



2024

# STATE of the TOWN

MAYOR OLSON

## **STATE OF THE TOWN** **An Annual Report to the Council and Citizens of Cathlamet**

March 30, 2024

*Honoring the 117<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of incorporation of Cathlamet*





## **INTRODUCTION**

I am honored to present my second Annual Report to the citizens of our community regarding the state of the Town of Cathlamet. This Report summarizes developments worthy of note during my second year as Mayor (2023) and includes a section looking ahead to challenges facing the Town in 2024.

No single individual, including the Mayor, is solely responsible for Town governance and operations. Town governance is a collective endeavor entrusted to us by the citizens of Cathlamet, facilitated by an elected Town Council and dedicated Town staff. Transparency and accountability are essential in daily operations and decision-making, whether at Council meetings or at the ballot box. Town policies and budgets are set by the Town Council. As Mayor, I 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 work of Town staff in all departments, including Finance and Administration, Public Works, the Fire Department, the Library and Town projects and activities. I am grateful to everyone. Highlights of the past year, by category, are listed in each section of this report.

This document could not have been prepared without essential data ably provided by Town department heads, including Clerk-Treasurer Sarah Clark, Project Manager Annie Watters, Public Works Superintendent David McNally, Fire Chief Vernon Barton, and Librarian Cheri Rendler. However, this report is based on my own notes; therefore, any errors or omissions are my own.

Mayor David Olson  
March, 2024

## **FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION**

*Sarah Clark, Clerk-Treasurer, Annie Watters, Project Manager, Michelle Baughman, Deputy Clerk*



- **Clean audit and solid finances:** The Town entered the year with a clean financial bill of health following an audit from the State Auditor's Office (November 2022). Town finances continued in solid shape in 2023, with a balanced Town budget approved by the Council (December 2023) and Town spending and collection procedures certified as correct and consistent with state law;
- **Town receives \$673,905 from cell tower easement grant** - the Town received (December 2023-January 2024) more than \$500,000 from a cell tower easement grant negotiated by the Mayor; with an additional arrearage payment the unanticipated one-time funds to the Town totaled \$673,905.
- **Relocation to New Town Hall successfully completed** – The cell tower easement resources enabled the Town to handle an unexpected Town Hall move (due to toxic mold in the former building) without burdening tax dollars or reserves.
- **Project Manager recruitment** – After Council deliberation over the growing administrative workload, the Council (November) approved recruitment of a Project Manager to assist the Clerk-Treasurer and provide backup support for the Council and Mayor; Annie Watters was hired for this and began work in December;
- **Waterfront Park grant implementation** - After grant submittals spanning nearly three years (including both 2020 grant and 2022 grant submittals) the Town began implementation a \$500,000 grant award from the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) for the long-awaited Cathlamet Waterfront Park (\$666,000 project) based on the Town's 2020 grant submittal written by Clerk-Treasurer Sarah Clark;
- **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 (twice a month) as well as work sessions, including on budget and Waterfront Park planning;
- **Butler Lot bid completion** - Butler Lot construction was completed on time and within budget;
- **New Town Councilor seated** – Joe Baker was welcomed as a new Town Councilmember for Position No. 3 (February 2023) following a recruitment/replacement process resulting from a mid-term vacancy;
- **2024 Town budget approved** - Development and process guidance for successful budget process, including incorporating continued best policies and practices to improve Town functions, processes and finances; resulting in unanimous Council approval of balanced Town budget (December);
- **Oversight of multiple grants and projects** - Management and oversight of 12+ grants and more projects throughout the year;
- **Regular compliance reporting consistent with applicable deadlines** – Town complied with multiple reporting requirements for a variety of regulatory activities, meeting all deadlines;
- **Town website improvements continue** – The Town website [www.townofcathlamet.com](http://www.townofcathlamet.com) continues to reflect improvements, including customer service applications and forms;
- **Internal procedures improved** – Town internal procedures continue to reflect efficiencies; regular staff meetings are now conducted with the Mayor and key department heads, internal procedures for various Town Hall activities have been made regular and consistent;

## **PUBLIC WORKS**

*David McNally, Public Works Superintendent  
Troy Gorley, James Smith, and Brandon  
McClain - Public Works Crew*

- **Water Pressure Improvements** - The Boege Rd/SR 4 PRV project was successfully completed and low water pressures east of town have been increased approximately 12psi. Next steps are to place individual pressure reducing valves several customers at the lower elevation of the new eastern pressure zone to allow Town to increase the pressure an additional 10-15psi.
- **New Public Works hire** – Public Works welcomed new utility hire Brandon McClain (November) to “join the team” in performing excellent public works and maintenance service; assisted by crewmembers Troy Gorley and James Smith. Public Works continues 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.
- **WWTP highlights** - Daily WWTP plant operations continued, with routine and minor plant maintenance. A faulty ballast was replaced for one of the UV components. Digester samples were collected and prepared for biobag dumping. Public Works completed a substantial portion of a sewer mainline extension job on Columbia St, apart from additional necessary backfilling when weather permits.
- **Erickson Park security enhancements** – After repairs and improvements at Erickson Park (including upgrades to the picnic area and restrooms) some vandalism unfortunately occurred and additional security measures (including cameras) were implemented (Summer 2023));
- **Julia Butler Hansen (JBH) Pool reopened with improvements** – with financial help from Wahkiakum County, for which the Town is grateful, the JBH Pool successfully reopened in June for the summer season, pool operations and procedures were monitored with input and recommendations from the volunteer Pool Advisory Committee;
- **Sewer and Water systems operated successfully** - the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) and the Town’s Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) were successfully operated and maintained consistent with all State compliance requirements.
- **Removal of water hazard on sidewalk adjacent to Queen Sally’s Park** (see photo) – after decades of neglect, the Public Works crew is moving forward to install a French Drain on the sidewalk adjacent to Queen Sally’s Park (above the library) to abate a hazardous wet sidewalk that has existed at this location for many years (particularly hazardous during winter weather when ice forms).



# CATHLAMET FIRE DEPARTMENT

*Vernon Barton, Fire Chief*

*Jodie Mason, EMS Battalion Chief*

*Lauryn Roberts, EMS Billing Clerk*



- **Active Membership** Current Fire Department membership stands at 30 members. Of those 20 are active firefighters with 11 participating in the EMS division as well. EMS division also has 10 members who are strictly with the EMS division. The fire department membership is currently relatively high numbers in both membership as well as participation.
- **Participation** - In 2023 Members contributed approximately 7,890 -man hours, EMS continuing education training hours 238, Fire training hours 2672, EMT/EMR classes 440 hours, 520 hours of in station on call for EMS, 220 hours of maintenance, inspection, and general station keeping hours for Fire, 512 hours on Fire calls and 3,921 hours on Fire training. 2023 responses consisted of 478 EMS calls and 32 Fire/Rescue calls. The EMS call volume was consistent with prior years and the Fire/Rescue call volume was higher than average than average partially due to some re-structuring which has the fire division respond more often on EMS calls to support our care providers.
- **Outstanding Service.** The Department annually recognizes three top EMS responders and gives an inspirational award to a member whose performance is recognized as inspirational to the rest of the membership. The top three responder awards were presented to EMS LT. Justin Roberts, EMT/Secretary Lauryn Roberts and LT Paul Tillman, with the Inspirational Award to Lt. Ashley Tawater.
- **EMS call volume**– EMS call volume in 2023 continued at high levels; Fire/Rescue call volume was consistent, With higher volunteer numbers 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;
- **Equipment and Apparatus** - The Fire Department’s vehicles and apparatus are generally in good working order except for Engine 902 and Brush Truck 905 with lingering maintenance issues;
- **CFD Public Events** – the community is grateful for CFD’s participation in the Santa Run, holiday parade, tree-lighting and Bald Eagle Day events.

# **CATHLAMET BLANCHE BRADLEY PUBLIC LIBRARY**

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

*Carol Blix, Librarian (through September 2023); Cheri Rendler, Librarian (beginning September, 2023)*

*Library Board of Trustees:*

*Robin Westphall (Chair), Carolyn Holt, Audrey Hedman, Judy VanderMaten,*



- More than 780 registered users (split roughly evenly between Town and non-Town residents, new this year (2024) library cards are free if within Wahkiakum County. The Town wants to thank the Library Foundation for contributing library card scholarship funds in 2023 for county non-residents.
- About 20,000 physical items in Library collection available for checkout, including print materials and DVDs; an additional 80,606 in downloadable e-books and 59,041 in downloadable audiobooks, and thousands of online magazine titles are available through the library's Washington Anytime Library subscription.
- Monthly physical circulation averages 508, with a 1,175-item total in the summer months – total circulation of 6131.
- Online materials circulation 3972 for the year, materials available 24/7.
- Annual Library Visits: 3726 (2023 figure).
- 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, reshelving and programs; 17 volunteers logged over 1,300 hours combined.
- Conducted successful Summer Reading program, with 150 adults and children attending the summer sessions.
- Robo Rascals Robotics Club held learning sessions in the library for youth during the summer.
- Developed seasonal online Beanstack challenge reading programs for youth and adult reading (2023), with 78 participating.
- Held two storytime and craft events in conjunction with events downtown, and had over 190 people pass through the library doors on October 29 for Neewollah.
- Library worked with Computer Link NW to secure a portion of Digital Equity grant to help fund new public computers and a printer (August 2023)
- Library is working with Washington State Library to bring high speed Internet and improved wifi access in 2024.
- Town is appreciative of Wahkiakum County budget contribution toward Library operations.

# NOTEWORTHY PROJECTS, EVENTS & MILESTONES 2023

In addition to departmental activities and accomplishments, a number of 2023 projects, events and milestones are worth noting:

- **Butler Lot High Power Electric Vehicle charging station** – A high power Level 3 Electric Vehicle Charging station was installed and dedicated with a ribbon cutting (November 13<sup>th</sup>) at the Butler Lot;
- **High School Underwater Robotics Team earns international recognition** – the Wahkiakum HS Underwater Robotics Team became international champion by successfully competing at the International SeaPerch Challenge (June), sponsored by the Office of Naval Research
- **Bald Eagle Day celebration (July)** – the Town cooperated with the Chamber on an outstanding Bald Eagle Day celebration (July 15<sup>th</sup>) with a record number of vendors, participants and parade entries; the celebration met all goals and finished in the black;
- **Town joins Washington Main Street Affiliate program** After an application approved by the Town Council, Cathlamet was accepted as an affiliate of the Washington Main Street program, opening up networking and grant opportunities for a variety of projects to benefit the Town and Cathlamet Main Street; see: <https://preservewa.org/programs/mainstreet/>
- **Skate Park grant approved for Erickson Park** – the Town accepted a Skate Park grant from the state Recreation and Conservation Office for construction of a renovated skate park at Erickson Park, construction anticipated in 2024;



## LOOKING AHEAD - 2024

As can be expected, more work and many challenges await the Town in 2024. A partial list includes:

- **Waterfront Park construction** moving forward– having secured an RCO grant to build the long-awaited and widely supported Cathlamet Waterfront Park, the Town now moves forward with the task of undertaking the work in an environment of greatly increased construction costs, and meeting applicable grant deadlines, which requires completion of Phase 1 by 2025;
- **Skateboard Park reconstruction at Erickson Park** –the Town will be moving forward with completion of the long-awaited Skateboard Park at Erickson Park







- **School Sidewalk (S. 3<sup>rd</sup> St)** – the Town plans to move forward with a contractor to complete a long overdue sidewalk on S. 3<sup>rd</sup> St outside the Wahkiakum School campus; this project will hopefully be completed in 2024.
- **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;

- **Conservation and preservation plan for Julia Butler Hansen Heritage Center** – The Mayor will continue working 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.



- **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Wahkiakum Ferry (2025)** – The Mayor looks 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, a tentative celebration is planned (June 21, 2025) in cooperation with the Little Island Creamery and 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 Governor’s and legislative delegations from both states);
- **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
- **CWCOG Chairmanship** – I am honored to have been re-elected Chair of the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments (2024). I hope to use this position to catalyze opportunities of benefit to the Town and the County.

## CONCLUSION: STORMY WATERS

At this writing, Town Council meetings are often bogged down with endless discussions (including 4+ hour Council meetings with few decisions made); and personal animus from certain Council members directed at the Mayor. Numerous important Town issues or projects have been slowed or stranded due to this destructive and fruitless behavior which includes reflexive opposition to the Mayor on the part of disaffected Council members. Among many important matters delayed or abandoned due to Council inaction or squabbling over the past year are items such as finalizing the Town Comprehensive Plan, restoring the Planning Commission, re-establishing sensible Main Street parking regulation (desired by the majority of businesses and residents), installing traffic calming measures on critical roadways, exploring a proposed Creative District, completing initiatives including a kiosk and landscaping at the Butler Lot, and (most recently) refusing to move forward (thus far) with including public restrooms in the initial phase of the new Waterfront Park despite funding being available. Moreover, several Council members have followed a pattern of inappropriately interfering in Town personnel matters, may be flouting Washington Public Meetings law by conferring outside Council meetings, and have fueled a toxic environment for Town staff (as well as potential labor law violations) by meddling in personnel matters subject to collective bargaining. Beyond this, the Mayor's advocacy for an MRC grant after a Council member failed to do so, admonishment of the Council regarding a wasteful and unnecessary street overlay, and effort to ensure a potential Town/PUD utility merger (with potential ramifications including decimation of the Town public works crew and drastic increases in Town utility rates) were NOT discussed behind closed doors out of the public eye have been misrepresented, misconstrued and misquoted. Instead of correcting these multiple failures and omissions, three Council members have instead chosen to invest energy in demonizing the Mayor, with a majority adopting (without public notice) a resolution with no legal effect but rife with grudges and unsubstantiated allegations. Sadly, at this writing the Council majority seems determined to proceed along a self-destructive path rather than serve the public interest or needs of the citizens of Cathlamet.

As mentioned at the outset, Town governance is a collective endeavor that cannot be accomplished by one individual. The citizens of the Town rely on understanding, goodwill, and constructive cooperation between the Mayor and the Council. If we resume working together, I know we can do better. Let us NOT join the ranks of local governments in our area where squabbles are creating instability and wasting time and scarce tax dollars. Bullying and clinging to grudges and grievances are NOT good governance. Let's get back to work serving the public interest and the citizens of our beautiful and historic riverside Town!

Thanks once again to the 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