



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Mayor Jennifer Massey
Council President Jessica Chilton – left at 4:00 p.m.
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard – arrived at 3:40 p.m.
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator	Mouhamad Zaher, Public Works Director
Kathy Payne, City Recorder	Aaron Kunders, Water Quality Manager
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder	Sharon Darroux, Engineering Manager
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director	Ashley Wigod, Contracted City Attorney
Jacob Graichen, City Planner	

OTHERS

Steve Topaz	Eddie Dunton	Erin Salisbury
Steve Toschi	Jim Coleman	Seth Otto, Maul Foster Alongi
Robyn Toschi	Adam St. Pierre	Cem Gokcora, Maul Foster Alongi
Brady Preheim	Tina Curry	

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

CLEARING CONFUSION AND SETTING THE FACTS STRAIGHT

1. Response to February 4, 2026 Visit Comments

Mayor Massey addressed clarifications regarding statements made during visitor comments at the February 4, 2026 Council meeting. She explained that a citizen had stated the City was being fined related to public records litigation, but clarified that at that time, the City was not being fined. The plaintiff had requested fines be imposed, and a hearing was held on February 17 where the judge heard arguments. The judge is reviewing the request but has not made a decision.

The Mayor explained the "Clearing the Confusion" process, which was added to help the public receive accurate information on topics that have caused confusion or where inaccurate statements were made during visitor comments. The process allows any Council member or staff to request review of statements they believe may be confusing or factually incorrect. The City Administrator then asks staff to research the statement and propose clarification, with legal review when needed. If beneficial, the correction is placed on a future Council agenda.

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

Contracted City Attorney Wigod clarified a procedural issue from the previous Council meeting, explaining that while public hearings for land use sometimes allow citizens to give their time to others, the Council rules do not permit this practice. Citizens can request additional time from the Mayor, but this is not required to be granted.

- ◆ Steve Topaz. Raised concerns about DEQ's involvement in various local environmental issues, including the Sykes Road Boise waste dump, Scappoose Bay dredging, Pope and Talbot remediation projects, and Columbia County's high cancer rates. He asked three questions: whether the Council has had communications with DEQ, if they plan to start communicating with DEQ, and whether City Administrator Walsh has asked the governor why DEQ appears to be hindering St. Helens' development.
- ◆ Steve Toschi. Spoke positively about the City's lagoon, noting it doesn't create odor problems like sewage treatment plants in other cities. He strongly opposed the concept of filling the lagoon with toxic waste, calling it "a nonstarter" and expressing concern about potential environmental disaster if there were a breach. He advocated for putting the lagoon project on pause or ending it entirely, suggesting the City focus on more pressing infrastructure needs like water treatment and sewage management.
- ◆ Jim Coleman. Raised ethics concerns about the Mayor lobbying for new detective positions while her husband works for the Police Department, suggesting this creates a conflict of interest. He also opposed the off-road vehicle ordinance, criticizing what he perceived as coordinated advocacy from the Mayor's family members. Coleman noted the ordinance would have costs for signage and enforcement that the City hadn't adequately considered, comparing it unfavorably to Rainier's permit-based system.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

2. **Presentation by Maul Foster Alongi on Central Waterfront Project Update - *Seth Otto, Principal Planner***

Seth Otto from Maul Foster Alongi presented an updated analysis of the Central Waterfront Lagoon Project, explaining significant changes from previous proposals. City Administrator Walsh prefaced the presentation by emphasizing that filling the lagoon with toxic waste had never been contemplated.

Otto outlined the project's evolution over the past decade, starting with the goal of redeveloping the waterfront with minimal fiscal impact on the City. The original concept involved creating a disposal facility for Portland Harbor Superfund cleanup materials to generate revenue while creating usable land.

However, recent studies revealed three major constraints: extreme variations in depth to bedrock across the lagoon, liquefaction risks from silty material, and a floating liner issue. These challenges significantly increased costs and reduced feasible areas for development.

The Wastewater Treatment Plant analysis, conducted by Cem Gokcora, determined that a new facility would be necessary regardless, with intensified activated sludge technology recommended. This facility would require solid ground and cost approximately \$100 million.

Otto presented two options: the original concept (Option 1) which would now have negative net present value due to increased costs and reduced capacity, and a revised concept (Option 2) focusing on preparing for the inevitable Wastewater Treatment Plant replacement using local fill materials rather than Portland Harbor sediments.

The recommendation was to proceed with Option 2, using remaining State grant funds to design and permit cell A for the new Wastewater Treatment plant, while potentially filling areas B and C with local materials for recreational use.

Council President Chilton expressed doubt about the project's viability, suggesting the City had missed its window of opportunity and should focus on other priorities. Councilor Hubbard agreed, noting the City's financial constraints and other pressing needs.

Mayor Massey questioned the Treatment Plant's lifespan and strategic planning implications. Public Works Director Zaher indicated the existing system has several years of life remaining but would eventually need replacement, with costs being astronomical. He supported continuing the engineering work since it was funded by grants.

Water Quality Manager Kunders explained the regulatory timeline, noting the current permit expires in December 2029 and that DEQ would likely provide a compliance schedule rather than immediate strict enforcement of new limits.

The Council reached consensus to proceed with the remaining grant-funded engineering work for Option 2, emphasizing this would not involve City funds and would position the City for future needs.

Council President Chilton left at 4:00 p.m.

3. Quarterly Reports from City Departments/Divisions - Public Works (Informational)

Public Works Director Zaher presented his comprehensive quarterly report. Mayor Massey noted the thoroughness of the report and appreciated the inclusion of IT services. No specific issues were raised by Council members, with Zaher indicating his department continues to face challenges while serving citizens effectively.

4. Review Right-of-Way Dedication Deed for 80 S. 21st Street - City Planner Jacob Graichen

City Planner Graichen explained this was a follow-up to a previous agenda item involving a combined lot line adjustment and partition plat. He clarified that while the partition portion could be dedicated via the plat, which Council had previously authorized, the lot line adjustment portion required a separate dedication deed. This represented the completion of the two-part process that hadn't been fully addressed initially. This is on tonight's agenda for a decision.

5. Discuss Council's Role on Taking Position on Ballot Measures

Mayor Massey initiated discussion about whether the Council should adopt a formal policy limiting its role in endorsing ballot measures outside the City. She suggested it might be more appropriate to allow educational presentations from both sides of issues rather than taking official positions that could alienate citizens.

Contracted City Attorney Wigod provided research from other jurisdictions, explaining that typically only elected officials from the sponsoring public body can advocate for ballot measures at Council meetings, while staff cannot advocate due to public funds restrictions. Opposition voices would typically be heard during public comment rather than as formal agenda items.

Councilor Sundeen expressed ambivalence about the need for such positions, questioning whether citizens actually base voting decisions on City Council endorsements. After discussion, the Council decided to table the item rather than adopt a formal resolution, preferring to maintain flexibility for future situations while being mindful of the guidelines provided.

6. Discussion regarding Roles and Responsibilities of Council Members

Mayor Massey requested to table this item to the next meeting, indicating insufficient time for proper research and preparation. The Council agreed to postpone discussion to the second meeting in March.

7. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

- Outlined items for tonight's Council meeting including:
 - Morten Lane annexation
 - All-terrain vehicle ordinance approval
 - Service provider contract amendment

- Reservoir siting study extension
- Ratify AFSCME bargaining agreement
- Various intergovernmental agreements
- Positive progress on the police station project:
 - Construction to begin in June
 - 12-month build timeline
 - Meetings about finishes and design details
 - Solar carport grants were unsuccessful, but staff will continue to pursue funding opportunities
- Updates were provided on:
 - Reservoir siting project
 - Project Arcadia permit transfers
 - Ongoing negotiations for a potential development project with legal work to protect City interests while establishing reasonable timelines and milestones
 - Announced February 25 ballot measure meeting as the final opportunity for public input on proposed fees before the May election deadline. Mayor Massey added that there has been some confusion about this. This is a rush and did not have time to go to the Budget Committee first. There are timelines to be met.
 - Regional economic development coordination through Columbia County coalitions
 - Upcoming presentations on Independence Day celebration planning
 - Attended the City County Quarterly Dinner
 - Met with Councilor Gundersen and Fire Chief Smythe about buildings
 - Community Day in the Park and 13 Nights on the River is being planned
 - The meeting with the School District was cancelled and will be rescheduled
- Mayor Massey emphasized:
 - Time-sensitive nature of the ballot measure process
 - Praised the Parks and Trails Commission's enthusiasm and dedication to community improvement projects

ADJOURN – 4:20 p.m.**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- ORS 192.660(2)(d) To conduct deliberations with persons appointed to carry out labor negotiations
- ORS 192.660(2)(e) To conduct deliberations with persons designated by the governing body to negotiate real property transactions
- ORS 192.660(2)(f) To consider information or records that are exempt by law from public inspection
- ORS 192.660(2)(h) To consult with legal counsel concerning the legal rights and duties of a public body with regard to current litigation or litigation likely to be filed
- ORS 192.660(2)(i) To consider employment related performance of Chief Officer

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