



Presented by: Mayor Keith Weiss

2022

# State of the City

## LOOKING BACK - A REVIEW OF 2021

Last year I opened my State of the City message talking about how the COVID virus had affected our lives, both personal and work. I ended that part by expressing optimism that the virus seemed to be waning some, and with new treatments, including improved testing and more available vaccinations, by the end of the year 2021 most of the virus would be behind us.

Things did improve greatly but, just as we were beginning to breathe a little better (no pun intended), we were hit with a gut punch. Unfortunately, the virus gods did not listen to me. As we speak, the virus has come back with a new variant and is again threat-

ening our way of life. Many people are getting infected again, and hospitalization rates are on the rise. As before, we must work together to try to do what is recommended by the experts to try to keep ourselves and each other safe. I have confidence that with our continued sense of community we will once again contain this terrible virus and be able to move on with our lives.

Over the last two years of COVID, City leaders and staff have been working safely, while being available to our community and each other. In 2021, there was a lot of work and change behind the scenes. Through it all we kept our City moving in the right direction.

## COUNCIL AND STAFF UPDATES

- Councilor Calvin Kenney completed his council term. He served the city on several committees, most notably 3 years on the City Council. Citizens elected in a local businesswoman and proud mother of three, Maureen Wright to fill that Council seat. Councilor Wright, your enthusiasm for our community is greatly appreciated.
- After 15 years of service to our community as the City Recorder, Darci Henneman retired to spend time with her grandchildren. We welcomed David Grabicki to the city to fill the role and although we do miss Darci, David has fit right in.
- Our city Finance Director over the last year recently accepted a position at a school in Eugene which gives her the opportunity to work closer to her children. So, while her time with us was short, we wish her well. We are currently seeking a new Finance Director.
- In July, we welcomed Cole Haselip to the city as a Management Analyst. Cole is very energetic and has jumped right into several economic development projects.
- Darryl Davis, our favorite Sheriff's Deputy recently retired. He posted a heartfelt sign-off and farewell on Facebook that showed his tremendous heart. We were ecstatic when he came back to be a driver for one of our Light Parade floats. Fortunately, he has plans to continue to contribute to our community as he enjoys his retirement.

# Looking Back - Highlights from 2021

## March

- We built a new path extending East from City Park with a bridge over the wetlands to connect with our neighbors along East Hunter Road. This path provides better walking access to our park, pool, and community center.

## April

- Unfortunately, the very popular Easter Egg hunt had to be cancelled due to the COVID crisis. But we showed COVID that it couldn't beat Veneta's spirit! With help from the Lane Fire Authority, and the Fern Ridge Kiwanis club, I was able to join the Easter Bunny at the Elmira Elementary School and the Veneta Elementary School to pass out candy to the eagerly awaiting classrooms of very happy and appreciative children.
- We worked on improving our community outreach by forming a staff Communications Team to collaborate on Facebook information, website information, and even putting out a community survey asking citizens how we can best share news with you.



## May

- Beautiful hanging baskets dolled up Veneta's downtown Business District thanks to a partnership between the City and the Veneta-Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce. Several community members and businesses generously sponsored the baskets to celebrate the small town we live in. On behalf of the community, I thank each of those sponsors for celebrating our small town. The Public Works crew rigged up a truck to be their watering can and put extra time in to keep those baskets beautiful all summer long. Guys, thanks a bunch for helping our downtown be such a wonderful sight.



## June

- The City was once again able to create a lively outdoor market this summer with a retail POP-UP District that blended in with the Veneta Downtown Farmers Market where folks came together to eat, drink, listen to music, and of course, shop.
- The Veneta Community Pool reopened in 2021 with modified operations due to COVID. As you know, the previous year we were unable to open at all, so it was great to make this treasured community jewel shine again.



## July

- On the 4th of July, I was honored to help dedicate the new VFW memorial and mural at the Veneta City Park. I joined several guest speakers. I talked about my family's contribution to our armed forces, including my own. I also talked about the importance of recognizing our veterans and thanking them for their service to our country. They are all patriots who should be celebrated.

## August

- In August the community came together to celebrate a National Night Out at City Park. The event focused on public safety awareness and community-building with our Fire, Police, and First Responders. The City was recognized by the National Night Out organization for hosting such a successful event. There were free hot dogs sponsored by SaniPac and served by the members of the Alliance Church, demonstrations of equipment, and a Dunk-a-Deputy tank, operated by the Veneta Sheriff's Deputies to benefit the family of Amado Hernandez. I am very appreciative of our Deputy Sheriffs', and Lane County Sheriff Cliff Harrold's, willingness to celebrate our community with us.



# Looking Back - Highlights from 2021

## August continued

- We took a significant step towards sustainably funding our police services by creating a Public Safety Fee. Research was done and shared, comments taken, hearings held, and afterwards the Council enacted a new Public Safety Fee starting this year. Every year, the Council will re-evaluate the fee amount to balance community needs and affordability.

## September

- I sent an open letter to the community asking for every resident to come together to help fight this terrible virus we have been living through. I mentioned that I was fully aware of the controversy of vaccinations throughout our nation, however; if not for ourselves, but for our children, please consider getting vaccinated and boosted as soon as you can.
- The Veneta Harvest Festival was a big hit. There were vendor booths, a kid zone, and a Chili cook-off. Also, there was a new Kiwanis Kruise-in Car and Motorcycle Show that really added excitement to the day. These attractions brought our community together to celebrate the many things we are thankful for.

## November

- We brought back the Business Assistance Committee to help our local entrepreneurs and businesses with business grants.

## December

- On December 2nd we had the annual Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony. Santa highlighted the event and listened to the Christmas wishes of hundreds of little children. The Kiwanis provided hot chocolate, which came in handy on that cold December night. Thanks to the City Public Works department for procuring the beautiful tree that seemed to touch the sky, and for the set up for this and all the other City events throughout the year.
- On December 9th the annual Veneta Christmas Light Parade was again a big hit. The sidewalks were filled with families waiting eagerly to see the firetruck with Santa on board to start the parade. The parade stretched on with many beautifully decorated floats. A good time was had by all especially our precious children.



## Additional highlights throughout 2021

- ODOT contributed \$100,000 to the project to build a safe path between Veneta and Elmira.
- 2021 marked Veneta's 12th consecutive Tree City Award and 9th consecutive Budget Presentation Award.
- Throughout the year we distributed tens of thousands of masks, gloves, and sanitizer to Veneta businesses to help them manage the cost of being COVID safe. The City also distributed \$56,000 in COVID CARES funds to local businesses, in addition to the County's \$5.5 million to 122 Veneta-based business recipients.
- The environmental analysis for the OR 126 Widening project continued all last year and included several public outreach efforts to gauge public support and concerns with the project. Veneta citizens and our surrounding neighbors are very supportive of the project. This is important because the project will only get funded if there is very strong support for it.
- We got a lower interest rate on the City's \$2.8 million in sewer debt, which will save nearly \$750,000 in interest costs over the life of the bonds.
- And finally, we won two economic development grants in 2021: One to support the expansion of The Emporium into the adjacent outdoor space, and one to support our local food entrepreneurs with a training lab and technical assistance for local businesses.

# Looking Forward - Visions & Goals for 2022

Some of the things I see the City working on, in 2022, to hopefully make your lives better are:

- A new restroom building for the City Park has been purchased. We are anxiously awaiting delivery so it can be installed.
- Continued progress on designing a new pathway connecting Veneta and Elmira, so our school children can navigate between the two cities.
- Finalizing the environmental analysis for expanding Highway 126 to 4 lanes between Eugene and Veneta to help with growth and make the highway safer for travelers.
- Finding an affordable option to provide high speed broadband to the citizens of Veneta.
- Engaging the community to update the Bolton Hill Sports Complex Master Plan. Eventually we would like to provide a first-class place for our children to participate in their favorite sports.
- We hope to have completion of the Madrone Ridge subdivision of 38 new homes in 2022. The roads and infrastructure are being done so you can finally drive on the new section of 8th Street south of Bolton Hill Road.
- The City is working to find a desirable location large enough to house an off-leash dog park for our furry friends.
- You'll see lots of street maintenance work this summer as part of the City's efforts to keep our streets in good shape for long term savings.
- And renovating the Community Center at City Park to make it a desirable destination for our larger family events and special life occasions.

## PERSONAL APPRECIATION

I would like to take a minute to thank everyone for their patience and understanding during these hard times. The City and I do appreciate the positive feedback we have received this year. It spurs us on and keeps us looking forward.

Also, I would be remiss if I didn't take a few minutes to thank all the citizens in our community who take time out from their lives to volunteer their time to help others. It is a big ingredient in making a small town a loved community we all can call home.



## STATE OF THE CITY

It is with extreme pride that I, Keith Weiss, Mayor of the best city in Oregon, can once again declare: "The State of the City of Veneta, continues to be Excellent"!