

QUARTERLY REPORT TO COUNCIL



Meeting Date: January 7, 2026
Prepared by: Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner
Department: Planning
Division: Community Development
Reporting Period: October to December 2025
CC: City Administrator John Walsh / Planning Commission

1. General Operations

- **October:** In early October I received a message of concern from a county citizen about a Tree of Heaven infestation on the corner of US30 and Pittsburg Road. I had not heard of this species before but researched the tree and checked the site out and determined the concern is legitimate. I let our Public Works folks know because we have recently donated property to the city in this area and Code Enforcement as noxious vegetation is a nuisance in our code.

Right: many young Trees of Heaven are visible close to Pittsburg Road by US 30. **Below:** Tree of Heaven leaves have glandular teeth at their base as shown in the photo taken in the same area as the photo to the right.



- **October:** Engineering is starting to work on street lighting standards. I will assist some; first meeting this month.
- **October:** We received a new annexation application. There are more steps in these than other land use processes. This month I created the map and legal description for Oregon DOR Preliminary review, which is my typical first step for Annexations. This one is moderately complex in this regard.
- **November:** PSU published its 2025 preliminary population estimates. Here is an excerpt showing St. Helens:

Population Estimates for Oregon Cities (Vintage 2025)							
Incorporated City/Town	Estimates Base	Revised Population Estimate	Revised Population Estimate	Revised Population Estimate	Revised Population Estimate	Revised Population Estimate	Preliminary Estimate
	April 1, 2020	July 1, 2020	July 1, 2021	July 1, 2022	July 1, 2023	July 1, 2024	July 1, 2025
Sodaville	360	365	360	360	360	360	360
Spray	139	141	141	141	141	141	141
Springfield	61,935	61,940	62,042	62,379	62,508	63,263	63,304
St. Helens	13,847	14,108	14,240	14,203	14,371	14,472	14,552

Interestingly, Springfield, a much bigger city, increased by 41 people compared to St. Helens' 80-person growth.

The certified population estimates will be posted by PSU online by the end of the day on December 15, 2025. *I did not check this for this report.*

- **November/December:** I have been a professional local government planner since 2001, working for both cities and counties. Though exceptions, typically this is a time to work on projects that we don't otherwise have time for. 2025 was about trying to keep up; the combination of being the only planner, the Arcadia Mill sale, a death in the family and everyday tasks made this year's fourth quarter extra tough.

Also, continuing legislative changes for Oregon Land Use laws, feels impossible to keep up with combined with everything else. But this is the sentiment of many Oregon land use planners.

Note that the typical land use planner per capita is 1 per 5,000 population. Currently, St. Helens has one for its almost 15K population.

- **Notable administrative Planning Department permitting:**
 - **December:** Final inspection for 325 Strand Street. Though not 100%, this one has a striking before/after comparison and thus, report-worthy.





- **Pre-application / early assistance meetings:**
 - **October:** Held a pre-app meeting for potential reuse of former Rite-Aide suite for farm-type store. Some site reconfiguring is proposed.
 - **October:** Held a pre-app meeting for potential new police station at 1771 Columbia Boulevard.
 - **October:** Prepared right-of-way vacation materials for a potential proposal at N. 14th Street and Oregon Street.
 - **November:** Early assistance meeting for potential remodel of Safeway. This is related to the reuse of former Rite-Aide suite for farm-type store, which was discussed at an October pre-application meeting.
 - **November:** Held a second pre-application meeting for the City's Millard Road property for a proposed residential subdivision. The first was in July of last year when there was a surveyor involved with a plan at the time as a high-level concept with scant inclusion of city code in the proposal. Now, about 16 months later, there is more of a development team who are working on refinements of the plan.
- **Planning Commission had their normally scheduled monthly meeting on [October 14, 2025](#).** Outcome:
 - Held a public hearing and approved a Variance for reduced yard (setback) at 34891 Roberts Lane.
 - Held a public hearing and approved a Variance for reduced yard (setback) at 130 Ivy Lane.
 - The Commission considered an Architectural Review for modifications proposed at 201 S. 1st Street and recommended approval to staff.
 - The Commission discussed its attendance policy. More discussion anticipated at future meeting(s).
 - The Commission discussed the quarterly joint City Council/Planning Commission meetings, recommending only one scheduled joint meeting in the early part of the calendar year for 2026. Other meetings could be “as needed.” This will be a conversation with the Council at some point.
 - The Commission discussed two Commissioner term expirations. Commissioner Sisco wishes to continue; the Commission approved a motion accepting this. Commissioner Shoemaker does not want to continue after 2025, so we’ll need to recruit.
 - The Commission had the opportunity to review and discuss the previous quarterly report from the Planning Dept.
- **Planning Commission cancelled their normally scheduled monthly meeting on [November 12, 2025](#).**
- **Planning Commission had their normally scheduled monthly meeting on [December 9, 2025](#).** Outcome:
 - **This was a marathon meeting lasting 5 hours!** Note that this date was within the initial hard grieve time after the death of a close family member, so was particularly challenging.
 - The Commission held a public hearing and recommended approval of an annexation between Sykes Road and Morton Lane to the City Council. The Council will see this in January.

- The Commission held a public hearing and conditionally approved a 28-lot planned development preliminary plat subdivision at the west end of Seal Road (a private road). Making Seal Road public may be a topic for the Council in early 2026.
- The Commission held a public hearing and conditionally approved the new Police Station at 1771 Columbia Boulevard.
- We scheduled Commission candidate interviews but ended up postponing them given the length of the meeting, otherwise interviews would have been close to midnight!
- **Planning Commission's normally scheduled quarterly joint meeting with the City Council and Planning Commission on December 10, 2025 was cancelled.**
- **Development Code Enforcement.**
 - **December:** Attended municipal court on December 11 and 18 for an ongoing (about a year now) issue on the 100 block of S. 15th Street.
- **Geographic Information Systems (GIS).**
 - **October:** Provided zoning data to the state (DLCD) for their statewide zoning layer. Previous (and I think the first time) was in 2023.
 - **November:** Quarterly data updates.
- **Related City Council actions / decisions (Planning Commission FYI):**
 - **December:** After discussion with the Planning Commission in October to reduce the annual quarterly joint meetings with the Council, staff discussed this with the Council. The final verdict will be to have two pre-scheduled joint meetings: one in March and the other in September.

2. Staffing & Personnel

- **October:** Attended LOC's Municipal Fundamentals training.
- **October:** Attended annual OAPA Planning Conference.
- **October:** Attended CPR/First Aid training for city employees.
- **October – December:** The Planning Commission will have a vacancy as of the end of 2025 so recruitment efforts conducted. Due to an exceedingly busy December for both the Commission and staff, the efforts will continue into January 2026.
- **November – December:** Attended virtual classes for the City of St Helens Respectful Workplace Learning Plan.
- **December:** Attended annual legal issues for planners workshop.

3. Projects & Initiatives

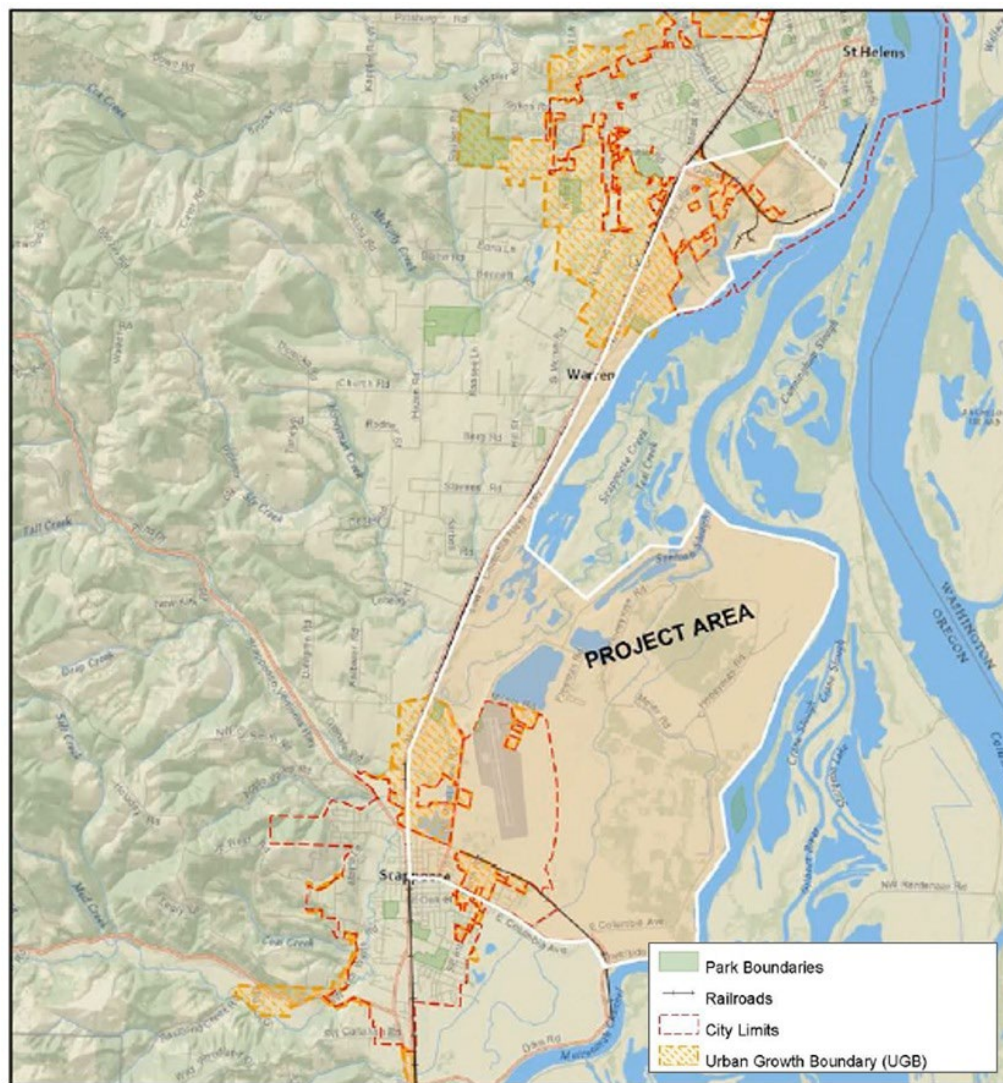
A. Ongoing Key Projects

- **Riverfront District, Mill Subdistrict** development (former veneer mill property):
November: Attended the first of a series of staff level meetings with Romano Capitol that will occur over the next several months. Preliminary market study (updated from approx. 10 years ago is promising—great potential here).

- **Parks Commission's Woodland Reserve.** Staff technical support for the SHBP Woodland Reserve concept. [No update this quarter.](#)
- **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. Consultants selected in early 2025. [Engineering with take this over but planning will continue to support the effort.](#)

[November:](#) Work order contract finally approved after a slow process with the state. ODOT in contract negotiations since March. Project duration is 1.5 years (78 weeks).

[December:](#) First team meeting occurred and monthly virtual meetings will commence in January. The map below shows the study area (outlines in white).



- **ODOT TGM Program: Transportation Systems Plan** – TBD \$\$ for new Transportation Systems plan. City Engineering is lead, with Planning providing support. [No update this quarter.](#) I can't believe how slow this is going!

- **New Water Reservoir** – City Engineering is lead, with Planning providing support. **October:** Effort to narrowing down potential sites (originally 7 sites, now 3) continues. Preparation for a November 13th public meeting discussed. Various documents reviewed related to site selection. **November:** Site selection fact gathering continues (e.g., Geotech borings, property owner outreach). Public engagement meeting occurred.
- **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** – My role is technical support to the City Administrator (acting Community Development Director) on this matter, mainly pertaining to document exhibits.

October – December: Continue to provide technical support for proper exhibits and such related to the sale of the mill to Arcadia. There have been revisions to the document exhibits, some from the surveyor team because they found their errors. So, tracking this has been a bear. In fact, reviewing the draft final documents from our legal team in early December, all of the legal descriptions were outdated versions! Pays to be organized.

The Arcadia transaction effort involved much more of my time in this quarter than anticipated.

- **SHIBP PGE Parcel** – Continue working with consultants on proposal for professional services for some design and survey work to carve off the mill for project Arcadia and to create a new PGE Parcel for a new sub-station. Next step is still a final agreement between the city and PGE. This was the next step last quarter too, and still in process.

November: City met with PGE to work out final details of a draft site readiness statement of work (SOW). Some added clarification language about permitting and an exhibit identifying the area needed for transmission line feasibility analysis should be all that is left for the SOW. However, the transmission line feasibility will result in a broader scope of work and will need to be updated.

December: Working with PGE and the city's consultant team for the broader scope of work for transmission line routing. The final agreement effort will continue into 2026.

- **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. Staff will probably need to look at grant opportunities around June 2026 for this to keep on schedule. **No update this quarter.**

- **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.](#)

B. Upcoming Projects

- Nothing new, not otherwise mentioned above.

4. Upcoming Events & Important Dates

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

Attachments

- Annual land use permit summary is [attached](#).
- Below is the department's strategic plan, updated based on the department being solo for now:

PLANNING DEPT STRATEGIC PLAN --- SHORT (green) --- MEDIUM (yellow) --- LONG (pink) UPDATED: 12292025	
GOAL AREA (BASED ON '22-'24 PLAN)	PROJECT TITLE
	CURRENT PLANNING - Includes permits, authorizations, annexations, etc.
	CUSTOMER SERVICE - Time is money for applicants! Also, internal customer service with other departments.
Goal 3 - Livable & Safe Community	ArcGIS Desktop to ArcGIS Pro transition (Support for Desktop ends in early 2026)
Goal 5 - Long Term Planning	Development Code Amendments related to Sanitary, Storm and Water Master Plans
Goal 4 - Economic Development	ODOT Community Paths Grant (in process)
Goal 4 - Economic Development	St. Helens Industrial Business Park Planning (PGE and Project Arcadia efforts)
	Riverfront Redevelopment Efforts (Discussions underway with potential developer)
	Managers Attend Professional Development Opportunities
Goal 5 - Long Term Planning	New Transportation Systems Plan
Goal 4 - Economic Development	Food cart/truck/trailers rules (>10 years over due now)
Goal 3 - Livable & Safe Community	Flood code amendments related to BIOP (Endangered Species Act)
Goal 4 - Economic Development	Economic Opportunities Analysis (EOA) Post Adoption Tasks (adopted in 2025)
Goal 1 - Effective & Efficient Organization	Planning related FAQ pamphlets/videos
	CLG Grant (New cycle begins December 2025 with applications due ~Feb 2026) - \$16K for 2026 cycle.
Goal 3 - Livable & Safe Community	Right-of-way street vacation policy
Goal 3 - Livable & Safe Community	Housing Production Strategy (related to HNA but not a land use action)
Goal 5 - Long Term Planning	Housing Needs Analysis Update per 2019 HB 2003
Goal 5 - Long Term Planning	Revisit UGMA with County
Goal 5 - Long Term Planning	Parks & Recreation Master Planning
Goal 1 - Effective & Efficient Organization	Update city Charter for no-vote annexations
Goal 3 - Livable & Safe Community	Addressing policy update (Last city-specific address policy is from 1929, yes nineteen hundred and twenty nine)
Goal 4 - Economic Development	Develop incentives for designation as a local historic landmark
Goal 5 - Long Term Planning	Historic resources inventorying

Comparison of Land Use Actions by Year

Planning Commission Public Hearings & Planning Administrator Decisions

Land Use Action	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Accessory Structure	6	8	7	8	3	4	2	1	2	2
Annexation (Processed)	1	2	2	2	0	11	0	3	3	5
Annexation (Submitted, Not Processed)	1	0	1	3	3	1	2	2	2	0
Appeals	1	1	1	0	10	1	1	2	1	3
Architectural Character Review	0	0	1	1	1	0	4	7	4	3
Map/Text Amendment	4	2	2	5	1	1	0	2	2	1
Auxiliary Dwelling Unit	0	0	0	1	3	0	-	-	-	-
Conditional Use Permit	7	6	5	3	5	2	2	5	2	2
Conditional Use Permits (Minor Modification)	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	2	0
Development Agreement	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Expedited Land Division	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Extension of Time	1	1	4	5	5	0	4	3	6	3
Historic Resource Review	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	1	3	0
Home Occupations ₁	4	1	3	4	3	2	2	2	1	1
Lot Line Adjustment	3	3	3	11	2	3	3	2	4	1
Non-Conforming Use Determination or Unlisted Use	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Partition	2	2	6	2	5	2	4	3	3	1
Planned Development	0	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
Revocation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sensitive Lands Permit	4	3	5	0	1	1	9	6	3	4
Sign Permit ₂	24	22	13	15	5	13	10	17	13	19
Sign Permit (Temporary)	-	12	10	10	4	3	5	6	8	11
Sign Exception/Variance	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Site Development Review	4	7	6	7	7	6	11	3	7	6
Site Development Review (Minor)	6	8	10	7	4	6	8	5	8	6
Site Development Review (Scenic Resource)	4	0	1	0	2	0	5	0	1	0
Street Vacations	0	2	0	1	2	0	3	1	0	0
Subdivisions	1	3	2	0	1	1	2	0	0	2
Subdivision Final Plat Approval	0	0	3	1	2	0	1	0	0	0
Variances	9	7	6	16	18	4	7	5	13	5
Temporary Use Permits	2	5	13	12	9	8	4	7	8	5
Tree Removal Permit	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other Public Hearing Subjects (i.e. Periodic Review)	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Columbia County Referrals	0	9	6	2	1	3	4	1	3	0
Total Land Use Actions	86	106	113	117	102	73	99	84	100	80

1 - This includes Home Occupation (Type II) prior to 2019 & Home Occupation (Type I) removed in 18/19

2 - Temporary Sign Permits were included in Sign permits prior to 2017