

# State of the City 2017

Once again it is my pleasure to present the annual State of the City of Veneta, a report of the City's activities, progress and challenges in 2016 and a look forward to 2017.

Last January, the Council revisited its annual goals and tweaked them a bit, but the City's concerns, aspirations, and responsibilities remain much the same for, to borrow from an old expression, neither Rome nor Veneta could be built in a day.

## Goal #1: Health and Safety

Public safety and health remained our number one concern in 2016.

The City collaborated with Lane County and the proponents of the Fern Ridge Community Policing District to put to the voters a plan to form a special public safety district that would provide both Veneta and surrounding communities with enhanced police coverage at no additional cost to Veneta residents. In fact, participation in the district would have made most of Veneta's annual public safety contract with Lane County redundant, and would have provided the City with better service at lower cost, especially in future years as the cost of that contract inevitably increases. After county commissioners held a contentious public hearing at Deep Woods, however, they decided that opposition from rural residents was too great and voted not to advance the measure to the May ballot.

The City continues to meet with policing district proponents, who are exploring other

avenues and revising their proposal.

We continued to provide support for the rejuvenated Neighborhood Watch Program, providing and installing signs throughout the city as well as start-up packets and other supplies. At last report, Neighborhood Watch had grown to six groups who provide an extra set of eyes for our deputies and help to identify "hot spots" within the city. At year end, four more groups were in formation.

Deputy Todd May's playdate with pre-schoolers at the Fern Ridge Family Resource Center exemplified Veneta's commitment to community policing practices that continue under contract sergeant Scott Dunham, who replaced Sgt. Billy Halvorson who was promoted to lieutenant and reassigned.

The City of Veneta is now prepared to deal with the emergencies and disasters that we hope will never happen.

Two years of collaborative work with Lane County and Lane Fire Authority produced

an Emergency Operations Plan that addresses local response to large-scale catastrophic events, including but not limited to the predicted Cascade seismic cataclysm.

City staff and officials completed FEMA emergency management training and participated in a tabletop exercise at Lane Fire Authority's Emergency Operations Center to test the functionality of the plan.

Veneta joined Eugene and Lane County in adopting the Community Emergency preparedness System, enabling residents to sign up online to receive emergency alerts on their cell phones.

In actions appropriate for a HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) City, two years ago Veneta prohibited smoking and vaping in all of its parks. Last year, we joined Lane County in prohibiting tobacco and tobacco paraphernalia sales to minors and establishing a tobacco licensing requirement, primarily to provide "teeth" to that prohibition.



Mayor Sandra Larson

State of the City of Veneta  
Goals set for 2017

### Page 1

- Goal #1: Health and Safety

### Page 2

- Goal #2: Economic Development

### Page 3

- Goal #3: Improvement and Modernization of City Streets
- Goal #4: Urbanize streets to Improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity

- Wastewater!
- Stormy weather!

### Page 4

- Goal #5: Promote parks and recreation projects and healthy and active lifestyles
- Goal #6: Community awareness
- Change!

## Goal #2: Economic Development

There's no denying that we continue to be a bedroom community for Eugene-Springfield employment, but we are committed to making Veneta not only a great place to live, but a great place to work.

To that end, the Veneta Economic Development Committee and the City have launched a number of initiatives, including the second year of the Business Retention and Expansion Program, piloted here by Rural Development Initiatives, a non-profit that supports rural communities as they work through challenging economic conditions. The BRE Program recognizes that the success of our existing businesses is priority one. Business Connect, a part of that effort, outreached to local businesses in detailed interviews to determine what the impediments are to business growth in Veneta and Fern Ridge.

At the top of that list, of course, is the inadequacy of Highway 126, a reality that we drive home to the Area Commission on Transportation, ODOT and the legislature at every opportunity. In fact, it's Veneta's mantra: 126, 126, 126.

Last year, members of the EDC and several others advocated for Highway 126 improvements before the legislature's Joint Transportation Commission and we initiated efforts with the state's Regional Solutions to address those issues.

We moved forward with intergovernmental agreements to complete the environmental impact study and design for the Southern Alignment Multi-Purpose Path from Greenhill to Veneta that is part of the Highway 126 Corridor Plan that envisions an eventual buildout of a four-lane highway connection. Yes, the plan is there, adopted by both Lane County and ODOT—all it takes to make it happen is a lot of will and a lot of money.

Additional challenges identified by Business Connect were availability of skilled labor, access to working capital, shortage of commercial and office space and lack of high speed Internet.

In 2015, the City received a \$20,000 Regional Fiber Consortium grant to extend our fiber buildout to the Veneta Business Park. Last year, we learned that both

Century Link and LS Network can deliver fiber to the business park to any business requesting it without our funding, so the Consortium said to hold on to the funds until we fully explore expanding broadband throughout the City. A recent survey conducted by the City and the EDC confirmed that there is demand for community-wide high speed Internet and the City is in ongoing discussion with three entities to provide it.

Economic growth will only come with private investment, of course, but the Council believes the City can and should facilitate that investment when and where possible.

“Did I mention that Veneta is a great place to live?”

We partner with the recently renamed Veneta-Fern Ridge Chamber of Commerce on many fronts, including financial support for the Visitor Center at the West Lane Shopping Center.

In September, the Council approved a temporary 50% reduction in Transportation System Development Charges (SDCs) for non-residential development, and we are looking at both short and long-term amendments to the Northeast Employment Center Specific Development Plan in response to input from property owners and commercial real estate brokers regarding some overly stringent standards that may impede development there.

We updated our Business Assistance Loan Fund Program, focusing on job retention and expansion and revised the Urban Renewal Agency's Redevelopment Tool Kit to provide grant funding for eligible redevelopment projects.

Veneta has been active in economic developments efforts at the county level, as well, including with the Lane County Rural Prosperity Program and the four-county Economic Development District, and the City has updated the 2006

Economic Development Strategic Plan.

Did I mention that Veneta is a great place to live? Residential development continues apace in an improved economy. Hayden built 27 homes at Applegate Landing in 2016 and will begin construction of public improvements for a 103-lot subdivision. Construction of homes on those lots would take place over two or more years. Two more subdivision applications are pending.

According to the Council's resident realtor, however, there is a low inventory of available, affordable homes here. This is good news for sellers but not for buyers and renters.

These are conditions that exacerbate homelessness, of course, a seemingly intractable problem that, realistically, we can only address with band-aids. We continue to work with the Veneta Homeless Coalition to try to address the needs of our long-term homeless population, and we continue to explore the feasibility of a tiny house community with SquareOne Villages.

The Society of St. Pius X's request to rezone 50 acres of rural residential property in east Veneta in order to accommodate a senior housing and residential care facility drew strong responses from residents concerned about increased traffic, water run-off and tax equity. The applicants met the criteria for rezoning, which was conditionally approved by the Planning Commission and Council. Actual development will require Planning Commission approval. No plan has been submitted to date.

Significant developments in the City included completion of Veneta Elementary School's expanded bus loading area and parking lot, construction of Veneta Veterinary Hospital's new building on Jeans Road, set to open in the spring, and opening of Veneta's very first overnight accommodation, the Veneta Yurtel across Territorial from the library, which prompted the adoption of Veneta's very first transient room tax ordinance. I think this is the very first use of the term “yurtel” anywhere, as well.

## Goal #3: Improvement & Modernization of City Streets

2016 was the second year of implementation of Veneta's six-year Pavement Preservation Plan, including asphalt overlays for all of Parkside Drive, Cheney Drive and Dawn Court. We also overlaid parts of West Broadway, from 4th to 6th Street, East Broadway, from Territorial to about the Methodist Church, 9th Street, from Parkside to Sherwood, and 5th Street from Broadway to

McCutcheon. Installation of a water line on Third Street is nearly complete. We determined that bids for preservation projects on both 2nd and 3rd Streets were too high, so they are on hold.

Veneta's Public Works Department manages a network of 21.5 miles of asphalt, concrete and gravel streets within our city limits. We continue to first repair roads that are in fair

condition rather than those in poor condition because it is more cost-effective to preserve them before they are critically deteriorated.

We began collecting a transportation utility fee of \$3.00 per month from each household and \$6.00 per month from each business in Veneta in order to help fund projected street maintenance and improvements.

## Goal #4: Urbanization streets to improve bicycle and pedestrian connectivity

We were elated when the Area Commission on Transportation made the Veneta-Elmira multi-purpose path the top priority on its recommendation list with an estimated price tag of \$870,900 and an approved funding request of \$800,000. Unfortunately, what was given with one hand was taken by the other, when ODOT scoped the project at nearly twice that amount and the Super Act recommended that the Oregon Transportation Commission fund only \$498,000 for the design and environmental impact study, leaving actual construction to compete for dollars in the

2020-23 State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP) cycle.

Following up on the 2015 sidewalk and bike lane inventory, the Council addressed prioritization of proposed sidewalk projects. We determined that unless an opportunity to advance a project presented itself we preferred to fold the prioritization process into the upcoming Transportation System Plan to be updated in 2017.

The same inventory recommended several sidewalk repair projects throughout the city. The Council amended municipal code to clarify that

Veneta requires property owners to repair and maintain abutting sidewalks, common practice for most cities.

Over the next fourteen months, a Transportation Advisory Committee composed of citizen volunteers, City Council and Planning Commission members will guide the state-funded update of the City's long-range Transportation System Plan. Issues to be addressed in the plan include, street, bicycle, and pedestrian safety & connectivity, safe routes to school, and transportation funding options.

## Stormy Weather!

We weathered another big December storm, escaping the worst of the ice storm that walloped Eugene and most of the rest of the region.

Our public works crew was busy clearing downed trees and branches from the roads and applying sand to icy streets, and both EPUD and Lane Electric scrambled to restore power to parts of the city, but we had no reports of major damage or injury.

Our resident homeless population weathered the storm with us, thanks to Valley United Methodist Church and the many volunteers who provide shelter when the temperature dips.

Our resident turkeys—the feathered ones—who are apparently thriving in spite of our not-universally-popular eradication efforts, also weathered the storm. Perhaps we need to advertise for a turkey whisperer?

## Wastewater!

For better and for worse, wastewater was a sexy topic that drew a lot of our attention last year.

For better: We updated our Waste Water Master Plan and City sewer will soon be extended to unserved properties on Eighth Street. Our public works director worked with residents to forge an alterna-

tive to the City's proposed Local Improvement District which is expected to be much less costly to those residents.

For worse: No one has yet claimed the \$1,000 reward the City is offering for identifying the source of the ongoing pollution of our wastewater plant. We have received a grant we wish we had never

needed to apply for—\$20,000 to help CSI Veneta ascertain the nature of the toxic chemicals being regularly dumped into our sewer system, threatening the beneficial microbes necessary to treat the City's wastewater and causing our public works staff much anguish.

## Goal #5: Promote parks and recreation projects and healthy and active lifestyles

### Change!

In an unusual year, for Veneta, two city councilors resigned: Victoria Hedenstrom because she and her family were moving out of state and Tim Brooker, unfortunately for health reasons, after 23-plus years of service to our city. Laura Ruff ably filled out Victoria's term, but opted not to run for the vacancy in November, leaving both a two-year and a four-year term to be filled next month by appointment from among seven applicants.

Unprecedented change has occurred in Washington, of course, and what that means for Oregon, Lane County and Veneta is unknown. To say that there is not a high degree of discord, anxiety and trepidation around the results of this tumultuous election would ignore reality.

But, as the expression goes, the more things change the more they stay the same.

As President Obama said in his farewell speech, "For all our outward differences, we all share the same proud title: Citizen.

Veneta will continue to be a community with a common sense of purpose; a community that agrees to disagree in a civil manner; a kind, compassionate, respectful community that, regardless of our individual political affiliations, opens its heart and rolls up its sleeves to make Veneta and Fern Ridge a great place to live—and to work!

Original plans for the Veneta Community Pool included a multi-purpose kiddie pool, where babies and toddlers could be introduced to the water under the watchful eyes of their parents. Unfortunately, the budget didn't stretch far enough so we only installed the plumbing and electricity for it. Last year, a group of local residents decided it was time to add the kiddie pool and launched a local fund-raising campaign, which has so far netted over \$15,000 and, happily, the State Department of Parks and Recreation approved the City's grant request for \$175,000, half of the estimated total cost for installation, which we hope to commence immediately after the pool closes in August.

There was lots of healthy activity at the pool this summer, including swim lessons, swim meets, water aerobics,

and special events, including Fern Ridge Middle School's cardboard boat races that are equal parts physics experiment and end-of-the year hilarity.

The City's 24th annual Zumwalt Country Fair campground launched a very successful new online ticketing system with Lane County that eliminated the long lines of campers waiting to enter, making it a happier experience for all. Income generated by the campground supports Veneta's parks fund.

Residents turned out to help us create a master plan for a major redesign of City Park, where 2015's big windstorm blew down 18 trees and destroyed play equipment. Stay tuned!

Grey skies parted and the sun came out just in time for the 30th annual Easter Egg Hunt. This year, the Easter Bunny was greeted by the Park

Board's very own bagpiper as well as hundreds of excited children.

The weather gods smiled on our annual tree lighting, as well, held in its new location at Veneta Elementary School. A record crowd turned out for Santa Claus and performances by the Veneta and Elmira Elementary School choirs.

They weren't smiling a week later, but relented at the last minute, choosing not to rain on the 14th annual Fern Ridge Light Parade.

The Veneta Downtown Farmers Market opened a month early thanks to a warm spring and relocated to West Broadway for the bigger-than-ever Veneta Harvest Festival. The market continued at that location for a trial run at the end of the season, and collaborated with Veneta to celebrate its seventh year as a Tree City USA.

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## Goal #6: Community Awareness

We want our residents to know what's going on in city government and we want to encourage their participation. We came a bit late to the social media party, but in September the City launched a Facebook page to augment our recently redesigned website and the city's monthly newsletter.

An informed citizenry begins with early introduction to

local government, the level of government that has the most impact on our daily lives and over which we have the most influence and control.

Oregon's second-grade curriculum standards require an introduction to local government and community affairs. For several years now, we have hosted second-grade field trippers from both Veneta and Elmira at City Hall

and at the Public Works yard, a highlight of the year for me and for city staff.

And I am pleased to report that seventeen high school students and seven elementary students participated in 2016's "If I Were Mayor" Contest, with EHS senior Fin King and Veneta fourth-grader Mallorie Roberts-Stotts taking top honors.