



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, September 04, 2024

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Rick Scholl
Council President Jessica Chilton
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard
Councilor Brandon Sundeen – arrived at 2:09 p.m.

STAFF

John Walsh, City Administrator	Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Sharon Darroux, Engineering Manager
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Alex Bird, Engineer II
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	

OTHERS

Howard Blumenthal	Nick Hellmich	Scott Jacobson
Jerry Belcher	Adam	Kevin Thompson
Lynne Pettit	Mary Wheeler	Mitzi Ponce
Michelle	Rooster	TW
Jaime	RT	Jason Morris
CC	Britt	Arthur
Dexter Quidd	Benjamin Atkins	Melissa Watson
Diana Wiener	Barry Greenberg	Kanale T.
TC	Steve Topaz	Ron Trommlitz
Brady Preheim	Jason Moon	

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

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

- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Described the lack of accountability and transparency with the 2 million-gallon (2MG) water reservoir leak and rehabilitation failure resulting in a more expensive reservoir replacement, citing evidence being withheld from the public and explaining why City Administrator Walsh should be replaced.
- ◆ Howard Blumenthal. Asked if he could organize clean-ups of the pieces of construction fence on the waterfront before they got into the waterways, citing concerns about the pollution of microplastics.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Added to his comments at an earlier meeting, listing more places in St. Helens that contained toxic waste. He was surprised that during the recent special session the Council did not know who should sign the bill of sale for the mill when it was spelled out by City Charter. He

asked why project managers Associate Planner Dimsho and City Administrator Walsh did not help the man at the last meeting with concerns about concrete forming on the waterfront.

Mayor Scholl responded that he, Public Works Director Zaher, and City Administrator Walsh had met with Randy Sanders and Dave Lauridsen.

Councilor Sundeen arrived at 2:09 p.m.

- ◆ Brady Preheim. Noted Treadway had failed to take over all tourism events and said it was not honoring the celebrity contracts for appearances at Halloweentown, which would likely result in the City being sued and celebrities no longer coming to St. Helens. Tourism used to make the City money, but now the City would be losing \$613,000 with the \$193,000 of Treadway's management fee, the \$300,000 transfer to Treadway being discussed tonight, and \$120,000 former events contractor E2C used to pay the City. He noted the entrances on the Waterfront could not fit two cars and should be widened.
- ◆ Barry Greenberg. Provided talent for Spirit of Halloweentown for the past 10 years and explained the significant liability the City faced with three of the biggest agencies in Los Angeles if celebrity contracts obligated months ago would not be honored. E2C's director, Tina Curry, was a person of her word and honored such contracts. If the contracts were not honored, no celebrities would appear in St. Helens again. He had received no reply from City Administrator Walsh to his letter outlining his points. Treadway did not respond after promising the contracts would be reviewed and signed.
- ◆ Diana Wiener. Asked if there was documentation of actual contracts with celebrities made on the City's behalf or if it was just hearsay.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Parks & Trails Commission Annual Report - *Chair Scott Jacobson*

Parks & Trails Commission Chair Scott Jacobson and Commission members Jerry Belcher, Nick Hellmich, and Howard Blumenthal reviewed the annual report, highlighting Parks inventory, the Commission's members and their current park assignments, and the Commission's discussion of changes wanted in four parks. Updates were provided on maintenance and improvement efforts at several parks. The report concluded with an overview of the current Milton Creek Woodland Reserve and Urban Trail projects, the \$2500 Oregon Community Foundation grant for signage, and acknowledgements.

Questions were addressed and comments from the Council were as follows:

- A splash pad next to the pool was suggested to draw more visitors to Civic Pride Park.
- The warranty period had expired to get a refund on the weathered playground tile coming apart at McCormick Park. Benches should be added at the playground, as there were never enough for people to sit.
- Access to Sand Island was prioritized to people who rented a campsite. The shuttle operator told the Commission if a person called the office, a shuttle could be arranged, from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Citizens of St. Helens used to get free shuttle rides to the island, but the practice went away and was not included in the contract.
- Port of Columbia County, who owns the other side, had confirmed they saw no issues with the riparian buffer being annexed for Milton Creek into St. Helens' park system.
- Drawings were shown of how spray painting the asphalt on the Urban Trail would look on the ground. Where there was no asphalt/concrete, pads would be poured even with the ground, and the spray paint would be on top of the pads.

It was suggested to have the next Commission report scheduled for a less full agenda to allow for dialogue. Mayor Scholl pointed out with 45 minutes the Commission had not been rushed.

Parks Commissioners expressed concerns that the Commission's input was not sought before decisions were made about Sand Island improvements and finances, and described the Commission's hopes for Milton Creek and plans to present on setting the area aside for a trail and nature area to Council before the end of the year.

Chair Scott Jacobson asked if the City Attorney could review public meeting laws and provide advice on when Commissioners could meet and have discussions.

2. Semi-Annual Report from St. Helens Senior Center - *Melissa Watson, Executive Director*

Executive Director Watson presented her report, highlighting the Senior Center's operations, active volunteers and staff members, community involvement and events, and the Center being a heating/cooling center during business hours, as well as updating on the Center's recent repairs and financials, including the use of TopNotch thrift store sales, which averaged \$11,000 a month, and a re-awarded grant of \$25,000. New state Medicaid guidelines would broaden eligibility for the home delivered meals program. More volunteers were needed, and she described how people could get involved.

She confirmed that with the new nutrition program guidelines, the reimbursement level would be higher, similar to Title XIX, which reimbursed \$12.25 for a meal with an average cost of \$10. However, the Center would have to look realistically at the capacity level.

There was discussion on other avenues for welfare checks that would hopefully come along with the clientele expanding, the cost to rent the Center's building, and social media videos encouraging people to get involved.

City Administrator Walsh and Mayor Scholl announced additional cooling centers that would be available.

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

Public Works Director Zaher, Engineering Manager Darroux, and Engineer II Bird provided the requested monthly Waterfront Project update, highlighting the goal of completing the project in December, the project team, and utility coordination. The impacts of the work's unforeseen risks and the tentative work schedule for the next three months were described, and updates provided on traffic and parking, including adding ADA parking next to the physical therapist's office downtown, the project budget, and the work being done in front of City Hall via time-lapse video.

Public Works Director Zaher described addressing the concerns of business owners and residents, including a successful meeting, which included a suggestion to add signage to navigate the closure of Cowlitz Street. He explained how the City updated citizens and businesses on the project, noting the City had no control over when contractor MEI let an employee go.

Questions were addressed from the Council as follows:

- Paving 1st Street had been pushed back a bit because it could not be paved until Pump Station 1 was decommissioned and lateral connections were done.
- Instances where pavement was poured and then taken back out were due to grading issues, and the contractor paid.
- The project team met with Treadway to discuss the construction and shared staff's direct contact information.
- St. Helens was experiencing growing pains, which were expected, as the Council collaborated with staff to complete the construction in two years versus over multiple years.
- Urban Renewal utilized staff to do inspections for OTAC, doing a better job and saving \$100,000.

Council President Chilton stated Council should have been more diligent in making sure staff could handle such a major project in addition to their actual jobs. It was unfortunate she was not invited to the project meeting as she, like Mayor Scholl, oversaw Public Works.

Councilors Hubbard and Sundeen appreciated the update directly from Public Works, which put gossip to rest.

Councilor Sundeen wanted to see continued, regular communication with residents and businesses as well, in addition to the newsletter.

4. Review Draft Amendments to Circulation Policy - *Library Director Suzanne Bishop*

Library Director Bishop requested approval of the proposed Circulation Policy amendments, which she reviewed. Although the document was updated, it included no changes to the policy. The old document stated the library still collected overdue fines, which it no longer did. Fees were still collected for lost and damaged items.

Break - 3:55 p.m.

5. Review Draft Amendments to Purchasing Policy - *Finance Director Gloria Butsch*

Finance Director Butsch reviewed the proposed amendments to the Purchasing Policy, highlighting its purpose and the establishment of authority levels. Other than expenditures within Council-approved contracts, purchases were within department heads' and the City Administrator's authority. Department managers or departments would have up to a \$5,000 purchasing authority unless directed otherwise by the department director. A department director would have up to a \$10,000 authority, and the City Administrator up to a \$50,000. Anything over \$50,000 would come before Council.

6. Review Draft Amendments to Purchasing Card Policies & Procedures Manual - *Finance Director Gloria Butsch*

Finance Director Butsch reviewed the Purchasing Card policies, processes involved, and proposed amendments, which would have the same authority levels as the Purchasing Policy. Once a month, Finance would pay the bill, and Council would get the purchasing card list of transactions, aside from the Accounts Payable list. The policies also outlined items purchasing cards could not be used for, including meals during training, which were reimbursable.

She confirmed gas cards were separate and managed differently from purchasing cards.

7. Review Draft Amendments to Training and Travel Policy Procedures - *Finance Director Gloria Butsch*

Finance Director Butsch briefly reviewed the Training and Travel Policy and proposed amendments and explained how and why she standardized the meal reimbursement amounts using the federal government guidelines.

8. Review of Utility Leak Adjustment Authority - *Finance Director Gloria Butsch*

Finance Director Butsch reviewed the data from the last six months of utility leak adjustment requests and the Utility Billing Administrative Rules, which had no provision that such requests must go to the Council. Council would only be involved if a customer was denied an adjustment and chose to appeal to Council. Otherwise, the City Administrator or Finance Director approved leak adjustments. There was no rule that requests be sent to Council when exceeding a specified dollar amount.

The Council consented to keeping the current Administrative Rules as written.

Questions from the Council were addressed as follows:

- Because the City calculated the leak adjustment based on the customer's average, the City would only give a \$2,500 adjustment on \$5,000 paid over five months. If the customer wanted the full leak adjustment, they would probably want to talk to the Council.

- One real-life example of why a leak adjustment could be denied was fraudulent activity, such as filling up one's pool with a neighbor's hose.
- All the leaks were on private property and had to run through the meter.
- The leak was the customer's problem; the City was just giving them a break. Adjustment policies varied from city to city. Some cities would not give any adjustments, and others would once a year.

The customer had 60 days from the discovery of the leak to get it fixed, after being notified by the City or the customer notifying the City, which the Council believed was reasonable and fair. The high-usage report was reviewed every month by staff.

9. Audit Process Presentation - Finance Director Gloria Butsch

Finance Director Butsch presented an overview of the audit process. Key highlights included why an annual audit was required, preparing for the audit, preliminary fieldwork, year-end closing, the audit itself, and finalizing the audit. She answered clarifying questions from Councilors about auditing grants, the requirements to become an auditor, and the three different levels of audit, noting that staff had been preparing a report in lieu of audit for Urban Renewal, which likely would require a review or a full audit next year.

Staff added that in Oregon, due to the difficulty of finding auditors, there had been discussion to follow Washington's process of audits being done by the State Audits Division. The Oregon Legislature lowered some criteria requiring a full audit, which allowed more entities to do a review.

10. Review League of Oregon Cities (LOC) Priorities - City Administrator John Walsh

City Administrator Walsh reviewed the League of Oregon Cities priorities for the Council to identify its top five priorities and highlighted the priorities that were mutually beneficial for the City and LOC.

The Council and staff discussed which priorities to choose, noting the restoration of recreational immunity made the City halt and consider if someone was hurt in a City park. It was explained that the marijuana tax would offer cities the opportunity to recover some of the 75 percent cannabis revenue taken due to Measure 110 and that the alcohol tax could take a couple paths, as Oregon had the lowest beer tax in the country and the second lowest wine tax.

Following discussion, Council identified infrastructure funding as its number one LOC priority followed by employment lands readiness and availability, restoration of recreational immunity, energy affordability, and transportation.

11. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

Postponed to the Regular Session.

ADJOURN – 5:01 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/ Kathy Payne

Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl

Rick Scholl, Mayor