

A work session meeting of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 6:00 pm.

Councilors Present: Nemlowill, Herzig, Warr, Price, Mayor LaMear

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Assistant City Manager/Police Chief Johnston, Parks and Recreation Director Cosby, Finance Director Brooks, Financial Analyst Snyder, Fire Chief Ames, Interim Planner Morgan, Library Director Tucker, Public Works Director Cook, and City Attorney Henningsgaard. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

LIBRARY GOAL:

City Manager Estes briefly reviewed the discussions from a City Council work session held a few months ago to discuss Council's library goal for Fiscal Year 2015–2016. Staff has developed criteria for analyzing potential sites based on feedback received at that work session. He gave Councilors a copy of the standard location criteria that addressed zoning, compliance with the building assessment, costs, and other criteria. Staff would like additional feedback from Council about more specific local criteria they would like added to the standard criteria. He explained that there were three tiers of priorities, with the top tier being weighted most heavily and the third tier being weighted the least. He would like Council to list specific sites for staff to analyze. Staff would present results of the analysis at a future work session. City Manager Estes presented the location criteria as follows:

- Tier 1 Criteria: Located near commercial, retail, cultural, and other activities; location driven by retail site selection factors; property configuration should be adequate for successful completion of the building program/building project; provide library materials and services to the greatest number of users at the lowest cost; sufficient accessibility should include parking that is convenient to the library's entrances with sufficient parking spaces for customers and staff, and conveniences for courier or outreach delivery services; visibility from the street.
- Tier 2 Criteria: Arriving at the library creates a favorable impression; meets unique needs of different segments of customers; neighborhood compatibility with existing and future development; consideration of easements, zoning restrictions, entrances and egresses, and multiple owners of potential library site property.
- Tier 3 Criteria: Cost of site acquisition or lease; timeframe for development of the site; utility availability and site infrastructure; cost of site mitigations; technical and environmental assessments; library programming requirements.

Councilor Warr believed staff was missing the point. Council should consider existing resources for building or renovating a library, and then decide what can be done with those resources. Analyzing potential sites against these criteria would delay this entire process.

Councilor Price confirmed that staff used the square footage requirement recommended in the Metz report, which she had issue with. She wanted the next plan to allow additional staffing in the future. The City cannot and does not want to commit to additional staffing at this time; however, this may change over time. An expanded library may want expanded programming, which she did not believe would be possible at the current level of staffing. She could see how the location criteria could create a very long process. She has done research on libraries built in the 1960s, most of which have been converted to other uses with a new library being built in another location. She was not sure how to move this process forward at this point. The process starts by specifying the Metz recommended square footage must be met, and it must be met all on one floor. Also, that the Merwyn/Waldorf cannot be demolished. That means the basement of the existing building cannot be used. It means the renovation cannot include the Merwyn/Waldorf Building. So what the criteria says is that the only option left is to build a new library in a different location. The City owns the space at Heritage Square, but nearby parking would need to be considered. Expansion into Heritage Square would eliminate about a quarter of the Sunday Market's income, which was not something she wanted to do.

Councilor Herzig agreed with Councilor Price. He believed it was mistake to say more staff would never be hired. The library is already under providing because of staffing. The City needs to make sure a library with better

services has enough staff to provide those services. The library is closed on Sundays and Mondays, so people who want to look at meeting agendas must do so on Saturdays. He believed the concept of sharing a library with workforce housing should be kept in the discussion. Building a new library with housing provides two uses that the community desperately needs. Astoria also needs childcare. Perhaps the City can trade the existing library building with the American Legion building, which could be taken down to provide more space for the Sunday Market or parking. He believed all the benefits of building a new library should be discussed. He also wanted to start referring to the potential site as the Safeway parking lot because calling it Heritage Square creates a road block.

City Manager Estes clarified the criterion to provide library materials and services to the greatest number of users at the lowest cost was not a statement indicating there would never be additional staff allocated to the library. At any time, City Council can choose to allocate additional resources. However, the City has not had enough General Fund revenue to allocate additional staff without cutting the funds of another department. The criterion simply recognizes that the City would do as much as possible with available resources.

Councilor Nemlowill said she was expecting to discuss the feasibility of expanding the library in its current location, utilizing the Merwyn/Waldorf building, and Heritage Square. City Manager Estes said feedback from City Council at the last work session indicated Councilors had a variety of interests and preferred different scenarios, but Council agreed that staff should not hire a consultant at this time. These criteria are designed to help Council compare the pros and cons of renovating the existing building to new building at Heritage Square.

Councilor Nemlowill asked if it was reasonable to consider the sites without the help of a consultant. City Manager Estes said he needed a consensus from City Council. Staff is attempting to provide Council with enough information to make a decision and take action.

Councilor Herzig believed Council had asked staff to provide information about the feasibility of the footprint available in the Safeway parking lot. City Manager Estes confirmed City Council had been given this information, but staff still needed feedback about how to address parking. Councilor Herzig said he did not know the space was available. City Manager Estes said the space would provide 18,000 square feet of space.

Mayor LaMear said she and staff have discussed two different proposals for utilizing the Merwyn. In order to offer housing in part of the building, the front portion of the building would be the entrance and lobby for the residential units. The residents would likely park bicycles in the lobby, so this would only leave about 2,500 square feet at the back of the building for the library. Adding this space to the 9,000 square feet of the existing library would expand the total space to 11,500 square feet. However, optimum square footage is 18,000 square feet. City Council is not saying the library must have 18,000 square feet, but 11,500 square feet is not adequate. Two groups in Astoria are opposed to expanding into the parking lot. This is another reason renovating the existing building on the current site does not provide enough space. Therefore, she believed the best option would be to develop a brand new facility at Heritage Square and possibly include housing. Parking is a big issue that cannot be ignored. However, there is always the possibility that a parking garage could be utilized by the library, residents, and downtown shoppers. People are concerned about leaving the existing building. However, the current building can remain in use while a new building is being built. Once the library relocates, there may be an opportunity to sell the current library and Merwyn buildings together.

City Manager Estes said he was attempting to use an approach used by architects, designers, and consultants who help clients decide where to locate a particular building. The criteria he presented are standard. Instead of hiring a consultant, staff would like to use the criteria to frame this discussion in an effort to work within its own resources. However, if Council does not want to use the criteria, staff would take other direction from Council.

Councilor Price said after hearing Mayor LaMear's opinion, she would vote to consider Heritage Square. However, she wanted to know what could happen with the current library building and the Merwyn. She was very concerned about leaving a large blight right next to City Hall. Therefore, she would be happy to hear if there were opportunities for those sites. She liked the idea of a public/private partnership, but preferred mixed use housing instead of workforce housing. Larger residential units could create revenue to cover the costs of smaller apartments rented out at lower rates. She believed a spot between the cooperative building and Overbay Auto should also be considered. This site might be available at a reasonable cost and would be a great location for a parking structure that would serve the Sunday Market, downtown, and Heritage Square. All of her suggestions could be incorporated into Council's consideration of Heritage Square.

Councilor Warr said Council needed to decide on a timeframe and budget before moving forward. If these decisions could not be made before money is spent on another survey or more planning, the discussions would never end. He strongly believed that if this project is going to be completed, the City needed to take a get-it-done approach. However, he understood his opinion differed from the rest of Council and would be fine if Council wanted to go another direction.

Councilor Herzig said Council wants to get it done, but deciding where to put the library should be the first step. This process has taken other cities about seven years because a lot of aspirational budgeting was done before all of the funds had been obtained. He reminded that Ruth Metz said this could be done if Astoria wanted it badly enough. This will take a lot of work, a foundation, and a lot of teamwork, but this can be done. He believed the community wanted a new library badly enough. The sooner the City begins, the sooner those seven years will go by. This is not a short or inexpensive process, but it is a process everyone wants. He supported Mayor LaMear's proposal to relocate and combine housing. The Merwyn is not the City's responsibility and those who want to save the property can form a non-profit and get partners. The City owns the existing library building and the Safeway parking lot, so Council should move forward with those two options.

Councilor Warr noted the City was already in year three or four of the process, leaving only three or four more years to complete the process within seven years.

Councilor Nemlowill believed the Mayor and Councilors had made very valid points that should be considered. She preferred relocating to Heritage Square because it needed to be redeveloped in a way that would contribute to downtown Astoria. Housing is key and she believed the community would support mixed use with the library. Studies that have already been done on Heritage Square indicate the community wanted a public/private development and the library was the most plausible use. However, she still wanted more information about how parking would work and what needs to be done before the site is developed. One plan from ten years ago showed diagonal parking with one lane of traffic on Duane and 12th Streets. She wanted to see this process move forward and the City to begin taking requests for proposals (RFPs) soon. She wanted the City's costs to be as low as possible while providing many benefits to the citizens and businesses in Astoria.

Councilor Herzig said City Council would likely have a future work session to discuss downtown parking. Any new building project needs to consider that parking is a real issue. However, he did not believe the library plan should be burdened with solving the downtown parking problem. Parking is a larger issue that the library would be part of and expecting the library plan to solve the downtown parking problem is not a good approach.

City Manager Estes understood Council wanted to pursue Heritage Square and additional information about parking, finances, and costs. He suggested hiring a consultant to help formulate answers to Council's questions. Mayor LaMear said about 24 architects responded to the newspaper article that indicated the City was considering relocating the library to Heritage Square. City Manager Estes confirmed a story was published in some of the construction publications in Seattle and Portland. Design firms and construction firms have expressed their interest in the project. He asked City Council to make a motion during a regular session meeting to support staff as they investigate relocating the library to Heritage Square.

Councilor Herzig said when Mayor LaMear is informed about various contacts, he would like all of the Councilors to be informed as well.

Councilor Nemlowill said this discussion might provide some clarity to those who have interests in the Merwyn/Waldorf building.

Councilor Herzig asked if staff could let the American Legion know the library building might be available to them in the future. He believed the Legion should have this information.

Councilor Warr said some years ago, the City attempted to trade the library building for the American Legion building. However, the Legion wanted the City to spend several million dollars on remodeling the library building before they would be willing to use it. The City and the American Legion negotiated for a couple of years; however, the Legion was not interested in trading unless the library building was renovated.

Councilor Price recently spoke with Mike Phillips, Commander of the American Legion, who indicated the Legion wanted the building brought back to its original condition and the library building should remain a library because it is a memorial library. Therefore, she was unsure how the City would approach the American Legion with an actual plan.

Councilor Nemlowill believed the City should approach the American Legion before plans were made. She understood why the Legion would not want to relocate to the library building.

City Manager Estes believed Council had given staff the direction they were seeking. This consensus from Council would allow staff to move forward and engage with someone who has the resources and knowledge about costs and feasibility.

Mayor LaMear believed Council, the Library Board, the Library Revitalization Committee, and staff wanted to move forward. This process seems to have gone on for so long with no action. She believed this consensus was a good step in the right direction. The City can put everything it wants in a new library without having to work around the issues of the existing building. The project will not be held up by appeals on using the Merwyn or changing the architecture of the existing building. In the mean time, the City can consider possibilities for people to invest in the Merwyn and the library building.

Councilor Herzig said one of his constituents asked him to thank Mayor LaMear for moving this process forward.

Mayor LaMear called for public testimony about the library.

Cheryl Silverblatt, 811 Glasgow Avenue, Astoria, thanked Councilor Price for saying Library staff should be allowed to increase. The proposal to prohibit additional Library staff was the most difficult, challenging, and absurd proposal she had ever heard. After one of Ms. Metz's presentations, she heard someone say they wondered what the proposal would have been if there were no restrictions. Without restrictions, she believed Ms. Metz could have provided a wonderful library plan for the citizens of Astoria. It is a loss that there were so many restrictions placed on what Ms. Metz was able to provide because she is very experienced and has a wonderful reputation. She was happy that Council had come to a consensus.

Kate Summers, Library Board Chair, encouraged everyone to attend the Library Board meetings. She was excited to receive direction from City Council and learn more from the Library Revitalization Committee.

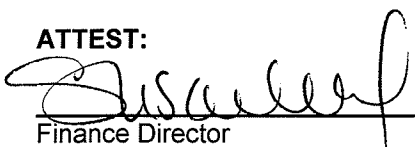
Shel Cantor, 1189 Jerome, Astoria, said he liked the way City Manager Estes wanted to approach this discussion. He liked the priorities, but believed costs and availability should have been first tier priorities. He added that closed circuit monitoring could allow a smaller staff to monitor multiple levels at a lower cost. He believed closed circuit monitoring would be more effective than hiring additional staff because people assume there is always someone watching a monitor. He was not against relocating to Heritage Square, but he did not want Astoria to end up with a library that looked like it belonged in Anywhere, USA. Astoria is a historic area and the downtown is a historic district. He wants a new library to blend in properly with the historic character of the city.

Councilor Price agreed costs should be Tier 1 priority. She wanted to build a library that people would still be in awe of 100 years from now. This community has extraordinary and creative master craftsman who should be part of this project. She understood this could cost an extra million dollars, but she would help raise the money. She believed it was very important to refrain from building another warehouse looking building. Astoria can do better. Members of the Library Foundation and the Astor Library Friends Association (ALFA) are capable of raising the necessary funds.

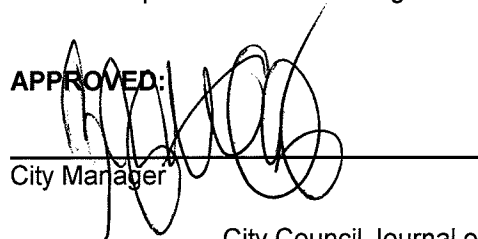
ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:52 pm to convene the regular City Council meeting.

ATTEST:


Finance Director

APPROVED:


City Manager