

State of the City

Congratulations and thank you to our newly sworn in Councilors.

(Poster)

In the Fall of 1994 I ran a write-in campaign for the Mayor of Coburg. I ran with a promise to “Bring the Community back to City Government”. As I look back on that; the motto was great. But personally, knowing what I know now; the scariest part of the story is I almost won!

22 years later, in March of 2016, I was appointed Mayor. It has been an adventure to say the least! I am truly honored that this community has shown support and they continue to trust me to be their Mayor for a second elected term.

Tradition dictates that I stand up before you as your Mayor and tell you about the status of our City Government.

Well, it's going pretty good!

Over the past 30 years, I have never felt better about the status of our government. Our friends and neighbors tell me that we are doing a good job. Discussions with citizens are fruitful and hopeful. Rarely do I hear angry criticism. Criticism, yes, but not the angry criticism that I've grown used to over the decades.

Commonly, a review of the last year's accomplishments is in order. But to get the true perspective of Coburg's success, we must look back further than 2018.

Since that failed 1994 campaign for Mayor. There have been too many hard lessons learned by this city. The outcome of some narrowly focused agendas sometimes cost this city dearly.

Most of our staff, and none of the current Councilors were present for the dark days created by actions (or inaction) of a council and staff that created an \$800,000 deficit in our general fund. This deficit initially came to light about 2008 and it was not overcome until FY 2016/17.

Just a few short years ago, the city of Coburg was technically operating in violation of Oregon law with a large deficit in our General Fund. We had laid off staff and provided at best minimal services and usually substandard service because there was no money. Our staff dealt with pay cuts and no money to maintain equipment, let alone buy new equipment.

This occurred because there was too much trust and/or too much apathy about what was happening in our government. Oversight was minimal and improprieties occurred over a long period of time which created the monumental problems that took our city 10 years to recover from.

I would hope we will never have another budget meeting where we are deciding who to lay off, and how much we will affect the paychecks of the remaining staff.

Please do not let this lesson of oversight and responsibility fade.

Through patience, diligence, professionalism, and hard work, our staff suffered through years of simply trying to survive. We made it thanks to them!

The motto:

In order to keep the “Community in the city government”, we must maintain an easy to understand and documented process of oversight in the Coburg City Government. We must personally be accountable and we must hold each other accountable.

It is the City’s responsibility to provide information. It is the City’s responsibility to accommodate our citizens’ input. I believe the city has achieved great successes in both of these.

The Visioning project is one of our more visible successes.

Our “rules of governance” that dictate how to run Council meetings has also created a not so obvious success. With less formality, the Mayor can allow dialogue with guests and citizens during our public meetings. This eases the intimidation for both Councilors and citizens when trying to gather information to make the proper decision.

Improvements in the city websites and monitoring of social media are additional examples as we strive to improve our community communication process.

2018 was a productive and successful year.

On to the future!!

(Props)

I learned a long time ago that a speech with visual aids helps people retain more information for a longer time. So I apologize in advance if your nights of insomnia are filled with memories of this speech.

Last year in my State of the City Address, I Mentioned the need for a non-profit foundation in Coburg.

I believe the future of Coburg will be greatly affected by the Coburg Community Foundation and I am delighted to update you on the progress of the Foundation and it’s board.

Coburg Community Foundation received its incorporation from the State of Oregon and submitted its 501(c)3 application to the IRS in 2018. The Foundation is currently spearheading the effort to purchase the Primrose Lane building for future use as a community center. To date they have raised over \$53,000 in donations and pledges. As CCF moves into the new year, the plan is to complete fundraising for the purchase of the Primrose Lane building. To create volunteer action teams, (including a youth board), to help determine programming and community building activities and events.

The coordination of volunteer activities is desperately needed in Coburg. I constantly hear from citizens who want to volunteer. People have a lot ideas, skills and energy and my hope is the Coburg Community Foundation (and thus the community) can profit from this talent and energy.

I have maintained that it is not the City’s responsibility to staff and coordinate the public events.

Yes, the City should and does participate in many ways. But the general operation and coordination needs to be outside of the City Government.

This issue becomes more evident as the City implements a multi-million dollar, multi-project water system upgrade. These projects will add a tremendous workload to our staff and we must prioritize our resources for accountability and efficiency.

(Board)

While I carry excitement and pride for what Coburg is and will soon become, I carry a bit of anxiety about what the Council and staff has ahead of us. We are experiencing a growth like no other time in our past. Our population could possibly increase by as much as 50% in the span of 4 years.

Coburg City government is growing from a small city to a mid-sized city model of operation. More homes and businesses requires more staff and equipment to maintain the infrastructure and provide the services our citizens and businesses need and want.

(Water)

The city is embarking on some major water system upgrades. We will be spending about six million dollars to provide new service to the east side of the city, and provide better production and storage facilities which will also enhance our abilities to endure disasters.

(Pavement)

Always an unpopular subject; raising money to fix our streets. We have a two million dollar backlog of maintenance and repair to our streets. To me, increasing our fuel tax should be a “no brainer” but voters disagreed. We should take advantage of our I-5 location and let travelers help pay for our streets. While this will not come close to paying the bill, it will help with approximately eighty to one hundred thousand dollars per year. The rest will have to come from the residents and businesses of Coburg. This year the Council will have to determine a workable plan to deal with stopping the deterioration and starting an improvement project.

The city has purchased better equipment to provide the services to residents and businesses of Coburg. Decades of trying to get by with old equipment was costing us money in the long run and exposing our workers to unsafe conditions. With a focus on efficiency and long range plans we continue to increase our productivity and the safety of our employees.

Employee retention should be a primary concern for our Council and City Administrator. Continuity of planning and goal setting is a crucial element of smooth operations for a city government. Our employees should always have significant ownership in the information and discussions that help to create the future vision of Coburg. Conversely, Our Council and the Mayor must be dynamic in our thought process and continue to challenge all of us to be better decision makers for our city.

Trust is so very important to a good government. The definition of trust must be clearly defined so that all of us understand how we will communicate. Trust does not mean blindly accepting what the other party says. Our definition of trust should mean that we all understand that we will be held accountable to our actions and words. Staff should “trust” that this Council and Mayor will ask questions and hold them accountable. In turn, Council should trust that Staff will hold us accountable to rules, ordinances, statutes, policies and most importantly, our commitment to goals set by input from our constituency and then adopted by this council.

Since that epic campaign in 1994, Coburg has seen so much change. When I look back to that time and realize what the city government has become, it is sobering and amazing.

The people seem comfortable with the operations of our city. I believe we all feel the anxiousness as we rapidly grow. I admit that I have more than a little anxiety as we implement multi-million dollar plans to improve our infrastructure to keep our growing city safe and comfortable. The thing that eases that anxiety, is right here before me. The City Council, staff and citizens that are all committed to doing the right thing for Coburg. People that care about our town, people that step in and get things done. That is the heritage of Coburg, that is present day Coburg, and that is the future of Coburg.

Sent from my iPhone