



**Columbia Gateway Urban Renewal Agency Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, July 15, 2014**

**5:30 PM**

City Hall Council Chambers

313 Court Street

The Dalles, OR 97058

*Conducted in a handicap accessible room.*

CALL TO ORDER

Acting Chair Kramer called the meeting to order at 5:31 PM.

ROLL CALL

Members Present: Steve Kramer, Jennifer Botts, Robin Miles, John Nelson, Linda Miller

Members Absent: Chris Zukin, Gary Grossman, Greg Weast

Staff Present: City Manager Nolan Young, Administrative Secretary Carole Trautman

Others Present: Economic Development Specialist Dan Durow

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Kramer led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

It was moved by Nelson and seconded by Botts to approve the agenda as submitted. The motion carried unanimously; Zukin, Grossman, and Weast absent.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

It was moved by Botts and seconded by Nelson to approve the June 17, 2014 minutes as submitted. The motion carried unanimously; Zukin, Grossman and Weast absent.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

ACTION ITEM – Business/Development Proposal for Downtown

Economic Development Specialist Dan Durow highlighted the staff report and introduced David and Kirsten Benko, presenters of the downtown business development proposal. Durow said the primary proposal was the acquisition of the Elks building with a primary activity of a neon sign museum. Durow gave a brief history of the status of the Elks building and pointed out it had been suggested in the past that structural repair, coupled with other operations and upstart costs,

could possibly total approximately 1 million dollars. He said to start a business in this structure would be a monumental task.

Botts asked if the building was still in private ownership and if so, who would be responsible for repairs. Durow indicated that had not been discussed at this point because the potential developers were only proposing marketing and feasibility studies at this time.

Durow explained that a marketing study of the building could have a useful purpose beyond this proposal, and the feasibility study would be more specific to this proposal. The next phase would include engineering, archaeological, and environmental studies.

Nelson asked what UR funds were available for the proposal. City Manager Young said the funding could fall under the property owner rehabilitation budget category with approximately \$288,000 available.

David and Kirsten Benko gave a PowerPoint presentation of the proposed project (Attachment 1). Mr. Benko said he took a good look at the downtown area approximately two months ago and saw the potential of for a neon sign museum at the Elks building. He said the concept would be similar to the structure's past use that could include a ballroom on the top floor, and the main floor and basement to include a combination museum/exhibit space and a café/coffee shop. Mrs. Benko stated that she worked previously at the Portland Art Museum as a community events coordinator. She pointed out that she and David were not just interested in bringing their business to a community, they would also be invested in the community. Their intent would be to field the community comments on what needed to be done with the structure and the business development, she said. Mr. Benko summarized the nature of his sign collection and said he would be open to eventually developing a trade school.

Botts emphasized that there were other non-profit agencies and business developers in the area that were struggling for funds such as the Discovery Center, the Civic Auditorium, the Granada Block Developers, etc. She encouraged the Benkos to make contact with these groups to get a concept of the development market of the community. Botts asked Mr. Benko what he could bring financially to sustain the business. Mr. Benko said he felt the uniqueness of the project would bring people to the community and sustain the business.

City Manager Young asked Mr. Benko what would be entailed in the marketing study. Mr. Benko indicated his business associate could best answer those questions; he was not present at the meeting. Young suggested the Advisory Committee members could request more information on the details of the marketing study, possibly give input on what the Committee would like to see included in that study, and discuss the study details at the next URAC meeting.

Miller said she thought it was an appealing project. Miles stated she believed the project would draw in Hood River tourists. Nelson said he thought the project was a good fit. He liked the concept of incorporating an historic building into the project. Kramer asked if their business was non-profit or for-profit. Mr. Benko said it was for-profit, but a 501C3 status had been discussed in the past for the museum portion of the project. He indicated he would be open to pursuing that

again. Miller said she appreciated that part of the vision was to use the facility as an educational tool. Botts stated she thought it was a great idea and she re-emphasized that the Benkos should become acquainted with the community partners—more specifically what they are up against in funding endeavors. Durow said some of that type of information would be part of the marketing study.

After further discussion, it was the general consensus of the Advisory Committee to have the Benkos gather more information on the nature of the marketing and feasibility studies, talk amongst community partners in The Dalles, and schedule a future date for Benkos and their business associate to return to discuss the studies in detail.

#### ONGOING URBAN RENEWAL PROJECTS UPDATE

- A. Granada Block Redevelopment Project – Michael Leash
  - A prominent hotelier is coming to town July 28. Rapoza has a signed confidentiality agreement with the hotelier.
  - Another hospitality group is interested in coming to look, and they are working on the confidentiality agreement.
  - Work continues on acquiring equity partners.
- B. Non-Profit Property Owner Rehabilitation Grants  
No new report.
- C. Other Projects  
Young stated that the Agency would be considering the N. Wasco County Parks and Recreation District's request for funding on July 28.

Acting Chair Kramer encourage Committee members to recruit new members for the two vacant Committee positions. City Manager Young advised Committee members that they could take their suggestions to City Clerk Krueger or Mayor Lawrence. The positions are appointed by the Mayor.

FUTURE MEETING – August 19, 2014

#### ADJOURNMENT

Acting Chair Kramer adjourned the meeting at 6:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Administrative Secretary Carole Trautman.



Steve Kramer, Acting Chair



## OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Rocket City Neon opened its doors to business in Seattle, WA in 1988.

Founded by David Benko, a Washington resident, student of film and photography, lifetime antique collector and curator.

# neon

## WATCH. WORK. DISPLAY.

Collecting, art, and work careers collided.

A natural 'people person', David's enthusiasm and desire to educate and share his vast historical knowledge of the advertising and sign industry resulted in an irresistible combination.

Bending glass is fascinating and people love to watch. It inspires one to look, learn, and share a piece of history.



*Ron Cole, former owner of Ace Neon stated, "When David was bending glass for me, if I was on the phone while a customer came in, I would motion for them to watch him work in the fires. When people watched him work, and listened to him share, it always sold a sign."*

# neon

## JOINING FORCES

In 1994 Rocket City Neon relocated to Camas, Washington for centrality to the Pacific NW sign and collector market.

Moving into a 6500 sq. foot showroom, and eventually transforming it into a reception hall, they proudly shared their love of antique signage and advertising with travelers and residents.



# neon

## IN THE NEWS

From its inception, the Sign and Advertising Museum, as well as the Reception Hall drew the attention of the media. Newspapers and TV from all over the Pacific NW came to relive the days when gas was 22¢ per gallon and milk was delivered to your front door.



# neon

## WORLD CLASS SIGNS

Rocket City is more than a world class sign museum. In conjunction with their passion for the history, art and science of the industry, they design and fabricate some of the Northwest's most unique and iconic signs. With a focus on classic design, and individual quality construction, Rocket City signs are one of a kind.



# moon

## WHY THE DALLEES?

Rocket City desires to join and invest in a community that has common endeavors to grow and support local business.

Community is based on relationships, and Rocket City wants to be part of a region that desires to thrive, and work together to bring life to each business, in every economy; prosperous or struggling.



# moon

## STATISTICAL REPORTS

According to ODOT's 2012 reporting, more than 7 million cars pass by The Dalles exits annually.

Half of these travelers stop in the Gorge area, spending approximately \$40-\$226 per person. If a modest 1% additional, of the total passersby, stopped in The Dalles, this would increase revenue anywhere from \$3 to \$16 million.





## SUPPORTIVE ATTRACTIONS

- **WAAAM** is one of the largest collections of operational antique aircraft in the country, and is a precursory draw for the nostalgic and historian.
- **Columbia Gorge Discover Center** bolsters an impressive tourist attraction for the novice and expert, presenting an overview of the historical and geological natural life of the Gorge.
- **Sunshine Mill Winery, The Dalles Dam, St. Peters Cathedral** and **Fort Dalles Museum** all offer an eclectic variety of family friendly attractions and activities locally.
- **The Portland Spirit** offers scenic cruises from Cascade Locks to The Dalles daily during the summer months; docking walking distance to downtown.

# neon

## DIVERSE COMPARATIVES

Projects like *City Museum*, an eclectic experience of art and oversized mayhem began as a small operation in the slums of St. Louis. With 300,000 guests the first year, 700,000 the second and today has expanded its project and attraction to more than 1 Million annual visitors.

Seattle's *Experience Music Project* reports approximately 1.2 million paid visitors annually.

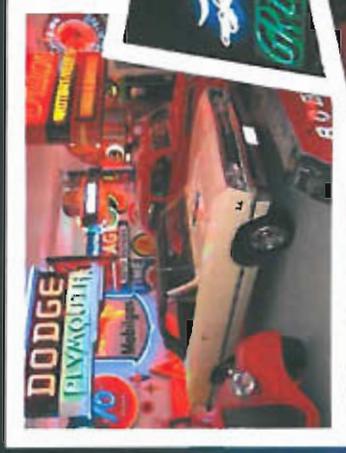


# neon

## WHAT WE OFFER

Rocket City offers its collection to become part of the ambiance of The Dalles. Situated to display a family friendly, interactive and fresh approach to a world class museum.

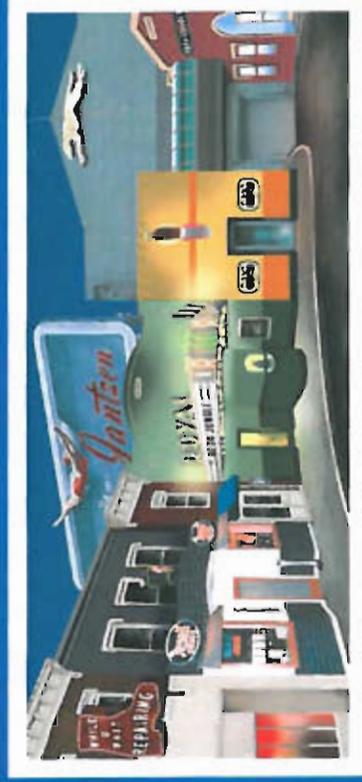
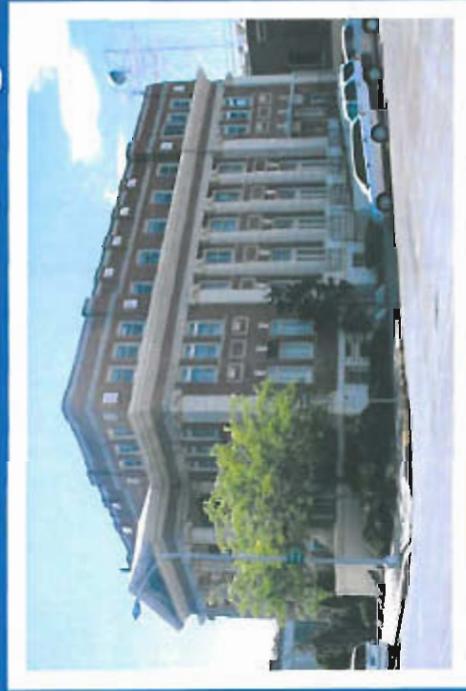
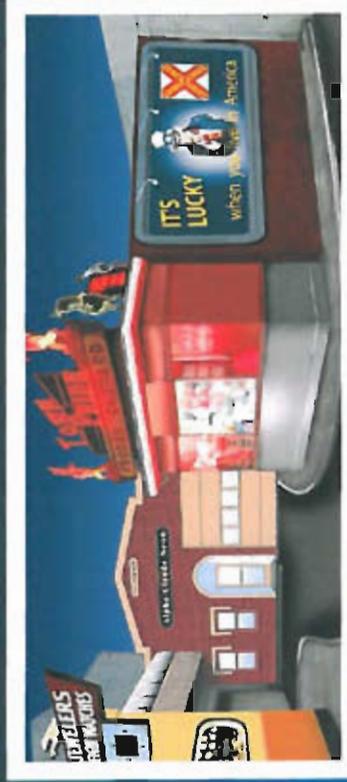
ICONS collection would include colorful and dynamic vintage signage and advertising, historically relevant ephemera and fabricating machinery, as well as modern art.



# moon

## OUR VISION

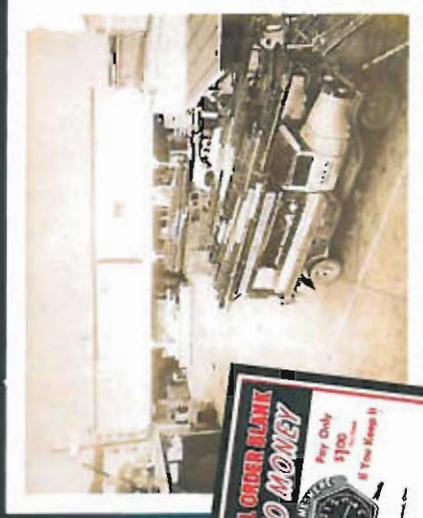
Rocket City, plans to preserve one of The Dalles outstanding and historical buildings, while at the same time providing a venue to increase tourism and capital for all businesses in the region.



# moon

## ESTABLISHING A PLAN

Rocket City is seeking to engage with a community that can facilitate the necessary analysis and location of financial resources, to augment our personal efforts and assets in bringing the ICONS Museum to life.





THANK YOU