

# 2021 State of the City

January 5, 2021

It's not been done before, but Carlton's citizens ought to have a general update on our city's activities and general condition.

So, here's Carlton's first "State of the City," with a little bit of history included.

Starting three years ago, with Kathie Oriet's retirement as mayor after 16 years, and accompanied by the retirement of 6-year City Manager Chad Olsen, Carlton has been facing one major challenge after another: The selection of a new city manager, and now three years later another selection process for that position; another change in the mayor's office, and almost complete turnover on the city council, with three newly elected members - my replacement, yet to be selected will make a fourth.

Fortunately, we have a long-term, professional staff with the experience and confidence to fill in the gaps these changes have created. I have every confidence they will provide the best service they can for all of us. From our Administrative staff to Public Works to our Police department, Carlton's city employees have stepped up to the challenges of dealing with new city managers and elected officials, departing city managers, and pandemic procedural guidelines that seem to change weekly, all while keeping our city running smoothly and helping citizens under challenging circumstances. That we've experienced few glitches in our system is to their credit and they deserve our thanks as they try to ensure all of our needs are met.

With all of our Council, Committees, and Staff in place, we will be in good shape to handle whatever challenges we will encounter in 2021. We don't know what changes will come with the availability of the Covid vaccination; we don't know how our businesses will come out of this whole situation, nor how each of us individually will survive. Covid-19 has become a good reminder that we can never take our health and safety for granted; and that we always need to consider – before we act – how our actions will affect everyone around us.

We will soon have a new City Manager. This recruitment process is very different from that used for the prior manager and while we want to get this done as soon as possible, we're not feeling the urgency that accompanied the previous selection process. To ensure citizen participation one of the four interview committees is composed of citizen volunteers, and there will be a

virtual “reception” for all city residents that I hope you all will attend. Written comments from all of these events will be given to the Council when we meet to make our final decision. In the meantime, the four final candidates under consideration have been announced, and I urge you all to do your research.

2021/22 will also bring us (barring complications) the long-awaited dredging of our city’s water supply reservoir and the replacement of our main water transmission line from that reservoir. Staff has been working the last two years on the preliminary surveys, environmental studies and reports, and other logistics associated with this project. We anticipate the actual dredging will begin in late spring/early summer this year. At that time, we need to have the water use agreement with McMinnville Water and Light signed as we will, for at least four months, be depending on them for water while the work on our reservoir proceeds.

And speaking of water, I’ve talked with hundreds of people around Carlton in the last couple of years, and no subject of concern comes up more often than our water rates. This year, with the Covid-relief, restaurant rebate program, income from water billing is down, and we’re going to be facing additional water costs incurred with buying McMinnville water during the reservoir work. At this time, we don’t know what those costs will be. Staff started work last year to figure out how we can deal with the losses and cost increases without making life even more difficult for all of us, but I warn you – and I’m not happy about having to say this – that we will be facing some price increase. But before we approve any increase, you will know exactly what and why and it will be the absolute minimum. The city staff is already working to provide a more precise and transparent explanation of our monthly water bills and we’ll be exploring ways to control those costs.

We are grateful that with the help of State Senator Brian Boquist, and State Representative Ron Noble we have close to ten million dollars total in grants that will pay for the dredging and the replacement of the main water transmission line. This is one cost the city will not have to bear but without that help, our water bills would be even worse.

You’re also likely to see stepped-up activity by the Oregon Department of Transportation as they prepare for the Highway 47 realignment, which will ultimately restore ownership of Main Street to our city. Many thanks to the citizens who have stepped up to volunteer for the ODOT Realignment committee, which will work closely with ODOT to ensure that our citizens’ concerns are heard and addressed as ODOT plans out the project.

As a side note: This summer you'll see ODOT doing some ADA ramp work on Main Street...this is being done as part of a statewide project and bears no relation to the Hwy. 47 realignment.

One of the less discussed, but critically important, activities in the next couple of years will be the work of our Planning Commission, who will be updating our development code...a project that has been needed for quite some time and which, had it already been in place, would likely have saved a considerable amount of heartburn over the JR Meadows 1 and JR Meadows 2 subdivision requests.

The Commission will also be tasked with creating development standards for 5-G transmitters in anticipation of the increased use of that technology in the very near future.

Their focus for all of this will be on ensuring one of our on-going city goals of livability receives more attention. This is a vision that will drive future housing planning, parks, and infrastructure – including sidewalks and streets – always with the goal of retaining the historic charm and warmth that has made Carlton the place we all call home.

I'm happy to say that for the first time in several years every seat on our Planning Commission is filled and they deserve a vote of thanks from all of us for stepping up.

I also want to take a minute to express my appreciation for our city's police department. Our police department doesn't have an easy job, and over the last ten months, the Covid lockdowns and financial stress for our residents have made their jobs even harder. That we as a community don't hear a lot about the increases here in domestic and neighbor disputes can be attributed to the watchfulness of a department that believes in keeping in touch with their citizens and trying to derail potential disputes before they devolve into situations where one or both parties find themselves heading to jail. This year will see the addition of a fourth officer... the first officer addition in more than 20 years.

Make no mistake: Carlton is not Mayberry, and while we don't see our city getting crime headlines, the potential is here. We decided several years ago that we wanted the focus of our police to be on preventative, community policing and the lack of those headlines is proof that is what we're getting.

Another project that has been hanging around and that requires some resolution is the question of a new city hall. Our current city hall doesn't meet seismic standards, and we're going to need improvements sooner rather than later. But, until we determine what our economic position is going to be after the national economic fallout from the last year, we need to proceed with caution, if at all. And whatever we do, we need to make the need clear and make sure that YOU are actively involved from early stages onward rather than being presented with a "done deal."

And last, I'm looking forward to finally getting the Bee City program up and running. This is one of those projects that, like Planning, Tourism and the Carlton Business Association will focus on bringing encouraging volunteerism and get us all thinking about what we collectively can do to bring our community closer together.

We have a big job ahead of us folks, and I'm reaching out to you now because I want you to be informed and prepared. We'll all need to step up to make these things happen, despite the unknowns that we're all dealing with – and I believe that as long as our priorities are to keep our community strong and our neighbors cared for, we'll be fine.

My thanks to each of you – you're the reason Carlton is the great little town we live in.

Please, be kind to each other. It's what we all need most right now.