

DATE: December 2, 2024
TO: St. Helens Planning Commission and City Council
CC: Jenny Dimsho and Jacob Graichen, City of St. Helens
FROM: Beth Goodman and Nicole Underwood, ECONorthwest
SUBJECT: St. Helens EOA: Economic Development Goals, Policies, and Actions -
DRAFT

The City of St. Helens is developing an Economic Opportunities Analysis (EOA), which evaluates whether the current supply of employment land will be sufficient for projected growth. The project will also establish updated economic development goals and policies to support business growth over the next 20 years. Additionally, it includes drafting an action plan to guide the implementation of these revised policies.

Purpose

This memorandum identifies goals, policies, and actions for economic development that prioritize business growth, job creation, and economic diversification. The goals and policies will be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan, while the specific actions will serve as an action plan to guide the City's implementation efforts. A Technical Advisory Committee, consisting of city leaders, economic development professionals, representatives from the port, business owners, and commercial property owners, supported the development of these actions and policies.

Request for Planning Commission and City Council Feedback

We are seeking input on the goals, policies, and actions to ensure they align with the community's economic development needs. As you review this document, please consider the following questions which we will discuss at the meeting.

- ◆ Goals and Policies:
 - Do the proposed goals and policies address the key economic challenges and opportunities in St. Helens?
 - Are there additional goals or policy areas we should consider?
- ◆ Actions:
 - Are the proposed actions effective for achieving the stated goals?
 - Is there detail or information that we're missing in the actions?
 - Are there other actions that should be prioritized to support economic growth?
 - Are there barriers to implementation of the goals and policies or critical partnerships that should be factored into the action plan that are not included in this draft?

Draft Economic Development Goals, Policies and Actions

GOAL A: ENCOURAGE THE GROWTH OF A HEALTHY, STABLE, AND DIVERSIFIED ECONOMIC BASE FOR COMMERCIAL AND INDUSTRIAL BUSINESSES

Policies

- ◆ Support the growth, development, and retention of a diverse mix of industries that complement existing strengths and assets in the community, reducing reliance on any single sector.
- ◆ Attract businesses offering jobs that pay higher than Columbia County's average wage, to provide opportunities for people to live and work in St. Helens, focusing on industries such as manufacturing and healthcare.
- ◆ Coordinate economic development efforts with other jurisdictions and agencies such as the St. Helens Main Street Alliance, Columbia Economic Team, Small Business Development Center, and Port of Columbia County to identify and support the expansion of existing industries and attraction of new industries to the community.
- ◆ Foster entrepreneurship, new business creation, and expansion of existing businesses through strengthened partnerships and coordinated economic development efforts.
- ◆ Enhance the diversity of goods and services available to residents by attracting and supporting a wide range of enterprises, including but not limited to remote workers.
- ◆ Prioritize the attraction and growth of businesses that use less energy, focusing on sectors that promote energy efficiency and sustainability.
- ◆ Ensure adequate economic development staffing to implement economic development policy.
- ◆ Ensure adequate development review staffing such as those in Planning, Building and Engineering divisions to maximize responsiveness and optimum customer service for development proposals.

Actions

- ◆ Hire a community development specialist to improve coordination with organizations and businesses to make St. Helens a more business-friendly city. This role would supplement current staff by handling tasks they lack the time or expertise to advance. The specialist would collaborate with organizations like the Columbia Economic Team, Small Business Development Center, and Growing Rural Oregon (GRO) Greater, serving as a liaison between City staff, these organizations, and businesses. The focus of this position will be on enhancing coordination with existing



economic development efforts, not replacing them. Key responsibilities would include streamlining city functions, simplifying the development and permitting process, helping businesses understand the development and permitting process, and assessing why businesses fail. The City may be able to use Urban Renewal funds to partially fund this position as long as the position supports implementation of Urban Renewal priorities. Given budget constraints, it is possible this would be a component of a new position, rather than a specialist employee that only focuses on this issue.

- ◆ Ensure that any employee/staffing study for the city includes economic development staffing considerations and adequate staffing for the Planning, Building and Engineering divisions.
- ◆ Develop programs to attract businesses in identified target industries, considering tax incentives, land use controls, and capital improvement programming. Consider targeting incentives in Urban Renewal Areas.
- ◆ Create a "How to Do Business in St. Helens" packet, outlining general timelines and expectations. Coordinate with the Small Business Development Center to include relevant resources.
- ◆ Streamline development processes for commercial and industrial lands.
- ◆ Develop a checklist outlining the steps a developer must follow to navigate the development process.
- ◆ Increase communication with and support for businesses, such as by proactively communicating about construction impacts such as road closures and help with navigating the development and permitting process.

GOAL B: ENSURE THAT ST. HELENS HAS SUFFICIENT LAND AND INFRASTRUCTURE CAPACITY TO SUPPORT A DIVERSE RANGE OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Policies

- ◆ Ensure that St. Helens has enough land zoned to provide industrial and commercial opportunities, periodically monitoring land development and updating the land use map to ensure that there is enough land in each designation to accommodate expected growth. Encourage land uses that are compatible with existing and planned transportation infrastructure, ensuring compatibility with residential uses.
- ◆ Coordinate capital improvement planning with economic development planning to ensure infrastructure availability to employment lands.
- ◆ Partner with providers of infrastructure not provided by the City, such as electricity, natural gas, and high-speed internet, to ensure service is available when needed.



- ◆ Collaborate with the Port of Columbia County to prioritize strategic infrastructure development that activates Port-owned properties in St. Helens
- ◆ Support the cleanup and remediation of key distressed properties and brownfields in St. Helens.

Actions

- ◆ Partner with Columbia River People’s Utility District (CRPUD) to increase access to electrical power throughout the City.
- ◆ Partner with Portland General Electric, which supplies power exclusively to a majority of the St. Helens Industrial Business Park.
- ◆ Continue to work with state partners and electrical companies to increase access to electrical power to St. Helens and other communities in the state.
- ◆ Continue to support regional and local internet feasibility studies and future implementation of regional high-speed internet.
- ◆ Monitor development in commercial and industrial areas. As development or rezoning occurs, evaluate whether the city continues to have enough commercial and industrial land as defined in the most recent adopted Economic Opportunity Analysis to support employment growth.
- ◆ Coordinate capital improvement planning with the City’s Public Works Department to ensure infrastructure availability on employment land and continue to pursue funding for needed infrastructure to support economic development activities.
- ◆ Conduct a code audit to ensure that zoning regulations are aligned with the City’s goals and policies. As a part of the code audit, conduct a review of the Light Industrial zone to determine whether and what types of commercial uses could be appropriately accommodated. This review should assess compatible commercial uses, their potential impacts on industrial activities, and their consistency with the City’s objectives. Consider tools such as overlay zones, adjustments to permitted uses, or other mechanisms to support targeted commercial activity while maintaining the primary function of industrial land.

GOAL C: RETAIN AND ATTRACT INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT THAT DIVERSIFIES ST. HELENS’ ECONOMIC BASE, SUPPORTS HIGHER-THAN-COUNTY-AVERAGE-WAGE JOB CREATION AND PROVIDES A BALANCED TAX BASE

Policies

- ◆ Encourage the redevelopment and repurposing of former industrial sites.
- ◆ Discourage the leapfrog development of industrial lands, unless there is a program to provide sewer and water to intervening properties.



- ◆ Preserve prime industrial land while considering opportunities for rezoning non-prime industrial areas along key commercial corridors.
- ◆ Work with applicable agencies at the state and federal levels in enacting controls and performance standards for industrial operators to reduce the possibility of adverse impacts on the environment.

Actions

- ◆ Define “prime industrial lands,”¹ identify those lands in St. Helens, and preserve them for industrial uses.
- ◆ Conduct a market study to identify key opportunities to rezone non-prime heavy or light industrial land to commercial land to ensure that St. Helens has enough commercial land to support growth.
- ◆ Determine if there is need to rezone heavy industrial land to light industrial to provide more flexibility for future uses.
- ◆ Prepare the St. Helens Industrial Business Park site for redevelopment, including acquiring funding for necessary infrastructure improvements.
- ◆ Work with the Port of Columbia County, Columbia Economic Team, and other partners to coordinate regional efforts around recruitment and strategies surrounding economic incentives.
- ◆ Work with the Port of Columbia County, Columbia Economic Team, and other partners to promote St. Helens as a prime business location. Highlight key advantages, such as access to ample water supply, strong public safety supported by a local police force, and other benefits.
- ◆ Partner with Oregon Manufacturing Innovation Center (OMIC) and OMIC R&D in Scappoose for potential industrial businesses that may locate in St. Helens, and workforce training opportunities.

GOAL D: FOSTER SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Policies

- ◆ Support the retention, growth and expansion of local small businesses.
- ◆ Encourage entrepreneurship and innovation in the community.

Actions

¹ OAR 660-009 defines prime industrial land as: “... land suited for traded-sector industries as well as other industrial uses providing support to traded-sector industries. Prime industrial lands possess site characteristics that are difficult or impossible to replicate in the planning area or region. Prime industrial lands have necessary access to transportation and freight infrastructure, including, but not limited to, rail, marine ports and airports, multimodal freight or transshipment facilities, and major transportation routes.”



- ◆ Partner with organizations like Growing Rural Oregon (GRO) Greater, Main Street Alliance, the South Columbia County Chamber of Commerce, Columbia Economic Team, and the Small Business Development Center to provide resources and support for local entrepreneurs.
- ◆ Work with partners to support the creation of a business incubator or co-working space to support start-ups and small businesses.
- ◆ As staff capacity allows, develop a work plan for business outreach to understand unmet workforce needs and identify opportunities for workforce development to meet those needs. The outreach plan should focus either on a location for outreach each year (e.g., downtown) or should be sector focused (e.g., manufacturing or downtown commercial). Set a goal of number of businesses to reach out to each year and topics to discuss.
- ◆ Develop a strategy and materials about the ways that the City can help businesses, focusing on the value the City can provide to support businesses in St. Helens. These materials could be used on the City’s webpage and in presentations to businesses about economic development.
- ◆ Explore opportunities with partner organizations to incentivize property owners to invest in their properties and encourage them to lease them.
- ◆ Continue to coordinate and partner with organizations that provide workforce development.

GOAL E: FOSTER VIBRANT COMMERCIAL ZONES WITH A MIX OF RETAIL AND SERVICE OPTIONS THAT SERVE THE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS AND ENHANCE DESTINATION APPEAL

Policies

- ◆ Make commercial designation large enough to accommodate a large variety of commercial development with sufficient buffers. Encourage a variety of retail shopping activities to concentrate in core commercial areas to enhance their attractiveness for a broad range of shoppers.
- ◆ Encourage in-filling of vacant lands within commercial areas.
- ◆ Prioritize the development of the Riverfront District as a key commercial and tourism hub.
- ◆ Support the revitalization of the Houlton Business District.
- ◆ Improve connections and encourage development to better connect the Riverfront and Houlton Business Districts.



- ◆ Enhance the aesthetic appeal, functionality, and economic vitality of key commercial corridors and districts through strategic public infrastructure investments and design standards.
- ◆ Support retail businesses that encourage foot traffic in the Riverfront District.

Actions

- ◆ Continue to implement the US 30 and Columbia Boulevard/St. Helens Street Corridor Master Plan and Riverfront Connector Plan to enhance and better connect the Riverfront and Houlton Business Districts through improved transportation links and wayfinding.
- ◆ Work with mapping services (e.g., Google Maps) to ensure proper routing through the Houlton Business District rather than the industrial area.
- ◆ Develop and implement public facility designs and development standards to revitalize businesses and business districts in the US 30 and Columbia Boulevard/St. Helens Street Corridor Master Plan area.
- ◆ Create gateways and improve access and wayfinding signage to the Houlton Business and Riverfront Districts.
- ◆ Improve the appearance, attractiveness, and safety of the Houlton Business District and Riverfront District through an enhanced street design that includes street trees, landscaping, and more public spaces and pedestrian amenities. Explore opportunities for rezoning industrial land along key corridors where some conversions have already occurred, while preserving prime industrial land.
- ◆ Consider long-term rezoning options for the oversized wastewater treatment plant area to expand the Riverfront District. This is based on potential reduction of the wastewater lagoon size of relocation of the plant.
- ◆ As funding or resources are available, develop a parking management strategy for the Riverfront District using assistance from the Transportation Growth Management Program (a Joint Program of DLCD and ODOT).

GOAL F: ENHANCE TOURISM AS A KEY ECONOMIC DRIVER

Policies

- ◆ Promote year-round tourism opportunities to extend beyond the popular Halloween season, through partnerships, development of infrastructure, and leveraging assets.
- ◆ Ensure Transient Lodging Tax spending aligns with the City's broader economic development and tourism goals.
- ◆ Integrate recreational opportunities into the Riverfront District, creating public spaces that promote access to and enjoyment of the Columbia River.

Actions



- ◆ Develop a plan for the allocation of Transient Lodging Tax (TLT) revenues, prioritizing initiatives that drive year-round tourism.
- ◆ Explore opportunities to leverage TLT funds to attract matching grants or private investment in tourism-related infrastructure and marketing efforts.
- ◆ Work with tourism consultant to develop a comprehensive tourism strategy that includes events and attractions for all seasons (beyond Halloweentown), supported by a marketing campaign to promote St. Helens as a year-round destination.
- ◆ Partner with developer of a boutique hotel on City owned riverfront site.
- ◆ Explore the potential for St. Helens to become a destination for small ships such as local dinner cruises.
- ◆ Expand spring and summer tourism opportunities through initiatives such as:
 - Creating a farmers' market
 - Growing the summer concert series
 - Developing water taxi service
- ◆ Investigate opportunities to grow sports fishing and windsurfing activities, including the development of necessary onshore and in-water amenities.
- ◆ Continue partnering with and supporting the St. Helens Marina in managing Sand Island.
- ◆ Support business uses in the Riverfront District that enhance recreational uses on the water.
- ◆ Support development of trails and other recreational opportunities in St. Helens.
- ◆ Partner with the Columbia Economic Team (as the Destination Management Organization) to tap into tourism funding from agencies like Travel Oregon
- ◆ Partner and coordinate with organizations such as Columbia Economic Team, the Main Street Alliance, and the Columbia County Museum Association to develop a Heritage Tourism strategy.

