

A special session of the Astoria Common Council was held at the above place at the hour of 9:00 am.

Councilors Present: Nemlowill, Price, Brownson, Jones (via telephone), and Mayor LaMear.

Councilors Excused: None

Staff Present: City Manager Estes, Parks and Recreation Director Cosby, Planning Consultant Johnson, Finance Director Brooks, Public Works Director Harrington, and City Attorney Henningsgaard. The meeting is recorded and will be transcribed by ABC Transcription Services, Inc.

Mayor LaMear thanked Rosemary Johnson and Nathan Crater for researching the City's properties and preparing the report.

### **SALE OF CITY-OWNED PARKS LAND**

Earlier this year, the City Council directed the Parks and Recreation Department to consider sale of several City-owned parcels that are currently maintained by Parks staff. Based on the recently adopted Astoria Parks and Recreation Master Plan, several sites were identified by the Council due to the underutilized nature of the sites and/or development potential of the sites. The sites Council identified to be investigated included: Birch Ballfield, US Custom House Reconstruction, Tidal Rock/Chairwall, First US Post Office, and Yacht Club. It was later determined to not pursue the sale of the Yacht Club at this time due to the complications concerning relocation of the Parks facilities located at the Rec Center (Yacht Club).

Sale of any City-owned property is governed by processes identified in City Code, State Code, and City Administrative Practices. Staff has prepared a summary of the process for sale of City-owned property. The process includes several City Council meetings at different stages, an appraisal, and hiring a real estate firm to handle the sale documents. Staff has also prepared a fact sheet on each of the four sites identified with a list of issues that would need to be considered and/or resolved prior to sale of the properties.

It is recommended that City Council determine which of these properties and/or any other possible properties should be researched further for possible sale. Should Council wish to have staff proceed further based upon the information above, actions to consider include proceeding with sale of Birch Field; relocation evaluation and engineering evaluation of Customhouse; contact adjacent property owners to Tidal Rock.

Director Cosby gave an overview of each site, which was included in the Agenda packet. Her presentation included details about each property's current condition, potential uses for each property, potential issues with selling each property, Staff's recommendations, and the next steps necessary to implement those recommendations. During the presentation, Staff addressed Council's questions and concerns with the following key comments:

#### **Birch Field**

- Birch Field is in a flood zone, so the park would need to be evaluated to determine whether filling it in would impact drainage in the Alderbrook neighborhood. Development of the property would require flood plain permits, which would mandate drainage infrastructure.
  - The City could not issue permits at the time sale, but would have to wait until a development had been proposed to the City. However, because this park is in a flood zone, a higher level of review would be done.
- Director Harrington explained the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) project and the potential future need for more storm water treatment facilities. He described various types of facilities, noting that an open wetland at Birch Field would be more economical than a vault. The Custom House would also be suitable for a wetland. The City has several other sites suited for storm water treatment facilities, so selling Birch Field and/or the Custom House would not negatively impact the CSO project.

### Custom House

- If the Custom House were moved, the new location would have to be deemed appropriate. One potential location is the east side of the park. An environmental impact review would also be required. Staff believed any new location would need to be near the water or within view of the water, and that certain locations would be deemed ineligible due to historic context.
  - Annual expenses for Custom House were estimated to be \$4,000 or \$5,000 on average. Annual expenses fluctuate due to maintenance needs. During FY2015-2016, repairs to the building and installation of the interpretive panels cost \$8,000.
  - Maintenance costs were likely to increase if the house were moved to a more accessible location.
  - The house was originally to be used by an organization like a genealogical society. The interior is part of the building's historic designation, so a commercial use would have to be a very low impact use. The building does not have a foundation or plumbing.

### Tidal Rock

- A 40-by-80-foot space at Tidal Rock Park could be developed for commercial use. Rosemary Johnson indicated the exact location on the map shown on the screen.
- The rock used to be accessible by a trail, but is now only accessible from the Astor Hotel parking lot.
- Even though Tidal Rock is not designated as a park, the Parks Department still maintains it because it is City-owned property. The Parks Department maintains many City-owned properties that are not parks. Director Cosby confirmed she preferred that all parks be accessible and well-maintained.
- Urban Renewal District Funds could be used to improve Tidal Rock. However, funds have already been earmarked for other projects.
- Councilor Nemlowill confirmed that Fort George had not made any formal offer on the property, but was focused on expanding to Warrenton.

### Post Office Park

- Councilor Brownson wanted to find out why the Post Office did not take care of the park, given its historical importance. However, the new 5-year maintenance agreement on the park gives the City time to consider next steps.

Councilor Price did not believe selling the properties made sense, given the high costs of selling them and their limited uses. Mayor LaMear agreed, but believed Tidal Rock might be worth pursuing. The adjacent property owners might be willing to purchase or maintain the park.

Councilor Jones believed Tidal Rock Park was useless as a historic attraction because of the property's configuration unless the section of the property south of the rock were developed. He suggested relocating the Custom House to Post Office Park. Staff confirmed there would be significant difficulties getting that approved. Councilor Jones said Birch Field is not used and recommended pursuing the opportunity to turn the one-acre lot into single-family homes.

Councilor Brownson agreed that of all the properties researched, Birch Field was best suited for sale and development. He also agreed the Custom House should be moved, but the other properties were not worth considering due to the high costs of selling them and their limited uses.

Mayor LaMear believed the Custom House would be more visible at the 9<sup>th</sup> Street Park.

Director Cosby confirmed the best possible outcome of these properties is not feasible due to the City's limited resources.

Councilor Price asked if there was a way to inform the public of the City's intent to sell these properties without spending any funds until a proposal came forward. City Manager Estes said the sale of any City-owned property would incur expenses and a time intensive process. He confirmed the steps necessary to sell each property in Staff's report. Councilor Price recommended removing the Park designation from Birch Field because that seemed like a simple task. Ms. Johnson explained how the Park designation impacted Code enforcement.

Director Cosby confirmed removing the Park designation from Birch Field would not impact the Parks Department. If the property were sold, the department would have one less site to manage and resources would

be reallocated to other higher uses. Selling one site would not make a significant impact, but many small changes could add up.

Mayor LaMear expressed concern about the potential future importance of Birch Field as a storm water treatment facility. Staff confirmed they did not yet know what the City's storm water treatment requirements would be. Removing the Park designation would be done through a City Code amendment, which would require a public hearing.

Councilor Price said she supported selling Birch Field because the Alderbrook neighborhood already had several other natural areas like the Riverwalk and Violet LaPlante Park. Additionally, Birch Field is under water for most of the year.

Mayor LaMear asked Council to narrow the list of properties to be considered for sale. Discussion of each property included the following key comments:

- All Councilors agreed nothing should be done with Post Office Park.
- Most of the Council agreed that the City should consider a public/private partnership for the maintenance of Tidal Rock Park. However, Councilors Nemlowill and Brownson disagreed since the park has a maintenance agreement and could be improved with urban renewal funds. Councilor Jones believed the land around the rock should be developed commercially and the rock showcased as a historic attraction.
  - Councilors debated about whether to pursue a partnership now or wait until the current park adoption had expired. Forming partnerships take time, but Staff has limited capacity and it could be beneficial to wait and see what happens with the current park adoption. After some discussion, Council agreed Staff should start conversations with potential partners about adopting Tidal Rock after the current park adoption expires.
- Moving the Custom House would be very expensive. However, the City could sell a portion of the lot and use the profit to move the Custom House. Councilor Jones believed a quarter-acre could be sold, which would accommodate five residential units. The potential to add to Astoria's housing stock was a good reason to pursue dividing and selling a portion of the land. Councilors Nemlowill and Brownson agreed. Councilor Price did not believe a developer would build housing on that lot due to its location and configuration.
  - Councilor Brownson wanted to discuss the entire section, including the ballfields, because he was concerned about the City maintaining properties it does not own. The ballfield is owned by the City and the City does not sponsor sports programs. Staff explained that most of the field was owned by the school district, but home plate was on City property and within the street right-of-way. The City only maintains a portion of the park. Additionally, the Parks Department uses school facilities.
  - Maybe the US Customs Service would have interest in the Custom House.
  - Council debated about whether Staff should spend time pursuing options for the site. Most of the Council believed doing so would take up too much of Staff's time and be too expensive. While something should be done, this site should not be considered a priority. Councilor Brownson said he needed more information about the feasibility of moving the Custom House before he could make a decision.
  - Ms. Johnson confirmed she had the capacity do more research on the feasibility of moving the Custom House. Staff agreed that doing more research would help inform a decision about what to do with the site. This research could be done affordably and without taking up too much of Staff's time. Council agreed that Staff should continue to pursue options for the Custom House.

Mayor LaMear called for public comments.

Celia Davis, 1354 Miller Lane, Astoria, asked if Tidal Rock had to remain in its current location.

Ms. Johnson said yes because it serves as a benchmark. The rock marks the location of one of the original survey pin sites and is still used for surveying today.

Ms. Davis said it would have been cool to incorporate Tidal Rock into the new Scandinavian park. She noted that she liked the Custom House.

Jim Stoffer, 51<sup>st</sup> and Cedar, Astoria, said the Custom House site did not look viable for housing, even low-income housing. He believed the City was stuck with the building and moving it would be costly. The size of the

lot looked like it could accommodate a fast food restaurant but it was not even big enough for a Dollar General. Developing the lot would degrade the approach to Astoria. Improving the site with a pull-out lane for busses, similar to the lane at the monument adjacent to Safeway, would enhance accessibility to the site. He believed the residents of Alderbrook considered the ballpark part of the neighborhood's fabric even though it is not used much. Converting the open space to another use like a swale would be acceptable to the community, but he did not want the park sold.

The Council discussed Birch Field. Most of the Council agreed that if the park designation was removed, the City should make their reason known, that the designation was removed for the purpose of pursuing a housing development on the property. If the City has a future need for the property, the park designation should remain. Staff confirmed the property was not critical to future storm water treatment; Staff does not know what the future requirements would be.

City Manager Estes gave details about the process of removing the park designation from Birch Field, which would include a public hearing and an amendment to the City Code. Ms. Johnson explained how this could impact the Buildable Lands Inventory and said more information would be provided when Council reviews the Code amendments. Council agreed Staff should move forward with the process.

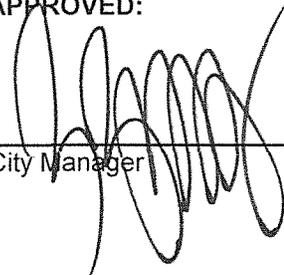
**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:42 am.

**ATTEST:**

  
Finance Director

**APPROVED:**

  
City Manager