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Spirit of Halloweentown Weekend Parking

2026 Pilot Program Report

Prepared for Columbia County by St. Helens Main Street Alliance – November 2026

In past years, the County's courthouse and riverfront lots were unmanaged on Halloweentown weekends: first come, first served, and producing no revenue. This fall, with the Board of Commissioners' approval, Main Street ran a six-weekend pilot to sell and manage event parking in those lots. Main Street served as merchant of record, local volunteer groups staffed the gate, and the proceeds go to the County, less a 10% administrative fee to Main Street. This report describes what we did, what changed along the way, and what we learned.

At a glance

Season	Six weekends, September 26 to November 1, 2026
Net sales	$39,075.00 from 1,511 online payments
County share (90%)	$35,167.50, remitted in a single payment
Day passes	About 1,460 single-day passes, 93% of revenue
Gate coverage	Roughly 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, every weekend
Volunteer groups	PAWS of Columbia County, Yankton Grange, CERT, and Search and Rescue

What Main Street provided

Main Street designed the program with County staff and then built and ran everything behind the gate. That included the online sales system through Zeffy, the program page at sthelensmainstreet.org/parking, buyer terms, dashboard placards, pre-numbered day passes, a gate kit and shift summary for volunteers, signage, a redirect flyer, the space roster, and a phone line for buyer questions. We printed new pass stock for each weekend and revised the gate materials as conditions changed.

The program was set up so that no cash changed hands in the lot. Every sale was made online, every pass ties to a receipt, and the season reconciles to the cent: 1,511 payments, six Zeffy payouts, and one remittance to the County. Enforcement authority stayed with the County throughout. The buyer terms stated plainly that attendants and Main Street do not cite or tow.

We also built in protections for the lot's neighbors and regular users. Accessible spaces were never sold. Spaces were held at no charge for adjacent property and business owners, and for County vehicles. When paid event parking began to squeeze out guests of the neighboring movie theatre, we created a free matinee pass, offered as courtesy of Columbia County, limited to the Rose Garden lot

with a three-hour stay. The two refunds issued during the season went to theatre guests who had bought day passes before that option existed.

The volunteer groups

The gate was staffed entirely by volunteers. Each weekend, a local group covered roughly twelve hours a day on both Saturday and Sunday, with two volunteers on shift at quieter times and as many as four or five during rushes. Across the season that is about 144 hours of gate coverage, or an estimated 300 to 700 volunteer hours.

Weekend	Dates	Volunteer group	Sales
1	Sept 26–27	PAWS of Columbia County	$1,200.00
2	Oct 3–4	PAWS of Columbia County	$4,025.00
3	Oct 10–11	Yankton Grange	$5,550.00
4	Oct 17–18	CERT	$9,875.00
5	Oct 24–25	Search and Rescue	$10,650.00
6	Oct 31–Nov 1	CERT	$7,775.00
Total			**$39,075.00**

Sales are grouped by payment date, so a small number of early purchases fall into the weekend before the one they were used.

Volunteers did far more than check passes. They greeted every car, checked receipts on phones in a crowd, issued passes, sent cars without a pass to the event's public parking at 7th and Plymouth, and handled the hard conversations in person. On Saturday, October 17, the lot sold out by 12:30 p.m. and the CERT team kept cars cycling through the rest of the afternoon, a day that produced $6,225 in sales on its own.

Their feedback also shaped the program. What attendants reported each weekend became next weekend's procedure: open parking for day passes instead of assigned spaces, same-day re-entry printed on the pass, a separate pass color for each day, and a single opening question at the gate. Because a different group arrived most weekends, the gate materials were written so a new team could read them in a few minutes before opening and run the lot. That approach worked, and it is reusable.

We are grateful to every volunteer who stood in that lot this fall. The program does not work without them.

How the program changed during the season

Sales opened on September 25, the day before the first weekend, with reserved weekend spaces at $50 and a season pass at $275. Before launch we dropped the planned business rate, interactive space selection, and license-plate checks in favor of simple, transferable, name-based placards. After the first weekend, the County approved a $25 single-day pass, sold online only and picked up at the gate with a receipt. Sales went from $1,200 in the first weekend to $4,025 in the second, and rose each weekend after that. Day passes became the program: no season passes sold, and reserved weekend

sales made up less than 7% of revenue. The matinee pass followed mid-season, once the effect on theatre guests was clear.

A coordination issue beyond the lot

During one weekend, motor coaches arrived expecting to load and unload passengers in the lot behind the courthouse. They turned out to be shore excursion transfers from an American Cruise Lines vessel at the City dock. With no advance notice, volunteers had to turn them away, and passengers, many of them older, were unloaded on the street nearby. Main Street informed County staff and opened a conversation with the City. American Cruise Lines has scheduled St. Helens as a stop in 2027, so a shared way for the City, County, and event partners to know when a vessel is coming, and a designated loading area, would prevent a repeat.

What we learned

- **Single-day passes are what this lot sells.** Event visitors decide on the day. A future program can be built around day passes from the start.
- **Online-only payment works at the gate.** No cash handling, no volunteer liability for money, and a clean reconciliation.
- **Numbered, color-coded passes make the gate fast and the books easy.** Attendants can verify a pass at a glance, and pass numbers tie back to sales.
- **An earlier start would pay off.** Sales opened one day before the season. A launch several weeks ahead would let reserved sales and promotion build.
- **A one-page gate card beats a manual.** Short, visual instructions let a rotating volunteer group run the lot well from the first hour.
- **The lot has neighbors and other users.** Theatre guests, adjacent businesses, County staff, and now cruise visitors all need a planned place in the program.
- **The administrative load is real.** A repeat would benefit from defined volunteer group commitments confirmed before the season and an earlier planning calendar.

Next steps

The County's share of $35,167.50 and the final reconciliation are included in this packet. Main Street would welcome a short debrief with County staff on how the season looked from the County's side and whether the County would like to consider a program for 2027. Thank you to Columbia County for the opportunity to run this pilot, and to the volunteer groups who made it work.