



PLANNING COMMISSION

Tuesday, January 13, 2026 at 6:30 PM

APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present:

Vice Chair Brooke Sisco
Commissioner David B Rosengard
Commissioner Charles Castner
Commissioner Scott Jacobson
Commissioner Reid Herman
Commissioner Trina Kingsbury

Members Absent:

None

Staff Present:

City Planner Jacob Graichen
Communications Officer Crystal King
Community Development Administrative Assistant Angelica Artero

Council Members:

Councilor Mark Gundersen
Councilor Russ Hubbard

Others:

Nick Hellmich (Zoom)
Jay Echternach (Zoom)
Patrick Birkle

1. 6:30 P.M. CALL TO ORDER

2. TOPICS FROM THE FLOOR (Not on Public Hearing Agenda): Limited to five minutes per topic

None.

3. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Draft Minutes dated December 9, 2025

Motion: Upon Commissioner Rosengard motion and Commissioner Castner's second, the Planning Commission voted to approve the draft minutes dated December 9, 2025.

AYES: Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Kingsbury, Commissioner Rosengard

ABSTAINS: Vice Chair Sisco, Commissioner Herman, Commissioner Castner **NAYS:** None.

4. PLANNING DIRECTOR DECISIONS (previously e-mailed to the Commission)

No discussion or questions.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Interview with Patrick Birkle

Birkle, Patrick introduced himself as a 33-year resident of St. Helens who previously served on the City Council as well as the liaison to the Planning Commission. He described his background, including his work at St. Frederick's Catholic Church, 25 years in public school teaching (now semi-retired and substituting), and service on various community boards including the St. Helens School Board, City Budget Committee, and City Council.

When asked about the impact he'd like to have on the Planning Commission, Mr. Birkle expressed interest in handling the business brought before the Commission by planning staff while also being more proactively involved in developing items. He noted his interest in environmental concerns related to development, particularly making the community more resilient to climate change and improving areas like the Holton Business District through better planning.

Mr. Birkle shared that his legacy would be helping make St. Helens better than when he arrived, specifically creating a welcoming community with a beautiful waterfront and inviting entrance from Highway 30. When asked about historic preservation, Mr. Birkle expressed strong support for preserving historic buildings and features in St. Helens, including potentially getting the city's staircases recognized as historic features. He noted the importance of supporting property owners of historic buildings through grants and other economic assistance.

Interview with Jay Echternach

Echternach, Jay introduced himself as a four-year resident of St. Helens with professional experience including 30 years in publishing as VP of sales. His community involvement included serving on the Gresham Barlow School Board, budget committee, curriculum committee, and foundation board for 10 years. He also ran youth baseball programs including Gresham Little League and currently serves as a high school baseball umpire.

When asked about his desired impact on the Planning Commission, Mr. Echternach discussed his interest in being part of a group solving community problems. He noted that he found the St. Helens Building Department to be cooperative and helpful when he built an Airbnb in town, contrasting this with the difficulties builders face in larger cities. He expressed his desire to contribute to maintaining this cooperative approach.

Mr. Echternach highlighted his sales background as bringing problem-solving skills to the Commission. He emphasized his experience dealing with complex information and working with the public to find common ground. He also mentioned his current service on the St. Helens Library Board.

Deliberations

All commissioners agreed both candidates were excellent choices. After discussion about the relative strengths of each candidate, some commissioners noting Mr. Echternach's professional background and others highlighting Mr. Birkle's institutional knowledge and experience, a vote was taken.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson's motion and Commissioner Rosengard's second, the Planning Commission moved to recommend Patrick Birkle to the City Council for appointment to the Planning Commission.

AYES: Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Reid, Commissioner Kingsbury **NAYS:** None.

Chair and Vice Chair Appointments

Motion: Upon a motion by Commissioner Castner, seconded by Commissioner Rosengard, the Planning Commission appointed Vice Chair Brooke Sisco as Chair of the Planning Commission.

AYES: Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Rosengard, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Reid, Commissioner Kingsbury **NAYS:** None.

Motion: Upon Commissioner Jacobson's motion, seconded by Commissioner Castner, the planning Commission to appoint Commissioner Rosengard to Vice Chair of the Planning Commission.

AYES: Commissioner Castner, Commissioner Jacobson, Commissioner Reid, Commissioner Kingsbury **NAYS:** None.

End of Year Summary Report

City Planner Graichen presented the end of year report with numbers from the past 10 years. He noted that 2025 had seen fewer applications than typical, with only about 80 land-use files compared to the 96 per year average files over the past decade. The lower numbers were attributed to less development happening now, which Graichen suggested might be a good thing given current staffing levels.

Joint Planning Commission/City Council Meetings Update

Graichen reported that when the Planning Commission's preference for annual joint meetings with the City Council was presented, Mayor Massey felt strongly that at least two meetings per year would be beneficial. The Council subsequently scheduled joint meetings for March and September for 2026.

6. PROACTIVE ITEMS

F. Architectural Standards

No updates provided

G. Vacant and Underutilized Storefronts

Commissioner Jacobson reported that he had recently started working on this issue again and hoped to provide more information at the next meeting.

7. CITY COUNCIL LIAISON REPORT

Councilor Hubbard reported on the waterfront development negotiations with Romano. He explained that while the process might take approximately five years to get something built, the developers were working on conceptual plans and would be providing more details in about three weeks.

Councilor Hubbard also provided an update on the police station project, reporting that the City now has a lease on the property which will turn into a purchase. The site has been cleaned and vacated, and it is ready for demolition this year with construction to follow.

8. FOR YOUR INFORMATION ITEMS

9. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Planning Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 8:04p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Angelica Artero

Community Development Administrative Assistant