

State of the City 2021

By Mayor Keith Weiss - January 25, 2021

LOOKING BACK - A REVIEW OF 2020

This is not the proper forum to use the colorful words that a lot of folks are calling the year 2020, but let's just say we are glad we are through with it.

Normally, most people would say that the National Election would have been the main story of the year. That was big. So were fires that blazed through our state that consumed 100's of homes in their wake. And too, the nationwide protests sparking local conversations about equality and race. But, who would have thought that an unknown virus would have dominated the news and our lives for nearly the entire year? Who would have thought, that if you walk into the City Administration building, you would see staff working behind pro-

TECTIVE plastic shields and that some of the staff had to be moved to another building to comply with the social distancing ordinances? Who would have believed that everyone entering the Admin building would be required to wear a mask? We even had to limit availability to the building and the amount of people who could be in the room for council meetings. It used to be the only time I heard "Zoom" was when my grandson was young and received a new toy car from Santa!

As weird as that sounds, we have made it through the year. We totally understand that a lot of our residents have had it worse. Many have had family or friends with the virus. Most have had limited abil-

ity to spend time with others. A lot of you have had to work from home, or worse, have lost your jobs or had your business closed.

Our children have been attending school virtually. We all miss attending those big Falcon, Duck and Beaver sporting events. The good news is that there are vaccines becoming available which should help immensely. However, we still need to continue to be safe and as always, look out for each other.

As your Mayor, I felt the need to issue two statements for your reflection in 2020:

In March, I issued "Now is Our Moment" where I asked that we come together as we always have, to help our neighbors and



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do whatever we could to think of each other, as we embrace the challenge thrown to us by this terrible COVID-19 Virus.

In September, I issued "Our Shared Peace" where once again, I called on our residents to do what we always have done in Veneta, and show respect for each other, as we conduct our daily lives. We are a community that understands the values we all share when we live together.



LOOKING BACK - A Review of 2020 Continued...

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In 2020 we added two new shopping options for you with the opening of the Grocery Outlet Market and the Dollar General Store. We have had several requests for information about residential development and it looks promising for 2021.

The City has worked diligently throughout the year to develop, and just adopted, the 2020 Veneta Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, which will guide development of the City's park system for the next 20 years.

VENETAWORKS

VenetaWorks is a collection of programs, events, and initiatives hosted by the City of Veneta in partnership with Oregon RAIN (Regional Accelerator and Innovation Network), and RDI (Rural Development Initiatives), aimed at promoting and supporting entrepreneur-based economic development. Among its activities, the program brought experts to the community for a monthly topic-driven speaker series, launched an accelerator program to help local businesses grow, and helped area entrepreneurs find the resources they need.

This year, more than 30 entrepreneurs took advantage of the VenetaWorks services to help launch or improve their businesses. We created shopfern-



ridge.com – an online marketplace where items from several local entrepreneurs are displayed for ordering. They are now rolling out Shop Veneta gift cards to encourage people to shop locally.

VenetaWorks also worked with the Veneta-Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce and the City Staff to bring sizzle to the summer 2020 Downtown Popup Retail District. One result from all of this support of our local entrepreneur ecosystem was local entrepreneurs coming together to create the holiday season debut of “The Emporium.” Turning the long time eating establishment on the corner of Territorial and Dunham into a Holiday Bazaar where for 2 months customers could shop for holiday items from a variety of local vendors.

CITY FINANCES

In 2020, our City once again approved a balanced budget and for the 7th year in a row received the prestigious Government Finance Officers' Association “Distinguished Budget Award”. Our Financial Director, Shauna Hartz retired after almost 20 years of service to Veneta. She hopes to spend time with her family and to also get out and enjoy the great outdoors and all it offers. She especially wants to go camping

and visit National Parks.

The City has hired Caitlin (Caiti) Hippler to be our new Finance Director. She has recently completed her Master of Public Administration at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She most recently worked as Director of Academic Operations at Nevada State College near Las Vegas.



LOOKING BACK - A Review of 2020 Continued...

PUBLIC WORKS

The Public Works Department has, as usual, kept the City running smoothly and looking great without much of the fanfare they deserve.

This year we completed upgrades to the decking at the pool. However, because of the COVID-19 Virus, we were sad to not be able to open the pool. We also had a grand opening of the new and improved City Park. The park was enlarged, with a new stage, new playground equipment, and new paths for walking. The Public Works Department was also instrumental in Veneta adding a new parking lot for Broadway shopping and dining at 4th and Broadway. This year because of the COVID-19 Virus,

big changes were made to the annual Christmas Parade.

The City along with the Veneta-Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce presented "Lights on Broadway", a reverse parade where the floats and displays were fixed and the cars drove by for all to enjoy. Santa and his helpers were at the Veneta Elementary School to wave to the children who were cuddled up nice and warm in their family's car. It has been estimated that in excess of 1,200 carloads of happy families drove by. Thanks to the hard work of the Public Works Department, Lane County Sheriff's Office, and others, it went off without a hitch and was enjoyed by all.

PUBLIC SAFETY

My hat's off to the Sergeant and Deputies that work in Veneta under contract from the Lane County Sheriff's Office. They have worked very hard under difficult circumstances to keep us all safe and secure as we stayed close to home this year. Many of them had to work long hours on the front lines of the fires around the state and helped to save lives. After serving our community for about 4 years, Sgt. Sieczkowski was tapped to lead a new McKenzie River post because of his leadership during the fires. We welcomed Sgt. Ware, who has roots in the community going back to when his father patrolled the Veneta area for the Sheriff's Office. Also, I would be remiss if I didn't take a minute to express the thanks from the



whole community for all of the good work the Lane Fire Authority does on a daily basis to save lives and keep us

safe. They, along with the Lane County Sheriff's Deputies have a thankless job, and we do appreciate it. They run to trouble when we run away. They are all heroes.

The city has agreed to provide funds in 2021 to help the Fern Ridge School District add the position of School Resource Deputy.

There are many things that this will provide to the citizens of Veneta, most importantly, helping to keep our children safer. The program is scheduled to begin next year depending on whether the schools can reopen to student attended learning.

EVENTS



Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, most of the normal city events had to be canceled for this year. Although we did, as mentioned previously, have a modified Christmas Parade, and we participated in a drive-by Easter event. I, along with City Administrator Matt

Michel and the City Staff, handed out Easter goodies to the children as their parents slowly drove up. We are so hopeful that next year we can go back to our full slate of events for our residents.



LOOKING FORWARD - VISIONS & GOALS FOR 2021

As I look forward, my biggest wish is for us to all overcome the COVID-19 Virus and get back to lives we all miss. I don't know about you, but I could sure use a big hug! I am proud of how our community has responded to keep each other safe and to mitigate the spread of the virus locally and limit the sickness as much as possible.

Some of the things I see the City working on in 2021 to hopefully make your lives better are:

- Free WiFi internet at City Park and the Administrative Center parking lot to help those kids and adults who need internet access for school or work.
- A new park trails study to develop a vision for connecting our parks and providing paths to enjoy living in our city.
- Continued progress on designing a new pathway connecting Veneta and Elmira so our school children can navigate between the two cities, to go to and from school.
- The continued progress towards expanding Highway 126 to 4 lanes between Eugene and Veneta to help with growth and to help make the highway safer for travelers.
- A new 5-year Economic Development Plan that includes a commitment to try to eliminate the road blocks to providing a Fiber network to residents.
- I think we are very close to a group of entrepreneurs opening a brewery right here in downtown Veneta.

Personal Appreciation

On November 4th you showed your confidence in me, and your appreciation for the work our city has accomplished this past few years, by voting overwhelmingly to reelect me, to continue to represent you for another four years as your Mayor. I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to you. I am humbled. My pledge to you, is to do the best I can, every day of those four years, to ensure city government does everything within its power to address your needs and keep you and your families safe.

State of the City

Yes, 2020 was tough. However, as we turn the calendar to a new year, my heart is full of faith, love and inspiration. My mind is full of hope and expectations. It is with great pride that I hereby declare: The State of the City of Veneta continues to be Excellent!

