

## **Independence State of the City January 2016**

Happy to be here today to share some of the great things that have happened in Independence the past year. And where we're going in the next year.

Our prospects are bright – we are on firm ground financially, the local and national economy is growing, and Independence is prospering.

New businesses are opening, others are growing, many are hiring.

This did not happen by accident.

In Independence, we are always preparing, and always looking for opportunity.

**Accreditation** – A great example would be the Police Department, which successfully achieved accreditation. This was an extremely lengthy effort to document and bring City policies and practices in line with best practices for high-performing public safety agencies.

Only 39 cities or counties in the entire state have received this designation.

It is an acknowledgement that our police department operates at the forefront of accepted procedures for law enforcement.

The people who founded Independence didn't just decide one day to set out on the Oregon Trail.

They thought long and hard about it, prepared as best they could, and then turned their wagons to the west.

We - as a community - planned, prepared, and spent nearly 20 years working to revitalize.

Even in the middle of the great recession, we prepared - set the stage. We knew that opportunity would be coming and we wanted to be ready

And ready we are! It's happening!

Independence is experiencing economic growth unlike any time in its history.

Last year saw the completion of three industrial expansions and strong residential growth.

The trend has continued this year Specifically:

**Riverplace Apartments** A \$20M investment .

The apartments were completed in record time and are nearly full—

204 apartment units, a recreation center and three commercial businesses.

This was a great example of a public private partnership, the city working hand in hand with the developer to make things happen as we emerged difficult economic times.

**Sunset Meadows Subdivision** – 60 unit subdivision nears completion with the vast majority of the platted lots occupied by completed or near completed residences.

**Independence Subdivision** – This 100-unit subdivision was approved this year and should be developed this coming spring. And there is lots of interest in other properties.

**Cooper Building** – 100 plus year old building has been fully restored with a wonderful mixed-use rehabilitation effort.

The lights are on upstairs and the owner is beginning negotiations with prospects for ground floor commercial occupancies.

And we know people who are living there

**FCR** – This time last year we highlighted the pending arrival of a major new employer to the community.

FCR opened their doors in July and I'm thrilled to announce that they now employ over **200** people – and they have room for quite a few more.

We're always looking to see how we can take one success and turn it into another.

FCR was going to need a lot of new employees, in order to make a bigger event, we partnered with SEDCOR and Incite to organize a giant job fair.

The event featured 24 area employers representing several hundred available positions. Over 500 job seekers attended, many got hired on the spot, and many employers walked away with lists of 80+ interested applicants.

I can't tell you how wonderful it was to walk through the high school cafeteria and see the tables full of people filling out job applications. This was when I truly felt like we were out of the recession.

Even with all the growth and activity happening, we continue to plan and prepare. Always building on what came before.

**\*\*Water story from 1953\*\*** It's our obligation to continue to carry the ball forward.

Infrastructure is the foundation of any city. We're planting seeds for the future. Trees for our grandkids.

I want to highlight a couple of projects in particular:

**Parks Master Plan** – In 1996, the revitalization of Independence started with a Parks and Open Space Master Plan. We've knocked off most of the projects from that list, so this year it was time to create a new plan.

With the help of more than 500 citizens who participated every step of the way, we have a new vision for our parks.

This 20 year plan lays out a list of improvements for city parks and an exciting vision for almost 2.5 miles of recreational uses along the Willamette River.

We've already gotten started.

**Southern Arterial Predesign** – We're not just looking at parks. Most of our future residential growth will happen in the southwest part of town. We'll need new roads to get these people around.

Work has begun on the preliminary corridor alignment, early engineering and cost estimation for the first leg of a new Southern Arterial.

I Hope Monmouth can continue to be involved in this process, as they have been since we first considered expanding the UGB to this area.

In some cases, our plans have turned to action. In the past year we have realized some long-held community goals.

**Development of a Sports Complex** Riverplace provided additional benefit beyond just the development itself

In addition to welcoming several hundred new residents to the community, we were able to develop a creative partnership with the builder which allowed us to finish the first three soccer fields of Independence Sports Complex together with much-needed road improvements connecting the new motorized boat ramp and adjacent parking.

We're already talking with community groups about operating the fields, providing recreation opportunities for all parts of our community – families, kids, adults, and visitors.

But it's not just about recreation.

Tournaments will bring in thousands of players, parents and friends, who will spend money while they're here.

**Revitalize long-vacant buildings downtown** – I already mentioned it but it bears repeating.

The cooper building is the jewel of the downtown but had been vacant for decades.

Addressing long-vacant buildings downtown was an important community priority, and the City collaborated to help the Developer of this building acquire and renovate it.

**Independence Station** – It's a private project, it's officially for sale, and we stand ready to help anyone who expresses interest in purchasing and finishing this property.

**Train tracks** We found a letter from the City Council complaining to the original railroad about the tracks from the 1800's. This year, we got the last section fixed.

Historically cities have had trouble working with railroads, but with Portland and Western our City Staff found great partners who were willing to work together to solve the problem.

This was another long-time community goal, and I think it looks great now. Plus, it should last for decades.

While I'm proud of the strides we've made toward our most important community goals the past year also saw many less visible, but equally important successes

**Biker/boater Campground** opened to the public this year without much fanfare but great response from the bicycling community. Had visitors from across the country and as far away as Belgium.

I can't wait to see who comes this year now that word has gotten out and people have time to plan.

I'm hoping that others in our region will also embrace the economic benefits that bike tourism can bring to our area.

**Park Host** – Included with the campground was our first ever camp host, who served ably as a visitor resource center, kept an eye on the park overnight and pitched in with all the events in the amphitheater.

**Summer Series** – The River's Edge Series averaged over 1,000 people per show this year.

It was our best year ever.

This series continues to grow and the quality continues to improve. People are now coming as much for the great atmosphere as they are for the entertainment.

**Disc Golf** – Continuing our tradition of working with the community to improve our parks, this year saw the completion of a 15 hole disc golf course.

Volunteers installed all the baskets and organized an inaugural tournament which was a great success.

Thanks to MINET for helping fund the course and also to the Salem Disc Golf Association for their work installing, maintaining and organizing tournaments.

**Community Liaison** – For a second year we had a dedicated position focused on outreach to our latino population.

The development of the grant-funded Youth Garden and teaching module was well received. The community play was a great hit.

The monthly roundtables were well-attended and the Festival Informativo was a success for the second year running.

We're now being approached by other organizations and cities looking to leverage or replicate our efforts to reach out to all members of our community.

Pioneers were innovators before it was cool. We are continuing that tradition – exploring new ways of doing things and testing new ideas.

MINET is as important as sewers, water and roads.

It's not just about the services it offers to customers. MINET is a tool for Economic Development.

We built MINET to stay on the right side of the digital divide.

Our investment in MINET is beginning to pay off.

Working with MINET as a tool has allowed us to establish ourselves as a hub for innovation and development of broadband technologies.

We were named the first Innovate Oregon City and have formed relationships with a host of new partners.

Together we're exploring exciting topics like smart agriculture, smart cities, telehealth and more.

In the spirit of embracing technology and innovation, I would like to use this opportunity to unveil our latest technology tool.

We want to ensure a high quality of life for our community by giving our citizens a strong voice in its own government. With this in mind, we blended technology with good old fashioned ears-to-the-street and developed Indy Works.

This interactive tool fosters two-way communication between the City and Citizens – and it helps us keep the public up to date as we work to solve issues they identify.

Go to your app store and download it today. It's Free! It already has great functionality and will have much more over time.

**The Vision** – In order to properly prepare, it is important to have a vision, a unified understanding of where we're going.

Ever since those initial community planning efforts our efforts have included revitalizing our downtown and reconnecting the community to the river. This year we are beginning to undertake perhaps the most important and complex project we have ever done at 20-acre, downtown former Valley Concrete site.

The valley concrete site has been envisioned as a redevelopment opportunity for decades. In the last year we were able to acquire the property, and get it shovel ready.

Our community has a vision for this site, and we invested strategically to ensure it would come to fruition. That vision is to create a development that will serve to solidify Independence's position as a major Mid-Willamette Valley destination.

The wine industry and our historic hop industry have been tremendous, but relatively obscure successes in Polk County. This development will enhance our region, County and community as a focal point for the future.

In pursuit of that bold vision, I'm thrilled to say that in late December we selected a preferred developer and are in the process of negotiating a development agreement which will bring lodging and new residential growth downtown.

TOKOLA PROPERTIES – and Oregon company based in Gresham – has a long history of high-quality developments and successful public/private partnerships. We're excited to have such a successful development firm to work with on this critical project.

The 20-acre site includes over 11 acres of developable ground in the heart of downtown with the remainder to be dedicated and developed as an extension of Riverview Park

This new park will include a much-needed link to the Willamette River Trail which will run the entire river frontage within the Independence city limits.

Development of the valley concrete site will move our community to a new level of energy and economic vitality.

We've planned and prepared. Now we're operating.

2016 will see the continued evolution of the Valley concrete site.

Last year I said that 2014 was a banner year and 2015 would be even better. Looks like I was right, and 2016 should be better still.

We're Independence, and we're continuing to move forward