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Park County Historical Society cancels meeting meant to resolve conflicts

Board tells President Art Hall he's 'on his own'

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Art Hall

Art Hall, shown here at a Platte Canyon chamber meeting in December 2010, has come under some criticism for his handling of Park County Historical Society matters as president. (Flume File photo by Tom Locke)

Sept. 11, so the meeting had to be canceled, he said.

Hall said it was a case of "poor communication." He said the board told him they didn't know about it, but it was Hall's understanding that the "email went out to all of us."

Rankin said that neither he, Pat Mauro nor Roger Christenson were aware of the requirement.

"We were not asked to write a letter to the board; we were asked to present our complaints at the meeting on the 19th," he said.

Andrews' email also said, "John's \$50 will be returned to him." That \$50 was money Rankin paid to hire the mediator. But Rankin said it was his understanding that the \$50 was only part of the cost, and he thought it was \$50 per hour. To his knowledge no one else paid anything.

And that is probably the case. Todd Alcock, the board treasurer, said, "The PCHS executive board is unwilling to spend money on a mediator, and there are no plans to reschedule at this time."

Rankin said that Hall "pushed us into (the mediation meeting) rather than having something at a general meeting."

When asked if the discussion would be brought up at a general meeting, Rankin said, "That's the plan."

Informal decisions

Hall said the board decided not to reschedule the mediation meeting.

But that decision, as well as the decision to tell Hall he was on his own, was not at a formal meeting and did not involve all of the board members, said board vice president, Judy Jeute. She said that both decisions were "discussed in a non-formal meeting that (she) was not included in."

"I was told the details of this meeting by Todd (Alcock, board treasurer) by phone the next day," she said.

A planned mediation meeting, scheduled for Sept. 19 to clear up disagreements between the board of directors and three members of the Park County Historical Society, was canceled by the board on Sept. 11 by an email from Secretary Kate Andrews.

The meeting had been scheduled with a professional Denver-based mediator to resolve differences that have been aired in letters to the editor in the Flumes of Aug. 16, written by John Rankin; Aug. 24, written by Roger Christenson; and Aug. 31, written by Pat Mauro. (See the Sept. 7 Flume article.)

Art Hall, president of the board, told The Flume that the board told him he is "on his own" in resolving the disagreements. He said the board members decided they shouldn't be involved because the disputes are between Hall on one side and Rankin, Mauro and Christenson on the other.

Rankin agreed. "It's (Art's) problem," he said.

Canceled

Andrews said in her email to the parties involved that the meeting was canceled because: "Requirements, including the fee, were not fulfilled in time for this meeting to take place."

Hall said that each party was supposed to put in writing what they thought the problems were and what they thought was a reasonable resolution. The mediator needed those documents before the meeting so they could be reviewed. The documents were past due by

“Not that I disagree with these things, but I was told after the fact,” she added.

Jeute said she doesn't know what the solution is to the historical society disagreements.

“We must first be allowed to hear the issues. We have respectable members of our Society with credible concerns that need to be dealt with. Just because they are issues that our Society has never seen does not mean we sweep them under the rug and hope they go away,” she said.

Opposite view

It seems Jeute does have some idea of the complaints the three Society members have. But Alcock said, “Frankly, most of us don't know exactly what they are upset about.”

In an email to The Flume, he said that as far as he is concerned “the issue is closed.” He said that Mauro, Rankin and Christenson have failed to submit their issues in writing to the historical society executive board. Instead, “they have published generalized complaints and inflammatory accusations in The Flume, but neglected to directly notify the PCHS Board of their complaints.”

He said he thinks the “problems stem from personal issues between (Mauro, Rankin and Christenson) and Arthur Hall and the PCHS board is stepping aside.” He also said that if there is a problem involving the PCHS board, it will be handled by the board.

So, what are the problems?

Christenson

Christenson's complaint is personal, but his problems with Hall happened when Hall was acting as president of the PCHS. Christenson said that on three occasions, Hall yelled at him in public about PCHS matters, which he said is not good for the image PCHS wants to project.

Once he was at a restaurant in Bailey where the two happened to run into each other. Hall yelled at Christenson so loud that the restaurant proprietor told Hall and Christenson to take it outside, according to Christenson.

Another occasion was at a dinner and presentation event that PCHS sponsored last November. Christenson made a comment Hall didn't like, and Hall responded by yelling at Christenson, using an expletive in front of other people attending the event, Christenson said.

Hall did not deny yelling at Christenson. “Roger can't take criticism,” he said.

Rankin

Rankin's complaints are that Hall makes PCHS decisions and spends money independently of what has been decided in general meetings, which is against the bylaws.

Hall said that “the bylaws are so worthless.”

“I'm trying to follow them,” he said, but in “some areas I may not be able to.”

“John is using the bylaws to beat up on me,” he added.

Mauro

Mauro's complaints are less specific but he would like a discussion of the problems and see what comes of that.

Bylaws

All seem to agree that the bylaws need to be changed. The executive board has appointed a committee consisting of Hall, Alcock and Andrews to draft new bylaws. There is another committee of three that will review the draft and consider more changes. The final bylaw revision can be put in force by a majority vote of a mere 20 members who are present at any regular meeting, providing a written proposal has been given at the previous meeting, according to the current bylaws.

Repercussions

With the airing of the historical society problems and apparently taking no steps to resolve the issues, what repercussions might the historical society expect?

“Airing internal strife in the media exposes a sense of turmoil to not only the public but to potential funders and partners,” said Linda Balough, executive director of the South Park National Heritage Area, and director of the Park County Office of Historic Preservation.

“While I know of no organization that now holds a negative opinion of PCHS, with competition so strong now for dwindling funding, I would like PCHS to have the best possible standing for future funding and partnerships.”

Balough, who is also involved in the Park County



Keystone Bridge

In December 2011, the Park County Historical Society was celebrating the completion of improvements to the Keystone Bridge and to fishing habitat on the North Fork of the South Platte River at the Society's McGraw Memorial Park in Bailey. It was accomplished through combined efforts of the historical society, Denver Water, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Park County Tourism and Littleton-based private company Freestone Aquatics. In this photo taken Aug. 9, 2011, the work had not yet been completed. Today the historical society is struggling with internal turmoil. (Photo by Laura Van Dusen/The Flume)

Historic Preservation Advisory Commission, suggested that this historical society work hard to resolve the problems it is having now “so potential funders and partners can feel assured that PCHS is a strong body of people united in their mission of protecting, interpreting and promoting the history of Park County.”

Meeting

The next meeting of the historical society is Friday, Oct. 5, at 6:30 p.m. at the Platte Canyon Community Center in Shawnee.

Note: John Rankin is an employee of The Flume.