

City of Selah Study Session

November 9, 2004

At 3:00pm, Mayor Jones opened the Study Session and reviewed the format.

Joyce Darling, 209 Valleyview, passed around handouts including a letter from the Greater Selah Friends of the Library and an information sheet about the Library. She reported the group held a meeting the previous night, and they have been looking at Library issues during the past year. She stated they have talked to Grandview, have been before YVRL, the Selah School Board, and have concluded that in order for Selah to have a quality library a vote for annexation is imperative and needs to be done soon. She stated in the letter there are steps to follow to unite rural and urban Selah in a capital facilities area for the library and subsequently a bond issue for a building, noting her group recognizes that City taxes will go up so they will pay as much as those in the County and in other cities in Yakima Valley. She explained that if annexation fails, people in the City would not have access to the Yakima Valley Regional Library. She noted City Hall would like to have the space the Library is in. She stated the Friends would work to get a new building. She stated the users of the Library aren't complaining about the building. The building is not the most important thing, it's what's inside the library that's important. She stated they all agree that the City should go ahead with annexation vote and promised their help.

Richard Pingrey spoke, representing the Selah Library Board. He stated they met last Friday and unanimously supported the resolution put forward to the Council. He stated the Friends and the Library Board are in agreement, the difference being that the Board believes it is a two-part commitment, that it is not enough to have library services without having them in an library facility. He stated they not only want to see annexation, but also a roadmap to the formation of a library facilities area and then a vote for a library building. He stated the Board's resolution is that roadmap, but suggested it should probably be drafted by the City Attorney. He stated the need to reassure the community that we will have an adequate facility down the road. He said the Board believes the YVRL can best provide library services. He stated the best facility is a building designed and built to be a library paid for by the formation of a capital facilities area and paid for by a bond issue. He said people need to understand that a roadmap is a conditions for voting to annex. He stated some are afraid we will lose the library December 31, 2004 and that's why they are holding back on support of the "roadmap." He reviewed fact sheet of his perceptions. He noted hostility between the Regional Library and the City has kept the two groups from open discussion of that would be best for the Library. He said there is zero support from any of the people in the community for an inferior library. He stated the Selah Library Board's position supports what they believe the community wants, and they also believe rural Selah wants a quality library and that they will support a facilities district. He volunteered to answer questions.

Councilman Keith Larson stated the Library Board's position says there are no unknowns, but that he wants to see some commitment from YVRL that their service will improve.

Mr. Pingrey responded that there is an assumption that the better the facility is, the better the service would be.

Councilman Larson asked if Mr. Pingrey believes it is the size of the Selah library that prevents our getting a "bigger bang for our buck."

Mr. Pingrey responded that others have the same perception that resources are being drawn from this area, and we're not getting our equivalent share. He stated it is possible to withdraw from annexation.

Mayor Jones stated for the last two weeks the City Supervisor and department heads have been working on the City's budget. He noted a tax initiative limited yearly increases to 1% while the cost of living is going up at the rate of 3-5%, insurance and utilities at an even higher rate. He stated the Council will balance the budget; how, he is not sure.

City Supervisor Frank Sweet passed a handout to Council Members, a memo concerning a Selah City Library. He stated he is proposing a Selah City Library and has attached a budget. He stated after receiving a letter from the Yakima Valley Regional Library stating they were not interested in a joint proposal or any solution other than annexation. He stated his conclusion that the City can operate the Library for less cost. He noted his budget outlines 1.5 full time librarians, who with the help of the Selah Library Board, would choose books and materials. He stated the Library would be open from 2-8pm Monday through Friday for use by both City and County residents. He stated the first year the City would install 4 computers, and recommended \$15,000 for books and materials. He stated this is a sound business decision and proposed a two-year trial, and, if after that time, the City determines the independent library is not working, we could then go for annexation. He reviewed budget items proposing to operate for \$80,000 the first year and \$70,000 the second. He noted no action will be taken on this or any proposal until November 23, emphasizing it is important to have a quality library in Selah and that people have choices.

Councilman Larson asked what item 41.01 "Professional Services" would be for. The City Supervisor responded it would be used if there is a need to contract with some group for media services or possibly for an inter-library loan program.

City Supervisor Sweet said it appears doable. Someone in the audience asked if copies of Mr. Sweet's proposal would be made available to the public. Mr. Sweet said they would be available after the meeting.

Mayor Jones stated he appointed a committee from the Council to meet with Yakima Valley Regional Library Board last year. He asked if any members of that group wished to speak.

Councilman Herb Schmidt stated that committee has been working for almost three years. He stated discussions always seemed congenial, but because the YVRL Board is reluctant to "set precedence" by entering into any special relationship with the City, not much action was taken. They were reluctant to change. They made it clear that if annexation were presented, the YVRL would not support a facility to go with it. He stated support for a library within the City was never questioned by any member of the Council or of the committee. He stated a library reflects the community, it reflects a source of information, it reflects a position of intelligence within the community. He emphasized the point Mr. Sweet made that annexation could be considered down the road and he believed it likely would be. He stated these negotiations have been going on for years and still are at "square 1." He said he is looking forward to making a decision and moving forward.

Councilman Scott Smeback stated there are three good views here, but his questions have to do with the business decisions that must be made. He said he has not seen the paperwork to reconcile the apparent imbalance in funding. He stated this became an issue because the Council didn't believe the City was getting full value in service for what the larger community of Selah put into it. He stated continuing with YVRL doesn't answer the question of could it be more or should it be more. He said he doesn't believe we have an answer yet.

Councilman Keith Larson stated this issue came to the forefront when a distraught parent came to the Council pleading for help because her child had seen something appalling, and she could not believe we would allow such a thing to be happening in our City. He noted the dialogue (or lack thereof) was opened centered around the question "are we getting the value for money?" He said there is a misconception that the Council doesn't care about the library, but noted those in audience don't come to other meetings so they don't see how much the Council has supported the library through the years. He stressed the importance of the Council's role as stewards of taxpayers' money, noting that when the City questioned the Regional Library, their response was "just keep quiet and keep making your payment you should be glad you're getting by with the rates that you pay. He stated he wants and the rest of the Council want the best library for the City of Selah and doesn't believe the YVRL is the way to achieve that.

Councilman Brian Harris stated the usage of the Library by 154 people a day is a bigger number than he thought it would be. He noted the Regional Library does not seem to recognize that a customer looks for three things: quality, service and price. He said the City is not getting two out of three with YVRL, the price is high and the quality and service are low. He said it appears the City could sustain its own library and have a better one.

Councilman Herb Schmidt thanked Joyce Darling for the information she provided. He stated it is first time he has seen these usage figures. He noted the City has requested this information for some time.

Councilman Allen Schmid thanked the Selah Library Board and the Friends of the Library for putting this information together. He stressed the importance of recognizing that the Council Members have always said there will be a library. He said he has a problem when people try to define what constitutes a library; for example, Grandview and Ellensburg both have libraries. He stated if a building makes a library, we don't have much of one, and if what's in it constitutes a library we still don't have much of one. He stated the YVRL budget is staggering spending \$40,000 for books at Selah Library and \$19,200 for support services for books and materials processing. He stated for the amount of money they say they're spending on Selah's Library, we ought to be appalled. He recalled his experience on the Council sub-committee and its attempts to negotiate with the YVRL Board. He stated when just board members and Council members were together, everything went fine, that is until YVRL staff entered the picture. He stated from that point on he became frustrated with negotiations. He praised the efforts of the Friends and the Selah Library Board to approach the YVRL. He further stated he would be interested to see how these numbers were arrived at and to learn how many of the people using the library are from within the City and how many from outside. He said he needs more information before he is ready to make a decision. He said the letter YVRL Board sent September 28, 2004 promised that if the City annexed they would show us how to build a new library. He said it would be a very difficult decision for the Council to make and thanked the citizens for their time and effort.

Councilman Pete McNew said he has had only one year on the committee, but appreciates Allen's frustration. He said they were encouraged to think outside the box and stretch, but then the YVRL refused to negotiate. He described the Library as "very, very adequate" meeting

minimal standards, when Selah is not a minimal town. He stated his hope that all will work together to achieve the best.

Mayor Jones stated he tried to keep himself out of it. He stated he appointed Richard Pingrey to the Library Board hoping he could advance the efforts toward a Library of which Selah could be proud. He said he was awake much of the previous night thinking about this, and it seems that in every other way Selah thinks of itself as a community. He noted over \$350,000 a year goes to the Yakima Valley Regional Library and they tell us \$180,000 supports the Selah Library, which he doubts, but even if it does, the remaining \$170,000 is going somewhere else. He stated he wants the best there is for Selah, and if there is some left over, so be it. Generosity to others cannot begin before we are taken care of.

Richard Pingrey stated he does not disagree with the frustration Council Members have expressed with the Yakima Valley Regional Library, but he hopes the Council won't let it interfere with their decision-making in regards to the Library. He stated not one person in the room agrees with a City-run Library.

Mayor Jones said he wondered what facility will go first when the Regional Library system comes into world of shrinking budgets. He noted they have made no guarantees that they will continue to support a library in Selah.

Kathy Adamson addressed the Council, noting she is a newcomer to the community who teaches at Selah High School. She stated she didn't inherit any of the problems the Library and City have had, and asked if she could continue to use the Yakima Valley Regional Library system if the City decides to run an independent library.

Councilman Keith Larson responded that that threat has been made, but he thinks it should be possible.

Ms. Adamson stated she would not like to give up a library card, having had one for so many years. She stated if City residents were not able to have full access, she would have to recommend people move out to the County.

Mayor Jones noted the Council has wrestled this issue for years as budgets have become tighter and tighter. He stated the YVRL was unwilling to adjust the amount when the Eyman initiatives hit and still demanded a 6% increase in fees each year at the same time the City was only able to increase levies by 1%.

A county resident who did not give her name asked what is not quality about our library. She stated she gets new books from the Library.

Mayor Jones responded that for \$40,000 a year for books, those books should be available on the shelf.

The same county resident said she believes a lot of them are there.

At 3:58pm, Mayor Jones thanked those in the audience for coming and declared a short break prior to the Council Meeting.