
CITY OF SEDRO-WOOLLEY

Special Meeting of the City Council
Retreat

March 14, 2016 – 10:00 A.M. – Swinomish Lodge

ROLL CALL: Present: Mayor Wagoner; Councilmembers: Judith Dunn Lee, Brenda Kinzer, Germaine Kornegay, Julia Johnson, Chuck Owen, Rick Lemley and Brett Sandström. Staff: City Supervisor/Attorney Berg, Finance Director Nelson, Public Works Director Freiburger, Planning Director Coleman, Fire Chief Klinger, Police Chief Tucker, IT Director Chambers and Library Director Peterson.

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 A.M. by Mayor Wagoner.

City Supervisor/Attorney Berg welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the retreat agenda and purpose.

IT – IT Director Bill Chambers provided a report from the IT Department, including a presentation that introduced his department and articulated the 2016 goals and objectives.

FINANCE – Finance Director Patsy Nelson provided a report on the Finance Department including a basic understanding of the functions of the Finance Department. Finance is the backbone of the city with primary responsibility for budgeting, auditing, cash receipting, cemetery, utility billing and call center, payroll and much of Human Resources, accounting, receivables, collections, record keeping, facility rental counter etc. She also discussed future needs including options for credit card processing, cemetery software and the fact that 80% of the Finance staff are nearing retirement.

PLANNING & BUILDING – Planning Director John Coleman provided a report on the Planning and Building departments including a discussion of how a permit is processed when received over the counter. He also talked about future ideas to improve customer service with limited staffing. The Planning and Building Department is down one full time FTE from a decade ago and two of the three current employees are likely within five years of retirement.

LIBRARY – Library Director Debra Peterson provided a report on the Sedro-Woolley Public Library including a written report that include some Sedro-Woolley Library history and the critical nature of early literacy. The Sedro-Woolley Library serves about 6,800 patrons including about 500 rural residents. She also provided some data regarding the city and the region as it related to service demands at the city library.

FIRE – Fire Chief Dean Klinger reported on the Sedro-Woolley Fire Department, including call volume, staffing and possible future options and issues. In the Chief's time with the department, call volume has increased from a few hundred a year to probably more than 2,400 this year. Sedro-Woolley Fire Department is well equipped, but limited in staffing. The biggest issue facing the department is staffing in the long term.

POLICE – Police Chief Lin Tucker provided an update on the Sedro-Woolley Police Department, including working through a handout provided to Council. He also talked about 2016 training, crime watch volunteers, reserve officers and the Police Department’s Facebook page. The Police Department is better staffed now than at any other time in history and is busy making progress on quality of life enhancement in the city. The Police Department is proactive in its operation and will work outside of the city limits when those rural residents are committing crimes that impact the city. He also talked about revised evaluations and updating the department’s manual. Finally, he addressed the need for additional code enforcement and records personnel.

PUBLIC WORKS – Public Works Director Mark Freiberger reported on Public Works, including Solid Waste, Operations (Parks, Facilities, Streets, Storm Water and Cemetery) and Wastewater. Public works staff has been reduced by 3 FTE’s since he was hired in 2007. Today, public works has 25 FTE’s and 12 part time employees, divided into three divisions. If it rolls, is wet, is coming down or going out, it is the mission of public works. Freiberger also addressed the engineering function internally. He noted the list of recent accomplishments on the hand out. Pressing needs for public works include maintenance of the 49 miles of streets in the city (budget unchanged in the past 9 years), 41 miles of sidewalks on city rights-of-way, ADA compliance, parks oversight, facilities maintenance, 2MGD WWTP assessment and plans for future upgrade. Funding construction phase work for Fruitdale is a significant issue for this fall to construct next year. Finally, the public works planning documents are taking some time and need to be addressed in the very near future.

Council and Staff visited informally during lunch beginning at 12:15 P.M.

Following the informal lunch, the retreat moved to a presentation by City Supervisor/Attorney Eron Berg at 1:05 P.M. He talked about the overall economic conditions of the city, including the services delivered, current delivery models and options available. He also talked about tax and fee options as well as service delivery alternatives.

Councilmembers asked questions about the presentation and then led into a council conversation regarding priorities. Councilmember Kinzer asked about the economic impact of Northern State. Councilmember Owen expressed concern about the equipment maintenance on lawn mowers. Mayor Wagoner prioritized public safety and believes Police Department records support is critical and would like to see that happen first. Councilmember Sandström asked about software or technology options that could assist in the Police Department records department. Councilmember Dunn Lee feels that the city cannot afford to lose more WWTP employees to neighboring treatment plants. Councilmember Kornegay agreed and also agrees with the need for the records support.

Councilmember Kornegay appreciated the Finance Department’s plan to add elements to Bias as well as the advance Bias training. Mayor Wagoner asked if there was interest in reconsidering business license fees for the bars. Councilmember Kinzer asked if there is a way to charge bars by event. Councilmember Kornegay asked if the council could see the council packet from the bar business license fee discussion from a few years ago. Councilmember Kinzer requested that the Council get updated 911 call statistics for the bars.

Councilmember Kinzer reflected the biggest complaint she hears is the condition of the streets in the local access areas. She questioned if it is possible to reallocate funds in a particular year and make some progress on local access streets? Councilmember Johnson feels like Sedro-Woolley citizens are most concerned about the lack of local options to purchase staples including grocery stores, clothes, shoes, etc. Sedro-Woolley needs to have a "brand" or a "draw" to attract tourists to visit. Councilmember Sandström believes the downtown needs to be thriving to attract additional and new businesses to the city including SR 20 frontage and questioned how we revitalize the downtown? Councilmember Kinzer asked for a plan to revitalize downtown. Discussion ensued regarding the downtown area to include how do we transition downtown from offices to downtown commercial? How do we encourage mixed use redevelopment downtown? Is there any interest from the council in code enforcement regarding downtown to require maintenance and repairs? Could the city provide informational notices about repair and maintenance requirements to encourage voluntary compliance? Councilmember Sandström asked about the Main Streets Program.

Councilmember Johnson expressed concern about the street crew and the parks department staffing levels. Could we support those departments with more staffing? Councilmember Kinzer stated that more money must be found to support the departments and particularly through the growth of new and more businesses. Councilmember Dunn Lee stated that the city must prioritize sales tax generation. City Supervisor/Attorney Berg asked about plans for the old Tesarick Field.

The spray park was discussed. Councilmember Sandström asked about revising the bathrooms at Memorial Park to reduce criminal activity. Could the bathrooms be restructured to delete the locking front doors? The same questions could also apply to Hammer Heritage Square. The food bank was also discussed, specifically regarding the future location.

Councilmember Owen feels that the utility tax is the only fair way to increase taxes. Mayor Wagoner agreed and expressed that taxes are not pleasant, but a user tax is the most fair way to levy costs. Councilmember Kinzer asked about the feasibility of purchasing derelict buildings in the Central Business District for redevelopment purposes. Councilmember Sandström also likes the idea of facilitating small business development and cited the Port of Anacortes's incubator project. Councilmember Owen thinks the city needs businesses and tax base.

Councilmember Owen left the meeting at 3:35 P.M. to pick up grandkids.

Councilmember Sandström asked about the Omni Processor and how it could be incorporated into the city's WWTP.

City Supervisor/Attorney Berg provided an update on the proposed library partnership. Some discussion followed. Some conversation also followed about the location of the proposed spray park at Memorial Park.

City Supervisor/Attorney Berg asked about the retreat and retreat format. Both Councilmember Johnson and Councilmember Dunn Lee liked the retreat. Council members expressed appreciation for the use of the room.

Mayor Wagoner adjourned the meeting at 3:57 P.M.