



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, May 12, 2026, at 6:30 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present:

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

Members Absent:

Vice Chair David B Rosengard
Councilor Russ Hubbard

Staff Present:

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

Council Members:

Councilor Mark Gundersen

Others:

Al Petersen
Steve Toschi
Lena Coy
Jeremy Miller (Zoom)
Holcombe Waller (Zoom)
Erin Salisbury

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 April 14, 2026

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson's motion and Commissioner Kingsbury's second, the Planning Commission voted to approve the draft minutes dated April 14, 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. The subject of the hearing was a request for a Conditional Use Permit for the property at 184 S. 15th Street. No exparte, site visits, or conflicts of interest were declared.

City Planner Jacob Graichen presented the staff report, providing background on the property's history. He noted that Al Petersen, the applicant's architect, was familiar with the site from its earlier days. Graichen recounted that back in 2013–2014, a proposal to build an addition on the site had moved forward but ultimately stalled, and the permits—both building and land use—had since expired. The property was acquired by the current owner, Hunter Christiansen, around October 2024.

Graichen explained that the matter was before the Planning Commission due to the outdoor storage component of the proposed use. In the Houlton Business District zoning, any permitted use that includes outdoor storage is elevated to a conditional use, requiring Planning Commission review. Without that component, the matter would have been handled administratively.

One of the key issues was screening on two sides of the site: the south side, which abuts a single-family dwelling, and the side along South 15th Street. Graichen explained that rather than tailoring the parking allowance strictly to the proposed craftsman use—which would be based on number of employees and could necessitate another land use permit if a different tenant moved in—he recommended that parking be based on the amount of lawfully fitting parking within the existing paved area. This approach was intended to provide flexibility for future tenants without requiring repeated land use review.

Al Petersen of AKAAN Architecture and Design presented on behalf of property owner Hunter Christiansen, providing paper copies of the site plan to the Commission. Mr. Petersen explained what he described as a central concern: that the staff report's conditions of approval appeared to require a redesign of the site plan rather than approving the site plan as presented with standard conditions. Petersen requested that condition five (i.e., 2.a.v)—requiring the plans to be calibrated to an existing survey—be removed, asserting that the dimensions shown on his site plan already matched the survey on file with the County Surveyor's Office, which he provided copies of to the Commission. Petersen requested that condition six (i.e., 2.a.vi)—requiring the parking lot design to be updated—be removed, again on the grounds that the existing nonconforming parking lot should not be subject to redesign and that the wider stalls already addressed maneuverability concerns.

Testimony in Support

Erin Salisbury, Executive Director of the St. Helens Main Street Alliance, testified in support of the application. She spoke to what she characterized as the heart of the matter: a building in the uptown portion of the city's business corridor that has been empty for six years. She described the proposed artisan workshop use as a natural continuation of the building's working industrial history, calling it "a continuation of one" rather than a dramatic change of character.

Testimony in Opposition

Steve Toschi testified in partial opposition, expressing support for the artisan workshop concept but objection to specific aspects of the application he characterized as outside the law. He urged the Commission to deny any portion of the application that would permit vehicle storage or general storage unrelated to the artisan business.

Lena Koy, Adjacent Property Owner (196 S. 15th Street), testified regarding impacts to her property from the current owner's activities. She noted that her family had lived next door since 2015 and had

no issues with the prior tenant. She described several concerns arising since Mr. Christiansen's purchase including fence damage when barrels were removed, contamination, and drainage and water runoff onto her property. Koy stated that her family was not opposed to him doing something there and acknowledged the property looked better than it had when it was occupied by a homeless individual. However, her principal concern was that if the permit was approved without addressing her issues, the owner would not fix any of the damage and impacts to her property.

Rebuttal by Applicant

Petersen offered rebuttal on several points raised by the opposing testifiers. Regarding Steve Toschi's comments, Petersen stated that he had been misquoted. He read from his application narrative, which described the proposed use as a woodworking shop for a trim and molding business—a one-man shop at the same scale as the previously approved artisan workshop use. He confirmed that outdoor storage, as shown on the site plan with site-obscuring fencing, was for the products which he will be working on in the shop and that they are not asking for automotive storage.

Regarding Koy's testimony, Petersen stated that he was unable to address the matter of the barrels, which predated the current owner's acquisition of the property. He did note that Koy had herself testified that Hunter Christiansen removed the barrels as one of his first acts as owner. On the water and drainage issues, Petersen stated that the rear of the property was relatively flat and that the more significant water problem at the front was attributable to the crown of South 15th Street directing runoff toward a low point at the edge of the sidewalk, which then flowed across both the sidewalk and onto the adjacent property.

Regarding conditions five and six, Petersen reiterated his requests that both be removed from the conditions of approval, asserting that the survey dimensions on his site plan already matched the recorded survey and that the parking lot, as an existing nonconforming condition, should not be required to be redesigned.

Staff Response

Graichen clarified his intent with respect to several conditions. On condition five (survey calibration), he explained that the concern was not about the accuracy of the property line dimensions, but rather how those property lines related to existing improvements on the ground. It should be confirmed whether the planters along the frontage were within the right-of-way or on the property itself. He noted that if the planters could be shown to be outside the right-of-way, a right-of-way permit through engineering would not be required, thereby reducing bureaucratic burden on the applicant.

Regarding parking, Graichen said if the ADA space were oriented perpendicular to South 15th Street and facing the street, the wheelchair access aisle would run alongside the walkway connection, effectively gaining space rather than losing it. He acknowledged that the walkway addition would require some adjustment to the parking layout but would not need wholesale redesign as testified.

Deliberations

Commissioner Jacobson raised questions about the ADA accessibility situation and noted that requiring individuals using mobility devices to navigate behind parked cars—while common in large retail parking lots—was still a known hazard. He observed that the striped ADA space near the side door would provide a measure of access to that entrance and questioned whether the broader concern over the walkway was proportionate to the parking impacts.

Chair Sisco expressed concerns about the conflicting measurements between the building and the south property line and stated a desire to ensure the property lines were accurately confirmed. Chair

Sisco also raised the issue of the south-side fence which had been damaged and not repaired and expressed concern about the barrel situation and residual environmental impacts. Chair Sisco stated a preference that any outdoor storage be expressly tied to the business operating on the site.

Commissioner Castner asked whether the impacts described by Koy—flooding, oil contamination, and the damaged fence—were matters for code enforcement rather than for the Planning Commission to resolve as part of the land use proceeding. He expressed sympathy for the adjacent homeowners while acknowledging that the land use process might not be the appropriate venue for all those concerns.

On the survey calibration condition (Condition Five), the Commission agreed to retain it, expressing the view that confirming property line locations was in the property owner's interest and was not unduly burdensome.

On the parking lot redesign condition (Condition Six), the Commission's discussion acknowledged that the applicant's objections were partially well-founded—particularly the concern that requiring a full redesign was disproportionate—but that the walkway requirement remained valid considering the added side door not previously permitted. Graichen clarified that his intent with the parallel ADA space suggestion was to help the applicant achieve both walkway compliance and adequate parking without a wholesale redesign. The Commission accepted the general conditions as recommended by staff, with the added outdoor storage condition as discussed.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Castner's motion to approve the Conditional Use Permit with the conditions listed in the staff report and the additional condition that outdoor storage shall be limited to supplies, materials, and operable equipment associated with the business occupying the site, and Commissioner Jacobson's second, the Planning Commission approved the conditional use permit. **AYES:** Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Reid, Commissioner Birkle, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Kingsbury **NAYS:** None.

Motion: Commissioner Jacobson moved for Chair Sisco to sign the Findings and Conclusions once prepared. Commissioner Castner seconded. **AYES:** Commissioner Kingsbury, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Birkle, Commissioner Jacobson.

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

There was no discussion or questions.

6. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Graichen noted that the Planning Commission serves as the acting Historic Landmarks Commission for the City of St. Helens. In that capacity, the Commission reviews architectural changes to properties within the Riverfront District that are not individually designated historic landmarks. He introduced property owner Holcombe Waller and project architect Jeremy Miller who were present to present proposed improvements to The Klondike building at 71 Cowlitz Street.

Waller provided an overview of the second phase of improvements to The Klondike building, noting that the Commission had previously approved an elevator and porch addition in Phase One. He explained that rather than sequencing the phases as originally planned, the project had combined all remaining improvements into a single proposal intended to bring the building to hotel-occupancy ready. Waller explained that the original building connected at the corner to a structure that was an opera house believed to have been relocated from the town square, and an addition in 1909 meant there was no separate door to the later building. Patrons entered the lobby and crossed over. When the first building was dismantled in 1951, a glass block and concrete stairs were added at that location. Under the current proposal, the glass block structure would be removed and converted to an open porch, with the original entry into the historic structure restored as the hotel entrance. The result

would be that the hotel's front door would be visible and would open to the original lobby with a historic open staircase that had been walled off since 1961. Commissioner Jacobson asked when the project was expected to be completed. Waller said the goal was to break ground by the end of 2026 and open the hotel by spring or summer of 2028 with an approximate 18-month construction timeline. He noted the restaurant would remain open throughout construction to the extent possible, with potentially one month of closure. He hoped that any closure would fall in March.

The Commission had no objections to the proposal.

7. CITY COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT

Councilor Mark Gundersen reported that a joint meeting had been held the prior Thursday with Romano and that talks were continuing regarding the waterfront development proposal. The goal is to find an arrangement agreeable to all parties, though details remained to be worked out.

8. FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

This will be Community Development Administrative Assistant Angelica Artero's last Planning Commission meeting as she leaves for a new job opportunity.

9. 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