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Mediation talks planned over Pearson Air Museum

Vancouver, Park Service, Fort Vancouver National Trust aim to end dispute



Photo by [Troy Wayrynen](#)

Aaron Ochoa, a park ranger, left, opens a door at the reopening of the Pearson Air Museum on Feb. 27. The parties involved in the dispute over the museum have agreed to mediation talks, it was announced Thursday.

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Agencies with a stake in operating the Pearson Air Museum have entered into formal mediation talks, prompting U.S. Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler to hit the pause button on her legislative solution for the dispute, her office said Thursday.

Herrera Beutler remains ready to advance the bill if talks don't work out, her spokesman, Casey Bowman, said Thursday. Herrera Beutler's "goal all along has been to restore the air museum complex to the local community, so she's going to give mediation every opportunity to succeed," Bowman said by email.

Herrera Beutler's legislation, which has already passed through the House Natural Resources Committee, would transfer ownership of Pearson Air Museum from the National Park Service to

the city of Vancouver. Herrera Beutler introduced the bill on Feb. 14 after negotiations on a management agreement for the site broke down between the Park Service, the city of Vancouver and the Fort Vancouver National Trust, which had managed the museum for the city since 2005. On Feb. 4, the Park Service, which owns the land but did not own the museum's contents, demanded that the trust hand over the keys and alarm codes for the museum. The Park Service's request triggered community outrage from Clark County residents. The trust ceded management control to the Park Service, but not before moving out the museum's displays, including several antique airplanes.

It was the Park Service that initiated the latest mediation attempt, said Jan Bader, program and policy development manager for the city of Vancouver.

"The Park Service approached the city and trust with an offer to enter into mediation to find a mutually acceptable solution to the management of Pearson Air Museum," Bader said by email.

"We've all agreed and are in the process of outlining the conditions and selecting a mediator."

Although the trust and the Park Service are the major players in the dispute, Bader said the city agreed to participate in mediation talks because the three organizations "are all intertwined in the development and administration of the Historic Reserve."

Congressional legislation, signed by President Bill Clinton in 1996, created the 366-acre national historic reserve, originally a partnership among the city, state, National Park Service and the Army. The state hasn't been very involved, and the Army has since relinquished ownership of the barracks, leaving the Park Service and the city as the only original partners still involved.

Vancouver effectively turned over its stake to the Fort Vancouver National Trust, which manages city properties at the reserve.

Tracy Fortmann, who works for the Park Service as superintendent of the Fort Vancouver National Historic site, said Thursday that she couldn't go into details about the mitigation process between the trust, Vancouver and the Park Service.

"We have all signed a pre-mediation agreement that includes a confidentiality clause," Fortmann said. "We're working in good faith, and we're all working together. I don't think I can share any more information at this time. ... I want to respect the process."

Steve Horenstein, who Bader said is the trust's lead on mediation, could not be reached for comment on Thursday.

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