For immediate release
Sept. 5, 2017

Statement on Railway Museum lease

The City Council's vote today to reject the renewal of a lease for the historic Santa Fe Depot followed the receipt of concerning information last week about the Railway Museum of San Angelo and its leadership.

The City Council learned of that information, along with the museum's legal history, from City Attorney Theresa James during a closed session today. James reported the museum, which was incorporated by the state of Texas, has been suspended multiple times and on one occasion involuntarily dissolved for failing to file required reports with the Secretary of State. Further, the museum board is not operating in accordance with its articles of incorporation. Those documents are on file with the Secretary of State.

The City Council heard other concerns about the board and its leadership. The decision to let the lease lapse on Sept. 15 was based upon both those concerns and the museum's failure to maintain its legal sufficiency. Before entrusting an historic, City-owned building to an organization for up to 50 years, the Council must be confident the lessee is stable. The Railway Museum board, as it is currently formed, is not.

Originally, the museum was to use only a portion of the Santa Fe Depot. The rest of the facility would be used for other purposes. The museum's use of the entire facility is contrary to the plan agreed upon by the City and the museum board; that use has served neither the depot nor the community as well as it should.

If the museum board undergoes a radical and convincing remake in culture and in practice, and should a "new" organization win the City Council's confidence that it will put the historic depot to the best public use, only then will the Council consider a lease. To otherwise allow "business as usual" with a priceless public asset would be irresponsible.

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