



# CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT

# MEMORANDUM

**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner  
**RE:** Discussion of “alterations” to The Courthouse Plaza, a Designated Landmark  
**DATE:** February 9, 2022

The Plaza is “designated landmark” per city code, which means it is an historic resource officially recognized by the City of St. Helens. With this designation, “alteration” is subject to permitting by the Historic Landmarks Commission.

The Planning Commission (as acting Historic Landmarks Commission) discussed some recent changes to The Plaza (see attached [January 27, 2022 memo](#)) at their February 8, 2022 meeting and unanimously concluded (with all seven members present) that the metal business sponsor sign features recently added with permanent construction (and intentions) constitutes an alteration.

This issue needs to be resolved. They must be removed from The Plaza or allowed under a Historic Resource Review (HRR). There is no guarantee an HRR can be approved.

This memo will accompany a discussion with the Council at a work session to inform about this recent alteration and educate for potential future ones.





# CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT

# MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Planning Commission (as the Historic Landmarks Commission)  
**FROM:** Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner  
**RE:** The Plaza, a Designated Landmark v. Amusement Park  
**DATE:** January 27, 2022

Per Chapter 17.36 of the St. Helens Municipal Code a “designated landmark” is an historic resource officially recognized by the city of St. Helens.

Historic resources are often buildings but can also be other things like sites. The city’s Locally Designated Landmarks List includes 24 official historic resources. 22 of these are buildings. One is a site: the **Courthouse Plaza**. More information about the city’s historic resources can be found online: <https://www.sthelensoregon.gov/planning/page/historic-preservation>

There is a key term in the city’s historic preservation chapter: “**alteration**.” This is important as a proposed alteration of a designated landmark requires formal review by the Historic Landmarks Commission before the alteration occurs. This is known a **Historic Resource Review**.

The definition is important for you to be aware of. Alteration is defined as:

**“Alteration” means an addition, removal, or reconfiguration which significantly changes the character of a historic resource. Painting is not an alteration.**

In 2019, the Commission approved an alteration for a kiosk, which has since been installed. Lawfully.

The purpose of this memo is twofold: 1) to inquire with the Commission whether or not you feel an addition after the kiosk was installed constitutes an alteration and, 2) as an FYI as Halloweentown continues to grow, there will be more tourism use of the plaza (as a key feature of the 1998 movie) and interest in modifications such as addressing the grass surface which gets a lot of use and takes much abuse during the local seasonal Halloweentown festivities.

1910



1983



1963



The courthouse was built in 1906 and the plaza followed in 1907. Key features include the central circular platform and the crucifix feature. The center remains, but the crucifix, lost sometime between 1963 and 1983 could be restored to honor the original design.



**Above:** The Plaza as viewed from S. 1<sup>st</sup> Street in 2019 before the kiosk, permitted by the Historic Landmarks Commission, was lawfully installed. **Below,** same view of The Plaza this month. Note the permitted kiosk (light blue with faux basalt base) to the left. Also note the metal business sponsor sign features on either side, that appeared sometime after the permitted Kiosk was installed. **Do you think these constitute an alteration?**





**Left:** another current photo of The Plaza looking towards S. 1<sup>st</sup> Street.

The metal business sponsor sign features are within the boundaries of The Plaza.

**Right:** A closer view of the foundation of one of the metal business sponsor sign features shows a small concrete pad that was poured (and never existed prior) and the intended permanency of these features.

Since there are two of these, there are two pads. A pad, albeit larger, was necessary for the permitted kiosk.

