



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, May 21, 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	Suzanne Bishop, Library Director
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney

OTHERS

Erin Salisbury	Marci Sanders	Steve Topaz
Ron Trommlitz	Brady Preheim	Mary Hubbard
Jenn Dougherty	Adam St. Pierre	Reed Hjort
Jason Morris		

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

CLEARING CONFUSION AND SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

1. Response to May 7 Visitor Comments

Mayor Massey addressed two items from the May 7 visitor comments. She noted that clarifications on these items could be found on the City Council page of the website.

The first item concerned rules on posting No Loitering signs. Mayor Massey explained that No Loitering signs may be posted on private property as long as they are not erected in vision clearance areas and do not exceed eight square feet in area and six feet in height. She added that this type of sign is exempt from sign permit rules under SHMC 17.88.040(10).

The second item was regarding the Tourism Fund. Mayor Massey mentioned that the Tourism Fund income statement as of March 31, 2025 was attached to the "Setting the Facts Straight" document. She noted it was accompanied by a summary report from Finance Director Gloria Butch and profit/loss summary statements for the Spirit of Halloweentown 2024 and Holiday in the Plaza 2024 events.

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

- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Expressed concerns about the city's handling of the 2MG Water Reservoir rehabilitation failure, emphasizing the need for trust and transparency. He criticized the City's secrecy and silence on the true cause and responsibility of the failure, highlighting that this could lead to voter disapproval. Trommlitz provided a detailed timeline of events, noting that City Engineer Sue Nelson required repair work to begin in October 2016 during the Oregon wet season, which led to the failure of the repair work. He argued that Nelson attributed the failure to workmanship issues, stating that the contractor did not apply the product correctly, even though

product tests were successful. Trommlitz pointed out that Nelson omitted a December 20, 2017, investigation report that noted a lack of oversight during the geotextile mat and epoxy application inspection. He questioned the qualifications of Construction Inspector Tim Underwood and highlighted that Underwood received a Certified General Construction Inspector's certificate only in April 2021. Trommlitz described this as a failure of compliance during the liner's application and criticized the City's actions as neglectful and lacking diligence. He demanded access to files related to the March 1, 2022, mediation, expressing dissatisfaction with City Administrator John Walsh's lack of explanation regarding the settlement agreement, which determined that contractors like Western Partitions, Inc., Carboline, and KennedyJenks bore no liability for the failure. Trommlitz argued that the mediation notification indicated the City was responsible, underscoring the need for an explanation beyond client privilege and emphasizing that hidden truths lead to public distrust.

- ◆ Brady Preheim. Criticized the Finance Director for purportedly providing false information about tourism income, indicating either dishonesty or mismanagement that might warrant an FBI investigation. Preheim also questioned Treadway's reported profits, emphasizing that a loan given to Treadway was never clearly shown as repaid in the City's income statement, which, if deducted, would reveal Treadway did not make any profit after all. Preheim expressed discontent with the City's handling of the waterfront project, specifically pointing out the unpopularity of the railings and mentioning unspecified construction issues. He disapproved of the Main Street funding decisions, calling attention to a perceived conflict of interest regarding Councilor Hubbard's undisclosed receipt of a Main Street grant. Preheim highlighted the expense of \$150,000 on Christmas celebrations, which he viewed as excessive. He questioned the revenue generated by Treadway, noting the lack of record on the City's part of any money received from them, contradicting the Finance Director's claims. Preheim brought up significant concerns over a reported conflict between the Mayor and the Police Chief, as the Mayor had allegedly accused the Police Chief of lying. He stressed the need for the Council to resolve this critical issue of character, proposing they should investigate who is indeed lying through an executive session and advised concrete action, including potentially censuring the Mayor if she were found to have lied.
- ◆ Steve Topaz. Addressed the Council with concerns regarding the accuracy and accessibility of public records. He recounted difficulties he faced while trying to access information about a presentation made by City Administrator John Walsh to Portland Harbor. Topaz highlighted the inconsistency in the meeting minutes, which referred to the presentation as "allegedly made," despite his assertion that it occurred and was electronically recorded. This discrepancy prompted him to emphasize the need for maintaining accurate public records, noting his inability to find the authorization from the Council for such a presentation. Topaz further criticized the lack of public meetings on the topic of toxic waste disposal over the past 11 years, stating the absence of discussions with the community about the use of the City's waste pond as a potential toxic waste dump. He also mentioned encountering inaccessible links in public meeting documents, which prevented him from verifying information related to the same issue. He stressed that these barriers to public records and meeting accessibility contribute to public distrust and frustration. Additionally, Topaz raised a broader concern about the perceived inequality in the treatment of different community members during Council meetings. He suggested that certain locals seem to receive preferential treatment by being allowed to speak longer than allotted times during discussions, while outsiders or newcomers were often cut off strictly at the time limit. Topaz drew a parallel between these perceived disparities and how rights and privileges could gradually be diminished if not actively addressed. This, he warned, could potentially foster an environment of tyranny if the Council does not uphold equal participation rights for all residents.

- ◆ Adam St. Pierre. He expressed concerns about potential cuts to the police budget during the meeting. He highlighted the critical importance of maintaining 24-hour police coverage to ensure the safety and security of the community. St. Pierre emphasized that officer burnout could become a pressing issue if not addressed, considering the extensive overtime being worked by the existing officers, who are reportedly handling between 15 and 30 hours of overtime per week. St. Pierre underscored the necessity of constructing a new police station as a strategic move to attract new recruits, which is essential for sustaining the department's operational capabilities. He recounted past conversations about the department's temporary schedule adjustments and highlighted the need for stable, long-term solutions rather than temporary fixes due to budget cuts. St. Pierre urged the Council to ensure the budget provides for adequate staff and resources, reflecting on past warnings from previous police chiefs about potential recruitment challenges and the lengthy timeline required to onboard new officers. Addressing budget and facility issues is crucial for the department's future stability and efficiency, advocating for the Council to make the Police Department a priority in their planning and budgeting efforts.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

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

Public Works Director Mouhamad Zaher provided a detailed update on various projects, with a focus on the Waterfront project. He addressed concerns about concrete cracking, emphasizing that cracking is a natural process caused by factors such as weathering and the hydration process of concrete, which can extend up to 30 days. Zaher assured the Council that all comments and concerns have been documented, and any failures to meet City standards will be corrected before final project sign-off. He also mentioned working on a punch list, a standard practice in construction, to ensure the project meets all specifications.

Zaher discussed anticipated road closures, explaining that the closures were necessary due to issues with incorrectly installed paver bands in the intersection, which require correction. While these closures were not pleasant news for the City or its residents, Zaher informed the Council that solutions were being explored to maintain traffic flow, including opening a temporary road through Plymouth Street and providing delineations to accommodate traffic and ensure access to businesses and essential services.

Regarding callout alarms, Zaher explained that high and low-level alarms in the water systems are common due to the sensitivity of the SCADA system and are often triggered by basic changes in water levels. He reassured the Council that the team is working to adjust sensitivity levels to minimize false alarms. Additionally, a VPN access is being implemented to provide remote system monitoring, allowing adjustments to be made without having to drive to sites.

In response to concerns raised by Council members, Zaher noted that the department is working on addressing tight parking spots at certain intersections and is considering changes such as designating the first few parking spots for compact cars to alleviate traffic flow issues. Mayor Massey and Council members expressed appreciation for Zaher's comprehensive report and the department's prompt responses to business owners' concerns, acknowledging the challenges faced and the efforts made to minimize disruptions to local businesses during ongoing City projects.

Zaher and other City officials, including City Administrator John Walsh, were commended for their timely responses to business owners and for the efforts made in streamlining City operations and communications, highlighting a significant improvement in addressing business and resident concerns promptly and effectively.

3. Main Street Alliance Annual Report to Council - *Board President Erin Salisbury*

Erin Salisbury, Board President of St. Helens Main Street Alliance, presented the annual report to the Council. She explained that the Main Street Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, entirely volunteer-run, focused on supporting the economic vitality of St. Helens' historic commercial districts, which include both the downtown riverfront area and the uptown Houlton Business District along Columbia Boulevard. The organization's mission encompasses economic development, promotion, organization, and design, aiming to engage the entire community.

Salisbury highlighted several successful grant applications for local projects that the organization has facilitated. These projects included significant work on the Columbia Theater, the Klondike, Houlton Hollow, and Crooked Creek, collectively generating over a million dollars in grant funding since 2022, with additional matching funds contributed by local property owners. Notably, the Houlton Hollow project, managed by Russell and Mary Hubbard, involved new construction supported by an Oregon Main Street grant, which focused on enhancing the building's aesthetic elements to create a sense of place.

Furthermore, Salisbury emphasized the organization's ability to apply for grants that the City itself cannot directly apply for, showcasing their unique role in bridging gaps, gathering volunteers, and solving local issues. One creative solution she mentioned was the surplus property declaration and subsequent donation of the flying eagle canoe to Willow Bill, who plans a cross-country journey using the canoe.

Salisbury also discussed the organization's plans to elevate their status from an affiliated Main Street to a designated Main Street level, a goal that requires demonstrating comprehensive datasets and best practices, along with employing a full-time program director. Upcoming events, such as the second iteration of the North of West music festival and a collaboration with the Columbia Arts Guild for an event, were mentioned as part of their ongoing community engagement efforts.

Council showed appreciation for Salisbury's presentation, asking questions about the grant selection process, financial impacts, and future plans. Mayor Massey commended Salisbury and the organization for their professionalism and dedication to the City's economic vitality, particularly lauding their transparency and fair process in selecting local projects for grant applications. The presentation underscored the importance of the Main Street Alliance in driving economic growth and community development in St. Helens.

4. Review Proposed Seasonal Library Intern Job Description - *Library Director Suzanne Bishop*

Library Director Suzanne Bishop presented information about a proposed seasonal library intern position. She explained that the position would be fully funded by a grant from the State Library of Oregon. The intern, aged 15-17, would work approximately 130 hours and focus on three main areas: a connected learning project, teen advisory council, and summer library challenge work.

The Council expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity and commended Bishop for securing the grant.

5. Review Proposed Updated Governing Policy and City Code Revisions - *City Attorney Ashley Wigod*

Contracted City Attorney Ashley Wigod presented proposed revisions to the Governing Policy and City Code. She outlined several changes related to City Council responsibilities, performance evaluations, and the City Administrator's duties. Specifically, sections to be removed were identified, such as those that were either too narrow or duplicative, and did not align with the shift away from City Council involvement in day-to-day operational decisions.

The Council delved into the details of these changes, notably discussing the necessity for the City to develop hiring policies. Mayor Massey highlighted that while the Governing Policy referenced hiring

policies, such policies were not currently in place, leading to a consensus that the City should move towards formalizing them. In doing so, they aim to ensure consistency and transparency in the hiring process.

Further, they debated the access to performance evaluations, particularly regarding department heads. Wigod advised that sharing copies of performance evaluations with the City Council is not recommended, as access is typically restricted to direct supervisors to maintain confidentiality. Instead, performance outcomes and departmental operations that do not compromise personal evaluations should be communicated to the Council.

Additionally, the Council reviewed the delegation of authority and how the City Recorder might manage the process of evaluations, suggesting the involvement of either an internal or external HR professional. Following this exhaustive discussion, the Council agreed to adopt the Governing Policy with the expectation that specific hiring policies are to be developed and implemented in the near future, without delaying the policy adoption. They recognized the importance of continuing to improve administrative procedures while maintaining the momentum of current governance enhancements.

6. Police Station Site Deliberations - *City Administrator John Walsh*

Mayor Massey declared a potential conflict of interest due to her husband being a police officer for the City of St. Helens. She elaborated that although legal consultations have not necessitated such a declaration, she decided to proceed in a manner ensuring full transparency and caution.

City Administrator Walsh gave a detailed update regarding the police station project. He confirmed that the 1771 Columbia Boulevard location continues to be the preferred site after exploring numerous alternatives and performing comprehensive cost analyses. Walsh shared insights from the latest talks with the project team, which indicated that the station might be constructed with the funds already available, although certain aspects would need adjustment. These adjustments could mean scaling down or deferring minor features of the project.

The Council reviewed specific potential adjustments, which include possibly omitting the installation of a backup generator. Despite the proposed cuts, there was a strong inclination among the council to proceed with the project; however, they remain intent on acquiring more specific information on project expenses and timelines.

Following the update and discussion, the Council agreed to make a motion at tonight's meeting to move forward with the purchase and sale agreement for the 1771 Columbia Boulevard site, approving a 90-day due diligence period to finalize details.

7. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

- It's National Public Works week.
- Acknowledged the Council for allowing staff to attend Dave Elders' memorial service.
- Announced the renewal of the jail levy, benefiting police operations.
- Upcoming events:
 - 13 Nights on the River
 - Kiwanis Community Parade
 - Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
 - Community Day in the Park
 - 4th of July celebrations
- Project updates:
 - PGE substation project
 - Project Arcadia
 - Waterfront development
- Senior Center and Columbia Learning Center lease renewals are under negotiation.

- Upcoming bargaining dates with labor units were discussed amid a challenging budget year.
- Dock construction is set to begin the following week.
- The City is hosting the next City-County Quarterly Dinner. There was a discussion to host the event at the Elks Lodge in June.
- Council President Chilton noted the contract between Treadway and Wauna is being reviewed by attorneys and will be finalized soon. Discussion of authorizing Walsh to sign the contract and bring it back to the next meeting for ratification.
- Councilor Gundersen inquired about the use of a boat for the Sand Island Sandcastle Festival. The arrangements are still under work, with options including the boat being licensed or renting boats like in past events.

ADJOURN – 4:40 p.m.**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- 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