Council should apply for the appointment, noting the District needed to work closely with the City as projects like Project Sprint moved forward. The selection would probably be made by the first week of November at a special meeting. The position is a voting seat. He believed a Councilor could be on a board of directors but urged a check with legal counsel.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. Mr. Preheim believed a Councilor serving on the Fire Board was the worst idea he had heard. Council members did not need another elected position. He was opposed to the new police station. His concern was about police staffing. The City needed to stop the idea of building a police station and use the resources to hire police officers. The city needed more police, and an empty building would not help. The City could not afford both. He was happy to hear about the interest in St. Helens from the solar company.
- ◆ Jennifer Buechler and Heather Epperly. Ms. Buechler and Ms. Epperly of the Big Halloween Parade Board spoke of their plans not to hold the parade in 2024 due to not enough support for safety this year. The Police Department was not supportive, initially telling the Board they would have three officers to help, which did not end up happening. They had to have private security risk their lives instead of a patrol car to stop traffic. They spoke about how Oregon State Police was going to help but St. Helens Police said no. CERT was consumed with parking and could not help with closing the streets, which the private volunteers did. As a result, vehicles pushed through crowds on streets that were closed to traffic. They clarified they hired nine private security guards as part of the permit process.

Council President Chilton asked about security, a fee, and sponsors. Ms. Buechler and Ms. Epperly said for the security team they needed, it would probably cost \$25,000 or \$30,000, which is an amount local businesses are unlikely to donate.

Mayor Scholl said he found it alarming St. Helens Police refused to allow the State Police help. Ms. Buechler and Ms. Epperly said they had a lot of outside forces like the County that helped and clarified although it is hard to tell with a parade, they had heard the crowd was 15,000-20,000 people.

Mayor Scholl asked if they would reconsider holding the parade again with more support. Ms. Buechler and Ms. Epperly replied they had discussed that, and a lot would have to happen for it to feel safe, noting last year was the same and this year worse with the response from the local police.

Council President Chilton believed the whole community supported the parade team. She asked how to fix or help the parade.

Public Works Director Zaher said if Public Works could help to let him know. Ms. Buechler and Ms. Epperly said Public Works was fine, however, the Police Department said they did not see or sign off on the permit.

- ◆ Jenni Gilbert. Jenni stated since the Big Halloween Parade was a private event, it was not the police's responsibility. She attended the parade, lived on the parade route, and was in favor of it going away, describing how the event was out-of-hand. Things could have gone very wrong. Even with CERT, way more traffic control was needed; Old Portland Road was backed up all day. The parade is too big for St. Helens. She did not believe the Police Department was on the permit. If the community would like to see more police at events, the City must get them staffed.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Steve stated he delivered his thoughts and facts at the September 6 Council Work Session and gave them to the Recorder in writing, but what was published in the meeting's agenda were not the words he used or presented. The statement that was proposed to be his presentation was a lie. He addressed how when locating a business, many items were considered and how St. Helens measured up to such requirements. He handed a copy of his statement to the City Recorder and sent a copy to the Council.
- ◆ Steve Toschi. Steve said the Council needs to find paths to make sure outside views are heard. He suggested the City hire attorneys in water law for the proposed wafer production development after what happened with the pot farm sale. The Big Halloween Parade team needed to start event planning on a professional level, especially to address the potential dangers of crowd control. The police were not asking for more money but for more people. They were told staffing would increase, but it did not happen. He encouraged the Council to get a realistic handle on how to propose to pay for the \$2 million increase in funding to staff police.
- ◆ Drew Layda. Drew, candidate for House District 31, was excited about the solar plant. Industry would attract careers. He spoke about the appeal of St. Helens. There was a lot of money in superconductors and solar was a fantastic option for self-sustainability. He was pro-power and energy.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Update on Police Staffing

Chief Greenway first addressed the Big Halloween Parade, noting St. Helens Police Department was not part of the parade permit or any meetings. When the Department first saw the permit, it stated Columbia County, State, and private security would help. Knowing a large crowd was expected, he personally reached out to Lieutenant Andy Hasenkamp with the State Police, but no State Police troopers wanted to work the overtime. The Department could not mandate officers to work overtime. The permit process

needed improving. It was unacceptable to blame St. Helens police officers. St. Helens was woefully understaffed to handle such events. The situation was not the fault of the Police Department, and he was thankful to the four officers who came in to help. It was false to say the police did not communicate about the matter.

Key discussion items regarding the Police Department's involvement in the Big Halloween Parade were as follows:

- Mayor Scholl said there were matters the community could do better when working together. The Council was accountable to each department, their budgets, and the overall budget. The Police Department and the Council needed to work as a team.
- Chief Greenway clarified he did not sign the permit in the end. Council President Chilton agreed that work needed to be done on the permit process.
- Mayor Scholl said the community should see if the parade was even doable for next year and start talking about it early. He added the City was nowhere close to defunding the police, citing numbers from FY2016 to the present that show the increase in police funding of 141 percent, describing the efforts to find funding to add another officer, and emphasizing the Council cared about the Police Department.

Chief Greenway spoke about how the community agreed the police needed more staff and a lot of staffing was driven by the Collective Bargaining Agreement which establishes a minimum of two officers on duty. Any hours outside of their three determined shifts must be negotiated between the City and the union.

Currently, the Department has 21 sworn officers and was authorized for 22, 14 of which were needed to maintain 24/7 on-duty patrol. Some were injured and some were in training. Eleven or 12 officers were currently filling the 14 slots, resulting in an abundance of overtime and concerns about exhausting the officers. He and Walsh had been discussing staffing models to continue 24-hour police response. The sense of urgency stemmed from four retirements that would be occurring in the next nine months. He wanted the citizens to know that even if a response for a non-urgent matter was delayed, officers were committed to excellence and would maintain the same level of service.

Key discussion items regarding the staffing of Police were as follows:

- The Council and staff discussed the vacant position, and Chief Greenway stated that position was not authorized by the Budget Committee to be filled.
 - Chief Greenway clarified the City was not hiring an officer because it does not have the money to hire. Walsh added the Council ultimately approved the budget using \$500,000 of reserve money predicated on not filling the police position.
 - Mayor Scholl stated a discussion was needed with the Finance Director. He added this was not the position the Budget Committee talked about. He would like to look within the budget and try to find funding for the 22nd police position, which he believed was in the budget.
- Chief Greenway acknowledged the Department had made some adjustments such as reducing detectives down to one, which Council President Chilton found unfortunate. It still would take just over a year from the day an officer was hired to be fully trained. However, one out of three would not make it through training. He noted they welcome laterals, but it was a buyer's market, acknowledging St. Helens had a lot to offer.
- The Department used to get over 200 applications, and now they were only getting around 20. It would cost more to hire the wrong person than to have a vacancy and they had not lowered their standards.
- If the police were to have a staffing process, they would have to over-hire and start the process immediately. The worst thing to do would be to wait until someone retired and then filled their position. If the Department over-hired, then when someone retired, the vacancy would be filled immediately.

- It was too late to put police funding on the ballot. In 2012, the staffing study showed what the City needed. Councilor Gundersen noted raising taxes was unpopular, but he wanted to support the police. The City needed to look at something like that since there was no money in the budget.
- Mayor Scholl stressed the City needed to look at the finances of everything in the Police Department, including vehicles. The problem would not be solved overnight, and the matter needed to be revisited, probably with updates once a month. Chief Greenway said whatever they cut affects their recruiting ability and retention.
- Walsh said he understood the need, but the fiscal reality was the City had to be sustainable with finances, especially with the decline in industry.

2. City Appointment to Columbia Learning Center Foundation Board of Directors

Mayor Scholl stated that former Councilor Birkle previously served on the Board representing the Council. The next meeting will be held Thursday. Councilor Gundersen was available for the position.

Walsh addressed the Fire Board's request, and he would be willing to serve on the Board as a non-voting ex officio member. Council President Chilton said she wanted to check with legal counsel about Council members serving on the board, but Mayor Scholl replied it was allowed since Councilor Hubbard served on the Columbia River PUD Board. Councilor Gundersen was also interested in the Fire Board position.

ADJOURN – 3:50 pm

EXECUTIVE SESSION – None

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl
Rick Scholl, Mayor