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*John Moore, Chair
Parks & Commons Commission
P.O. Box 345, City of Yachats, Yachats, OR 97498*

Dear John,

I am asking the Parks and Commons Commission to recommend to the City Council a policy that grants a particular exception to three iconic historical local organizations, which were formerly operating under the umbrella of the Friends of the Yachats Commons. These three are: Big Band, One of Us Productions, and the Yachats Academy of Arts and Sciences (YAAS).

*In this letter, I will explain why I believe the “**grandfathering-in**” of these three organizations is crucial for the future relationship of the City governance structure to the village culture, and to the maintenance of the often mentioned “Spirit of Yachats.”*

My pertinent background locally includes serving on the Parks & Commons and the Library commissions, and the Planning Commission. I also served as President of the Friends of the Yachats Commons from 2010 to 2013. My general background and career of 40 years were spent in various private and governmental positions of management, often working with advocacy groups. In addition, I have taught psychology, management and supervision at Utah State University and other training venues.

Earlier this year, there was a critical disruption of the Yachats Village culture, when the Friends of the Yachats Commons decided to disband and cease operations. The Friends worked diligently to transfer coverage and support for most of the non-profit and volunteer organizations under their umbrella.

Big Band has now settled on a 50:50 split of their net profits with the City, in order to receive the legal and financial protection of the City's insurance coverage. YAAS is currently under the umbrella coverage of another non-profit, Polly Plumb. However, One of Us Productions has been stalled in establishing their preferred and historical “home base” at the Commons, since – on the threshold of an agreement -- a private subsidy was offered, and the neophyte agreement was disregarded.

The generous offer should be accepted with gratitude, but it should not derail the effort to cement a future policy stance. This request by-passes the need to re-negotiate or establish a specialized non-profit fee structure as part of the new policy.

I understand that “fairness” was an issue that caused the most contention in the discussion of a “proper” consideration of One of Us Productions as a non-profit eligible for specialized treatment. I suggest here that the discussion needs to shift ground, from a focus on finances to a focus on the local cultural value of this long-standing and beloved local symbol of the “Yachats spirit.”

Here is the reason. Being “grandfathered-in” is a term understood to be explicitly limited only to organizations of a certain stature. The requirement that new groups, or all groups, need to be considered at the same level is erroneous. There is a culturally understood and shared value in historical continuity and loyalty. (Maybe it could be compared to the Chinese culture's approach to caring for the aged as a sacred duty.)

The first consideration is symbolic in nature. How do these three groups (Big Band, One of Us Productions, and YAAS) define the identity of Yachats as a unique and special place? How do they help define us as a community? What is the value of preserving that function in our village? What is the value of having them be a permanent part of the City volunteer organizational and policy structure, rather than outside it?

All three of these local organizations had much more than a financial relationship with the City. Because of their supportive arrangement with the “Friends” – another iconic organization of about the same age as One of Us -- there has always been a feeling of mutual ownership and belonging to the village and community of Yachats.

All of us have heard the recent outcry, “Yachats is losing its community center!” In this context, the term “center” is more rightly interpreted as a psychological or emotional “center,” rather than the building itself, as in “the center does not hold.” As a commission charged with the health and preservation of the City's Parks & Commons, is there not a value in being seen as the protector of this treasured commodity – our community “center”?

It has lately appeared that the City is ignoring, de-valueing or discounting its symbolic relationship with these organizations. That has resulted in the onslaught of vitriolic complaints being brought against the “new Yachats management.” The new conviction is stated as, “Now the Commons only cares about money!” Yachats citizens do not want the Commons to become “only an events center.” Deciding to provide a home for these three unique, historical, local non-profits would go a long way in proving the commitment of this commission to the ideal of the Yachats community, whether we have actually succeeded in achieving it, or not.

This commission has a timely opportunity, as well as the power and authority, to change the nature of the discussions being held here. This commission can change the relationship of the City (and its governance structures, like the commissions) to the community at large, through providing a policy “home” where these organizations “belong.” The quickest, easiest way to accomplish this task is to “grandfather-in” the agreements that have been in place for years. Nothing needs to be re-worked.

The ire about recent changes is not about money. Finances should be a secondary consideration in this discussion. First of all, the revenue from any of these three non-profits is negligible to the City budget. None of their profits, nor any percentage of their profits, is going to resolve the City's financial problems, now or ever. What they have been paying has been enough, and should continue to be enough, for the intangible value they provide.

A private subsidy, even though it temporarily increases the Commons' revenue, can never take the place of a structural “home” in the City's organization of commissions and policies. The private subsidy may last, or it may not. There is no ground to it.

Neither can a “home” with another non-profit, such as Polly Plumb, serve the same unifying purpose that integrating only these specific, historical non-profits into the City governance structure can do. An existing example is the Little Log Church. Can we imagine that being “privatized”? The only secure attachment is to the City structure, through its commissions.

For that reason, I am asking that all three non-profits be grand-fathered in, whether or not they are currently seeking that benefit. It makes the action more consistent and meaningful, since the argument applies to all three “home-grown” entities. It gives the option of returning to their base, when and if there is ever a desire or a need to do so, without the delay and complication of further future negotiations. The invitation can be offered, and it can wait, if the non-profit does not wish to accept it now (e.g. YAAS). If advantageous, each can choose to make the change immediately.

Such action does not need to translate into a whole new category of “non-profit rates.” Such action will preserve the unique connection of our community “center” with the “heart” of Yachats, for which local residents feel such a deep and intense loyalty.

Sincerely yours,

Fran Morse