



# PLANNING COMMISSION & CITY COUNCIL JOINT MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, June 12, 2024, at 4:00 PM

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**Members Present:** Mayor Rick Scholl  
Council President Jessica Chilton  
Councilor Russ Hubbard  
Councilor Brandon Sundeen  
Councilor Mark Gundersen  
  
Chair Dan Cary  
Vice Chair Jennifer Shoemaker  
Commissioner Ginny Carlson  
Commissioner Charles Castner  
Commissioner Scott Jacobson  
Commissioner David Rosengard

**Members Absent:** Commissioner Brooke Sisco

**Staff Present:** City Administrator John Walsh  
City Planner Jacob Graichen  
Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho  
Community Development Admin Assistant Christina Sullivan

This meeting was held in the Council Chambers.

At 4:00 p.m., Mayor Rick Scholl opened the Joint Planning Commission and City Council Meeting. The purpose, rules, and goals of this meeting were explained. The mayor is the presiding officer, the group must have respect for others' time, and no decisions are to be made at these meetings.

## **ST. HELENS ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY ANALYSIS PRESENTATION**

City Planner Jacob Graichen did a small recap on previous discussions on the Economic Opportunity Analysis (EOA) and explained this presentation was to help both groups understand better what it is.

Beth Goodman is a consultant from ECONorthwest. She said they would be sharing where they were in the process and how they planned to move forward. She said they were in the early stages, so they would be asking a lot of questions to gather information and then later in the process is when the policy would be discussed.

She said there are many reasons cities do an EOA. The first is for legal requirements. It also gives them an opportunity to plan for long-term growth and forecast future conditions by helping them understand existing conditions. She mentioned at the end of the study, they would give recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan policy changes and any changes or actions that need to be implemented.

There was a small discussion on how the determined buildable land inventory was calculated and if there are zone changes that may make sense.

Goodman discussed some of the national and state economic trends. There was a small discussion around the power needs for St. Helens and across the state for certain industrial users.

There was a discussion about commuting trends and how common it is for St. Helens.

There was a discussion on the unique economic advantages and disadvantages of St. Helens..

Mayor Scholl shared that he believes that St. Helens has a generational workforce and if the jobs are available, they would work here instead of commuting. He also said there needed to be a focus on bringing more power to this area to be able to service lighter industrial and heavier industrial businesses so that there are not more missed opportunities.

Commissioner Ginny Carlson said there are a lot of vocational programs here for students to learn trades and further their education while in high school. She said trades jobs can be hard to outsource, so she thought it was great that we had a school system that recognizes the need for trades and offers these opportunities to our students.

Councilor President Jessica Chilton said they have a solid Mainstreet Program and that there is not a lot of commercial property along Highway 30, but there is a lot of commercial property along our main street and nurturing that and figuring out how to connect this to our downtown area is part of the Mainstreet Alliance focus.

Councilor Russ Hubbard said we have a lot of smaller industry and St. Helens would need to focus on the capacity they are able to sustain. He said he would like to see St. Helens focus on building these lighter industrial type businesses, instead of trying to bring in larger corporations and giant commercial industry. He mentioned the items that large business needs to be able to set up and run is too large for St. Helens to handle.

Commissioner Jennifer Shoemaker said she would like to see the City of St. Helens work to incentivize the small business. She said currently they work hard to bring in larger business and she feels there is a need to support both types to have a thriving community.

Commissioner David Rosengard said there were advantages that the City had become a destination location and can help with development and economic growth.

There was a small discussion on how to break down these barriers to achieve more of these goals.

### **DISCUSS PLANNING COMMISSION PROACTIVE ITEMS**

Commissioner Shoemaker shared the proactive items currently on the list. She talked about the Courthouse Plaza and the need for improvements to help keep it from looking thrashed after large tourist events. She also shared the vacant storefronts was still on the horizon working with the Mainstreet Alliance to try and get this going. She also mentioned architectural standards and that the Commission agreed this should be narrowed to one district at a time to help keep the focus. She mentioned there were several commissioners interested in taking over some of these items and heading them up.

She said she would like to head up the plaza project. She shared some of the ideas she had to start discussing how to renovate the area.

There was a discussion about preservation of the trees in the Plaza and the bricks that are already laid out in the area. The Planning Commission and the City Council agreed they needed to get the approval of Columbia County in agreement with improvements to be made, as the property belongs to them.

There was a discussion with the group about being sure to keep the proactive items more manageable so that a subcommittee can handle the research and work.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Graichen mentioned there could be a discussion at the next meeting about the code amendments and he said that Columbia County Mental Health (CCMH) had reached out about expanding their campus. He said for what they want to do there is not really a category available in the amendments that allows

for this type of use. He mentioned CCMH had some professional consultant staff that were willing to work with the City on finding a correct definition for this type of commercial use.

Vice Chair Shoemaker brought up a concern about future parking structures or availability of parking for future developments in the new waterfront district. She said they had to deny a recent proposal for a parking variance, and she thinks this will be a trend as more development comes up. She wanted to find a solution on how to meet these parking standards in the Development Code, but also allowing development to come in.

There was a discussion about parking standards and doing a parking study in the future. There was also a discussion about building a public structure or parking lot space.

There was no other business discussed. The meeting was adjourned.

*There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 6:01 p.m.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Christina Sullivan*

*Community Development Administrative Assistant*

/s/  
Rick Scholl, Mayor

/s/  
Dan Cary, Chair