



2023

# STATE *of the* TOWN

MAYOR OLSON

## STATE OF THE TOWN

**An Annual Report to the Council and Citizens of Cathlamet**

In honor of February 18, 2023

*116<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of incorporation of Cathlamet*

## INTRODUCTION

It is an honor to present my first Annual Report to the Council and citizens of our community regarding the state of the Town of Cathlamet. This Report summarizes accomplishments and developments worthy of note during my first year as Mayor (2022) and includes a section looking ahead to challenges and opportunities facing the Town in 2023.

No single individual, including the Mayor, is solely responsible for Town governance and operations. Town governance is a collective endeavor, facilitated by an elected Town Council and dedicated Town staff, and entrusted to us by the citizens of Cathlamet. Transparency and accountability are essential in daily operations and decision-making, whether at Council meetings (where public comment is welcome) or at the ballot box (where voters remain the ultimate boss). Town policies and budgets are set by the Town Council. As Mayor, my job is to work with Town staff to carry out Council policy, spend budgeted funds wisely, and provide effective ongoing oversight of Town administration in all principal areas of Town responsibility.

In sharing information included in this Report, I want to recognize and acknowledge the diligence and many hours of hard work of Town Council members and Town staff in all departments, including Finance and Administration, Public Works, the Fire Department, the Library and many Town projects and activities too numerous to mention. I am very grateful to everyone. Highlights of the past year, by category, are listed in each section of the report.

This document could not have been prepared without essential data ably provided by each Town department head, including Clerk-Treasurer Sarah Clark, Public Works Superintendent David McNally, Fire Chief Vernon Barton, and Librarian Carol Blix. However, the final report is based on my notes; therefore, any errors or omissions are my own.

Mayor David Olson  
February, 2023



## FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

*Sarah Clark, Clerk-Treasurer; Michelle Baughman, Deputy Clerk*

- **Clean audit and solid finances:** The Town was notified of a clean financial bill of health upon completion of audit from the State Auditor's Office (November 2022), confirming that Town finances and procedures are in good shape, our budget is in balance, and our spending and collection procedures are correct and consistent with state law;
- **Waterfront Park grant award** - After a lot of grant work spanning nearly three years (including both 2020 grant and 2022 grant submittals) the Town was notified of a \$500,000 grant award (November) from the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for the long-awaited and widely-supported Cathlamet Waterfront Park (\$666 k project) based on Town's 2020 grant submittal written by Clerk-Treasurer Sarah Clark;
- **Complex utility rate revisions developed and implemented** - Successful completion and implementation of complex utility rate revisions incorporating water usage factor, as deliberated on and authorized by the Town Council (lengthy multi-year process);
- **Town Council meeting support and improvements in budget practices** - Staff support, preparation, minutes and follow-up were provided by the Clerk-Treasurer and Town Attorney for multiple Town Council meetings (scheduled twice a month) as well as work sessions, including on budget and Waterfront Park planning;
- **Butler Lot bid and construction process** - Preparation and release of bid documents and award of bid for construction of Butler Lot, Butler Lot Phase 1 construction completed on time (December 15<sup>th</sup>) and within budget;



- **Shoreline Management Plan reauthorized** – the State-required Shoreline Management Plan was reauthorized and updated in a public process consistent with State requirements approval (December)
- **New Town Councilor seated** – Kermit Chamberlain was welcomed as a new Town Councilmember (February) following a recruitment/replacement process resulting from a mid-term resignation;
- **2023 Town budget approved** - Development and process guidance for successful budget process, including incorporating recommended best policies and practices to improve Town functions, processes and finances; resulting in unanimous Council approval of balanced Town 2023 budget (December);
- **Low interest rate refinancing on Wastewater Treatment Plan loan** - Through the initiative of Councilmember Stowe, the Town applied for and secured a low-interest refinancing loan for WWTP (anticipate final implementation in 2023);
- **Oversight of multiple grants and projects** - Management and oversight of 12+ grants and even more projects throughout the year (some were prior-year grants with administrative responsibilities that rolled into 2022)
- **Regular compliance reporting consistent with applicable deadlines** – Town complied with multiple reporting requirements for a variety of regulatory activities, meeting all deadlines (Town reporting previously was too often not processed in a timely manner)
- **Town website improved and updated with relevant forms** – The Town website [www.townofcathlamet.com](http://www.townofcathlamet.com) reflects updates and improvements, including all customer service applications and forms;
- **Internal procedures improved** – Town internal procedures have been regularized and improved to implement efficiencies for current and future staff; regular staff meetings are now conducted with the Mayor, internal procedures for various Town Hall activities have been made regular and consistent; *much of this was NOT in place before*; these improvements and further efficiencies represent an ongoing process, we are always examining ways to do Town work better and more efficiently;
- **Special Acknowledgement** – I want to particularly call out the exemplary work of Clerk-Treasurer Sarah Clark who has gone above and beyond her assigned duties and worked many additional hours beyond her regular schedule to make these accomplishments possible.

## **PUBLIC WORKS**

*David McNally, Public Works Superintendent; Jay Watson, Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) & Water Treatment Plant (WTP) Mgr; Troy Gorley, James Smith, and David Florek - Public Works Crew*

- **Town Dock replaced and reinstalled** – the previously-dilapidated Town Dock at the foot of Broadway Street, historically a central feature of the Town (and the only way to arrive or depart before roads were constructed) was successfully replaced and reinstalled (July);
- **Port Sewer Lift Station Project completed** – the lift station that moves sewage from the Port's collection system to the Town's system was successfully overhauled, correcting a longstanding problem; this complex project required replacing the upper half of the manhole to accommodate a new pump and replacing a single sewage pump with two grinders, while providing additional facilities for the potential expansion of two additional grinder pumps. This also required replacing the discharge line from the Port's manhole to the Town's system and running new electrical connections as well;
- **Erickson Park renovations completed** – Budgeted repairs and improvements at Erickson Park (including upgrades to the picnic area and restrooms) were successfully completed on time and within budget (June);
- **Julia Butler Hansen (JBH) Pool reopened with improvements** – with financial help from Wahkiakum County, for which the Town is very grateful, the JBH Pool successfully reopened in June for the summer season, with new insulating pool





blankets and repairs to critical machinery, pool operations and procedures were reviewed with input from the volunteer Pool Advisory Committee;

- **Downtown Parking and Library lot repainted and restriped** – Long overdue restriping and repainting of downtown parking spaces and the Library lot were completed;
- **Sewer and Water systems operated successfully with few incidents** - aside from a Conserve Water notice (November) arising from raw water turbidity issues that brought to light a previously unknown electrical issue at Town reservoirs, the Water Treatment Plant following a severe storm, the Town's Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) and Water Plant successfully operated and duly maintained consistent with all State compliance requirements.
- **Low-cost ornamental ironwork obtained to enable Pioneer Cemetery renovations to stay on time and within budget** – due to the lapse of time and rising construction costs, the Town's grant-funded Pioneer Cemetery renovations were at risk of being incomplete; thanks to quick action by the Public Works Superintendent and Clerk-Treasurer an alternative and less expensive source of ornamental ironwork required for the project was found and secured;
- **Public enjoys new, safer reconstructed footbridge over Birnie Creek (2021)** – Diligent work by Public Works staff in 2021 (David McNally, Troy Gorley and David Florek) facilitated construction of a new and safer footbridge over Birnie Creek for the public to enjoy – this also anticipated a future need in connection with likely expanded public use when the Cathlamet Waterfront Park is constructed;
- **Butler Lot construction oversight** – Public Works was closely involved in the Phase 1 construction of the Butler Lot, and ensured that necessary advance work was done and the public was notified (through signage) about lot opening and closures;
- **New Public Works hire** – Public Works welcomed new utility hire James Smith to “join the team” in performing excellent public works and maintenance service; existing plant manager Jay Watson and Superintendent McNally, assisted by crewmembers David Florek and Troy Gorley continue to provide day to day operating oversight of the WWTP and WTP as well as all associated collection and distribution systems 365 days a year, including providing all required bi-weekly, monthly and quarterly sampling and lab reports to the State.

## **CATHLAMET FIRE DEPARTMENT**

*Vernon Barton, Chief; Jodie Mason, EMS Battalion Chief; Lauryn Roberts, EMS Billing Clerk*

- **Active Membership** – 29 (including 18 firefighters with 14 considered active). EMS division has 16 members (13 considered active). Fire department membership is currently enjoying the highest numbers in 10 years measured by both membership and participation. The Fire Chief reports that recruiting is finally bearing measurable results;
- **Participation** - In 2022 Members contributed approximately 6,379-man hours, consisting of EMS continuing education training (297 hours), Fire training (412 hours), EMT class (380 hours), In-station on call for EMS (520 hours), maintenance, inspection, and general station keeping for Fire (200 hours), Fire calls (250 hours) and EMS calls (4,320 hours). 2022 responses totaled 480 EMS calls and 16 Fire/Rescue calls.
- **EMS call volume at 5-year high** – EMS call volume in 2022 topped 480, representing a 5-year high; Fire/Rescue call volume was slightly lower than average, but only by a few calls; with volunteer numbers increasing, it is taking less time for EMS crews to respond to emergencies, and adequate staff is on the scene more often than in previous years;
- **Outstanding contributions** –the Fire Department annually recognizes outstanding members. Top three responder awards were presented to EMT Dan Bigelow, EMS Lt. Steven Lewis and EMT Justin Rainey. The Inspirational Award was awarded to EMS Lt. Ashley Tawater;



- **Equipment issues TBD** – Engine 902 (oldest unit) is out of service with maintenance issues (repairs in progress) all other apparatus is in working order; some tools and equipment are undergoing maintenance; some power tools are inadequate to cut through high strength steel used in newer cars – CFD is looking into newer tools;
- **CFD Public Events** – the community is grateful for CFD’s participation in the Santa Run, holiday parade, tree-lighting and Bald Eagle Day events; a Fill the Boot fundraising drive can be expected to repeat this year (2023); and
- **Review of International Property Maintenance Code** – Fire Chief is reviewing fire safety provisions of International Property Maintenance Code and should have report to Mayor in 2023 once Council reconsiders overall Code adoption.

## **CATHLAMET BLANCHE BRADLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY**

<https://www.cathlamet.lib.wa.us/>

*Carol Blix, Librarian; Library Board of Trustees: Leslie Billington, Carolyn Holt, Audrey Hedman, Judy VanderMaten, Robin Westphall*

- More than 1,000 registered users (split roughly evenly between Town and non-Town residents, non-resident User Fee \$15/year);
- More than 21,000 physical items in Library collection and available for checkout, including print materials and DVDs; an additional 64,600 in downloadable e-books and 47,900 in downloadable audiobooks, and thousands of online magazine titles are available through the library’s Washington Anytime Library subscription.
- Annual Library Visits: 2,890 (2022 figures)
- Monthly physical book circulation averages 610, with a 1,123-item average in the summer months – not bad for a town of Cathlamet’s small size!
- The library maintains a website and a Facebook page to help keep people aware of library news and events. On the website patrons may look at materials available for checkout, place holds on them, and log in to Washington Anytime Library, Gale research databases, Northstar computer literacy classes, and LinkedIn with Lynda computer and business classes, and the Washington Rural Heritage digital photo collection.
- Library has a corps of dedicated volunteers assisting with inventory, book processing, and reshelving; 17 volunteers logged over 1,900 hours combined;
- Conducted successful Summer Reading program and developed Beanstack challenge reading program for youth and adult reading (2022/2023);
- Local author Lily Brock was invited guest for book signing/book reading in November 2022, as our first in-library program since COVID).
- Library Board and Librarian continue to work with Town and Town Council to address parking and volunteer issues; Library Volunteer Parking sign ordered and placed (January 2023);
- Proclamations honoring the Library’s Summer Reading Program, Library Services, and Librarian Carol Blix were issued by the Town (December 2022);
- Library worked with Computer Link NW to secure a portion of Digital Equity grant to help fund new public computers and a printer (expected Winter 2023);
- Town is extremely appreciative of Wahkiakum County budget contribution toward Library operations;





## NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS, EVENTS & MILESTONES 2022

In addition to departmental activities and accomplishments, a number of 2022 projects, events and milestones are worth noting:



**Town 115<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration and Flag raising (February)** – The 115<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Town’s incorporation was celebrated with a Proclamation and a public event outside Town Hall on February 18<sup>th</sup>, with many celebrants in period costumes; the new Town Flag (developed by Mayor Jacobson) was raised for the first time; this event received considerable news coverage including a feature article in the *Chinook Observer*.



**Public Wi-Fi launch (June)** – The Cathlamet Public WiFi system, unique in SW Washington in providing free WiFi for local residents and visitors in Cathlamet’s downtown core, was successfully launched (June 2022) and a ceremonial “wirecutting” was held in front of the Wahkiakum Courthouse; the WiFi system is a unique public-private partnership among the Town, Port District #1, the PUD and the Chamber of Commerce, with Computer Link NW (network operator) – system usage already shows regular growth.



**Town Flag presented at AWC (June)** – the Mayor and Councilmember Waller helped present Cathlamet’s Town Flag for the first time to all Washington cities at the Association of Washington Cities Annual conference (Vancouver);

**High School Underwater Robotics Team earns international recognition** – the Town proclaimed June 4<sup>th</sup> “International Underwater Robotics Day” and the Wahkiakum HS Underwater Robotics Team subsequently earned international recognition at the the International SeaPerch Challenge, sponsored by the Office of Naval Research

**Wright Hardware parking lot opens to public (July)** – the Town appreciates the generous voluntary action of Lemmie

Rockford in developing and opening for public use a parking lot on the site of the old Wright Hardware store adjacent to Main Street– this lot has provided material help addressing ongoing parking issues downtown;



**Bald Eagle Day celebration includes Chinook participation (July)** – the Town cooperated with the Chamber on an outstanding Bald Eagle Day celebration (July 16<sup>th</sup>) with a record number of vendors, participants and parade entries; the celebration met all goals and finished in the black –notable is the first-ever participation of the Chinook Nation who honored the Town with singing and drumming in celebration of our indigenous heritage.



**Astoria Regatta (August)** – for the first time in anyone’s memory, the Town of Cathlamet was represented in the Astoria Regatta parade (August 13<sup>th</sup>) by the Mayor (with First Lady Dayle Olson) and Councilmember Waller (with son Tim Waller at the wheel) participating in a vintage vehicle arranged by former Astoria Mayor Willis Van Dusen, creating goodwill with our Columbia downriver neighbor;



### Town Council takes action to protect downtown street-facing retail business

**(August)** The Town Council took emergency action to forestall conversion of scarce street-facing Main Street retail space to residential use, seen as harmful to business in Cathlamet’s downtown core; the community was also greatly relieved to see mutually agreeable lease terms concluded to ensure continuance of Patty Cakes coffee shop on Main Street.

**Butler Lot Phase 1 construction begins (October 3<sup>rd</sup>) and concludes (December 15<sup>th</sup>)** – The Town moved forward with construction begun and concluded on Phase 1 of the Butler Lot project, awarded to the lowest responsive bidder, with construction completed on schedule by mid-December, and the lot re-opened for public parking until commencement of Phase 2 (installation of High-Power Level 1 EV charger) in 2023.



## LOOKING AHEAD - 2023

As can be expected, more work and many challenges await the Town in 2023. A partial list (not prioritized) includes the following:

- **Review and Finalize Town Comprehensive Plan (1<sup>st</sup> quarter)** – updating the Town Comprehensive Plan is more than 20 years overdue. With many hours of review and assistance already contributed by Town Council members (including Councilmembers Stowe and Waller), and outside staff support from the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG), we hope to soon bring a long-awaited, revised Comprehensive Plan forward for Council review;
- **Downtown Parking (1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter)** – a majority of Town Council members in attendance are already on record (2022) expressing support for restoring reasonable time limits (2 or 3 hours, weekdays) on parking in the downtown core in order to prevent weekday “squatting” and ensure limited parking spaces turn over and are more available to local residents and visitors; the Sheriff stands ready to enforce such limits; final action by the full Town Council on this issue will again be scheduled in the first half of 2023; separate action will also need to be scheduled on similar parking regulations in the Library and Butler lots;
- **Waterfront Park construction** – having at long last secured an RCO grant to build the long-awaited and widely supported Cathlamet Waterfront Park, the Town now faces the challenging task of undertaking the work in an environment of greatly increased construction costs, and meeting applicable grant deadlines, which may require completion of Phase 1 by 2024;



- **Skateboard Park grant at Erickson Park** – if funded by the Washington Legislature under the RCO grant applied for by the Town, the Town will need to prepare bids and move forward with completion of the long-awaited Skateboard Park at Erickson Park



- **School Sidewalk (S. 3<sup>rd</sup> St)** – the Town was awarded a grant to construct a long overdue sidewalk on S. 3<sup>rd</sup> St outside the Wahkiakum School campus; this project will hopefully begin in 2023;
- **Cathlamet Gateway Arch (Main St)** – the Town hopes to continue discussions with the Chamber regarding a possible Cathlamet Gateway Arch on Main Street at the entrance to the Town off SR 4;
- **Main Street revitalization** – with support from the Chamber and the Council, the Town hopes to explore creative initiatives to revitalize the downtown core, including exploring possibilities with the Washington St Main Street program <https://preservewa.org/programs/mainstreet/>

- **Conservation and preservation plan for Julia Butler Hansen Heritage Center** – I will continue to work with owner David Hansen, interested Town representatives, and State and Federal representatives to develop an appropriate conservation and preservation plan for the Julia Butler Hansen Heritage Center, a crown jewel of the Town and County's heritage and home to unique historic artifacts of significance to the Town, the County, the State and the USA.



- **Improved wireless cellular reception in Wahkiakum County** – through permit negotiations with an existing cell tower company, the Town hopes to work cooperatively with the County to improve wireless and cellular reception for Town and County residents, including in West Wahkiakum County, which will provide consumer and public benefits for all residents and visitors;
- **Additional support for Town administration** – I hope to bring forward a budget increment for additional administrative support for Town Hall administrative staff, particularly to provide additional support for our Clerk-Treasurer;
- **Repairs and improvements to Angle Street Path and Queen Sally sidewalk** – Town Public Works staff have been asked to develop a plan to move forward with necessary and overdue improvements to the Angle Street Path (next to Pioneer Church) and to remediate the longstanding water seepage over the sidewalk in front of Queen Sally's Park
- **Re-establish Planning Commission (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> quarter)** – once an updated Town Comprehensive Plan is approved by the Town Council, I hope to work with the Council to re-establish the Cathlamet Planning Commission (defunct since 2018);



- **Columbia Saloon** – the long-closed Columbia Saloon has blighted Cathlamet Main St for nearly two decades; I will not abandon efforts to catalyze development or abatement of this derelict building whose shameful abandonment and neglect by out-of-town owners continues to harm the business climate and revitalization of our Town core; among other things I hope the Council will complete action to adopt the International Property Management Code to provide the Town additional tools in this regard;
- **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Wahkiakum Ferry (2025)** – I look forward to working with the Chamber of Commerce and Wahkiakum County to develop “cross-Columbia” plans with Oregon to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wahkiakum Ferry, it is hoped we can confirm participation on both sides of the river (including with Clatsop County) and encourage visits by dignitaries (including Oregon and Washington Governors and legislative delegations from both states);



- **Columbia Street Traffic Calming Measures** – I look forward to working with Wahkiakum County and the Sheriff on implementing traffic calming measures on Columbia Street, supported by residents and the Sheriff, including reductions in the speed limit and possible construction of traffic humps;
- **High Power Electric Vehicle Charger Installation (Butler Lot) (3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> quarter)** – once necessary equipment arrives (delayed electric panel) the Town expects to move forward with construction of Phase 2 of the Butler Lot, and budget for Phase 3 (including ornamental landscaping, a kiosk and possibly a Town Clock);
- **SR 4 Scenic Byway designation** – SR 4 between Longview and Cathlamet is one of the most scenic stretches of highway in the state of Washington, but has been sorely neglected by not being included or designated by WSDOT as a State Scenic Byway; I plan to work with the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments and Wahkiakum County on this issue, together with our State Legislative Delegation
- **Work with PUD on possible backup water sources (Puget Island)** – I plan to continue discussions with the Wahkiakum PUD to explore possible backup water sources on Puget Island – these discussions have begun and will continue; any actionable plan will be brought forward for Council consideration;
- **CWCOG Chairmanship** – I am honored to have been elected Chair of the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments (2023). I hope to use this position in partnership with Wahkiakum Commissioner Lee Tischer, who has been elected 2023 Chair of the Southwest Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO- handling transportation planning for 5 SW Washington Counties) to seek and implement opportunities of benefit to the Town and the County.



## CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the outset, Town governance is a collective endeavor that cannot be accomplished by any one individual. I depend and rely on the contributions, initiatives, understanding, goodwill, and constructive criticism provided by the Town Council of Cathlamet. Each member of the Town Council contributed many hours toward the betterment of the Town over the last year and will continue to do so in 2023 (with at least one newly appointed member). I am appreciative and mindful of the contributions of each Council member, having previously served in that capacity myself for more than two years. I cannot complete this report without specifically recognizing the contributions of Robert Stowe (Position No. 1), Kermit Chamberlain (Position No. 2), CeCelia Raglin (Position No. 3), Jeanne Hendrickson (Position No. 4), and Laurel Waller (Position No. 5). I cannot thank the Council enough for their candor, time and understanding of the importance of Town business, along with their oversight and care for determining the right policies, and providing essential oversight to ensure the wise expenditure of Town resources.

Thanks once again to the Council and citizens of Cathlamet for your trust and the high honor of allowing me to serve as your Mayor.

Sincerely,

David C. Olson, Mayor

Town of Cathlamet

Email: [david.olson@townofcathlamet.com](mailto:david.olson@townofcathlamet.com)

Mobile: (360) 218-9956

***Photo credits:** Dayle Olson, Laurel Waller, Tiffany Hartman, David Olson, and Sarah Clark, with appreciation and acknowledgement for photos from the **Wahkiakum Eagle** newspaper (including Town birthday crowd scene and Wi-Fi wire cutting), used by permission.*