

State of the City

Mayor Gordon, February 27, 2020

Hello neighbors and friends, members of the City Council, Manager Corthell and the incredible, hard working employees and volunteers of this City. Thank you all so much for being here on a sunny day to hear some thoughts about the state of your City, your neighborhood, the beautiful Falls City. It seems a little odd to me to highlight this immediate period in Falls City's life without acknowledging all those who lived and served before us. I'm wondering if we can take a moment or two to reflect on and honor those who have served Falls City in any capacity: from the Chinook and Calapooia tribes who raised their families and sustained their communities here, to the City's first platting in 1891 by the Montgomeries, all the way to 2020. Let's give a moment of thanks for all of those who have served this community, upon whom we all depend...

As a friend once said to me, "Falls City chooses you, you do not choose it." I'm so glad my family and I were chosen and that you all were too. It is my honor to speak with you today about the perhaps the greatest place to

live, raise a family, or retire. I will also look toward our immediate and long term futures, to touch on what might be required of all of us to realize our vision for Falls City which includes a thriving downtown with ample recreation opportunities, safe and dignified housing options, and a healthy, stable, and engaged community.

When I first became Mayor in 2017, I heard a story about a mayor in the 1960's who drove a pump truck and volunteered his time by pumping residents' septic tanks, some of which were as rudimentary as sealed up car bodies. I thought this was amusing, but it highlights a recurring challenge in, not only Falls City, but many other small cities in Oregon; how do we modernize and keep up with the times while maintaining what we love about our communities- the quiet, the fresh air, access to nature, the falls, the small community feel. How does this former timber town thrive and maintain its charm despite its various economic, geographic, and capacity challenges?

Well, I am happy to report that many indicators exist showing that Falls City is, indeed, thriving. While the City still faces many challenges that will require all of our efforts and focus, some of which I will highlight later in

this speech, the arrow is most certainly pointing in the right direction.

Site plans for six new residences have been approved over the past year, The School District is building a new gym and recreation facility, 18 new buildable lots through partition and lot line adjustment are paving the way for families to set up shop in Falls City, to frequent our businesses, to join our faith-based congregations, to enroll in our wonderful schools, and to volunteer in our community. Unprecedented levels of partnership have formed in the public sector ranging from those formed with Polk County, to the Governor's office and State Organizations, to the Federal Government. New partnerships have been formed in the nonprofit and foundation sectors as well and new partnerships have formed in the private sector.

In March, the Falls City City Council will vote to approve a new business license for a brand new business on Main Street, Friendship Fabrics Upholstery. We welcome Travis Erwin and Sara Dneaster to Falls City and wish them much success. People are leaning in to Falls City as a good place to set up shop, to partner, to visit.

I like to say that we can only move as far and as fast as staff will take us. I would like to now turn our attention to highlight some accomplishments made by City Staff over past year or so that have been necessary components to our collective success in areas of infrastructure and economic health, public safety, and community development.

The City has secured over \$1.5 million dollars in grants for infrastructure, fire equipment and apparatus, and community development projects. Another \$800k is under review by various agencies. These numbers are a direct result of building partnerships and relationships and represent keys to success for any City. It would be foolish to believe we can do this alone, and for that, I am grateful to the many partners who have engaged with Falls City.

Phase I of the Falls City Wastewater Project is still underway and going strong. The City's DEQ permit for a mass load increase was officially approved by DEQ. This is a major hurdle to overcome. We are in the environmental stage and navigating the various agencies who have a stake in our project. The most recent stakeholder request is a request by the State Historic Preservation Office and area tribes to perform an

archeological survey to determine if there are any precious artifacts or burial areas within the various wastewater project sites. We will work hard to accommodate these sensitive needs while presenting Council with options that best serve Falls City residents. In addition, Manager Corthell and I will begin discussions with USDA, HUD, and other funding agencies in order for staff to present the City Council with funding options for construction of the lagoon system. We estimate that construction will begin in the summer of 2021, but may be delayed slightly due to the rate study and archeological survey.

There will still be much to accomplish regarding our wastewater system even after the new treatment facility is built. But by solving problems and mitigating risks now, we stay in front of our obligation to have a safe, functional, and affordable wastewater system and avoid being mandated to build a system according to regulator's preferences instead of our own. Ultimate success will depend on all of us doing our part to work toward a sustainable system that is available to all residents in the future and I appreciate in advance everyone's commitment to helping us move forward in that direction.

Manager Corthell applied for and was successful in securing funds for the street project that included the overlay of 5th Street from Mitchell Street to Fairoaks, and Fairoaks from Wood to Ellis and Boundary Street from Fairoaks to Prospect. The City is now working with ODOT, Area timber companies, and The Bureau of Land Management for a street project on Chamberlain. We also hope to make improvements to 3rd Street near City Hall, and secure funding through the Safe Routes to School Program to improve walkways between the high school and elementary school, as well as bridge street and North Main.

The Falls City fire department, thanks to the hard work of former volunteer Megan Sykes, City Manager Corthell, and current volunteer, Lori Albert, secured a \$100,000 federal grant to purchase self-contained breathing apparatus, ensuring the safety of our volunteers in this particularly precarious time of heightened fire risk. The fire department is going strong and will soon finish outfitting the new brush rig made possible through the citizens' hard earned operational levy contributions.

Staff was also able to modernize and further professionalize City Hall in order to serve residents efficiently, fairly, and with the best use of precious City

dollars. For example, the City's IT system was upgraded and is no longer under threat of theft and data loss, credit and debit card payments are now allowed for utility bills, the City's planning documents are now fully organized and accessible, policies and procedures are more clear than they have been in the past, personnel policies are being followed and improved upon, and the City employee structure is now more cost efficient without any reduction in service.

The City's Communication and outreach efforts have also been enhanced. We now have a new City Facebook page and brand new Website, the City hosted two town halls and multiple community meetings to engage residents about what we should enhance, what we should correct, and what we can build together.

Staff and Council created a City and Community Event approval process by resolution. The lack of events was a big concern expressed by citizens and we needed to figure out what role the City might play regarding events. The new resolution incentivizes citizen members and citizen groups to propose City events to the Parks and Rec Committee and the City Council. In 2019, this process yielded TWO brand new City-sponsored Community events: Let Freedom Ring!, an event honoring our

veterans, and Falls City Pride, an event celebrating the inclusion of all people within our community. Both events went off without a hitch thanks to staff and volunteers, and provided a wonderful time for residents and visitors of all ages.

These staff accomplishments truly only touch the surface. I'd like to thank City Manager Corthell for his unyielding energy, creativity and leadership by bringing these projects to completion and for opening doors for many more. Mac would be the first to admit that none of this happens without City staff – thanks to City Clerk Jamie Ward, our brand new Utility Biller, Athena Warren, the Public Works Team of Don Poe and Jon Creekmore, and our Fire Chief, Bob Young. Your dedication to the City keeps us moving forward.

I'd like to recognize another member of the current City Staff. The City was matched with a RARE Americorp volunteer, William Sullivan, through a highly competitive selection process. William has increased City Hall's capacity immensely and has brought fresh energy to City Hall and the greater community. William is working on many projects such as the Falls City Greenway Project who's first stage will be the pedestrian pathways mentioned earlier. Perhaps most impressively, William

has cultivated and organized a self-selected steering committee of Falls City devotees who are now in the process of forming a nonprofit called, Falls City Thrives. Falls City Thrives will perform work toward the community's vision. William is performing research and doing the legwork to ensure Falls City Thrives is properly registered as a functioning nonprofit and is set up for future success. Thank you, William, for all of your hard work and dedication.

A special thanks is in order to Falls City Thrives members Lynn Bailey, Dani Haviland, Victoria Avery, Greg Oldham, Bruce Sickles, and Guy Mack for assuming this leadership role to work on issues related to downtown revitalization, housing, and community engagement, health and volunteerism. Falls City Thrives is in the planning stages of creating a pocket park in front of the Luckiaumute Clinic that will promote community interaction, include a waterproof display for community events, signs pointing to the Luckiamute Falls, Valley of the Giants, and Black Rock, and will include natural and hard landscaping with a nod to our timber heritage. There will be ample opportunities to volunteer with the group and get involved.

As you can tell, the list of people to thank for making Falls City such a special place is nearly endless. Thank you to the volunteers at Mountain Gospel Fellowship who organize the produce giveaway EVERY WEEK, the volunteers with the James II Kitchen who feed our families with love and care, and the volunteers who make the food bank happen at the 7th Day Adventist Church. Thank you to our School District staff and teachers who work tirelessly for our families and children. I cannot express sufficient gratitude for all of your dedication to your neighbors.

The City Council has set goals for the coming year by reflecting on the community survey data and by anticipating longer term challenges by facing them head on but in manageable stages. These goals include completing our sewer infrastructure upgrades, including a full facilities plan update based on the new system and its new capacities, finding a way to finance City code services and beautification initiatives, and implementing an economic development strategy developing Falls City into a destination and gateway to nature.

Despite currently only serving just under half of households in town, the wastewater project will require all of us to do our part and work together toward achievable solutions. We will likely need to eventually phase in a city-wide system that can accommodate the moderate but natural growth facing Falls City.

Community input and investment will be critical to make this happen. This will be a community-wide responsibility as we, unfortunately, have not kept our infrastructure up to par over the decades.

We have also heard from many of you that a consistent and fair city code services program is needed. As mentioned earlier, we ask you to fill out the surveys to help us make decisions toward this end. Council also plans to work with various community members and organizations, including Falls City Thrives and the Parks and Rec Committee, to cultivate community volunteers to help clean up properties without the means to gain compliance.

Lastly, it is no mystery to anyone that Falls City rests within one of the most beautiful natural areas around. The Falls, Black Rock, Valley of the Giants, our wonderful Parks all need attention, better access, and care. I cannot wait to get my hands dirty toward this goal and we have

already formed relationships with Oregon Solutions out of the Governor's Office, Senator Merkley's Office, area tourism organizations, the Bureau of Land Management, the Polk County Commission, Sheriff's Office, and hopefully, the timber companies to improve access and development of Valley of the Giants, a 52 acre designated "Outstanding Natural Area."

In conclusion, Falls City is well positioned for continued success thanks to the hard work of so many. We look forward to working with you all to achieve these goals and please feel encouraged to contribute your voices and time to the challenges ahead. Thank you again for this great honor to serve and to address you all. We will now address any questions you might have.