



CITY OF JOHN DAY

mayor
Ron Lundbom

city manager
Nicholas Green

office manager
Chantal DesJardin

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

To: The John Day City Council

Subject: 2022 State of the City Address

Dear Mayor and City Councilors –

A state of the city address is a time for the city manager to reflect on the overall condition of our community and our municipal government. I plan to address a number of areas of concern in this year's state of the city address, but I want to start on an optimistic note.

Over the past two years, we've had to deal with the impacts of a raging pandemic, but we have also made significant progress on a number of fronts for the city. We deregulated and streamlined procedures for selling land at the airport industrial park and have begun to reap the benefits of those land sales, with 17 acres sold or under contract. We have a permit to operate the new wastewater treatment plant in the final stages of review and approval, and we've raised over \$13 million for grant funded projects since the start of the pandemic.

Our FY2021 financial audit was the strongest audit in the five years I've been the city manager. Our net position (or financial net worth) of \$10.6 million is 35 percent higher than it was at the end of FY16 when I was hired. This means that all of our assets, once you subtract out all of our debt, have increased by \$2.7 million over the last five years.

That increase is the result of the City changing its investment strategy by prioritizing capital investment and operating with a leaner footprint. At the same time, we've modernized our equipment in public works and seen significant progress on all of our capital improvement projects.

We have multiple street improvement projects currently in construction or ready for construction in 2022, with additional improvements planned and funded for 2023 and beyond. Our long-term strategies to replace our aging wastewater treatment plant and pool are also bearing fruit, and we will be ready to proceed with construction on both facilities later this year.

The State's investment in a new Kam Wah Chung interpretive center, new sidewalks to the high school, and replacement of 97 curb ramps on downtown sidewalks will further boost our economic recovery by resulting in local jobs for local workers and by improving the quality and condition of our transportation infrastructure.



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The EDA broadband grant and ReConnect grant will result in fiber to the home not just for our community, but for the broader county, at no cost to our local taxpayers.

These are just some of the public benefits the John Day City Council and city staff have worked toward for the past five years. We have celebrated our success by moving on to the next project, but if you stop to think about it, the work we've accomplished is truly remarkable, and has been remarked on by people both within and outside of our community.

In many ways, John Day's success has become the envy of the state. We have been recognized in the New York Times, Bloomberg, Wired magazine, Oregon Public Broadcasting, Oregon Business magazine, Oregon Humanities, and a host of other media outlets, including recently on NBC and CBS in Portland. Our projects for the Innovation Gateway, Recreation Economy for Rural Communities, and others have earned state, regional and increasingly national recognition. We have become a model for what rural communities can accomplish.

At the same time, there are those within our own community who would cause you to question these successes or paint them as anything but a success. There are voices that attempt to discourage you from the course you've begun.

The voice you learn to heed should be calm, and it's difficult to hear amid a multitude of loud, persistent, angry voices that conjure up perceived injustices, or whining voices that avoid challenges and work. I would submit that these negative voices were present in our society before COVID-19, and they will be present afterward.

The solution is to take the challenges head on, with persistent and diligent effort, to have hope for the future, and to use that hope to challenge us to do better, and to be better, than society expects us to be. Filter out the static generated by unproductive and destructive voices. Be leaders and advocates for the type of community you want to see.

We should choose to be happy. This work should not feel like fulfilling an obligation or a duty, going through the daily drudgery of public meetings and public opposition. We should be joyful and purposeful as we pursue those measures designed to improve the quality of life of all our residents.

My message to my staff this year was "just have fun." For them, the victory is already achieved. They've had a chance to be a part of something unique and marvelous, the rebuilding of their own community from a dying timber town to a vibrant and growing economy. And we're only just beginning.



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The people whose voices need to be heard are not just the old, the taxpayers, the voters. The work of building a community crosses all ages and demographics. It even crosses traditional boundaries of experience, socioeconomic condition and education. We need to listen to a broad audience, because it is a shared responsibility to rebuild a community.

My message to our residents about the “Never John Dayers,” those who only criticize but never contribute, is to let them go noisily into the dustbin of history, with their four “likes” and their five “friends” on social media. We don’t have time for it. The more they hate and fight against us, the louder they whine, the stronger we get. The lion never fears the jackal.

We should take efforts to invite broader participation but we should avoid critics that don’t contribute. Criticism is not a contribution. It tears down one idea but it does not build up another one in its stead.

No critic has presented a comprehensive alternative to what we’re doing. No one has demonstrated the value of continuing to decline in population, losing residents, and infighting, which are the default conditions if we don’t continue to pursue our strategies. No other proposal has been submitted to the council beyond a “get back to basics” philosophy that has no comprehensive path other than asking us to “stop doing what we’re doing” coupled with a generalized fear and anxiety that our goals and objectives are not sustainable, or will lead to some future demise that they can’t quite articulate because it isn’t quite real.

We value different viewpoints. But we also have to recognize that not all viewpoints have equal merit. We respect others’ rights to disagree with our policies and procedures, but being loud and disagreeable doesn’t make one right.

Personal attacks have become commonplace in our political discourse at the national level, and are increasingly common at the local level. Publishing personal information about the worst moments in a public official’s life, and then using that brush to paint their entire character, is not only unfair – it’s inappropriate and increasingly illegal. They call it doxing. Doxing is a general term used to describe a situation in which someone deliberately shares another person’s individual private information on the internet or in a public forum with an intent to incite harassment.

We have seen people exercising hate and harassment against those with different viewpoints in our own community. I have experienced it myself on multiple occasions. That harassment continues today. Publishing a person’s private information online implicitly encourages hate and harassment against those individuals.



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There's power in knowing who you are. It allows you to continue working in spite of negative commentary. I don't worry about adult cyber-bullying for myself, but I do worry about what it means for our community if we allow it to happen and say nothing.

Who are we? Who are we going to become? What type of community do we want to be a part of?

Individuals with no financial stake in the outcomes of our city who do not live within our city limits have become our most outspoken critics. They occupy seats in our council chambers without being residents of our city, while our own residents remain too often silent, sitting on the sidelines of the debate. The result is that the only voices left are the voices of hate and discouragement, the voices that use personal attacks when their own policy arguments fail, the voices who do not want what's best for our community as a whole, but selfishly think only of themselves.

As Margaret Thatcher once said, "I always cheer up immensely if an attack is particularly wounding because I think, well, if they attack one personally, it means they have not a single political argument left."

I fear that we, as a society, are moving in the direction of intolerance and hate. You can observe these trends in our national discourse.

I fear that we, as a community, will also move in the direction of intolerance and hate if we listen to those negative voices.

But we have a choice. We don't have to get swept up in the national debate, where both sides claim to have the virtuous choice. Reality is far more complex.

We can simply choose to work together for common goals that improve the health, safety and welfare of our community.

Earlier today I gave Mayor Lundbom my resignation. This will be my last year as John Day's city manager. I've made the choice to move on and pursue other opportunities. That wasn't the city council's decision. It was a decision that my family and I made for our quality of life. We're making the conscious choice to trade fatigue for family time.

I am 42 years old and if I'm lucky that means I only have to work for another 23 years before I get to retire. I have two young children and a long career ahead of me. If Covid has taught us anything it's the value of time with our family. I want to make the most of the next twenty years and to be able to spend more time with my family, which means I need a position with more flexibility than the



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city manager role affords. But I hope I'll get to continue to influence John Day for good in some other capacity.

city manager
Nicholas Green

Since this is the last time I'll be addressing the council and community in a state of the city address, I'll simply ask that you also come together and make a conscious choice to pursue those measures that will make investing in kids *your* top priority. They are our future and the future of our community. We need to prioritize them above ourselves, no matter what it takes.

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I am concerned about an aging school building in a hundred year floodplain. When it goes, it won't come back. It's time to begin planning for its eventual replacement. Grant Union is a tribute to the work of our early community founders. That they were able to build it and that it has endured for as long as it has is a testament to their ingenuity and willingness to work together – but we are on borrowed time. When the new gym is older than I am, it's time to start thinking about it as the old gym.

The foundation for a modern educational experience has become increasingly digital, experiential, and interactive, and we need to be willing to adapt to the changing times. The basic classroom setup at our schools today is exactly the same as it was for me, and for my parents, and for their parents in the pre-Internet age. We need to create a new educational experience for our students at a new location that will be warm, safe and dry. One that prepares them well to live and work in a digital economy, where they can learn as students to grow crops hydroponically, to print computer-generated homes in three dimensions, and to interact responsibly on social media.

We need our critical community facilities throughout the city to be strong enough and resilient enough to withstand the dramatic changes in climate we're experiencing. We need schools, roads, bridges and public facilities that are safe from the risk of catastrophic loss due to flooding, landslides, wildfires, extreme temperatures, and other natural disasters that have become increasingly commonplace.

I am concerned about the efforts of some to deprive our youth of a pool and other recreational amenities because they disagree with city policies or fear they'll actually have to pay for them. Within the past month we've heard them publicly advocate for us not to listen to our youth, to strike their testimony from the public record, because our kids don't vote or pay taxes today. The reality is that our children will live with the outcomes of our decisions far longer than we will. If anything, their voices should be given our *first* priority.

I am concerned about rising home prices coupled with the 'Great Resignation' we're seeing across the nation. Home values in the United States rose faster



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than ever in 2021. The median sales price for an existing home increased 17% year over year – a dramatic price increase that set a new record.

We are facing a major housing shortage in John Day and it has impacted our ability to adequately staff our open positions for both public and private employers. Good quality candidates are turning down job offers or accepting them and then later resigning because they cannot find adequate housing for their families. Those fortunate few who do find housing frequently refer to themselves as “lucky.” Luck should not factor into it.

Millions of people are now working from home and will never return to the traditional work place. Record low housing supply, coupled with strong demand driven by digital commuters, has pushed up home prices quickly and we lack the labor pool and the capacity to compete with the demands on our housing supply from these higher growth rates and stay-at-home workers.

What this means for us is that a time where there is an increasing demand for the quality of life we have to offer, we are unable to meet that demand, because we don't have an adequate housing supply. It's as if our customers want to shop in our stores and our friends want to eat at our table, but our shelves are empty and our cupboards are bare. We want to be a good host but we have nothing to offer them.

Addressing our housing shortage and aging infrastructure should be among our top priorities. That means we need to replace every bridge. Repair every road. Increase our local street capacity to support the needs of a growing population by building new residential streets and continue to set aside a little each year in our community development fund for future water and food security, so that we can meet the basic needs of our growing economy without relying on global supply chains that have become increasingly vulnerable and problematic.

Our new water reclamation facility will treat our wastewater to near drinking-water quality standards. Our greenhouses, when they are reconfigured this year, will have the ability to scale to meet the produce needs of our entire city without depending on external supply chains. Our proposed solar array will power all of our municipal infrastructure using locally-generated energy. Our broadband network will connect each of our cities and critical community facilities to a common, shared network, one that can operate independent of outside resources in the event of a disaster.

A community that can house, feed, water, educate, communicate and otherwise meet the basic needs of its residents without depending on external resources will never regret those investment decisions in its time of need.



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Thank you to all who have supported me and my family during our time in John Day. It has been an experience we'll never forget. I am excited for what the future holds for us and for this community.

Over the past five years we've raised over \$25 million in grant funding for 15 capital improvement projects in John Day. We've reduced the city staff from 24 positions down to 14. Our total overhead is about five percent of our operating budget. We are a lean, mean, fighting machine. Pound-for-pound, we're one of the strongest cities in the state. We're fighting way above our weight class. And we're an underdog. Everybody loves an underdog.

We have spent an entire generation in last place in almost every socio-economic category. The good thing about being in last place is you can only move up, and we're ready to move up. It's time for the rising generation to flex some muscle, to take their seat at the leadership table, and to position our community for a generation of success – one where we in rural communities are the thought leaders, the innovators, the creators – where our policies and practices are setting an example for rest of the state.

As we move forward, my hope is that we will increase our efforts to help our community succeed. Look for opportunities to serve and make a positive and proactive contribution. Let your voices be heard in praise of those things that build us up, and let go of those that tear us down.

The choice of whether we succeed or fail is largely ours. I hope we choose to succeed.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Green
City Manager