

WALLA WALLA CITY COUNCIL
Special Work Session Minutes
April 27, 2015

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

Present: Councilmembers Jim Barrow, Barbara Clark, Mary Lou Jenkins, Dick Morgan, Chris Plucker, Allen Pomraning, and Mayor Jerry Cummins

Absent: None

City staff in attendance: City Manager Nabel Shawa, City Attorney Tim Donaldson, Police Chief Scott Bieber, Parks and Recreation Director Jim Dumont, Development Services Director Elizabeth Chamberlain, Assistant City Attorney Preston Frederickson, Police Capitan Chris Buttice, and City Clerk Kammy Hill.

2. ACTIVE AGENDA

A. Downtown social Improvement/environment plan.

City Manager Shawa reported the purpose of this meeting is to review the draft plan for implementation by Memorial Day. This plan is the development of an approach for dealing with the social problems experienced in the downtown area.

Police Chief Bieber thanked and recognized the partners for development of the Heritage Park report; and reviewed:

- Highlights of the Heritage Park report and the fourteen recommendations in the report.
- What the plan is attempting to accomplish:
 - Help create a welcoming environment in the downtown core. Reduce anti-social and /or criminal behavior or the perception of it in the downtown core. Enhance people's feeling of safety in the downtown core. Reduce number of calls for service.
 - Assist homeless and mentally ill subjects congregating in the downtown core areas. Link each person with services to help with personal needs. Help them transition away from current lifestyle.

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- The proposed strategies are comprehensive, multi-disciplinary, and ongoing.
- The necessary tasks to be undertaken by the Police, Parks & Recreation, Downtown Walla Walla Foundation, and other community partners.
- The measurements to determine the success of this plan.

There was discussion on:

- Involvement of downtown merchants.
- How downtown "ambassadors" will be recruited, potential liability, and training.
- Organizing a downtown concert series in the parks.
- Rights of private property owners to exclude persons from their property and trespass laws.
- Ownership of the parking lot and alleyway around Heritage Park.

City Attorney Donaldson reviewed laws and a draft ordinance defining and consolidating portions of the Municipal Code dealing with park rules; and clarifying current laws such as loud/raucous behavior; and general park hours. The proposed ordinance would also separate urinating and defecating in public from indecent exposure. The City must take a multi-disciplinary approach and separate innocent conduct from criminal conduct. The City cannot make things unlawful, such as loitering, as this would violate individual's constitutional rights. The draft ordinance provides legal tools to combat crime, and leaves other matters, such as exclusion from parks to judicial discretion.

There was discussion on:

- Provisions in the draft ordinance that are being reworded or refined and how they differ from current Municipal Code provisions.
- The hours and availability of public restrooms in the downtown area.
- The feasibility of police officers walking the downtown area.
- Communicating the plan with the Chamber of Commerce to enlist their support.
- Working with the VA Hospital to provide veterans with services.
- Holding police officers and ambassadors accountable to ensure non-criminal behavior is addressed professionally and respectfully.

Mayor Cummins invited public input.

Teresa Klaus, no address provided, had suggestions to house the homeless community of Walla Walla.

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Brooke Bouchey, 1424 University St, Walla Walla, asked about the role of the downtown ambassadors and expressed concerns with police department employees being able to connect with the people that are hanging out downtown with services.

Kelsey Beckmeyer, 303 Catherine Street, Walla Walla, suggested educating the community, including businesses, on what behaviors are legal versus illegal.

Duane Wollmuth, 814 Biscuit Ridge Road, Walla Walla, commended the City's efforts to address the situation and explained his involvement in the Heritage Park survey. Mr. Wollmuth suggested eliminating the music played in Heritage Park; prohibiting dogs in the downtown parks because of intimidating behavior in small spaces; and providing funds for conducting quantifiable surveys over a period of summers

Parks and Recreation Director Dumont reported:

- The music receiver has been removed from Heritage Park.
- The need to lower the surveillance cameras in Heritage Park because of the growth of the tree canopy.
- Respecting people that are struggling with basic needs.
- Need for a permanent day center so homeless people can receive mail, shower, and use facilities to make them presentable for job interviews, etc.
- Dogs are often used by homeless people for protection.
- Smoke-free parks are being reviewed and citizens are encouraged to provide their feedback.

Elio Agostini, 217 Beam Court, Walla Walla, commented on the complexity of the issues and thanked the City's efforts in preparing the plan. Mr. Agostini also thanked Duane Wollmuth and the Whitman College students that helped with the Heritage Park survey.

Alex Kempler, 712 N Rose, Walla Walla, explained her senior thesis and how it relates to the Heritage Park study. Ms. Kempler offered to provide a copy of her thesis to provide another perspective on the issues.

Debbie Dumont, Walla Walla County Health Department, mentioned her work on the County's homeless planning efforts to find solutions; and the ten-year plan to reduce homelessness.

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City Manager Shawa clarified that the intent of staff is to:

- Hire and train ambassadors to start by May 31;
- Schedule first reading of the draft ordinance for May 13;
- Look at options for additional temporary or permanent bathroom facilities in downtown.

It was a consensus of a majority of Council to move forward with the plan as proposed with an update on the effect of the plan in a few months.

3. OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was discussed.

4. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:44 p.m.