



COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

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
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director
Tina Curry, Contracted Event Coordinator
Jeremy Howell, Police Officer
Dylan Gaston, Police Officer

Bryan Cutright, Police Officer
Jamin Coy, Police Officer
Kolten Edwards, Police Officer
McKenzie McClure, Police Officer
Adam Hartless, Police Officer
Luke Marshall, Police Officer

OTHERS

Adam St. Pierre	Drew Layda
Nick Hellmich	Jenni Gilbert
Brady Preheim	Eddie Dunton
Steve Toschi	Jim Coleman

CALL REGULAR SESSION TO ORDER – 7:00 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ST. HELENS POLICE ASSOCIATION PRESENTATION TO COUNCIL

Officer Bryan Cutright, resident and Vice President of the St. Helens Police Association (SHPA), reminded the Council that they were here in 2022 with their attorney pleading for the Council to prepare for the upcoming retirements. Council had promised two positions in 2022, one position in 2023, and one position in 2024. Since then, two officers have left and they have hired three. They should still hire three officers but were told they would not be filling the positions. It's already too late to begin the process to fill the vacancies that will be created with next year's retirements. The City desires 24-hour coverage but does not want to staff appropriately. A staffing study done in 2012 showed the need for 25 officers, not including supervisors, but they only have 13 officers now and three are in training. Officers work countless hours of overtime and are tired. The City adds housing, continues to host events expecting coverage, but does not properly staff the Police Department. Again, they need more officers.

Officer Jamin Coy addressed stats. Over the last two years, domestics have increased 7.8%; suicide threats have increased 16%; suicide attempts have increased 40%; juvenile problems have increased 77.3%, which may be associated with not having a school resource officer; unwanted calls have increased 10.4%; and alarm calls have increased 87.6%, which requires two officers. Most of their

shifts only have two officers on. If they're on one call that requires two officers, they may have to wait. Between 2021 and 2023, traffic stops reduced from 2,100 to 2,000 and 1,240 this year. That is a 38% decrease. Traffic stops are the number one sign of proactivity, whether they're issuing a citation or warning. He compared the data to Portland reports, which showed a decrease in traffic stops resulted in an increase of violent crime and traffic deaths. So far this year, they have worked 5,047 hours of overtime. There has only been one week the entire year that they didn't have to cover a shift. They already have people signed up for next month. Compared to other cities similar in size, they are in the middle for the number of officers they have. They have three trainees right now, but statistically one will not be successful, and there is a possibility of four or five retirements next year, which will move them to the lowest in the State. He likes overtime but is experiencing burnout. No days off for three weeks is too much. Officers have a low age expectancy for life. They need more officers.

Officer Kolten Edwards reported that Detective Matt Smith was planning to be here, but due to the reduction of detectives from two to one, he is attending to a priority call. Speaking as an employee and resident, he thanked Council for their dedication and willingness to listen. His daughter and wife are also here supporting him as they do every day. He aspires to become a detective and has assisted with cases that the Council has been made aware of through social media and department reports. Unfortunately, due to the staffing crisis he was not able to reach that goal. Once next year's retirements occur, there will not be enough officers to fill those shifts. He needs the Council's assistance to explain why help will not arrive when emergencies occur in the middle of the night. Council has known about the retirements since last year but has not created a plan. He made a promise to his family that he would come home safely every day. The job is becoming more dangerous and they need Council's help. Community members have continuously been coming to ask for more staffing and they're not doing it. The City approves growth but not increased police services to accommodate that growth. They are tired of working overtime to cover shifts, injuries, and training to be successful at their jobs. They are tired of asking for help and not getting it. He pleaded with the Council to give them more officers and enable them to be the best they can be.

Officer Dylan Gaston, former school resource officer, former detective, resident, and Vice President of the SHPA. Reported that SHPA has been trying to raise awareness about the staffing crisis since 2021, which resulted in the City cutting a position. Since then, the City has added a substantial number of apartments and events. It's not working to expect more service from fewer officers. They appreciate that a new police station is being built but it can't replace staffing. He had hoped that all SHPA members would be in attendance tonight, but some simply said, "they don't care and won't do anything." The mental health of working in a stressful environment for so many hours is real. City administration doesn't seem to see how bad it is. Do these concerns align with the City's goals? He wants the Council to be honest if they are not going to hire or plan to make further cuts. The officers and their families need to make decisions whether this is where they want to be.

Mayor Scholl said they need to look at this with management. He respects them and understands the burnout. Since he has been mayor, the police budget has increased from \$2.4 million with 16 officers to \$5.6 million now with 20 officers. Cutright pointed out that he is counting the chief, lieutenant, and sergeants, but they do not patrol the streets. Mayor Scholl responded that they used to patrol the streets. They all need to work together. They're hearing something different from SHPA than the chief and lieutenant.

Council President Chilton talked about reducing 24-hour coverage. Police are overworked and she wants to keep them safe. They have also lost \$1.4 million from the Cascades closure. Gaston agreed that may be a short-term option.

Councilor Gundersen reported that he is investigating a levy to increase officers in the May election.

Council expressed their appreciation of the officers and their work.

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

- ◆ Jenni Gilbert remarked on the Police Department and SHPA warning the Council about police staffing issues since 2021. Had the issue been taken care of sooner, they could have had officers on the road and kept the second detective. The City has increased apartment buildings and events yet neglects the public and officer safety. They are overworked and argued with when they ask for help. They must do better. Not all City departments are equal. Libraries are not essential but police staffing is essential. Thanked Council for their support of the new police station and encouraged them to staff the Police Department.
- ◆ Drew Layda understands the situation and appreciates hearing from the officers. Thanked Councilor Gundersen for leading the levy endeavor.
- ◆ Brady Preheim is opposed to the police station because of funding. It's illegal to put whatever they want on the utility bill and needs to be done through a levy. What the police station really needs is storage space for equipment and evidence. It's going to be a costly fight at the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA) over the proposed location. They need to use the added utility billing fee to immediately hire police.
- ◆ Jim Coleman remarked on the Big Halloween Parade and having a great time. The organizers informed him they are not doing it again due to lack of support from the City. They submitted their application but the police did not sign-off and were not involved. The Police Chief lied to them saying he didn't know there was going to be a parade, which is untrue. They don't need a police station, they need officers. The land deal for the dirt is a joke. The dirt is already there but they denied the sale. The City is broke and they're spending \$12 million on a new police station with not enough officers. Councilor Gundersen recently told people to come to meetings to address their concerns and not just complain on social media. The mayor attacks people who come here by threatening them with jail if he doesn't like what they are saying. That is why people don't come. They need to tell the mayor that behavior is not tolerated during meetings. Mayor Scholl informed Jim that was done during a public hearing when they were out of order.
- ◆ Nick Hellmich gave a shoutout to Contracted Event Coordinator Tina Curry for doing a great job with Spirit of Halloweentown.
- ◆ Steve Toschi appreciates Council President Chilton's comments about wanting to do things legally. However, the City is not getting correct answers to legal problems. There are serious management problems. He addressed budget concerns at a Budget Committee meeting in 2021, he ran on that and will run on that again. All the numbers in the budget are estimates and they are promising money they don't have. The mayor's statement that the budget doesn't lie is not true. He is requesting Mayor Scholl's resignation as a friend and citizen. The faster he gets out, the better they'll be. He is doing things up there that are shocking and against his nature. He suggests they start looking at building the police station in its current location. They are not going to win the appeal.
- ◆ Adam St. Pierre pointed out a local bond that was drastically defeated. A Council person in that city criticized citizens who voted against it, saying they needed to be re-educated. It's important to poll and talk to constituents about what they want. Police funding is huge. Not every department is equal and should be reflected in the budget.

- ◆ Adam Hartless, St. Helens Police Officer and resident, thanked everyone for covering for him while he's out of town. He moved to St. Helens for the 24-hour coverage, which was not available in other areas of the county. He doesn't think that anyone wants to go to less than 24-hour coverage but it's a concern and has been discussed. The burnout is real. Officers sometimes work 60 hours a week. Population and the level of calls is increasing. Having worked in other jurisdictions, St. Helens has some of the best officers and the best level of service. They need to take the upcoming retirements seriously. The burnout and wanting to be with families will make people leave.

ORDINANCES – Final Reading

- 1. Ordinance No. 3297:** An Ordinance to Amend the City of St. Helens Comprehensive Plan Map for Certain Property from Light Industrial (LI) Designation to the General Commercial (GC) Designation and the Zoning District Map from the Light Industrial (LI) Zone to the General Commercial (GC) Zone

Mayor Scholl read Ordinance No. 3297 by title. **Motion:** Motion made by Councilor Sundeen and seconded by Mayor Scholl to adopt Ordinance No. 3297.

Discussion. Councilor Hubbard is voting no because the facts, including traffic studies and employment, did not match what was presented. They said they'll never sell it but that can change. He also did not see a plan of what they're going to do.

Vote: Yea: Mayor Scholl, Councilor Sundeen; Nay: Councilor Hubbard; Abstaining: Council President Chilton, Councilor Gundersen

APPROVE AND/OR AUTHORIZE FOR SIGNATURE

2. Appeal AP.2.23 Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for New Police Station

Motion: Motion made by Council President Chilton and seconded by Councilor Gundersen to approve '2' above. **Vote:** Yea: Mayor Scholl, Council President Chilton, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Sundeen; Abstaining: Councilor Hubbard

CONSENT AGENDA FOR APPROVAL

3. City Council Work Session, Public Hearings, and Regular Session Minutes dated October 18, 2023
4. OLCC Licenses
5. Accounts Payable Bill Lists

Motion: Motion made by Councilor Sundeen and seconded by Council President Chilton to approve '3' through '5' above. **Vote:** Yea: Mayor Scholl, Council President Chilton, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Hubbard, Councilor Sundeen

WORK SESSION ACTION ITEMS

Toy N Joy Auction Request

Motion: Motion made by Councilor Gundersen and seconded by Council President Chilton to donate two \$100 gift certificates to the Toy N Joy Auction. **Vote:** Yea: Mayor Scholl, Council President Chilton, Councilor Gundersen, Councilor Hubbard, Councilor Sundeen

COUNCIL MEMBER REPORTS

Council President Chilton reported...

- Met with Communications to talk about videos sharing information and educating the public.
- Honored to participate in the Veterans Day ceremony with her daughter. The new veterans' plaques are almost done and look nice.

- The attack on the police chief identifying a problem with the parade permit process was wrong. This is a big parade that is more than the City should take on. They don't have the police to manage what they already have.
- When they discussed the levy at the Budget Committee meeting, they didn't say they would bring a levy, they said they would investigate it. Councilor Gundersen is doing that now.
- Utility bill fees are not illegal. Cities do it all the time. Oregon is one of the most under taxed states.

Councilor Sundeen reported...

- He recognized the high school students in attendance.
- Thanked the officers for being here. He wishes they could do more. He is happy to share ideas with them any time.
- Thanked Officer Edwards for his five years of service with the City.
- Acknowledged the passing of Columbia City Mayor Sue Ziglinski. He did not know her well, but was impressed with her style, spunk, and love for her community.
- Unfortunately, the grant for the Warrior Rock lighthouse replica was not funded. That project is on hold for a while.
- It was a great Veterans Day program on Saturday. Thank you to the veterans for their service.
- Successful work party at Nob Hill Nature Park.
- Parks & Trails Commission met on Monday. They have been reviewing park fees and special use permits. Recommendations for consistency:
 - Change verbiage in SHMC Section 8.08.060 from \$1 million to \$2 million.
 - Remove the verbiage referring to dogs being licensed at City Hall in SHMC Section 8.08.130(4). Dogs are no longer licensed at City Hall.

Councilor Gundersen reported...

- Planning Commission met on Tuesday.
 - He encouraged Council to continue the joint meetings with the Planning Commission. The next one is December 13.
 - Commissioner Carlson has noticed a lot of new plants and trees that are not being watered in the summer and are dying.
- Thanked Officer Edwards for his service.

Councilor Hubbard reported...

- Attended his first Library Board meeting on Monday. They are very energetic about their programs.

MAYOR SCHOLL REPORTS

- Condolences to the family of Columbia City Mayor Sue Ziglinski. He enjoyed her sparkling and sassy attitude.
- Encouraged the Council to correct public testimony when they hear things that are not true. He would never have someone arrested for public comment. There was an incident at a public hearing with the applicant's rebuttal being interrupted. He warned the person multiple times that they would be trespassed and removed. He does not appreciate Jim Coleman saying that. He is getting his information from Steve Toschi, who wants to be mayor.
- He wants to help people and move projects along. There are no hidden agendas. They try to make the best decision with the information in front of them. They do their best to be fiscally responsible. They need to sit down collectively to figure it out. It needs to be on every agenda until they figure it out.

- The proposed police station location has never flooded. There used to be four houses there. It's out of the 100-year floodplain. He is tired of people pushing half-truths and lies. He is always available for an in-person conversation but will not respond on social media.
- Looking forward to:
 - The possibility of new industry
 - Waterfront redevelopment and investment
 - New Sewer Master Plan and a plan to improve sewer capacity
- Every dollar is budgeted and audits occur every year. The city has predominantly been a wood industry mill town, which has caused them to be where they're at now. Cascade Tissue leaving is a \$1.4 million loss.

OTHER BUSINESS**ADJOURN – 8: 17 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Rick Scholl
Rick Scholl, Mayor