



CITY OF WHITE SALMON
City Council Special Meeting – Wednesday, May 12, 2022
In Person and Via Zoom Teleconference
DRAFT

Council and Administrative Personnel Present

Council Members:

Ben Giant
Jason Hartmann
David Lindley
Jim Ransier

Staff Present:

Marla Keethler, Mayor
Jan Brending, Clerk Treasurer
Paul Koch, Interim City Administrator
Jeff Cooper, Public Works Foreman
Brendan Conboy, Land Use Planner
Ken Woodrich, City Attorney

I. Call to Order and Roll Call

Marla Keethler, Mayor called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. There were approximately 31 members of the public in attendance in person and via teleconference.

II. Business Items

A. Walker House

1. Public Comment

Mike Nelson, White Salmon said the city is not a historic preservation society. He said the Walker House is not a realistic investment and the tax payers would be paying for the costs which is not a cheap project. Nelson said funds should be used on streets and not a pet project.

Laura Cheney, White Salmon said she is a neighbor to the Walker House. She said it is a tranquil neighborhood. Cheney said she is again the purchase of the Walker House.

Gabrielle Gilbert, Fruit Valley said she supports the purchase of the Walker House. She said it will add revenues to businesses. Gilbert said she believes the investment would be an attribute and treasure to White Salmon and believes in the future of White Salmon.

Shelly Baxter, White Salmon said she thinks the Walker House proposal could be a good idea and a benefit to the community. She said she does have concerns about the traffic.

Felton Jenkins, White Salmon said he has commented on the Walker House proposal in the past. He said that although he loves the idea he does not believe it works for White Salmon. Jenkins said the city council needs to consider if the proposal makes sense economically. He said that he does not believe the proposal can yield enough income to make the project viable and it will

ultimately be subsidized by the city. Felton suggested a solution for protecting the property would be to grant a historic preservation easement through a voluntary legal easement from the family.

Corey Arnold, White Salmon said he lives in the neighborhood of the Walker House which is nice and quiet. He said originally he was not disappointed that the city had suggested buying the Walker House but has concerns with the idea of using it for a wedding venue and with the price point to purchase and remodel the facility. Arnold said he does not think the cost is worthwhile. He said the city needs to take into consideration the neighbors who live in the area.

Richard Pratt, White Salmon said he agrees with the last two speakers. He said he lives in a neighborhood with short-term rentals and understands the disruption that might occur with a wedding venue. Pratt said the city streets are in poor shape and the money should be used to repair them and spent on the rest of town. He said the Walker House should be kept in private ownership.

Allie Nicholas, White Salmon said she lives behind the Walker House. She asked council members to think how they would feel if the Walker House was behind their home and the affect the proposal might have on children playing in the area. Nicholas said she is concerned about using it as a wedding venue and only wants her children to be safe.

John Edwards, White Salmon said he owns the house across the street from the Walker House. He said he does not see the justification in the city purchasing the Walker House. Edwards said he feels there are other options to preserve the structure. He said the facility will be expensive for the city to maintain. Edwards said the city should not be in the business of providing a wedding venue. He said he was impressed by the feasibility study but feels the city cannot pay for the costs associated with the proposal.

Kirby Erdely, White Salmon said he learned as much as he could about the proposal for the Walker House. He said he started a Change.org petition online which he presented to the city council reading excerpts from the comments. Erdely said almost 500 individuals signed the petition against the purchase of the Walker House with at least 271 confirmed White Salmon residents. He said he does not think the purchase of the Walker House is a good idea. Erdely said the city council needs to decide what is best for the community. He said he believes the residents consistently speak to wanting better roads and improved parks.

Tao Berman, White Salmon said he commends the Mayor and City Council for the process that has been used to make a determination on the Walker House, including involving the public. He said he is concerned that if the city council moves forward with the Walker House proposal that it will limit what the city can do in the future. Berman said there needs to be an accurate income

statement for the proposal. He said he feels the Walker House will be a liability on the city.

Pam Morneault, White Salmon said she feels all of her points have been covered on both sides. She said she had to separate her feelings for Margaret Walker from the property. Morneault said the city council needs to make the best decision for the community.

Lynn Mason, White Salmon thanked the Mayor and City Council for being open, transparent and collaborative in the process. She said where her mother used to live a property was purchased and turned into a senior center. Mason said the property would be public space that is accessible for the community for meetings and gatherings. She said she is a member of the Grange and it in her neighborhood and is very quiet. She said there is a way to put limits on the events so they do not disrupt the neighborhood.

Mike Tresko, White Salmon said the points made by the neighbors of the Walker House are valid. He said he is not sure what the need is that is driving the purchase of the Walker House. Tresko said White Salmon should stay a small community and the city council should be mindful of its needs. He said growth should be slow and methodical. Tresko said he does not agree with the purchase of the Walker House and the city should let go of the purchase as soon as possible.

Charlie Hogue, White Salmon said one of the basic functions of the city is to take care of the city infrastructure. He said real estate prices are at obscene levels. Hogue suggested the city council should step away from the purchase and find other ways down the road for creative things.

Gigi Pomerantz, White Salmon said she believes the purchase of the Walker House is a poor investment and the city will be stuck with all of the costs related to improvement and maintenance. She said she believes there are other spaces in the city that are underutilized including the Youth Center, the Grange and the Elks. Pomerantz urged the city council to vote against the purchase of the Walker House.

2. Discussion and Action

Marla Keethler, Mayor thanked everyone for attending the meeting in person and via Zoom and for providing comment. She said the city council has been provided a lot of information and heard a number of comments on the issue. Keethler opened up the discussion to the council members for questions or thoughts.

Jim Ransier, Council Member said he has read all the comments that were submitted via email. He thanked the mayor for her vision which he felt was a strategic vision to invest in a project that would bring people together. Ransier

thanked the Walker Family for their patience. He said it has been refreshing to have citizens engage in the process and hopes that it continues. Ransier said he does not agree with the idea that the city shouldn't be looking forward to these types of ideas. He noted that the construction of a new pool is not a city project but is part of a district that includes a much larger area than the City of White Salmon. Ransier said he has tried to become as informed as possible on this issue. He said the dollars needed to improve and maintain the facility are concerning. Ransier noted that using the property for a wedding venue is not cast in stone. He said he does agree the council should be concerned about the costs. Ransier said he hopes the Mayor and staff continue to bring opportunities forward to bring community members together. He said he will not be voting in favor of pursuing the purchase of the Walker House.

Patty Fink, Council Member said she has been exploring the topic on her own and trying to catch up. She said she was struck with the feasibility study which clearly calls out the historic nature of the Walker House. Fink said it would be a tragedy to lose the structure but understand there are a variety of ways to protect the house. She said she is leaning towards voting no on completing the purchase.

Ben Giant, Council Member said he felt the feasibility study was well done. He said it appeared to have used a lot of previous documentation that was prepared.

Jan Brending, Clerk Treasurer said the consultant to the exiting information that was previously compiled and did an analysis of it to come up with the costs and determining what was needed to make the structure useable as a public facility.

Ben Giant, Council Member asked how the project would be funded.

Jan Brending, Clerk Treasurer and Marla Keethler, Mayor provided information regarding potential grants and the need to fund the project through financing.

David Lindley, Council Member thanked Jim Ransier for his comments. He thanked the Walker House for bringing the opportunity forward to the city. Lindley said that when the purchase of the Walker House was originally brought forward he was surprised to see it on the agenda and had reservations about the purchase at that time. He said the business plan that was developed has not been endorsed by the community or the city council. Lindley said there have been a lot of comments from the community on this issue. He said he believes the city has a lot of room to improve on core city services. Lindley said he does appreciate the opportunity to consider the purchase of the property. He said he believes the purchase would tie the city hands. Lindley said he has heard how the community center needs to be improved which is worth considering. He said the city needs to move onto other things.

Marla Keether, Mayor said she feels many good things have come out of this process including a reset at city hall. She said it has forced some activities including getting a picture of the city's capital facilities. Keethler said she appreciates everyone who has participated and challenged assumptions.

Jason Hartmann, Council Member said he does not have much to add that has not already been said. He said he does wish the due diligence had happened faster and feels that things were put together in a haphazard way. Hartmann said the council has heard people speak out and most of them have spoken against the purchase. He said he looks forward to better times and better availability of resources in the city. Hartmann said he agrees that this is not the right time to use the city resources for this purchase. He thanked the Walker Family and the Mayor for an interesting proposition. Hartmann said the city should be considering bold ideas.

***Moved by David Lindley. Seconded by Jason Hartmann.
Motion to rescind offer on the Walker House and to officially decline purchase of the property due to it being unfeasible.***

Discussion on Motion

Patty Fink, Council Member asked if the motion could be amended.

Marla Keethler, Mayor said a council member can bring forward a proposed amendment and if it seconded then it can be voted on.

Patty Fink, Council Member said she would like to ask staff to explore the possibility of placing the property on the historic registry to preserve the home and to possibly provide special tax assessment for the home.

Marla Keethler, Mayor said there was information provided about that process. She said depending on the outcome of the proceedings staff could pursue that. Keethler noted that while placing a structure on the state registry recognizes its historical importance it might not prevent future changes or alterations to the face of the structure.

Jan Brending, Clerk Treasurer said she is not aware of any special tax assessment category for historical homes.

Marla Keethler, Mayor said the creation of a historic district might provide those types of opportunities. She said information can be shared with the family.

Ben Giant, Council Member said he came into the discussion about the Walker House mid-stream. He said he loved the idea and vision which included an opportunity for community engagement, growth and enrichment blending a mixture of the old and new. Giant said he has looked forward to the due

diligence. He echoed the thanks and gratitude to the Mayor, staff, the Walker Family and the community. Giant said he feels it is important to also look at the return of intrinsic value of the proposal and what it would bring back to the city. He said however that he came up with the conclusion that the city could get a better bang for its buck with other initiatives and will be voting in favor of the proposed motion.

Jason Hartmann, Council Member said there must be a way of honoring Margaret Walker. He suggested considering renaming Rheingarten Park in honor of her.

Marla Keethler, Mayor said that is a good point. She said the Walker Family has been very gracious in allowing the proposal to be brought forward in such a public way. Keethler said it was Margaret Walker's spirit of building community and giving back that was brought forward. She said the city needs to think about that moving forward.

Motion carried 5-0.

III. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Marla Keethler, Mayor

Jan Breeding, Clerk Treasurer