

2023

State OF THE City

Presented by: Mayor Keith Weiss

It is hard to believe it is already 2023. I have prepared this State of the City report to help give you an idea of our accomplishments for the past year, and a glimpse of what we are working on for this coming year.

For the most part, our lives are returning to our normal routines as COVID-19 is stubbornly waning. That means more people are going back to work at their job locations and our children are finally attending school in an environment that is important for their education, development, and their overall growth as they interact with their teachers and classmates on a daily basis.

Here at the City, we are hard at work doing our best to make the lives of our residents less stressful and as safe as we can. For the most part, we are able to accomplish that without much fanfare or notice. We feel we are doing our job well if we do not hear about it, and we receive an occasional appreciative note. We strive to make your residential life feel like you are part of a welcoming community.

One of the ways we accomplish that is through our volunteers. We have several groups that consistently volunteer to make the lives of our residents a little better. These groups include, but are not limited to, the Veneta Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce, Mid Lane Cares programs at the Fern Ridge Service Center, the Kiwanis Club, the local Veterans group, the Scouts, the Fern Ridge Library volunteers, the Lane Fire Authority volunteers, the Fern Ridge Area Unhoused Group and the Faith Based organizations in and about our City. I encourage all residents to find out more about what these great groups do for our community and if you can find time, help out with volunteering. It is a good feeling to give back to your community.

As most of you are aware, the cost of buying and maintaining goods has gone up dramatically. I am sure you have noticed that everything from buying a

hamburger to a new car has affected our budgets. Here at the City, we are feeling the pinch, and are doing our best to spend wisely. However, just like you with your household budget, we have to make sure we do what we have to do to keep things going on an even keel, and also continue to save for future projects. In that vein, you will see a small increase in your water and sewer bill for 2023. We have some needed improvements to our sewer plant that will be required within the next couple of years, so we have to start preparing for that now.

One thing we are working on to improve your city experience is improving our communication platforms to make it easier for you to know what we are doing, and to let us know about your needs. You will be receiving surveys from us for you to let us know more about how you would like to communicate with us. Please take time to complete these and we will publish the results as soon as we can. Additionally, we will launch a re-designed City website by late February that will allow you to sign up for email or text notices of City happenings. We feel an informed public better understands what we are trying to accomplish in the city and can, if they wish, contribute to those accomplishments.

On the next few pages you can read about those notable accomplishments from 2022.



NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM 2022

CITY FINANCES

The City again was successful in obtaining a clean opinion from our auditors on our 2020/2021 Financial Statement and Report and I am happy to report that we received the Government Finance Officers Association Budget Award for the 9th consecutive year.



BROADBAND

It seems like every year I announce to you that high-speed affordable broadband options are coming to town, then it seems like something always comes up to delay it. I am happy to report that we have made significant progress in 2022 and by this time next year, I am confident it will be available for your consideration.



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The City has been working to bring our city development codes up to date and to help make it easier for developers to build in our city. For instance, the council passed an ordinance that allows detached or attached homes to be clustered around a common area. That kind of development has been popular in other areas. It is commonly called Cottage Housing.

The developer who is building homes at the Madrone Ridge site continues to build and sell beautiful homes this year and we have had discussions with other builders for more residential development in the near future.



Example of Cottage Housing from M-Group

PUBLIC WORKS

Some of the hardest working folks we employ at the City are the guys of the Public Works Department. They keep our city clean, safe, and beautiful in all kinds of weather. When you drive by and see them working, give them a friendly wave. In addition to the landscaping work they do, they are also the ones that keep our pool up and running for your enjoyment during the summer. They also keep our sewer, water, and storm water systems running like clockwork.

This year they helped prepare for and install new bathrooms at the City Park. They made sure our street curbs were painted while the preventive Pavement Preservation Project sealed up cracks and added an overlay of asphalt on most of our streets. In the long run it keeps our streets safe, reliable, and actually saves money overall.



CODE ENFORCEMENT

Our Lane County Sheriff's Office deputies led by Sergeant Tim Ware are a great bunch. They care about our community and do their best to help anyone in any situation.

I would like to repeat my message from last year concerning code enforcement in our City. "In response from our citizens, the City is planning to put more of a priority in enforcing the city codes that are in effect. The City will be looking at issues such as, but not limited to, animal control, abandoned vehicles and vehicles parked on front yards and as a reminder, RVs need a permit to park on the street. In addition, the City has recently followed the lead of other cities across the country in passing an ordinance requiring owner's registration of abandoned, vacant or distressed properties. This was done to urge property owners to keep their properties maintained and productive."

NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM 2022

PARKS AND RECREATION

Coming out of restrictions from COVID-19 it was a challenge to get the pool up and running for the year. Staffing was a major issue as we needed to hire and train several new lifeguards. It took a yeoman's effort from all involved to make it happen; but they did it, and we made a lot of people happy. Hopefully we can expand on what we did and make it even better for this coming summer.

A proposal was made to surplus a couple of small parks that did not seem to get much use and to use the money for improvements to other existing parks or the development of a new off-leash dog park in the City. The residents expressed their displeasure with those plans and made it clear to the City Council that they wanted to keep the two smaller parks. The Council heard their voices and voted to keep the parks as they are.

We do plan to go ahead with a new off-leash dog park, thanks in part to the generous offer from the Port of Coos Bay to allow us to use some of their railroad right of way for that purpose. You might have noticed that some clearing has begun between the railroad and Brooker Drive, just west of Territorial. The city hopes to have the land fenced, gated and ready for use by late Summer.



Future site of the Dog Park

The City is working with the Territorial Sports Program board members to draft a design for major improvements to the Bolton Hill Sports Complex. Keep an eye out for a big community outreach effort soon to get ideas from our residents. Our former Community Development Director Lisa Garbett said "Balancing the community's wants with the community's ability to collectively pay for the new facility will be a tough, but prudent challenge." I think we all understand what she was saying.

COMMUNITY CENTER

Our current Community Center is becoming out of date and is in need of repairs. It is a lovely place next to City Park for our residents to rent for celebrations and events. It was decided by Council that in the long run, we would be better off to replace it than to spend the money to remodel it. We are currently in the design phase. Once that is completed, we will apply for grants to help with the financing.

COUNCIL CHANGES FOR 2023

I am so happy to honor our long-time city councilor, Thomas Cotter. He decided to retire after 24 years on the council. We wish him the best and thank him for his many years of dedicated service to our community. In case you do not know, the Mayor and Councilors are volunteers in this city. They volunteer to do the work because they care about your needs. We will miss Councilor Cotter.

In the general election, we had three people run for two openings for City Councilor. One of the openings was because the term for Councilor Robbie McCoy had expired. Fortunately for the city, she ran for another term. We also had an opening because of the aforementioned retirement of Thomas Cotter. Robbie was the top vote-getter by a sizeable margin and the person with the second most votes in the election was Alexa Benson.

Please join me in congratulating both of them. Robbie and Alexa were sworn in at the first meeting in January 2023. We look forward to continued service from Councilor McCoy and to be working with our new Councilor Alexa Benson.



NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FROM 2022 continued

EVENTS

We were able to go back to some of the old traditions for events that had to be altered because of COVID-19. This year we were able to have the traditional Easter Egg hunt at the Veneta Elementary School. Hundreds of children were so excited to have their pictures taken with the Easter Bunny. They yelled and screamed with joy as they filled their baskets with the goodies they found!

In May we celebrated the City's 60th Anniversary with the Veneta Celebration Run. Nearly 90 participants of all ages showed up on a typical rainy Oregon morning to run or walk the 5k course through the city with neighbors cheering them on as they ran past their homes. Nearly \$5,000 dollars was raised for the Park Board's park beautification efforts. This year, the Veneta Celebration Run will happen on Sunday, September 24th mark your calendars and start walking to get ready!



This year the City was excited to announce that it had received an award from the National Night Out organization, which oversees the annual event of the same name focused on public safety awareness and community-building. I would like to thank our City Staff, the Lane Fire Authority, Neighborhood Watch, the Oregon Department of Forestry, and the Lane County Sheriff's Office, for their help and participation in this event. Also, thanks go to Sanipac for providing free hot dogs for all of the attendees.

The Christmas tree lighting and the Annual Light Parade were better than ever this year. There may have been more people at those events than the total population of Veneta. We were so excited to host people from all over to show off our city with these fun events. I'd like to say thank you to our friends at the Veneta Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce for putting on another wonderful parade, and thank you to our LCSO deputies and their law enforcement friends from around Lane County who showed up to help make it a safe event.

GOING FORWARD INTO 2023

In 2023, we are planning to move ahead with advocating for the Highway 126 expansion project. The environmental study is almost complete. The next big step is funding. Passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act should give a big lift over that hurdle.

We are continuing to work with our partners, Lane County and ODOT, to build a path between the Veneta Elementary School and the Fern Ridge Schools in Elmira. A lot of surveys and engineering and environmental analysis has happened over the last two years. Four bridges are needed to cross the wetlands. This year, the County will apply to the State for a \$2.8 million grant for full design and partial construction of the path from Suttle Road in Elmira to the ODFW parking lot on the east side of Territorial Highway. They plan to apply next year for the remaining construction to the Ray's Shopping Center area with an estimated cost of \$6.8 million. It is a huge project and our community needs it to happen for the safety of our students. Keep in mind that all Veneta stu-

dents beyond elementary level, travel to Elmira for school. Those who walk or bike must use the shoulder of Territorial to get there and back.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier, we will continue working on the Community Center project and plan to have an off-leash dog park open for our furry friends. It will be so nice when it all comes to fruition.

As your Mayor, I know I speak for the whole City Council when I thank you for your support for what we do here on a daily basis, to hopefully enhance the lives of each of you and your families. After all, that is truly what we are here for. So, once again, I am honored to declare, "The State of this beautiful City of Veneta is GREAT"!

Respectfully,
Keith Weiss

