



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, August 20, 2025

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Jennifer Massey
Council President Jessica Chilton
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder
Alex Bird, Engineer II
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director
Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney
David Rabbino, Contracted City Attorney

OTHERS

Steve Topaz	Howard Blumenthal
Brady Preheim	Erin Salisbury
Adam St. Pierre	Robin Toschi
Marci Sanders	Steve Toschi
Holcombe Waller	

CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 3:00 p.m.

CLEARING CONFUSION AND SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

1. Response to July 16 Visitor Comments

Mayor Massey presented two items from the July 16, 2025, Council Work Session that required clarification:

- **Dance Floor at 13 Nights on the River:** A citizen had commented that the dance area was unsafe and suggested creating a safer dance floor. The City's response clarified that flooding issues and construction of the riverfront project led to the removal of the dance floor for the 2025 season. For the 2026 season, the City and event contractor would be evaluating improvements and a different configuration for the temporary stage and dance area with ADA improvements. The current space in front of the stage consists of a concrete pathway embedded into the flat lawn, which meets all park use safety requirements.
- **Fire on the Fireworks Barge:** A citizen had commented about a fire on the fireworks barge on July 4th and inquired about safety measures. The City clarified that it contracts directly with Western Display for fireworks and not through any event manager. The City confirmed there was a fire on the barge, but fire extinguishers were present, and the fire was extinguished according to safety protocols, which required waiting until fireworks were discharged. No injuries were reported.

Western Display is responsible for safety as part of their contract, and the City has asked them to assess this year's event to prevent future barge fires.

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

- ◆ Steve Toschi. He advocated for keeping the Fish Eagle Osprey boat, describing it as an asset that enhances the City's waterfront experience. He noted he had spent 400 hours on the river over the past two years and observed the positive impact of the vessel, with people lining up to use it during special events. He disagreed with Councilor Hubbard's opinion (as reported in a newspaper) that the boat was "the worst decision the City ever made." Toschi urged the Council to keep the boat as part of their vision for a vibrant waterfront. Regarding Chief Smith, he suggested making him temporary rather than permanent chief due to ongoing litigation with former Chief Hogue.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. He, Art Leskowich, Mayor Massey, and City Administrator Walsh met to review toxic waste issues at the Portland Harbor. He requested permission to give a 30-40 minute presentation to Council about the details of the toxic waste in the lagoon, including history, biological and geological dangers, the sewer system, water wave, and logistics of moving, storing, and treating the material. He noted there are geohazards with the lagoon cooling pond even without toxic waste. He expressed concern about Resolution No. 3310, referencing a previous Resolution No. 1872 that gave authority to the City Administrator to sell mill property for a marijuana business. He argued that the Council cannot delegate its authority and responsibility, which led to legal problems when the sale was deemed null and void.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. Commented on a recent court hearing where the City's attorney admitted there are over 10,000 pages of documents that have not been released, contradicting previous statements about transparency. He also mentioned text messages obtained through a records request that showed distrust of the City Administrator and an attempt to exclude the mayor from a ribbon-cutting ceremony. He supported keeping the water taxi, noting that Sand Island is the only public park accessible by water in the United States. Finally, he criticized the mayor for "harassing" Harvey and his initiative regarding police station funding, predicting the initiative would pass and that the City would lose funding.
- ◆ Howard Blumenthal. Expressed concern about bicyclists, skateboarders, and others riding on the waterfront, especially during 13 Nights on the River events. He requested reinstalling signage prohibiting these activities for safety reasons, noting he was recently injured and had close calls with cyclists. He also mentioned an issue with electric motorcycles on the trail systems and on a dirt pile at the Veneer Plant property, which he believes contains contaminated material that needs protection.
- ◆ Holcombe Waller, owner of Klondike. Informed the Council that financing may come together in the next two to three months for reactivating the upper floors of the hotel, with potential groundbreaking as early as November. This would create a 19-room hotel by 2027, which could roughly double the Transient Lodging Tax budget for the City within a couple of years, with room for future expansion.
- ◆ Adam St. Pierre. Commented about inconsistency from some citizens who previously opposed keeping unused equipment but now support keeping the water taxi. He requested documentation on the return on investment for the water taxi, noting that FOIA requests didn't reveal revenue information.

- ◆ Erin Salisbury, President of St. Helens Main Street Alliance. Provided updates on several projects: 1) They passed the first round of approvals for a grant that provides \$40,000 annually for three years for the 13 Nights on the River events, potentially doubling the budget; 2) They are partnering with the County on fundraising for the historic clock tower on the courthouse; 3) The North of West Music Festival is happening on September 20 with 14 private music venues, 26 bands, and shuttle service from CC Rider.
- ◆ Robin Toschi. Spoke against selling the water taxi, arguing that the City hasn't fully explored all potential programs it could support. She noted its unique features, including the front that drops down onto sand for safe loading/unloading. She mentioned previous uses during Spirit of Halloweentown, pirate events, and sand castle contests, and suggested including operation of the water taxi in the next RFP process for event contracts.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

2. Quarterly Reports from City Departments/Divisions (Informational)

Mayor Massey noted that Council members had received and reviewed the quarterly reports from City departments. She commended the detailed reports, particularly those from Finance Director Butsch and Public Works Director Zaher, which included comprehensive information about ongoing and upcoming projects. No specific questions were raised by the Council.

3. Staff Report for 2025 Annual Pavement Striping Project (Informational Only)

Council reviewed the staff report on the 2025 Annual Pavement Striping Project. City Administrator Walsh noted that bids came in significantly lower than engineering estimates, which was beneficial for the City. He explained that the project is done annually, typically later in the fall when paint wears off throughout the year, to ensure visibility during darker months. Councilor Hubbard observed that some areas wear out faster than others.

4. Staff Report for 2025 Annual Pavement Patching Project (Informational Only)

City Administrator Walsh reported that, similar to the striping project, the pavement patching bids came in at favorable prices with multiple bidders participating. Councilor Hubbard noted there was a big stretch between the different bids, and Council President Chilton remarked it was interesting to see the market changing. Councilor Hubbard commented that the local contractor's bid was notably different, indicating changing market conditions.

5. Discussion regarding Amendments to SHMC Title 13 Public Services (Proposed Ordinances 3315 & 3316)

Council briefly discussed proposed Ordinances 3315 and 3316 regarding amendments to St. Helens Municipal Code Title 13 (Public Services). Mayor Massey noted only one potential concern on page 49 regarding a struck-out "and" in section 13.30.40. City Attorney Wigod confirmed that the strikeout was intentional as part of the document showing changes from the current Code. The Mayor commented that the document was well done, showing strike-throughs and underlines to clearly indicate changes.

6. Discussion regarding Water Taxi Continued - *City Administrator John Walsh*

City Administrator Walsh provided an update on efforts to bring the Fish Eagle Osprey boat into compliance with Coast Guard requirements. He explained that progress has been made on five of six deficiencies identified by the Coast Guard, with the last item requiring a public records request to obtain documentation from 1994 when the boat was constructed in Wisconsin. Once these issues are resolved at the national level, a local inspection with in-water drills would be required.

Councilor Gundersen asked about the timeframe for completion, and Walsh estimated it could be resolved within approximately one month. Gundersen also inquired about insurance requirements, and Walsh explained that the previous event contractor carried the liability insurance rather than the City insuring it directly. The current event contractor does not have interest in the water taxi.

Council members discussed various options for the water taxi, including:

1. Selling it after certification is complete
2. Keeping it for potential future use
3. Leasing it to the Sand Island Campground

Council President Chilton expressed interest in better understanding the City's relationship with Sand Island Campground. Mayor Massey noted that any sale would require declaring it surplus property and following a formal bidding process. Councilor Sundeen raised concerns about policing on the island during events.

The Council agreed to continue working on certification and to revisit the discussion once that process is complete. Mayor Massey requested information on potential resale value when the item returns for discussion.

7. Discussion on Budget Committee Recommendations Regarding Event Permits and Associated Fees

City Administrator Walsh and Contracted City Attorney Wigod discussed the Budget Committee's recommendation for a \$4.95 surcharge on Spirit of Halloweentown tickets. They explained that implementing this fee would require establishing an ordinance that clearly defines what types of events would be subject to the fee.

Council President Chilton expressed concern that the fee might unintentionally affect other businesses wanting to run events during Spirit of Halloweentown, which wasn't the intention of the Budget Committee. She clarified that the intent was specifically to add a fee to Spirit of Halloweentown tickets, not to impact small businesses or restaurants hosting special events.

Wigod suggested that event size could be a factor in determining fee applicability and offered to research how other cities categorize events for fee purposes. Walsh mentioned that the City's transient lodging tax model, where operators retain a percentage for administering collection, might be adaptable for this fee structure.

The Council directed staff to develop more specific proposals that would target larger events without impacting small business activities.

8. Discussion Regarding Assistance for Human Resources

City Recorder Payne presented a memo outlining Human Resource (HR) functions that could benefit from professional assistance. She suggested hiring a firm or individual on contract to help until her retirement (likely within the next couple of years) and provided a list of priority items including updating the personnel policies handbook, developing a recruitment policy, updating job descriptions, and implementing employee evaluations.

Mayor Massey strongly supported the proposal, noting the liability concerns of not having proper HR policies in place. Contracted City Attorney Wigod recommended issuing a Request for Proposals (RFP) to see what services are available and at what cost. She noted that the Lane Council of Governments (LGOC), which is helping with performance evaluations, might also have resources for HR services.

Council members unanimously supported contracting for HR services rather than hiring a full-time employee. Council President Chilton raised a question about funding sources, and City Administrator

Walsh indicated professional services funds could be used, potentially with cost-sharing across departments.

The Council agreed to place this item on the agenda for the regular session meeting for a formal vote.

9. Status of Evaluations for Department Heads

City Recorder Payne reported that she and Contracted City Attorney Wigod have been working with Lane Council of Government (LCOG) on developing an evaluation process. She noted that they have a preliminary process under development, and a consultant will attend the next work session to explain the framework to the Council.

Wigod added context, explaining that in March, the Council amended its governing rules to provide for City Administrator and department director evaluations, directing the City Recorder to work with an HR professional to implement these processes. The consultant will present to the Council to get feedback about what they're looking for in evaluations.

Mayor Massey expressed appreciation for this work, noting it would establish clear procedures moving forward.

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

City Administrator Walsh explained that the League of Oregon Cities Conference would be held in Portland this year, celebrating the organization's 100th anniversary. The Council needed to appoint a voting delegate and alternate to represent the City.

Council members discussed attendance at the conference, which will be held October 2-4. Due to budget constraints, they considered limiting attendance, though Walsh offered to look into scholarship opportunities. After discussion, the Council designated Councilor Gundersen as the voting delegate and Mayor Massey as the alternate.

11. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

- Personnel: Acknowledged Brett Long's retirement after 32 years and Roger Stauffer's upcoming retirement after nine years at the end of the month. Tonight's agenda includes a resolution for Chief Smith's appointment.
- Events: 13 Nights on the River is winding down and Spirit of Halloweentown planning is ramping up. Regarding concerns about the dance floor at 13 Nights, he explained that once the stage is removed, they will take out the gazebo foundation and level the area, allowing the stage to be positioned differently next year.
- Project Arcadia: This project is consuming much of his attention as they work to complete the transaction by the end of the month. He highlighted the benefits of the project, including 70 jobs, a \$6 million annual payroll, property returning to the tax rolls, and revenue for the City. He reflected on the City's 2015 purchase of the mill, which allowed Cascades to remain for nearly nine years, generating \$2.7 million in payments to the City. He noted that Arcadia is buying only 30 acres, leaving 160 acres for potential waterfront trails and park connections.
- Police Station: Presented preliminary test fit concepts for the police station on Columbia Blvd. He explained that options are being evaluated based on the location of a sewer line running through the property and potential costs of relocating electrical infrastructure. Both concepts position the building entrance away from Columbia Boulevard for safety reasons, with potential plazas to soften the building's appearance.
- Treadway Contract: The events contract with Treadway terminates December 31. When would the Council like to discuss renewal. The Council agreed to review this in November to allow time for any necessary changes, with interest in hearing Treadway's feedback on their first year managing City events.

ADJOURN – 4:30 p.m.**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- Labor Negotiations, under ORS 192.660(2)(d)
- Real Property Transactions, under ORS 192.660(2)(e)
- Exempt Records/Confidential Attorney-Client Privileged Memo, under ORS 192.660(2)(f)
- Consult with Counsel/Potential Litigation, under ORS 192.660(2)(h)

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