

# City of St. Helens

## CITY COUNCIL

Public Forum Minutes

June 24, 2019

**Members Present:** Rick Scholl, Mayor  
Doug Morten, Council President  
Keith Locke, Councilor  
Ginny Carlson, Councilor  
Stephen R. Topaz, Councilor

**Staff Present:** Matt Brown, Finance Director  
Kathy Payne, City Recorder  
Shanna Duggan, Recreation Coordinator  
Ryan Ward, Youth Program Lead  
Margretta Brinson, Recreation Assistant

**Others:** Scot Stockwell, St. Helens School District Superintendent  
Howard Blumenthal  
Nicole Thill  
Susan Conn  
Christine Menges  
William Allen  
Adam Sommers  
Jan Zuccarini  
Patrick Birkle



### **Public Forum**

#### **Recreation Program & Future Funding Discussion**

*This public forum was held at the St. Helens High School Loo Wit Room.*

6:00 p.m. - Mayor Scholl opened the Public Forum and briefly explained what the purpose of the meeting was for, which is for taking public comments on the imposition of a \$2 or \$3 fee for the St. Helens Recreation program. The fee would be called the Community Recreation and Parks Fee and would be added to City utility bills. Councilor Carlson said that a lot of people that support the program are actually at the Recreation Program tonight. Tonight, there are a couple of programs going on including Community Game Night.

#### **Public Comments**

◆**Adam Sommers.** He feels like the program is competing with other businesses in town. He is paying for the program to compete with private business and that is not okay. He also said that he already pays for Parks and Rec in his property taxes. *He was corrected that it is actually for the pool, not for parks and rec.*

There was discussion about how the Recreation Program has tried working with the private businesses to partner and make it work for everyone involved. We don't want to compete with the businesses. We want to make it affordable for everybody in the community.

Sommers asked why this isn't being taken to the voters. Staff said that we are planning to go to

the voters. Right now this is a two year plan...\$2 or \$3 for a couple of years. We've initiated the program as a pilot program so that the community can see what it is. We have to find a way to fund ours. The people have to see what it is that they are voting on. This will sunset in two years; that is what the ordinance states. It gives us some breathing room. We are partnering with the School District. The Program has been very successful. It has taken off and it took off quicker than expected.

◆Susan Conn. This is one of the things that is a community building effort. We started out by partnering with the School District. We hear from industry what they want.

Council President Morten said that partnering with the school district is huge. You don't see that too much.

◆Jan Zuccarini. So it is going to a vote? What does that mean? What are you doing about mitigating about the fact that you have other people coming from other areas that don't pay the fee?

Finance Director Brown said that right now, on the docket, is a potential resolution that will enact the \$2 or \$3 that will last two years. The long term goal is to go to the voters, who will hopefully pass a vote to create a Community Recreation and Parks District. Then people inside the District would pay In-District fees or no fees and people outside the District would pay Out-of-District fees.

◆William Allen. He is in favor of the Recreation Program. His biggest concern is the money thing. He believes it is a tax. It is becoming very, very abusive. He would like to work with the City to find a way to make this work but not by putting a charge on the utility bills.

Ms. Zuccarini asked what the difference between the \$2 and \$3 is. Mayor Scholl said it started out at \$2 because it was a minimum operating cost. But after looking at what it would cost to have a consultant help with the marketing of getting something on the ballot, we decided an additional \$1 would help with that.

Council President Morten said that if we want to keep the Recreation Program but don't create any funding source for it, we would need to cut funding in the General Fund. That would mean cutting Police, or Library, or Administration.

There was discussion regarding how Measures 5 and 50 froze our tax rate at \$1.90 per \$1,000 of assessed value which is one of the lowest in the state of Oregon and can never be raised. The only way to raise money is to go out for levies for specific purposes.

Mayor Scholl emphasized the benefits of the Recreation Program. The Program targets students from ending up on the streets. The programs are not based around cell phones and social media which are creating mental health issues such as depression and anxiety which lead to kids wanting to commit suicide.

Mr. Sommers said that there is no question that it's a good program but said that the Program is also competing with the private world. It's sort of this authoritarian move. The City keeps talking about polls favoring the Program but he's not seeing those.

◆Patrick Birkle. He served on the City's Budget Committee for six years. In those six years, he can count the number of citizens that attended the meetings. The fee is the culmination of a long process. We are a system where we elect officials to make decisions.

Councilor Topaz said that we've got to really come up with some imaginary ways to raise money around here. We have people who don't think there's a future around here. We've got to raise money somehow.

Mayor Scholl said that we are not trying to ram this fee down anyone's throat. We have tried to figure out what is the bare minimum needed. We have to do the polling. That is why we have had two extra public forums.

◆Howard Blumenthal. For years, before the new Recreation Program came out, the Parks Commission talked about putting a fee on there. What is this going to mean to the Parks Division?

Mayor Scholl responded, saying that the Parks Supervisor is working gangbusters. Our target for the next year and a half is to improve our parks significantly.

Mr. Blumenthal asked how much of the \$2 is going to go toward Parks.

Mayor Scholl said that none of the money would go towards Parks at this point.

Finance Director Brown explained that when it goes to the voters it would be the Community Recreation and Parks District. Then the money would go towards both the Recreation Program and Parks.

Councilor Carlson said that there needs to be real outreach to kids. She wants to continue to see the partnership with the City and the School District and the City and CCMH.

Mayor Scholl pointed out to the audience that there were three employees of the Recreation Program in the room: Shanna Duggan, Recreation Coordinator, who is a winner! And two others.

Scott Stockwell, Superintendent for the St. Helens School District, said we are making leaps and bounds and really getting some momentum. But there is no doubt that there is some improvements that can be made and will be made. He mentioned St. Helens Connect.

Ms. Zuccarini asked how there are some fees for classes and some have no fees.

Finance Director Brown responded saying that classes that are led by instructors usually have fees. A percentage of the fee goes towards the program and a percentage goes to the instructor.

Council President Morten asked Superintendent Stockwell to tell us some benefits of the Recreation Program from his viewpoint. He said that one of the benefits is that someone who is passionate about something can go teach a class to others and it benefits the instructor and the students.

Recreation Coordinator Shanna Duggan said that the Program employs high school kids and that really helps when working with the young kids in the Program. We also work with all the businesses in town and partner with many of the non-profits.

Councilor Topaz said that it takes a village to raise a child. Somehow, we've got to come together, we have to get the whole town to have skin in the game, and whatever that takes, we've got to do it.

Ms. Zuccarini reminded everyone that the Program is also for adults.

Council President Morten also said that he is trying to get art therapists who work with veterans to be part of the Program as well.

Mayor Scholl thanked everyone for attending the Public Forum and for sharing their comments and concerns.

Adjourned – 7:18 p.m.



Respectfully submitted by Kathy Payne, City Recorder.

ATTEST:

  
Kathy Payne, City Recorder

  
Rick Scholl, Mayor