

State of the County 2007

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This morning I will reflect on 2006, talk about our goals for 2007 and discuss what I think is the greatest single challenge for our Board and our community. We have a lot of material, so let me just dig in.

Achievements in 2006

First, I want to touch on the highlights of a remarkable year for Washington County. It's too rare in this business that we get to check off a box and say, "I think we've got that one done." But we have two significant multi-year projects that you have probably heard about every year that are near the finish line.

Commuter Rail

Thanks to U.S. Senators Gordon Smith and Ron Wyden and Congressman David Wu and the other members of our federal delegation, we obtained final congressional approval for the Washington County commuter rail line in 2006. Construction is underway. This rail project will link the job centers and populations of Wilsonville, Tualatin and Tigard to Beaverton at the Beaverton Transit Center and the light rail system. As the few remaining issues are resolved, we anticipate ridership to begin in 2008. We especially also want to thank our Oregon legislative delegation from Washington County who committed to partial funding of this project in 1999 and have continued their support to this day.

There has been a great story of collaboration among many partners. I especially want to acknowledge Tri-Met; they are the national leaders on how to put rail projects together. The smartest thing we did on the project was to contract with Tri-Met for project development and operations. They are a first-class operation from their general manager, Fred Hanson, to Neil McFarland and several of their staff who have worked so hard to make this project a reality.

Stewart State Park

The second checkmark goes to our new state park. This has been a priority of mine since taking office eight years ago. With the strong support of our Board and the work of our state legislators and the Oregon State Parks Department, Washington County will be home to Oregon's first full-service state park in three and one-half decades. After eight years of working and planning and lobbying, the Stewart Memorial State Park will be opened this summer. This 1,800-acre camping and hiking site will be a great asset to Washington County families and our organizations.

Support from Voters

We can thank the residents, voters and volunteers of Washington County for the next significant accomplishment and that is the voter-approved renewals of our Public Safety Levy and our countywide Cooperative Library Levy. These were both critical to our safety and quality of life. Voters also approved a lodging tax increase to implement the Tourism 2015 plan, which we'll discuss a little more later, and the regional greenspaces bond levy.

Genentech

In 2006, we also landed a new community partner and the global leader in biotech research and production of pharmaceuticals that fight some of the worst diseases in the world. We are proud to welcome Genentech to the community. And we welcome the jobs and the economic diversity they bring to Washington County. They will be a high-quality partner and we believe they will prosper and grow here.

Investments in Transportation

And, of course, we continue to work to improve transportation and reduce congestion on all fronts. From increased connectivity of roads and bikeways, to support of transit, to using our MSTIP funds—that's the property tax Major Streets Transportation Improvement Program—using that funding to undertake projects such as the \$18 million improvement to Oleson Road. By the way, when we finish the current MSTIP Work Program, we will have invested \$555 million of local funding in our local system. No other

county has made a stronger effort to help meet its own transportation needs, even though we have something close to a \$1.5 billion gap in our Transportation Plan over the next 20 years.

These achievements, and many others, reflect far more than the work of a Board of Commissioners and a dedicated staff. They reflect our community and our core values it embraces.

Clearly, Washington County residents value a high quality of life—from grade schools to exceptional recreational facilities, from an improved transportation system to expansion of the arts and libraries and natural spaces. We are building ties to China with our relationship with Yichang. We are witnessing university expansions in Washington County and the expansion of the Washington County Historical Museum.

We also are a community that has kept a focus on the basics—an array of public services at a reasonable cost, safe streets, quality libraries, economic growth and diversity, and family wage jobs.

And, we are a community where Latino, Asian and Middle Eastern populations are growing rapidly, reflecting the changing face of the American workforce and increasingly rich cultural mix of our communities and our schools.

A Quality Community

I'm very proud to serve such a quality community and, as a result of the 2006 elections, I am grateful for the opportunity to extend my service as Chairman of the Board of Commissioners for another four years. I do not mean proud in a boastful sense, but in a sense of how proud I am of those around us. I am proud of the thousands of citizens who generously volunteer their time with the County, with their schools, their churches, their non-profit organizations and youth sports. I am proud of our citizens, who also support the public institutions with their votes, who remain active to ensure that our government priorities match their priorities. I am proud of our business community, which has consistently demonstrated far-sighted leadership in promoting economic growth as well as a quality education system and cultural and recreational opportunities. I am proud of the men and women I work with at Washington County and other levels of government.

As I've said before, Washington County has over 1,700 employees who work quietly and diligently every day keeping us safe, serving those in need, inspecting restaurants and construction projects, planning for better communities, maintaining our roads and many, many other services.

I want to acknowledge my good friend and former colleague, John Leeper. John is a wonderful human being and made a great Commissioner. And again, John, we thank you for your service. And of course I have several notable entries in my book of clever sayings from John!

And, of course, I am proud of our Board. We have our differences, as it should be, but we have our debates in a civil manner and keep our eyes on what is best for our community. My fellow commissioners—Roy Rogers, Andy Duyck and Dick Schouten—have been a pleasure to work with. They all work hard and bring so much to the debate and to our decisions. And joining our Board last month—Commissioner Desari Strader—who brings new energy and ideas to the County Commission. Desari has assured us that she will be fair with us, even though she has us outnumbered—one woman to four men.

Priorities for 2007

That brings us to the priorities for 2007.

Long-term Water Supply

As an ongoing project, we energetically continue to pursue developing a long-term water supply for the west side and the region. As you may know, this involves raising Scoggins Dam and enlarging Hagg Lake to double its capacity. The increased water resource will provide clean, reliable water for our residents, our businesses, agriculture and environmental applications, such as stream-flow augmentation. It will also diversify the region's water supply and make us less dependent on the Bull Run

watershed.

Clean Water Services, of which our Board serves as the Board of Directors, manages the project. Tom VanderPlaat is here—he is the project manager for this very complex and very important project. Clean Water Services is actually the minority partner that manages this, but the cities and the water districts are the majority. And we work closely with the Irrigation District.

As you may know, Hagg Lake is a federal property owned by the Bureau of Reclamation. An exciting option we have discussed with the national Commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation and our federal delegation is the possibility of transfer of title, the ownership, to a local entity. This will lower the cost of the project, save time and allow local control in the future. I think it makes a lot of sense and the partnership will continue exploring that option. Our goal is to have this major project providing water by July 1, 2016, which in federal and water development terms is lightning fast.

Tourism 2015

As I mentioned, voters approved an increase in the lodging tax to help increase our focus on tourism. Working with the Convention and Visitors Bureau, who brought us the Tourism 2015 concept, the Chambers of Commerce, the Lodging Association, and many others, we will help create a tourism in three key niches: nature, amateur sports and our rapidly growing and exciting wine industry. This represents a significant potential economic gain and diversification for our restaurants, hotels, wineries, cultural attractions and new businesses that will come as a result. Of course, all of these exciting venues will serve our residents as well as our visitors.

Fairgrounds Revitalization

Seeking a broad consensus from the community, our Board agreed to facilitate a process to revitalize the Washington County Fairgrounds. You may have read a little about this. This property is a diamond in the rough. It is about 104 acres, level, dry, with its own light rail stop, across the street from Oregon's second busiest airport. Our challenge will be to develop a plan that maintains and improves the traditional County Fair and traditional uses while increasing the capacity and adding community value as a place for expositions, wine festivals, employment fairs, high school graduations, home and garden shows, etc. So our Board will be appointing a Revitalization Task Force shortly—a broadly representative group countywide. And hopefully we will have a positive outcome with something that we can implement and afford to implement. I think that's an exciting prospect for us and 2007 is the year to act.

Drive Less, Save More

And we continue to support a program to use our highways, arterials, and our own neighborhood streets more wisely. Warning: this is a blatant plug for the Drive Less, Save More campaign. Washington County was the lead advocate of this concept. It took root in the 2005 Legislature and was developed through a very good pilot project with ODOT, Metro, Tri-Met and local partners such as the Westside Transportation Alliance.

The idea is to use education and advertising to get people to think about how they use their cars. For example, by planning our errands, we can reduce just two trips per week in our household. That's about a 4 percent reduction in the use of our cars on the road. Four trips per week, one trip every other day, would save about 8 percent, which is more than the trips taken on bus, rail, bike and other modes all together. And it's free, just by thinking.

Can we change behaviors by education and advertising? It has worked on recycling, seatbelts, smoking, littering—why not convincing ourselves to combine our trips? Remember, about two-thirds of our trips are non-work—they are errands and personal trips. So save gas money, save parking costs, save time while doing your part to reduce congestion and air pollution. Drive less, save more. This is something you can help do and you can start it today.

Legislative Agenda

Now, of course 2007 is a legislative year and we'll ask our state partners to help us with several important items. We will urge lawmakers to approve a second round of lottery-backed bonding for ConnectOregon II to improve freight mobility. We'll also join the region in requesting \$25 million in lottery funding to debt service approximately \$300 million in lottery-backed bonds for tri-county transit

investments. We will also ask legislators to raise the gas tax to cover the increasing costs of maintaining and preserving our existing roadways and bridges. This tax has not been increased since 1993 and its buying power is about 45 percent of what it was. We need to protect the investments already made.

We also asked for legislative support to prioritize construction of the I-5/99W connector, which received a \$10 million authorization in federal funds last year and is in the environmental impact stage at this time. And again, we thank our federal delegation—both Senators Wyden and Smith, Congressman Wu, Congressman DeFazio (who now chairs surface transportation for the nation) for this investment with us, this authorization.

Finally, we will work with lawmakers to gain the financial tools and authorities we need to accommodate growth, including ways to pay for infrastructure and needed services.

How Shall We Grow?

And this brings me to what our Board considers the largest and most complex challenge facing our community.

The challenge is "how shall we grow?" Experts tell us that Washington County will add 400,000 residents to our current 505,000 in the next 23 years or so. The projections, by the way, are usually low. So that is an 80 to 100 percent growth coming to Washington County. We are currently growing by about 1,000 new residents per month. If current patterns hold, our County unincorporated area alone would have more residents by the year 2030 than any city in the northwest, except Seattle and Portland. If we merely expand the UGB and develop at the edges, it will be worse. I call it worse. We will have far more residents outside of cities than in, which is a whole policy discussion and our preference is that they be in cities. We're not built to do municipal service.

So, how shall we grow? Where shall we grow? What should that growth look like? How shall the infrastructure be paid for? How much of the population should be accommodated by UGB expansion versus infill and redevelopment inside the existing UGB? Where will these people work or go to school? Who will provide services and in what form of governance? Cities, new cities? County? Special service districts? And, of course, how do we protect existing neighborhoods and quality of life? Will we be a high-quality and exciting place to live and own a business or one large, sprawling traffic jam?

With the prospect of continuing population growth, Washington County—with all of its citizens and partners—must decide on strategies to accommodate this growth. We must put in place realistic, achievable plans to manage this growth, to manage congestion and to retain a high quality of life. We must find practical, affordable ways to invest in the urban infrastructure we will need to fulfill our plans, once determined.

These are not easy decisions. Our ability to retain a quality community will depend on how well we answer these questions and address these formidable challenges. And we cannot afford to wait. I view it as part of our leadership responsibility to talk openly and often about these challenges and the options open to us.

Our community enjoys a legacy of anticipating and meeting future challenges with creative ideas and collaboration. Over time, this approach has positioned Washington County as a forward-thinking, attractive place to live, work and operate a business. Many of the creative ideas we will need are yet to be discovered, much less agreed upon.

We may want to identify three or four places around the County at which to develop our own versions of Pearl Districts, where we can plan for high-density housing units in a community designed for people who want that lifestyle while minimizing impact on existing neighborhoods. We may want to look at older, undeveloped areas to examine if it is possible to redevelop those areas on a larger scale.

Clearly, we will have to work hard to decide how to accommodate significant growth within the existing UGB. But just as clearly, we will need to expand the UGB. Where should the expansions occur? How do we minimize the impact on farms and forestlands?

This will not be easy work, but I believe it is necessary.

I hope this year, working together with you, with the cities, special service districts, neighborhoods, Metro and many others, we will begin the process of mapping out how we choose to accommodate this growth. Like we in this county have done in the past on Title III, Goal 5, jobs-housing balance issues, and other matters, I believe we can and should work proactively to anticipate the issues, be creative and collaborate to make sure that we chart the course that works best for our community. There is nothing more important we can be working on for our community's future and we should ramp up this process in the next few months.

Quality and Affordable County Services

In the midst of this challenge, I want to repeat that our continuing priority will be delivery of our most basic priority: providing quality services at an affordable cost. Under the leadership of former County Administrator, Charlie Cameron, and past Boards, Washington County has one of the highest rates of competitively contracting out for services among all counties in Oregon. We also have the second lowest ratio of staff-to-population. We have operated this way on the belief that we should focus on the benefits provided instead of who provides the service.

We are fortunate, by the way, that for over 20 years, a key part of this effort has been Bob Davis. Bob has also been our new County Administrator for about one year now. Bob is doing an excellent job for all of us and I want to thank him publicly for his service. With his leadership, we will continue the distinction of operating at a high level of efficiency. And a year from now, Bob, I promise not to call you "new."

Looking to the Future

As we move through 2007 and look to the future, it is obvious that we are no longer a bedroom community or a sleepy suburbia. People often say we are the economic engine of Oregon and we are becoming more integrated into the global economy, which requires us to remain vigilant and remain competitive through world-class education, relevant workforce training and smart infrastructure investments. We are seeing Portland State University expand westward through cooperative arrangements with Portland Community College, Rock Creek. And we are seeing Pacific University expand eastward, through their efforts with the City of Hillsboro. The Regional Arts and Culture Council is expanding programs on the west side. And we are hosting a far-reaching student exchange program, currently through Sherwood School District and growing to others, of young men and women from China, whose destiny will influence our own.

In many ways, we are laying the groundwork for a more intentional, better-planned, urban center that can flourish alongside prospering agricultural areas that produce high-quality nursery stock, fruits and vegetables and great wine.

We are privileged to live in one of the best places on earth.

To keep our corner of paradise, we must act as good stewards of the resources around us, from rich soils to quality water; from a skilled workforce and some of the world's most vibrant companies, to planning for the citizens who will inevitably join us.

We must also remember that not every Washington County citizen shares our prosperity. Many subsist on wages that cannot support their families. Others are seniors with limited means. Our stewardship must extend to investments in affordable housing and affordable health care to ensure safety, security and dignity so that all of us have an opportunity to succeed.

Recently, Washington County joined the Bridges to Housing Program and we are working with our partner counties and non-profits in the region to expand access to housing and other services needed to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty. We are also supporting the Governor's Healthy Kids Plan to provide access to health care for uninsured children.

Collectively, our achievements are significant. But the challenges are formidable. This is a moment to celebrate what we have accomplished together. And it is a moment to commit to working equally hard to meet the challenges ahead that will define our community for a new generation.

Thank you.

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