

A special meeting of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 3:00 pm.

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

Councilors Excused: None

Parks Board Members Present: President Norma Hernandez and Janet Miltenberger.

Staff Present: City Manager Brett Estes, Police Chief/Assistant City Manager Brad Johnston, Parks Director Angela Cosby, Parks Maintenance Supervisor Jonah Dart-McLean, Parks Recreation Supervisor Terra Patterson. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

PRESENTATION:

Director Cosby provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding the background and issues related to the Ocean View Cemetery.

CEMETERY TOUR:

Councilors, staff, and citizens toured the cemetery, and then returned to the Chapel to continue the meeting.

DISCUSSION OF CEMETERY ISSUES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

Director Cosby sought feedback from City Council on what level of cemetery maintenance the City Council expects, how those expectations should be achieved, and what the preferred timeline is for implementing the expected improvements. Discussion regarding key issues and suggestions was as follows:

Maintenance:

- Mayor LaMear did not want the cemetery to be losing money every year, so fees should be raised. The cemetery looked pretty good, as moss and dandelions are to be expected, but the grass should be kept neatly cut and green. She would have to consider whether to keep the lawn green year-round since irrigation would be necessary in the summertime.
- Councilors Warr and Herzig agreed maintenance should meet the expectations of the people who have purchased cemetery plots. Current maintenance was not meeting public expectations and that feedback should be used to provide a baseline expectation for maintenance.
- Councilor Nemlowill believed the maintenance level should be what the City can afford and agreed with Mayor LaMear that funds should not be taken from the General Fund.
- Council agreed rates needed to be raised.
 - Councilors Warr and Price believed rates should be raised incrementally. Councilor Warr suggested increasing rates by 40 percent initially, and then by 10 percent or some amount each year thereafter. He believed that in order to keep faith with cemetery patrons, some General Fund money would be necessary. The rates had not been raised in 19 years, when they were doubled, upsetting funeral homes and monument dealers who claimed the higher rates would put them out of business.
 - Director Cosby noted a \$5,000 increase in cremations which is going from approximately \$600 in value to about \$1,500 in fees.
 - Director Cosby confirmed it would take two years to remove moss and dandelions at a cost of about \$126,000, including labor and materials. Such a maintenance plan would involve chemical applications or hand pulling of dandelions and thatching, which is extremely expensive, multiple rounds of reseeding, a large amount of fertilizer. A lot of the work would likely be contracted out to avoid hiring a full-time employee who would need to be laid off after two years.
- Councilor Nemlowill noted Ocean View is one of two public-owned cemeteries in the State and suggested exploring selling the undeveloped 50 acres to a private operator and use the revenue to clean up the existing portion. How to continue maintenance with no further revenue was a good question, but she noted the operating costs of the Pioneer Cemetery were significantly less than Ocean View's.

- Staff explained that mowing and weed eating around headstones significantly drives up costs, making the cemetery harder to maintain than other parks. To be as cost effective as possible, juvenile crews do much of the work twice a month throughout the spring and summer. Differences in maintenance between the Pioneer and Ocean View Cemeteries were noted.
- Staff offered to explore Xeriscaping as an alternative to maintaining a golf course look in sandy areas close to beaches.
 - Councilor Herzig believed Xeriscaping required more maintenance intensive because of the wind and rain. Moss and dandelions would not move around like sand or rocks.
 - Councilor Price clarified that rather than Xeriscaping, she wanted to allow a more natural approach. A field of dandelions can be beautiful when they are in bloom. However, she agreed cemetery maintenance should meet the expectations of the plot owners and their families.
 - Mayor LaMear did not believe making the cemetery look like a golf course was appropriate.
- Getting water to the cemetery has been an issue. Three very costly attempts were made to drill wells, and only one well worked for a few years. One company estimated water could be found at a higher elevation, but it would only be enough to irrigate the cemetery for three to five years. In addition to the drilling investment, the City would also have to invest in piping the water to the pump house, which would involve tearing up the roads and would cost more than \$75,000. Additionally, there is no guarantee drilling in a new location would hit water
 - Staff advised simply purchasing water from the City of Warrenton and planned to talk to them to discuss the possibility of a reduced water rate. Warrenton has different rates for residential, commercial, industrial, and government customers. Their government rate is the second to the highest rate and higher than residential rates.
- The cemetery was kept pristine up until a few years ago and most people with family members at the cemetery are used to a higher level of maintenance.
 - Warrenton citizen LeRoy Dunn said he owns several plots and has many family members in the cemetery. He had no complaints about Directory Cosby; however, the cemetery used to be the best-kept cemetery. The cemetery looks good now, but one month ago, there were so many limbs lying on the area with the baby plots that it could not be seen. The City will build walking trails and give away John Warren Field, but he said there is not enough money to take care of the cemetery. He could be buried at Fort Stevens or the military cemetery, knowing his plot would be taken care of; so it is disheartening to own plots at Ocean View.
 - Warrenton citizen Muriel Dunn noted the sand at Ocean View would require irrigation all the time, which is not possible. Brown foliage in the summer will have to be tolerated; however, the area gets plenty of rain, so the cemetery may only be a little brown in August and September. She did not mind the dandelions and just wanted the cemetery to be kept mowed
 - Mr. Dunn asked if water could be pumped out of the lake and brought to the cemetery.
 - Director Cosby replied this has been done in the past; however, the lake started to run dry and leaves from the alder trees mixed in with the water stained the headstones brown.
- Director Cosby said the weeds have begun to increase over the last three years. If staff does not do anything about the dandelions, they will increase. She asked if staff should try to maintain the current level of dandelions or allow them to spread.
 - Responses from Councilor Price and Mr. and Mrs. Dunn were that the dandelions stay green through the summer, reseed themselves, and the blooms would not be seen if the grass was kept mowed.
 - Parks Maintenance Supervisor Dart-McLean added that the undeveloped portion of the cemetery contains a healthy stock of Scotch broom, which needs to be removed. The 50 developed acres contain a little bit of topsoil and then sand as does the undeveloped 50 acres making irrigation difficult.

Staffing and Labor:

- The Parks Department has utilized labor from the County Correctional Department's work crews. Sometimes, the fees charged for adults are more than the City pays its own full-time employees, and workers on the juvenile crews do expensive damage to gravestones, vases, and equipment.
 - Community service volunteers, who are mandated to do community service for citations like speeding tickets, have worked on many trails in Astoria over the last few years. However, it would be more appropriate to use the juvenile crews in areas like trail maintenance. This would still reduce the workload in one area, allowing skilled staff to spend more time in other areas. The number of workforce hours the Parks Department has is the issue.
- Councilor Herzig and Director Cosby agreed a full-time employee at the cemetery would help significantly.

- Councilor Nemlowill said as long as burials were being conducted at the cemetery, a dedicated employee should be present. She recently attended a funeral where it seemed awkward to have a Parks employee cover the grave with dirt. She questioned whether the employee was emotionally equipped to handle the work. The employee was wearing maintenance attire and people even commented it was not appropriate for a funeral. Having the recreation coordinator spending 25 percent of her time on funerals seemed strange and out of place.
- Director Cosby said it was not common for a cemetery to be part of a Parks and Recreation Department, but other cities do put their Parks Departments in charge of cemeteries. These cities typically have staff dedicated to cemetery maintenance.
 - Councilor Nemlowill noted most citizens in Astoria cannot believe the City owns a cemetery in Warrenton.

Selling all or a portion of the cemetery:

- Staff would look into the legal and ethical implications of selling the cemetery.
- Councilor Warr did not believe the number of burials at Ocean View would make the cemetery attractive to investors, noting that Michael Leamy, owner of Greenwood Cemetery, had to find additional work to support his cemetery. Most of the maintenance expense is on old graves. Ocean View has about 16,000 old graves that must be cared for forever.
- Councilor Price asked if the families with plots had been asked about the choices between raising rates "x" amount or having brown grass, or did staff know enough from receiving public comments. Director Cosby replied the City definitely receives a lot of comments, generally from those who are unhappy.
- Mr. Dunn suggested contacting the City of Warrenton about splitting the costs of maintaining the cemetery. Director Cosby was not certain whether Warrenton had been approached about that.
- The City needs to decide what will be done when the developed portion of the cemetery is full, which will be in two or three years.
 - Director Cosby said she was concerned about continuing to develop the cemetery while increasing fees enough that the Irreducible Fund had enough money to keep funding maintenance after the rate increases stopped. If the City sold the undeveloped portion now, the cemetery could be maintained without increasing rates using the \$3,000 budgeted annually for cemetery maintenance. The City could also consider selling the entire cemetery.
 - Depending on the price, selling the 50 acres might build the fund or provide money for maintenance. The Irreducible fund has over \$800,000. With the current interest rates, an additional \$800,000 or \$1 million still would not be enough. However, if interest rates returned to 4 or 5 percent, this would provide an additional \$40,000 to \$50,000 additional on the money that we now have.
- Councilor Price asked what options might be available, if not for this budget year, for future fiscal years.
 - Staff explained a consensus was needed from City Council so staff could develop next steps. Staff understood Council is interested in raising fees and offered to propose some specific rate increases to Council in the future. In addition, as part of the budgeting process, which starts in April, staff understood Council wanted a higher level of maintenance at parks. Staff has already begun to discuss the Parks budget for the next fiscal year and would present proposals to the Budget Committee and City Council to address the concerns in a way that fits within the City's resources. Putting money toward the Parks Department may mean the City will not have the ability to fund some things in other departments. Staffing levels would be addressed through the full budget process.
 - Councilor Price noted one option is to consider what will be necessary in two or three years when space runs out; perhaps the 50 acres could be developed one acre at a time, instead of all at once. City Manager Estes said staff could provide for discussion cost estimates to develop smaller portions at a time.
- Councilor Herzig wanted to explore whether the City could legally sell the cemetery. Council needed to know if there was a way to get out from under the entire cemetery. City Manager Estes said staff would research this.
- Councilor Warr confirmed no more property was available in Warrenton. Director Cosby clarified the Ocean View Cemetery was about halfway developed.

Director Cosby asked the Council to summarize and provide a clearer consensus about the level of maintenance desired:

- Mayor LaMear believed keeping the graves cleared and clean was most important. As long as the grass was mowed and kept neat, a manicured lawn was unnecessary.
- Costs associated with keeping gravestones cleaned are not included in cemetery plot fees.

- Councilor Warr explained that routine maintenance of the gravestones involves weed eating around the flat markers to keep them visible and blowing grass clippings off the upright markers. He preferred a pristine cemetery, but understood this was not possible. He agreed the cemetery should just be kept mowed and gravestones maintained. He and Mayor LaMear preferred mowing be done weekly instead of twice a month.
- Councilor Price said she was more tolerant of longer periods between mowing and was not concerned about watering in the summer. She agreed uncovering the flat markers should be a priority and may be easier to maintain once completed. She believed mowing should be kept to a minimum.
 - Councilor Warr said failing to mow often enough leads to more maintenance issues. The flowers and trash need to be cleaned up because nothing looks worse than two-week old flowers on a grave. During the prime mowing season, the grass is high enough that the vases cannot be seen and they are mowed over. Mowing every two weeks creates more damage and causes the cemetery to look tacky with old flowers and trash. Councilor Price agreed.
- Parks Board President Hernandez asked how many hours of staff time would be necessary for minimal maintenance. Staff replied that mowing weekly would require two people for about three and a half days. Additional staff time would be needed for weed eating and picking up trash. If irrigation or fertilizer were added, the grass would grow faster, which would require even more staff. President Hernandez believed the first small step should be to have a full-time employee dedicated to cemetery maintenance.
- Councilor Herzig believed the cemetery should be maintained at least as is because the complaints indicate people do not want to see lower levels of maintenance. He believed a full-time employee should be dedicated to the cemetery. The City needed to be sensitive to the people who paid money with the promise of professional care and if they say any less maintenance is unacceptable, then the City needed to respect that.

City Manager Estes said staff would use feedback from City Council to develop a proposal for the budget process. Director Cosby said she would provide Council with more detailed information about incremental fee increases and staffing costs associated having two seasonal employees, as well as two seasonal employees and one full-time employee. She confirmed that fees would need to nearly double to eliminate the \$56,000 deficit.

Mr. Dunn listed several projects throughout Astoria that were completed by the National Guard and said the National Guard might be able to help develop the cemetery.

Councilor Price noted she did not see any benches in the cemetery. Councilor Warr explained benches were not legally allowed. Mayor LaMear added benches would present more mowing obstacles. Councilor Price suggested selling benches for \$5,000 to \$10,000 to keep the number of benches in the cemetery to a minimum. Director Cosby added that the City charges a substantial amount for the memorial benches along the Riverwalk. Ideally, a full concrete pad would be installed under the bench to avoid mowing around it.

Councilor Nemlowill was very concerned about increasing the amount of money taken from the General Fund for cemetery maintenance. While the City has made a promise to cemetery customers, the City has also made a promise to the taxpayers of Astoria that services would be provided. She did not believe taxpayers ever thought their tax money would be going to cemetery maintenance. Many people who have purchased plots are not residents of Astoria.

- Director Cosby noted some cemeteries charge separate out-of-district fees. City Manager Estes said that because the General Fund is already being used to cover the deficit, staff could consider how a revised maintenance plan might decrease the amount of General Fund money used if fees were increased incrementally.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:55 pm.

APPROVED:

City Manager

A work session 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, Public Works Director Cook, Financial Analyst Snyder, and City Support Engineer Moore. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

DISCUSSION OF THE CSO PROGRAM AND ANTICIPATED SURCHARGE AMOUNTS

In January 1993, the City of Astoria executed a Stipulation and Final Order (SFO) with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Since that time, the City has taken substantial positive steps toward significantly reducing combined sewer overflows (CSO) into the Columbia River and Youngs River. The Council work session will include a brief history of the CSO Program, completed and future projects, monitoring, modeling, and finances. The goal of the work session will be to provide the Council with history, current status, and future direction of the CSO Program.

City Manager Estes said DEQ approved the City's request to extend the deadline for completing the CSO project.

Engineer Moore gave a detailed description of what is involved in the CSO project, reviewing the history of the CSO program, monitoring, and utility surcharges via PowerPoint. During the presentation, she and Director Cook responded to Councilor's questions and comments as follows:

- Currently, Astoria controls about 90 percent of the sewer overflow that used to flow into the rivers, which is estimated to be about 300 million gallons per year.
 - The system will always result in some overflow into the rivers during heavy rain events. However, Astoria now complies with DEQ's requirements to prevent overflow during smaller rain events.
 - When the wastewater treatment plant was built in 1975, it was designed for population growth. Astoria has not had any population growth, so the plant has plenty of available capacity for the sewer overflow. Since the CSO project, the plant now treats about 1 million gallons per day in the summer and 20 million gallons per day in the winter. Treating this wide range of flows is a challenge.
 - The City is not required to monitor the quality of the water that overflows into the rivers. Astoria does not regularly monitor the overflows, but does monitor the first flush of overflow that occurs after a summer of dry weather. Since storm water causes most of the overflows, most of the contaminates are very diluted. Therefore, the City is spending a lot of money for a little bit of gain.
- Monitoring is essential because it allows the City to determine how much work is necessary to comply with DEQ without overspending. Population projections and safety are factored into the monitoring.

Financial Analyst Snyder presented a detailed financial analysis of the CSO project via PowerPoint. His presentation included historical and current financial projections, amortization schedules, loan requirements, and utility surcharges. He and City Manager Estes responded to Councilor's questions and comments as follows:

- The loans require the City to keep a reserve and bring in enough revenue to cover the debt. Rate increases plus sewer surcharges are necessary to comply with the loan requirements. Revenue is generated from the consumption that is billed and since consumption is not increasing, neither is the revenue.
 - For the next fiscal year, Staff will recommend a 2 percent rate increase and a surcharge increase of 5 percent.

Councilor Price understood the loans were extended to prevent overlapping debt service. However, she was concerned that the extension would cost more interest. Staff confirmed the interest rates were very low. Financial Analyst Snyder said he would get back to Councilor Price with the exact amounts.

Engineer Moore presented the results of completed CSO projects and reviewed the current status and future direction of the CSO Program via PowerPoint. She made the following key comments in response to Council's questions and concerns:

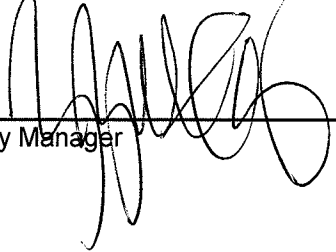
- Future projects will be more difficult and expensive because the locations are not as densely developed.
 - Projects will not overlap prior to 2025 so the City has time to pay off loans.
 - The City expects to spend between 9 and 12 months obtaining funding from DEQ, which has been factored into the timeline.
- The actual expenditure for crosswalk paint on the 11th Street CSO project was less than projected. Councilor Herzig believed substandard paint might have been used because the paint is already wearing off. Engineer Moore explained paint is only expected to last about a year and Staff restripes annually.

Councilor Herzig noted some of the CSO work would overlap with construction on the Irving Street Bridge. However, he understood Staff would work to ease the burden on the neighborhood.

ADJOURNMENT TO REGULAR SESSION

There being no further business, the work session was adjourned at 6:49 pm to convene the regular session City Council meeting.

APPROVED:



City Manager