

Mayor's Message for the 2023 Budget

To: City of White Salmon Council and Residents of White Salmon

*Five hundred, twenty five thousand, six hundred minutes
Five hundred, twenty five thousand moments so dear
Five hundred, twenty five thousand, six hundred minutes
How do you measure, measure a year?
-Seasons of Love*

Measuring a year is something I've thought about a lot as this budget for 2023 has come together. In the life of city government, a year could be measured simply in council meetings, commission meetings, public hearings, codes adopted, events attended, emergencies abated, the mix of wins and disappointments. Even with the budget itself, we reduce larger visions and aspirations for our future down to granular detail, often losing the nuance of how goals and objectives across different departments align to move us one step closer to a bigger strategic pursuit. When we fall into a rhythm of repeating patterns even if they're not working but have been the standard, those minutes and years can become a hamster wheel with limited forward movement.

Which is why it is with immense pride in my staff that I submit the 2023 budget. The collective work over this past year to change our approach, mindset, and culture in how we think about serving this city has been an all-hands-on-deck effort, and at times one that has felt Herculean. This year was marked by intentional change: change focused on setting higher standards for what we can achieve, prioritizing the public service aspect of city governance, and building a team of interim, new, and long-term members where everyone's strengths were utilized and voices were heard. All change is unsettling but shifting the foundations of our operations in such an integral way would not have worked without each person on this team giving their all in this shared pursuit. Every minute, every day, through every setback and frustration.

At its core, I view local government as having two primary responsibilities. One is to sustain and improve the infrastructure of its community: roads, traffic, transportation, public safety, code enforcement, economic development, master planning, environment and more. The other role is to build the social fabric of the community. Of those two, I think the harder to rebuild, or create, is the social fabric.

I believe White Salmon has that social fabric. We've seen it time and again in this past year alone as residents mobilized over issues such as the Parks Plan, Walker House, childcare, and the Hood River Bridge project in a respectful and passionate way; as our businesses and local organizations keep new and returning annual traditions like Community Cleanup, SpringFest, July 4th, El Grito, Halloween, and the Dock Grade ornaments alive and growing; as stakeholders come together to protect shared interests, such as the transition of Rhine Village to Cascade Columbia Housing to ensure the long-term affordability of those multi-family residences, or the ongoing multi-agency support

to realize a new pool under the White Salmon Valley Metropolitan Park District.

Instead of our residents only showing up as critics and consumers, we're fortunate that they connect with us and each other and get engaged in being producers of the future; together we share in asking the joint question "What can we create together?" In yet another year where national policies and governance lose sight of that shared commitment to the greater good, I continue to find the ethos of our city restorative and inspiring.

Which is why getting that first responsibility right was such a key focus this year. Building the right team of civil servants and having clear processes and procedures, I know we can achieve the aspirations of this council and the driving vision of our current comprehensive plan.

One of those new processes is a different approach to how we present the people's budget. This budget emphasizes the outcomes we expect from each department, and how we'll be measuring them. It also works to deliver the data points in ways we will be tracking, so council feels engaged year-round on evaluating progress and more empowered to determine what projects or department needs they want to support with limited funds. We also strived to paint a fuller picture of the city's long-term outlook, so that council can be proactive in addressing fund limitations and monitoring how my administration is continuing to cut unnecessary costs and be fiscally responsible in allocating funds.

The most noticeable shift in this approach, I hope, will be the ability of council to weigh whether they want to pursue a new project that is not part of the adopted budget. In the past, these considerations could easily get lost from being seen as part of the bigger picture, weighing if a new idea was worth reallocating a set amount of funds from something they had already committed to pursuing. In short, this budget shows the work we have planned for 2023, and our intent to work that plan.

That plan includes completion of construction projects delayed by Covid, such as repaving Garfield and replacing manhole covers along Jewett and Phase I of our mainline water project. It also anticipates installation of new park amenities in Rheingarten Park, and what could be perceived by some as the monumental launch of free mail delivery for city residents, either via cluster mailboxes or no-fee PO Boxes. It also expects we will realize the implementation of SCADA and GIS into our public works operations, as well as adoption of a housing action plan and consideration of new housing codes that reflect our support of increased housing options and affordability.

As we embark on another five hundred, twenty five thousand, six hundred minutes in 2023, I hope what we report back is noticeable ground being gained on infrastructure and housing. These two pressure points will determine our ability to successfully manage our future growth and protect and nurture the strong social fabric that exists in our town.

It is with honor that I continue to humbly accept the charge of running the city responsibly and with purpose. I also graciously ask to be held accountable and challenged

to see issues from other viewpoints. We can't make a strong future together if we are more interested in being right over one another.

In closing, I would like to express my respect and gratitude to those who have walked alongside me in this pursuit of transforming our approach this year: Interim City Administrator Paul Koch, City Administrator Troy Rayburn, former Clerk/Treasurer Jan Brending – who selflessly delayed her own retirement to help us realize this vision – and our Department Heads: Clerk/Treasurer Stephanie Porter, Public Works Acting Operations Manager Jeff Cooper, Land Use Planner Jeff Broderick, Police Chief Mike Hepner, and Building Inspector and Fire Chief Bill Hunsaker. Their continued patience in navigating these shifts, as well as their daily leadership and ingenuity in serving the city has been greatly appreciated.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Marla Keethler', written in a cursive style.

Mayor Marla Keethler