



# CITY OF JOHN DAY

mayor  
Ron Lundbom

city manager  
Nicholas Green

secretary  
Lindy Berry

council  
Paul Smith, President  
Shannon Adair  
Gregg Haberly  
Dave Holland  
Elliot Sky  
Heather Rookstool

May 5, 2021

Letter to the Editor of the Blue Mountain Eagle and all John Day Residents:

The time has come to put aside our differences and work together towards common goals and a unified mission. The John Day city council has identified and begun combating the issues that have led to a steady decline in population and growing poverty across the county over the last 30 years. Over a thousand residents have moved out of our area. Our kids were leaving, our parents and grandparents aging, and timber – the mainstay industry that supported our economy for almost a century – was declining rapidly. As a result, Main Street businesses in John Day were closing, jobs diminishing, and our tax base was flat. In some cases, revenues had decreased to the point we could no longer fund basic services.

These conditions weren't the result of a catastrophic, one-time event that created an irreversible revenue loss for the city. They were the byproduct of complex changes that occurred over the course of a generation. We recognized things were changing for the worse, but the changes were happening slowly, and every year it was too easy to say we'll fix it next time, we'll deal with it later, it's bad but we can still hold out.

Four years ago, we recognized that we could no longer continue to operate the way we used to. Too few homes were being built, the age and condition of our housing stock and infrastructure was deteriorating, and without a deliberate change in our policies and procedures, we were going to continue losing ground.

We realized we had to do things differently.

We needed to run the city more like a business. We had to get leaner, more efficient, and more strategic in our investment decisions. We had to start looking further down the road at what was coming next so we would be better prepared. We needed to act now to start repairing our core infrastructure like our wastewater treatment plant and our aging roads and bridges before it was too late.

The City of John Day has worked hard towards these goals. We dealt with our budget issues by making hard choices like transitioning the 911 Center to an intergovernmental agency. We adopted better business practices, including reducing the number of full-time staff employed by the City and creating new jobs to streamline planning and community development functions. We created a new home incentive program to encourage private sector investment in our housing market. We also started investing differently. We adjusted our spending priorities so that the investments we made and the costs we incurred



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would fuel our growth. We recognized we needed to get back the population we had lost, and to do so, we needed to create amenities that people want – new parks and trails along our riverfront, more buildable commercial and residential lands, and basic building blocks of a 21st Century economy like broadband internet.

As a result of these policy changes and others, John Day grew in population last year for the first time in over two decades and we are gaining new private sector development at a pace we haven't seen in many years.

Despite our efforts to help bring John Day out of our economic decline, we have struggled to see eye to eye with other public agencies in Grant County that don't share our vision or our sense of urgency. We maintain the belief that what is good for one community in Grant County is good for them all. There has never been a greater need for collaboration to get back to a sustainable quality of life.

Recently, we have worked with other agencies and private businesses to help bring broadband to the entire county, looking beyond the boundaries of John Day. When Prairie City was in need of water after their well failed, we were the first to respond with over \$30,000 of free water donated by our residents, no questions asked. However, our efforts last year to bring a ballot measure to the voters to replace Gleason Pool failed due to a lack of interagency cooperation. This means voters didn't get the opportunity to give their opinion on the creation of a pool for the county.

Roads and bridges in John Day are driven on by all county residents and continue to deteriorate faster than we can repair them, while the County Court sits on over 50 million dollars in federal funding that was specifically dedicated for these uses, intentionally withholding their resources from our residents. Judge Myers has repeatedly ignored our efforts to meet with him to discuss these issues on the pretext that it requires a legal review, which he has not produced and is not necessary. To encourage him to act, our attorneys sent him our own legal opinion, which so far he has ignored. As a result of the County's deliberate neglect, our residents might have to go into debt to repair flood damage to 4th Street, a critical access road to the Grant County Regional Airport used by firefighters, the local hospital, and county residents.

We have also been unsuccessful in being able to meet with the County to discuss a potential police transition plan. If this does not happen in a timely manner the residents of John Day will not have a clear understanding of a transition option when they vote for/against the police department funding levy and additional strain will be placed on county law enforcement services that will impact all county residents.



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While Judge Myers has been clear about his unwillingness to meet with the City of John Day, the other commissioners have not acted decisively. Our families in every community in Grant County deserve better than this! We can and must work together to fulfill our oath of office to serve our residents.

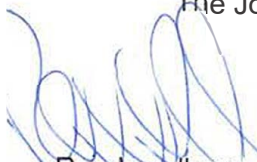
We call on our residents and all responsible citizens in Grant County to contact Judge Myers, Commissioner Hamsher, and Commissioner Palmer to encourage them to stand with us in our fight to rebuild our community.

One community. One fight.

We remain dedicated to our mission to serve John Day residents and ask you to join us in asking our elected officials to recommit to working together.

Sincerely,

The John Day City Council



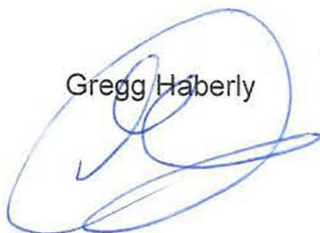
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