**BINGEN CITY COUNCIL MINUTES**

**December 20, 2022**

**Meeting Via Teleconference and In-Person**

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Catherine Kiewit at 7:03 p.m.

Council members present: Phil Jones, Ryan O’Connor, Joe O’Sullivan, and Izzy Schroder.

Staff present: City Administrator Krista Loney, City Attorney Christopher R Lanz., Mike Beck

Audience Present: Jonathan Cohen, Leslie Naramore, Kelli Horvath, Jennifer Pauletto

**Public Comment**

None.

**Meeting Minutes – 12/6/22**

Councilor O’Connor made a motion to approve the December 6, 2022 meeting minutes. Councilor Jones provided the second and the motion carried. Councilor Schroder did not vote as she had not joined the meeting at the time of the vote.

**Mid-Columbia Houseless Coalition Presentation**

Kelli Horvath, Director of the Office of Housing Stabilization; Leslie Naramore, Executive Director, Washington Gorge Action Programs, and Jennifer Pauletto, Assistant Director Washington Gorge Action Programs attended the meeting this evening to present the Strategic Plan and work completed by the Mid-Columbia Houseless Coalition.

Background: rising rates of insecurity, lagging supply with growing demand, investors buying up homes, rents skyrocketing, houselessness more complex, disproportionate impact on traditionally underserved communities.

Partners: 40+

Vision: The Mid-Columbia Houseless Collaborative envisions a region with equitable opportunities and support where everyone who needs stable housing can find it and afford it, especially communities who have faced disproportionate barriers to housing so everyone can achieve the best quality of life possible.

Values:

* Compassion and humanity
* Collaboration and partnership
* Advocacy
* Diversity, equity, and lived experience
* Tenacity and perseverance

Want to find and address root causes of inequity

Four key goal areas:

* Shelter
  + Priorities: build better systems to coordinate shelter placements and services to end houselessness; make sure our region has enough funding to provide shelter, treat shelter staff well, and help shelter guests find housing quickly
* Services
  + Priorities: improve access to resources houseless people need by asking them what would be helpful, and by valuing their culture; add more services in our area that help people who need behavioral health care, support after leaving jail or prison, housing that makes it easier to recover after a health event, and resource navigation; make it simpler for service providers to coordinate care
* Housing
  + Priorities: make it easier to build housing that low-income households can afford and construct at least 262 affordable, accessible housing units int eh five-county mid-Columbia region by 2027; preserve the region’s existing supply of affordable housing; help people of color and other underserved populations access housing; help leaders and the public understand the need for more affordable, accessible housing
* Advocacy
  + Priorities: explain the need for our work to build community support; use data to challenge myths about houselessness and teach people about the impact our regional’s housing shortage has on all of us; advocate for funding and policies that help us make real progress on these issues.

Council had a variety of questions for the presenters. Councilor O’Connor asked for an estimate of the number of houseless people. Leslie Naramore stated that a point-in-time (PIT) count is done every year in January and with the bad weather that makes it difficult to find and count folks. For the January 2022 PIT count in Bingen there were 35 people; Leslie is confident that there are many more. Kelli Horvath explained that the PIT was done a bit differently in Oregon and the January 2022 total was 269 people unhouse, which was a 50% increase over 2021 numbers.

Councilor O’Connor asked what “affordable” housing is and what a monthly rent that represents affordable housing in the Columbia River Gorge would be. Leslie Naramore stated that “affordable” means no more than 30% of income. WAGAP considers less than 30% of 80% of the area median income to be affordable. Kelli Horvath stated that they coordinate closely with the Mid-Columbia Housing Authority because one of the barriers to access for housing is folks who are on a waitlist for a housing voucher, or have one and can’t use it, because the rents in the area are too high. The Mid-Columbia Housing Authority is conducting a study about what fair market rates should be in terms of housing vouchers as Housing Authority rates are not particularly representative of what most housing opportunities are advertise for.

Councilor O’Connor asked at what point the group would have a list of coordinated suggestions for cities in the area to improve the housing situation. Leslie Naramore stated that they will be releasing a document with specific actions that people can take, especially in time for the legislative session. Kelli Horvath added that the Mid-Columbia Houseless Coalition has several different projects in the works including compiling and publishing information specific to opportunities to preserve current affordable housing, what others have implemented that has works, what you might implement.

Councilor O’Sullivan asked if there is anything that has been discovered of what would be considered a livable wage for the Gorge or around Hood River. Leslie Naramore stated that this figure depends on household size and the number of parents or guardians in the home. The Washington Low-Income Housing Alliance has a number that can be researched on what qualifies as a living wage in a specific geographic area.

Councilor O’Sullivan asked how many houseless individuals are working and houseless. Leslie Naramore stated that the doesn’t have numbers off the top of her head but can say that approximately half of the people currently in a WAGAP shelter are employed. Some have a disability and receive SSDI. WAGAP sets those in the shelter up with a community health worker to help them navigate the system. One thing that WAGAP does right away is find out if those in the shelter have an income. If not, they work closely with WorkSource and People for People to help them find a job. If the person has a disability but isn’t on SSDI, WAGAP will help them apply. Kelli Horvath stated that half if not more of their shelter guests are working and houseless. They operate houseless prevention programs, as well. They can provide short-term rent assistance.

Mayor Kiewit stated that she participated in all of the dialogue setting up this organization, part of brainstorming sessions. She added that the work on the comprehensive plan may create some relevant opportunities with zoning and density.

**Public Hearing – Conditional Use Permit 2022-003**

Mayor Kiewit opened the public hearing at 7:54 p.m. Administrator Loney read the three comments from Bingen residents into the record.

Howard Bulick

*==Your Contact Information:==  
Full Name: Howard Bulick  
I would like to stay anonymous: No  
E-mail Address:* [*redacted*](mailto:HOWARDBULICK@HOTMAIL.COM) *I would like to stay anonymous: No  
Phone Number: redacted  
I would like to stay anonymous: No*

*Are you a Bingen Resident? Yes  
==Public Comment Details:==  
Public Comment:  
RE: Request for conditional use permit for congregate housing at  
210 N. Cedar St.  
My understanding is this proposal is for a three level, eight  
unit apartment building on a standard city corner lot (50'X100'),  
In an R1 residential zone. My home is one block from this  
location, at 303 E Humboldt St, and I am opposed to this project  
for the following reasons.  
1. Parking. There is not enough available parking for this many  
units. We already have spillover parking in the neighborhood from  
the hotel when they have events and busy weekends. This is a  
residential neighborhood, I don't want to have to look at a line  
of cars in angle parking spaces. I would much rather see a nice  
house with a yard and garden.  
2. Setbacks. We should not allow any variance from codified  
setbacks to enable the developer to encroach on their neighbors  
or hinder traffic sightlines around this corner lot at a busy  
intersection.  
3. Fire and Safety. There are seven residences on that block now,  
eight units will more than double the chances for a fire or  
medical emergency.  
3. Use. This is a residential neighborhood of single family  
homes, with the exception of a tri-plex and a four-plex in the  
100 and 200 blocks of Jefferson St. The Hotel has already added  
enough traffic and noise to the neighborhood. A three story,  
eight unit apartment building is not an appropriate use for this  
lot, and it is a bad precedent to set before we establish proper  
urban growth planning. If the City were to allow this conditional  
use, I myself would immediately apply for the same conditional  
use on my corner lot at Humboldt and Cherry.*

*Surely, the Hotel can find enough space within the already  
permitted location to add some housing. When the hotel applied  
for the original conditional use permit I did not object, partly  
because promises were made of good jobs for local people. That  
promise has not been kept. If it had been, there would be no need  
for the Hotel to provide housing for it's employees.*

*No one would deny that we are in desperate need for more housing  
in low to middle income segments of the market. Already,  
available jobs in nursing, education and other professions are  
going unfilled because of the lack of affordable housing, but we  
should not allow ad hoc, unplanned development in residential  
neighborhoods to suit the needs of one business. The City needs  
urban growth planning, but even before that happens we could  
identify areas where high density housing would be more welcome.  
Perhaps along Stueben and Oak streets, in or above unused  
commercial space if parking can be provided. Across the street  
from me is a house for sale on a double lot. I would not object  
to a four-plex with off street parking in that location.*

*I would like someone to follow up with me: No*

Allan Shafton

*From:* ***Allan Shafton*** *Date: Fri, Dec 16, 2022 at 4:07 PM  
Subject: Society Hotel Conditional Use Permit  
To: <*[*clerk@bingenwashington.org*](mailto:clerk@bingenwashington.org)*>  
CC: <*[*administrator@bingenwashington.org*](mailto:administrator@bingenwashington.org)*>*

*I’m writing to provide input on the proposed Society Hotel Conditional Use Permit.*

*I believe that the application should be denied.*

*I have been living on Cedar Street for many years.   When I first saw the neighborhood, I was impressed by how uncongested and peaceful (train noise not withstanding) it was.  There was very little traffic going past my house.  That is no longer the case.  Car traffic has increased dramatically.  Further increasing the population density can only add to the problem.  Building an apartment building does not fit the neighborhood.*

*The hotel should have anticipated housing for employees during the planning stage.  There is a public bus stop at the hotel.  Employees can live elsewhere and take the bus to and from work.  If employees lived in an apartment, where would they park?*

*I’m also concerned that the congregate housing will be built, and then at some future date be re-purposed.  What would prevent the hotel from opening up rentals to non-employees?  What if  the parcel in question was sold to another entity at some later date.  Then we have a relatively large rental property in a Residential R1 zone.*

*My additional concerns include the precedent that would be set by granting the permit.  If permission is granted to this application, other people could make a case for granting them a permit.  Besides the conditional use permit, what other exceptions would be made?  Would required setbacks be exempted?*

*In summary, I am opposed to the request for a conditional use permit.  The City of Bingen should deny the request.*

*Thank you for considering my input.*

*Sincerely,*

*Allan Shafton*

*Bingen, WA*

Maria Lopez

*The TSH lot and my lot are neighbors. I have a beautiful garden and if they build it the garden will be in shade. There is no room to park. If they make the building she is worried about her child. She is worried about the noise. She has lived here for 32 years and doesn’t want an apartment there. That lot on the corner cannot handle that many people. The parking is not enough. I do not agree.*

Mike Beck from Skamania County Building attended the meeting and stated that he had received no additional public comment.

Councilor Jones stated that his thought process kept circling around to fairness. If another citizen of Bingen came to council and asked for the same thing that The Society Hotel (TSH) is asking for, the answer would be no.

Councilor Schroder stated that congregate housing in a R-1 district does not meet the conditional use and that the code should be modified.

Councilor O’Connor stated that Council must comply with the rules of Bingen Municipal Code as they are written.

Jonathan Cohen stated that he feels the comments that were submitted were unfair and that TSH has been a good neighbor, employer, and community member and that he will defer to Council’s decision.

Mayor Kiewit stated that the comments that were submitted weren’t necessarily relevant to the conditional use permit that is before the Council now. She continued that a conversation about modifying the density and zoning portions of the Bingen Municipal Code is forthcoming and she hopes that Jonathan will be part of those discussion.

Councilor Jones made a motion to deny Conditional Use Permit application 2022-003. The motion was seconded by Councilor O’Sullivan and carried.

**2022 Budget Amendment**

Administrator Loney provided a memo, a budget, and Ordinance 2022-12-733 for Council for their review. This budget amendment is a “true up” to actual spending for the year. After review, Councilor Jones made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2022-12-733 Amending the 2022 Budget. Councilor O’Connor provided the second and the motion carried.

**2022 Year In Review**

Administrator Loney reviewed the minutes from the January 25, 2022 visioning session and outlined all the items on the list that council has achieved this year.

**November 2022 Treasurer’s Report**

Administrator Loney presented the November 2022 Treasurers Report. All is as it should be and the books are balanced. Councilor O’Connor made a motion to approve the November 2022 Treasurers Report, and Councilor O’Sullivan provided the second. The motion carried.

**Staff Reports**

Administrator Loney presented the following updates:

* Work continues on the agreement with Everybody’s Brewing.
* Many thanks to all who were involved with the Santa Parade and a special thank you to Santa Spratt.
* Bingen Fire Department heard from FEMA that they did not receive the grant for self-contained breathing apparatus.
* An email was received regarding the Bingen-White Salmon pool. Price tag for the pool is now over $7M.

**Mayor’s Update**

Mayor Kiewit presented the following updates:

* She spoke with Police Chief Hepner. There is usually a small uptick in calls to the police this time of year for things like domestic violence. Please contact Chief Hepner with questions or concerns. The new lateral-transfer officer is operating on her own now.
* The Hood River bridge replacement project will have a new website unveiled in 2023. The website will focus on the bridge commission and encourage the public to be involved in the fundraising and building process.
* She is looking forward to 2023 and the January visioning session.

**Council Comments**

Councilor O’Sullivan asked if the results of the bridge survey would be made publicly available. Mayor Kiewit stated that she would have access to those results and would share them.

**Voucher Approval**

Payroll Checks 23469-23471 (Dated 12/15/2022) and Payroll Check 23490 (Dated 12/20/2022) and Payroll EFT (Dated 12/15/2022) totaling $25,261.09; General Fund - $10,497.38, Street Fund - $3,923.84, Water Fund - $2,541.60, Sewer Fund - $462.40, and Treatment Plant Fund - $7,835.87.

Councilor O’Connor made a motion to approve the Payroll dated December 15 and 20, 2022. Councilor O’Sullivan provided the second and it passed unanimously.

Claims Checks 23472-23489 (Dated 12/20/2022) totaling $32,941.93; General Fund - $4,202.44, Street Fund - $230.32, Hotel/Motel Tax Fund - $9,968.04, Water Fund - $508.42, Sewer Fund - $230.32, Treatment Plant Fund - $6,397.80, and Water Capital Reserve Fund - $11,404.59

Councilor O’Connor made a motion to approve the Claims dated December 20, 2022. Councilor O’

Sullivan seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

**Adjournment**

Mayor Kiewit closed the meeting at 9:02 p.m.