



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, April 14, 2026 at 6:30 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present:

Chair Brooke Sisco
Commissioner Charles Castner
Commissioner Scott Jacobson
Commissioner Reid Herman
Commissioner Trina Kingsbury
Commissioner Patrick Birkle

Members Absent:

Vice Chair David B Rosengard

Staff Present:

City Planner Jacob Graichen
Communications Officer Crystal King
Community Development Administrative Assistant Angelica Artero

Council Members:

Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russ Hubbard

Others:

David Sass
Hawley and Jill Hubbard
Brad Hendrickson
Andrew Niemi
Brett Kahr

1. 6:30 P.M. CALL TO ORDER

2. **TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR** (Not on Public Hearing Agenda): Limited to five minutes per topic
None.

3. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Draft Minutes dated February 10, 2026

Motion: Upon Commissioner Birkle's motion and Commissioner Jacobson's second, the Planning Commission voted to approve the draft minutes dated February 10, 2026.

AYES: Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Kingsbury, Commissioner Birkle, Commissioner Herman, Commissioner Castner **NAYS:** None

4. PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA

Chair Sisco opened the public hearing at 6:31 p.m. for a lot line adjustment and conditional use permit at 34959 Roberts Lane. The applicants were not at the meeting. No Commissioners declared any conflicts of interest, ex parte communications, or site visits.

City Planner Graichen presented the staff report explaining that the request involves reducing the area of an open space tract that was dedicated as part of a subdivision to benefit an abutting lot. Graichen provided background on the distinction between lots and tracts in subdivisions, noting that tracts are set aside for specific purposes like stormwater facilities or open space. City Planner Graichen recommended maintaining at least a 10-foot minimum area where the stream is within the tract. He showed comparisons between the applicant's request and staff's recommendation, noting that the stream veers onto the abutting property outside of the tract in certain areas. His recommendation would give the property owner the areas outside where the stream needs protection while keeping areas where the stream requires tract designation. The proposal requires homeowners' association approval and includes a small shed that may need to be moved if it falls within the dedicated area.

Chair Sisco called for testimony in support, neutral testimony, and testimony in opposition. No public testimony was provided. Chair Sisco closed the public record and opened deliberations. Commissioner Jacobson stated agreement with the City staff recommendations. Commissioner Kingsbury agreed that the recommendations made sense.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson's motion to approve the lot line adjustment (and minor modification Conditional Use Permit) with staff recommendations, Commissioner Kingsbury seconded the motion. **AYES:** Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Reid, Commissioner Birkle, Commissioner Castner. **NAYS:** None.

5. PLANNING DIRECTOR DECISIONS (previously e-mailed to the Commission)

No discussion or questions.

6. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Keith Locke-VA.1.26 Street Vacation 901 Columbia Blvd & 114 N 1st Street

City Planner Graichen explained that this discussion item involved a street vacation request that would go before Council next month. He provided background on the vacation process, explaining that it involves returning dedicated public right-of-way to private ownership and is a term that comes from state law. The request involves 30 feet on one side of a portion of North First Street, an underdeveloped right-of-way that currently serves essentially one house but exists within an 80-foot-wide right-of-way. City Planner Graichen explained that the original plat of St. Helens was developed in the 19th century with a grid pattern that didn't account for topography, resulting in rights-of-way that go through unsuitable terrain. City Planner Graichen discussed street classification standards, noting that while the vacation area is a local classified street, Columbia Boulevard and South First Street are arterial and collector streets respectively, which affects design considerations. He explained the City's right-of-way width standards, including 50-foot and 40-foot options for local streets, with the 40-foot "skinny street" standard limited to areas with 200 or fewer average daily trips.

Commissioner Jacobson questioned why the City gives away assets rather than selling them. City Planner Graichen acknowledged this has been discussed many times, noting that creating such provisions would ideally be written into law, and that this would be the first time such an approach was taken.

Commissioner Birkle asked about waterline relocation costs, with City Planner Graichen confirming the developer/applicant would bear those expenses. He noted that according to Lower Columbia's engineer,

the existing line type needed replacement anyway. Engineer Andrew Niemi from Lower Columbia Engineering presented the applicant's perspective, arguing that street vacations serve the public interest by returning property to tax rolls and upgrading utilities to current standards. He emphasized that the vacation would require bringing utilities up to current City standards and could facilitate intersection improvements through associated development.

Niemi explained their deliberate process in requesting 30 feet, noting they had initially considered a vacation on the west side but found those property owners didn't want additional property due to the increased property taxes they would then have to pay. He addressed centerline alignment concerns, stating that since the street will never be a through-street due to topographical constraints, perfect alignment isn't necessary. Developer Brad Hendrickson noted the year-long planning process and expressed excitement about potential overlook improvements that could tie into their project. He emphasized the developers' local connections and commitment to quality development. Commissioners discussed various aspects including parking impacts on the planned overlook, future public building possibilities, fairness of the vacation amount, and the significant value of the 4,000+ square feet being vacated in the waterfront downtown area.

Commissioner Castner asked how reducing the street vacation from 30 to 20 feet would impact the proposed development. Niemi responded it could reduce parking and potentially eliminate one unit, tightening circulation areas and reducing property tax generation.

Motion: Commissioner Castner moved to recommend to City Council approval of the 30-foot vacation with staff recommendations regarding waterline relocation, public utility easement, vehicle turnaround, and completion within a three-year timeframe from City Council approval. Commissioner Birkle seconded the motion. **AYES:** Commissioner Kingsbury, Commissioner Reid, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Birkle. **NAYS:** Commissioner Jacobson.

PC TSP PAC Representation

City Planner Graichen explained that the City is updating its Transportation Systems Plan and is seeking a Planning Commission representative for the Public Advisory Committee. Commissioner Jacobson volunteered for the position, and the Commission agreed.

Quarterly Report

City Planner Graichen presented the Planning Division quarterly report to Council. No Commissioners had any questions about the report content.

7. PROACTIVE ITEMS

F. Architectural Standards

G. Vacant and Underutilized Storefronts

City Planner Graichen described impending furloughs and layoffs, including eight people receiving layoff notices, with Community Development Administrative Assistant Artero among them. He noted that additional reductions would be necessary if the utility fee referendum fails. Given the loss of continuity in support staff and the reduction of City Council meetings to one per month, City Planner Graichen recommended removing proactive items from future agendas for efficiency and survival purposes. The Commission agreed to remove these items from future agendas.

8. CITY COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT

Councilor Gundersen indicated availability to help if needed but had no specific report.

9. FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

City Planner Graichen reminded commissioners that Statement of Economic Interest filings were due the following day. He also noted that the Planning Commission ordinance would have its second reading at the next Council meeting.

City Planner Graichen mentioned that Council would discuss quarterly meetings with committees and commissions, likely reducing from quarterly to annual meetings due to staffing circumstances. The Commission confirmed their previous recommendation for one meeting per year plus additional meetings as needed, such as for the Transportation Systems Plan process.

10. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Angelica Artero

Community Development Administrative Assistant