



COUNCIL PUBLIC FORUM

Wednesday, October 01, 2025

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Jennifer Massey
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

MEMBERS ABSENT

Council President Jessica Chilton

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

OTHERS

Art Leskovich	Eddie
Steve Topaz	Debra Korpela
Mary Hubbard	Greg Korpela
Ron Trommlitz	Janelle Adams
Brady Preheim	

OPEN PUBLIC FORUM – 6:00 p.m.

Mayor Massey explained that the forum's purpose was to allow for the presentation of two community members, Arthur Leskovich and Stephen Topaz, on the future potential use of the wastewater treatment secondary lagoon.

Mayor Massey provided background that the City has been exploring repurposing the secondary lagoon area for more than a decade, with the most recent project name being the "Central Waterfront Redevelopment Project." She noted that the City is in early stages of repurposing this project and is gathering information and consulting with experts to identify the best ways to move forward safely and in the City's best interest.

Mayor Massey explained that both presenters have been personally engaged with the lagoon's status and potential repurposing. She noted that Topaz regularly speaks about the lagoon at Council Work Sessions during visitor comments, and when asked, was open to having a longer presentation period. Leskovich has also spent considerable time gathering information on this topic. The Council decided it would be beneficial for the City and community to provide them with an extended period to present their information and perspectives.

Mayor Massey clarified the forum format: Leskovich and Topaz would present their information uninterrupted, followed by a question and comment period. She asked that questions be written down and held until the end of the presentation.

TOPIC**1. Presentation of Viewpoint from Community Members Arthur Leskowich & Stephen Topaz on Future Potential Use of Wastewater Treatment Secondary Lagoon**

Steve Topaz began the presentation by explaining that the lagoon repurposing discussions started in 2014 with City Administrator John Walsh's presentation to Portland Harbor regarding where to put dredge waste. He introduced Art Leskowich to explain technical terminology.

Art Leskowich stated he prefers to use "contaminated sediments" rather than "toxic waste" when discussing the materials. He mentioned that most information he would share had already been presented to the Council previously but could be confusing due to the volume of information (thousands of pages). He noted his background in environmental business, primarily in cleanup.

Leskowich pointed out that the Council has changed over the years, while this project goes back over 10 years. He expressed concern that from the beginning, the only option discussed was turning the lagoon into a landfill, without exploring alternatives such as doing nothing, cleaning up completely, or options in between. He questioned whether the City had consulted with tribes, the Public Health Department, and other stakeholders beyond state agencies.

Leskowich discussed funding, noting that the project has been at higher levels of government for years, including the governor's office. He questioned why Portland Harbor and the state had such interest in sending contaminated sediments to St. Helens, explaining that clean sediments could be disposed of in open water.

Topaz then showed historical photos of the area, explaining important physical features including:

- The railroad on pilings 14 feet above water level
- A lift bridge that allowed barges from the river to enter the quarry
- The mill dumping large amounts of wood waste
- The lagoon's location relative to the railroad and river

The presenters showed additional photos demonstrating:

- The levee being 25 feet higher than the railroad
- A PVC membrane that had slipped and required repair
- A deep slot in the rock (283 feet deep) filled with sand
- Unconsolidated silty soils beneath the lagoon

Topaz presented data from groundwater testing in the area, highlighting concerning findings:

- Temperature variations in groundwater (58-67 degrees Fahrenheit instead of the expected 52 degrees)
- Evidence of gas being generated, causing the membrane to float
- Changes in water levels correlated with river tides, suggesting unstable ground
- Risks of the membrane floating during flood conditions

Leskowich explained that the lagoon's liner is leaking, allowing contaminants to leave the lagoon through a permitted National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) pipe. He stated this permit was just renewed after 20 years and that the facility uses old technology that cannot meet current standards. He expressed concern about PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances or "forever chemicals") leaving the lagoon and flowing toward the City's drinking water intake, which is about a mile and a half downstream.

The presenters showed maps of water flow patterns, highlighting:

- The discharge point from the lagoon into the Multnomah Channel
- Flow patterns carrying discharge toward the City's Ranney well drinking water collection system

- Areas of high contamination (PCBs at 1,000 times allowable levels) near a proposed barge unloading facility

Leskowich raised concerns about a previous application to use a contaminated area for a barge facility by Wilsonville Concrete Products, stating that the Division of State Lands was unaware of the contamination when processing the application, demonstrating a lack of communication between agencies.

Topaz noted Columbia County has the second-highest cancer rate in the state, suggesting potential links to environmental contamination. He presented calculations regarding the logistics of transporting contaminated sediments to St. Helens, estimating:

- 800,000 cubic yards of material would need to be moved annually
- This would require a truck every 7.5 minutes or five barges per day
- Processing challenges including drying and sorting of materials
- Potential revenue of \$120 million over 10 years, but with costs of \$110 million, netting only about \$800,000 per year

As they concluded, Leskowich questioned the current plan to spend \$400,000 on a permit application for the landfill and suggested exploring alternative uses for the Waterfront property such as floating homes, light commercial shipyards, or dry docks.

During the question period, Mayor Massey first acknowledged the need for a follow-up presentation to address all questions raised. She noted that multiple investigations in 2019-2023 showed groundwater at the lagoon flowing east toward the Multnomah Channel, not toward the Ranney well system. Topaz responded that water flow through the sandy slot versus basalt layers created a more complex situation than portrayed.

Mayor Massey asked about the Ranney collector wells' distance from the discharge point, which Leskowich confirmed was about a mile and a half.

Regarding PFAS from the fire department, Walsh indicated that staff may have followed up, but this would need to be addressed at the next meeting.

Leskowich questioned whether grant money received could be repurposed for alternatives to the landfill plan. Mayor Massey noted she understood there was approximately \$863,000 in federal dollars remaining. Walsh clarified that there was about \$1.4 million in the last round of funding (part FEMA money, part congressional appropriation), targeted for evaluating the berm's stability, with a shifted focus toward resilience.

Mayor Massey clarified that DEQ doesn't permit hazardous waste (which would require a different type of facility) but rather contaminated sediments. She asked about the project's origin, and Walsh explained that when examining the Veneer property, developers were concerned about the lagoon's odor. Consultants suggested filling it in, which led to evaluating whether this could be done safely with revenue-positive material that wouldn't negatively impact the community, potentially funding a relocated treatment facility and redevelopment.

Mayor Massey outlined potential scenarios: status quo, closing and capping the lagoon, marine expansion/recreation reuse, or a hybrid approach. Leskowich suggested the window for using the site as a landfill was closing and expressed doubt about building structures on the site in a cost-effective manner given its geological instability and proximity to the drinking water source.

CLOSE PUBLIC FORUM – 6:56 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