

STATE OF TEXAS §
COUNTY OF CAMERON §
TOWN OF LAGUNA VISTA §

MINUTES OF A WORKSHOP MEETING OF THE LAGUNA VISTA TOWN COUNCIL

DATE: October 26, 2015

TIME: 6:00 p.m.

PLACE: City Hall Building

MEMBERS PRESENT: Susie Houston, Mayor
Michael Carter, Councilmember Place 1
Wanda Reyes-Rice, Mayor Pro-Tem
Frank Davalos, Jr., Councilmember Place 3
Leti Keplinger, Councilmember Place 4
Gary Meschi, Councilmember Place 5
Nadine Smith, Councilmember Place 6

Rolando Vela, City Manager
Ricardo Morado, City Attorney
Tony David, Police Chief
Alma Deckard, City Secretary

MEMBERS ABSENT: All present

ALSO PRESENT: Elizabeth Etheridge, Citizen
Janie Petty, Citizen
Fred Petty, Citizen
Henry Etheridge, Citizen
Victor Worrell, Citizen
Richard Hinojosa, Citizen
Eugene Hoagland, Citizen
Ryan Maza, Citizen
Maile Worrell, Citizen
George Moore, Port Isabel
Terri Galloway, Citizen
Curt Chamberlain, Citizen
Debi Chamberlain, Citizen
David Lohse, Citizen
Cliff Schey, Citizen
Martin Infante, Citizen
Nancy Ostos, Citizen
Bob Ostos, Citizen
Rolando Gonzalez, Citizen

Tom Gulbranson, Citizen
Vicki Gulbranson, Citizen
Isidro Ramos, Citizen
Alan Ewers, Citizen
Dan Bucklew, Citizen
Rusty Justice, Citizen
Felicia Justice, Citizen
Travis Flanagan, Citizen
Terry Volz, Citizen
Mary Volz, Citizen
Michael Miller, Citizen
Michael Jones, Citizen
Yolanda Birdwell, Citizen
Jimmy Lee Brown, Citizen
Keith McNatt, Citizen
J. R. Meredith, Citizen
Roberto Ramirez, Jr., Citizen

ORDER OF BUSINESS

1. Call to Order

Mayor Houston called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

2. Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance was led by Elizabeth Etheridge.

3. Roll Call/Excused Absences – All present.

Mayor Houston informed the audience that the Town signed a fifty (50) year lease agreement with the Laguna Vista Recreational Association (LVRA) in September 1971, which is due to expire September 2021. This workshop is to give citizens the opportunity to give input to the Council about the future of the marina.

Mayor explained that the Council is still looking to possibly obtain a grant for the boat ramp off Highway 100.

Everyone will be given an opportunity to speak, Mayor requested that people be brief and courtesy in their comments.

4. OPEN PUBLIC COMMENT SESSION – To hear public comments on the marina property and its future in light of LVRA’s request for a lease extension.

Ryan Maza addressed the Council explaining that he is the current President of the LVRA. We are requesting an extension of the lease that is in place at this time. The LVRA has maintained the marina for the past 40 years because the Town could not afford to keep up with the maintenance. This has been a benefit for the LVRA and the Town. The Roloffs had a vision for the marina and an asset for the Town and its citizens. Every citizen in Laguna Vista has access to the marina with membership to the LVRA. This access should be preserved and the LVRA is willing to negotiate the lease.

Victor Worrell addressed the Council stating that the marina was a big factor in his decision to purchase his home here in Laguna Vista. Opening the marina to the general public would depreciate property values. Without a lease extension, the future leaders can change the marina from being private.

Richard Hinojosa addressed the Council asking them to consider these questions: If the lease expires in 6 years, why are we discussing it now. Yes, 40 years ago, the Town could not afford to maintain the property, but today it can. The marina belongs to the citizens of Laguna Vista. Will there be an appraisal of the property, to determine the value? Attorney Leann Hewitt did an extensive research of the marina and what exactly was leased to the LVRA.

Curt Chamberlain addressed the Council, explaining that they should go to Thomae Boat Ramp on a Saturday morning. It is a public board ramp and it can take up to 1 1/2 hours to launch a boat, and the traffic is backed up. If you open the marina, all the valley people will be here, and we’ll have traffic jams and Beach Blvd and the entire park area. The Jetties is a public fishing area, and you find, trash, dead fish, and debris everywhere, because it’s public. The LVRA should get an extension on the lease, this marina is an asset to the community.

George Moore, Mayor called for Mr. Moore and he stated that he would not be speaking.

David Lohse addressed the Council stating that he bought his home because of the marina. The LVRA has struggled somewhat, but the membership fees are modest. Any public ramp is backed up and trashy, we don’t want that here.

Nancy Ostos addressed the Council, stating that she is a former LVRA Secretary and they also built their home here because of the marina. Before the fence was up, all these valley people were here and the trash was everywhere. The marina should be kept private. The LVRA is doing a good job in maintaining the property. People that don’t live here, don’t care about keeping it clean. I suggest that a committee be formed with members from the LVRA, the Parks Board and the Town Council.

Robert Ostos addressed the Council repeating that the Thomae Board Ramp and the Port Isabel Board Ramp are trashed out. To a fisherman, there is nothing more important than

getting the boat in the water. He asked that the Council consider renewing the lease extension.

Rolando Gonzalez addressed the Council stating that as the Laguna Madre population increases and the park renovations, the marina should be preserved. Changing the marina will affect the quiet neighborhood we have. The Roloffs has a vision for the marina. We chose to live here because of the marina. As Laguna Vista grows, this part, the marina, should not grow, it should remain the same.

Hank Etheridge addressed the Council stating that he has lived in Laguna Vista for 26 ½ years and has raised his son here. We love this area, this is our home. Thank you for having this workshop for discussion. Please renew the lease with the LVRA. Mayors and Council Members come and go, you need to agree on the this common goal.

Allen Ewers addressed the Council stated that he has lived here for 30 years. He stated that approximately ½ million dollars have been spent through the 40 years in maintaining the marina, that property owners did not have to pay through property taxes.

Janie Petty addressed the Council stating her and her husband have lived here for 35 years. She was a member of the fire department for 10 years. We have paid for the maintenance of the marina. Please preserve property values by keeping the marina.

Dan Bucklew addressed the Council stating he resides on Beach Blvd, is a member of the LVRA. He is not a fisherman, but enjoys windsurfing and the water. A public marina is not the answer. What would the liability be, after a couple of lawsuits, you can't afford the insurance. The LVRA lease is the appropriate way to handle the marina, don't wait for 6 years to renew the lease.

Terry Volz addressed the Council stating he has lived in Laguna Vista for 30 years, was a member of the fire department for 10 years. He was also the building inspector for 15 years. The development on Highway 100 will not effect this part of town, but making the marina public will. There will be trash everywhere.

Mayor Houston gave George Moore another opportunity to speak and he declined.

Yolanda Birdwell addressed the Council stating she did not have sufficient information to form an opinion one way or another. If people are making money by using the marina, they should be open about this matter. She suggested that two more workshops be held to get additional information on the matter.

Michael Jones addressed the Council stating he just recently built a home on Beach Blvd. He stated that he considered South Padre Island and other waterfront property, but he chose Laguna Vista. If you make this a public boat ramp, boats will be lined up all day long to launch out of here. Will citizens even be able to use the park, with all the traffic? Where will they park? He asked that the Council not compromise this area of Town.

Casey Loft (sp) addressed the Council stating that she lived here from 2005-2009 and has returned because she missed the quietness of the town. She has small children and they walk to the park from Mesquite Drive. I am not a member of the LVRA, however I am in favor of the marina remaining private. The park would become very busy with people launching their boats out of this area.

Jimmy Lee Brown addressed the Council stating that she purchased her home on Beach Blvd when she saw the view from the marina. The marina is the only are that is opened to the bay that allows you to see South Padre Island. This is a treasure and a piece of gold that improves the values of our property.

5. Discussion by Town Council regarding request for extension of current lease.

Council Member Meschi addressed the audience, explaining that there is a movement to change the Home Rule Charter with regards to the marina because Council Members will change. The next set of leaders could change the marina. If we amend the charter to read that the marina cannot be changed, this would be voted by the citizens. The only way to change the marina would be through an election of the citizens. The language would be that the marina will remain a marina and not a public ramp.

Mary Volz asked how will you control who goes in?

Council Member Meschi stated, the same way as it is now, through a key or a security code.

Elizabeth Etheridge asked why would it not be a marina always?

Council Member Meschi explained that the Town Council that sits here 10 years from now could change it. Where, if it is added to the Home Rule Charter, it can only be changed by an election of the voters.

Council Member Smith stated that an ordinance would state that the marina will always be a marina. She stated that she was 100% in favor of the lease extension.

David Lohse if the Town takes it over, how will you control the people that enter. Just let the LVRA maintain it for 25 years lease extension.

Rolando Gonzalez stated that most folks want it left like it is now.

Council Member Carter stated that the LVRA has relieved people from paying taxes to maintain the marina. If they want to use the marina, they simply become members of the LVRA. He stated that he is 100% in favor of the LVRA lease extension.

Council Member Davalos stated that he is also in favor the LVRA lease extension. He feels that the LVRA has been doing a good job of maintaining the property.

Council Member Rice stated that everyone should have access to the marina. Some people don't know that they can get access to the marina, because there is no publication or notification to the citizens. Is the LVRA tax exempt? What about the value of the property of the marina? Some people run their business out of the marina and make money from that property.

Ryan Maza stated that the LVRA is a 501C Corporation.

Isidro Ramos stated that any boat captain can access any boat ramp. That has nothing to do with the marina.

Nancy Ostos stated that the members from the LVRA have their own insurance. This would not fall under the LVRA insurance.

Michael Jones stated that his neighbor Skipper Mock is a captain and drives to Paradise Cove to launch his boat; he does not use the marina.

Mary Volz asked if when the Council votes on this matter, will the citizens have a say?

Mayor asked the Town Attorney to explain the process.

Ricardo Morado explained that there is a specify calendar to follow for any charter amendment and election is held.

J.R. Meredith stated asked why are you altering the language of the charter. If it's not broken, don't break it to fix it. Just give the LVRA a 99 year lease agreement.

Council Member Carter stated that the charter amendment will be that the marina would remain a marina, which has nothing to do with the lease agreement.

Council Member Meschi stated that changing the charter than the voters control the destiny of the marina, not the Town Council.

One of the concerns of the lease extension is having access to the water without a boat. The South end of the property can be opened for people to enter to go fishing without a boat.

Jimmy Lee Brown stated that there is an odor from the marina that needs to be addressed.

Michael Jones stated that there no boat ramps that are free.

Council Member Keplinger stated that she absolutely does not want to see the marina become public.

Mayor Houston expressed thanks to everyone for coming and submitting their input to the Council.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Council Member Davalos made a motion to adjourn meeting at 7:18 pm, Council Member Rice seconded the motion. All voted “aye” to approve, motion carried.

Susie Houston, Mayor

Attest:

Alma Deckard, City Secretary



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