

Mayor's Corner
December 28, 2022

While the weather and the holidays are holding a lot of our attention right now, the city of Carlton – and many other local governments around the country received the best Christmas package we could have wished for on Friday, Dec. 23: Congress passed the Omnibus spending bill that will keep our government funded until Sept. 2023.

Why, you may ask, should we be doing a happy-dance because a bunch of people with whom we have minimal contact passed a spending bill?

It's because tucked within that bill is an allocation of \$3.7 MILLION for the City of Carlton!

That money will be used for two long-needed projects: 1. replacing our 100-year-old main sewer collection line down West Grant Street (from Pine St.) to the system headworks at the bottom of West Grant, and 2. FINALLY! The repair and resurfacing of West Main Street, including the addition of curbs, gutters, sidewalks and an ADA ramp addition between Cunningham Street to N. Yamhill St.

Both projects have been on the city's high priority list for a decade, at least, but finding the money to get them done without even larger utility rate increases, or new charges such as "street fees" has been the holdup.

When the "Congressionally Directed Funding" program to help local governments with costly projects was announced last year, your City Council weighed the pros and cons of contracting with an advocacy firm to help usher our requests through the process. Your councilors took a leap of faith and contracted with an experienced lobbying/advocacy firm, knowing full well what the community response would be if this effort failed. This is what leaders do: They weigh the options, and the value of the outcomes, they're prepared to take the heat if the effort fails – and they deserve the credit if it succeeds.

These grants don't just appear; nor are they the product of any single person's efforts. They owe their presence first and foremost to Congress (who put the program in place), and our U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley – who are doing the job we elected them to do: Helping their constituents. The request preparation was done by Carlton city staff, who were advised by the CFM team and both of the senators' field staff.

Once the Council voted "yes," our city staff coordinated the funding request information packets with the senators' staffs, and with CFM, our project advocacy firm, all of whom provided advice and direction – and any of you who have been involved in grant writing for any agency know this is an intensive, time consuming, and complicated process with very specific demands and very tight timelines. Information is requested to be submitted in very specific formats; and failing in those requirements means failure of the request. The request packets were submitted early last summer, and CFM shepherded them through the congressional review processes, tracked their progress and kept the Council updated and encouraged as the budget process stuttered its way through Congress – Until December 23, when the House of Representatives provided the final votes needed to approve the package. (In case you're wondering, yes – Mayor, Council and staff alike have been holding our breath for the last couple of weeks, as the budget process has inched along. And last Friday at 11:15 a.m.,

Council President Ward-Mullen, City Manager Beaucaire and I were finally able to breathe freely!

The Congressional Directed Funding program is a prime example of the work Senators Wyden and Merkley do for us every day.

Over the years, the news and information coming out of Washington, D.C. has tipped more and more into the drama of the political conflicts and in-fighting. With the 24-hour news cycle, it's important for the networks to keep folks glued to the television, and we all know conflict is more enticing than "just the facts."

But beneath all of the posturing and drama of national politics that dominate the news cycles, a large amount of work does get done – and elected officials DO work together. As citizens we need to know that at all levels, our elected officials are working to help us – but we need to pay attention, and participate to ensure they know what we need help with.

Being able to participate in programs such as this one, and with it, staying in contact with our elected officials and their staff not only helps local communities get the attention and assistance they need, it helps strengthen the ties between citizens and our government – something we badly need these days. I encourage you to thank your Carlton City Councilors for being willing to take a leap of faith, and Senators Wyden and Merkley for supporting our city. They all have shown what true leadership and teamwork is, and they deserve our appreciation.