

January 7, 2021

TO: OAKRIDGE COMMUNITY AND COUNCIL
FR: Mayor Kathy Holston
RE: State of the City of Oakridge

Good Evening everyone:

2021 ... I hesitate to say that this year will be challenging for our community because the definition of challenging is a moving target these days. So let me say rewarding, rather than challenging and I'll explain later.

Our Council has a strategic plan and I would like to follow that plan as I share with you the path forward.

Safe Community

- Ensure a safe community by partnering to protect people, property and the environment
- Provide efficient, sustainable, and equitable public safety services including police, fire, and emergency medical services.

Primary right now is how to provide efficient and sustainable public safety services. This undoubtedly will require courage. It will take courage to set aside preconceived ideas to first absorb where we are fiscally, and then cooperatively approve a budget. This process was started already and the community turned down a levy increase that would have given us a bit of breathing room for five years while we crafted a solution to the funding of our Police, Fire and EMS. Personally I believe that was a mistake, but as Mayor I must say we have asked and the question was answered. We must do what we can with the resources that we have and look to other means to increase our revenues – through business, recreational and residential growth.

Responsive Government

- In an open and transparent manner, effectively deliver services that citizens need, want, and support.
- Provide facilities and infrastructure that support current and future needs.
- Manage finances in a fiscally responsible manner ensuring long term financial stability.

This year council and community will tackle a revision and updating of our City Charter which provides the framework for how we want our community to be governed. It sets the tone as well as guides us as we create a community that is in keeping with the values shared by those that live here. All charters require periodic updating to remove language that is both archaic or has become vague and to address social changes. This will be a community/council effort and

ultimately will reach the citizens in the fall election of 2022 for approval. I am looking forward to getting this underway.

Our City Administration will continue to improve access to the functions of the city through our website. Already the material and resources you can find there have been greatly enhanced. I have been working with our RARE intern and in the next month you will see a new feature – a mayor's and councilmembers page. It is no small task to keep us on the rails and I am grateful for the strong leadership that Bryan Cutchen has lent to our community. I would be remiss not to mention the two individuals who have delved deeply into our financial situation and come up with a workable and accurate understanding of our financial situation Bil Jones and Eric Kytola. Bill served until June and we are so fortunate to have Eric to fill his shoes. Both have brought us into a better understanding of budgeting and I thank them for their hard work. Please let us know how we can be more responsive to you.

Being responsive sometimes means getting out of the way. When your resources are severely limited you have to use what you have. We have seen an increase in volunteerism. Or perhaps just new volunteers and new ways of volunteering. Don't get me wrong or misquote me here. This community has a very long and strong tradition of volunteering. Our Local Food Bank is an example of decades of service as is The Toys for Tots program Our volunteer fire program has been the backbone of our community fire safety for many years. New volunteer efforts that are what can be called grassroots are springing up. Clean-up crews, beautification efforts, enrichment work through the theater group at the WAC, caring for the less fortunate and a community yard debris program. These are all spearheaded by individuals who have seen a need and rallied support and moved forward. Our job as a city government is to facilitate their efforts in any way possible and get out of the way. Helping in our community whether it is a grassroots effort, standalone organizations or the city needs you to continue to remain strong and viable – if you have even slightly thought about being part please reach out and become involved. A word here about our Oakridge/Westfir Chamber of Commerce. This organization under the leadership of Lynda Kamerrer has taken the lead in helping business wade through the levels of compliance with the pandemic and take advantage of the federal and state assistance. Lynda and others have visited businesses to deliver PPE and ask how the chamber can be of assistance.

Sometimes government gets out of the way and sometimes it creates the way. OakridgeAir is up and running strong - this is a prime example of how government takes action to improve the community. It is only government, local, state and federal that can accomplish what has happened here. We can thank forward thinking individuals in our community who saw that Oakridge was being asked to comply with an unfunded mandate - a compliance that would benefit our communities health and economic wellbeing - and went after creating a solution - partnering with governmental agencies and pushing the boundaries. Oakridge did that. I now serve as vice-chair on the LRAPA Board. I am intimately acquainted with the difficulty of moving a community or a county into a healthier situation; providing both a carrot and a stick when necessary. Both are necessary and an example of the courage it takes to lead.

Strong Economy

- Improve the City's economy by focusing on increasing living-wage jobs, training, and education opportunities for Oakridge residents.
- Sustainably develop and market the recreational tourism industry in a way that benefits local business and residents.
- Improve the city's economy by creating an atmosphere that is open to business.

This year we have been fortunate that our City Administrator took the initiative and has secured interns to assist with the projects of our community. Specifically our RARE intern has been tasked with economic development. Economic development is crucial to our community. Not only enhancing existing business but recruiting and capturing new business will increase our income stream allowing us to provide better service to the community. Having an intern to focus and provide support to economic development is essential and we are seeing the results of that. I can't stress how important it is to have support to the admin and to volunteers to keep forward motion in an area like economic development. We are seeing activity in the Industrial Park and I expect this council to keep the economic growth and stability in the forefront of our conversations as we help our business community recover from this disastrous year.

Oakridge is fortunate at this time to have individuals who are dedicated and determined to see growth in our community. One such individual among many is Sarah Altemus Pope whose vision for Oakridge, her determination to form a Forest Collaborative and her commitment to this community has resulted in opportunities, grants and forward motion. A home grown asset. Thank you Sarah.

As a council it is our job to encourage and enable these efforts to succeed. We can clear a path to growth if we have the courage it takes to be unafraid of change.

Included in this goal is developing and marketing recreational tourism. We are a recreation hub and ignoring that aspect of our economy is both foolish and short-sighted. Recreation is here and it will shape us or we can shape it. I intend to push the council to look at specific ways we can increase our recreation income and support business and community efforts in this area. It's time to actively and whole-heartedly embrace it as a way to improve our economy.

Community Livability

- Work with community partners to provide recreation, education, and enrichment opportunities for citizens and youth.
- Find creative ways to work with public and private partners to increase access to housing.
- Seek opportunities to revitalize the City's business corridors and neighborhoods to provide safe and beautiful places to live and work.

Livability is a broad stroke and encompasses many things so I want to focus on Opportunity - Housing and Revitalization of business corridors. We must this year get serious about abating derelict housing, and serious about bringing in new housing. This is a priority if we are to survive. New jobs are useless if we don't have housing to go along with them.

I want to see the planned trail system around the OIP move forward and the trestle path this year be approved and move toward completion. With educational signage and seating this will become an attractive feature providing walking and biking paths for our community.

Council did not pass the improvement of Hwy 58 as proposed by ODOT. This was our prerogative, but we now cannot ignore the beautification of that roadway and the improvement of the safety for the community. This council cannot afford to ignore this important task.

Let's get back to Challenging and rewarding. To gain Reward out of challenge we must bring our best game.

Council this year isn't going to be easy. We are going to have to be disciplined and bring our best to the tasks ahead. We will have to **work at** being cooperative, respectful of one another's ideas, open-minded and willing to learn. We will have to have courage to make change that is long lasting and sustainable. I am committed to doing this. I hope that you are as well.

Community, looking for the positive and looking for answers to issues isn't the sole responsibility of the elected council. It is yours also. I challenge you to ask yourself what the answers are when you see a problem. To look for the positive - thank you Joy Kingsbury and Rick Yarborough for doing just that. Joy with your journalistic gift and Rick with your positive determination to clean up our neighborhood.

2021 is here....Let's get to work.