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Hammond appears to not care

I participated in the April 12 Hammond Town Hall meeting and it appeared to me that very few people, if any, who live in Hammond showed up to comment about the probable future of the old Hammond City Hall. I am disappointed about the lack of civic support for the old city hall building.

I have been a longtime active supporter of Hammond. I feel it was a civic failure that a measurable number of at least 35 Hammond residents (I have been told a past Hammond town hall meeting attracted approximately that many) choose to not participate in a town hall meeting devoted exclusively to the fate of that building.

I have engaged in hundreds of conversations with Hammond residents in the past where residents expressed opinions they did not feel the Warrenton City Commission treated their area of the city fairly in their decisions.

When I challenged these opinions by stating Hammond residents rarely participate in public meetings of the com-

mission, I was told it is more trouble than it's worth.

People who wish to complain in face-to-face conversation about government but not to participate in public meetings lose the value of living in a democracy. People may not like what I have to say; however, I participate and state my opinion, which is what freedom of speech is all about.

It is now obvious to me most people who live in Hammond have lost any civic pride they once had in the history of their town and no longer care about the name Hammond.

I am not a contractor. Therefore, I cannot guess at what the total cost would be to bring the old city hall building into current code compliance which would be a requirement before the VFW could be allowed to take control of that building.

I assume the total repair cost to bring the old city hall up to code would be between \$5,000 and \$10,000. I do not think the VFW could afford the annual cost of utilities, property insurance, liability in-

surance, and any new maintenance issues that arise in the future.

I suggest Burt Little (a leader in the local VFW) seek out a contractor he may know and ask the contractor to make an estimate of how much it would cost to make all the repairs listed on the document read by Mayor Balensifer at this town hall.

Once a reasonable cost amount has been determined, and Mr. Little feels he could possibly obtain a grant to fund the repairs within a full year's time, a letter should be sent by Mr. Little to the city manager requesting an extension of time (12 months) before the city commission decides to make a final decision on the old Hammond City Hall building.

Burt Little would need to inform the grant provider no grant would be provided in the future until other contingencies discussed below are solved.

I question whether the VFW could obtain a grant to repair this building to full code sim-

ply because they want to have a permanent home for their meetings. I am a big fan of the VFW. I also question if the VFW can pay the costs of utilities, insurance coverage, and future maintenance problems from their limited resources.

My suggestion to this problem is if the VFW can obtain a grant to fund the code repairs, they should return to the Warrenton City Commission and request the city consider treating the VFW the way they treat any Warrenton budgeted operation (library and senior citizen building) if this is possible.

At the end of the town hall meeting, I asked Mayor Balensifer if there was going to be any feedback of the verbal comments made at that meeting. I was informed the city commission will have a public meeting at some currently unknown future date to decide the fate of that building.

When there was a town hall meeting in Warrenton concerning a major change Pacific Seafood wanted to make at their PAC FAB building, there was a huge amount of conversation from all the commis-

sion members (both positive and negative).

I cannot understand why commissioners could make comments at the Pacific Seafood town hall meeting, yet have no comment concerning the VFW request.

There was no comment back to the VFW how commissioners felt about the request and or any action they might consider if the VFW made changes. This is just more lack of transparency to me.

At this time, it looks like the next time the city commission discusses this issue it will be when they take a public vote and then it will be too late to consider anything else.

I think the city commission should have a public conversation about supporting the VFW with the insurance coverage the city currently uses to cover these library and senior citizen center buildings at this time.

The VFW would need to pay for the annual utilities and any future damage to property if this property is provided to them on a 25-year lease for an annual rent of \$1.

I would like to see the old Hammond City Hall building retained for the future if that can be economically justified as described above. Otherwise, it would be a sound decision to sell the building and the land for whatever the city can get for it.

If the property is sold in the future, I would prefer there be a clause in the sale agreement that requires the existing building be torn down or removed.

The city would prefer to have a new home developed on that land to obtain a new property taxpayer to justify all the years this property has produced no income for the city while still having costs incurred since the library was closed.

Scott Widdicombe
Warrenton



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The week ahead

Nearly all public meetings are also held virtually. Information on how to connect is posted on each entity's website.

SUNDAY, MAY 15

•**Astoria Sunday Market**, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on 11th Street, downtown.

MONDAY, MAY 16

•**Astoria City Council**, 7 p.m., City Hall, 1095 Duane St., Second Floor.

TUESDAY, MAY 17

•**Primary election day**, ballots can be put in an official drop box until 8 p.m.

•**Port of Astoria Commission**, 4 p.m., 10 Pier 1, Suite 209, Astoria.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18

•**WomenHeart Support Group** for those at risk of

heart disease, 6:30 p.m., via Zoom. Info: 503-338-8435.

THURSDAY, MAY 19

•**Countywide Veterans Breakfast**, 8 a.m., Port Light Cafe, 33168 Patriot Way, Camp Rilea.

•**Spruce Up Warrenton**, noon, City Hall, 225 S. Main Ave.

•**Warrenton Community Center Board**, 4 p.m., Community Center, 170 S.W. Third St.

•**Grief Support Group**, 4:30 p.m., CMH conference room A, 2111 Exchange St., Astoria.