

City of Forks  
Council Meeting Minutes Special Session  
City Council Chambers  
500 East Division Street  
November 22, 2021  
5:30 P.M.

**CALL TO ORDER**

The Budget Workshop was called to order at 5:32 p.m. by Mayor Fletcher.

**ROLL CALL**

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

**2022 Budget Workshop**

Mayor Fletcher invited those present to speak about their applications for lodging tax funds and to answer any questions the Council may have.

Linda Offutt, Board Member and Treasurer for the Forks Timber Museum introduced Bryon Monohon, the new Museum Director. She said the Museum reopened to the public on May 15, 2020, and is still receiving 15–20 paying customers per day for a total of 6,791 paying visitors within the first six months. That number is on par with the total number of paying visitors in 2019. She informed Council that the Museum would close Thanksgiving Day and reopen on January 9, 2021. During that time some additional displays will be created and Mr. Monohon will be brought up to speed on photos and items in storage. As in past years, lodging tax funds received by the Museum are put toward salaries and marketing materials.

Director Monohon said that in his short time as Director, he has been surprised by the volume of visitors and the type of visitor. He said the majority of visitors to the museum are those sympathetic to the timber industry, either through knowledge of, or some connection to, the industry.

Council Member Hillcar asked what the Museum's other major sources of income were. Mr. Monohon responded, admission (\$3.00 per person), memberships, and gifts.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom reminded Council of past amounts awarded to the Forks Timber Museum: \$34,000 in 2020 and \$31,500 in 2021. \$35,000 has been requested for 2022.

Kenneth Turner, Chairman of the Board for Raincon reported that Raincon was cancelled in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19, but that they are planning an in-person event, possibly with an online component for those who are unable to attend in person, for June 2022. He explained that the relatively new Raincon event is a comic convention that

began in 2018. The 2019 event was substantially larger than the first. Raincon now includes vendors, panels with artists, at least one cosplayer, guests, and so on.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom reminded Council that Raincon has requested \$2,000 for their 2022 event.

Phillip Sifuentes represented the Rain of Terror Haunted House with Jolene Price assisting via Zoom. The Haunted House did not open in 2020 due to COVID-19, but 2,500 visitors came from all over the country in 2021 for a 20-minute experience, due in part to advertising in the form of a professional video that was distributed to a large audience. They also encourage repeat visitors by providing a different experience each weekend. The entrance fee is just \$10 compared to \$45 charged by another haunted house approximately the same size as Rain of Terror. ROT has become a professional haunt, yet still runs on one of the smallest budgets in its 10-billion-dollar-a-year industry. The requested lodging tax funds would be put toward masks, costumes, props, repairs, and advertising, as well as additions to the experience, possibly in the form of an escape room, corn maze, actor panels, and so on, to extend the experience for those who travel to visit the Haunted House. Rain of Terror actively recruits at-risk kids from the schools and people from the community who are in recovery. They also encourage seniors from the high school to take on the Haunted House as their senior project. Profits from the Haunted House are donated to local charities.

Attorney/Planner Fleck suggested that each applicant submit a spreadsheet indicating where their visitors came from so the City could have its cartographer map the origins of visitors to our area. Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom said this was a great idea and suggested that all awardees add a spreadsheet to their end-of-year report as these numbers are very important.

Clerk/Treasurer Grafstrom reminded Council of the past amount awarded to Rain of Terror Haunted House: \$8,000 in 2021. \$20,000 has been requested for 2022.

Council Member Hillcar suggested increasing the amount recommended by the Mayor from \$11,000 to \$12,500.

Sue Shane with Rainforest Council for the Arts (RCA) explained their application for lodging tax funds, which is exactly the same as that presented for 2021. They are requesting lodging tax funds for the Rainfest and Hickory Shirt/Heritage Days celebrations. New Old Time Chautauqua has agreed to come for Rainfest, and RCA would like to host a movie and popcorn night for Hickory Shirt/Heritage Days. She noted that no events would be held for either celebration if it's not safe to do so.

Lissy Andros, Chamber of Commerce Executive Director spoke about their request for funds to be used for Visitor Information Center (VIC) operations. The two top priorities in 2022 will be salaries and marketing. The budget for the current two part-time employees and one administrative employee at the VIC is \$73,000. The Chamber of Commerce would like to add a third part-time position and two to three seasonal positions at a cost

of \$44,000. Her salary is not included in either amount. The other priority will be marketing. A new website will be launched in 2022, and the Forks brochure will be reprinted as it is every two to three years. In addition, marketing activities utilize a variety of media, including print, tv, bus ads, and social media, which is used to advertise the Forks area, our three unique museums—Timber Museum, John’s Beachcombing Museum, FTF Collection—the logging and mill tour, our tribal areas, businesses and restaurants, and community events. They will focus their advertising on the shoulder/off season with the tagline and concept, “The rainforest is most beautiful when it’s raining.” She said she would like to keep the sanicans at the VIC, but at an expected \$7,500 for the year, the cost exceeds the need to do so.

Lissy Andros next spoke about the Chamber’s application for lodging tax funds for the Forever Twilight in Forks Festival (FTF) to be held September 8–11, 2022. She said she is hoping for support from the City, businesses, and the community in general. The Festival plans to sell 400 tickets to people from around the world. These visitors tend to stay, eat, and shop in Forks for five or more days. Next year, costs of goods and services will increase; rent on the office space at the ICN Building used for the Festival will increase by 5.5%, and she thinks that as much as 1/3 of the funds requested could be spent on lodging for special guests, cosplayers, and staff. In addition, another cost that she emphasized was accommodations for Festival ticketholders with special needs. For example, she’s heard from a deaf person who plans to attend next year’s festivities, which means the Festival must provide, at its own expense, an ASL interpreter for that guest for the entire weekend.

Lissy Andros then spoke about the Chamber’s application for lodging tax funds for the Forever Twilight in Forks Collection. She said that as of October 31, 2021, the total number of visitors, most of whom shop and dine in Forks, for the year is 14,271. Rent for the Collection will increase by 5.5% next year, and she would like to increase the staff so the Collection could be open five days a week as it is in the summer rather than the two days a week they currently operate in the winter.

Council Member Hillcar reminded Ms. Andros of previous discussions/suggestions that the Collection charge even a nominal entrance fee, and asked whether that has been considered in the past year. He said he would like to see the FTF Collection showing some commitment to increasing their revenue so they are not so reliant on lodging tax funds, and pointed out that other applicants for lodging tax funds, such as the Timber Museum and Rain of Terror Haunted House contribute to their budgets themselves by charging small entrance fees of \$3 and \$10, respectively. In addition, he reminded everyone present that the model for the property since the Odd Fellows Hall was there has been for the retail space to pay for building operation and maintenance. Ms. Andros said she feels that casual visitors would cease to visit the Collection, and donations would decrease if an entrance fee were charged. She said that an entrance fee is something they may consider in the future. Hillcar ended by recommending that the lodging tax award for the FTF Collection remain at the \$14,000 awarded last year, and not increased to \$15,000.

[Council Member Hillcar left the meeting at 6:24 p.m.]

Discussion of the various applications for, and allocation of, lodging tax ensued followed by discussion of revisions made to the proposed budget at the previous meeting and clarification of revenues and expenses.

[Council Member Gilstrap arrived at 7:07 p.m.]

Discussion reverted to applications for lodging tax funds. Mayor Fletcher recommended increasing the award to Rain of Terror Haunted House to \$16,000. Council Member Weissenfels was for the \$5,000 increase in the Rain of Terror award, as well as the \$10,000 increase to the Tillicum Park restroom remodel, and in agreement with all other recommendations by the Mayor including \$15,000 to the FTF Collection. Council Member Gingell agrees with Council Member Hillcar's suggestion to reduce the Mayor's recommended award for the FTF Collection to \$14,000, but otherwise agrees with the Mayor's recommendations. Council Member Soha said he would like to see a comparison of locals to visitors from out of town attending the Rain of Terror Haunted House.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

The Budget Workshop recessed until the Regular Meeting at 7:17 p.m.



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Tim Fletcher, Mayor



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Audrey Grafstrom, Clerk/Treasurer