

MINUTES

TOWN HALL MEETING
OF
APRIL 16, 2012
5:30 P.M.
MID COLUMBIA SENIOR CENTER
THE DALLES, OREGON

PRESIDING: Mayor Jim Wilcox

COUNCIL PRESENT: Bill Dick, Carolyn Wood, Dan Spatz, Brian Ahier

COUNCIL ABSENT: Tim McGlothlin

STAFF PRESENT: City Attorney Gene Parker, City Clerk Julie Krueger, Public Works Director Dave Anderson, Police Chief Jay Waterbury, Librarian Sheila Dooley, Community Development Director Dan Durow, Finance Director Kate Mast

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Wilcox called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

PRESENTATION REGARDING COAL TRAINS IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

Lauren Goldberg provided a presentation regarding coal exports and potential impacts to The Dalles. She provided background information regarding proposed coal terminals in Oregon and Washington and discussed the number of trains that would need to be added to carry the coal to the terminals for export. Ms. Goldberg asked that the Council consider sending a letter to state and federal decision makers, or adopting a resolution asking for a review of the impacts of coal exports to rail communities.

Dennis Morgan addressed the City Council, saying he was speaking as a concerned citizen and pointed out there were four at-grade crossings in The Dalles and if additional trains were added, it could cut off the downtown from the river. He said the community had been working hard to reconnect the community with the river and this would be detrimental to the efforts. He asked the City Council to call for an investigation of the impacts and to further study the issue.

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Luise Langheinrich urged the Council to give a voice to the opposition of adding coal trains through the community, saying the environmental consequences to the citizens and environment could be severe. She said emissions from coal burning in China had been proven to return to the United States, causing additional health concerns.

John Nelson said The Dalles was a beautiful community to live in and feared the coal trains passing through the area could devastate the environment and also cause the town to be cut off from the river due to the large volume of trains that would be added to the rail system. He asked the City Council to be the voice for the community and ask for further review of the impacts to rail communities.

Katy Young noted that the railroad companies had their own laws and had a lot of control over important issues. She noted a derailment that had occurred in the past and no other agencies, law enforcement, or environmental agencies were allowed at the site until the railroad had completed their clean up. Young said it was very important for the community to ask questions and to take a stand in opposition of the addition of coal trains passing through our town.

Phil Brady provided a demonstration of how coal easily turned to dust and would be carried in the wind. He also showed coal suspended in water, noting that it would stay in the water and air for a very long time. He said some would like to see coal cars covered, but that could cause them to explode, so was not an option that could be pursued to keep the dust down. He talked about the economics of coal exporting, saying consumption could level off and that the amount of exported coal would depend on the cost of coal in the United States, compared to the cost of coal in China. He asked the Council to oppose the coal exports to protect water life, business, and the environment.

Dewanda Clark said this was a wonderful community to live in. She said another concern of adding more trains to the system was that it could hurt businesses on the Port because of their need to go over the railroad crossings. She urged the Council to gather additional information and urged citizens to speak up about the issue.

Jim Gordon said he did not think there was any safe method for transporting coal.

Mary Merrill suggested the City work with other communities to collaborate regarding the questions, concerns and protecting all the Gorge rail communities.

Councilor Ahier expressed concern regarding the capacity of the railroads to add the number of trains that would be needed to transport large quantities of coal.

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Ms. Goldberg said she believed the Burlington Northern line in Washington was currently at 70% capacity and Union Pacific line in Oregon was currently at 60% capacity. She said questions should be asked about how the railroads would accommodate, whether by adding rails or sidings.

Councilor Wood asked if the local agriculture industry had concerns regarding the coal trains. It was noted that vineyards in the Dallesport and Skagit Valley areas had expressed concern.

Councilor Spatz asked if there had been any studies regarding the impact of the coal residue to the fish or agriculture industries. Ms. Goldberg said she did not believe there had been any formal studies. She said there was some concern also expressed by some of the Native American Tribes.

Councilor Ahier said he had learned that in 2005, there were two train derailments in Wyoming and both were caused by coal dust on the rails.

PRESENTATION REGARDING PRIDE IN THE DALLES PROGRAM

Mayor Wilcox reviewed his proposal to develop a program to take a positive approach to keeping our community clean and cared for. He said he hoped someone would sponsor a beautification program for individual properties or neighborhoods, hoping people would help one another to get neighborhoods looking good again. Wilcox said it was also important for government agencies and schools to keep their own properties in good condition and wanted to encourage civic organizations to get involved in helping people in need. He said he hoped Boy Scouts, churches, and civic organizations would help those in need to refresh their properties and neighborhoods.

Tim Pitts said it would be helpful to provide information to citizens regarding dry landscaping methods, which would make yards look nice without having to spend too much money for irrigation.

Callie Jordan shared an idea to create a group of people, "Pride Corps", who could establish official work days in the community or neighborhoods and provide before and after pictures for publication.

It was noted the Master Gardeners or County Extension Service may be good resources for various landscaping methods.

John Westhaver, Faith Lutheran Church, said the church property had a lot of lawn and landscaping and it was very expensive to irrigate. He said it would be helpful if there was a rate incentive for larger properties.

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A citizen from Dallesport spoke about the Dallesport Community Clean Up annual event, noting that people signed up in advance of the event, either to receive assistance in cleaning up their property or to help clean up properties. She said the program was very successful.

Mayor Wilcox said the City may need to review their current program to see if it could be adjusted to be even more successful.

Callie Jordan noted the annual clean up event in The Dalles was so crowded with vehicles that some people didn't participate because they had to wait so long to dispose of their items. She suggested the event occur more than one time per year.

Mary Merrill commented that she had been recovering bicycles from the community clean-up event and took them to someone to restore. She suggested someone else could help with bike rehabilitation and offer the bikes to those in need.

Dana Schmidling said one easy way to help keep the community clean was to just pick up litter as people are walking.

Councilor Spatz said he supported re-implementation of the Beautification Award.

There was discussion regarding creation of block parties to celebrate neighborhoods that get cleaned up.

Jim Gordon said people would not appreciate more laws to keep the community clean and suggested the City Council serve in a support role of any programs developed toward community clean up, but not to run the program through the City.

Teresa Myers said it was also important to get people to change how they think about disposing of items. She said many things could be re-purposed.

Bobbie Miller said she thought the recently adopted burn ban was ridiculous and she said she was disappointed that there was not alternative view presented regarding the coal train issue.

Bob McNary said the City needed to take care of its streets, sidewalks and curbs, which would help to make the City more presentable.

It was noted that street maintenance was funded by fuel taxes and that while the local fuel tax had not increased, the cost of asphalt had more than doubled in recent years. Public Works Director Anderson said there were approximately 88 miles of City streets. He said the goal was to re-pave 5% or about 3 ½ miles per year, but it was not possible to keep up due to revenues.

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Marilyn Clifford said she had been disgusted by the bad smell at Sorosis Park, caused by a portable toilet. She said there were many smelly places in the community that needed to be addressed, including Dirt Hugger on the Port, Cherry Growers, and the Tie Plant.

It was suggested the City consider alternate sources of revenue to keep the streets maintained.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.

Submitted by/
Julie Krueger, MMC
City Clerk

SIGNED:


James L. Wilcox, Mayor

ATTEST:


Julie Krueger, MMC, City Clerk