

CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT ACTIVITY REPORT



To: City Council
From: Jacob A. Graichen, AICP, City Planner
cc: Planning Commission

Date: December 30, 2024

This report does not indicate all *current planning* activities over the past report period. These are tasks, processing and administration of the Development Code which are a weekly if not daily responsibility. The Planning Commission agenda, available on the City's website, is a good indicator of *current planning* activities. The number of building permits issued is another good indicator as many require Development Code review prior to Building Official review.

ASSOCIATE PLANNER/PROJECT MANAGER—*In addition to routine tasks, the Associate Planner/Community Development Project Manager has been working on: See attached.*

PLANNING ADMINISTRATION—PREAPPLICATIONS MEETINGS

Had a preliminary Q&A meeting for a food cart pod at the running dogs brewery brewing facility sort of by the St. Helens Street/US30 intersection. The brew facility was partially constructed and done so contrary to approved plans, so there are challenges.

PLANNING ADMINISTRATION—MISC.

We got a recent population estimate from PSU, as we usually do in November, but the numbers look off. The preliminary estimate (for 2024) document v. the 2023 preliminary estimate document.

	2024 Estimate Document	2023 Estimate Document
Total population → 2024	14,492	n/a
2023	14,383	15,009
2022	14,223	14,506
2021	14,238	14,492
2020	14,067	14,413

Sent message to PSU to understand the issue on November 26, 2024. They responded on Dec 2nd: *“Thanks for reaching out to us. With each new release of the annual estimates, the entire time series is revised for all years back to the beginning of the decade (for the state, all counties, and all cities) to reflect the increased data availability, specifically for the COVID-19 period. These revisions increase the accuracy of net changes since the census benchmark (2020 Census).”* So, we are not at 15K population yet, after all.

Spent some of Thanksgiving eve catching up on Oregon Senate Bill 1537 which takes effect 2025 to 2032. Based on this, I will present a fee schedule change for Planning fee's early next year to add an “administrative variance” type category.

Attended meetings, prepared for, and participated in depositions related to a legal matter the city is dealing with. My first disposition.

Attended December 18, 2024 City Council work session for the Parks/Trails Commission presentation regarding the “woodland reserve” concept for certain land along Milton Creek on both city and port property.

Planning staff have started working on the adoption materials and process for the Economic Opportunities Analysis effort. Public hearings are anticipated in March and April.

Conducted the last final inspection for the Fast Lube & Oil business by the new Burger Kind on the north side of town. The site was mostly finished, but there was a walkway issue to be resolved.

We have several annexations eligible for processing in 2025. These will likely be delayed due to the vacant Community Development Administration Assistant position. But drafted a legal description for one, which I knew would take a little more time and so used the holiday “slow” season to get ahead on this.

PLANNING COMMISSION (& *acting* HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION)

December 10, 2024 meeting (outcome): The Commission held three public hearings and (1) approved a CCMH campus expansion, (2) denied a nonconforming use triplex rebuild, and (3) approved a pair of Variances related to some residential development along N. 6th Street just off Columbia Boulevard.

The Commission also conducted candidate interviews with success in finding a new member.

As the Historic Landmarks Commission, they reviewed some details and potential options for the County Courthouse clock tower restoration effort, which they previously reviewed.

We had the department’s semi-annual report on the agenda too, but the meeting was long enough nobody was interested in hearing it—electing to watch the previous presentation before the Council.

January 14, 2024 meeting (upcoming): This meeting has been cancelled at the request of staff. Staff proposed this because there are no public hearings and to buy some time as the city looks to replace the Community Development Administration Assistant, whose last day was the December Planning Commission meeting.

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS)

Because the GIS software we use daily ArcGIS/ArcMap is being retired in 2026, I installed the new version, ArcGIS pro the Friday after Christmas, to hopefully increase familiarity of this new software over time in 2025. Luckily, IT staff was in (though they didn’t intend to be) to get installation authorization. My plan was to do this before Christmas; I’m thankful to get this installed before New Year’s Day.

COUNCIL ACTIONS RELATED TO LAND USE

Council approved 2nd batch of 2024 Development Code amendments and the final reading for the first batch's ordinance was passed. So, though it took longer than anticipated, this effort will not encumber 2025 much.

At the December 18, 2024 regular session, the council acknowledged the Parks/Trails Commission's "woodland reserve" concept and directed staff to help. The next focus for the Council will probably be the exact boundaries of the woodland reserve area.

From: [Jennifer Dimsho](#)
To: [Jacob Graichen](#)
Subject: December Planning Department Report
Date: Friday, January 3, 2025 11:38:48 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Here are my additions to the December Planning Department Report.

GRANTS

1. **Riverwalk Project (OPRD Grants x2)** – Shoreline bank revetment is complete, along with all retaining walls. Cantilever has been poured with masonry work beginning. Concrete pours will continue to occur weather permitting. Construction timeline looks on track for an early completion. Contract is approximately 65% expended. Submitted & received our first LWCF grant disbursement of approximately 750k and our first and final LGGP reimbursement request for 338.5k. Coordinated with Communications on E-newsletter content and timing of drone footage. Reviewing/tracking submittals and RFIs. Attending bi-weekly check-ins with contractor and design team.
2. **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG): Sanitary Sewer Improvement Project** – \$2.5 million grant award to fund design/engineering/permitting for 3 sanitary sewer basins identified as deficient in the adopted Wastewater Master Plan. Received our 60% design package. Prepared for and submitted our 3rd disbursement request in December for work through November. At approximately 54% expended.
3. **DLCD Technical Assistance Program** – 60k will fund a new Economic Opportunities Analysis (EOA). Attended for an held last Joint PC/CC Meeting of 2024 where the final EOA draft and goals & policies were reviewed. Preparing staff report for 2025 adoption public hearings for DLCD in February, March PC, and April CC.
4. **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. Prepared for consultant selection. RFP closes on 1/9 for consultants to submit proposals.
5. **2024 Travel Oregon Grant Program: Riverwalk Project** - 100k grant for Riverwalk Project. Anticipated to receive remaining 50k when project is complete by April 2025.
6. **ODOT TGM Program: Transportation Systems Plan** – Consultant selection is likely for late February or early March.
7. **2025 Travel Oregon Grant Program** - Letter of Interest available online December 2 with a deadline for January 15. Preparing a letter of interest for County Courthouse plaza accessibility improvements. Final grant applications due end of February 27, 2025.

PROJECTS & MISC

8. **Business Oregon – Infrastructure Finance Authority** – Low-interest loan for Streets & Utilities Project and Riverwalk improvements. Loan amendment coordinated and approved by Council on 11/20. Submitted Disbursement Request #4 which put us at about 85% complete with expenditures on the loan. Preparing for Disbursement Request #5.

Attending regular check-ins. Reviewed regular Waterfront E-newsletter content regarding construction updates, closures, progress, etc. Follow the [City's Waterfront E-newsletter](#) for timely updates.

9. **OAPA Legal Issues Workshop 2024** – Attended a legal issues workshop to keep up-to-date on recent LUBA cases and upcoming state legislation held in Portland, OR.
10. **CIS Trainings** – Attended a workplace culture of civility and respect training, a stress management training, and a mandatory cyber security class.
11. **Community Development Administrative Assistant** – With Christina's last day on December 10, I have been covering all of the Planning Department secretarial duties which includes file creation, notice mailings, planning commission packets/minutes, 2024 annual reporting, and creating all new 2025 planning file tracking systems. The deadline for applications for her position is 1/24/25.

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