



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, February 11, 2025 at 6:30 PM

DRAFT MINUTES

Members Present: Vice Chair Jennifer Shoemaker
 Commissioner David Rosengard (via ZOOM)
 Commissioner Scott Jacobson
 Commissioner Charles Castner
 Commissioner Brooke Sisco
 Commissioner Reid Herman

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Planner Jacob Graichen
 Associate Planner Jenny Dimsho
 City Councilor Mark Gunderson
 City Councilor Russell Hubbard
 Communications Officer Crystal King

Others: Al Petersen
 Katherine & Kevin McCarter
 Jay Echternach
 Joshua Walter
 Art Leskowich (via ZOOM)
 Trina Kingsbury

6:30 P.M. CALL TO ORDER & FLAG SALUTE

Vice Chair Shoemaker called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR (Not on Public Hearing Agenda): Limited to five minutes per topic

There were no topics from the floor.

CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Planning Commission Minutes dated December 10, 2024

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard’s motion and Commissioner Jacobson’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Minutes dated December 10, 2024. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

- B. Joint Planning Commission & City Council Minutes dated December 11, 2024

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson’s motion and Commissioner Rosengard’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously approved the Draft Joint Planning Commission City Council Minutes dated December 11, 2024. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

C. Chair/Vice Chair Selection

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson’s motion and Commissioner Rosengard’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously recommended to appoint Vice Chair Shoemaker to Chair. [AYES: Vice Chair Shoemaker, Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson’s motion and Commissioner Castner’s second, the Planning Commission unanimously recommended to appoint Commissioner Sisco to Vice Chair. [AYES: Commissioner Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA (times are earliest start time)

D. 6:35 p.m. – Variances (x3) at 35732 Hankey Road - McCarter

Chair Shoemaker opened the Public Hearing at 6:33 p.m. She confirmed that no Commissioner had conflicts of interest to disclose and that no one objected to the jurisdiction of the Planning Commission.

Jenny Dimsho presented the staff report for the three variances on Hankey Road. She said the applicant is variances for a reduced lot size, reduced side yard size, and reduced lot width based on R7 zoning standards. She said the applicant is seeing if variances will be approved in order to pursue a future partition application. She noted that did not identify any special or unique circumstances outside the applicant’s control to support the requested variances. If granted, the variances would make the partition complicated.

Commissioner Castner asked about the breezeway that was required before and whether something has changed to allow two unconnected dwelling units. Dimsho confirmed that the code has been updated to allow two dwelling units outright, but that additional permitting would be needed to make the 2nd dwelling legal. With the breezeway removed, the two-story garage building is an oversized accessory structure without the proper permitting for a dwelling.

McCarter, Catherine. Applicant. McCarter shared that the building official did not measure the eaves, but they meet fire separation requirements. She stated they would relocate the porch stairs and remove part of the retaining wall to prevent encroachment on the new property line if the partition is approved. Both buildings have separate water and electric lines but share a sewer line. They anticipated installing a new sewer line for the original house if the partition is approved. A french drain was installed to manage runoff between the buildings and stated they could direct downspouts to improve drainage. They expressed confusion about ADU permitting and the two-structure rule for property splits.

McCarter, Kevin. Applicant. He stated they can redirect storm drain runoff of building if that is necessary.

In Favor

No one spoke in favor of the application.

Neutral

Petersen, Al. Petersen asked the meaning of a dimension at the building line instead of the street. He also asked how two buildings on one lot related to the ADU rules.

City Planner Jacob Graichen clarified that zoning standards specify lot width at both the street and building line. While some lots can be narrower at the building line, the rest must be wider. In this case, the issue is the overall lot's narrowness.

Graichen also clarified that while the code allows a second unit to be called an ADU, no special permitting is required. It must meet standard requirements like setbacks and lot coverage. House Bill 2001 mandated duplexes in cities with over 10,000 people, and the Council allowed them in a detached form. However, the two-story garage building has not been permitted as a dwelling unit or detached accessory structure. It was permitted as a building addition with a breezeway with no dwelling unit.

Opposition

No one spoke in opposition of the application.

Rebuttal

McCarter, Catherine. Applicant. They are willing to make any accommodations necessary to split the lots.

End of Oral Testimony

Close of Public Hearing & Record

Deliberations

Commissioner Sisco was concerned about an aerial trespass of the power if a partition occurs. Dimsho noted that the recommended conditions of approval address utility issues, including power and sewer lines crossing the property line, which would need to be surveyed and resolved as outlined in the staff report.

Chair Shoemaker stated that the hardship in Criteria E appeared to be self-imposed. She believed that Criteria C and D could be met, but A, B, and E had issues. Commissioner Jacobson also stated that some of the criteria were not met.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard's motion and Vice Chair Sisco's second, the Planning Commission recommended to deny all three Variances. [AYES: Vice Chair Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson's motion and Commissioner Rosengard's second, the Planning Commission moved for the Chair to sign the findings when prepared. [AYES: Vice Chair Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

DISCUSSION ITEMS

E. 7:00 p.m. - Planning Commission Interview - Echternach, Jay

Jay Echternach, a three-year resident of St. Helens, introduced himself, sharing his 50-year background in sales, including serving as vice president of a publishing company responsible for strategic planning, budgeting, and sales. He has been involved in managing youth sports leagues and budgets, and served over 15 years on the Gresham Barlow School District's budget, curriculum, and foundation boards, focusing on fundraising and working within state law and budget constraints. His experience includes problem-solving, leading initiatives, and leadership training.

Mr. Echternach responded to questions from Commissioners as follows:

- After relocating to St. Helens three years ago, he wants to be involved in the community, as it is in his nature. Living near the Waterfront Project sparked his interest in the planning process, funding, and development. At 73, he is gainfully unemployed and looking for meaningful engagement.
- He confirmed his recent appointment to the Library Board and noted his involvement in fundraising and the makerspace. He reviewed the City's resolution and found that serving on multiple boards requires an exception. He stated he intends to continue, calling the library a tremendous asset to the city.
- He stated that historic preservation is a newer interest for him, inspired by his travels across 45 states. He highlighted visits to historic sites in Charleston, Savannah, and Boston, where he developed an appreciation for architecture and planning.
- He stated that if you aren't proactive, the world passes you by, and noted that St. Helens is well-positioned for growth. He highlighted the need for sustained, smart development, citing the Waterfront Project as a key step and pointing to other cities as examples of strategic growth driving economic benefits.
- He addressed how to handle public disappointment and potential conflicts while representing the community, stating that in sales, you get nine no's for every one yes, and his career was built on handling that. He noted the importance of being consumer-friendly in communication and seeking workarounds within legal guidelines to support the community while adhering to state and federal laws.
- He said St. Helens is the greatest community he had never seen, discovering it through Sand Island while dating his wife. After marrying, they settled on South Second Street, developed an Airbnb, and laid down roots, believing the city reeks of history and opportunity for the future.
- He said that being a sales guy, he is used to being on the fly and has read extensively the City budget, what's going on, losing a major taxpayer with the mill, and now getting new people in there. He has not done any research on planning or building but stated that his natural background is to jump feet first in with an open mind, believing his background, skills, and history would adapt well to the commission.

F. 7:15 p.m. - Planning Commission Interview – Walter, Joshua

Joshua Walter introduced himself, sharing his personal and professional background. He was born and raised in La Pine, moved to Scappoose at 18, and settled in St. Helens two years ago. He is actively involved in his church and the community, with a passion for natural organic food, local markets, and agritourism. Working remotely in software engineering, he now has time to engage with the Planning Commission and enjoys being a liaison for people looking to open businesses or make changes in town.

Mr. Walter responded to questions from Commissioners as follows:

- He said he wants to be involved anywhere and enjoys walking in the parks.
- He said he is a frequent ZOOM watcher of City Council and Planning Commission meetings but has not attended in person due to his schedule. His remote job now allows him more time for local involvement.
- He noted preserving the town and maintaining its character is essential to St. Helens. He appreciates efforts to retain historic elements, like the downtown rockwork and the restoration of the first bank building. The best way to enhance the city is by building upon its history rather than replacing it with something new.

- He wants to help people by explaining why something can't be done or finding alternatives. He hopes to bridge the gap between decisions and alternatives through creative solutions. He is excited about the Riverfront project and noted that community concerns often have simple explanations. He wants to be known for helping make a "no" seem less final and celebrating the "yes."
- He said he loves St. Helens for its strong sense of community and the people who are passionate about helping. He noted that it is hard to find that small-town feel and wants to help protect it while recognizing the potential for growth. He is interested in being part of the process through wise counsel and consideration.
- He tends to believe that property owners should be able to do what they want with their land but acknowledges the reasoning behind regulations. He noted that he bounces back and forth on the issue and sees his perspective as a potential balance in discussions.
- His remote job provides a lot of flexibility, working four days a week with Fridays and weekends off. This schedule gives him free time, allowing him to plan around meetings and participate in the planning commission.

G. 7:30 p.m. - Planning Commission Interview – Kingsbury, Trina

Trina Kingsbury introduced herself, stating that she has lived in St. Helens for eight years. She grew up in Hillsboro, moved to Scappoose, and then settled in St. Helens with her husband after falling in love with the area. She has worked in the supply chain throughout her career and is currently between jobs, which has given her extra time to commit to a commission. She expressed her love for the community, the river, the history, and the opportunity for growth in St. Helens. She lives near McBride and enjoys frequenting downtown, walking along the river, and spending time on the water with her boat.

- She became interested in the Planning Commission after moving to St. Helens and getting to know the community. She believes she will have time for the commission once employed again, citing her ability to manage both work and commitments in the past, including attending meetings and reviewing material.
- She expressed interest in historic preservation, mentioning she has done a couple of walking tours around St. Helens and enjoys learning about the history of the city. She believes the buildings tell a story and reflect the art and culture of past times, offering valuable lessons.
- She expressed that St. Helens has many opportunities for growth, which must be managed responsibly. She mentioned the importance of considering the long-term impacts of current decisions while allowing people to use their property within reason.
- She mentioned that she has watched several planning meetings over ZOOM or YouTube and attended one pre-Covid about the Sand Island campground. She was interested in the plans for the island, particularly how it would affect boaters and community access. She also read through the minutes of the last meeting to familiarize herself with the decisions being made, especially regarding laws, codes, and the end use of projects.
- She noted she lives on the different side of the tracks and is a little bit younger than a lot of the commission. It's important to have those generational voices, as a diverse response helps with making sound decisions by getting more input.
- She has experience working with suppliers and in sales, where she dealt with different people and environments, focusing on finding a middle ground. She believes the commission's work is more about clear decisions but sees the importance of discussing challenges and providing creative solutions, helping others revise their plans if needed.

- She asked how much time is spent reviewing meeting packet materials beforehand. Chair Shoemaker mentioned that sometimes the packet is for two small hearings, while other times it can require more preparation. She noted that generally, the materials can be reviewed in a couple of hours, and nothing is unreasonable in terms of preparation time.

The Commission preferred someone who was not already serving on another Commission. Vice Chair Sisco liked Kingsbury's response about why she loved St. Helens. Chair Shoemaker thought her application was also the most complete. Commissioner Jacobson thought Walter's interview was impactful. Councilor Gundersen wants to see as many people involved as possible, so selecting someone who is already serving on another Commission is not ideal.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Castner's motion and Vice Chair Sisco's second, the Planning Commission moved recommend to Council to appoint Trina Kingbury to the Planning Commission. [AYES: Vice Chair Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

H. Architectural Character Review at 161 St. Helens Street - AKAAN

City Planner Graichen presented the architectural review for a building that is not an official historic resource. The proposal is to convert a multi-suite office building into a mini-mart business, with plans showing windows being blocked out. These windows are in the back and side, not along St. Helens Street. Graichen raised the question of how much the side and back matter in this context. Staff's main comment was that the windows in the back might be more important to preserve, as they contribute to the character and crime prevention of the area. The Commission's review is for a recommendation to staff.

Al Petersen explained that the windows will be blocked to avoid vandalism, as they will not be accessible from the inside. The intent is to cover the windows with fire-treated lumber, fire-treated plywood, and fiber cement. The windows will not be functional but may be restored in the future if the property next door is developed and the need arises. The front facade will remain unchanged, with frosted windows covered by coolers. Petersen clarified that the side and rear walls are not the primary facades for preservation, as the street-facing facade is the focus in historic districts. The goal is to protect the windows and allow for potential future restoration.

Mr. Petersen addressed questions from the Board as follows:

- He explained that the fiber cement will not match the existing building and the windows will be blocked with large visible squares. The building codes historically required a solid wall on property lines, preventing windows, though it was once common to install windows with the understanding they could be covered if a new building was built next door. The fiber cement will not match the rough concrete wall but will be painted the same color.
- He noted that he cannot answer whether the project can move forward with some windows covered and others not, as he is not the building owner.
- He stated that Section 9 of the National Trust for Historic Preservation Guidelines, which pertains to windows, still applies. In most historic districts, the focus is on the streetscape, not the rear windows facing parking lots or the backs of other buildings.
- He shared his experience in Philadelphia, where windows were covered on historic buildings to protect them from vandalism. Later, when funding was available, the windows were uncovered for restoration. He explained that the National Standards for Historic Preservation discourage covering windows during restoration but noted that the intent here is to preserve the building's historic fabric for future restoration. He cited the example of the courthouse's historic flooring, which was covered for future restoration purposes.

The Commission agreed with the applicant’s plan to cover up the windows instead of removing them, allowing for potential future restoration. It was also noted the mini-mart has a high risk of break-ins, with the windows being easily accessible for vandalism.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson’s motion and Commissioner Rosengard’s second, the Planning Commission moved to recommend that the architectural character review be approved with a condition that the existing architecture be preserved when covering the windows so that the covering can be reversed. [AYES: Vice Chair Sisco, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Herman, NAYS: None]

I. 2024 Year End Summary Report

There was no discussion of note.

J. 2025 Joint Planning Commission & City Council Meeting Time

The Commission and Staff discussed the timing of the Joint Planning Commission and City Council meetings. There was a mixed preference regarding the meeting time, with no strong consensus either way. Some members felt that 6:00 PM would be better for community and visitor attendance, while others preferred 4:00 PM, as it would allow staff to finish earlier. The Commission agreed to continue the discussion with the Council to determine the best time for everyone.

K. Miscommunication Regarding the "Millard Road Property"

City Planner Graichen explained that at the January 15 Council meeting, concerns were raised about the City recommending a mobile home park for the Millard Road property. He clarified that the confusion arose from a mix-up in communication, specifically a public records request that included emails about the "Millard Road property." The discussion was about options for nearby properties within the Urban Growth Boundary, not the City-owned Millard Road property. The mention of a mobile home park was simply a designation, not a development recommendation for the city-owned Millard Road property.

He addressed concerns about an exhibit showing proposed lots below the 5,000 square foot minimum for the Millard Road property and clarified that the plat predates the Council's resolution regarding lot sizes. During the pre-application meeting with the developer, the lot dimensions were removed, but the plans were not-to-scale, and it was noted all lots must conform to R5 dimensional standards. No subdivision applications had been received, and the property had not been sold, making the claims of approving smaller lot sizes incorrect.

Vice Chair Sisco clarified that pre-application meetings are common and that the initial plans often change before a subdivision is finalized. She noted that lot sizes and placements may be altered. She added that just because the city has a copy of the preliminary plans, it does not mean any agreement has been made.

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

- L. Time Extension (TUP.1.24) at 175 Bowling Alley Lane – CC POD LLC
- M. Sensitive Lands Permit at 1645 Railroad Avenue – Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc.
- N. Sensitive Lands Permit (Amended) at 1645 Railroad Avenue – Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc.
- O. Site Development Review at 745 S. Columbia River Highway – Pacific Stars Contractors
- P. Conditional Use Permit (Minor) at 36200 Pittsburg Road - Stewart
- Q. Site Development Review at 58389 Columbia River Highway – Ojeda

The Commission discussed proactive planning items, which were accidentally left off the agenda. They considered dedicating 30 minutes during each meeting for research, assigning members to specific items. Concerns about avoiding the appearance of decision-making outside meetings were raised. The Commission explored how other communities handle this issue and discussed the need for more detailed ethics training. They agreed to bring ideas to the next meeting and noted the upcoming joint meeting with the City Council on March 12. The timing of the two-year strategic plan was also considered.

PLANNING DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT

- R. Planning Department Activity Report – December
- S. Planning Department Activity Report – January

City Planner Graichen clarified that some code changes, such as those related to manufactured and prefabricated homes, were mandated by State law. However, the City Council rejected proposed amendments that would have allowed manufactured homes and detached multifamily housing (cottage clusters). The amendments regarding Single Room Occupancy (SRO) housing were retained.

The hope was to reinforce state law provisions through code amendments, specifically regarding manufactured homes near historic landmarks. However, without the code in place, there is uncertainty about its implementation. Since the issue arose during the 2nd reading, the decision was made to delete the amendments and potentially revisit them later, as most of the other amendments were successful.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 9:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Jennifer Dimsho
Associate Planner*