

The Columbian

Vancouver, lawmaker pursue Pearson fix

Herrera Beutler bill would give city control of museum



Photo by [Zachary Kaufman](#)

The National Park Service has terminated an agreement with the city of Vancouver, putting Pearson Air Museum under management of the park service's Fort Vancouver National Historic Site.

By [Stephanie Rice](#)
Columbian staff writer

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U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler will introduce legislation this week that would turn control of Pearson Air Museum and surrounding land to the city of Vancouver, her aide said Tuesday.

"She's fine-tuning the bill details, but does still plan to introduce it this week," Casey Bowman said of Herrera Beutler, R-Camas.

The confirmation that Herrera Beutler will pursue a legislative fix followed Monday's meeting of the Vancouver City Council, where councilors reassured concerned residents that they were working hard to overturn a decision by the National Park Service, which owns the museum and surrounding land.

The Fort Vancouver National Trust, which had been operating the museum on behalf of the city, cleared the museum out on Feb. 6 after the park service abruptly ordered it vacated.

The park service was under the mistaken belief it would be able to keep the planes and displays and operate the museum as it wanted, with a focus on history.

City Manager Eric Holmes said Tuesday that the objective is to get the museum back open and accessible to the public. The trust used it as an education and community site, because, as Councilor Jeanne Harris said Monday, the hangar was a wonderful venue for large community events. Renting it out was a way to make money to keep the museum open, as ticket sales alone didn't cover operation costs.

"We are wanting to make sure we pursue any and all avenues," Holmes said Tuesday. He said Herrera Beutler's legislative fix "may be one way to get there, but I'm not ready to say it's the only way."

James Beckelhiemer, who started a [Facebook page](#), told the council Monday his page has received more than 1,100 "likes."

He asked what the council was doing.

Vancouver Mayor Tim Leavitt said he directed Holmes to work toward getting the community asset back.

Holmes said on Feb. 8 he had a conference call with staff members from the offices of Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, both D-Wash, and Herrera Beutler.

"Cantwell spoke with National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis on Friday and urged him to work with the city to find a resolution," Cantwell's spokeswoman, Janeen Heath May, wrote by email Tuesday. "She's hopeful that this situation can be resolved quickly through negotiations between the city and the park service."

Additionally, Holmes said he'll go to Jarvis to try and "get some relief from the decision that was made locally to terminate the contract."

Councilor Jack Burkman told Beckelhiemer and others museum supporters who attended Monday's meeting that while city officials can work with their federal counterparts, it's encouraging to see such a response from the public.

"There's really something to be said when a bunch of residents stand up and say, 'This is wrong.' And I haven't heard anyone in the city say this is right," Burkman said.

Tracy Fortmann, superintendent of the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site, said Tuesday that she was not aware of any pending legislation and it would be inappropriate to comment. She said her goal has been to keep the museum open, and that the park service does recognize the importance of having the museum building available for community events. She said the park service has a special-permit process to allow such events.

Stevie Mathieu contributed to this report.

Stephanie Rice: 360-735-4508 or stephanie.rice@columbian.com.