

State of the City Address

Corvallis, Oregon

The Honorable Mayor Charles C. Tomlinson

Presented to the Corvallis City Council and the People of Corvallis

At The Rotary Club of Greater Corvallis

January 2008

Welcome to the 2008 State of the City Address. It is an honor to report our progress in the past year and outline this year's hopes and aspirations for our community.

From my perspective, the state of the City is first-rate. We continue to be honored with 'Best of' awards, most people in our community are pleased with our services and when traveling around the state, people often tell me how much they like our community, they like visiting here and they remark that we do things well. We are held in high regard.

As Mayor, I have a close working relationship with the City Council and City Staff and our community is well served by them. Councilors sometimes read five hundred pages of material for a Council meeting, one of my definitions of commitment to your craft. They are prepared and deliberating thoughtfully. City Staff continues to implement Council policy direction efficiently and effectively.

The *Corvallis 2020 Vision Statement* serves as our roadmap for the future development of our community. This State of the City follows the seven sections of the Vision Statement, which is available on the City's website.

Central City

Our downtown is a vibrant place for shopping, eating, the arts and enjoying the Riverfront Commemorative Park. Our community will take two major steps this year to enhance our downtown.

First, the City Council has a goal to establish a Downtown Commission. This Commission will be responsible for implementing the Downtown Strategic Plan, our vision for future downtown enhancements. With the Downtown Commission, our community will benefit having a group responsible for keeping the Plan's

implementation on track and the City Council will benefit with the Commission's advisory role.

Second, the City Council is considering the creation of a downtown Urban Renewal District; the District requires an affirmative vote of the people. An Urban Renewal District is an entity that receives tax revenue to construct projects within the District's boundary. Included on the ballot will be a list of projects that would be funded through District tax revenue. Funds flow to the District from the tax revenue calculated on rising assessments within the District boundary. Property owners do not see increased taxes on their tax bills because to the District; taxing jurisdictions experience decreased tax revenue. Ultimately, the benefit of the District is increased private and public investment, leading to the downtown being a desirable place to live, work and play.

A well-defined project list will assist voters in determining their support of the District. For example, the project list could include an underground parking garage for a private/public Benton County Historical Museum project, pedestrian improvements along Madison Avenue to help bring OSU students, faculty and staff to Downtown, an enhanced bicycle and pedestrian trail between the downtown and south Corvallis, streetscape improvements along Harrison Boulevard from Second Street to Fifth Street to create a better looking entrance to the community and improvements to the North Riverfront Park and to Central Park, both important community spaces. These projects align with specific areas of the Downtown Strategic Plan and would add to the downtown's sense of place.

The City Council will discuss how to proceed with the Whiteside Theater Land Use Board of Appeals remand at their next meeting.

Cultural Enrichment and Recreation

The Corvallis Community Theatre, the Corvallis Youth Symphony, The Corvallis Art's Center, da Vinci Days, Fall Festival, and the Magic Barrel are all examples of significant contributors to our community's cultural richness. Oregon State University deserves special recognition for the many speakers, music performances and cultural exchanges brought to Corvallis. This past summer, Maria and I sponsored a Summer Concert Series and we will repeat the Series this year. The Mayor's Winter Celebration of Music, Art and Literature occurs January 25. Many citizens have asked how they can promote the arts in Corvallis and some of them met in October to start this discussion. We should do all we can to honor and celebrate the arts in Corvallis. Community and business support of these endeavors is crucial; give gladly to and participate in the cultural enrichment this community loves.

The City Council decided to place a Senior Center Expansion Bond Measure on the ballot this November. Originally a fire station located in Chintimini Park, the

Center was remodeled and now provides senior services, general community rental space, and other programs. The bond measure will amount to about twelve million dollars and will expand the Center, make improvements to Chintimini Park and provide other recreational facilities throughout the community.

This expansion is part of a broader community issue involving limited recreation and education facilities. With the reduction in class sizes in the Corvallis Public School District, more classrooms are being used and some programs have been limited due to lack of space. During 2008, there will be increasing awareness of this shortfall and the City will continue to work with the School District and other organizations to craft creative solutions to this general facility issue.

Economic Vitality

In 2007, the community began implementing the *Prosperity That Fits Plan*. The Plan is a set of action items for economic vitality – Corvallis style. We are in this for the long haul, while taking incremental steps toward economic prosperity. The plan is broad based: strengthening existing businesses, recruiting targeted business, developing human and physical infrastructure and integrating sustainability and economic development efforts. Ultimately, the plan will help make our city sustainable – economically, environmentally and socially.

In addition to beginning the *Prosperity That Fits Plan*, we were added to the Governor’s ‘shovel ready’ certification list for a section of the Airport Industrial Park. Through accomplishments like this, Corvallis better competes for industrial “green” projects and jobs and signals that we are committed to thoughtful, responsible economic development.

Improved standing for the OSU College of Engineering toward its Top 25 goal, the announcement of the 625 million dollar Campaign for OSU and record enrollment at the University mark notable achievements from our largest employer. Please support The Campaign for OSU.

The expansion of health care facilities and services from Corvallis Clinic and Samaritan Health Services and our ability to retain Tripod Data Systems while meeting their demand for highly skilled labor signal an improving environment for traded sector job regeneration. Eleven out of fourteen local technology companies surveyed by the Corvallis Benton Chamber Coalition are currently hiring.

The Chamber Coalition is working on a recommendation for a Business License Fee. Once complete, the City Council will discuss the recommendation and its ability to fund action items in the *Prosperity That Fits Plan*.

Our local economy will continue to be built around our technology, talent and tolerance, three keystones of the creative class outlined in Richard Florida’s book,

The Rise of the Creative Class. Corvallis ranked fifteenth in the nation in Florida's Creativity Index. We are recognized as a unique place with a unique blend of attributes, well positioned to thrive both locally and in the global marketplace.

As mentioned earlier, we will continue to execute the *Prosperity That Fits Plan*. Among other action items, this implementation supports the infrastructure needed for our economic vitality; the infrastructure includes:

- an enhanced small business incubation facility and program that complements the University's commercialization efforts
- access to capital, mentoring and business services for local entrepreneurs
- work-force development with Linn-Benton Community College, especially in the creation of green-color jobs
- support of the University's research capabilities and how our community can enhance these efforts

Plan on attending the April Town Hall meeting and learn what we are accomplishing with the *Prosperity That Fits Plan*. Our community benefits from a vibrant, diversified local economy: be a part of our efforts.

Education and Human Services

The Corvallis School District hired over eighty new teachers last year and began the process of reducing class sizes in our schools. It just feels good to be headed in the right direction regarding class size. For too long, our public school system, as well as the City and County, has been hamstrung with M5, M47 and M50 funding rules.

Expansion Management Magazine, a magazine for company executives that are actively looking for a place to expand or relocate their facilities, ranked the Corvallis School District in their Best Overall Quality of Public Schools category. Our SAT scores are well above national averages; our elementary schools met the No Child Left Behind benchmark. Our high school students raised over \$100,000 to donate to local and regional charities. Even though this sounds a bit like Lake Wobegon, our school district has turned a corner; let's support the efforts of the School Board, Superintendent and district staff to continue their work in providing educational excellence in Corvallis.

As I mentioned earlier, smaller class sizes lead to more classrooms in use and available space is now fully utilized for instruction. In some cases, the SMART Program, Head Start and preschool programs have lost or are in danger of losing space in a school. Coupled with my remarks earlier about community and

recreation facilities, our community needs to collaborate on how we can address this space issue.

Our community passed the Benton County Health and Safety levy last fall. County Commissioners have more flexibility in funding services in public safety and the health department. The longer-term funding of these services is problematic, given how unsure the Federal Timber Payment program is. The City provides funding for local social service agencies through our Social Service, Community Development Block Grant and HOME programs.

Our community includes a broad spectrum of service clubs that demonstrate their caring by their service projects, their philanthropic programs and their community engagement. Members of the Lions, Altrusa, Rotary, Kiwanis, Zonta, Soroptimists and others provide significant human services to Corvallis. Our faith community adds to the human service network through organizations like Love INC and Interfaith Care Givers. Our array of non-profit organizations, like Community Outreach, the Boys and Girls Club, Community Services Consortium and the Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence, are a third source of community caring.

We all benefit from this broad array of social service providers.

Governing and Civic Involvement

The good news about the city budget is that it's balanced over the next two years. The better news is that the City Council is developing a long-term financial strategy that creates long-term budget stability. The best news would be the long-term budget constraints are resolved. Senator Frank Morse's bipartisan efforts on state tax reform are important steps in this resolution.

Earlier, I mentioned the need to diversify our economic base. From a local government perspective, the most pressing reason to diversify our economy is to diversify our property tax base. Today, one large employer accounts for thirteen percent of our tax revenue; ten years ago, that employer accounted for twenty-five percent of our property tax revenue. Rounding out the top ten taxpayers are companies that contribute less than one percent each. This lack of property tax diversity puts our community at risk for city service reductions if our large employer further reduces its presence in Corvallis.

The Corvallis Police Department has been in the news lately. I am unable to say much about these issues except to indicate that City Staff continues to work on them. We value our public safety employees, who often put their lives at risk for our safety. As a side-note, at the same time, Corvallis was rated the Most Secure U.S. Places to Live by Farmer's Insurance Group.

More than two hundred and fifty people serve on various Corvallis boards and commissions. These people develop policy recommendations for the City Council, they interact with community members and they assist staff in new projects and services. For those who serve, thank you all for your caring and dedication to our community.

Last year, the community adopted City Charter language that provides protection to a broad range of our citizens. To honor Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday, sixteen high school students wrote essays describing how they would promote diversity if they were Mayor. Joseph Squire was awarded a scholarship for his contribution. Joseph calls for the promotion of direct action, the education of those around us and the personal commitment through daily actions. A common theme through all the essays was outreach to youth. Cultural competency is an important asset in our personal lives and an important aspect of our civic life. I urge you to embrace diversity in your lives as a personal goal and to develop tolerance and acceptance of all people. Cultural competence is an important asset in a world that is increasingly global in context and pluralistic in culture.

Protecting Our Environment

Sustainability, Global Warming and Climate Protection: these are phrases heard increasingly around the world and in Corvallis. Our community continues to protect our environment in many ways. This year, we will participate in a Community Energy Program with the Energy Trust of Oregon to raise awareness about energy usage, conservation and renewable energy options. The Corvallis Sustainability Coalition will sponsor Town Hall meetings engaging the community about how we envision a more sustainable Corvallis. City staff continues to implement sustainability initiatives inside government operations. These initiatives include changing our vehicle fleet to bio-diesel, reusing bio-gas and bio-solids produced at the wastewater treatment plant, and initiating a green building program.

Climate protection is the most pressing issue of our time. Whether global warming stems from natural climatic variations or from human induced green house gas emissions, we must act now to protect our environment. It is in our national interest and it is in our community's interest. To quote Alan Greenspan, "It should be obvious that as long as the United States is beholden to potentially unfriendly sources of gas and oil, we are vulnerable to economic crises over which we have little control." I concur and will work hard to further the climate protection agenda. For a broader understanding of the energy issue, please read Alan Greenspan's *The Age of Turbulence*, Chapter 24, The Long-Term Energy Squeeze.

Oregon State University student leadership in the Climate Protection area has been extraordinary. A new OSU Student Sustainability Incidental Fee was

implemented in 2006 to help reduce the ecological footprint of the University. In 2007, students voted to increase the fee to fund 100 percent renewable energy for the campus. The OSU Student Sustainability Center is engaged in a variety of initiatives, both on campus and in the community. In 2008, students will continue to engage us in ways to create sustainable awareness and living.

Corvallis is known in the state and nation for our caring for the environment – we have done much but we have more to do. The benefit to our community and future generations is significant – and priceless.

Where People Live

Our neighborhoods are special.

Willamette Neighborhood Housing Services continues to develop affordable housing in our community. WNHS completed the Coho Ecovillage Project in 2007, a mixture a market-rate and affordable housing units. They have future projects on their schedule to create additional affordable units in town. Habitat for Humanity is also working on affordable housing.

Our Land Development Code, put in place at the end of 2006, promises better building patterns, more pedestrian friendly neighborhoods and continues our commitment to quality of life.

The City of Corvallis approved almost four hundred new building lots in 2007. This inventory is in addition to almost one thousand lots currently approved for building within city limits. How quickly houses will be built on these lots is a market determination; we have significant residential housing inventory in our community.

I expect the community will see future sustainability efforts, including green building design and sustainable neighborhoods. The extent of these sustainability efforts is a future community discussion. For the moment though, we can be pleased that the building patterns used by many local developers follows green building practices. I particularly want to highlight the work that the Energy Trust of Oregon is doing with Legend Homes and AKRO Construction. These two builders recognize the value of green building development through programs like Earth Advantage. Green building techniques are not solely a market-rate housing phenomenon; Coho Ecovillage is also a green building project.

Conclusion

Serving Corvallis as your Mayor has been a wonderful experience and I thank you for the opportunity. Together, we can make our community the place we envision in our *Corvallis 2020 Vision Statement*. I wish you peace and joy in the New Year.