

WALLA WALLA CITY COUNCIL

Work Session Minutes

July 16, 2012

1. CALL TO ORDER



Mayor Barrow called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Present: Councilmembers Conrado Cavazos, Jr., Barbara Clark, Jerry Cummins, Mary Lou Jenkins, Shane Laib, Chris Plucker and Mayor Jim Barrow.

Absent:None

City staff in attendance: City Manager Nabil Shawa, Deputy City Manager Tim McCarty, Parks & Recreation Director Jim Dumont, Public Library Director Beth Hudson, Parks Maintenance Supervisor Joan Schille, and City Clerk Kammy Hill.

2. ACTIVE AGENDA

D. Walla Walla Joint Community Development Agency budget/software update.

City Manager Shawa reported attendance at the July 9 Joint Community Development Agency board meeting. All sides compromised and determined it would be financially advantageous to purchase the Trakit software in 2012. The net result will require an increase by the City and County in this year's budget obligation but will decrease next year's financial obligation to the Agency. A budget amendment will be required in 2012.

There was brief discussion on the vote by the Agency board; and the net cost to the City will be slightly over the funds returned by the Agency in 2012.

It was the consensus of a majority of Council to have staff prepare a budget amendment.

A.Consideration of Board representation/appointments to the Housing Authority.

Renee Rooker, Walla Walla Housing Authority Director, and Steve Wooley, Housing Authority Commissioner, reported the Walla Walla Housing Authority was approached by the County Housing Authority to build new homes at the Farm Labor camp to replace the dilapidated units. Sixty new homes have been constructed and now the County Housing Authority has suggested replacing the remaining sixty-eight homes. The County Housing Authority is not financially able to continue to provide farm labor housing. The two agencies have discussed whether consolidation is a feasible solution. The County Housing Authority would need to dissolve and transfer any assets to the City Housing Authority to provide affordable housing on a county-wide basis. If this route is chosen, it has been suggested the County be allowed to suggest the appointment of two members to the Board. The other option is to allow the continued operation of the two housing authorities with identical boards. Approval is sought from the City Council to move ahead with plans for consolidation of the two agencies.

There was discussion on:

- Merging the two agencies and responsibility for existing County Housing Authority liabilities.
- Possibility of renaming the housing authority to City/County so it is less confusing.
- Effect on City residents if the two agencies are merged. Ms. Rooker explained the jurisdiction of the City Housing Authority already encompasses a large area outside of the City limits. Ms. Rooker and Mr. Wooley explained how the Section 8 voucher program is managed.

- The Housing Authority is currently funded through federal grants, tax credit housing, and tenant rents.
- The County Housing Authority is a single purpose agency with responsibility only for the farm labor camp homes.
- If the County Housing Authority is dissolved and assets transferred, the City Council indicated they were amenable to the suggestion allowing the County Commissioners to suggest the appointment of two representatives to the Housing Authority Board.
- The County Housing Authority Board has met with the County Commissioners and they are amenable to whatever solution is appropriate.

It was the consensus of a majority of Council to move forward with more formal action to merge the two agencies.

Mayor Barrow invited public input.

Dorothy Knudson, 1108 Figueroa, Walla Walla, asked if the City Council has oversight over the Board of the Housing Authority and mechanisms in place to ensure adequate communication. Mayor Barrow explained the City Council appoints the Housing Authority Board members and a member of the City Council serves as a liaison to this Board.

B. Aviary Update and Discussion.

Parks & Recreation Director Dumont recognized and commended the Friends of the Aviary who have done a significant amount of work to raise funds to maintain aviary operations for the last two years. Council also commended the Aviary supporters.

Craig Keister, Friends of the Aviary, described the types of contributions received and thanked the community organizations, individuals, and businesses that supported the aviary. Most of the contributions received were under \$20 and came from a broad spectrum of citizens. Mr. Keister presented the City with a facsimile check representing the \$114,000 in donations they collected. Mr. Keister asked the City Council to consider funding both the necessary capital improvements and ongoing maintenance costs for the aviary. Many small towns are dying across America and amenities are necessary to entice young people to return and stay.

Parks & Recreation Director Dumont explained that staff recommended closure of the aviary as one of the program budget reductions for 2011-2012. Six programs were reviewed and rated by the Parks, Recreation & Urban Forestry Advisory Board, with the aviary receiving the least support. Small donations have been made community-wide to maintain the aviary during 2011-2012 but the supporters have been unable to find a sustainable sponsor. Currently, the aviary is not proposed for funding in the 2013-2014 biennium budget. Cost for Phase 1 capital improvements is estimated at \$240,000 with \$185,000 available. This leaves a shortfall of \$55,000 to \$60,000 for the needed Phase 1 capital improvements.

There was discussion on:

- The programs in the Parks & Recreation budget that were rated, in priority order, include: General park maintenance; cemetery; fee-based recreation programs; non-fee based recreation; aquatics; and aviary.
- Staff has not pursued any capital grants for aviary improvements because of the uncertainty of the continued operation of the program.
- The money spent to support the aviary is a major gain on the investment. The aviary is used by many people and is easily accessible by all.

Mayor Barrow invited public input.

Donna Johannessen, 1427 Boyer, Walla Walla, described her hundred year vision of the community that includes the aviary and requested the City continue to fund this program.

LaVonne Reser, County resident, commented she is a member of the Walla Walla Valley Lioness Club that spirited formation of the aviary in 1983 and asked the City to continue funding so it is available for future generations to enjoy.

Bart Preecs, 36 Parkwood Circle, Walla Walla, asked about unfunded areas remaining in the City's general park maintenance program.

Beth Call, 102 Otis Street, Walla Walla, commented that more and more birds are becoming endangered species and the aviary is an area that can save these species for future generations.

There was further discussion on:

- The struggle in funding other City priorities and whether the aviary is a high enough priority for public funding rather than being supported by private funding. The work of the Friends of the Aviary was recognized and commended.
- It was intended that Friends of the Aviary would form as a non-profit organization which has not occurred. It was suggested the group form and follow a strategy to provide ongoing funding for the aviary.
- The City revenues are below projections and funding for the aviary is unlikely. The concept of a private non-profit is likely to be the best solution for ongoing operation. If the City is unable to fund the aviary it is not because the facility is not valued, it is just a matter of diminishing revenues.
- The Friends of the Aviary are encouraged to develop a mechanism for funding ongoing operations. The Friends of the Aviary did a tremendous job fundraising to maintain operations in 2011-2012 but this will need to be an ongoing effort.
- Staff was encouraged to determine if there is some way to hold this program together and provide funding.

C. Library Strategic Planning Survey and report on Library Working Group negotiations.

Susan Newton, consultant hired for the library strategic planning effort, provided an overview of:

- The observation methodology used to gather data.
- Review of the collected data.
- Early conclusions – positive trends.
- Early conclusions –negative trends.
- How the data was sorted.
- External environment.
- Strategy, people, leadership processes, and business results.

Public Library Director Hudson reviewed:

- Results of a recent marketing campaign for the Walla Walla Public Library.
- Library working group principles.
- Benchmarking of library services.
- Circulation per capita.
- Annexation to the Rural Library District is not financially feasible if the Rural Library District proceeds with their plan to construct a new library.

There was discussion on:

- Clarification on why construction of a new library is a roadblock to annexation since funds are not available to operate and maintain two separate libraries.
- The City submitted two alternate proposals: a ten-year contract for service since it is more cost-effective to serve a denser population; and a joint operational model. There are no proposals for the City Council to consider because the Rural Library District is set on building a new library. The Rural Library District is not amenable to developing a cooperative relationship with the City.
- Non-City residents will not have access to City library services because selling library cards to non-City residents will not generate a revenue stream that can be relied on for budgeting. Taxes are not collected on a per use basis but on a per capita basis.

Councilmember Laib was excused from the meeting at 6:02 p.m.

Mayor Barrow invited public input.

Darci Double, 216 Whitman Street, Walla Walla, expressed interest in the City's proposals. If they were not discussed or negotiated perhaps they could remain opportunities for further exploration. No specific proposal was made for annexation negotiations, figures used were based on current operations.

June McKenzie, 1215 Figueroa, Walla Walla, asked why residents will not be allowed to vote on the issue of annexation to the Rural Library District. Council commented this is the prerogative of the Rural Library District Board.

Dorothy Knudson, 1108 Figueroa, Walla Walla, commented the Rural Library District had already decided to build a new library building so meetings of the library working group were fruitless.

Beth Call, 102 Otis, Walla Walla, suggested the Rural Library District Board survey their residents before making a determination on whether to build a new library.

Norm Osterman, 1032 Pomona, Walla Walla, asked if County Commissioner Johnson could provide a report on their citizen feedback and whether the County Commissioners can do anything to change the path of the Rural Library District.

Jim Johnson, 985 Reser Road, Walla Walla, Walla Walla County Commissioner, commented this is a new issue for the County Commissioners and they had been hopeful an agreement could be reached. The County Commissioners have no supervisory control over the Rural Library District Board. The preponderance of comments received by the County Commissioners are regarding the current impasse. The County Commissioners will work toward negotiating an agreeable solution to County and City residents to try to solve this apparent impasse.

Bart Preecs, 36 Parkwood Circle, Walla Walla, thanked the County Commissioners for their interest in working to resolve the issue as it would be a tragedy for the community to have two separate libraries.

Jackie George, 1842 Parkview Place, member of the Walla Walla Library Users Coalition, commented they are seeking a solution for cooperative library services for the region and will be holding a public meeting on July 17 at Fire District #4 Fire Station on Howard Street.

There were further comments by Council on:

- There is a great deal of community interest but the impasse in negotiations results in a \$245,000 loss in revenue for the City's library budget. Due to current economics, the City is projecting a zero-growth budget.
- Determination of the level of library services will be a part of the priority-based budget process.
- Reviewing all possibilities and different models for library service.
- Continuing to reach out and work towards a solution for library services while recognizing the City needs to adequately fund library services and not rely on contracts as a crutch.
- Commissioner Johnson was thanked for his attendance and comments.
- The City is willing to facilitate further discussions with the Rural Library District and County.
- The City's budget is extremely tight and it is anticipated services may have to be reduced or eliminated.

Public Library Director Hudson reported the City of Spokane is working on legislation for a municipal library district as a separate taxing district. Staff encourages support of this proposed legislation.

3. Other Business

No other business was discussed.

4.ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:25 p.m.