



COUNCIL SPECIAL SESSION

Friday, January 31, 2025

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Jennifer Massey
Council President Jessica Chilton
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard
Councilor Brandon Sundeen - via Zoom

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator	Gloria Butsch, Finance Director
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Ethan Stirling, Field Supervisor/Safety Coordinator
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Shanna Duggan, Recreation Manager
Crystal King, Communications Officer	Mike De Roia, Building Official
Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director	Sharon Darroux, Engineering Manager
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	Buck Tupper, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor
Joe Hogue, Acting Police Chief	

OTHERS

Rachael Barry
Simon Wright
Brittany
Jenni G.

CALL SPECIAL SESSION TO ORDER – 10:00 a.m.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. 10:00AM - Icebreaker & Introductions

Rachael Barry, the facilitator, introduced herself and explained that the agenda for the day was full. She noted that a parking lot would be used for items needing additional attention. Barry asked participants to share why they chose public service as an icebreaker.

City Administrator Walsh shared that he came to public service later in his career after working in construction. He explained that he initially volunteered with his local County before being hired by the City of Centralia. Walsh stated that public service has been rewarding and allowed him to leave a lasting impact.

Councilor Gundersen said he likes to be involved and give back to the community, noting his past experience coaching kids and being involved with schools.

Mayor Massey described herself as a "workhorse and overachiever" who enjoys projects, strategizing, and trying to be part of solutions to complicated issues. She said she felt she could add value in her current role.

Councilor Hubbard explained he moved to St. Helens about 15 years ago after finding Portland increasingly difficult for his development business. He said he sees St. Helens as needing changes and believes he can be beneficial in making improvements, noting his focus on getting results.

Councilor Sundeen shared that he ran for office after being critical of things happening in the City, deciding to try to make a positive impact rather than just complain. He noted St. Helens is his home and where his kids are growing up, so it's important to him.

Council President Chilton described herself as a "natural helper" who has worked in mental health and is now helping seniors in the community. She said being a helper is core to who she is.

2. 10:15AM - DISC Workshop

Barry introduced the DISC personality assessment, explaining it is a helpful tool for understanding communication styles and working together. She noted Mayor Massey had suggested using this tool.

Mayor Massey explained the DISC assessment provides a snapshot of how people communicate and receive information, which can help a new team understand each other's personality styles and adjust communication methods accordingly.

Barry provided an overview of the four DISC styles - Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness. She explained the key traits and motivations of each style.

Participants then shared their dominant DISC styles:

- John Walsh identified as an S (Steadiness) style
- Council President Chilton identified as an I (Influence) style
- Mayor Massey identified as a D (Dominance) style
- Councilor Hubbard identified as a D (Dominance) style
- Councilor Gundersen identified as an S (Steadiness) style
- Councilor Sundeen identified as an S (Steadiness) style

The group discussed strengths and challenges of their styles. D styles noted challenges with patience. S styles mentioned sometimes being too accommodating. The group discussed how understanding styles can improve communication and teamwork.

Barry showed a map of DISC styles for 20 city staff members who had taken the assessment. The group observed clusters in certain areas and discussed how this diversity of styles benefits the organization. They noted the importance of having a strategic plan and clear goals to leverage different strengths.

3. 11:00AM - Governing Policy Review

Walsh provided background on the current governing policy, noting it was adopted in February 2019. He explained it shifted Councilor oversight of departments to more of a liaison role, giving more authority to the City Administrator while maintaining some Councilor decision-making involvement.

Walsh noted the policy has been problematic at times, particularly around personnel supervision. He said attorneys have advised it creates unclear lines of communication and decision-making.

The group reviewed key sections of the policy and discussed potential changes:

For Section 4 on supervision, there was consensus to keep language stating department employees are supervised by department heads and department heads are supervised by the city administrator. The group agreed to remove language about Councilors being involved in hiring/firing decisions for department employees.

On evaluations, the group discussed adding language about conducting annual evaluations and potentially having the full Council involved in evaluating department heads along with the City Administrator.

Mayor Massey suggested looking into training on how to properly conduct evaluations and give feedback. The group agreed this would be valuable.

There was discussion about improving communication between Council and staff, potentially through more frequent check-ins or reports from department heads. Councilor Hubbard suggested having department heads present to the full Council periodically rather than just liaising with individual Councilors.

The group agreed to continue discussing potential changes to the liaison structure, with some interest in moving to a more open model where all Councilors could engage with different departments rather than having assigned liaisons.

4. 11:45AM - Break to Grab Lunch

5. 12:00PM - Working Lunch - Survey Results Overview

Barry presented an overview of results from the recent community input survey, which received 256 responses. Key points included:

- Overall satisfaction levels have decreased compared to previous surveys
- The library received high ratings for customer service and overall satisfaction
- Parks also received positive ratings for maintenance and overall condition
- There were lower satisfaction ratings for economic development efforts and opportunities to participate in government
- Key challenges identified included growth, housing, and employment
- Social media and the City website were the most common sources of city information

The group discussed potential actions based on the results, including:

- Improving communication and engagement efforts
- Finding ways to increase participation in local government
- Addressing economic development concerns
- Considering town halls or other forums to connect with residents

6. 12:45PM - Break & Welcome Staff

Staff members joined the meeting following the lunch break. Barry reviewed the DISC assessment results for the full group, including both Council and staff. She noted there was a good balance of styles represented.

7. 1:00PM - Envisioning Success Workshop

Barry led an exercise where small groups created vision statements for where the City will be in two years. Key themes that emerged included:

- Morale
- Balanced workload
- Council/staff trust
- Team building
- Effective communication/transparency
- Partnerships/community collaboration
- Project completion
- Waterfront
- Engagement
- Meeting needs
- Fiscal sustainability/opportunities for sustainable revenue
- Employee wellness
- Stability with tourism

- Proactive planning
- Community trust
- Safe workplace

8. 1:30PM - SWOT

The full group conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis.

Strengths:

- Talented staff
- Dedicated staff
- Team collaboration
- Broad service offering
- Economic assets
- Industrial land
- Recreational assets - location, programs, amenities
- Strong sense of community/place
- Communications program
- Care about the community
- Staff adaptability
- Many hats/many tasks/broad breadths of knowledge
- Multi-tasked
- Equipment/fleet/tools
- Industry and readiness
- Community partnerships
- Abundant infrastructure
- Small and efficient
- Partnerships with state and fed policy makers
- Facilities

Weaknesses:

- Facilities
- Lack of power
- Funding CIPs
- Staffing needs
- Staff morale
- Trust from citizens
- Internal trust and respect
- Growing pains
- Effective communication
- Lack of decisiveness
- Utilizing all strengths
- State funding
- Misinformation

Opportunities

- Continue to grow partnerships
- Employer of choice
- Supporting local economy
- Site more industry
- Improve public safety
- Waterfront

- More voice in Salem
- Job creation
- Citizen engagement
- More water storage
- Grant funding - governmental and private
- Technological improvements
- Revenue stabilization
- Tourism - build/improve/establish more opportunities
- More support for small businesses
- Transportation
- Parking
- Ferry
- Re-shape economic inventory
- Education/cross-training
- Keeping people local
- Competition
- Youth programs
- Emergency preparedness and response
- Council/staff teambuilding

Threats

- Tenuousness of federal funding
- Cybersecurity
- Salem
- Misinformation
- Competition, loss of talented staff
- Culture/morale
- Infrastructure
- Losing institutional knowledge
- Maintaining public safety
- Hazards/disasters
- Lack of power
- Aging infrastructure
- Lack of proactive plans
- Funding
- Defining neighborliness
- Division among people
- Lack of staff/council cohesion/collaboration
- Access to healthcare
- Public transportation
- Amazon/e-commerce
- Lack of morale
- Lack of understanding of what the City does jurisdictionally
- Rising cost of materials
- Distrust of government
- Quality of life

Council and staff marked their top two from each category. The following scored the highest:

Strengths

- Talented, dedicated staff

- Economic assets like industrial lands
- Efficient interdepartmental coordination
- Industry readiness
- Team collaboration

Weaknesses

- Staff morale
- Trust with citizens
- Effective communication
- Lack of electric power capacity

Opportunities

- Revenue stability
- Improve public safety facility
- Emergency preparedness and response
- Council/staff team building
- Supporting local economy

Threats

- Misinformation/lack of understanding of City functions
- Infrastructure capacity and aging
- Uncertain federal funding
- Staff recruitment/retention challenges

Observations:

The group noted that the team is a major strength, with talented and dedicated staff achieving strong collaboration and efficient coordination. However, staff morale emerged as a weakness, which the group found surprising and concerning, sparking a discussion about its potential causes. Trust with citizens and effective communication also were identified as critical areas in need of improvement. Opportunities focused on stabilizing revenue and optimizing public safety facilities, while threats emphasized misinformation and infrastructure challenges. The group concluded the SWOT analysis by recognizing that many of the internal weaknesses can be adjusted through targeted efforts, providing a path for improvement in the future.

9. 2:30PM - Priority Setting and Action Brainstorming

Based on the SWOT analysis, the group identified two key priority areas to focus on:

- Building trust, internal and external
 - Effective communication
 - Respectful/truthful communication
 - Accountability
 - Personally find good information
 - Being inclusive
 - Anonymous surveys
 - SWOT within departments
 - External town hall for public
 - Internal town hall for employees
 - Rewarding performance/recognition
 - Feedback
 - Improvement plans
- Revenue stability
 - New business and industry

- Waterfront development
- Heed warning
- Infrastructure to support growth
- Staff planning
- Fees for services
- Grant opportunities

The group agreed these areas provided opportunities to make significant improvements over the next two years.

10. 2:50PM - Closing Reflections & Next Steps

Barry asked each participant to share one word describing how they felt about the goals and next two years. Responses included: excited, hopeful, optimistic, opportunity, determined, motivated, grace, open, nervous, and encouraged.

Walsh expressed appreciation for the session, saying it was a positive step toward better collaboration between Council and staff. Mayor Massey thanked everyone for participating and being open to building relationships.

Barry noted she would follow up with more detailed notes and potential next steps on work plan items based on the discussions.

OTHER BUSINESS

ADJOURN – 2:55 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