



CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT

MEMORANDUM

TO: Planning Commission
FROM: Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner
RE: Absenteeism discussion
DATE: September 29, 2025

We started this discussion at the July 2025 meeting and since then, Commissioner Rosengard has drafted some ideas to discuss and we punted the topic to get past summer (ironically, so we can discuss with hopefully full or fuller attendance).

Key provisions that address Planning Commission absenteeism include:

- SHMC 2.08.040:

Appointments to fill vacancies shall be for the remainder of the unexpired term. A member may be removed by the city council after a hearing for **misconduct** or **nonperformance of duty**. A member who is absent from three consecutive meetings without an excuse as approved by the planning commission is rebuttably presumed to be in **nonperformance of duty**, and the city council shall declare the position vacant unless finding otherwise following the hearing.

Misconduct is not defined. Per <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/misconduct> misconduct means:

1. mismanagement especially of governmental or military responsibilities
2. intentional wrongdoing
3. improper behavior
4. a penalty (as in ice hockey) for improper behavior or abusive language (as toward an official)

Commissioner Rosengard's draft code (**attached**) intends to replace the SHMC 2.08.040 provision, that is shown above in **arial font**. So, compare the draft code with the code above as an aid.

Also **attached** is a table of when Commissioners were absent between September 2024 to September 2025.

We also need to discuss what meetings count for attendance. Should it be just the normal monthly meetings that have been occurring for decades or also include the joint meetings with the City Council? The first joint meeting was in December 2022, and thus more recent thing. To date, staff have not tracked joint meeting attendance, whereas normal meeting attendance is tracked.

Moreover, should ad-hoc meetings count?

- The Planning Commission is supposed to meet monthly per SHMC 2.08.070(1).
- The Planning Commission serves as the Historic Landmarks Commission, who are required to meet at least twice a year per SHMC 17.36.020(5).
- And somewhat related, Resolution No. 1648, Committee/Commission Guidelines (**attached**).

Amend SHMC § 2.08.040 as follows (existing text that remains in place is black; existing text that has been moved in blue; new text and deletions in red):

(1) Definitions

(a) 'Absent without notice' means failing to attend a regularly scheduled planning commission meeting without providing City staff with 48 hours notice.

Commented [DR1]: Using 'notice' rather than 'excuse' clearly side steps the need for someone to weigh in on whether a reason for absence is or is not a valid excuse.

(2) Removal of Planning Commissioner

(a) A planning commissioner may be removed from their position by the city council if after at a hearing the city council determines that the commissioner has engaged in misconduct or nonperformance of duty.

If we prefer to use 'excuse', then I suggest some combination of:
(1) Planning Commission determining whether a given excuse is valid;
(2) Writing in some guidance re: what sort of reasons are valid excuses.

(b) A planning commissioner being absent without notice three times within their term shall give rise to a rebuttable presumption that the commissioner has engaged in nonperformance of duty.

Commented [DR2]: Preserves existing ability of City Council to remove Commissioners.
(Providing an exclusive definition of either 'misconduct' or 'nonperformance of duty' would have the impact of narrowing City Council removal powers).

(c) The planning commission may request that the city council consider holding a hearing regarding commissioner misconduct or nonperformance of duty by resolving as much as a body on two consecutive regular meetings.

Commented [DR3]: Presumption being rebuttable is from the current version. Personally, I would read the presumption as rebuttable unless it specifically says otherwise (else, what point in having a hearing?), but I reckon little harm in redundancy...

(d) If a planning commissioner is removed from their position, the position shall become vacant immediately.

Commented [DR4]: This whole subsection is responsive to the sense expressed at our most recent planning commission meeting that the commission itself wanted more enforcement mechanisms.

(3) Filling Planning Commission Vacancies

(a) Appointments to fill vacancies shall be for the remainder of the unexpired term. A member may be removed by the city council after a hearing for misconduct or nonperformance of duty. A member who is absent from three consecutive meetings without an excuse as approved by the planning commission is rebuttably presumed to be in nonperformance of duty, and the city council shall declare the position vacant unless finding otherwise following the hearing.

My suspicion is that enforcement authority ultimately lives with city council – but this would make it explicit that the planning commission can request city counsel to consider using that authority.

I simply put the two-consecutive-meeting requirement in an effort to make it more likely that the subject of any enforcement request would be present for at least one meeting and able to offer their perspective.... Some other option could, of course, be used instead (e.g. written notice to the person up for referral to city council, etc)

Commented [DR5]: More precise than existing version.

St. Helens Planning Commissioner Absenteeism September 2024 – September 2025

This table identifies dates Commissioners where absent in this time period with totals.

Rosengard	Kingsbury	Jacobson	Shoemaker	Herman	Castner	Sisco
Mar-24	July-25	May-25	Sept-24	May-25	Sept-24	June-24
Sept-24	Aug-25	Total=1	Sept-25	Total=1	Oct-24	Oct-24
Aprl-25	Total=2		Total=2		Nov-24	Aug-24
May-25					Sept-25	Total=3
Aug-25					Total=4	
Total=5						

City of St. Helens
RESOLUTION NO. 1648

**A RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES FOR THE APPOINTMENT
OF ST. HELENS BOARD, COMMITTEE AND COMMISSION MEMBERS,
SUPERSEDING RESOLUTION NO. 1521**

WHERAS, the City Council wished to establish the same guidelines for recruitment, interviews and appointments for all City boards, committees and commissions, and adopted Resolution No. 1521 on August 12, 2009; and

WHEREAS, Resolution No. 1521 established general recruitment, selection and appointment guidelines for appointments to the City of St. Helens boards, committees and commissions; and

WHEREAS, the Council wishes to update the guidelines adopted in Resolution No. 1521 to better meet the needs of the City.

**NOW, THEREFORE, THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ST. HELENS
RESOLVES AS FOLLOWS:**

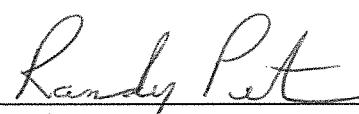
1. The City Recorder shall send a press release to the local newspaper of record announcing all board, committee and commission vacancies as they become available. A "vacancy" is defined as an unoccupied position, resulting from a voluntary resignation or involuntary termination. A member whose term expired does not create a vacancy, unless that member is resigning at the end of his/her term or the majority of the board, committee or commission wishes to terminate said member.
2. Any individual or group is encouraged to submit names for consideration to the City.
3. All new applicants shall submit a written application to the City Recorder's Office.
4. Members wishing to continue their appointment for another term will inform the City Recorder but need not submit a new application. If a member has served two consecutive full terms, a press release shall be sent to the local newspaper of record, each subsequent term expiration thereafter, to solicit new applications for that position. The incumbent may be reappointed at the discretion of the interview panel and City board, committee or commission. If an individual has been off a City board, committee or commission for a year or more, they must complete a new application.
5. The recruitment period to the board, committee or commission shall be for a finite period. At the end of the advertising period, the Council liaison shall determine if the pool of candidates is sufficient to continue with the selection process or may continue the recruitment period for a set or unlimited period until it is determined there is a sufficient pool of candidates.
6. The Council liaison to the board, committee or commission shall be responsible to assemble an interview committee. The interview committee shall be responsible to make recommendations via the Council liaison to the Mayor and City Council.
7. Appointments must comply with any ordinances, bylaws, Charter provisions, or state or federal laws concerning the board, committee or commission. In the event of any inconsistency between these policies and a chapter relating to a specific board, committee or commission, the specific chapter shall control.

8. In order to become more familiar with each applicant's qualifications, the interview committee may interview all or a shortlist of applicants for a position. The number of applicants to be interviewed is at the interview committee's discretion. The interview committee also has the discretion to reject all applications in favor of re-advertising if no applicants are found to be suitable for the board, committee or commission.
9. Reappointments to a City board, committee or commission shall be considered in accordance with the guidelines listed in this section, together with the type of service the individual has already given to the board, committee or commission and his/her stated willingness to continue.
10. Consideration should be given to residents outside the City when the board, committee or commission or function serves residents outside City boundaries.
11. Board, committee or commission members shall not participate in any proceeding or action in which there may be a direct or substantial financial interest to the member, the member's relative or a business with which the member or a relative is associated, including any business in which the member is serving on their board or has served within the previous two years; or any business with which the member is negotiating for or has an arrangement or understanding concerning prospective partnership or employment. Any actual or potential conflict of interest shall be disclosed at the meeting where the action is being taken.
12. Board, committee or commission vacancies are filled by appointment of the Mayor with the consent of Council. Board, committee or commission members shall serve without compensation except the Planning Commission that may receive a monthly stipend at the discretion of the City Council.
13. Individuals appointed to one City board, committee or commission shall not serve on any other City board, committee or commission during the term of their appointment; provided, that the Council may waive this limitation if it is in the public interest to do so.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the City Council on this 18th day of December, 2013, by the following vote:

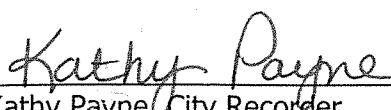
Ayes: Locke, Carlson, Conn, Morten, Peterson

Nays: None



Randy Peterson, Mayor

ATTEST:



Kathy Payne, City Recorder