

State of the City of Waitsburg

Speech given by Mayor Markeeta Littlewolf on 2/22/2010

As the Mayor of Waitsburg I occupy this City's highest elective office and as the political head of the city I am expected to provide the leadership necessary to keep it moving in the proper direction.

I am not only a leader staking out policy positions but also a facilitator of effective teamwork between staff, crew and citizens.

As your mayor, I have a special set of long-term responsibilities to this City and to its citizens.

For instance, we were spared flooding this year but that does not mean we should not continue with flood control/mitigation efforts to protect us in the years ahead.

I am a community leader as well as a political leader.

Yet most of the day to day trials and tribulations the Mayor has to face during office deal with housekeeping items, like a dog at large or how to keep the public informed about City government.

These day-to-day issues oftenseem to be of most immediate concern to many citizens,

and sometimes solving the little problems that come up suddenly

are the most fun.

Still I have to be sure of finding time to deal with the important policy issues

So long-term future concerns are not pushed to the side by the minutia.

Making your city a better place to live tomorrow,

not just today, is at stake but that effort

Is often swept away by those thriving on misinformation and willful ignorance

I would like to leave a legacy of long-term substance and good to this community,

And, hopefully, have the satisfaction of a job well done,

and that is the principal reward of public service—

clearly we are not in it for the money

My style of leadership may not suit everyone

but it is open and as I like to say, I am not hard to find,

so come and talk to me and some of you do when you have questions.

I am the Mayor and stand behind the decisions made by this council

and those I have made as CEO.

I want people to have the best information available on all the issues.

Dealing with tough situations,

difficult facts demands an approach taken in good faith and

in dedication to finding the truth or best solution we can.

Backstabbing, posturing, hidden agendas and petty personal popularity contests

are not part of this administration.

I challenge the general public to be savvy enough to gather the facts and stay on the high ground so we can get the work of this City done together, for all of us.

The light is still on;

Drafting the City of Waitsburg budget is always challenging and 2010's was no exception.

The current economic crisis has us all uneasy.

The State is running a considerable deficit.

Some counties are laying off workers.

Trying to balance their budgets

Many cities, large and small, are cutting services and jobs.

Fortunately, Waitsburg is quite sound financially and the outlook is positive for 2010.

We carried over \$724,128 from 2009 into 2010; including water deposits and endowments.

As of 12/31/09, the current expense account held \$67,275, which was about \$17,000 more than the City expected to carry over into 2010.

Our 2010 budgeted contingency reserve is operating well in the black with each fund containing reserves on hand of 10% or better.

The overall City budget for 2010 is balanced and reflects total projected receipts and expenditures of \$1,887,282 as compared to the 2009 budget of \$2,406,802 when we had the fourth street hydrant project, relining sewer pipes and other large capital outlays.

The council is always under pressure to maintain existing services. Law enforcement, street maintenance, water and sewer systems, the pool, the library, and animal control are among those important services.

For the first time since 2004, the council voted to raise property taxes. Although the City had hoped to avoid doing that through adding a quarter of one percent to the excise tax on the sale of real estate, a petition was mounted by citizens, successfully suspending that increase. Consequently, a property tax increase was necessary to balance the budget. This was a difficult decision but one the majority felt necessary. The excise tax issue, however, will be on the City ballot in April, 2010. If received favorably by the voters, a roll back of the property tax increase would likely follow.

The City of Waitsburg is blessed with first class employees;

They work for this community in more ways than most of us think about.

It's easy to thank the folks after an emergency fire or medical response

But what about the guys who clean out and repairs the sewer pipes

or replaces a broken water valve.

This usually happens on Thanksgiving Day

About the time they are ready to carve the turkey

Pick up the stray dogs and return them to their owners

(well, on the first offence)

The kids at City Hall who ensure the bills are paid.

Questions answered

Our workers take pride in what they do,

and they care about this community far more than just a pay check.

To help balance the budget in 2010,

Without any layoffs

And with no reduction in services

the City staff and crew

Gave up any cost of living or merit increase.

Their wages remain the same.

As a sign of solidarity to the Community

The Mayor declined her monthly stipend of \$100 per month for 2010 as well.

On other matters, flood control/mitigation is always of importance to us.

We know where we live, on a delta of sorts between the Touchet and the Coppei.

The City pursues flood control as a well justified expense.

When the Highway 12 Bridge over Coppei Creek, which had been a sticking point for flood debris and point of overflow, was replaced, the new bridge was designed with improved flood control characteristics (larger opening).

In 2008, Waitsburg completed a Joint Aquatic Resources Permit Application (JARPA)

for removing sediment in Coppei Creek at the Highway 12 Bridge.

This was a significant accomplishment and took a a lot of political badgering on my part with the governor's office, the corps and fish and wildlife.

There now seems to be agency understanding that this location is a bottleneck due to the flat stream slope.

The first round of work was done in 2008 and since there was minimal silt built up there in 2009, no dredging was required last year.

In 2009, Waitsburg-served as a stakeholder in the Touchet River Assessment, conducted by Alexandra Amonette, which relates to the City and adjacent County areas. Waitsburg hosted several discussions/events as an interested stakeholder, not as an advocate. Flood prevention participation must continue.

In 2009, Waitsburg completed a Flood Control Study for Coppei Creek. This study built upon the Corps of Engineers study from the 1996-2000 period. The City's study is currently under review by the Corps. The City secured a State grant to pay the cost of that study.

Further In 2009, Waitsburg in cooperation with Walla Walla County And the Corps of Engineers completed a Flood Response Plan Several public meetings were held to encourage grass roots participation with our community.

Waitsburg has identified the levee south of the racetrack as a high priority location for flood control work. It formed one breach point during the 1996 flood. Waitsburg is pursuing an interim reinforcement project of bank build-up; armoring several hundred feet long along that stretch. The levee would be widened and include access on top. The improved levee, although not fully to Corps standards, will still be an improvement over its current condition.

This work will begin no later than Summer, 2010.

The City has decided to employ a new “hybrid” form for getting names on City Election ballots.

Keeping the long standing Caucus system and permitting a potential candidate to be on the ballot by filling out a Declaration of Candidacy form.

This was determined to be the best way to go about changing the election method, as it would give the most opportunity for individuals to get on the ballot. The ultimate goal of changing the system is to allow the most people who are interested in running for a City office the ability to do so.

Another aspect of the Election process that has been changed is the amount of time to sign up or hold a caucus.

The old timeline was 20 days from the first date a caucus could be held.

The new time period is 10 days.

This gives the City Hall staff of two people a more reasonable amount of time to get the ballots out by the deadline for mailing.

The City hopes this new process will give more people

an opportunity to get involved in City government.

On to other subjects:

The City approved and installed new playground equipment in Preston Park.

Council members Leroy Cunningham, Bart Baxter and Ken Lenhardt, City Clerk/Treasurer Randy Hinchliffe and the City Crew helped with the installation.

Pacific Power donated \$1,000 towards that project which will provide more pea gravel for the area;

Approved an interlocal agreement with Columbia County Transport to continue delivering prescriptions to the Waitsburg Clinic;

Elk Drug works as a partner with the City paying \$600 (half of the fee) towards that service.

Approved a four month Downtown/Historic Overlay Moratorium on June 17, 2009

in order to ensure future work in that area conformed to property styles, land uses and the existing character of that area.

Removed that Moratorium on August 5, 2009

(less than 2 months after it went on);

and Approved the historic Preservation Overlay Ordinance 2009-950;

Approved banners/hanging baskets for the streetscape, welcoming people to Waitsburg.

Redesigned the City website making it more accessible

while providing expanded information on City business,
community events,

business opportunities and real estate.

Reinstated the animal control program,

Started operation clean up,

Established a utility tax on our own utilities.

The City collects 4% of gross revenue from its water and sewer utilities
paid monthly to the City's current expense fund.

Total for 2009 was a little less than \$18,000

Artist Bernard Hosey displayed his steel art balls
on Downtown Main Street over the summer of 2009,
which were met with,

shall I say,

mixed reviews from different folks.

They have since moved on,

the balls that is.

Reestablished the library board,

distinguishing operation of the public library as separate from the City
as required by law.

Started reroofing the mill and with grant money in hand,

we all know where that project went,

destroyed by fire Sept 4.

Moved the building inspection function to Columbia County's inspector.

Walla Walla County bailed out due to lack of funds.

Updated the sidewalk sales ordinance.

The current ordinance is now more business friendly and liberalizes the use of the sidewalks for the display of merchandise while being ADA compliant.

The old ordinance actually prohibited the lay out of the side walk flower sales put on by Waitsburg Hardware and Mercantile and enjoyed by so many of us.

So that had to be fixed and the new ordinance is good for all businesses and their customers.

Approved an RFP for the repurposing or redeveloping of the Mill Site.

Updated the Council procedures ordinance to include a provision that 3 unexcused meeting absences by a member is grounds for removal from office.,

This ordinance allows councilmember to appear at a council meeting telephonically; and grants the mayor authority to admonish council members should their behavior become disruptive and contrary to the reasoned process of the council's work during meetings..

Waitsburg is a unique City, we pride ourselves on that, maybe sometimes too much so, letting our one of a kind status stand by itself

as a solution to problems while forgetting to actually do something.

In any event,

the current City Council could well be the most diverse group
in the City's 144-year history.

Serious matters deserve serious people
and this council has proven its mettle.

We are here do an important job in serving the community of Waitsburg.

This does not mean we always agree;

lively discussion, disagreement and dissent surely ensue.

However, this council works through the issues in an agreeable manner
without allowing personality clashes,

petty disagreement or

personal agendas to interfere in moving forward for the community.

I want to thank the council for its dedicated commitment to our fair City.

Our United States would be fortunate to have them in the other Washington;

but we're all better off having them here

where results can actually be achieved.

God Bless Waitsburg and God Bless America

Markeeta Little Wolf
Mayor of Waitsburg