



## CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT

# MEMORANDUM

**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner  
**RE:** Planning Commission Annual Report  
**DATE:** May 15, 2024

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This report covers Planning Commission activities from **June 2023** through **May 2024**. The Planning Commission discussed this report at their May 14, 2024, meeting.

- **Number of meetings: 14 (last year 15)**

16 meetings are usual (12 regular PC meetings + 4 Joint City Council Meetings). In this last year, the Commission cancelled 2 Joint City Council Meetings (June 2023 and September 2023), and 1 regular PC Meeting (October 2023). However, they met outside of regular meetings in April 2024 for a Special Session with City Council regarding the Police Station.

- **Number of Public Hearings (a continued hearing is counted separately): 18 (last year 18)**

- **Planning Director Decisions: 44 (last year 56)**

For administrative land use actions (e.g., Site Development Review, Home Occupations, Sign Permits, Temporary Use Permits, and others), the items from the last month are included on the agenda to facilitate discussion and query usually for clarification purposes or to address concerns.

- **Discussion Items: 25 (last year 35)**

**Regular meeting items included (in the order they were reviewed):** CLG Historic Preservation Grant Selection, Discussion of properties at the corner of Pittsburg Road & US 30, Planning Commission Vacancy/Term Expirations, December Joint Meeting with City Council, Planning Department Semi-Annual Report to Council, Planning Commission Stipends, 2023 Year End Summary, 2024 Development Code Amendments, Chair & Vice Chair Selection, Planning Commission Interview Committee Recommendation, Historic Resource Review HRR.1.22 Plan Revisions, 2024 Development Code Amendments (Continued), Joint Meeting Discussion Items, Planning Commission Representation on EOA Technical Advisory Committee, 2024 Development Code Amendments Draft Review, 2024 Development Code Amendments Draft Review (Continued).

**Joint and special meeting items included (in the order they were reviewed):** Psilocybin Prohibition, Vacant Storefronts, Vacant Storefronts, Police Station Location, 2024 Development Code Amendments Overview, Architectural Standards, Discuss Proposed Public Safety Facility with Council.

- **Architectural Review: 4 (last year 6)**

Certain proposals within the Riverfront District require architectural review. We had an average number of these reviews.

- **Proactive Items:**

As part of the proactive resolve, in June 2022, the Planning Commission adopted the Planning Commission Proactive Procedures which dictate how “Proactive Items” are included on agendas. All PC agendas now include Proactive Items as a permanent agenda heading.

Proactive items sometimes include a non-quorum subcommittee, which can meet outside of normal meeting hours to discuss the item. The Proactive Items which were voted by a quorum to be taken on by the Commission during the last reporting period include:

1. **Architectural Standards** – This item was included on all the regular PC meetings and one Joint meeting.
2. **Vacant Storefronts** – This item was included on 5 regular PC meeting and one Joint meeting.
3. **Courthouse Plaza** – This item was included on 1 regular PC meeting, being added only recently beginning with the May 2024 meeting.

- **Future Projects/Plans:**

Continuing efforts on the Vacant Storefronts Proactive item in a Subcommittee that includes members of the City Council, Mainstreet, and others.

Time will tell how much traction Architectural Standards and the Courthouse Plaza get, but its possible in a year timeframe.

Aiding in city-led projects including the Economic Opportunity Analysis, the Transportation Systems Plan update efforts, and the Oregon Community Paths Scappoose St. Helens Trail project.

- **What can the Council do to support the Commission?**

1. The Commission recommends an **Associate Planner** at a future date when fiscally feasible.\*
2. The Commission desires to continue their involvement in the city’s efforts. The Commission recognizes the increased inclusion and hopes this will continue.

\*The five-year period between 2018 and 2022 was particularly difficult for staff due to development activity combined with many city projects. Development activity is cyclic and a return of booming development activity could push staff over the edge (compromising critical thinking) and/or force staff to forego attention to city projects or other proactive efforts. Land use legislation at the state level is more frequent in recent years and demands more attention.