LOCAL NEWS

Larkspur council weighs options for civic campus plan

Larkspur City Hall on Thursday, August 19, 2021. (Sherry LaVars/Marin Independent Journal)

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"I have found in general in my own life, every time I try to save some money at the expense of quality I end up regretting it five-plus years down the road and wished I had done it differently," he said.

Other residents said that they didn't want to see the historic City Hall building abandoned.

Resident James Holmes called the building "iconic" and "an integral part of our history, our heritage district and also our municipal identity and dignity."

"So I would recommend that the council focus on rehabilitating 400 Magnolia," he said. "Shifting a civic campus to the community parcel would be a substantial deviation from what was presented to the community at the time that parcel was dedicated as part of the Rose Lane project."

City Manager Dan Schwarz clarified that the intention has never been to demolish 400 Magnolia Ave. City officials will still have opportunity to discuss what to do with the property at later date.

Joe Jennings, president of the Commons Foundation, said it has raised $1.8 million in pledges.

"Everything is lining up to enable us to raise the money to build the library," Jennings said after the meeting. "We're going to make a huge push to make it clear that the city and our plans are in sync."

Jennings said that he'll be working with city staff on the grant application. They will use the funds to leverage a matching grant of up to 50%, he said.

City staff will be exploring both modular and traditional construction options. Schwarz said he will provide an update at the council's meeting on Nov. 17.

"I feel like we have a tremendous asset with the City Hall we have," Haroff said. "And I recognize there are costs associated with the renovation of that structure in order to make it last into the future, but I think it would be likely the perspective of our community that it's an asset that is not to be discarded."

Many repair and maintenance tasks at City Hall have been complicated by issues with the building — which is deficient in accessibility, seismic structure, electrical and heating ventilation and air-conditioning. The building also is plagued by a lack of adequate fire sprinklers; mechanical, electrical and alarm systems issues; and an elevator that is out of date and unreliable.

Julian Skinner, the city public works director, presented several options to consider as a path forward for the 2.43-acre lot on Rose Lane. The preliminary proposals include two buildings approximately 5,000 square feet each.

He said a project with modular construction could cost about $3 million and take about 15 months to plan and build.

A traditionally built project, which would involve hiring an architect to design it, would cost approximately $5 million, and planning and building could last over three years, he said.

Skinner also gave the council another option to consider: leasing portable buildings, such as trailers, which would cost about $60,000 up front and $50,000 a year to rent.

The benefit of a traditional route is that there would be more freedom to customize the design and tailor it to the needs and wants of the community, Skinner said.

Residents voiced concerns at the City Hall meeting that a modular unit could look out of character with the Rose Lane community.

Councilman Scot Candell agreed and said he preferred taking a traditional path to design the civic campus in an effort to garner more support from the community.

Larkspur officials have agreed to explore options to build a new civic campus on a municipal lot — including a library and city offices — and they'll seek help from a state grant.

The city recently received a $1 million injection from the state to help build a new library, a project that has been planned for more than five years. It also garnered the support of the Commons Foundation, a nonprofit that pledged to raise $5 million over three years to fund the project.

At the same time, the 108-year-old City Hall at 400 Magnolia Ave., where the library is situated now, is in need of a $10 million renovation. City staff said more state funding could become available in February, and the City Council majority agreed to try to take advantage and build on the city-owned plot on Rose Lane.

“I think it’s really important that we unequivocally say that the library is moving to the community facility parcel on Rose Lane and it won’t be coming back to 400 Magnolia,” Councilwoman Catherine Way said.

She said that regardless of what happens with the City Hall, “it is still not the appropriate place for a contemporary 21st century library.” A combined city office-library campus would allow the city to “maximize our request for library funding from the state grant as a possibility.”

Mayor Kevin Haroff, who heavily leaned toward a renovation, was in the minority.

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