



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, October 02, 2024

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	Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Sharon Darroux, Engineering Manager
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Crystal King, Communications Officer
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	Nolan Cochran, TMDL Program Coordinator
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	

OTHERS

CC	Richard Mason	Wela Negelspach, CET
David Lauridsen	Mitz	Stephen Topaz
Stephanie Patterson	MM	Ron Trommlitz
Brady Preheim	Mike Fletcher	James Adkins

CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 2:00 p.m.

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

- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Spoke about The Chronicle's recent article on the two million-gallon (2MG) water reservoir and the City placing blame for the reservoir's rehabilitation failure on the contractor, Western Partitions Inc., when the failure was due to the City's choices. He listed incidents of neglect and deception, citing inspections and investigations of the reservoir, the findings of which were not disclosed to the public. City Administrator Walsh should be responsible for all incidents by people he supervised. Mayor Scholl should be transparent about what really resulted in the empty reservoir.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. He hoped Council President Chilton and Councilor Hubbard would appear on his KOHI show on Friday. He had made multiple complaints about election signs violating the Sign Ordinance and was basically told the City would not enforce the Ordinance, which was unacceptable. He asked how he should proceed, as action needed to be taken. He described event failures during Treadway's stewardship of Spirit of Halloweentown and asked when Council would admit its error and correct it. Treadway, not the taxpayers, should be responsible for whether the company profits.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Compared the St. Helens Waterfront contamination to Portland's Swan Island which had almost the exact geology and overall descriptions. He compared DEQ's report on the Waterfront to the EPA's remediation plan for Swan Island. The EPA replied to him that the

Waterfront was not an acceptable place to build houses. He spoke about how when he was censured his criticism of City staff was pointed out, but the Ethics Commission found he did nothing wrong, which showed the City's problem with critical information. If the City did not tell the truth about problems affecting businesses and potential residences, no one would want to come to St. Helens.

- ◆ Mike Fletcher and James Adkins, Columbia 911 Communications District. Presented via PowerPoint an overview of the District and its special option levy. Key highlights included the need for the levy and what it would pay for, how much the levy would cost, where the District's money came from, its 2023-2024 budget breakdown, and what would happen if the levy did not pass.
- He confirmed just the maintenance service contract on the radio system, which needed replaced, was approximately \$125,000 to \$150,000 per year. The District had been working on a plan to replace it, which would be a general bond ask and cost tens of millions.
- From his experiences working for non-special district 911 centers and how they decline to take over dispatch services from entities outside of their counties, he urged St. Helens to think long and hard before using Portland's or other 911 centers.
- A VoIP phone call made from Seattle could be routed to Columbia County 911, but 911 calls from a cell phone were routed based on the location of the cell tower, not the phone.

A newsletter about the District was available, and a flyer about the levy would be distributed.

Mayor Scholl said he supported the levy, as 911 was a life-saving service for St. Helens citizens and police and fire relationships with 911 went a long way. Being familiar with local roads helped.

Brady Preheim, member of the public, believed the presentation should have been an item on the agenda so that people could respond. Some of the information Mr. Fletcher provided was untrue compared to what he said on his KOHI show. The need for a levy was not an emergency.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Employee Length of Service Recognition: Sergeant Jon Eggers - 25 Years

Mayor Scholl presented a length of service award to Sergeant Jon Eggers, who had retired.

2. Review Proposed Rates Increases for Waste Management Drop Box Services - *City Administrator John Walsh*

City Administrator Walsh reviewed rate increases for drop boxes, which were construction dumpsters, and how the annual increases were built into the franchise agreement. Based on the consumer price index (CPI), the full 1.5 percent increase was requested and had been incorporated into the rate schedule. Tonight's Regular Session would provide an opportunity for public comment on the increase.

3. Request for Donation to Merchants' Toy N Joy Auction

Mayor Scholl noted the merchants typically ask for water bill donations. City Administrator Walsh clarified it would be \$100 credit on the water bill.

Council discussed how many water bills should have the credit. Staff explained how the credit worked as a voucher for the silent auction. Council agreed the auction was a great cause and consented to do the credit on two water bills like last year.

4. Update on Waterfront Redevelopment Project - *Public Works Director Mouhamad Zaher*

Public Works Director Zaher and Engineering Manager Darroux presented via PowerPoint the monthly project update. Key highlights included project progress, innovative solutions for on-site challenges, cost savings of \$712,000 accomplished so far, and the project schedule for the next month or so.

Comments from Council regarded the basalt facing on intersection planters, intersection seating, the public outreach, the forethought that went into the project, and the lift station across from Crooked Creek Brewery.

Questions from Council were addressed as follows:

- Staff was unaware of recent vandalism to lights along the river walkway as had been reported to Council and would connect with contractor MEI about the reports.
- Staff checked concrete work before and after pouring. If not done to the City's standards, the contractor had to make any corrections and pay for the fix.
- Even with the new streetscape's bump-outs and planters, there would be a net increase in parking, which would all be diagonal, head-in parking on Strand.
- All the planters would include irrigation, and everything already built was well irrigated.

Councilor Sundeen acknowledged the frustration for businesses affected by contractors correcting mistakes, such as messing up parking, etc. Even if the City did not pay for the redos, other people were paying in other ways.

5. Discussion Regarding Directional Signage on Columbia River Highway

Dave Lauridsen, Crooked Creek Brewery, explained applying through the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) for directional signage on Highway 30 for his business. Requirements included a follow-up sign because downtown was a couple miles off the highway. The follow-up sign would be on City property, and the City denied approval primarily because Crooked Creek was designated as a restaurant on the business license, not a brewery. Approval would also set a precedent. The City already had follow-up signs in the same place ODOT had requested, such as for the marina, although ODOT had confirmed the location for the follow-up sign was flexible. He proposed the City adopt a policy aligned with ODOT's policy.

Mayor Scholl agreed it made no sense not to invite people off the highway to downtown, and such signs were an opportunity for tourism or the museum. Many people who had traveled through St. Helens numerous times were unaware of the downtown until it was pointed out to them.

Questions from the Council were addressed as follows:

- The main issue was the City had no policy in place for such signs to address maintenance, the cost such as for installation, locations, etc. Especially in light of specific downtown and corridor signage in master plans and the Riverfront Connector Plan, the City would want to have a clear policy and not use the skeleton policy in place allowing brewery districts, etc.
- The signs were described in how they differ from wayfinding signs.
- ODOT had said Crooked Creek was a brewery, which was reflected in multiple licenses at federal and state levels.

Mayor Scholl recommended finding policies used by similarly sized cities to draft one for St. Helens.

Wela Negelspach, Columbia Economic Team (CET), reported talking with Council President Chilton and staff about using available Travel Oregon funding to help pay for signage pointing the way to the Waterfront. The funding had to be spent by June 30, 2025.

Mayor Scholl asked if CET could work with Associate Planner Dimsho and Engineering Manager Darroux. City Attorney Wigod agreed having a clear policy in place was important and that it was a good idea to look at what other jurisdictions did. Supporting the businesses was important.

Mr. Lauridsen suggested the City implement a fee with the policy to cover costs.

Council and staff discussed if a draft policy could be brought back to a November meeting. Staff confirmed a policy would be an ordinance requiring public input and could bring a draft back by December. Council

will have a directional meeting for the policy between November 11 and 15. It was clarified the proposed policy would address the tourist-oriented directional sign, a secondary sign to the ODOT sign.

6. Assignment of Voting Delegate and Alternate for LOC Business Meeting

Council discussed who the delegate was last year and when the LOC Business meeting would be held. Following discussion, Councilor Sundeen would be the Voting Delegate and Mayor Scholl, the Alternate.

Mayor Scholl noted the LOC meeting would conflict with Council's October 16 meeting and recommended the meeting be canceled unless a vote was needed. He directed staff to explain to the public why the meeting was canceled.

7. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

City Administrator Walsh presented his report, which included a review of the regular session agenda items and updates on the following key topics:

- Waterfront redevelopment
- Congratulations to Deputy City Recorder Lisa Scholl on receiving Oregon Association of Municipal Recorders (OAMR) President's Award of Distinction. Other staff award recipients were acknowledged as well as their involvement with professional organizations
- Spirit of Halloweentown was underway with Treadway at the helm.
- A timber harvest proposal was received. Timber prices were up approximately 10%, and staff was directed to prepare the bid documents. The benefits of the City selling on a stumpage basis were discussed.
- The City was proceeding with due diligence on the police station's new location.
- The Millard Road earnest money had been deposited.
- Work continued on broadband opportunities with Strategic Networks Groups, a private investor, the County, and PUD Board.
- Project Arcadia
- The creation of a PGE substation parcel with a 50-megawatt transformer
- Riverwalk project
- A developer's interest in a block of Waterfront property for mixed-use with \$15 million potential investment

Council discussed how the transformer should be sufficient unless the City got a data center or similar that would use a lot of power.

Library Director Bishop reported the Library Foundation Board was looking for tenants for the Columbia Learning Center space vacated by Columbia Pacific Economic Development District and proposed the City lease the space for approximately \$900 to \$950 a month and use it to expand the Makerspace. The Board sought a long-term lease and was willing to negotiate the rate. The space did connect to the current Makerspace.

Council requested a price and what and how the space would serve. The City would own the building in 2035, but until then the Foundation owned it.

Council discussed a good time for a strategic planning exercise to be facilitated by a third party. December was suggested as a good month.

ADJOURN – 4:14 p.m.

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