

QUARTERLY REPORT TO COUNCIL



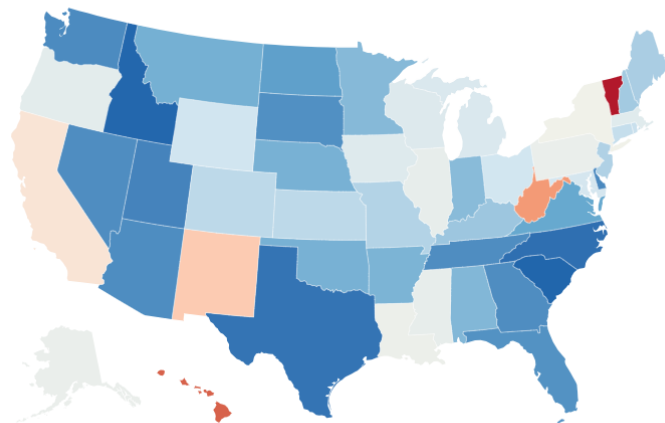
Meeting Date: April 1, 2026
Prepared by: Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner
Department: Planning
Division: Community Development
Reporting Period: January 2026 – March 2026
CC: City Administrator John Walsh / Planning Commission

1. General Operations

- **January:** Assist Public Works staff with maintenance possibilities on a couple of open space/utility tracts that include wetlands.
- **January:** Effort spent on a public records request, related to police station proposal at the Kaster Road site.
- **January:** For last quarter's report I mentioned St. Helens' population estimate showing growth of 80 people between July 2024 to July 2025. This figure has been certified by PSU's Population Research Center. Other cities in Columbia County also had marginal growth (Scappoose and Rainier increased by 5 people each, and Clatskanie and Vernonia 25 and 24 people, respectively). Columbia County as a whole increased 145 people (to 53,785), a paltry 0.3% with St. Helens' contribution of 80 people representing 55% of that.

The fastest-growing (and shrinking) states

Rate of population growth
-0.29 0 1.46



Map: Addy Blink, Nexstar • Source: US Census Bureau • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Left: Observing national trends, Oregon is not shrinking like a few states including California, but it is not growing like neighboring states such as Washington, Idaho and Nevada.

This broader national trend could be an aspect that impacts the city's budget, at least for the near term.

Not too long ago, Oregon was briskly growing, which was reflected in our development permitting.

- **January:** We received notice from Columbia County about updated on-site (septic) system usage rules within Urban Growth Boundaries. There is basically a physically and legally available question whether the city and county allow it or not, and that is still the case, just a little different than before. Some new forms not previously needed are required now. This resulted in updating notes I had from 2012! If you are curious, see OAR 340-071-0160.
- **February:** Started working on the Planning Department budget as this year's budget season begins.
- **February:** Thinking about the budget issues, once staff shrinks and/or are subject to furlough days, one thing we'll need to consider is having a message at the bottom of emails like Columbia County:



*****Due to Columbia County's mandate of 19 unpaid furlough days, response time to emails and phone calls may be delayed. We apologize for the inconvenience and thank you for your patience.*****

- **February:** A troop master for a local St. Helens scout troop asked if the city had any projects a scout unit could help with. I directed them to the Parks Commission regarding the woodland reserve project with potential trail development.
- **Pre-application / early assistance meetings:**
 - **January:** Held a pre-app meeting for an RV park proposal behind the Village Inn / OYO Hotel.
 - **January:** City staff visited Sand Island as part of the effort to resolve private management, lease and compliance issues there.
 - **February-March:** Millard Road property response to plan version 11 through 14. Plan #15 is in my in box (and not reviewed yet) as I finish this quarterly report.
 - **March:** Attended a County pre-app meeting for a mobile home park on property located along Millard Road. This would require extension of city sewer which is approximately 1,900 feet away, with consideration of the city's sewer conveyance shortcomings, unless exceptions are made. This is **not** the city owned Millard Road property.
- **Planning Commission had their normally scheduled monthly meeting on January 13, 2026.** Outcome:
 - The Commission selected their Chair and Vice Chair for 2026.
 - The Commission interviewed two Planning Commission candidates to fill a vacant position, recommending one for appointment to the Council.
 - The Commission reviewed the end of year summary report (of land use permitting) for 2025.
 - The Commission had the opportunity to review and discuss the previous Planning Department's quarterly report to the Council.
- **Planning Commission had their normally scheduled monthly meeting on February 10, 2026.** Outcome:
 - The Commission reviewed some cost saving changes to the recently approved Police Station site at 1771 Columbia Boulevard and had no objection.
 - The Commission continued the discussion regarding proposed operational rules from previous meetings. They have reached a point of agreement with the proposal, so we can discuss with the Council.
 - The Commission discussed the Vacant and Underutilizes storefronts proactive item, focusing on a potential list of details for inventorying purposes.

- **Planning Commission cancelled their normally scheduled monthly meeting on March 10, 2026.**
- **Planning Commission had their normally scheduled quarterly joint meeting with the City Council on March 11, 2026.** Outcome:
 - Discussed Planning Commission operation rules amendments.
 - Discussed the SHIPB, PGE related matters (substation and transmission lines) and potential RV park.
 - Discussed the Parks and Trails Commission's woodland reserve status, which is basically on hold pending resolution of PGE needs. In other words where will substation and transmission lines be located, which is still TBD.
 - Discussed vacant and underutilized storefronts.
 - Discussed waterfront property development, generally, based on latest exhibit from Romano Capital, Inc. The exhibit discussed is **very preliminary**, especially the architectural stylings shown.
- **Development Code Enforcement.**
 - **January:** Trying to resolve some sign enforcement issues (permanent private signs installed without property permitting) along US30 and Columbia Boulevard. Both sites are smoke/tobacco shops. Business owner seems ok; sign contractor is imperfect in their approach. Later in the month the sign issue at 555 S. Columbia River Hwy has been resolved. **February:** The Columbia Boulevard site has been resolved.
 - **January - March:** Attended municipal court on for an ongoing issue on the 100 block of S. 15th Street. Though a chronic lack of cooperation throughout the entirety of 2025, we may be achieving progress.
 - **January:** A wetland enforcement issue that started in 2025 along Mountain View Drive has been resolved.
 - **February:** Unauthorized permanent wall sign for Pure Serenity Massage along Columbia Boulevard has been resolved with proper permitting. Issue dates back to around last October.
- **Geographic Information Systems (GIS).**
 - **February:** Quarterly updates. Also updates for an adopted annexation.
 - **February:** Updated the city's official Zoning Map and Comprehensive Plan Map, which can be found here: <https://www.sthelensoregon.gov/planning/page/zoning-maps-gis>. The previous ones were from 2023 and out of date.
 - **March:** 2026 US Census Boundary and Annexation Survey (BAS) updates. This is important because the Census Bureau uses this boundary information for analysis and allocation of federal funds for health, welfare, infrastructure, education, and other federal programs and services. Updates needed this year based on recent annexations. Updates not finished this month; waiting for follow-up message to finish.
 - **March:** Need to start exploring WCAG ADA compliance for the GIS interface available to the public. Worst case scenario, if the matter is not resolvable, is discontinuing the service: <https://sh.metroplanning.com/>
- **Related City Council actions / decisions (Planning Commission FYI):**

- **January:** The Council approved an annexation proposal for land south of Sykes Road and north of the terminus of Morton Lane and they appointed Patrick Birkle to the Planning Commission. The Annexation applicant sent a thank you card to me once everything was done:



1/31/26

Dear Jacob,

Thank you so much for your outstanding written material and presentations regarding the annexation of my and my sister's property. You made the whole process seamless for us and we will always be grateful to you for your help and expertise. The St. Helens Planning Commission is so lucky to have you as City Planner.

Sincerely,
Susan Stutzman

2. Staffing & Personnel

- **January:** City of St Helens Winter Cyber Security Learning Plan online training.
- **January:** Attended a DLCD virtual workshop regarding the latest on Oregon Housing Needs Analysis (OHNA) updates. St. Helens is obligated by the state to conduct updated housing studies in the coming years. Interestingly, it addresses housing numbers and needs but not infrastructure shortcomings, which new housing units depend on.
- **January:** Former St. Helens Planner Jenny Dimsho who resigned last year landed a position with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department as the new Local Government Grant Program Coordinator. Congratulations to her!
- **January:** Attended housing and land use bill webinar hosted by DLCD. Less money is anticipated for state grant programs. Fortunately, a priority for the **Housing Planning Assistance Grant Program** are projects that fulfill a housing related statutory obligation. This includes St. Helens' Housing Capacity Analysis, described below.

3. Projects & Initiatives

A. Ongoing Key Projects

Riverfront District, Mill Subdistrict development (former veneer mill property):

[January – March](#): Attended meetings with Romano Capitol as part of their exclusive negotiation agreement with the City.

- **Parks Commission’s Woodland Reserve.** Staff technical support for the SHIBP Woodland Reserve concept.

PGE substation and transmission line assessment is a key thing to finalize the boundary. In the meantime, there was potential for boundary assessment efforts based on a June 2025 joint meeting discussion. Despite topographic maps created based on that joint meeting discussion and sent to some Parks/Trails Commissioners and others in June and September last year, nothing has happened to date.

- **ODOT Community Paths Program: St. Helens Scappoose Trail Refinement Project** – \$405k to study a trail route refinement project (30% design) from St. Helens to Scappoose. City Engineering is lead, with Planning providing support. [January](#): Supporting committees being formed. [February](#): Staff review of stuff including tech memos, draft website, draft flyers. [March](#): Early project efforts continue.
- **ODOT TGM Program: Transportation Systems Plan** – TBD \$\$ for new Transportation Systems plan. City Engineering is lead, with Planning providing support. [January](#): Staff review of Work Order Contract. [February](#): Effective Feb. 25th, we received the Notice to Proceed from ODOT for this project. Basically, this is the transition point from preliminary efforts to developing the plan. [March](#): Staff starting to review early project documents and track time as part of the grant match.
- **New Water Reservoir** – City Engineering is lead, with Planning providing support. [March](#): Communicating with appraiser who is examining the value of the property determined to be most suitable for the new reservoir.
- **Utility Master Plan Development Code Amendments** – These amendments based on the recommendations of the Wastewater (2021), Stormwater (2021), and Water (2022) plans. So now, several years have passed. [No update this quarter.](#)
- **SHIBP Project Arcadia** – The Record of Survey was filed with the Columbia County Survey this quarter in [February](#) and is the last item related to the real estate transaction. This item will be removed from future reports.
- **SHIBP PGE Parcel** – Continue working with consultants on proposal for professional services for some design and survey work to to create a new PGE Parcel for a new sub-station. City met with PGE and State staff in [March](#). Upcoming items:
 - Finish statement of work between city and PGE. The remaining item is determining general locations of transmission lines to serve new sub station.
 - Finish scope with consultants for discovery work related to the sub station pad and transmission lines. PGE will not accept anything without this information.

- In a few months PGE will need a future opportunity map, including anticipated targeted industries (i.e., future PGE customers). They need this for dealing with the PUC.
- **Housing Capacity Analysis / Housing Production Strategy** – For St. Helens, the due dates on these are:
 - **Housing Capacity Analysis (HCA): due December 31, 2028**
 - **Housing Production Strategy (HPS): due December 31, 2029**

This will be different than the previous, because it will need to go through the new Goal 10 OHNA process. [January](#): Started basic planning, in particular as it relates to budget preparation. It appears that the **Housing Planning Assistance Grant Program** does not require a match. More activity on this matter is anticipated for this beginning next quarter. I anticipate grant orientation in May with the grant application window beginning in June and lasting until early August.

- **Food cart/pod rules.** Currently, only allowed by Temporary Use, the goal is to create rules for permanent use and maybe improved temporary provisions. This issue goes back to 2015 when we made the decision to start allowing these kinds of uses via the city's Temporary Use provisions. So, this is about a decade old issue. [No progress has been made in this reporting period.](#)
- **Flood code amendments related to Endangered Species Act.** In 2009 FEMA was sued based on floodplain rules violating the Endangered Species Act. In 2016 the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) issued a biological opinion that Oregon's flood plain policies jeopardizes several threatened species such as salmon. In July 2024, FEMA announced a new program of pre-implementation compliance measures (PICM) for short term measures to be effective Dec. 1, 2024, separate from the long term, estimated for completion in 2027. Basically, flood development is supposed to include impacts to fish habitat, not just the loss of human-made structures.

[No updates this reporting period.](#)

- **TMDL** – Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) is a regulatory mechanism under the Clean Water Act that serves as a plan for restoring impaired or polluted waters. In Oregon, DEQ is responsible for developing and implementing TMDLs. In 2006 the Willamette Basin TMDL identified some communities to be Designated Management Agencies (DMAs) to administer TMDL efforts. St. Helens was not one of them, until a 2021 update. Now St. Helens is a DMA for mercury and temperature, which covers streams in the Willamette Basin. Though a significant burden to city Engineering and Public Works, Planning is involved too. [February](#): Staff meeting to discuss upcoming DEQ requirements and deadlines. Because stream temperature is related to tree canopy around a stream, how our existing riparian protection and floodplain rules protect tree canopy as it relates to DEQ expectations will need to be examined.

B. Upcoming Projects

- I anticipate efforts for the statutorily required **Housing Capacity Analysis / Housing Production Strategy** will start next quarter as noted above.

4. Upcoming Events & Important Dates

- No noteworthy events, special meetings or significant deadlines to mention.
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Attachments

- No attachments for this report.