

In My Opinion

How Did We Do? Where Do We Go?

Public Process - Seneca Street Extension

BY JAN GIUNTA

City Council has now answered “when” SW Seneca Street will be extended, assuring the demolition of our existing City Hall. On January 27 City Council with a 4-to-3 vote approved the extension of Seneca Street. The extension will be constructed concurrently with the development of the Nyberg Rivers shopping center. The street’s construction will likely begin this April with the demolition of our City Hall at the same time.

However much earlier, Council took the more important vote which set everything in motion. On August 26th Council took the fateful vote which required the Seneca Street extension and as a result made a replacement City Hall necessary. With the final vote taken and any doubt erased, Seneca becomes Tualatin’s newest street even though it is only a block long and ends in a shopping center. And, we now need a solution to the loss of our existing City Hall.

But how did we get here? Let’s take a few minutes to grade the public process...

- “A” to the many Tualatin residents who stepped up and became involved. You attended the CIO meetings; expressed your opinions in Facebook and OregonLive postings; read multiple emails from CIO officers and concerned citizens; sent your emails; showed up at Council meetings, and expressed yourselves in so many other ways. What a great community we live in as so many care so much!
- “A” to all the CIO officers who spent countless hours preparing the CIO meetings;

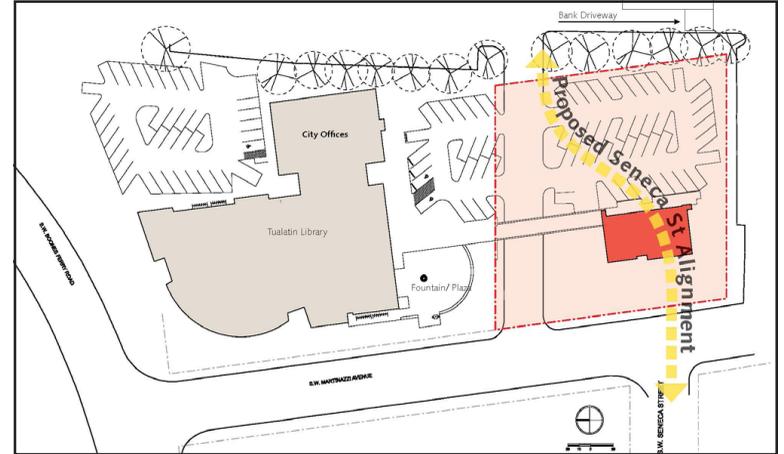
creating a website disseminating “Seneca Facts” to residents and Council; writing and sending call-to-action emails; conducting excellent meetings for our CIO members; and creating an on-line survey for those who couldn’t attend a meeting. We are proud of the CIOs!

- “B” to Council who, during their deliberations on January 27th, agreed with residents that a smaller Council building should not be constructed near our Library. They expressed concern of the loss of parking for the 340,000 annual library visitors.
- “C” to our Council and City staff who asked citizens to engage in a public discussion process. Why only a C grade? Because only after Council voted to extend Seneca Street in August did Council ask for citizen involvement. But then, staff prepared a web page with an on-line survey, and encouraged the CIOs to hold their meetings. City Council took almost an hour of their time during a work session to listen to the various CIOs report back on their meeting results.
- “F” to our City Council as they did not honor a timely, open, and transparent public engagement process before they took the crucial vote on August 26th. This specific issue was not noticed to the public nor was there an opportunity for public input before this vote requiring the Seneca Street extension and loss of the City Hall. Second, this important vote occurred deep into a hearing on the Nyberg Rivers development, so no public input could have or did occur. A separate Council hearing and multiple community meetings should have been held on a matter of this significance.

At Council direction, staff is now busy developing the scope, schedule, and budget “to develop a plan for our City facilities, to replace the Council Building” wrote City Manager Sherilyn Lombos in a recent email. The goal is a new Council building large enough to house most City departments, Council meetings, and City court. If this goal is realized, and a general obligation bond is required, then we residents will vote on that bond. If passed, likely our taxes will increase-so be thinking if this is what you want your tax money spent on.

Informed and involved citizens are very important for our community as our elected officials tend to make better decisions. Our elected officials have a responsibility to seek and honor resident input before they make definite plans or decisions on major items such as construction of a new downtown street which requires a replacement Council building - or before plans are well underway on a new City facility plan or Council building.

Having citizen input is always good, but having input on a forgone conclusion is not. So, before earnest City planning begins on a City facility plan and replacement Council building, residents should be involved in a community-wide conversation to answer important basic questions as:



1. Are there other more pressing needs in Tualatin than a new Council building? Possible examples are: parks and sports fields, or completion of the Tualatin River trail, or development of a local bus system.
2. And if so, what are those and should they have precedence over a public building?
3. Are we taxpayers willing to pay for any substantial public expenditure, including a Council building?

As we move forward as a community, I am confident you will remain engaged, providing Council and staff your honest feedback. The CIOs will host meetings on this issue, giving you a chance to learn the facts and make up your own mind. As we residents work with our elected officials, our community will continue to be a wonderful place to live!



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