

**Ruth Stellmacher**

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**From:** wqsternwheeler@aol.com  
**Sent:** Monday, March 11, 2024 10:16 AM  
**To:** CityRecorder  
**Subject:** Comments on City Council Agenda March 11,2024

These comments pertain to the grant application to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department for improvements to Riverfront Park  
We are requesting that the city consider including in their grant request funding for the acquisition of the Willamette Queen riverboat to be a permanent dockside restaurant and meeting room venue at the city dock located in Riverfront Park. In the original master plan for Riverfront Park there were plans for a restaurant facility overlooking the Willamette River but it was never built. Our vessel arriving shortly after the opening of the Park in 1999 has fulfilled that need for the past 25 years. Now we are retiring and wishing to sell our vessel and business but the most interest we've received to date is from folks who want to move her out of Salem. We sincerely wish for her to stay here in Salem both for her iconic and historic legacy representing Salem's early years as the Willamette Valley's most important riverboat landing, for the tens of thousands of people of all ages she has brought fun and enjoyment when they've come aboard, and the many wonderful memories she has given them. She is now the only riverboat still in business in the entire State of Oregon and it would be a shame for her to leave our State Capitol.

Mayor Chuck Bennett stated in an article he wrote for Salem Magazine "What we can't do is lose one that so clearly celebrates and recreates the most dominant feature in our city - the Willamette River. We also can't afford to lose the legacy the "Willamette Queen" represents."

I've enclosed a copy of the recent proposal that we made to the city.

Date: January 16, 2024

To: Scott Archer, Deputy City Manager

From: Richard and Barbara Chesbrough, Owners "Willamette Queen"

SUBJECT: Proposal to Acquire "Willamette Queen"

Dear Mr. Archer,

Thank you for the opportunity to present our latest proposal which could work for both the City of Salem and ourselves. We understand from your August 18<sup>th</sup> letter that limited financial resources are the main problem you are dealing with currently. When we originally approached Mayor Hoy and the City last year, we thought that the \$28.4 million for park upgrades in the recently passed bond measure would have been a logical funding source.

Our intention to continue operating the "Willamette Queen" at Riverfront Park for many years to come has not changed. However, as of the first of this month, we have notified the Coast Guard that we will no longer be cruising and will remain a permanently moored dockside venue. This decision will result in significant operating cost savings. We have notified all of our upcoming booked private events including a number of weddings and have received positive reactions from everybody. Customers still get to enjoy being right on the river with its beautiful views, the unique beauty of the vessel, fine dining, and at lower prices. We are still hoping to find a way to partner with the City of Salem going forward.

First and foremost, we have lowered our asking price for the business including the vessel and all equipment and materials as previously presented to you to \$600,000 which is \$200,000 less than the appraised value of the vessel alone. Payment could be spread out over a five year period. Additionally, both of us would be willing to continue managing the business for the first year as independent contractors or until new managers could be found and trained.

We are confident that the "Willamette Queen" even if the City designates it as a non-profit will more than pay its own way for many years to come and like the A.C. Gilbert Museum and Carousel bring joy and fond memories to both kids and adults of all ages. We couldn't agree with you more that keeping this important legacy alive in our community makes this all worthwhile.

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Mayor Chuck Bennett stated in an article he wrote for Salem Magazine "What we can't do is lose one that so clearly celebrates and recreates the most dominant feature in our city – the Willamette River. We also can't afford to lose the legacy the "Willamette Queen" represents."

It is also important to note that when the design plans were drawn up for Riverfront Park they included a riverfront restaurant. It never was built, but the arrival of the Willamette Queen and the subsequent investment the city made in constructing the new floating dock to accommodate her along with the beautiful stone stairs leading down to the turnaround with handicap accessible ramp and paved roadway was a huge improvement that has been enjoyed by tens of thousands of citizens and visitors alike.

Being a permanent dockside restaurant the Willamette Queen is the only riverside restaurant in not only the city of Salem but the greater surrounding area as well.

Barbara and I have both collected and received gifts of riverboat artifacts, photos, paintings, models, historic videos, etc. that are museum quality which we would leave aboard for future visitors to enjoy as well as learn about the rich riverboat history that built Salem a century ago. Every year we have many school groups on field trips come aboard. They watch a video entitled "They Hail the Steamboats on the Willamette" and Capt. Richard teaches and entertains them with his flipchart presentation and stories of the Willamette riverboats here in the mid-valley. They never forget the feeling of standing at the huge steering wheel getting their picture taken with a Captains hat on.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity to present our proposal and we truly hope we can find a way forward to insure that the Willamette Queen and the legacy she represents stays here in Salem for many more years.



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# Salem

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MAGAZINE

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# Willamette Queen

The History and Future of The Riverfront by City of Salem Mayor Chuck Bennett

Walking Salem's Riverfront Park on a fall morning when fog is rising six to ten feet off the Willamette River treats you to a beautiful view of our city's past, present and future captured in the "Willamette Queen."

From its dock at the park, the Queen, owned, captained and crewed by Richard and Barbara Chesbrough since 1998, takes passengers on a trip deep into Salem's history and makes memories of weddings, concerts, family outings and reunions for a lifetime.

After 20 years, the Chesbroughs, both in their 70's, have decided to retire. It's been years of success but even more, it's been years of re-establishing Salem as a sternwheeler's home port. A century ago the steamboat era that arguably built Salem ended with the departure of the last sternwheeler in the face of competition from trucks and railroads.

Salem continues to be committed to keeping the Willamette Queen at her home port and is working with the Chesbroughs as that market the iconic boat. The new master plan for the Riverfront Park shows the riverboat docked where it has always been. The question now is will a purchaser step forward and be willing to keep alive the memory of the 55 steam boats that made landings here since The "Salem Clipper" arrived in 1850.

The Willamette Queen is the latest and at this point last entrant into the long history of commercial navigation between Eugene and Portland. It all began in the mid-nineteenth century when demand for mid-valley agricultural products, particularly wheat, drove transportation development into the Willamette Valley by way of the Willamette River.

Initially river traffic stopped to portage to the Oregon City Falls and portaged boat and cargo from up river to down river carriers. The same program faces boat owners here if they look beyond the mid Valley cruising area. Even with the fall's lock system, built in 1874 the 87-foot, 86-ton sternwheeler is confined to our stretch of the river unless it is loaded onto a low-boy and driven around it. For most of the half century steamboats dominated commercial hauling, Salem was a popular landing because just like today, it offered a safe place to moor behind Minto-Brown Island free from strong river currents and dangerous river debris.

For years Albany was the southern end of the line. Early steamboats had a 3 to 4 foot draft and couldn't go further in the very shallow water above Albany. That all changed when Captain UB Scott arrived from Ohio in 1874 and designed the "Ohio" which drew only 9 inches empty and 18 inches loaded with 70 tons of cargo.

Captain Scott built his second boat, "The City of Salem" with an even shallower draw -- in fact, the captain bragged the 250 long, 350 ton craft could run load-



ed "on heavy dew." Maybe an overstatement but she could make it to Eugene and with that the entire Willamette Valley was opened to commercial river traffic.

Times have changed. The new river traffic is no longer focused on freight. Tourism and the opportunity to experience the past that has brought thousands of passengers over the years to daily excursions, lunch and dinner cruises and special events hosted by the Chesbroughs. Over 300 hundred weddings including the Chesbroughs' have been celebrated on the Willamette Queen.

For two summers the City of Salem has helped sponsor a series of 6 concert cruises called "Harmony on the Water." Along with the wonderful harmonies of the 30-man, nationally recognized Senataires, there are historic reenactors that bring the past to live and share the stories of Oregon's past.

There now is only one other operating sternwheeler offer day cruising in Oregon -- the "Columbia Gorge Sternwheeler" a replica of another Captain Scott built craft. She operates out of Cascade Locks on the Columbia River.

The two boats are all that's left of a rich history and have become major tourist and event draws for their respective communities.

The City of Salem remains committed to working with the new owners of the "Willamette Queen" to keep this long heritage alive in Salem. We are fortunate to have numerous icons and historic sites here -- the Capitol, Eco-Earth, our historic downtown Peter Courtney Minto-Island Bridge, the Willamette Heritage Center, our historic neighborhoods, numerous heritage trees, Willamette University and the list just goes on. What we can't do is lose one that so clearly celebrates and recreates the most dominant feature in our city -- the Willamette River. We also can't afford to lose the legacy the "Willamette Queen" represents

November 9, 2023

City of Salem, Attn. Chirs Neider  
Cultural Tourism Promotion Advisory Board  
555 Liberty St. SE  
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Rivers of Life Center Proposal for Dockside Heritage and Youth Programming

Dear Cultural Tourism Promotion Advisory Board members,

Travel Oregon's vision is that Oregon is a welcoming destination where tourism drives economic prosperity, benefits the natural environment and celebrates rich, diverse cultures. This includes enhancing economies throughout the state to help communities better leverage their local, regional and state tourism economy. Part of the strategy behind achieving this vision is to facilitate the development of world-class tourism products and experiences with a focus on priority gap areas. As such, Travel Oregon encourages your consideration of the Rivers of Life Center's proposal to develop dockside heritage and historical youth programming in Salem.

Many visitors travel to the state with plans to recreate in Oregon's diverse and scenic outdoors and enjoy attractions that celebrate arts and culture. In fact, according to a 2017 study, of the 26.4 million visitors to Oregon, 33% (nearly 9 million) participated in some form of outdoor recreation during their visit. Development of youth programming such as this, a blend of on-the-water recreation with history and the arts, would help attract year-round visitation to the area.

Development of heritage and historical youth programming on the Willamette Queen Sternwheeler could prove to be a valuable tourism asset as it is an investment that provides increased economic activity for locally owned businesses like coffee shops, breweries, and lodging properties which are owned and managed by locals and employ community members. This project has the potential to help drive visitation to the Salem waterfront, ultimately boosting the local economy. We're intrigued by Rivers of Life Center's programming proposal and hope you will consider the possibilities for the local economy it might entail.

Thank you for your consideration,

Todd Davidson  
CEO, Travel Oregon

*The*  
**Willamette**  
*Queen*

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Barbara Chesbrough  
Event Planner 503-409-5325

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