



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, January 03, 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	Brian Greenway, Police Chief
Crystal King, Communications Officer	Mike De Roia, Building Official
Jenny Dimsho, Associate Planner	Bill Monahan, Contracted City Attorney
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	Tina Curry, Contracted Tourism Director

OTHERS

Ron Trommlitz	Jane Garcia	Brady Preheim
Steve Topaz	Scott Jacobson	Eddie Dunton
CDC	Shannon Sims	Lori Armstrong
MM	SB	

CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 2:00 pm

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

- ◆ Chief Brian Greenway. Chief Greenway read a statement to the public and the Council apologizing to Heather Epperly and the Halloween Parade Committee for his public comment at the October 18, 2023, Council meeting where he disagreed with her statements about the police's level of service at the Halloween Parade which contradicted the City's mantra where public comment is a time for listening, not for dialogue. He had also offered his apologies to Ms. Epperly in person, noting they both were committed to strengthening communications surrounding future parades.
- ◆ Rick Scholl. Mayor Scholl apologized to Councilor Russ Hubbard for suggesting Councilor Hubbard had ex parte contact at the last work session when he was in fact referring to a City document.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. Mr. Preheim spoke about how, per the Administrator Code, 91 percent of the money collected from the hotel/motel tax would be spent on tourism. That percentage could not be reallocated to the General Fund as City Administrator Walsh said at the last work session. To remove those funds from the Tourism Director would be foolhardy as no one else knew what to do with the money. It would be another mistake made by the Council. He believed the Council needed to sign the tourism contract and if sending it out for RFP, it should be started now for 2025, not for the contract that expired a month ago. Preparations for next year's Halloweentown began last summer.

- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Mr. Trommlitz spoke about the Walker consultant's report which Mr. Walsh had said was being withheld. The report could disclose the City's participation leading up to the 2MG reservoir rehabilitation failure which he addressed. He spoke about how concrete core samples should have been taken before the W49 contract was bid, the core sample results taken six weeks after the settlement and mutual release agreement, and the results of the petrographic examination.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Mr. Topaz asked if the denial to share his slides via USB drive was an administrative decision; it had been allowed up until last year. He would send the Council what his slides said. He said the community should have a final say as to the changes to the Riverwalk Project. St. Helens had historically been a large polluter of the Columbia River, and he addressed how the city still was, wondering if the City had asked the Army Corps, DEQ, and other agencies how federal involvement in the clean-up plan of the river would affect the City's plans. He spoke about how the flow of contaminated groundwater caused cave-ins, demonstrating the land next to the river was unstable and about the studies of the waterfront, the cooling pond, the creosote plant, and the mill plant.
- ◆ Lori Armstrong. Ms. Armstrong said she was in attendance to represent the Christians in the community and expressed concerns about the decorations in the square not representing what Christians celebrate. She spoke about the Wiccan and Pagan decorations, asking who made the decisions for the statues in the County-owned center square. The Christian community would like to put a Nativity scene in the square next Christmas and a cross for Easter, and she would like feedback and direction.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Review Revised Riverwalk Plans - *Shannon Simms, Mayer/Reed*

Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho reviewed via PowerPoint the recent timeline, process, bids, and revisions as well as the \$2.3 million in grant funding for the Columbia View Park project. The remainder of the \$3 million construction budget and all the design work was the Urban Renewal Agency contribution. She clarified the project was bid from July to September of 2023 and the Local Government Grant program knew the City was planning on construction in 2024. The Land and Water Conservation Grant had a five-year horizon.

Mayor Scholl asked staff to think about whether it would make sense to put the project out for bid again.

Shannon Simms, Mayer/Reed, reviewed the redesigned project proposal which took into account the value engineering discussed with staff after analyzing the bids that were much higher than anticipated. Efforts were refocused on just the main Riverwalk component which was largely unchanged from the design in the previous bid package. The stage area redesign was removed from the project scope proposal; the existing playground and splash pad were not changed.

Key discussion items regarding the revised Riverwalk plans were as follows:

- Mr. Walsh noted the revisions made were an attempt to downsize the project enough to preserve the elements so they can happen in the future when funds become available and also meet the expectations of the grant.
- It was confirmed the south pathway going all the way to the end one day would connect to Phase 2 when there is additional funding which had always been the plan for Phase 1.
- Ms. Simms clarified that what they designed already for the stage would fit in the future or with minor adjustments.

- Mayor Scholl believed the cost to move the playground could not be that expensive, noting it would be nice to have the playground on the other side. He asked for the Parks and Trails Commission to be consulted about the possibility.
- Council President Chilton did not believe the playground could be taken apart and put back together safely.
- Ms. Simms described the stormwater facility, clarifying it might not be the size as shown in the revised site plan because the rest of the design team was mobilizing to update plans to match the displayed scheme.
- Councilor Sundeen advocated for very low-maintenance in the planned slope area, asking Ms. Dimsho to attend the Parks and Trails Commission meeting next week. She replied that she had asked that the revised project be added to the Commission's agenda.
- Mayor Scholl agreed with Councilor Hubbard about making the stage fit now so that what would be built now would not have to be torn out.
- Ms. Dimsho clarified the City was not chasing \$2.3 million in grants; the grants were required and were entirely for the Riverwalk project.
- She further clarified the funding for the design costs outside of the grants would come from the Urban Renewal Agency and the special Public Works fund which was a loan program through the state. The grants required the City's contribution which was addressed by Finance Director Gloria Butsch.
- Ms. Dimsho said she hoped moving forward and going out for bid, the cost for the project would not be above what the City had. The City had numbers in hand from going out to bid that said that would not happen. The Urban Renewal Agency would cover whatever it takes to get the project built.
- Ms. Simms addressed why the estimate from September 2023 was so wildly different from the one in January 2024, explaining how the site design project was now much simpler which should be more aligned with the anticipated budget.
- Council President Chilton spoke about why she wished the Council had been more included on what would be removed from and what would remain in the project design. Ms. Simms noted the OPRD grants were not able to be used for the stage construction, which is why the stage and the playground were separated out.
- Staff had thought about whether aspects could be done in-house to bring costs down, with regard to demolition in particular. With not a lot of demolition work involved and not a lot of cost savings to be found, they ended up pursuing just the contractor providing all services.
- Staff clarified bidding for the project would begin in early February with bids closing at the end of February/early March and hopefully contracting for March with a start date in April.
- Mr. Walsh noted that the Urban Renewal Agency and the Council were two separate entities even though the same people served in both groups. It would become clearer how the money flows with the regular budget and the Urban Renewal Agency budget orientation.
- Ms. Dimsho clarified the project was expected to take one year and that it was already anticipated that summertime activities would be shuffled due to other construction during the same time period.
- Mayor Scholl spoke about how, as a citizen, he found the plan very nice because of the concrete involved.
- Council President Chilton recommended educating the public on why there would be a new walkway when the playground was falling apart.
- Councilor Hubbard spoke about his belief that the Parks Commission needed to enter into putting a number on yearly maintenance. He and Mayor Scholl discussed whether the City was responsible or if a private option was better.

- Council President Chilton stated if the City did look at shifting the playground, she would not feel comfortable unless provided information on how to move the playground and if it would damage the equipment.

2. Building Division Semi-Annual Report - *Building Official Mike De Roia*

Building Official Mike De Roia presented via PowerPoint his report covering July to December of 2023, which was included in the meeting packet and highlighted the Division's workload, inspectors and intergovernmental agreements that help maintain their levels of service, Building Codes Division (BCD) updates at the state level, completion of the specialized plumbing inspection course to obtain certification, BCD's technical bulletin on the psilocybin regulations, and current major projects under construction. He had some Code update classes to keep up with. As time allowed, he was trying to get the Fire and Floating Code sections of the Municipal Code updated.

He clarified that Dairy Queen had been approved for land use but had not yet submitted for building permits. He noted he let people know to contact him or his team if they encounter any problems with the State Inspection's Accela program.

3. Discussion regarding Police Staffing

Mr. Walsh noted Chief Greenway had talked to Sheriff Pixley about staffing/coverage.

Mayor Scholl said the City should probably schedule a meeting with the Police again to talk about the hybrid schedule.

Mr. Walsh spoke about revising the Union collective bargaining agreement (CBA) regarding call backs. The City needed to talk with the Union as overtime was currently voluntary and the City was limited in its ability to call officers back. Staff would like to get language in the contract to require officers to come back and work once the Police Department has more capacity.

Key discussion items regarding the Police staffing were as follows:

- Council President Chilton did not believe now was the right time to require officers to come back due to the officers communicating they are overworked. Councilor Sundeen noted the Police were willing to have the conversation about call backs.
- Mr. Walsh clarified that eliminating 24-hour coverage was definitely on the table.
- He further clarified the City did not have the budget to hire additional officers right now and would have to make decisions on how to maintain a level of service.
- Mayor Scholl said he would like to look at other revenues to get the hiring process going, maybe even between now and the budget process, at least for one or two officers.
- Mr. Walsh spoke of running the proposed budget scenarios with Finance Director Butsch, both with and without construction of the police project, noting the Police would like more officers rather than the new building.
- Council President Chilton asked even if the City traded the building for staffing would it not be enough. Mr. Walsh replied the \$10 fee on the utility bill could be taken along with a tweak in the Code to pay for officers which would help a lot. He confirmed the payment had been paying debt service on something that did not exist. Mayor Scholl added it also paid for the design.
- Mayor Scholl asked if it would be possible to take the debt and roll it into Urban Renewal and use it for projects. Mr. Walsh replied staff had met with the City's bond funders. Rather than paying interest on borrowed money, the City could actually put the money to work.
- Ms. Butsch clarified the City would eventually have to give the money back in some way and had until September 2024 to substantially use the bond proceeds.
- Council President Chilton noted the Police had asked for three officers last year. What was under discussion would not really help them much. Times were different now, and the Council did not have a current staffing report.

- Mayor Scholl stated he wanted other services provided by the City as well; the Council had a whole City to run. Council President Chilton noted all of the other services were funded. He replied only the police budget had gone up 140 percent.
- He said the City needed to look at the budget in a collaborative effort.
- Council President Chilton noted if the Council kept putting bandages on the problem, it would never end. Mayor Scholl replied that throwing money at the problem was not working either. She asked if the City had met with the Police to go over their budget. Mayor Scholl replied he wanted to ask questions about the police budget; he had not been able to.
- Councilor Sundeen said the City needed to look at the police budget just like it needed to look at every other budget. He was concerned if the station were put too far on the backburner it would never happen.
- Mayor Scholl stated the matter could not wait until Budget Committee meets. He believed it required immediate Council action to have a special meeting with the police in Council Chambers to talk about staffing and the police station.
- Councilor Hubbard said he wanted to hear from Chief Greenway if he was in charge of the police budget.
- Mayor Scholl noted that nobody was accusing anybody of anything but just trying to look where money could be saved and find ways of creating more officer positions.
- Council President Chilton noted the police had been asking for a sustainable plan.
- Mr. Walsh said if the City moved forward with using the \$10 water bill to pay for staffing, the police could start the staffing process immediately.
- Council President Chilton explained how it was difficult to do lateral hiring of officers; one reason was because St. Helens had very high standards.
- The Council discussed when they and staff would meet with the officers and police administration and whether to make it a special session in the event the Council wanted to make a decision.

The Council decided to schedule a meeting next week with officers and police administration to discuss options.

4. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

Mr. Walsh presented his report. Key highlights were as follows:

- He reviewed the decade of Waterfront planning efforts leading to where the City was today with the work coming to life.
- A meeting will be held tomorrow with the Riverfront businesses and Downtown residents to discuss the upcoming construction impacts from the streets and utilities project. Staff was looking at going out to solicit private developers again this year, likely in the summer.
- Project Sprint's letter of intent would come due in a couple weeks. Staff had been working hard to get the information Project Sprint needed to decide whether to move forward. He noted Project Sprint had not proposed any buildings on top of the existing mill footprint.
- Cascades left on good terms, leaving the property as good as or better than they found it. Staff had been drafting a redevelopment strategy leading into some kind of a business plan model. He spoke about the range of interest in the redevelopment and some possibilities for the future of the site.
- Mayor Scholl asked for the Council to be kept apprised as staff started getting proposals and ideas. He would not mind sitting down with people who had dealt with mills in their town shutting down. The Council discussed potential uses of the former Cascades site.
- Because the existing machines would only be valuable if they were kept with rolls turning and some minimal amount of heat on them, Mr. Walsh authorized Rory Moore to spend four hours a week turning the machines at least for the next few weeks.

- Councilor Hubbard spoke about talking with Mark about the water being shut off at the site and that Mark wanted to start up the fire hydrants. He believed Kalama, Vancouver, and Portland Fire should be notified that the City was on limited protection.
- Council President Chilton thanked Mr. Walsh for the plan he came up with to keep the mill buildings safe and operational.
- At the last meeting the Council expressed a desire for a short-term extension of the tourism contract. Mr. Walsh asked how the Council envisioned the extension. He acknowledged Mr. Preheim's comments about the use of the hotel/motel tax funds were accurate.
- Discussing the contract was on tonight's regular session agenda.
- The Council and Mr. Walsh discussed reviewing the tourism contract. Councilor Hubbard spoke about how he wanted a full review including input from taxpayers and citizens, to start fresh since the current contract was over.
- Council President Chilton suggested when reviewing the contract, the City Attorneys should be consulted about independent contractor rules. Mayor Scholl agreed with Councilor Sundeen that it would be good if the Council could help get rid of some of the controversy around tourism and make it work better for all involved.
- Staff submitted a \$150,000 grant last Friday to the Marine Board for Courthouse Docks improvements/repairs.

ADJOURN – 4:24 pm**EXECUTIVE SESSION – None**

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Crystal King
Crystal King, Communications Officer

/s/ Rick Scholl
Rick Scholl, Mayor