

City of Forks
Council Meeting Minutes Special Session
City Council Chambers
500 East Division Street
November 14, 2022
5:30 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Pro Tem Weissenfels called the Budget Workshop to order at 5:33 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Council members present: Weissenfels, Wood, Soha, and Gingell (present via Zoom). Absent: Mayor Fletcher. Staff present: Grafstrom, Clerk/Treasurer, Fleck, Attorney/Planner, Rowley, Police Chief, and Hampton, Public Works Director.

2023 Budget Workshop

Mayor Pro Tem Weissenfels invited those present to speak about their applications for lodging tax funds and to answer questions from the Council.

Sue Shane, President of Rainforest Council for the Arts (RCA), spoke about that organization's request for \$1,400 to cover costs associated with a spring event and a fall event, normally Hickory Shirt/Heritage Days and Rainfest, which RCA sponsors each year.

She said that in 2022, RCA sponsored its first maker's market that hosted 30 local vendors and a large number of shoppers. RCA earned \$500 in vendor fees, donations, and proceeds from a raffle. She said they also hosted a family art day and various art classes that were open to the public. Some discussion of possibilities for future activities ensued.

Cindy Mesenbrink from the Piecemakers quilt club spoke about that organization's request for \$5,300 to cover costs associated with the quilt show and a quilting class they host during Rainfest. These costs include the fee for the nationally renowned quilting instructor and advertising. There was a brief discussion of visitors to the events they host.

Kenneth Turner, Secretary of the Raincon committee, spoke about that organization's request for \$2,000 to cover costs associated with Raincon. Raincon 2022 hosted 107 attendees. He briefly explained Raincon, and said they had fewer visitors this year, especially from out of town/state. Next year, the committee would like to return Raincon to its original date around Father's Day.

Council Member Weissenfels asked about advertising. Turner said they advertise locally via social media and the Forks Forum. They hope to advertise in the Peninsula Daily News next year.

Victor Whitehead of West End Thunder spoke about that organization's request for \$10,312.61 to cover costs associated with races hosted by the group through the summer, and possibly a Hot August Nights event, including insurance and advertising. He said KISM out of Bellingham holds a contest for two free rooms donated by the Forks Motel for each race. He said racers come from as far away as Oregon and British Columbia.

Phil Sifuentes and Jolene Price from Rain of Terror spoke about that organization's request for \$15,000 to cover costs associated with the haunted house, including advertising, materials, props, dinners for the actors, and production of a promotional video, via social media. The Rain of Terror haunted house achieved "pro haunt" status last year and may be the only haunted house visitors can fly into. Sifuentes said they work with hotels and vacation rentals so that visitors to the haunted house can stay to see the area. Price said that all proceeds go back into the local community, and that last year they donated to the Clallam Bay Fire Department. Some discussion of the haunted house and its operations ensued.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom asked if they might partner with another group, such as the Sasquatch Convention, to draw more visitors. Sifuentes said that having just achieved "pro haunt" status, they are currently working on establishing their own brand and characters so they can one day branch out into activities that earn revenue they could put back into the community.

Bryon Monohon from the Forks Timber Museum spoke about that organization's request for \$35,000 to cover costs associated with operation of the Timber Museum. He began with a brief history of the Museum, followed by a description of the types of visitors they receive. He said they added a Twilight scavenger hunt this year that drew new types of visitors.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom asked if there was any crossover or cooperation between the Museum and the logging and mill tours offered by the Chamber of Commerce. Monohon said nearly everyone who goes on the tour ends up in the Museum. Much of this is due to encouragement from Richard Halverson, who leads the tours, and is a member of the Museum board.

Dan Trickey from the Forks Lions Club spoke about that organization's request for \$6,300 to cover costs associated with improvements to and maintenance of the City's ball fields at Tillicum Park. He said they would like to cover the fields with a new material that absorbs water. They also plan to do some renovations to the concession stand at the fields. He said that participation in the usual three softball tournaments that are held in Forks has been dwindling due to the state of the ball fields, and he hopes that with these improvements, the number of annual tournaments might increase to four or five. Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom noted the application included plans for cooperation between the City, Quillayute Valley School District, and the Lions Club to improve the ball fields. General discussion ensued about the project.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom asked about the draw our softball tournaments have. Trickey said that 10–12 players on each team generally bring around three family members or friends each, bringing a total of up to 300 people to stay in our hotels and campgrounds and eat at our restaurants.

Lissy Andros, Director, Forks Chamber of Commerce spoke about the Chamber's three requests for \$35,000, \$15,500, and \$135,000 to cover costs associated with the Forever Twilight in Forks (FTF) Festival, the FTF Collection, and the VIC, respectively. She referred to a chart that is part of her application packet and spoke about a new "Equinox" event to be held to coincide with the scholarship auction, which she has incorporated into the weekend's schedule. She hopes to welcome around 300 visitors for the event, who, according to the Olympic Peninsula Visitor Bureau (OPVB) should contribute approximately \$76,500 to our local economy. Other events to be held include a movie showing, a paint and sip, and the Twilight Lounge at the RAC where Twilight fans can hang out together. She said Very Important Twilighter (VIT) tickets for the 2022 FTF Festival sold out within 30 hours and that Forks welcomed 2,000 visitors for the event who stayed for several days. Based on OPVB estimates, that represents nearly \$60,000 contributed to our local economy. She said there was more mutually beneficial participation by non-profit organizations this year, and the Festival won the Event of the Year award for our region. The award is presented annually by the Washington Festivals and Events Association. She said the dates for next year's Festival are September 13–17.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom asked about the distances visitors travel to attend the Festival. Andros said people come from all over the country and the world.

Andros next spoke about the FTF Collection. One of the highlights of the Collection space is a 360° plexiglass-enclosed costume display that provides space for five additional costumes. Another is the animatronic baby affectionately known as Chuckesmee. Chuckesmee was not used in the movies because it is so creepy, but has quite a following and people come from around the world to see her. Due to the confined space, the Collection admits no more than eight visitors at a time to protect the displays. She said the tour takes approximately fifteen minutes, and people wait over an hour in line to get in. The Collection relies on lodging tax funds and public support to offset costs. She said local businesses have told her they are much busier when the Collection is open. The lodging tax funds she is requesting would be used to pay the rental fees for the retail space at the RAC and storage space at the ICN Building. She said public support offsets operational and staffing costs, and that the Chamber is considering donating a portion of their public support to one or more local non-profits.

Council Member Gingell asked about an entrance fee. Andros said no fee is charged because the objective of the Collection has always been to encourage people to visit and shop in downtown Forks. Donations are accepted. Gingell then asked about the number of visitors. Andros said the Collection had received 15,332 visitors for the year as of October 31.

Finally, Andros spoke about the request for lodging tax funds to cover costs associated with operation of the VIC and tourism marketing. The VIC continues to set records in terms of numbers of visitors. All-time records were set in September and October of this year, exceeding even those seen during the height of the Twilight craze, and she expects this trend to continue in 2023. She said staffing is the VIC's largest cost, and is not covered by lodging tax funds. A single day sometimes sees as many as 400 visitors and even 200 on weekend days during the October through May value season. She said the VIC currently has five permanent employees, and she hopes to hire for three summer positions. The VIC markets Forks, La Push, the Park, and Twilight with visitor packets, print and television ads, social media, and more.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom asked about VIC record months. Andros said the VIC had over 7,000 visitors in September of this year, well exceeding the previous record month of 5,900 visitors. She said that as of October 31, the total number of visitors for the year was 52,000 compared to 45,000 in 2011 and 2021, and 73,000 in 2010.

Council Member Weissenfels asked about the percentage of visitors to the FTF Festival who were repeat visitors. Andros estimated it to be around 60%. She attributes this to social media and younger people discovering Twilight.

The meeting turned to general discussion of the lodging tax fund budget amongst the Council and staff. Council Member Wood said he didn't think \$70,000 for ball field improvements was enough. Public Works Director Hampton agreed. Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom asked Hampton to investigate the cost of the project in more depth, and if Council is in favor of those improvements.

Council Member Weissenfels drew attention to the difference between the Chamber of Commerce request for the FTF Festival and the Mayor's recommended budget, and wondered what effects the reduction would have. Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom said this is the time for Council members to make their recommendations regarding lodging tax fund allocation.

[Mayor Fletcher arrived at 7:08 p.m.]

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom directed Council to a printout regarding the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in their Budget notebooks. She said that per City ordinance, water and sewer rates are tied to the CPI, and the "10.1" highlighted in the printout is the number upon which 2023 rate increases will be based. She said next year's increase is unusually high and will be a shock to users. Council should be aware of the upcoming rate increase, as well as the ordinance upon which it is based, and be ready for input from the community.

Public Works Director Hampton reminded Council that even now, our water and sewer rates do not provide enough revenue to keep up with significantly increasing costs. He also said he has an excellent crew, but that the City needs to be more competitive in terms of wages to keep the hardworking employees it has, especially when higher paying jobs are opening up.

ADJOURNMENT

The Budget Workshop recessed at 7:15 p.m. until the Regular Meeting at 7:30 p.m.



Tim Fletcher, Mayor



Audrey Grafstrom, Clerk/Treasurer