

Comments on the current resolution of the

Wilsonville City Council

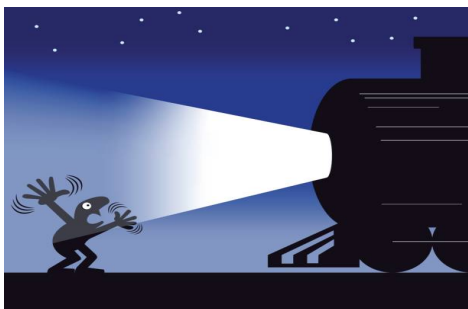
To create an Arts, Culture & Heritage Commission

December 20, 2021

To begin with, I want to point out that I've lived in Wilsonville for 35 years – longer than I think any of you have been in public service here, That's over half as long as Wilsonville has even been incorporated as a city and in existence! I've seen the population grow six-fold from 4700 to now over 25,000. So, I am very familiar with the town and its issues. My credentials include a degree in Parks & Recreation Administration as well as a Master's Degree in Counseling Psychology. I am also very experienced in government, its role, limitations, and its workings. This background includes some years as an Assistant Director of a county level department, work in a city level department, and 19 years working within the Multnomah County government working directly with judges, district attorneys, and lawyers. Here in Wilsonville specifically, I've served on four "City Council appointed" Task Forces, and was the initial President of our inaugural neighborhood association. I've attended City Council, Park Board and Tourism Committee meetings. I've also completely set up a new, federally recognized non-profit here in Wilsonville that would tremendously promote Wilsonville regionally and even nationally! Finally, for over half a decade I've been president of one of the five, specific non-profits this resolution is planned to encourage and work with. So, I feel strongly that the comments made here are extremely applicable and germane, and need to be heard.

As much as I am totally in favor of the overriding goals of this resolution, I am also overwhelmingly opposed to the current rendition of it in the way it is set up to operate.

I may not necessarily be considered an "artistic person" by many, but I can rely on the old adage that a picture is worth a thousand words – and here are three of them!



The current resolution is merely the adaptation of what the City has already done with the Tourism Committee and the Park Board. (Notes on this follow) That does NOT automatically make it an appropriate road to follow in this case. The current resolution also accomplishes a City Council goal, and a long-standing cry from Wilsonville citizenry. But that does not mean it is the best way to do it – at best I'd give it a "C" or even a "D" rating. It does give City Council a feather in its own cap that it can show off to surrounding communities and enable it to say, "Hey! We have a Arts Culture, and Heritage Commission just like you do (finally)!" But that doesn't mean the Commission is actually meeting the needs, desire, and wishes of the local community nor for those who are actively creating, painting, producing, singing, and trying to fulfil the vacuum of need here in Wilsonville. It also meets

the requirements, as explained to me in a reply email from a City Staff member, of a “Commission” as dictated by State law. But that still does not make it the ‘best’ option for us to follow (maybe it’s not a Commission that we need!) It DOES CLEARLY demonstrate, however, no effort what-so-ever for putting heads together to come up with an appropriate plan, or to incorporate creativeness, imagination, and productive thought – all of which are unbending HALLMARKS of the topic for which you are trying to support. Thus, the current plan clearly has a complete disconnect from the goal trying to be achieved.

Another picture comes to mind as I think of the application of the current resolution to what is needed here in Wilsonville ...



Remember that poster from our high school years!!!??

One of the primary failures of the current plan is that it straps down and completely eliminates freedom, free thinking, creativity, and the ability to be productive, efficient, and timely. As the City already has a couple examples of this, let me relate some comments about them.

When I first came to Wilsonville in 1987, the word went out that new Park Board members were needed. I attended the meeting to be introduced as a candidate. My vivid observation of that meeting I still recall to this day is that they were more concerned about their microphones and name plates sitting in front of them than they were us. They literally almost forgot to introduce me. I decided that night that I had no desire to be part of this board and have never seen anything in the years since that would make me change positions. As a general citizen of Wilsonville for all these years, I can’t really speak to essentially anything beyond the

review of grant applications for the hotel tax grant moneys that the Park Board has really done. In my opinion an ‘advisory board’ is next to worthless. The people serving are GREAT! The setup is inefficient!

Similar comments about the City Tourism Committee can be made. It, too, is set up to be similarly relegated to obscurity and of little value - as seen by the general Wilsonville citizen. Oh, public officials can say they do this and they do that – but to the citizenry of Wilsonville, what have been the actual accomplishments of the Tourism Committee after years in existence outside of one well-done brochure, and some academic research? I would hazard a guess that over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the city’s population are not even familiar with the brochure so it’s hard to get behind even that! I, for one, have high interest in but don’t want anything to do with that city group (or the Park Board,) because I want to see accomplishment, I want to see creativity, I want to see results. I don’t want to be hamstrung by a City Council that demands to micromanage every aspect of everything (membership of the Commission, all plans, etc.) - thus sets up Commissions, Committees, etc., so that EVERYTHING HAS to go through them, to be approved by them, as demigods sitting in judgement. This portrays the thought that only THEY know everything and can make judgement!

Trust is not given by the City even to Department heads to be creative (let alone Commissions!). It’s hard to let professionals be professionals and allow them to do their job productively and efficiently when everything has to be ratified by City Council. It’s complicated further when you consider that City Council members, as in the example areas of parks and tourism, have no personal background, experience, or first-hand knowledge of the topic area. Take the example of Mike McCarty. He was brought in to head the Park Department about the time that a new comprehensive parks plan was to

be developed. By the paper anyway, he was brought in here because of his 30-years of experience and background in this type of endeavor. So how did the City handle it – they sat him on the sidelines and hired an OUT-OF-STATE firm (!) to come in and do the master plan. What a horrible end of a 30-year career for Mike to just be relegated to the background and totally dominated by City Council. Clearly, the City doesn't trust its own employees after they've hired them. I'll add here that I have sincerely felt sorry for Mike in that the appearance is that he was brought here under false pretenses and was never allowed to do his job! And the current resolution for an arts, culture, and heritage commission is merely following the same plan. I think that anyone can therefore see the reason the above picture of Pegasus was chosen!

Another huge failure of the current plan is the utter lack of effort by its writers to make **any** actual, direct connection with appropriate community members or to the people that would be dynamically affected by this Commission. Staff can excitedly say, oh yes! We did a community survey where everyone had opportunity for input. However, I think we all know how futile and often lacking of depth such surveys can be. I am sorely disappointed that there has never been ANY EFFORT by the City staff to reach out to the any of the five specific non-profits and simply ask – what are your members feelings and ideas about how the City and your group could work together for the benefit of arts, culture, and heritage in Wilsonville? Lack of any effort to collect specific, real ideas directly from those actively working in the topic field! As President of one of those groups, I know that I have never canvased my group because I was never asked to do so – I never had the sense that such input was even desired by the City. Yes, the City had a large task force, but it was set up and ran under City dominance, and as a member of that task force, I felt that my membership had been totally useless! So, the result is that City Staff will highly recommend this resolution because its just like the other groups the city has formed, it meets State regulations, and (the best part) THEY came up with it! They wrote it!! Why wouldn't they heartily recommend it??? But sorely it lacks local, community input from any of those specifically involved.

What happened was that City Staff put a plan together, developed nice posters, a great presentation showing what other communities are doing (paid for at City expense), etc., and already had things getting onto City planning calendars for approval before ANYTHING was presented to us. I understand discussions were even beginning about utilizing the Art Tech facility for an arts, culture, and heritage center – with no effort what-so-ever made to directly reach out to the affected organizations to see what their thoughts, needs, etc., would be on such an idea. City staff relied solely on their own thoughts, their own interpretations, and their own “levels of thinking” (which can be questionable!) in putting this current plan together. I am appalled at this approach on such a deeply involved and needed topic.

Admittedly, once the plan was put together it was THEN presented to us! Unfortunately, it was already at that point finding its ways into City planning calendars, and thus at a point already very difficult to change anything as it would blow many things and processes up that were already in play. I understand that a lot of feedback – hours of feedback and written comments - were given at that point, but I personally am not aware of any impact what-so-ever any of that feedback had on anything at all! Thus, City Staff can giddily say to Council that they presented it to us while slapping any efforts to derail their plans. Like so many government-dictated “Public Meetings”, the decisions had already been made and the presentation to us was merely a sham as shown by all input being garbaged.

So, I clearly, and in no way can I make a stronger statement, encourage a NO VOTE on this current resolution. I will offer thoughts on how this process needs to occur in verbal comments at the meeting.

Thank you. Steve Van Wechel