

Dear Editor,

Over the last three months I have served on the Stevenson Sewer Committee. Readers may recall that in November the Pioneer published a letter to the editor I wrote that was critical of this committee operating in secrecy. Members of the press and the public were not allowed to observe our work.

When Tracy Gratto, the facilitator the city hired for \$5,000, authored her final report, she wrote:

“Disruptions: Unfortunately, one committee member and her husband, who is now an elected official, made multiple attempts to disrupt and undermine the committee. For example, there were numerous out-of-scope public records and data requests, which not only confused committee members but also necessitated staff to provide extensive documentation to address straightforward inquiries. On December 4, 2023, the newly elected councilmember expressed concerns in an email, stating, ‘The fact that this committee operated in secrecy taints whatever conclusion or recommendation it makes.’ Following this email, several committee members discontinued their involvement. There were two committee members who voted against an open meeting format, and all meeting notes were consistently posted after each meeting.”

Ms. Gratto’s description of my husband, Pat Rice, and me is inaccurate. Washington State’s public records act does not allow Ms. Gratto to determine what a requestor’s motives are. However, all the documents I asked to review were directly relevant and needed to perform my duties as a sewer committee member. Furthermore, the documents were only requested after City Manager Leana Kinley refused to answer my straightforward questions.

It is true that both Pat and I were not pleased that the press and the public were not allowed to observe the committee’s work. Two members out of 17 wanting our work to be done in secrecy is not a good excuse to do so.

Ms. Gratto’s statement that we were disruptive does raise these questions:

Is a citizen disruptive when they ask for financial and other information related to the Sewer issue? Is it disruptive to request that the sewer committee meetings be

open to the public? Are the only appropriate questions those that are vetted by Ms. Grotto?

Pat and I were questioning the city about an issue that impacts all of us. Asking questions is the only way citizens will ever know what is going on at City Hall. Despite what Ms. Gratto may think of us, we will never stop asking questions.

Karen Rutledge
Stevenson