



# COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, August 21, 2024

## APPROVED MINUTES

### MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Rick Scholl  
Council President Jessica Chilton  
Councilor Mark Gundersen  
Councilor Russell Hubbard  
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

### STAFF

John Walsh, City Administrator	Suzanne Bishop, Library Director
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Jana Wiersma, Youth Librarian
Crystal King, Communications Officer	Alex Bird, Engineer II
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney

### OTHERS

Steve Topaz	Steve Toschi	Mitz
Ron Trommlitz	Brady Preheim	Jenn
Jennifer Massey	Jak Massey	Arthur Leskowich
Michelle Millar	Lynne Pettit	Jessica Sturdivant

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

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

- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Described information he received from Emery and Sons regarding the two million-gallon (2MG) reservoir replacement, noting that the City was not being transparent. He was told in November 2022 to cease talking about the failure of the 2MG rehabilitation lest he be sued. City Attorney Bowers received a suggestion by the District Attorney that the City could share the Walker Report redacting any legal advice. A disclosure would reveal cause and responsibility for the 2MG rehabilitation. It seemed the newspaper wanted to censure opinion on the matter.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Referenced a National Institutes of Health (NIH) report connecting various sites and projects in the St. Helens region, which he listed, to higher rates of cancer due to contaminants. Columbia County had the highest cancer rate in Oregon.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. Disagreed with Council President Chilton's praise in The Chronicle for new tourism contractor Treadway who had canceled contracts which would likely result in no more celebrity appearances in St. Helens. Treadway was destroying tourism relationships that took almost a decade to build, knew nothing about hosting the haunted house which would take weeks to prepare, and had committed a fraud against the City. Financing was way over budget with Treadway's contract written at \$1 million. He asked if funding Main Street despite the Budget Committee denial of the funding was another favor to Councilor Hubbard. It was unacceptable and illegal to fund what the Budget Committee did not approve.

- ◆ Steve Toschi. Businesses downtown needed help after this year's changes, suggesting the Council look to Urban Renewal to create a fund for businesses to recoup some of the lost revenues due to construction this year.

**DISCUSSION TOPICS** - *The Council will take a break around 4:00PM*

**1. Presentation of Certificate to Outgoing Library Board Member Jessica Sturdivant**

Library Director Bishop and Mayor Scholl commended Ms. Sturdivant's service to the library.

Jana Wiersma was introduced as the new Youth and Makerspace Librarian, and the activities and programs she would be doing were described.

**2. Report from South Columbia County Chamber of Commerce - *Outreach Director Jak Massey***

Jak Massey presented the report on the South Columbia County Chamber of Commerce. Key highlights included its 145 active members and two staff members, official Chamber office hours, the successful March awards banquet which some of the Council attended, the upcoming Chamber fundraiser Halloween event, the growth of networking events, and current board members. She challenged each Council member to find a business not currently a member, tell them about the Chamber, and share the parade flyer.

Council President Chilton reminded Council that the City was a Chamber member and encouraged attending Chamber events.

**3. 4th Quarter Financial Report 2023/24 - *Finance Director Gloria Butsch***

Finance Director Butsch presented the 4th Quarter Financial Report, highlighting the General Fund cost for Services outweighed revenue by nearly \$1.3 million. For Fiscal Year 2025, the General Fund had once again been infused with one-time revenue which was an unsustainable practice. She advised the Council to prioritize identifying and obtaining the resources to support general services or for the City to discuss how to make service cuts. She also reported on the upcoming supplemental budget that would be proposed for the Tourism and Events Fund and noted that St. Helens was highly dependent on industrial businesses which were economy-driven for funding.

Mayor Scholl explained how the City's finances had ended up in their current state, citing the end of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding and Cascade Tissue leaving the city. The hope was to ultimately backfill the supplemental budget and interfund loan.

Council and staff discussed Mr. Preheim's question about the Main Street program being funded and the budget process. Main Street was budgeted in Projects and Programs in the Community Development Fund under Economic Planning. It was never brought up during budget discussions that Main Street would not be funded. The City developed a Memorandum of Understanding with Main Street which continued in perpetuity and started before Councilor Hubbard joined the Council. Main Street brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars.

**4. Utility Bill Leak Adjustment Request for 1835 St. Helens Street (Westside Laundry) - *City Administrator John Walsh***

City Administrator Walsh confirmed the utility bill leak adjustment requests come to the Council when they are over \$1000, noting Westside Laundry caught and fixed their leak.

The Council discussed whether to continue to hear the requests, raise the threshold of the amount that comes before the Council, or leave the requests to staff. Staff confirmed typically the leak was not caught on the first billing cycle because it was not seen the bill had spiked until the second bill came through. A significant leak would probably be noticed and called in, and when the City noted high usage, it would contact the customer.

The Council directed staff to look into raising the threshold, research the average of the last several write-offs, and draft the policy needed to raise the threshold.

#### **5. Report from City Administrator John Walsh**

City Administrator Walsh reported staff was busy with projects and programs especially due to people on summer breaks. Staff was keeping up but slipping behind a bit on important things. He provided updates on 13 Nights, staff's work on property-related matters and getting Treadway up to speed. He reviewed items on tonight's Regular Session agenda with input from Finance Director Butsch and answered clarifying questions about the agreement with Scappoose Bay and the amendment to the contract with Landis and Landis.

Council discussed the proposed increase in the award to Clark and Sons Excavating, their concerns about the quality of the pavement patching work done by Clark and Sons, whether to award an increase, Engineering's opinion on the company's work, the possibility of an intergovernmental agreement with the County to do patching when it was almost finished with hot plant work, and bringing the City's specification to the right level.

Engineer II Alex Bird recommended not patching on Columbia Boulevard to avoid having to redo work during upcoming public improvement projects. He also described the quality issues that Engineering found in some areas. He noted after Public Works did catch basin work on Deer Island and North 8th or 10th Street, no puddles could be seen at those locations the day after the rainstorm on Saturday.

Mayor Scholl said agenda item seven would be removed from tonight's Regular Session Agenda. [Secretary's note: Correction that item six would be removed.]

City Administrator Walsh reported on the status of the City's forest cut for the year, noting prices for timber had fallen considerably. The Council was advised to postpone the future cut it had approved due to the impact of lower prices on finances. Price fluctuations made depending on timber to balance the budget risky.

Council and staff discussed the sale process, how long after Council's approval the timber would be cut and sold, and the contract details. Walsh confirmed the cut and sale would likely be next year at this point and reflected on how things had changed after having read the financial report. Mayor Scholl noted a special session would be held soon to discuss some revenue for the City and more jobs for the community.

Council requested an update from the Forester, including information on the current timber market, which staff would coordinate.

#### **ADJOURN – 3:14 p.m.**

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- Real Property Transactions, under ORS 192.660(2)(e)
- Consult with Counsel/Potential Litigation, under ORS 192.660(2)(h)

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Lisa Scholl  
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl  
Rick Scholl, Mayor