

MINUTES

COLUMBIA GATEWAY URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY BOARD MEETING

October 17, 2023

5:30 p.m.

City Hall Council Chambers
313 Court Street, The Dalles, Oregon 97058
Via Zoom / Livestream via City Website

PRESIDING: Darcy Long, Chair

BOARD PRESENT: Scott Baker, Staci Coburn, Walter Denstedt, Tim McGlothlin, Dan Richardson, and Shanon Saldivar

BOARD ABSENT: Scott Hege and Ben Wring

STAFF PRESENT: Director and Urban Renewal Manager Joshua Chandler, Economic Development Officer Dan Spatz, City Attorney Jonathan Kara, Secretary Paula Webb

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Chair Long at 5:32 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chair Long led the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Long noted the Executive Session should be struck from the agenda.

It was moved by Coburn and seconded by Baker to approve the agenda as amended. The motion carried 7/0; Baker, Coburn, Denstedt, Long, McGlothlin, Richardson, Saldivar and voting in favor, none opposed, Hege and Wring absent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Richardson and seconded by McGlothlin to approve the minutes of September 19, 2023 as submitted. The motion carried 9/0; Baker, Coburn, Denstedt, Hege, Long, McGlothlin, Richardson, Saldivar and Wring voting in favor, none opposed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Tony's Building – Request for Proposals (RFP) Board Guidance

Economic Development Officer (EDO) Spatz presented the staff report.

EDO Spatz requested the level of specificity the Board may or may not wish to include in the RFP. As an example, he referred to requests for a Federal Street Plaza. Should some level of coordination with the Federal Street Plaza be included in the RFP?

Based on the Board's comments tonight, a draft should be available in November and ideally publish toward the end of December.

Chair Long requested a brief overview of the RFP suggestions. She added her preference was to move forward as quickly as possible.

EDO Spatz provided a summary:

- The Board may choose to require specific uses of the property, such as upper story residential, street level retail, a restaurant, green building requirements and other energy efficiency measures, community spaces or other elements.
- Respondents could be required to describe how their proposed development would make efficient use of the City-owned parking lot between the property and E. 1st Street and how redevelopment would align with the 1st Street project reconstruction.
- There may be an opportunity to integrate the property redevelopment into the concept of a Federal Street Plaza. As envisioned, this would be a public area encompassing the former Transit Center, which currently supports the Wasco County Veterans Service Office. As an aside, it is Spatz's understanding the Veterans Service Office will move to the former Greater Oregon Behavioral Health, Inc. (GOBHI) building acquired by Wasco County. This section of Federal Street could be redesigned with emphasis on pedestrian access, trees, green spaces, and perhaps a water feature.
- The Board could establish a vision for how the property's redevelopment would complement the Federal Street Plaza concept.
- The RFP could require non-programmatic elements, such as preferred development experience, project feasibility analysis and business model, identification of construction delivery method, qualifications of architectural design and construction team members, construction performance bond, description of property ownership, management plans, demonstration of successful past projects or expertise in urban residential developments.

Chair Long invited comment from the attendees.

Rod Runyon, 2019 W. Scenic Drive, The Dalles

Mr. Runyon is in favor of a plaza, but not green space. He felt green space would encourage camping and accelerate existing problems with the houseless. His preference was cement until the problem is resolved.

Mr. Runyon said Julie Krueger, former City Manager, invited the museum to move upstairs in City Hall. The new City Manager, Matthew Klebes, later moved the museum downstairs. The smaller space is inhibiting storage. City Manager Klebes approached both Mr. Runyon and Ms. Maxwell, stating the Transit Center might be an ideal space for the museum if the Veterans Service Office relocates.

Mr. Runyon said the Mid-Columbia Veterans Memorial Committee and the Museum Board are in favor of the idea, stating it would be an asset to the community.

Jean Maxwell, Director, Columbia Gorge Veterans Museum, 909 W. 11th Street, The Dalles

Ms. Maxwell appreciated the welcome from the City. The current space is quite small; operating in the space is difficult. The museum primarily consists of memorabilia from veterans within the five county area. She is moving the library into the Transit Center space now, and would like to move the remaining inventory as well.

Randy Cole, 816 E. 20th Street, The Dalles

Mr. Cole sat on The Dalles Traffic Safety Committee for four years. In his view, 12 parking spots were taken away from downtown customers. We have a City ordinance that states business owners and employees are not to park in front of their businesses or on the City streets. That ordinance is often violated, he said, asking if the Tony's property is further developed, where are they going to park? Six parking spaces were removed from the MCMC finance building, leaving only two spaces on E. 2nd Street.

Mr. Cole is in favor of the plaza, but is concerned the opportunity to enjoy the area would be diminished by a lack of parking. Will that be a deterrent for development of a restaurant or residences?

Chair Long replied parking considerations will be added to the RFP. She added Director Chandler recently worked on a project to update the parking lots along E. 1st Street. The prohibitions against employees and business owners parking downtown are complaint driven.

Board Member Denstedt's concern was inhibiting firefighters' access to the area. He felt the plaza was not important. He asked why this was brought to the Board, rather than the City.

Chair Long replied it was brought up at Urban Renewal because the Tony's site and Federal Street are adjacent; the plans for both may come together. The City will make the final decision, but the Board will have some input for development plans.

Director Chandler added the last design for the E. 1st Street will include balusters that drop down or can be removed manually to provide access to the alley and structures.

Richard Wolfe, 4752 Simonelli Rd, The Dalles

Mr. Wolfe said the plaza would be a gateway to parking on E. 1st Street. He said there is a cross ventilation problem with the Veterans Services building. A fence made of chain link and boards has become a sleeping area; Mr. Wolfe suggested additional lighting. Mr. Wolfe read from his email dated October 16, 2023, Attachment 1.

Chair Long thanked Mr. Wolfe for his thoughtful suggestions.

Mary Hanlon, 315 E. 10th Street, The Dalles

Ms. Hanlon has been working since 2017 on a 108-unit housing development. A housing development project at the Tony's site would be extremely risky and challenging to her project, she said. She requested the timing be staggered to allow construction of her project prior to release of the RFP to avoid adding an unknown amount of additional units at the same time.

Ms. Hanlon contacted Johnson Economics, a market analysis group, about potential impacts. She learned that adding more units would slow the absorption, cut the pricing in rents, and soften the market. The goal of our public/private partnership is to fight to make this first project work and demonstrate there is demand for more. If we are successful, other projects will follow.

Chair Long provided context, saying Ms. Hanlon reached out to City Manager Klebes and Chair Long to make us aware of these issues. Chair Long said it was not a consequence she had personally thought of when considering the RFP.

Director Chandler said the RFP provides an opportunity to consider the housing element. If it does include housing, we would need to take into consideration the impacts additional housing may have on other proposed projects.

Chair Long noted the Housing Needs Analysis (HNA) includes only residential zones; the downtown was not included. Director Chandler added the HNA methodology looked specifically at residentially zoned property. If housing were a part of the HNA, additional review or study of the downtown area is necessary.

Ms. Hanlon stated the timing of the RFP would directly affect her timing. Board Member Richardson asked what would be ideal timing. Ms. Hanlon replied she could have plans six to nine months from now, but the interest rates have to come down closer to six before beginning. Construction would then take 18 months. Board Member Richardson asked if that was a two-year timeframe after interest rates reached 6 percent. Ms. Hanlon agreed.

Board Member Denstedt asked what type of development would enhance her project. Ms. Hanlon replied any development that would bring people downtown.

Board Member Coburn asked if there was a difference in considering low-income housing versus regular housing. Ms. Hanlon replied that would affect her project differently.

Director Chandler noted an additional 14 comments were received in support of the Federal Street Plaza. Another aspect of the RFP could consider how the proposal incorporates the Federal Street Plaza design.

Director Chandler asked the Board for the main points of the RFP, types of uses specifically, they would like to see.

Board Member Richardson was personally inclined to see a broad approach to the RFP, rather than determine the ideal private use of the property. He would like to see a range of options. Richardson strongly supports a plaza, but was not inclined to have a public space constructed with a profit motive. Parking and timing are two things to consider, but thought the community is parking wealthy at this time. He approved of thoughtfully donating 12 parking spaces to a greater and more vibrant public use.

Board Member Baker stated the Tokola project was held up for many reasons, but not small among those was archeology, potential tanks, and prevailing wage. At that time, land banking was a consideration. If Basalt Commons [Ms. Hanlon's project] comes in, the Tony's property becomes much more valuable. The Agency needs to sell that property for a profit. He would like to consider the option to put it all into some low intensity plaza with shovel ready property downtown. Once Basalt Commons is established, the Agency may better imagine the property. Baker thought waiting to take action was worthy of consideration.

Board Member Coburn agreed with Board Member Baker. The Agency has worked hard on the Hanlon project; construction of more than 100 units is no small feat. Coburn urged the Board to consider what other uses are available. One of the comments referenced a space in Walla Walla for the Federal Street Plaza comparison. Coburn encouraged the Board to look at Indian Creek Plaza in Caldwell, Idaho. Most of a block was leveled and hardscaped for use year-round in a community much like The Dalles.

Board Member Coburn realized her suggestion may not bring tax revenue, but felt it would help other businesses thrive, bring in tax revenue, and maybe fill some vacant spots. It is often mentioned that the view of The Dalles from I-84 is unattractive. Anything we can do to clean up E. 1st Street, or adjacent to E. 1st Street, with lights and activity would attract people and potentially more revenue.

Board Member McGlothlin said the Board should consider:

- Sufficient parking
- Add to our tax base
- A positive benefit to our community
- Support the goals and mission statement of the Urban Renewal Agency

Board Member McGlothlin stated the Board should avoid any action that would hamper Ms. Hanlon's development. In addition, The Dalles is situated as a resource for a conference center, with many attractive features. A conference center would be a primary way to develop our community.

Board Member Richardson felt the Board was amenable to taking some time to imagine the space without an RFP. Is there a temporary, beneficial use?

EDO Spatz said an RFP could be a limiting factor. Another route is a Request for Expressions of Interest – a different way of inviting ideas.

Board Member McGlothlin added that every year Cherry Fest grows. What a great place for a multi-use area for a farmer's market, a parking area, or an opportunity for Cherry Fest to expand. We should consider options for a multi-use space.

Chair Long said she was happy with the discussion, and felt there was consensus for staff. Director Chandler agreed. Even with an RFP, it will take time to develop the space. Using the land in the meantime, rather than leaving a vacant space, is something to consider. He added a new fence will be installed around the property to reduce vagrancy on the property. In the event open space is desired, staff should consider the location of openings in the fence.

Board Member Richardson requested staff reach out to the Indian Creek Plaza and other communities with a town square, to discover the benefits and/or shortcomings, and any additional features that were later desirable.

Chair Long felt positive about how the public and the Board together. We have a totally different vision. Her goal has been to create positive energy downtown. Coming into this process, she thought an empty space was not positive energy. Now that we have all imagined it and shared our thoughts, she could see this as a good thing for downtown.

Board Member Baker said the property could be managed without a fence. We can have open space downtown with time and space restrictions; there are other ways to inhibit camping.

Urban Renewal Plan Update and Agency Strategic Planning – Introduction

EDO Spatz presented the staff report. Staff's proposal is an in-depth look at where we were, where we are, and where we are going.

EDO Spatz stated strategic planning will occur at regularly scheduled meetings; no additional meetings will be scheduled.

Director Chandler added this is strategic planning for the Agency as a whole. When the Agency sunsets in 2029, the Agency could effectively go away. Can we continue to have an Agency? Urban renewal agencies around the state are seeing successes that are not defined by one boundary or geographical area. Some cities have multiple urban renewal districts. An agency lives on able to sunset one district, then start a new district. Is that something the Columbia Gateway Urban Renewal Agency would like to see? There are other areas in town that would benefit from urban renewal investment. An important question for the Board is whether or not they would like to see this Agency continue. It is a very powerful funding tool. The update to the plan has been discussed for a while. This economic analysis will show taxpayers and taxing districts how this investment was spent.

Chair Long stated the timing was good; in one month we have the City Council goal setting. One of the topics will cover the strategic investment funding (SIF). If some of that is set aside for infrastructure, should the Agency focus less on infrastructure and more on other goals? Also, will City Council want to continue on with the Agency in other districts? Board Member Richardson said these are also considerations for taxing districts.

Board Member Denstedt stated the Fire District almost unanimously wants the Agency to sunset. Initially, the Fire District was in greater need of the funding. They would like to determine the impact of sun setting the Agency. Denstedt would like to see the Civic Auditorium finished.

Board Member Baker said the update was ambitious, but necessary. If unable to review this update at regularly scheduled meetings, we would be better served to schedule work sessions. Urban renewal is an incredible tool when used properly, he said. Baker is in favor of unfreezing the tax increment and forming a new urban renewal district. The Agency can still exist, but we can unfreeze the tax increment and get some relief for our smaller districts that disproportionately carry the weight of urban renewal. If we do not have a robust plan, we should consider paying off our debt early and sunset the Agency.

Board Member Saldivar left the meeting at 7:09 p.m.

STAFF COMMENTS / PROJECT UPDATES

EDO Spatz said the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) toured three downtown buildings. SHPO is one potential source of funding in conjunction with The Dalles Main Street, and perhaps in conjunction with Urban Renewal, for renovation of older buildings downtown and increasing the tax value of privately owned structures. One of the structures received a \$200,000 Main Street grant.

Tony's Update

Director Chandler said demolition is underway on the Tony's building. Konell Construction began by removing the wall adjacent to the next building. After visiting the site, the owner of Konell Construction chose to salvage portions of the building. Chandler expects the building removal to be complete within 1-1/2 weeks. An archeology team will begin mid-November. The resulting cavity will be backfilled.

1st Street Update

Since signing the new scope of work, KPFF (the engineers) are sharing weekly updates with Director Chandler. In about a month, 95% plans will be available for review. Construction should begin in 2025.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS / QUESTIONS

Board Member Richardson said Board Member Wring advised he was unable to attend this meeting.


Board Member Baker commended both EDO Spatz and Director Chandler for their efforts. Baker said he sees a lot of energy and forward motion from staff. It's nice to see fresh eyes on urban renewal and contemplating the heavy lift of an updated plan, he said.

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Meeting conducted in a room in compliance with ADA standards.

Submitted by/
Paula Webb, Secretary
Community Development Department

SIGNED: 
Darcy Long, Chair

ATTEST: 
Paula Webb, Secretary
Community Development Department

Paula Webb

Subject: FW: Federal St Plaza Ideas for Urban Renewal

From: Richard Wolfe <mrdoright1234@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, October 16, 2023 6:26 PM
To: Amie Ell <amell@ci.the-dalles.or.us>
Subject: Federal St Plaza Ideas for Urban Renewal

WARNING: Email from external source. Links and attachments could pose security risks. Investigate sender and think before you click.

Please send to Urban Renewal persons for tomorrow's meeting.

- Chain-link gated Lane, Park a dog.
- Permanent 3 pm shade structure.
- Water fountain.
- Outlet power source locations.
- Brightly lit / Or option for Flood lighting. Concrete pour over existing road and they live in sidewalk.
- Concrete pour over existing road and existing sidewalk, with a stamped none skid surface.
- Wind break study.
- Platform stage for Music, Events, Shade and Traffic Break.
- Train station/Train noise Attraction.
- Water Snow Ice And Water Runoff Study.
- No chain link in Plaza area.
- Low maintenance study.
- Security study.
- No food trucks.
- Bus Stop.
- Be a destination attraction.
- Bigger flag pole.
- A Name

Thank you, sincerely, Rick Wolfe