

City of John Day Newsletter



March 2017

What to Expect in 2017

Dear Residents –

Since this is the first newsletter of the New Year, I would like to give you a preview of what to expect in 2017; but first, let me share a brief experience.

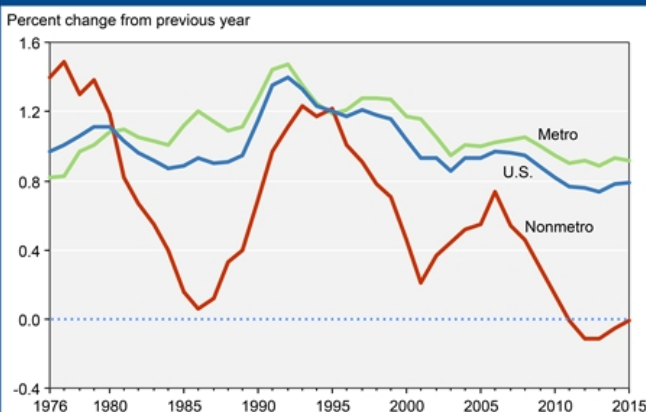
Ten years ago, I came to John Day for the first time. I remember looking at my wife as we drove down Main Street and saying, “This is where you grew up?”

It is difficult to capture my feelings in words. Surprise at the city’s size was quickly replaced by the impression of a quaint and quintessential American town – the kind that harkens back to a simpler time when communities like ours flourished across the United States.

Today we are among the last of the small cities trying to preserve our rural quality of life in the face of dramatic social and economic change. Over 1,300 rural counties across the country have lost population since 2010 (see graph below). In John Day, we are entering our third straight decade of population decline.

Unfortunately, our household incomes and business revenue are following a similar downward trend. Even in a county known for its ability to endure hardship, the strain of our prolonged economic retraction is hitting home. King’s is just the latest in a series of business closures that have left 16 percent of our Main Street storefronts vacant.

Population change by metro/nonmetro status, 1976-2015



Note: Metro status changed for some counties in 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010.
Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from U.S. Census Bureau.

A New Strategy for Growth

To stem the tide of population and economic decline, the city council has approved an aggressive new *Strategy for Growth*. The strategy emphasizes population growth as a strategic imperative and views residents as customers who have a choice about where they live and where they spend their money.

Today we are losing market share because our customers are leaving; and our customers are leaving because we are not providing the amenities and services that will keep them here. Yet in spite of our worrisome economy, there is hope.

Digital commuters, active retirees and employees of digital industries have a choice about where they live and choose to locate. Often these choices are driven not by proximity to an interstate but by proximity to talent and a high quality of life.

The raw material of America’s advanced industries is predicated on access to human capital and the digital information highway. All of these things are within our reach. However, preserving our community’s traditional values and culture will require us to embrace a difficult paradox: In order to stay the same, we have to change.

So what should you expect in 2017? Change.

My goal is to position John Day to become a national leader in rural innovation and job creation. To do this we will need to shift our spending priorities toward projects that have the potential to increase the economic value of our community. We need to make investments that will fuel growth and diversify our economic base without sacrificing our rural values and quality of life.

This newsletter features just a few of the changes that are coming in 2017...beginning with how you can provide input on the City’s future direction.

Our long-time residents remember what John Day was like when our industries were booming. By working together, my hope is that we can begin to restore our economic prosperity and vitality to improve the quality of life for all of John Day’s residents.

Oregon's Kitchen Table

From April through June, the City will co-host the Oregon Solutions Team and Oregon's Kitchen Table, a non-profit alliance that will help you share your voice in our decision-making and allow you to contribute your feedback, ideas and resources to improve our community.

Late last year a group of community representatives and advocates met with the Oregon Solutions Team to discuss projects and needs for our area. Among the topics discussed were the need for a new school; a new wastewater treatment plant; improved floodplain mitigation; a new library; a recreation center and indoor pool; job training and workforce development; and improved housing and transportation options. The total cost of these projects easily exceeds \$50 million.

This spring you will have the opportunity to share your ideas, help us prioritize these projects and set new budgeting and regional economic development priorities. Look for a survey in mid-May and learn more about the process by visiting www.oregonskitchentable.org.



7th Street Bike Park

Investing in recreation is a key component of the City's *Strategy for Growth*. In April, we will hold a public hearing to discuss the proposed 7th Street Bike Park. Several trails are proposed for the bike park along with a skills area with jumps and obstacles. Watch for a notice in the Blue Mountain Eagle for the date and time of the hearing.

Eclipse Update

The city has 95 confirmed reservations for the Industrial Park campsites and more are being added daily. Guests from all over the world will be traveling to John Day to see the August 21 solar eclipse. Both travel and parking restrictions will be in place during the event. Additional information on the Eclipse will be posted to the city website in early April.



Housing and Community Development

This year the City will develop a new Housing and Community Development plan as part of its *Strategy for Growth*.

Approximately half of our current residents live in low-to-moderate income households. While building and construction costs have grown at 10% annually for the past several years, our residents' incomes have remain fixed and some have even declined. The result is an affordability gap that leaves the majority of our residents unable to purchase a home or make needed repairs and improvements to their property. It has also led to a rental vacancy rate of less than one percent.

In 2017, the City will explore new programs to create a more balanced housing market with new home ownership opportunities for our residents in both the low and moderate-income categories. This plan will also consider the need for multi-family developments for seniors, families and people with disabilities. We will also look at options to provide financing and incentives for home repair and improvements for our current homeowners.

There is an adage that "retail follows rooftops." By stimulating the construction of affordable new homes in our area, we will begin removing barriers to growth and provide a broader customer base for our local businesses. If implemented correctly, this program can become a catalyst for economic revitalization by putting much-needed capital back into our local economy in a way that will provide tangible benefits for years to come.

These are just a few of our current projects. To learn more, stop by city hall or subscribe to our mailing list at www.cityofjohnday.com/newsletter/subscriptions.

Sincerely,

Nick Green, City Manager