



COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Wednesday, January 24, 2024

APPROVED MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT

Council President Jessica Chilton
Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russell Hubbard
Councilor Brandon Sundeen

MEMBERS ABSENT

Mayor Rick Scholl

STAFF PRESENT

John Walsh, City Administrator
Kathy Payne, City Recorder
Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder
Gloria Butsch, Finance Director
Suzanne Bishop, Library Director
Heidi Davis, Building Permit Technician
Crystal King, Communications Officer
Jenny Dimsho, Associate Planner
Christina Sullivan, Community Development Admin Assist.
Amy Lindgren, Contracted Municipal Court Judge
Bill Monahan, Contracted City Attorney
Michele Karmartsang, Library Assistant
Dan Dieter, Library Assistant
Nicole Woodruff, Library Technician I
Aryn Keeney, Librarian I – Youth
Cameron Burkhart, Library Assistant
Brenda Herren-Kenaga, Librarian I – Reference
April Messenger, Municipal Court Clerk
Melanie Payne, Municipal Court Clerk
Dawn Richardson, Admin. Billing Specialist
Sheri Ingram, Public Works Office Assistant
Tim Underwood, Construction Inspector
Alex Bird, Engineer II
Scott Harrington, Utility Worker II
Scott Williams, Collections System Operator
Curt LeMont, Utility Worker II
Nicholas Ratliff, Utility Worker I
Joel Beehler, Utility Worker II
Ryan Powers, Water Systems Operator
Jesse Templin, Utility Worker II
Tyler Hills, Water/Wastewater Trtmnt. Op II
Sam Ortiz, Pretreatment Coordinator
Julian Zirkle, Parks Utility I
Cameron Page, Parks Specialist

OTHERS

Lynne Pettit	Molly Matchak	Margaret Trenchard-Smith
Don Patterson	Steve Rosenlund	Judy Thompson
Jane Garcia	Jay Tappan	Collen DeShazer
Jennifer Shoemaker	Julie Pelletier	Joe Baessler
Carol Gortler	Ivan Salas	Nancy Sullivan
Christ Stout	Erin O'Connell	Taylor Thompson
Ron Trommlitz	Aden Dixon	Melinda Gartman
Emma Marks	Carmel L.	Jenni Gilbert
Josh Marks	Tina B.	Matt McHugh
Brady Preheim	Tammy Maygra	Steve Toschi
Colleen Ohler	Stephanie Patterson	Shauna Stroup
Jen Massey	Adam St. Pierre	Tommy Sullivan
Stacey Watkins	Eddie Dunton	Tina Curry

Michelle M.	Haley Starkey	Jane Garcia
Jennifer Shoemaker	Scott Jacobson	Betty Bundy
Arthur Leskowich	Mitz	Amy
CDC	Conor Delaney	Richard Mason
Jamie Smith	Nnnnn	Claire Catt

CALL WORK SESSION TO ORDER – 2:00 pm

PRESENTATION FROM AFSCME UNION MEMBER(S)

Heidi Davis, AFSCME Local 1789 President; Crystal King, AFSCME Local Vice President; and Jenny Dimsho, AFSCME Local 1789 Secretary/Treasurer, spoke on behalf of their members who were City union workers from various departments providing essential services to the community.

They addressed statements made at the January 3 City Council Work Session related to AFSCME Local 1789 members including the assertion that Public Works' services and programs were sufficiently funded because they did not come before the Council to seek additional funding, explaining how the statement was not true. Their members used aging and faulty equipment, infrastructure projects were deferred, and many department positions were unfilled. They were not asking for staffing or funding; members were helping cover the workloads.

They expressed disappointment in the St. Helens Police Association's disparaging comments made at the January 10 Special Session which some Councilors agreed with as well as comments that some departments are more important than others which was a sentiment affirmed by the Council. AFSCME Local 1789 did not feel supported by statements made by the City Council and were greatly impacted by existing and future budget shortfalls.

They encouraged the Council to discuss unmet needs with department and division heads and learn first-hand about the work they do in service to the community, speaking about how it was the Council's responsibility to gain a broad understanding of the City's needs as a whole before making budgetary decisions.

Christina Sullivan addressed how each department adds value to the City of St. Helens.

Cameron Burkhart read a letter on behalf of Gretchen Kolderup, former Youth Librarian, which shared some of the services the Library provided to the community.

Joe Baessler, Executive Director of Oregon AFSCME which represented the workers present and about another 37,000 employees in the state who were the backbone of their organizations, said he supported the AFSCME members' statement tonight.

Ms. King replied to Councilor Sundeen that immediate steps that could be taken to make sure the employees were heard and appreciated would be to show up in person where they work and talk to them.

Councilor Gundersen said he would make reaching out to them a priority, apologizing for his comments and thanking them for bringing the matter to the Council's attention.

Councilor Hubbard stated he had worked with many of them and had talked with them in the trenches.

Council President Chilton appreciated the presentation and their heartfelt message.

Councilor Sundeen spoke about how every City department was important, and everyone needed to work together as a team, apologizing that they did not feel valued. He would work harder to make sure they knew so and thanked them for all they do.

Councilor Gundersen expressed appreciation for the condition of the parks. The union members were being heard, and he would do a better job.

City Administrator Walsh appreciated all the City's employees and their coming to this meeting.

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

- ◆ Steven Toschi. The message he heard from the AFSCME speakers was that critical government services were underfunded and understaffed. Such a process should have been done all along to allow bright citizens trying to help the government assist with the City's budget. Budget Committee members were asking for information. It was a public process, and everyone needed to work together.
- ◆ Nancy Sullivan. The ethical way to budget for funding a capital improvement and services when funds were needed was voter approval per property tax bond. To implement directly through Council decision a fee that could potentially outprice a human needed resource such as water showed lack of knowledge to whom the Council served, the voting citizens.
- ◆ Margaret Trenchard-Smith. She represented the Kiwanis Club of St. Helens and was responding to the St. Helens Police Association letter. The Kiwanis Club expressed its support for Mayor Scholl and City Administrator Walsh, and they were in support of Tina Curry as well. Spirit of Halloweentown was an indispensable source of revenue, and for many, the chief source. She talked about what the Kiwanis Club provides to the community and encouraged a more amicable way to solve the City's problems.
- ◆ Judy Thompson. She felt the City's stress and appreciated hearing from the union. She spoke about how with matters such as the added fee on the water bill and the failed new policy facility, it was in nobody's interest to form a committee to evaluate Tourism now for 2024. She asked the City to give adequate time to form a committee that would review and explore city tourism that would result in respectful options. Everyone needed to work together.
- ◆ Matt McHugh. He is a City sponsor through Cascadia Home Loans and Big Food Cart & Brew. Ms. Curry makes the sponsorship easy. He quadrupled his investment every year for being a City sponsor. He would dislike seeing Ms. Curry not get renewed. She did a great job and was an asset the City should not lose.
- ◆ Ron Trommlitz. Silence was complicit if one knew the truth and did not use one's voice to speak out against client privilege as an injustice to the public. Mr. Walsh's invoking of client privilege in not releasing the Walker Report may not be criminal, but it was an annoyance. The report contained the City's involvement with the 2-million-gallon reservoir failure. He spoke about the attempts and testing involved in the reservoir's rehabilitation.
- ◆ Colleen Ohler. She is a citizen and the Queen of Halloweentown. She expressed how she was upset that Councilor Hubbard asked the definition of tourism and no other member of the Council explained that 45,000 people come from all over the world to St. Helens to spend money. The only budget currently working was Tourism which funneled money into the City. The City and its events would never recover if the events were not held this year.
- ◆ Stephanie Patterson. Read an email from one of her vendors regarding tourism events in St. Helens. She spoke about asking Councilors Hubbard and Sundeen for a meeting to address misinformation about Spirit of Halloweentown. The community was losing 13 Nights with every day that passed. Work on Spirit of Halloweentown started in October for the following year. She described what work she should be currently doing to prepare with the vendors. She and others

had been laid off. She explained how social media complaints had become more vicious. The Council's job was to sort through legitimate concerns versus people with an agenda. She asked the Council to extend Tina Curry's contract. The vendors needed the time.

- ◆ Julie Pelletier. Talked about her personal experience at Spirit of Halloweentown and being recognized by a child as a witch in the parade. There was joy, light, and magic with the kids.
- ◆ Steve Rosenlund. Loved the activities, and 13 Nights was his favorite. It was for the regular people. He wanted to help save it. He thanked the Council for what they do.
- ◆ Shauna Stroup. Found the lack of communication with the community unfortunate. Water bill increases should be voted on. For seniors living on fixed incomes, \$15 extra a month was a lot; water bills were already high. She was disheartened by the lack of compromise. Firing Tina Curry would not magically make money appear to pay for police staffing. She agreed that the police needed more support and a new building. She had concerns about the lagoon. The City was having one crisis after another.
- ◆ Brady Preheim. Glad to see he was not the only one irritated with the police. The City needed to sign the tourism contract now. If the Council wanted to change the contract, they could negotiate another one for 2025. Questioning the contract started because the police wanted the Tourism money. He agreed funding was needed for officers but not a new station. The police asked for Mayor Scholl's resignation, and no Councilor defended him which disappointed Mr. Preheim. The police wanted to add a \$25 fee which the Council thought was inconsequential and what they would spend at McDonald's. The people who were worried about the \$25 fee do not go to McDonald's; they go to the food bank. It was illegal to put a fee like that on the water bill, but he supported the \$10 fee for police staffing. The City should get a levy for the station.
- ◆ Tammy Maygra. Disgusted that Councilor Hubbard would want to take away a productive tourism director. Before Tina Curry came to St. Helens, there was no such thing as tourism in the city. People should stay home if they do not like Spirit of Halloweentown. The police needed more patrol officers and maybe a remodeled building, but they should not try to steal Tourism money. It was shameful that no Councilors stood up when the police asked for Mayor Scholl's resignation. She spoke about what Tourism provides, asking the Council to sign the contract and questioning why Ms. Curry must be audited every year which is ignorant and uncalled-for. The Council wanted to take away the little joy people in this town get from attending an event.
- ◆ Jen Massey. Spoke before about the Halloween Parade needing a permit process implemented. She sent the Council 502 documents today looking at how to improve what went wrong with the parade. She was a huge fan of Tourism. The comments made on the 18th by the parade organizers were wrong. St. Helens Police was never included in the permit which was signed by Mr. Walsh. The permit was issued, and OSP and CCSO were never contacted. The organizer was put in the middle. The events need to be done safely. She asked the Council to work on the permit process.
- ◆ Adam St. Pierre. Thanked the Council for doing what they do. Councilors must use facts and logic to make their decisions and had information not available to everyone.
- ◆ Tommy Sullivan. Worked in management and understood the Council was managing the City. He had lived in St. Helens for over 30 years and had seen a lot of change. The City was following in

the steps of the federal government. He did not want to see the town turn into a shambles. It seemed like the City was making wrong decision after wrong decision. Tourism should continue.

- ◆ Stacy Watkins, owner of Soup & Co. Vendors had contacted her to express that if Spirit of Halloweentown ends, their businesses would end. The parade was not organized by Tourism. Now was not the time to end Ms. Curry's contract. She asked the Council not to stop the event from happening which would affect many lives. She asked the Council to give Ms. Curry another year.
- ◆ Eddie Dunton. Served on the Budget Committee in the past. If something was not making money such as 13 Nights, maybe the event should be re-evaluated for future years. If the Fourth of July was costing money that could go to the Library or Water Department, the latter were more important until the City could afford the event. She spoke about rumors including the City having to pay when asking the contractor to stop work during Spirit of Halloweentown, asking where citizens can find out if rumors were true.
- ◆ Tina Curry. Ms. Curry stated that almost every rumor Ms. Dunton mentioned was not true which was concerning considering Ms. Dunton was on the Budget Committee last year. She spoke about her company E2C being brought on board in 2016, their work, and the outcomes including Spirit of Halloweentown becoming an international destination. She talked about her company being falsely accused of financial wrongdoing which resulted in an audit where they fully cooperated. Halloweentown tourism ran in the black and paid for everything; not one penny came from taxpayers. She would answer any questions anytime. She spoke of another audit of her company where all the money was accounted for. She had submitted a proposal to the City in November requesting a renewal of her contract. She and E2C were ready to go to work.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Fiscal Year 2022/2023 Audit Report from City Auditor - *Conor Delaney from Pauly, Rogers, & Co., PC*

Conor Delaney presented his audit report for Fiscal Year 2022/2023, a copy of which was included in the archive packet for this meeting, highlighting the purpose of the audit, an overview of the process, and the specific results for 2022/2023. He noted they did not find any issues with the City's internal controls and found no major issues or incorrectly stated balances. He thanked Finance Director Butsch and staff for their work and the Council for responding to the questionnaire. The final report would be issued next week.

Mr. Delaney clarified that if Councilors bring up any areas with a real potential for a material problem, they would take a look at that and potentially follow-up with the Councilor to ensure full understanding of the issue. If anything were flagged as a major problem, they would look into it further.

2. Municipal Court Semi-Annual Report - *Municipal Judge Amy Lindgren and City Prosecutor Sam Erskine*

Judge Amy Lindgren reviewed her report, a copy of which was included in the archive packet for this meeting, noting things were going well. Governor Kotek issued an order which would write off \$137,448 in line items for this year, a loss for the City. Numbers were consistent from last year to this year, but traffic violations were lower. She recommended holding off on the red light cameras until the time is right. Court Clerks worked hard and were professional. St. Helens was her favorite city to work for.

Councilor Hubbard was interested in redlight cameras. Judge Lindgren replied it would be something for the Police Department to look into, but she believed the initial investment was probably rather large.

3. Police Service Fee Discussion

Finance Director Butsch reviewed a spreadsheet showing phasing in of an additional \$15 fee and what it would cover when hiring three entry-level officers and retiring two officers. The \$15 monthly fee would provide for three fully loaded police officers through Fiscal Year 2032, based on her calculations. Alternately, there was enough in the \$10 current fee to pay for one year, Fiscal Year 2024, to hire one officer.

Ms. Butsch said more officers could be funded with interest earnings from the Bond; there were some available funds to help. The City could fund two officers now through 2025 but would need to work on immediately filling the gap. No such measures would help the revenue loss from Cascades leaving.

She clarified staff was working on affording the retirement costs by using built-up interest revenue and a portion of the current \$10 fee, which could cover the retirements unless all four retire. That would take the City back to square one. The City could do a couple officers and a couple retirements and have them funded.

Councilor Hubbard spoke about his frustration that the police could not move forward to maintain staffing without funds; the City must look at that.

Councilor Sundeen said he would like the Budget Committee to look at the matter, acknowledging that for some people a \$25 fee would be a hardship.

Mr. Walsh clarified a program could be implemented to help those who would experience a hardship with the \$25 fee. Ms. Butsch added that the Council could implement a policy for a low-income application. A tax levy would probably be the better way to go; it would be more transparent and show whether the community accepted it.

Council President Chilton said it was an option to add the fee for emergent needs and do a levy at the same time to continue the service. She was hopeful to drop the fee once the City budget would improve.

Mr. Walsh said the Rec fee was \$2 and sunsetted at a certain date. It worked well for the program to become self-sustaining. The City had not had the luxury to do succession planning.

Ms. Butsch acknowledged that when an officer retires it was a higher pay scale and then a new officer would be hired at a lower pay level. The cost of a retiring officer would be paying off leave accruals, etc.

Councilor Gundersen wanted to get the police what they needed to be successful.

Councilor Sundeen was not opposed to a public safety fee, but a lot of places around the state do one around \$2 to \$4, not usually as high as St. Helens'. Ms. Butsch pointed out that those cities typically have a higher tax rate to compensate; St. Helens had a really low tax rate. She recommended trying to get a tax levy.

The Council and staff discussed the tax levy. Council President Chilton believed the matter needed to be addressed and decided at tonight's Regular Session.

4. Report from City Administrator John Walsh

Mr. Walsh presented his report. Highlights were as follows:

- The community had experienced a lot of disharmony. He was proud of the City employees.
- Staff was looking at alternative locations for the new police station and meeting with the design team. The project was on standby with all works paused, not spending any money. They were looking at how to recycle the existing plans and salvage the amount of investment in the facility as designed and pick it up somewhere else suitable which would save costs.
- Staff was working with legal counsel and the labor union on the call back language in the union contracts for the police.

- Industry was so valuable to the community. When they leave, it takes millions out of the budget. The burden shifted to the ratepayers and constituents. It was paramount to get industry. Project Sprint was looking good; they needed better access to electric power.
- Equipment from Cascades would bring some revenue to the City.
- He and Councilors Hubbard and Sundeen met with attorney Peter Hicks who would have a draft of a new Tourism contract on Friday. The Council discussed whether to temporarily extend the current contract and a new contract going into effect to address concerns that come up over and over again, noting Ms. Curry had done a wonderful job. Council President Chilton said the contract renewal comes up at the worse time. The Council seemed to agree about the idea of extending the current contract until the new contract was proofed. Mr. Walsh noted it would be an action item at the regular session. The Council needed to see the contract sooner to review it in the future. The new contract would be adopted in no later than six months.

ADJOURN – 4:37 pm

EXECUTIVE SESSION

- Hear Complaints or Charges brought Against a Public Official, under ORS 192.660(2)(b)
- Real Property Transactions, under ORS 192.660(2)(e)
- Consult with Counsel/Potential Litigation, under ORS 192.660(2)(h)

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Scholl, Deputy City Recorder.

ATTEST:

/s/ Kathy Payne
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

/s/ Jessica Chilton
Jessica Chilton, Council President