

## City to seek proposals for use of Lord-Higel House

Idea is to bring in vendor to operate venue, generate revenue

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VENICE — With the renovations of the **Lord-Higel House** on track for completion in August, city staff wants to get the City Council thinking about the uses it will be put to.

Staff has identified four goals, Assistant City Manager James Clinch told the Council Tuesday: celebrate its history; ensure its sustainability; provide public access and benefits; and engage with the stakeholders who have been part of the project.

The worst thing that could happen, he said, would be that the **house** is open a day or two a month and locked up the rest of the time.

To keep that from happening, and to meet the goals staff recommends adopting, he asked the Council to approve the concept of “adaptive reuse” — repurposing the restored 1896 **house** to something new.

It’s what the county did with the Venice Train Depot, he said.

Train service ended decades ago, so the depot is now a public park that serves as the trailhead for the Legacy Trail, as well as a transportation hub with rental space for public events and historical displays.

Historical Resources Manager Harry Klinkhamer said that museums in historic facilities often struggle to stay open. The public needs reasons to visit repeatedly, not just once, and spend some money, to make them economically viable, Clinch said.

He said the potential uses for the **Lord-Higel House** are unlimited.

They include a coffee shop, a venue for small events and a meeting space for groups and businesses.

But the way to see what interest there is in any of them, he said, would be to put out a request for proposals.

The key to the **house**’s future is finding the right partner, he said.

No one on the Council disagreed. Council Member Helen Moore said she could see the **house** as a location for things that need a smaller space than is available at the Venice Community Center, like small weddings and meetings.

“But we can’t be managing that,” she said.

Mayor Nick Pachota said he’s happy to know renovations are coming to an end. He remembers the “thermometer”

the Friends of the **Lord-Higel House** put up in Centennial Park when he was a teenager, to track donations.

But he expressed concern about serving food or beverages inside the building, both from the perspective of extra requirements that would be needed and the risk to the building from spills.

Other than that, he said, “I think the direction you’re headed is fantastic.”

Staff will bring back a draft request for proposals at a later date.



This rendering shows what a coffee shop might look like in the **Lord-Higel House**. The city will be soliciting proposals for the operation of the nearly 130-year-old structure, whose renovations will be completed in late summer.

SCREEN CAPTURE

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