

Town of La Conner
Town Council Meeting
February 23, 2021 – 6:00 p.m.

The meeting of the La Conner Town Council was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Mayor Hayes.

Present: Councilmembers Brunisholz, Leaver, Stokes, Chamberlain and Wohleb.

Also present: Administrator Thomas and Finance Director DeGoede, Public Works Director Lease and Planner Davolio.

This meeting was held electronically on Zoom. Information to join was posted at Town Hall, the published Agenda in the La Conner Weekly News and on the Town Website.

Public Comments:

No Public Comments at this time.

Consent Agenda:

Approval of Agenda

Approval of the Minutes of February 9, 2021

Accounts Payable:	Checks 23853 - 23893	\$140,517.47
	<u>Electronic Pmts. – 201684 Excise Tax</u>	<u>\$5,406.47</u>
	Total Accounts Payable	\$145,923.94

Payroll of February 19, 2021	Checks 5344 - 5349	\$2,248.46
	Payroll Auto Tax Payment #201683	\$7,085.74
	<u>Payroll Auto Deposit</u>	<u>\$20,428.69</u>
	Total Payroll	\$29,762.89

Councilmember Stokes moved to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion seconded by Councilmember Chamberlain. Motion carried 5/0.

Administrator's Report:

Administrator Thomas reported another waterline rupture on Channel Drive, resulting in several after-hours time for repairs. Public Works Director Lease feels this waterline is at the end of its life with a cost of over a million to replace it. The Public Works Crew did a great job under a difficult situation.

Also, Public Works had another break-in that resulted in a significant loss. This is the second time in about a year. Administrator Thomas discussed installing security cameras in Town. WCIA has an available grant for security to apply for. If the Council has no objection, he will pursue it further. Also, he will look toward the Sheriff and a security company for suggestions and guidance. The Port has foot security, but that is not enough.

Mayor's Report:

Mayor Hayes discussed programmable locks for the public restrooms. Public Works Director Lease stated it will be about \$1,300 per door. There are four doors in Town and two doors at the park. He can program the time to open and close, as well as change the times during events. Currently the restrooms in the park are closed for four to five months a year. Mayor Hayes noted the parks are closed due to vandalism, which the money spent on the locks would be about the cost of one incident.

It was the consensus of the Council for Public Works to move forward with the installation of programmable locks for the six public restroom doors.

Councilmember Leaver will be meeting with Adam McGarity to discuss creating an audio program for the Art Walk. The next First on First will be on March 5th.

Listing Agreement – Sale of the Hedlin Property:

Mayor Hayes recapped the history leading up to the listing agreement now up for approval. In 2019, the Hedlins approached the Town regarding the purchase of the ballfield site, approximately 80,000 square feet. They had to sell assets in order to purchase an additional 40 acres of farmland from the Cram Family. Their desire was to have the Town retain the land as a park entirely, with a purchase price of \$625,000. This was not financially possible for the Town. However, administration came up with a solution, proposing a 75/25% model. There is 60,000 square feet for development the Town could sell to recoup its investment and 20,000 square feet to develop a park over time. The value of the park area would be used as a match for any potential grant for park development. The Council decided to pursue this deal with the purchase price of \$625,000 along with a one-year option payment of \$37,500 that was wrapped into the sale price, for a total of \$662,500. Because the Crams gave the Hedlins two years to finalize the sale, a second one-year option was implemented for an additional \$37,500. These are interest payments the Hedlins are paying the Crams.

If the Town did not pursue the risk of purchasing the property, the Hedlins would have probably sold it to a developer, who under the Town’s current code could have built a multi-unit development of a single building with 23 units. The Council did right by the Town by pursuing this, but they did it only with the understanding they would be able to recoup the Town’s investment.

This has been publicly discussed for over a year, along with articles in the paper to keep the public informed. Citizen input has shown the preference of moderate priced single-family homes with more park space. At the last meeting, Council reviewed all options and made it clear they wanted to stay with the 75/25% model and get the property on the market as expeditiously as possible.

Since the last meeting, administration has been working on a solution that would keep within the Council’s wishes and be mindful of public information we have received. The original plan for 12 lots was not possible due to setback issues, but a new model of ten single-family lots and an increase of park space to 30% does work. This includes easements, private streets and driveways, which reduces the cost of infrastructure. It also makes it possible to stay in the \$75,000 price per lot range, at a total of \$750,000. Mayor Hayes recommended adding a buffer for an asking price of \$775,000, but that is up to Council to decide. After all costs involved, there would be a surplus of \$11,260.

Reb Broker, President of the La Conner Little League Association felt there has been no outreach on the loss of the ballfield that kids have been playing on for over 30 years. He has 70 to 100 kids every year and is concerned about moving to the school fields. Their sports will take priority. He asked if the purchase agreement could include an extension to June 15th for the Little League to complete the season. That would give a year to work out another location.

Resident Catey Ritchie noted the information had changed with the purchase cost and number of lots since the last meeting and requested more public meetings to discuss options with information in laymen terms. A letter she put on social media brought in 33 names in support of more time and additional public meetings. She provided the names for the record.

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| Catey Ritchie | Tim Layfield | Evelyn L. Johnson |
| Daniel Castillo | Mark White | Jodie Buller |
| Scott McDade | Libby White | Kim Rubenstein |
| Michael Ritchie | Linda Talman | Georgia Johnson |
| Jules Riske | Sarah McCormick-Hippenstiel | Maggie Wilder |
| Steve Phillips | Jeanne Kleyn | Marc Horton |
| Heather Peterson | Theresa Trebon | Jeff Blanchard |
| Laurel O’Gormley | Sylvia Pippen | Beth Bowles Schmittou |
| Peregrine O’Gomley | Peter Millington | Suzann Schmittou Keith |
| Chris McCarthy | Marilyn F. Johnson | Andi Schmittou |
| | | Jason Burks |
| | | Geo. M. Parker |

Resident Mike Ritchie was happy with more park allocation and fewer houses, but has researched cottage neighborhoods that provide moderate priced housing. He also would like more public meetings and time for the opportunity to make it what everyone wants.

Resident and Planning Commissioner Bruce Bradbrun discussed the work the Planning Commission has been doing on the Comprehensive Plan involving setbacks and lot size. They are under some constraints by the State and County as the Planning Commission is told what they have to plan for, on population growth, within the next 20 years. The Town is extremely limited with land and we have to prepare for a possibility of 300 additional residents. We need affordable housing and preferably not multi-family complexes. This model is a win-win situation for the Town and the people that want the park and people that recognize we need housing.

Resident Amanda McDade is happy for the additional park allocation and agrees we need more housing for families, but focused on the need for more transparency, understanding and other ways to provide more public participation.

Resident Jules Riske helped write the proposal presented to Council, the Mayor and administration. She requested more transparency, information and options through public meetings. She also noted the Mayor went quickly through this new model that is different from the listing agreement in the packet, and asked Council if they understood the changes before them. She asked if it can be presented by design or mapping to understand what this change would look like.

Mayor Hayes explained administration's purpose is to show a concept that could be adopted, but ultimately it will be up to a developer.

Resident Linda Talman was on the Planning Commission last year, and in June, the Planner did mention the Hedlin Property would come up, but she has no recollection of any discussions. She requested more time to work with a public forum to discuss creative and collaborative ideas.

Resident Susan Macek felt we needed more time to make the right choices for future residents of La Conner, by looking at opportunities for maintaining open space, such as the ballfield on Maple, but also balancing the needs for housing development.

Resident Dave Buchan asked if the Town had considered a cottage style development consisting of homes that are 1200 to 1700 square feet each, in a park like setting.

Mayor Hayes read a letter from Dick Holt, a long-time resident and business owner of La Conner. Mr. Holt expressed the need for more affordable housing for families. Developing housing on the property would be beneficial to the Town, since it would support the school and the community as a whole. A possible location for the Little League could be the northwest field behind the elementary school. This field is not used often and would be a larger area, provide more parking and be safer with less traffic.

Administrator Thomas screen shared a visual concept provided by Planner Davolio, showing the 30% Park and 10 residential lots. He explained there are other methods and configurations possible, but the park location would stay the same, on Talbott and Maple Avenue.

Planner Davolio reiterated this is a single concept plan to show it is workable. Whoever purchases the property will have their own ideas. He discussed the parking area for the park, easements, setbacks and points of access. This plan also shows lots 1-5 have a 25-foot setback from the agricultural area. The average lot size is just under 4700 square feet.

Administrator Thomas explained the listing agreement before Council has minimal restrictions that will need to be updated after Council's decision tonight. It does set the minimum number of housing lots and they are to be sold individually. This will prevent the building of condominiums. Also, the square footage for the housing has been set at a maximum to maintain affordable housing.

Additionally, the listing agreement will include the construction of a fence between the residential lots and the park, as well as sidewalk improvements along Maple Avenue.

Mayor Hayes stated he has spoken with Charlie Edwards from the school in regards to the Little League. He said they don't need the field this year due to COVID. The Mayor is planning on meeting with the school in the Fall, to strategize on a temporary location for the Little League and what can be done for a permanent location at the school. He has also reached out to the Tribe. Administrator Thomas spoke with Reb Broker earlier this year, and gave assurances that the Town would try to accomplish one more season at the ballfield. There is no definite future location for the Little League at this time. The space required for a Little League ballpark is between 40,000 to 45,000 square feet.

Dick Nord, Commercial Real Estate Agent for Windermere, explained this is the best concept for capitalizing by selling them as individual lots at \$75,000 each. It is the most economical build for a developer and he feels a buyer could be convinced something like this would be the best layout. If we bring a buyer to the table before the fee of \$37,500 is due in April, the Town would save the \$37,500. That is as good as you're going to get and pay for the property. The price went down by \$150,000 because of the two lots removed at \$75,000 each.

Planner Davolio explained the tiny home or cooperative setting would be processed as a multi-family development because there would be multiple dwellings on a single lot.

Administrator Thomas answered remaining questions from the Zoom Chat Messaging, by the citizens, such as deed restrictions and platting. There were further discussions on flexibility of development to build cottage styled homes, but that would leave the Town at risk of a large multi-family complex or larger homes. Another suggestion was to have the Town plat the 10 lots, but the Town does not own the property at this time.

Dick Nord stated this is a standard listing agreement for a six-month period. Administrator Thomas summarized the changes to the current listing agreement in the packet as the price from \$925,000 to \$775,000, a slight change of the legal description of what is being sold, reduced the number of single-family lots from 12 to 10 but will maintain the size of 1200 to 1700 square foot homes, the property will be subdivided into 10 lots, the construction of a fence between the park and the development, and a sidewalk along Maple Avenue. The Council will need to approve it along with the discussed changes and additions.

Mayor Hayes asked Council how they felt on the 10 single-family lots and 30% park. It was the consensus of the Council to list the property with the 30% park and 10 residential lots. However, Councilmember Stokes noted he was not happy with the park allocation increase because of the costs we already have in this.

Councilmember Wohleb moved to approve the Listing Agreement between the Town and Windermere Reality as presented with a five percent commission, with the modifications of the purchase price of \$925,000 changed to \$775,000 and the 12 single-family lots changed to 10 single-family lots. Additional requirements are a potential revised legal description, the property be subdivided into 10 lots, the builder's responsibility of constructing a fence between the residential lots and the park, and a sidewalk along the park on Maple Avenue. Motion seconded by Councilmember Leaver. Motion carried 4/1 with Councilmember Stokes abstaining.

Little League Ballfield:

Reb Broker, President of the Little League requested a stipulation in the agreement for the sale that the Little League be allowed to complete their seasonal games through June 15th. Dick Nord suggested the possibility of working with the buyer to take possession on June 15th, but not to put it in the agreement. Ultimately the buyer should be first in the process as a large amount of money is involved. Mr. Nord is willing to go to the school to work on arrangements to use the School fields. As a community, we have a responsibility to solve the Little League problem.

It was the consensus of the Council to not have the stipulation in the agreement, as it could hinder the sale. But allow the Little League to continue utilizing the ballfield for now, but they will move to a temporary site if or when one is found.

Catey Ritchie requested a public event on the issue. Administrator Thomas stated Council has already made a decision on the listing agreement, but suggested working with the Parks Commission for the planning of the park. Planner Davolio noted the process to subdivide the property will involve public hearings.

Mayor Hayes noted there will be plenty of opportunity for public involvement and commended the Citizens Committee for their efforts and participation.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 8:41 p.m.



Maria DeGoede, Finance Director



Ramon Hayes, Mayor