



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, December 18, 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	Crystal King, Communications Officer
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Joe Hogue, Acting Police Chief
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Jeremy Howell, Police Officer
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	Mark Kletke, Police Officer
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	Jose Castilleja, Police Sergeant
Sharon Darroux, Engineering Manager	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney
Jacob Graichen, City Planner	

OTHERS

Jennifer Massey	Brady Preheim	Adam
Jenn Dougherty	Steve Topaz	Jerry Belcher
Arthur	Lucas Green	Howard Blumenthal
Scott Jacobson	Susan Tolleshaug	Richard Mason
Nick Hellmich	Dana Lathrope	Bob Salisbury
Elliot Levin	Greg	Jason Morris
Steve Webb	Dave Lauridsen	Jenni Gilbert

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

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

- ◆ Steve Webb, Acting Superintendent, St. Helens School District, described what he had learned about the community in the past three weeks and made a commitment to help resolve the current school safety crisis.
- ◆ Dave Lauridsen, downtown business owner. Spoke about the construction impact, his frustration that parking would remain closed for an undetermined time, the City's lack of responsiveness to his inquiries, and the online petition encouraging Council to do anything possible to open the street.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Pointed out the recorded minutes for the last three months of Council meetings were not available so they could not be approved, and that the Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) actions in closing the waterfront and covering toxic soil contradicted the 88-page report about the bright future of St. Helens' industrial property. He wanted the City to start being honest and report accurately what is said in this room.

- ◆ Brady Preheim. Stated the investigation of the Chief of Police and Mayor-Elect's involvement needs to be completed with the results released to the public. He was frustrated by the construction road closures, how long the closures lasted, and that the cost to alleviate the parking issues by extending the road would exceed the benefit.
- ◆ Jenny Gilbert. Agreed the Police Chief investigation needs to be completed with a transparent report about what happened.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Introduction of New Police Officer Mark Kletke and Newly Promoted Sergeant Jeremy Howell

Acting Police Chief Hogue introduced new Officer Kletke and promoted Sergeant Howell, sharing some of their backgrounds.

Mayor Scholl thanked Chief Hogue for building some culture at the police department, getting the City back to 24-hour service, and continuing to prioritize public safety.

2. Presentation by Parks & Trails Commission on Milton Creek Woodland Reserve Project - *Chair Scott Jacobson*

Parks & Trails Commission Chair Scott Jacobson; Vice Chair Dana Lathrope; Commissioners Jerry Belcher, Howard Blumenthal, Nick Hellmich; and contributor Lucas Green presented the proposed Milton Creek Woodland Reserve Project, highlighting the background, potential reserve area, project components and phases, benefits of creating reserve on City property, and next steps. The Commission requested the preservation of land for future park/trail space and support to work with City Planner Graichen to determine more specific details about the zoning and acreage of the proposed area.

Planning Commissioners and staff addressed questions and comments from Councilors regarding the salmon run; the importance of knowing the acreage of the proposed project; wetland and riparian buffers; an easement for publicly owned parks; the difference between a reserve and a park, as well as the associated costs for maintaining parks; and the opportunity for the reserve to work together with the industrial property.

Commissioner Belcher and Vice Chair Lathrope spoke about how the project would not be done at once, but the Commission would like to see the zoning addressed and the area secured now for the proposed purpose, so the City could start securing the needed funding to ensure the area is developed as proposed, and to give the City more time to take next steps.

Further discussion from Council included the City's potential plans for the property and the associated revenue to keep the park going; suggesting the Planning Commission ask Council to list the project as a Council goal; wanting to see how the acreages would connect and recommending the Commission work with City Planner Graichen to gather additional details about the zoning and acreage; the differences between parks and reserves and comparing the proposed reserve to other parks with minimal maintenance; and noting the camas fields within city limits and the historical Native American aspects of the Milton community. Overall, Council liked the project and wanted to know more about it.

City Planner Graichen confirmed he could estimate the area from City maps and spoke about ownership of the industrial park in the long term.

3. Update on Waterfront Redevelopment Project

City Administrator Walsh reviewed the Public Works Department Waterfront Report, highlighting construction impacts, misconceptions about the project, the possibility of a third-party construction manager, and opening S. 1st Street, which would cost \$224,000.

Engineering Manager Darroux reviewed the proposal and additional cost from contractor MEI to open the road from Cowlitz Street to the Tualatin Street intersection. The City would risk liability if it opened the rest of the street without putting in additional lighting. The cost was for the concrete repair and would require a change order for the additional cost.

Staff addressed questions and comments from Councilors regarding the S. 1st Street and St. Helens Street intersection, the road extending past Crooked Creek Brewery's property line, contractor work still to be done, the new project completion date, staff's management of the project outside of their usual scope of work, unforeseen circumstances causing project delays, the complexity of the project, and that a project manager should have been used from the beginning.

Council discussed simple ways to open the road, the construction manager needing to finish the project, concerns about making decisions that would result in losing the valuable asset of Public Works Director Zaher, the use of taxpayers' dollars, and how the public has reacted to project impacts. Communication should be improved to explain why things were happening the way they were. It was noted that Public Works Director Zaher wanted to be at this meeting but was absent because he had an appointment that was set five months ago.

City Administrator Walsh suggested a compromise to move the fence back 20 or 30 feet to open up three or four parking spaces.

Engineering Manager Darroux addressed Council's question about wriggle room to open up maybe two to four parking spaces, offering to look at the area this evening and explaining what Engineering takes into consideration when deciding to close roads.

4. Consideration of Application from Kaelyn Cassidy of the Columbia County Spotlight to Qualify as a Representative of the News Media to Attend Council Executive Sessions

Council briefly discussed the application, noting it was bound by ORS to allow a media representative at Executive Sessions, the required documentation was provided, and that media representatives should only be allowed to attend in person, not via Zoom.

City Recorder Payne noted the only time Ms. Cassidy would be allowed on Zoom is if the meeting is only via Zoom and confirmed *The Spotlight* was now the paper of record.

5. Discussion regarding Leasing Vacant Space at Columbia Learning Center for the Makerspace - Councilor Gundersen & Councilor Hubbard

Councilors Gundersen and Hubbard reviewed the proposal to expand the Makerspace, which they supported. An expanded Makerspace would be a good place to start with hard and soft skills for the area's need for more skilled employees in the future. They addressed questions about possible uses for the office space and whether the office space would be subleased.

Library Director Bishop confirmed the office space could be used to house the library's local history collection materials that cannot be lent out and reviewed data on the Makerspace use, emphasizing the need for the extra space to accommodate all users and clarifying what a certified user was.

Key comments from Council explained that ownership of the building will transfer to the City in 2035 and why the City would pay rent in the meantime, noted the Columbia Learning Center's Chance To Become scholarships, and highlighted how the expanded Makerspace would be more accessible and user-friendly.

Council consented to making this an action item for tonight's regular session.

6. Review Proposed Revisions to Job Descriptions - City Administrator John Walsh

City Administrator Walsh reviewed the proposed amendments to the job descriptions for Communications Officer, Deputy City Recorder, Administrative Billing Specialist, Building Permit Technician, and

Community Development Administrative Assistant. Some small tweaks were made to the Building Permit Technician description, and some administrative duties with special use permits were added to the Community Development Administrative Assistant description.

7. Review Request for Proposals Document for Forest Management Services - City Administrator John Walsh

City Administrator Walsh reviewed the Request for Proposal (RFP) process for forest management services. Although the City had no issues with current, longtime consultant Mason Bruce & Gerard's service, it was a best practice to periodically do an RFP. The RFP would open December 27 and close January 27 and was in many ways identical to the recently completed tourism contractor RFP process. It was Council's prerogative on how to assign the valuation committee. He confirmed in the past, the valuation would be internal, and perhaps the Council liaison over the department would be involved. It was yet to be determined which Councilor would be the Council liaison.

8. Review Draft Amended Library Board Bylaws - Library Director Suzanne Bishop

Library Director Bishop reviewed the proposed amendments to the Library Board bylaws, which were last adopted in 2001. Updating library policies and practices was part of the library's project. The bylaws had been updated to reflect some newer City policy.

9. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

City Administrator Walsh described upcoming City Day at the capital on January 28. He reported on supportive efforts to solve the Senior Center's issues and attending several meetings, including the Joint City Council and Planning Commission meeting to discuss the Economic Opportunity Analysis. He also reported on the Christmas Ships and Santa events, Project Arcadia and the Millard Road property sale, Representative Bonamici's aide reaching out about the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) flood plain regulations, working with Rachael Barry on the community survey, and meeting with Mayor-Elect Massey. He described the possibility of revisiting the project management services component to OTAK's existing contract; discussions in January to talk about school resource officers (SROs) and the City's partnership with the Recreation Program and the police station property; Engineering's analysis of putting extra parking spaces in front of physical therapy to comply with ADA Code, and Contracted City Attorney Matthew Kahl leaving Jordan Ramis.

Council emphasized the City had no plans to shut down the Senior Center or discontinue any services for seniors in the community. The City was trying to help and fix the problem. The new program had increased the outreach of meals that Community Action had taken on by approximately 40 percent, a stressor that informed the Senior Center Board's decision and ultimately led to current litigation that could not be discussed.

ADJOURN – 4:09 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION - None

Respectfully transcribed by ABC Transcription Services LLC and submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl
Rick Scholl, Mayor