



# St. Helens Waterfront Development Project A Canvas of Opportunity



**The American Institute of Architects - Center for Communities by Design**

**Sustainable Design Assessment Team Application**

**November 2013**



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## Summary

The city of St. Helens is situated along the shores of the iconic Columbia River 30 miles North of Portland, Oregon. The Columbia River waterway was made famous by the Lewis and Clark expedition in the early 1800's and the river today serves the world through its many inland ports and shipping connections. The St. Helens community was born on the riverfront



servicing the abundant timber supply and deep water shipping ports. The waterfront thrived with natural resource activity with numerous mills manufacturing lumber, paper and plywood products. There were also significant rock quarry operations from the areas abundant basalt rock supply. The city grew outward from the active waterfront, which served as the economic engine to the region for generations.

Fast forward over one hundred years, the bustling labor intensive industries that once occupied the waterfront is now a shadow of the former activity. The mills are gone along with most the paper and plywood manufacturing operations. The timber company Boise, who once employed over 900 people at the St. Helens mill, announced its final closure in December of 2012. The loss of jobs was difficult for the community which relied heavily on this major employer and many residents can only remember better times. Compounding the mill operation closure, Boise further removed their physical presence by demolishing most of the mill structures which delivered a sobering message and real sense of closure to the community. This mostly leveled property now represents a void in the community's history and a canvas of opportunity to the future. The monumental question now facing the community is: Now what?



The City's Economic Development Strategy and Planning Documents have long recognized the importance of the waterfront. Virtually every planning document related to economic activity has recognized the importance of the waterfront to revitalizing the community and building a new, sustainable economy. The waterfront property adjacent to the Olde Towne offers the ability to create new physical connections that improve transportation linkages, park and trail opportunities, and maritime opportunities, all of which further provide a platform for economic development.

The redevelopment possibilities are tremendous and the City is faced with the challenge to guide the redevelopment to a prosperous sustainable future. Understanding the importance of the waterfront redevelopment, the City has taken an active role in acquiring the property to assure the redevelopment outcome will serve the best interests of the community. The City's project goals are to ensure public access to the waterfront, create important transportation linkages and encourage sustainable economic development in the best interest of the community.

The Waterfront Development Project initially considered only the 17 acre property adjacent to the historic Olde Towne area. During the course of negotiations with Boise, the City has further expressed interest in acquiring a greater portion of the former mill property. Boise has been receptive to the acquisition concept and is working closely with the City on this secondary transaction. The expansion would add up to 200 acres of land to an already fantasia of opportunity further extending the waterfront for public benefit.

The Waterfront Development Project offers a monumental opportunity to positively change the future of the St. Helens community. It is imperative the redevelopment considers the public interest in a manner sensitive to balancing the social, economic needs of the community and the community is open to outside perspectives. The SDAT program offers an exciting opportunity for professional leadership to work though the many aspects of the waterfront redevelopment. The community openly welcomes the opportunity to work with SDAT on guiding the Waterfront Development Project and setting a course to transform the St. Helens community.



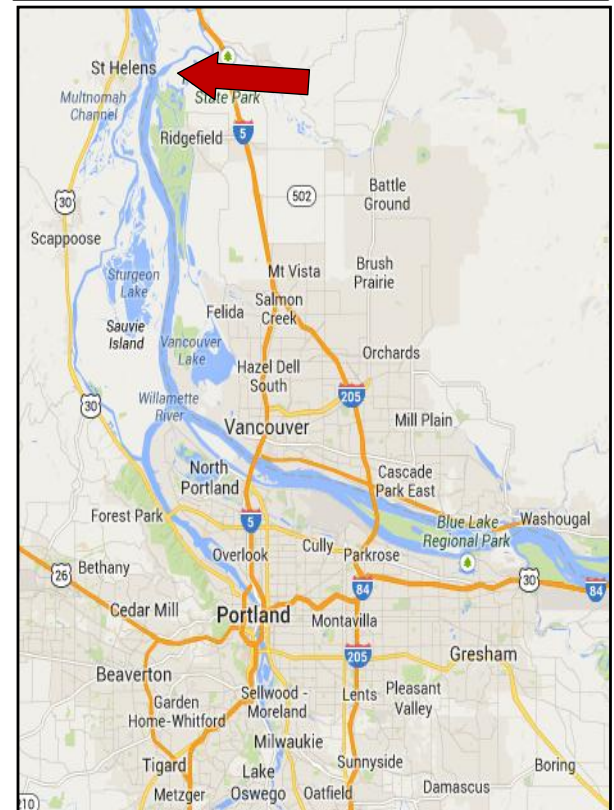
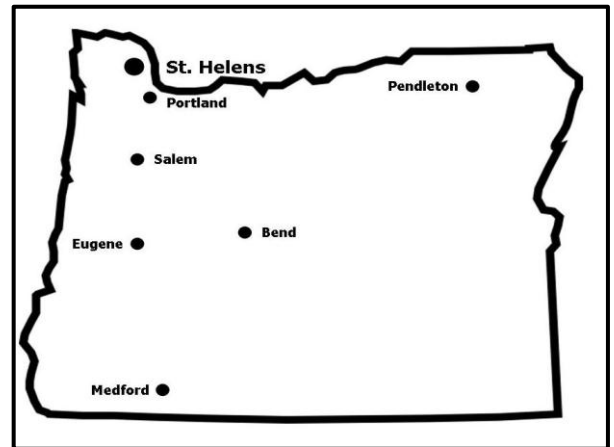
# Community Description

## Location and History

St. Helens is located approximately 30 miles northwest of Portland, Oregon along the Columbia River. St. Helens began as a lumbering community and was once coined “Payroll City” for its many lumber mill operations and numerous jobs related to the timber industry. Originally settled by New England loggers, St. Helens’ basalt rock quarry was also a major industry in the early 1900s. Because of the industrial and timber operations occurring in St. Helens and its location on the Columbia River, it rivaled Portland as a competing port city in the early days of Portland’s history.

Today, the Olde Towne which located on the waterfront adjacent to the old mill site, features a Nationally Registered Historic District encompassing 10 blocks, which includes residences and civic buildings dating back nearly a century.

One of the most significant changes in St. Helen’s economy is the steady decrease in local industries such as PGE, Trojan, and Multnomah Plywood. Over the last 20 years, the importance of the wood products industry has diminished as well as the number of local industrial businesses directly involved in wood products processing. However, the City’s natural resource assets, including its location on the Columbia River, are now recognized and are being harnessed as a focus for recreation and tourism.



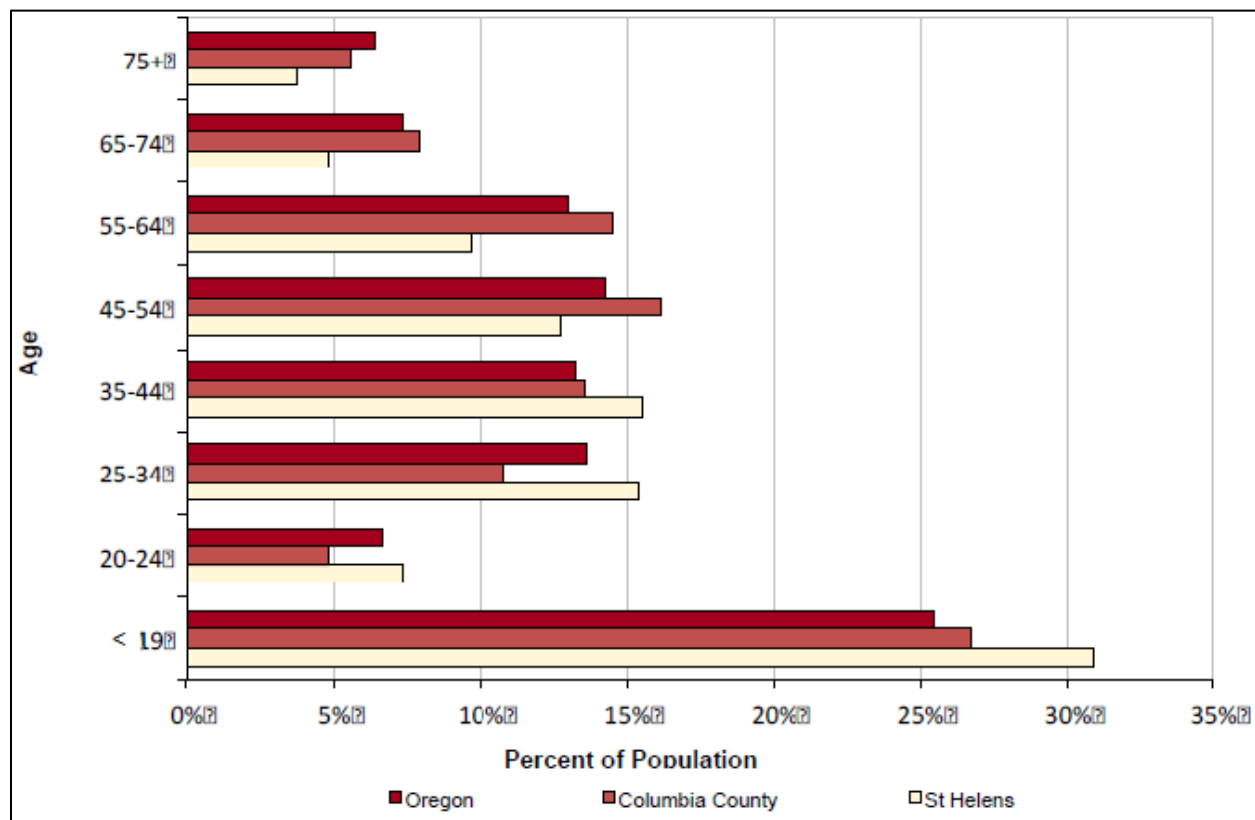
## Demographics and Economic Background

### Population

St. Helens' 12,890 residents account for about 26% of the County's entire population. In 2000, the population was 10,100. From 2000 to 2011, the growth rate was around averaged around 2.5% per year, which is more than Columbia County and the State of Oregon's growth rate of about 1-1.5% per year. According to the Portland State University Population Research Center, under a medium growth forecast of 1.9%, St. Helen's population will be around 15,591 in 2020.

Figure 1 shows the population distribution by age for St. Helens, Columbia County, and Oregon. The chart shows that, relative to Oregon and Columbia County, St. Helens has a higher portion of children and younger working-age adults, and a relatively low portion of individuals over the age of 55. This is in notable contrast to Columbia County as a whole, which has a higher proportion of elderly and lower proportion of children. The median age of St. Helens is 34, which is slightly lower than the median for Oregon, at 38 years old.

Figure 1. Population distribution by age, St Helens, Columbia County, and Oregon, 2011



Source: US Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

## Commuter Population

The population of St. Helens is steadily growing, mostly attracting Portland Metro bound commuters due to the convenient Highway 30 access allowing moderate commute distances. According to the 2007-2011 American Community Survey (ACS), the average commute time for a St. Helens resident is 32.2 minutes. An analysis of commuting patterns for residents of Columbia County shows that more than 75% of employed residents work outside of Columbia County. Most of those individuals work in Multnomah or Washington County, but many cross the Columbia River to work in Washington State. This analysis was pulled from the Market Overview for Boise Veneer Property provided by ECONorthwest in February of 2013.

## Housing

The residents of St. Helens enjoy a small-town lifestyle and many new residents are attracted by the broader range of housing options and relatively lower home prices. The median value of a home in St. Helens is \$186,900 and the median rent for a rental is around \$724 (ACS 2007-2011).

The median sale price in St. Helens peaked in November 2006, at \$220,000. Values have fallen to about \$135,000, equivalent to prices in 2005. The housing market is still in transition from the recent housing boom and bust, and it remains unknown if housing prices will hold steady. Current prices align with the estimated affordable home price based on median incomes in St Helens.

The percentage of owner occupied and renter occupied housing lines up with the statewide trends (See Table 1) at 63% and 37% respectively.

Table 1. Housing Tenure, St Helens, Columbia County, and Oregon, 2011

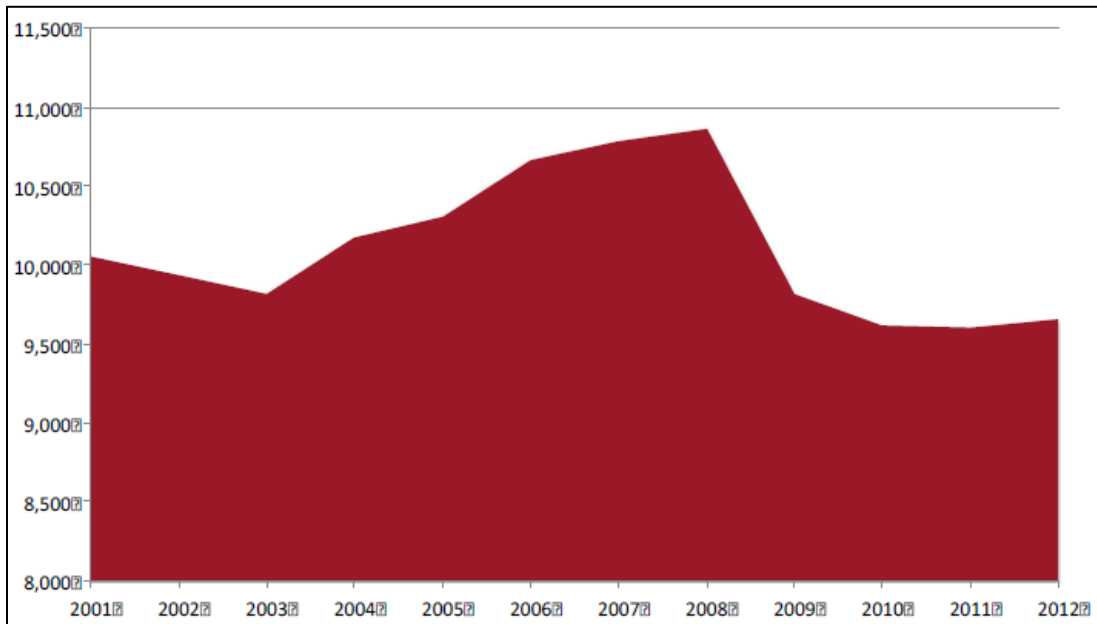
	Owner Occupied	Renter Occupied
<b>Oregon</b>	63%	37%
<b>Columbia County</b>	77%	27%
<b>St. Helens</b>	63%	37%

Source: US Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

## Employment

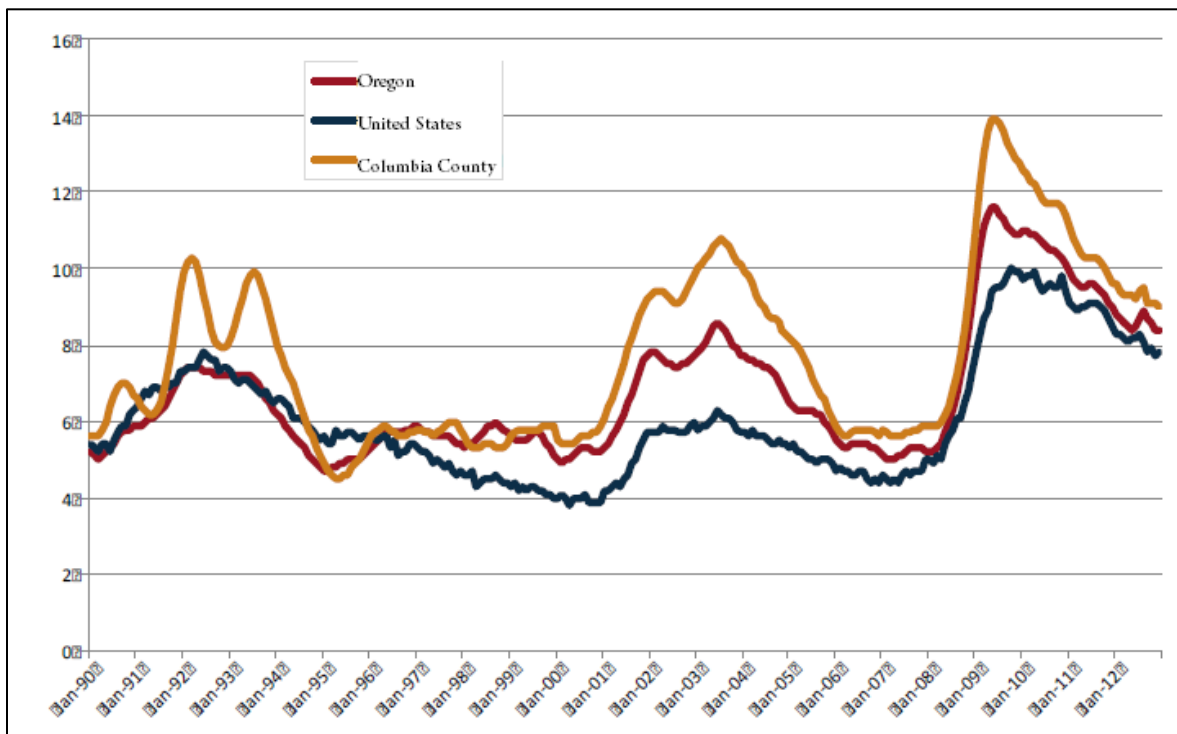
Figure 2 shows total employment in Columbia County since 2001. The data show that the area saw strong employment growth from 2003 to 2008. As the severe recession took hold, the County lost all employment gains made since 2003, and in 2012 had fewer jobs than it did in 2001. Changes in Columbia County's unemployment situation follow the same general pattern as the state and the country, but the unemployment rate is consistently higher than the statewide and national average (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Total Employment, Columbia County, 2000 to 2012



Source: Oregon Employment Department, Oregon Labor Market Information System.

Figure 3. Unemployment Rate, St Helens, Columbia County, and Oregon, 1990 to 2012



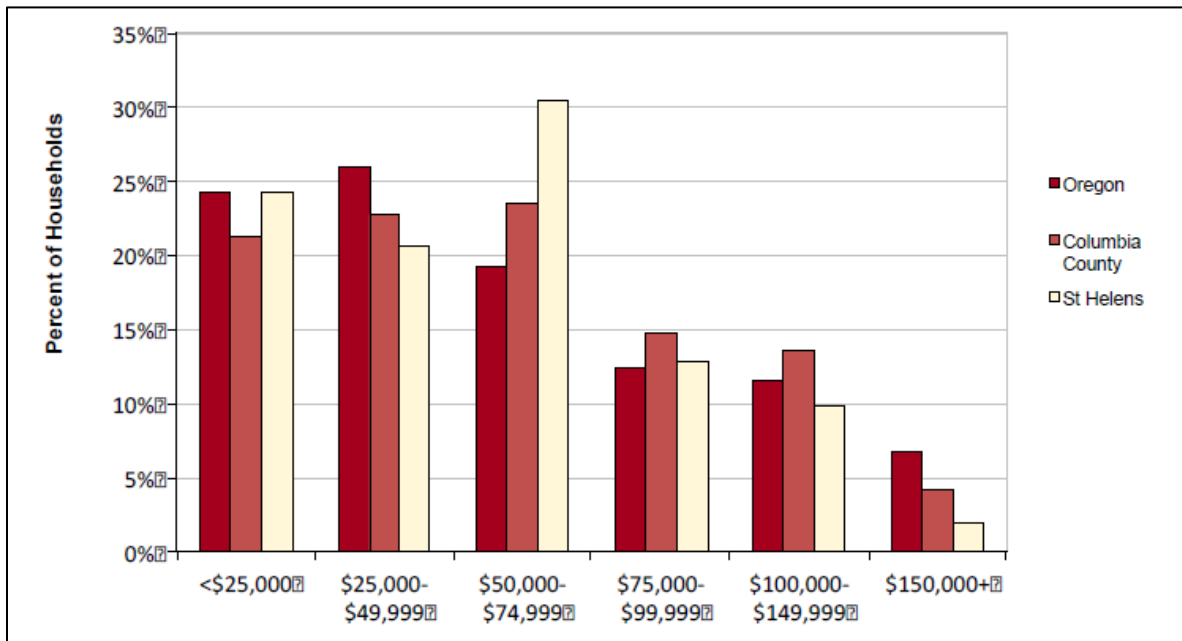
Source: State of Washington, Employment Security Department.



## Income

Income levels in St. Helens reflect a community that is predominately low-middle income to low income (see Figure 4). Almost a quarter of the community has a household income of less than \$25,000. About 12% of the community has a household income higher than \$100,000.

Figure 4. Household income, St. Helens, Columbia County, and Oregon, 2011



Source: US Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

Per capita income in St. Helens is actually lower than Columbia County and statewide at \$21,307, but the median household income is higher than the statewide at \$52,923 (See Table 2). This is likely because, on average, households in St. Helens are larger the countywide and statewide figure, so the higher household income incorporates more people. This data indicates that households within St. Helens have relatively low levels of disposable income.

Table 2. Median HH and Per Capita Income, St Helens, Columbia County, and Oregon, 2011

	Median HH Income	Per Capita Income
<b>Oregon</b>	\$49,850	\$26,561
<b>Columbia County</b>	\$56,270	\$25,440
<b>St. Helens</b>	\$52,923	\$21,307

Source: US Census, 2007-2011 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

## Governance Structure



The City of St. Helens, incorporated in 1889, operates as a Council-Mayor form of government consisting of a Mayor, elected to a two-year term, and four Council members, elected to four-year terms. At each biennial general election, the Mayor and two Councilors are elected. All positions are non-partisan and each Council member represents all residents. The City Council is the head of our municipal government structure.

### City Council



**Randy Peterson**  
Mayor

[randyp@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:randyp@ci.st-helens.or.us)



**Douglas Morten**  
Council President

[doug@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:doug@ci.st-helens.or.us)



**Keith Locke**  
City Councilor

[keithl@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:keithl@ci.st-helens.or.us)



**Susan Conn**  
City Councilor

[susanc@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:susanc@ci.st-helens.or.us)



**Ginny Carlson**  
City Councilor

[ginnyc@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:ginnyc@ci.st-helens.or.us)



**John Walsh**  
City Administrator

[jwalsh@ci.st-helens.or.us](mailto:jwalsh@ci.st-helens.or.us)

## Mission Statement

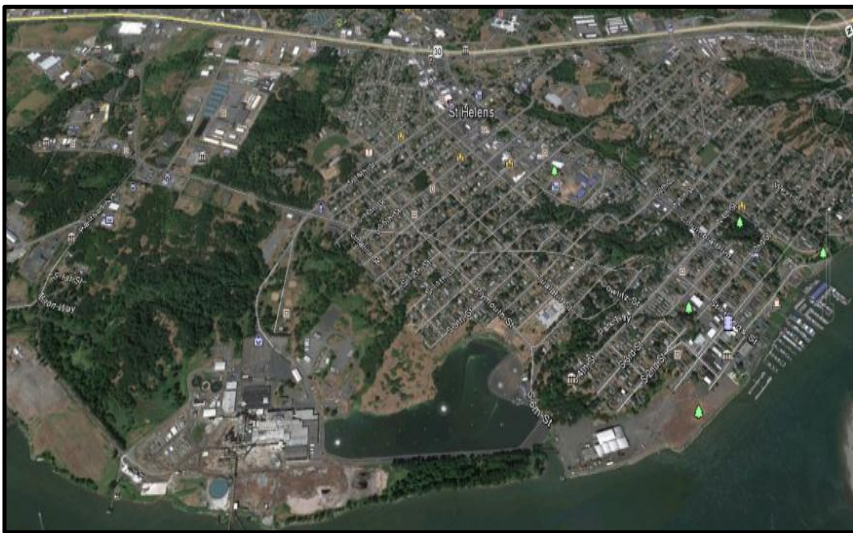
The city of St. Helens' Mission is to provide quality, effective and efficient service to our citizens. By doing so we will:

- Develop and preserve the highest possible quality of life for our residents, businesses, and visitors.
- Provide a safe and healthy environment within a sound economic framework.
- Provide leadership which is open and responsive to the needs of the community and works for the benefit of all.

# Problem Statement and Issues Analysis

## Study Area

The primary study area involves the 17 acre property located adjacent to the City's downtown core and along the City waterfront (see below). The site was previously the location of a plywood veneer manufacturing facility, owned and operated by Boise Cascade. This premium waterfront property located adjacent to the heart of Olde Towne downtown offers a convenient and logical extension of the historic Olde Towne district. The site is prepared for redevelopment and all above ground structures have been removed from the site.



In addition to the Veneer property (pictured to the top left), neighboring Boise White Paper has also expressed interest in the City's ownership of the much larger parcel which housed their former paper mill operations. Boise currently leases a portion of the property to Cascades Tissue for a tissue manufacturing operation leaving this large industrial site mostly underutilized. The Boise White Paper Mill property (pictured bottom left) comprises approximately 200 additional acres in multiple tax lots, located just south of the City's wastewater treatment plant. The site was used until 2009 for wood pulp processing. The Boise White Paper mill ceased operations in 2012 with Cascade Tissue continuing a smaller operation using imported wood pulp rather than processing on-site. Many of the non-essential structures have been removed leaving only those of value for the tissue manufacturing operations. In the adjacent photo it is easy to see how these properties could transform the community's access to the waterfront. The combination of the two properties extending from the City's Columbia View Park could provide nearly 1.5 miles of riverfront access and a multitude redevelopment of options.



The map above depicts the St. Helens City Limits further delineating Boise owned properties (in green and yellow) and the City's grossly oversized Wastewater Treatment Facility (outlined in red).

The St. Helens Waterfront Development project has lived in concept for many years. The community has long recognized the importance of the waterfront and voiced a strong desire for something more than the underutilized Veneer mill site. Recognizing the importance of the property the City adopted an overlay zone to offer options to eventually transfer away from the Heavy Industrial zoning designation. The Waterfront Redevelopment Overlay District (WROD) was adopted and offers the flexibility to change the land use to accommodate a mixed use type development. The zoning designation is triggered by an approved Developer Agreement with the City. The City's ownership role in this property should expedite this negotiation. With this opportunity now in reach, the question is almost too important for the future of the community: What is the best use for the waterfront property?

## Barriers to Success

The barriers to success for this project span a wide spectrum of issues. There are both physical and social barriers that will need to be addressed to ensure a positive redevelopment effort.

The 200-acre property offers an expansive opportunity for the community and the range of stakeholder's extends well beyond the St. Helens community. Managing the stakeholders' expectations of how this land is to be developed will be a complicated task that requires effective communication and more importantly, keeping the big picture in mind. For example, the City docks are currently used as a popular destination for the Portland Yachting community which crowd the docks and frequent the Olde Towne and Sand Island Marine Park. Rather than seeing benefits to the local economy, some members of the community resent the Yacht club affluence, expressing desire to not be labeled as Portland's playground.

The Veneer property is adjacent to Olde Towne has some homes situated on the rock bluff above looking down on potential new development. New construction property will likely impact views and neighboring property owners may express concerns and attempt to limit development possibilities. It will be important to have the collective best interest of the community in mind as development plans are formed.

There are also barriers caused by the recent mill closure in December 2012. Many long-time residents lost their jobs and are now forced onto the highway each day to find employment. Some residents have expressed bitterness and a sense of abandonment by the company. It will be important to consider this issue and a rebranding effort may be in order.

St. Helens was not immune to the national housing bubble bursting and the 2012 mill closure further impacted the community with high foreclosure rates and depressed property values with ongoing vacancies in our downtown. The community is clearly recovering with many new home starts and a minor rebound in property values. The economy is fragile and the recovery expectations should be conservative to assure successful redevelopment.

The current physical condition of the properties may also present a barrier to inhibit successful redevelopment. While the above ground structures on the Veneer property have been removed, many of the White Paper sites remain in support of the Cascades Tissue which is still in operation. The remnant concrete foundations and demolished buildings present an unattractive nuisance and detract from an otherwise scenic landscape. It will be important to address buffering and compatible uses in the redevelopment effort.

Redevelopment activity will result in job growth and increased population density. This growth and density will likely result in increased congestion accessing to and from the sites. This congestion may have reaching impacts to the City's transportation system which will need to be considered. The expansion of maritime facilities similarly will need to consider capacity limits.

## Scope of Issues

### **Environmental**

Open space creation  
Transit and land use  
Park planning

### **Social**

Housing/affordability  
Public spaces  
Sense of community/place  
Pedestrian/bicycle access

### **Economic**

Revitalization  
Jobs  
Public policy/planning  
Transportation

### Open Space Creation, Park Planning, and Public Spaces

- Where will the open spaces, parks, and public spaces be located?
- How much of the land will be dedicated to these types of development?

### Sense of Community/Place

- How will new development affect the sense of community/place for St. Helens?
- How will plans improve on the existing character of the community?
- How can we address the long-time residents' concerns about a changing community?

### Housing/Affordability

- With possible new development how do we address issues of gentrification and affordable housing?
- Renters and low-income families bordering the property will be concerned about large increases in rent or changes in property values. How can this project balance their interests with the overall goals of the project?

### Transportation, Transit and Land use, and Pedestrian/bicycle access

- What are some ways to create a connection between downtown and Highway 30?
- How can we create a loop or trail that connects the waterfront development to the downtown area and existing parks?
- How can we promote safety, despite increases in bicycle, pedestrian, and vehicle traffic?

### Jobs, Revitalization, and Public Policy/Planning

- What are some land use policies that welcome business investment to the project area?
- How can the project inspire a revitalization effort for the Olde Towne district?

# Objective of SDAT process

The main objective of the SDAT program is to develop a community-endorsed vision for the St. Helens Waterfront Development project. The city would like the SDAT to focus on additional areas including Planning and Land Use; Economic Development; Transportation; and Parks and Trails.

The project will require extensive public involvement, outreach and engagement to develop community support. The SDAT program offers an exciting opportunity to achieve the community's redevelopment goals.

## **Develop a Community Vision for the Waterfront**

- Stakeholder facilitation by a neutral third party
- Build community support for redevelopment
- foster "can do" community attitude

## **Planning and Land Use**

- Use sustainable design principles to enhance sense of place
- Balance social, economic and environmental factors associated with redevelopment
- Consider the community's best interest in the decision making process

## **Economic Development**

- Balance public and private interests
- Promote a cohesive economic development strategy
- Strengthen Olde Towne core district

## **Transportation System**

- Link Olde Towne to Highway 30
- Enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure
- Improve maritime facilities

## **Parks and Trails**

- Link trail and park facilities to existing network
- Ensure adequate parks and open space
- Increase waterfront access

# Proposed Steering Committee

The Waterfront Development Project Steering committee is intended to represent the Community's goals of expanding public access to the waterfront, connecting vital transportation linkages and provide a platform for sustainable development. In order to represent these interests, representatives from both the public and private sector will be included further including a citizen and local business position.



## Proposed Committee:

### AIA Representative:

Jeff Yrazabal, AIA President Portland Chapter  
403 NW 11th Ave.  
Portland, OR 97209  
(503) 223-8757

### City Council Representative:

Ginny Carlson, City Councilor/  
Community Development Liaison  
265 Strand  
St. Helens OR 97068  
(503) 866-8211

### City Administration Representative:

John Walsh, City Administrator  
265 Strand  
St. Helens OR 97068  
(503) 866-8211

Citizen at Large Representative: TBD

### Boards and Commissions Representative:

Al Petersen, Architect  
AKKAN Design and Architecture  
101 St Helens Street, St Helens, OR 97051  
(503) 366-3050

### Maritime Representative:

Chris Finks, Executive Director  
Maritime Heritage Coalition  
703 NW 51<sup>st</sup> Street  
Vancouver WA 98685  
(503) 998-0231

### Local Business Representative:

Joe Burks, Wauna Federal Credit Union  
500 N Columbia River Hwy  
St Helens, OR 97051  
(503) 366-1334



## Budget and Funding Information

The city of St. Helens in cooperation with its many community partners will provide the necessary resources to host the SDAT program for the Waterfront Development project. The City will provide the required \$5,000 for staff time on the project and will further make meeting space and cover incidental program costs. The following estimates represent the anticipated project costs.

### **Preliminary Visit (3 Members)**

Airfare (\$400 per SDAT team member roundtrip Washington DC to Portland)	\$1,200
Hotel – 2 nights, 3 rooms (\$130 per night)	\$ 780
Rental Car - 2 (including mileage and expense)	\$ 300
Food	\$ 350

### **SDAT Visit (6 Members)**

Airfare	\$2,400
Hotel 4 nights, 6 rooms (\$130 per night)	\$3,120
Rental Cars- 3 (including mileage and expense)	\$1,000
Food	\$1,000

### **Follow up (3 members)**

Airfare (\$400 per SDAT team member roundtrip Washington DC to Portland)	\$1,200
Hotel - 2 nights, 3 rooms (\$130 per night)	\$ 780
Rental Cars- 2 (including mileage and expense)	\$ 300
Food	\$ 350
Printing Expenses	\$ 500
Meeting Expenses	\$ 650
Media Expenses	\$ 300
Miscellaneous	\$ 680
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$15,000</b>

# Education Partners

## Portland Community College

Portland Community College is the largest college in Oregon and serves the St. Helens community. Rock Creek Campus President Birgitte Ryslinge, PhD has expressed support for the SDAT Program and offered the College's available resources toward completion of the SDAT project.

Birgitte Ryslinge, PhD  
Portland Community College  
(971) 722-7305  
[Birgitte.ryslinge@pcc.edu](mailto:Birgitte.ryslinge@pcc.edu)

## University of Oregon

The City has partnered with the University of Oregon to host AmeriCorps volunteers which bring valuable educational resources of the U of O. These AmeriCorps placements have been critical in furthering the City's Community Development efforts and the City is fortunate to have the collaborative partnership. The City's U of O contact is Meagan Smith, Program Director.

Megan Smith, Director  
Community Service Center | Resource Assistance for Rural Environments (RARE) AmeriCorps  
<http://csc.uoregon.edu/> | <http://csc.uoregon.edu/rare/>  
(541) 346-3881

## Portland State University

Portland State University Hatfield School of Government is a recognized for its outstanding Urban Planning program and is a longstanding educational partner with the City of St. Helens. Most recently an Urban Planning class cohort developed the City's Design Guidelines for Olde Towne St. Helens. The Guidelines are an important document in efforts to preserve the character of the historic area of the community and the partnership offered a mutual benefit to the students and faculty working on the project.

## St. Helens School District

The St. Helens School District maintains a positive working relationship with the City government. Many of the Community's Boards and Committees have overlapping memberships which better serve to the greater community.

## Communication and Media Outreach Plan

The City recognizes that the key to SDAT's project success is widespread participation throughout the multiple disciplines and sectors of the community. Effective communication through various venues is essential to getting the public and the various stakeholders involved. Utilizing the following communication mediums will assure that the SDAT process is well-publicized around the region.

The City's Communications Officer, Crystal Farnsworth, will play an instrumental role in implementing the media outreach plan. The different mediums involve press releases, the St. Helens Gazette (free quarterly city newsletter published in print and online), and updates to the City's website. The city also has a strong following on social media sites Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, all of which can be utilized to inform the public of upcoming SDAT meetings.

<https://www.facebook.com/cityofsthelens>

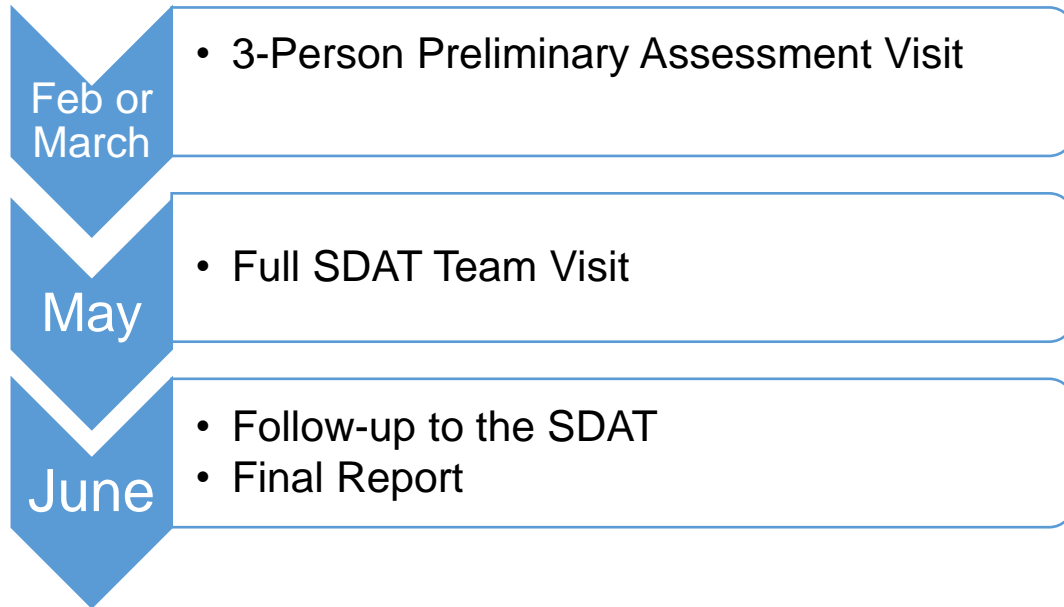
<https://twitter.com/sthelens>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/wearesthelens>

The major local newspaper is the St. Helen's Chronicle and the City's Main Streets Coordinator, Mary Heberling, has a monthly column which could also be used to gain public interest. Letters to the Editor and Opinion articles could also be used to gain publicity about the process. The City has a strong relationship with the Chamber of Commerce that has a weekly newsletter sent through email to all of the chamber members, which includes the majority of local business and public agencies. The City can also utilize KOHI, the local radio station, to broadcast upcoming SDAT meetings.

## SDAT Project Timeline

The City is flexible to the SDAT members schedule so rather than propose specific dates, a general outline of the process has been provided. A possible conflict exists in the months of April and June, where there are public workshops scheduled for the Corridor Master Plan project. In order to avoid planning two large public meetings in the same month, the suggested timeline below ensures the public won't be overextended in those months. As requested, there is ample time between the Preliminary Assessment Visit and the full SDAT Team Visit.



# Community Partnerships and Support

The numerous letters of support attached to this application offer a resounding support for the SDAT program and St. Helens Waterfront Development project. The following list of

- AIA Portland Chapter
- City Council
- Columbia County Economic Team (CCET)
- Columbia River Yachting Association
- ColPac - Regional Economic Development Partnership
- County Commissioners
- Maritime Heritage Coalition
- Port of St. Helens
- Representative Brad Witt
- Senator Betsy Johnson
- South Columbia County Chamber of Commerce
- St. Helens Arts and Cultural Commission
- St. Helens Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission
- St. Helens Economic Development Corporation (SHEDCO)
- St. Helens Parks Commission
- St. Helens Planning Commission
- St. Helens Tourism Commission
- Wauna Federal Credit Union

# Supplemental Documents and Attachments

## Existing and Past Planning Documents

- Attachment 1. Strategic Plan (2006-2008)
- Attachment 2. Economic Plan (2007)
- Attachment 3. Market overview EcoNW
- Attachment 4. Waterfront Development Prioritization Plan (2011)
- Attachment 5. Sustainable Tourism Plan (2007)
- Attachment 6. Transportation Systems Plan (2011):  
<http://www.ci.sthelens.or.us/landuseplanning/departement/transportation-system-plan-2011/>
- Attachment 7. Municipal Codes and Comprehensive Plan:  
<http://www.codepublishing.com/OR/sthelens/>
- Attachment 8. Waterfront Redevelopment Overlay District (WROD)
- Attachment 9. Land Swap Workshop Summary

## Plans in Progress

- Parks and Trails Plan: This plan is set to be completed and adopted by July 2014. It is an update of the Parks Master Plan from 1999, and will be the first plan to include a comprehensive look at the Trail System in St. Helens.
- Corridor Redevelopment Plan: This plan is set to be completed by January 2015 and the overall project goals include creating a streetscape plan for the US 30 and Columbia Blvd/St. Helens Street corridors and improving the aesthetics and function of the corridors to attract business and investment, provide better access, direction, and signage to the Houlton Business District and Olde Towne areas. You can view the project's website at:  
[www.sthelenscorridorplans.com](http://www.sthelenscorridorplans.com)

## Graphic Illustrations

- St. Helens Zoning Map
- St. Helens Comprehensive Plan Zoning Map
- City of St. Helens & Boise Properties

