

12 May 2025

Dear Mayor Massey, City Council members, and members of the St. Helens Budget Committee:

I am writing today to express my staunch support for continuing funding at current levels for our city library. There has never been a time when the library and all the resources and opportunities it represents have been more critical to the ongoing vitality of our local community.

In the most basic sense, the purpose of government is to provide services. People come together in community to pool their resources and desires collectively so that these citizens can reach goals and accomplish efforts that would not be possible by individuals alone. Within that framework, a library is the Swiss Army knife of government. Libraries provide safe spaces, access to information, support for learning, and referrals to a variety of community resources.

Books provide an escape from what can be a painful reality for some. They can provide comfort when, after the loss of a job or a loved one, a person needs help to keep going. In times of struggle, a person seeking answers to ethical or moral dilemmas can find guidance in books. Books can open avenues for future success that a person who might not know those avenues exist. But a library is so much more than just the books and other media housed within it. A library is the keeper of knowledge: local knowledge, lists of resources, career advice, templates and plans for creating a local business, language improvement, and so much more.

We live in uncertain times. No one knows what our future looks like – politically, economically, or socially. People need help. People need access to knowledge. People need to know there is somewhere they can go when they don't know what to do. Libraries provide the one thing that can give people a sense of control and direction in times of chaos and fear: knowledge. Libraries help kids applying for college figure out where to apply, how to apply, and how to obtain the financial resources needed to attend. Libraries provide job search assistance, access to online job forums, resume creation and editing, and resources for continuing career development. Libraries provide safe spaces, access to shelter, and even sometimes something as simple as a bathroom to those who might not have access to basic needs otherwise.

In the book *Palaces For The People*, Eric Klinenberg suggests that the future of democratic societies rests not simply on shared values but on shared spaces, libraries in particular. He argues that investments in community resources, like our libraries, amount to investments in social infrastructure that provide benefits that far outweigh the sum of their parts. One of

the benefits he highlights is that libraries provide a space where community members from all different walks of life come together to interact, thus strengthening social bonds through shared needs and experiences. Given the divided nature of our disrupted digital lives, this social infrastructure has become critical to our ability to see one another as a people that has more in common than that which divides us. In short, a library helps us hang on to our individual and collective humanity.

The phrase “palaces for the people” was coined by Andrew Carnegie as he went about building ~2,500 libraries around the world, 1,700 of them in the U.S. He imagined that the library was a sacred and revered space that provided an average citizen with the kinds of resources historically reserved for nobility and the wealthy. As a result, libraries became table stakes for a vibrant, functional community; it is difficult to imagine a city or town of any significant population without one. In many rural communities, such as ours, libraries are often the difference between success and failure for many residents. When you consider that there is not one bookstore in the entirety of Columbia County, it becomes obvious that access to our libraries is essential to our future.

At various times in my life, I have used libraries for knowledge, for shelter, for safety, for escape. I know, in my heart, that without access to libraries I never would have made it to college or have a solid foundation for gainful employment. Libraries saved my life. When the outlook for so much around us seems, at best, uncertain and, at worst, bleak or even hostile, I would argue that after food, water, shelter, and safety, the most important things a human being needs for survival can be found at the library. There is no other function the government provides that offers as many different benefits to as many different people. Every person in our community is better able to face any challenge in their life with access to a library.

I know you face a lot of tough decisions going into the budgeting process. There are so many things we want as a community, more than we can afford at present. But I urge you to give serious thought to any plans to cut, curtail, or furlough library resources or staff as part of your efforts. A library is more than a building, or the books inside it, or the people who work there. A library is a view into the past, a service for the present, and a hope for our individual and collective futures. In our current paradigm, I cannot think of a resource more important than that.

Sincerely,

Diana Wiener

St. Helens resident and St. Helens Library Board Member

**From:** [Macaluso](#)  
**To:** [Jamie Edwards](#)  
**Subject:** [External] Public comment for budget  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 14, 2025 8:38:00 PM

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Good evening,

I am writing as a parent, a community member, and a constituent to strongly urge to continue funding the St. Helens Community Recreation Center and prevent the devastating loss of this essential program.

The Rec Center fills a critical gap in our community providing opportunities for children to participate in sports, classes, and activities that simply don't exist elsewhere in our area. But beyond recreation, this center serves as a cornerstone of inclusion, particularly for our most vulnerable population: children with disabilities.

As the mother of a child with a rare, progressive disability, I know firsthand how difficult it can be to find spaces that are not only physically accessible, but emotionally welcoming. The Rec Center has made this possible. Their annual Sensory Friendly Santa event is the only opportunity my child has to experience the magic of seeing Santa in a way that honors her needs. Most public settings are not equipped with ADA accommodations or a true understanding of sensory differences. This also has been almost always consistently done with the same Santa and photographer which helps not only my child but many children who have disabilities with the consistency that they need to expect to have these enjoyable experiences. Most places would not even think of this detail. The Rec Center not only accommodates these needs, they center them.

What makes this program stand out is its commitment to evolving. They consistently listen to feedback and have shown a genuine dedication to building a more inclusive and connected community. One of the most meaningful recent additions has been their collaboration with the local developmental disabilities program to offer a monthly group specifically for children with disabilities and their families. This space provides something we often go without a place for connection, shared experience, and belonging.

Losing the Rec Center would not just mean fewer activities. It would mean taking away one of the only access point many of our children have to joy, to inclusion, and to community. These are not luxuries. These are fundamental parts of childhood and of a healthy, compassionate city.

Please consider what this space means to so many families. Please do not let it disappear.

With gratitude and urgency,

Ashlee Macaluso

Parent, Advocate, Community Member

**From:** [Joan Youngberg](#)  
**To:** [Jamie Edwards](#)  
**Subject:** [External] Budget  
**Date:** Thursday, May 15, 2025 9:32:34 AM

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As an active long time resident of St Helens I have witnessed the lack of transparency of our tax dollars. The city has misused and diverted funds and now they are in trouble, oh my!

Do not take moneys away from the community building heart of our town, the Recreation Center and the Library. We are moving forward with these two community hubs. They are where people meet and make connections and build a healthy city.

Thank you  
Joan Youngberg

## St. Helens Public Library

### Impact of Furloughs on Library Operations

- Impact of **eight-hour per month furloughs for all employees**
  - 15 fewer shifts per month
  - Reduction of open hours of **two** half days per week
  - At least three fewer programs for youth and in the Makerspace
  - More time at the desk for full-time staff, reducing the ability to complete essential projects and tasks
  - Up to 2,400 fewer items per year prepared for use, i.e., books, DVDs, Library of Things items
  - Because the building would not be open, this would impact
    - Library users
    - Hallway users – safety of vulnerable community members, tutoring, CCMH, WorkSource and other mentoring, teen meetups
  - Reduction of meeting room and Auditorium availability and corresponding library income
  - Substantial reduction of hours for only cooling center in the county
  - Retention loss due to 10% reduction in part-time staff pay
  - Decrease in take-home pay employees not offset by reduction to 2.5% COLA reduction
  - Increase in support from communications and IT staff
  - Decrease in ability to collaborate with community partners
  
- Impact of **eight-hour per month furloughs for full-time staff** and **four-hour per month for part-time staff**
  - 10 fewer shifts per month
  - Only cooling center in the county
  - Reduction of open hours of **one** half day per week
  - At least three fewer programs for youth and in the Makerspace
  - More time at the desk for full-time staff, reducing the ability to complete essential projects and tasks
  - Up to 1,200 fewer items per year prepared for use, i.e., books, DVDs, Library of Things items
  - Because the building would not be open for current hours, this would impact
    - Library users
    - Hallway users – safety of vulnerable community members, tutoring, CCMH, WorkSource and other mentoring, teen meetups
  - Reduction of meeting room and Auditorium availability and corresponding library income
  - Less reduction of hours for only cooling center in the county
  - Retention loss due to 5% reduction in part-time staff pay
  - Decrease in take-home pay employees not offset by reduction to 2.5% COLA reduction

- Increase in support from communications and IT staff
- Decrease in ability to collaborate with community partners
- Less concern about retention due to 5% reduction in part-time staff pay
- Decrease in take-home pay employees not offset by reduction to 2.5% COLA reduction
- Minimal need for increased support from communications and IT staff
- Less decrease in ability to collaborate with community partners

**Comments regarding the proposed Library budget.**

**Submitted by Lynne Pettit, Library Board, St. Helens Public Library**

**May 13, 2025**

Dear members of the Budget Committee,

Under the St Helens proposed budget our library services would be drastically cut. We are fortunate here in St Helens to have a Library that offers so much to our community. It serves as the center for many activities that enrich the lives of adults and children and fosters a healthy intellectual and cultural life. It is the “living room of our community”.

To start, I will mention Makerspace first, as it’s a place for kids, teens, and adults to conduct hands-on projects using problem solving, creativity and at the library’s initiative, to bring science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) to the community. The Lab contains a 3-D printer, laser cutter, computers, tablets, and other tools, for all ages.

Additionally, other projects, but not all, are the Summer Library Challenge (450+ last year) for Children and Adults, Winter Reading, Toddler/Preschool Storytime, and “Library of Things” where you can learn how to make pasta from a machine, learn about rain clouds, learn navigation constellations through a telescope, and play with math and coding.

The library provides many learning opportunities for families in our area that would otherwise be unaffordable. The library provides the internet for students and adults, and a safe place to study. There has been an increased use by small business owners, also for patrons navigating court documents, city transactions, health care paperwork, school support (middle school through Grad school) and more.

Please let our St. Helens City Council know that the proposed cuts to the library would drastically impact the many services the library provides that enrich our community.

Please protect this essential service and the resources that reflect the community in which we live.

Thank you for considering my comments.

**From:** [Jamie Edwards](#)  
**To:** [Gloria Butsch](#); [Jennifer Johnson](#)  
**Subject:** FW: [External] Rec impact letter of support  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 14, 2025 11:09:02 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[image002.png](#)

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*Jamie Edwards*

Accountant III

City of St. Helens

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**From:** Becky Izbicki <izbicki.becky@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 14, 2025 11:08 AM  
**To:** Jamie Edwards <jedwards@sthelensoregon.gov>  
**Subject:** [External] Rec impact letter of support

Hi there,

I'm writing to share just how much the rec program means to my family and many others. They have become a lifeline for this community!

During COVID, when everything felt uncertain, the rec center stepped up. The activity kits kept my kids engaged and gave us something to look forward to. For my youngest son, Miles, who is autistic, the inclusive programming—like Sensory Santa—was more than special. It was the first time he was able to participate in a holiday event that didn't overwhelm him. That meant everything to us. He also built social skills through these programs in a way that felt natural and safe.

What's more, the rec center keeps in mind families like mine—they actively partnered with our county's developmental disability program to support a self-advocacy group for young children. They opened their doors to make space for kids who are often forgotten or left out.

These programs have given so many young people in our town their very first job—mentoring kids, learning responsibility, and growing their confidence. And the after-school care has been essential for families—providing structure, snacks, support, and social connection in a world that can often feel isolating.

This is the kind of programming that builds resilient, inclusive communities. It makes kids feel seen. It gives families hope. And it gives working parents peace of mind.



I truly hope there's continued funding and support for this program. Losing it would be a devastating blow to so many families—mine included.

Thank you for listening,

Becky Izbicki

May 14, 2025

Dear Members of the Budget Planning Committee and City Council:

In 2021, our family purchased our first home in St. Helens. We moved here ready to put down roots and become part of this community. The public library has always been a place of refuge and knowledge for me. Growing up in Los Angeles' inner city during a particularly violent period in its history, the library was a sanctuary where I could lose myself in storybooks and escape the world outside.

One of our first outings after moving to Oregon was a visit to the local library to create accounts for my young daughters. It was important to me that they develop a love for the written word and an appreciation for a place dedicated to helping them dream, learn, and grow.

As our town faces a budget shortfall, I understand that sacrifice and difficult choices will be required. I ask that, as these decisions are made, those who have dedicated their time to making these challenging decisions remain committed to fairness and parity. Let us ensure that the burden of cutbacks does not fall disproportionately on vital community services like the library, which some may overlook in times of financial strain.

Our library is more than books. It is a hub of information, a space for creativity, and a cornerstone of civic pride and development. We owe it to the dedicated staff, and to our future as a thriving community, to protect and support this essential resource.

Sincerely,

Fatima Salas  
Saint Helens Resident  
Saint Helens Library Board Member

Comments regarding the proposed Library budget.

Submitted by Nancy Tarnai, St. Helens Public Library Friends of the Library President

May 14, 2025

St. Helens City Budget Committee:

I read with distraught the proposed cuts to the St. Helens Public library hours and staffing. Our library is a community center where people go for essential services and its budget should be added to, not subtracted from!

As you know, it serves as a cooling center on hot summer days. It provides free access to a plethora of information. The staff is knowledgeable, friendly and helpful, and provide information without censure.

There has been a markable increase in library usage in the past year. Why would you cut this valuable service?

Having a viable public library saves the community money on resources it has access to via the library without having to purchase these books and other services.

I can't say enough good about our local library and request that you take another look at cutting any funding there.

Thank you,

Nancy Tarnai

134 N. Second St.

St. Helens

907.460.9812

**From:** [Kathy Payne](#)  
**To:** [Jana Mann](#)  
**Cc:** [Gloria Butsch](#); [Jamie Edwards](#); [Jennifer Johnson](#); [John Walsh](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Budget Comments  
**Date:** Tuesday, May 13, 2025 11:05:09 AM

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Hi Jana,

I am sharing your email with the Finance staff to share with the Budget Committee.

Thank you,  
Kathy

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**From:** Jana Mann <janamanna@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 13, 2025 11:01 AM  
**To:** Kathy Payne <kpayne@sthelensoregon.gov>  
**Subject:** [External] Budget Comments

Hi Kathy,  
Please include my email in the written comments for the budget committee. Thanks for all you do! jm

Dear Budget Committee,

My name is Jana Mann and I am writing in support of fully funding the St Helens Public Library.

It is a vital resource, accessed by a wide swath of the population. In the last year alone, library visits have increased by 30%. In April 2024, there were 2,557 visits and this April saw 3,632 visits. That's an incredible amount of traffic - probably more than most any other city department.

The proposed furloughs would be a profound disservice to the community. The furloughs would mean 15 fewer shifts per month, a reduction of open hours by two half days per week, and at least three fewer programs for youth and in the Makerspace.

Historically, when the economy slows and finances get tight, folks access the library more and more to provide what they cannot. The ripple effect of library reductions would be harmful across the spectrum.

Please reconsider the proposed reductions to the library in order to maintain this amazing resource. Our community is depending on it.

Thank you,  
Jana Mann