

**CITY OF ST. HELENS PLANNING DEPARTMENT
STAFF REPORT
CP.1.24**

DATE: April 9, 2025
TO: City Council
FROM: Jennifer Dimsho, AICP, Associate Planner
Jacob Graichen, AICP, City Planner

APPLICANT: City of St. Helens
OWNER: City-wide

ZONING: City-wide
LOCATION: City-wide
PROPOSAL: Amend the Comprehensive Plan to include the St. Helens Economic Opportunities Analysis and related economic goals and policies revisions, and amend the Comprehensive Plan to include the St. Helens Wastewater Master Plan, St. Helens Water Master Plan, and St. Helens Stormwater Master Plan

SITE INFORMATION / BACKGROUND

The Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) awarded the city a 2023-2025 technical assistance grant to update the City's outdated Economic Opportunities Analysis (EOA) which was created in 2008 and adopted in 2009 with Ordinance No. 3101. The baseline economic conditions and demographic forecasting in the 2009 EOA were outdated with the development of employment lands, re-zoning of employment lands, the adoption of multiple long-range planning documents which inform economic development related policies, and population growth. Adoption of this new EOA and related comprehensive plan economic goals and policies will assist staff and policy makers in making informed economic policy-related decisions in the future.

The city began the process of updating utility master plans in 2020. This included a Wastewater Master Plan, adopted in 2021 by Resolution No. 1940, a Stormwater Master Plan, adopted in November 2021 by Resolution No. 1939 and a Water Master Plan/Water Management and Conservation Plan, adopted in May 2022 by Resolution No. 1950. Instead of adoption by resolution, DLCD recently recommended that the city adopt these utility master plans by ordinance as supporting documents to the City's Comprehensive Plan, consistent with Statewide Planning Goal 11. This allows them to be acknowledged by DLCD through the PAPA submittal process.

PUBLIC HEARING & NOTICE

Public hearing before the Planning Commission for *recommendation to the City Council*: March 11, 2025. Public hearing before the City Council: April 16, 2025.

Notice of this proposal was sent to the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development on January 6, 2025, through their PAPA Online Submittal website.

Notice was sent to agencies by mail or e-mail on February 19, 2025.

Notice was published on February 28, 2025, in the Columbia County Spotlight newspaper.

AGENCY REFERRALS & COMMENTS

There were no relevant agency comments or referrals as of the date of this staff report.

APPLICABLE CRITERIA, ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

SHMC 17.20.120 – Standards for Legislative Decision

(1) The recommendation by the commission and the decision by the council shall be based on consideration of the following factors:

(a) The statewide planning goals and guidelines adopted under ORS Chapter 197;

(b) Any federal or state statutes or guidelines found applicable;

(c) The applicable comprehensive plan policies, procedures, appendices and maps; and

(d) The applicable provisions of the implementing ordinances.

(e) A proposed change to the St. Helens zoning district map that constitutes a spot zoning is prohibited. A proposed change to the St. Helens comprehensive plan map that facilitates a spot zoning is prohibited.

(2) Consideration may also be given to:

(a) Proof of a change in the neighborhood or community or a mistake or inconsistency in the comprehensive plan or implementing ordinance which is the subject

(a) Discussion: This criterion requires analysis of the applicable statewide planning goals. The applicable goals in this case are: Goal 1, Goal 9, and Goal 11.

Statewide Planning Goal 1: Citizen Involvement.

Goal 1 requires the development of a citizen involvement program that is widespread, allows two-way communication, provides for citizen involvement through all planning phases, and is understandable, responsive, and funded

The City's Development Code is consistent with State law with regards to notification requirements. Pursuant to SHMC 17.20.080 at least one public hearing before the Planning Commission and City Council is required. Legal notice in a newspaper of general circulation is required too. The city has met these requirements and notified DLCD of the proposal.

The EOA was developed with an extensive public engagement process. A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was formed which included local and regional economic development

professionals, representatives from the Port of Columbia County, business owners, commercial property owners, and city leaders. The TAC met four times throughout the project. The Planning Commission and City Council also discussed the EOA at two of their Joint meetings which were open to the public and broadcasted online. One-on-one interviews with key stakeholders, particularly small business owners, were also conducted as part of the plan's outreach.

Finding: Given the extensive public vetting for the EOA, scheduled public hearings for both the EOA and utility master plans, and notice provided for both the EOA and the utility master plans, Goal 1 is satisfied.

Statewide Planning Goal 9: Economic Development.

Goal 9 requires that cities and counties have enough land available to realize economic growth and development opportunities. Commercial and industrial development takes a variety of shapes and leads to economic activities that are vital to the health, welfare and prosperity of Oregon's citizens. To be ready for these opportunities, Goal 9 requires that local governments perform Economic Opportunity Analyses based on a 20-year forecast of population and job growth.

Finding: The City's Economic Opportunity Analysis is intended to directly satisfy the requirements of Goal 9 related to economic development.

Statewide Planning Goal 11: Public Facilities and Services.

Goal 11 requires cities and counties to plan and develop a timely, orderly and efficient arrangement of public facilities and services to serve as a framework for urban and rural development. The goal requires that urban and rural development be "guided and supported by types and levels of urban and rural public facilities and services appropriate for, but limited to, the needs and requirements of the urban, urbanizable and rural areas to be served."

Finding: The utility master plans for water, sewer, and wastewater are intended to directly satisfy the requirements of Goal 11 as it relates to planning for orderly development and development of public facilities.

(b) Discussion: This criterion requires analysis of any applicable federal or state statutes or guidelines. There are no federal level statutes or guidelines that were specifically analyzed, except where already incorporated in state level statutes or guidelines.

The applicable state level statutes/guideline is ORS 227.186(2), which states:

All legislative acts relating to comprehensive plans, land use planning or zoning adopted by a city shall be by ordinance.

Finding: This will be adopted by ordinance in compliance with this statute.

(c) **Discussion:** This criterion requires analysis of applicable comprehensive plan policies, procedures, appendices and maps. The relevant comprehensive plan policy related to utility master planning is below.

SHMC 19.08.030 Public services and facilities goals and policies.

[...]

(i) Update the public facilities plan every five years and update the master water, sanitary sewer, storm sewer and transportation system plans periodically, but no less than every 15 years.

[...]

Finding: This proposal is facilitating the comprehensive plan policy to update utility master plans no less than every 15 years.

(d) **Discussion:** This criterion requires analysis of the applicable provisions of the implementing ordinances. The EOA recommendations include code audits; in other words, it recommends review of certain aspects of implementing ordinances.

The stormwater plan (via technical memorandum Appendix F) and wastewater plan (via technical memorandum Appendix C), also includes considerations of existing implementing ordinances.

Finding: The EOA and utility master plans are not contrary to the City's implementing ordinances (e.g. SHMC Title 17, Community Development Code).

(e) **Discussion:** This criterion confirms that the change in zoning and comprehensive plan map are not considered spot zoning.

Finding: Since this request is not a zone change or a comprehensive plan map change, this is not applicable to this proposal.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

Based upon the facts and findings herein, staff and the Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval of this Comprehensive Plan amendment.

Attachments:

- [Draft St. Helens Economic Opportunities Analysis](#)
- [Draft Comprehensive Plan Text Amendments](#)
- [St. Helens Wastewater Master Plan](#)
- [St. Helens Water Master Plan](#)
- [St. Helens Stormwater Master Plan](#)

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CHAPTER 19.08 GENERAL GOALS AND POLICIES

[...]

19.08.020 Economic Goals and Policies.

(Ref: Statewide Planning Goal 9)

(1) Preface. Historically the city of St. Helens economy has been directly related to the Columbia River, forests and mineral aggregate resources. ~~In the last decade there has been a significant shift in employment with over 50 percent of the residents commuting out of the county for employment. This is not a result of dying industries as much as it is a phenomenon of lower land costs, good quality of life, and reasonable commute times. Economic growth in the city of St. Helens is mostly due to population growth. New businesses are locating here to serve the growing population. Some new industrial growth is occurring but with very few jobs.~~

~~—The largest employers inside the city limits are government agencies, then forest/wood products manufacturers, and then retailers. The city has over two miles of water front and another mile of water front in the urban growth area. There are three marinas and about 2,700 feet of public docks. With the city's history of being a very old town (relative to Oregon's history) located on the largest river in the Northwest, tourism is a major target of the city leaders' plans for increased economic development.~~

~~—The city's vision plan envisions a maximum of 50 percent commuters, increased tourism, and self sufficiency in several areas such as healthcare and jobs. The city's leaders are working with business leaders in developing plans to encourage more businesses to locate in St. Helens. The city's leaders are coordinating with state leaders to improve the attractiveness of St. Helens for businesses and industries to locate in St. Helens.~~

In the latter half of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st century, a declining manufacturing sector has led to a decrease in employment and wages, and increases in commute activity. The early part of the 21st century subjected the city to significant changes due to events such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic. A key factor that will shape St. Helens' economic future is the ongoing Waterfront Redevelopment Project, which represents a pivotal opportunity for the city's economic growth. Another key factor will be how the city manages its abundant industrial lands and less abundant commercial lands.

(2) Goals.

(a) ~~To maintain favorable conditions for a growing, healthy, stable and diversified business and industrial climate~~ Encourage the growth of a healthy, stable, and diversified economic base for commercial and industrial businesses.

(b) ~~To encourage the expansion of employment opportunities within the urban area so residents can work within their communities rather than commute to jobs outside the county~~ Ensure that St. Helens has sufficient land and infrastructure capacity to support a diverse range of employment opportunities.

(c) ~~To promote industrial development necessary to provide a balanced tax base for the~~

~~operation of local government services~~ 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.

(d) ~~To establish greater local control over the destiny of the local economic development~~ Foster small business growth and entrepreneurship.

(e) Foster vibrant commercial zones with a mix of retail and service options that serve the needs of residents and enhance destination appeal.

(f) Enhance tourism as a key economic driver.

(3) Policies. It is the policy of the city of St. Helens to:

(a) ~~Develop program strategies with other agencies, groups and businesses in an effort to improve the local economy. Strategies should consider but not be limited to:~~ 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.

(i) ~~Tax incentives and disincentives;~~

(ii) ~~Land use controls and ordinances;~~

(iii) ~~Preferential assessments;~~

(iv) ~~Capital improvement programming; and~~

(v) ~~Fee and less than fee acquisition techniques.~~

(b) ~~Assist in programs to attract diverse businesses and industries~~ 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, healthcare, and high-tech.

(c) ~~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~~ 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.

(d) ~~Encourage enterprises offering local residents a far greater selection of goods and services to locate here~~ Foster entrepreneurship, new business creation, and expansion of existing businesses through strengthened partnerships and coordinated economic development efforts.

(e) ~~Make waterfront development a high priority~~ 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.

(f) ~~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~~ Prioritize the attraction and growth of businesses that use less energy, focusing on sectors that promote energy efficiency and sustainability.

(g) ~~Create gateways and improve access and wayfinding signage to Houlton Business District and Historic Downtown~~ Ensure adequate economic development staffing to implement economic development policy.

(h) ~~Improve the appearance, attractiveness, and safety of the Houlton Business District and Historic Downtown, through an enhanced street design that includes street trees, landscaping and more public spaces and pedestrian amenities~~ Ensure adequate development review staffing such as those in Planning, Building and Engineering divisions to maximize responsiveness and optimum customer service for development proposals.

- (i) ~~Develop the local tourist and recreation sectors of the economy~~ 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.
- (j) ~~Allocate adequate amounts of land for economic growth and support the creation of commercial and industrial focal points~~ Coordinate capital improvement planning with economic development planning to ensure infrastructure availability to employment lands.
- (k) ~~Identify special locations for industrial activities that will assist in energy conservation~~ 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.
- (l) ~~Discourage the leapfrog development of industrial lands, unless there is a program to provide sewer and water to intervening properties~~ Collaborate with the Port of Columbia County to prioritize strategic infrastructure development that activates Port-owned properties in St. Helens.
- (m) ~~Make commercial designation large enough to accommodate a large variety of commercial development with sufficient buffers~~ Support the cleanup and remediation of key distressed properties and brownfields in St. Helens.
- (n) ~~Encourage land uses that are compatible with the transportation facilities~~ Encourage the redevelopment and repurposing of former industrial sites.
- (o) Discourage the leapfrog development of industrial lands, unless there is a program to provide sewer and water to intervening properties.
- (p) Preserve prime industrial land while considering opportunities for rezoning non-prime industrial areas along key commercial corridors.
- (q) 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.
- (r) Support the retention, growth and expansion of local small businesses.
- (s) Encourage entrepreneurship and innovation in the community.
- (t) 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.
- (u) Encourage in-filling of vacant lands within commercial areas.
- (v) Prioritize the development of the Riverfront District as a key commercial and tourism hub.
- (w) Support the revitalization of the Houlton Business District.
- (x) Improve connections and encourage development to better connect the Riverfront and Houlton Business Districts.
- (y) Enhance the aesthetic appeal, functionality, and economic vitality of key commercial corridors and districts through strategic public infrastructure investments and design standards.
- (z) Support retail businesses that encourage foot traffic in the Riverfront District.
- (aa) Promote year-round tourism opportunities to extend beyond the popular Halloween season, through partnerships, development of infrastructure, and leveraging assets. Recognize and capitalize on the historical nature of St. Helens.

(bb) Ensure Transient Lodging Tax spending aligns with the City’s broader economic development and tourism goals.

(cc) Integrate recreational opportunities into the Riverfront District, creating public spaces that promote access to and enjoyment of the Columbia River.

[...]

CHAPTER 19.24

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES ANALYSIS

Sections:

19.24.010 Economic opportunities analysis.

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The city hereby adopts the economic opportunities analysis, attached to the ordinance codified in this section as Attachment “**A?**” and made part of this reference, as an addendum to the St. Helens Comprehensive Plan (this title). (~~Ord. 3101 § 2, 2009~~) (Ord. **????** § ? (Att. **?**), 2025)

[...]

CHAPTER 19.38

STORMWATER MASTER PLAN

Sections:

19.38.010 Stormwater master plan.

19.38.010 Stormwater master plan.

The city hereby adopts the stormwater master plan, attached to the ordinance codified in this section as Attachment “**?**” and made part of this reference, as an addendum to the St. Helens Comprehensive Plan (this title). (Ord. **????** § ? (Att. **?**), 2025)

CHAPTER 19.40

WASTEWATER MASTER PLAN

Sections:

19.40.010 Wastewater master plan.

19.40.010 Wastewater master plan.

The city hereby adopts the wastewater master plan, attached to the ordinance codified in this section as Attachment “**?**” and made part of this reference, as an addendum to the St. Helens Comprehensive Plan (this title). (Ord. **????** § ? (Att. **?**), 2025)

CHAPTER 19.42

WATER MASTER PLAN

Sections:

19.42.010 Water master plan.

19.42.010 Water master plan.

The city hereby adopts the water master plan, attached to the ordinance codified in this section as Attachment “?” and made part of this reference, as an addendum to the St. Helens Comprehensive Plan (this title). (Ord. ??? § ? (Att. ?), 2025)