

From the Mayor's Desk: 2014 in Review



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It has been an exciting, interesting and at times difficult first two years as your mayor.

These past two years have really been a time of change and taking a fresh look at the city operations.

We have excellent, hard working employees on our staff. Even during times when we did not have a city manager, the employees and department managers did a great job of keeping the day to day operations running. This was true even after having to lay off 10 percent of the staff to meet this past year's budget.

There were some issues such as bills to be paid and some accounting procedures that needed to be cleaned up, but that was all taken care of. We now have procedures in place and some are still being worked on to make sure these things do not happen again.

This past March we hired Gary Marks to take the helm and manage our City. He has

done a very good job and received a positive 6 month review from the City Council. Gary is the right person to lead Lebanon into the future.

Our water department found that the city was not getting accurate meter readings from the company we contracted. This caused some fluctuations in billing over a couple of months this year, but it is now much more accurate. To save money and have a more accurate reading, our city employees have taken on the task, and we have already seen a difference.

The city had done some easing of penalties and due times on bills and recently changed the bill to have the past due colored red to make it easier to see.

They are working on other changes to make the process work better and be more customer friendly. Audio and video recording have been implemented in the customer service area of the water department to help make sure our customer service is top notch.

I have listened to phone audio and viewed audio or video of several customer interactions where a customer complained that staff was rude or did not help the customer. In each case customer service rep was polite, friendly and did a very good job, even with a customer who may have been angry.

We were moving forward with our water plant and unfortunately progress was stopped when the city of Albany wanted to renegotiate our agreement on water usage on the canal. The city council directed the city manager and staff to look into getting our water direct from the Santiam River.

Currently, we are pursuing the feasibility of a river intake and we are still in negotiations with Albany. I feel the river intake is the way to go for Lebanon, but I am open to hear what Albany wants to offer for our use on the canal.

Last year during our "snowpocalypse" in December, I worked with Chief Frank Stevenson to get a warming shelter in place. Lebanon has never had one, and it was time. The Lebanon Soup Kitchen volunteers helped those who were out in the cold for those few days.

In preparation for this winter, Chief Stevenson and I worked on getting a shelter ready and in place. The City now has an agreement with the First Christian Church and the Lebanon Soup Kitchen to have a warming shelter when needed.

Big thanks to Chief Stevenson, City Manager Marks, Dala Johnson and the Lebanon Soup Kitchen to make this happen. Also thank you to our volunteers from the community who have been trained and will be helping out when the shelter is activated.

This year the council was approached with a citizen petition to reinstate "The City that Friendliness

Built," something I have wanted to see come back myself. The council agreed to make that our City motto and keep "It's Easier From Here" as our business development and marketing slogan. We will have the entrance sign on the South end of town done early next year and entrance signs in other parts of town as soon as we can.

Lastly and one of the most important items to update you on is the 2040 Vision. When I ran for office one of the biggest issues I had was that our town had no long term plan or vision. Without a long term plan, how do you run your day-to-day operations? How do you ask department managers to budget or plan for the next year?

Every business person knows you have to have a business plan to be successful. I agree and think that our city is no different and needs a long-term plan to be successful.

We have an outside firm with no stake in the game, who will be the information gatherers and moderators for input on what you want Lebanon to be in 10 or 20 years down the road.

The website and Facebook pages will be going live soon. Interviews and meetings for people all throughout the community will be held and the results will be given to the city council in June.

This is your turn to speak up. *Every* voice is important. We want to hear from everyone and we will make it easy to participate and everyone will have a chance. If you don't speak up, you won't have a say in how you want to see Lebanon in the future.

After the Vision process, we will not be done. We will then have to take the things that the community wants and make a plan to put those things in place and start working towards the goals. It is an exciting process and I hope you will be involved.

Thank You for your support the past two years and for entrusting me for the next two. We are just getting started Lebanon, hop on the train!

Dawn and I wish you the happiest of new years and that 2015 will bring prosperity to your family and our community.