



## **2025 North Bend State of the City**

Council, thank you for this opportunity to share with you, our residents, business owners and staff, the North Bend State of the City in 2025.

Tonight, I reflect on annual accomplishments and forward-looking, 2025 goals that focus on our community's shared vision of ensuring North Bend remains a highly livable small city that is both easy to reach, and hard to leave.

Many of you know that my history in our mountain town began 34 years ago, as a new resident and photographer. Long before I joined the Planning Commission, the Downtown Foundation, the Snoqualmie Valley Museum; long before I was elected as your councilmember, and before I was elected as your mayor, I was a local photographer. Seeing North Bend through my camera lens provided me with a real candid view of our community, one that is rooted in culture, resilience, empathy and connection.

As we continue forward into this year, let us trust in these themes.

### **Fiscal Sustainability**

In February we convened for our annual council retreat, time set aside for deep connection, grounded communication and always, an opportunity to lay the groundwork for the year ahead. Together, we set ambitious goals with a focus on increasing the city's financial sustainability and furthering our work toward determining the best course of action for police services.

In December, the Council approved our city's 2025-2026 Biennial Budget. The Budget Book serves an important role, reflecting projects that nourish our community, while also exploring strategies to increase general fund revenues.

This last year, we prepared a 2025 – 2030 financial forecast that will help us to identify long-term opportunities and challenges. The forecast incorporates the city's largest areas of expenses, including:

- General Fund
- Capital Improvements program
- Utility funds

Coupled with the completion of the city's 20-year Fiscal Sustainability study, I am confident the city has a healthy and robust set of tools that will help us to identify strategies for long-term economic development and fiscal sustainability. The departments of Finance and Community and Economic Development worked together with the Council to ensure the completion of this strategic study.

The Council recognizes the city's tradition of fiscal conservatism is critical in keeping operations sustainable now, well into the future.

In small city government working closely with our teams is how we achieve success for the betterment of the collective whole. This year, the departments of Finance and Public Works will complete a 2025 Water, Sewer and Stormwater Utility Rates Study, important to ensuring that our utilities fees are both fair and accurate.

The departments of Finance and Community and Economic Development are working on a Tax Increment Area District Formation study. Once complete, the TIA will give us tools to help promote development and redevelopment in specific areas, which, in turn, allows the city to capture incremental property tax, an essential form of revenue that will ensure city services remain operational.

## **Customer Service and Citizen Engagement**

Being accessible to our public is an essential part of city operations. Together, we have made a variety of changes at City Hall that we think you will appreciate.

This winter, Council Chambers underwent a massive technological upgrade. Expect seamless presentations and improved sound, both in person and as a virtual participant.

In December, David Miller retired as City Administrator after seven years of public service with North Bend. We selected Bob Larson as Interim City Administrator. His strong background in municipal finance, community partnerships, economic and organizational development have been welcome skillsets to the city. We are currently working with GMP Consultants to find our next city administrator. The city will miss Bob's expertise and the time and care he invests in our staff and the Council.

This year we hosted our third North Bend Citizens Academy, an eight-week course that provides an in-depth look into city operations. The Council and I were honored to present 20 residents with certificates at the April 1<sup>st</sup> City Council meeting. The success of this program is a testament to the good work of building bridges in our community, of opening new pathways to civic engagement! The Citizens Academy will return in February 2026.

## **Planning for our future**

The City's Comprehensive Plan, our 20-year guide for land use and community growth, went through a required 10-year periodic update last year, and in December, the Council approved the update. The process involved an immense amount of work by Community and Economic Development Department staff, commissioners and councilmembers.

This plan is required by the Growth Management Act and county-wide planning policies. It builds on literally decades of planning work. In March, the city received the Puget Sound Regional Council's draft certification review and report, and in May, the city received the formal PSRC certification letter! Certification by PSRC opens eligibility for many important infrastructure grants.

## **Infrastructure and Transportation**

Our commitment to maintaining North Bend's small-town character while enhancing your quality-of-life shines through all city projects. One of the ways we do this is by investing in critical infrastructure.

In June, we celebrated the completion of Phase 2 of the city's largest ever capital project, Wastewater Treatment Plant High Priority Improvements. This critically important infrastructure investment supports the health and well-being of residents, city staff, and our environment. It also offers additional capacity, such as for the Meadowbrook Sewer Utility Local Improvement District, a ULID that will expand public sewer throughout the western portion of the City.

Approximately 80 percent of residents are connected to public sewer, with about 20 percent remaining on private septic. Public sewer in the western portion of the city will provide property owners with development opportunities that better align with zoned uses, promoting a robust commercial sales tax base.

In April, staff led residents on a tour of our newly enhanced treatment plant. We look forward to more tours this summer and fall.

And, later this year, I expect to see movement as we get closer to installation and connection of the Meadowbrook Sewer ULID pipe, which is scheduled to be completed in 2026.

You've likely heard talk about local water: where it comes from, who provides it, and its conservation. This year is an exciting time for North Bend as we continue to improve our use of this finite resource.

Both the City and our other local water purveyor, Sallal Water Association, are in the process of constructing two water interties. We anticipate that both interties will be ready to share water by the end of 2025, allowing for mutual support in emergencies and providing everyone with the ability to supply water to all property owners in their service areas.

Local transportation is another essential form of infrastructure. The city continues to make huge strides in improving universal accessibility throughout North Bend in a variety of ways, including, in 2024:

- Three new Rapid Rectangular Flashing Beacon crosswalks
- Cedar Falls Way and Ballarat Avenue overlay projects

Since 2021, the Council has budgeted for a series of ongoing pedestrian transportation projects called the Sidewalk Gap Removal Program. With improved connectivity, beautification and a safer streetscape in mind, we have evaluated our local sidewalks, identifying the highest needs for repair and connection where missing sidewalk segments exist. In 2024, we removed sidewalk gaps throughout four streets in town. This year, the City will tackle four more sidewalk gaps.

## **Parks and Trails**

Integral to our healthy community are safe, accessible parks and open spaces, a place where you can picnic with friends, watch your kids play, and if you are anything like me, walk your dog while taking in some picturesque North Bend alpenglow.

Last summer, community celebrated the official opening of two city parks: Dahlgren Family Park and Tennant Trailhead Park. Both parks offer unique amenities, and importantly, they share the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe's deep history and profound connection to this land with art and historical and educational interpretive signage. I hope you have had a chance to play pickleball, enjoy the new covered picnic space and play structures, and take in the view at Dahlgren. And, if you enjoy walking or mountain biking, I am sure you have discovered all that Tennant Trailhead Park has to offer!

These parks wouldn't be possible without community collaboration. Weaving local civic engagement into the important work of connecting with neighboring cities, other public agencies, the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe and nonprofit organizations are what makes this possible.

In that vein, a healthy combination of neighborly collaboration between North Bend and the City of Snoqualmie is helping to enhance the care and maintenance of Meadowbrook Farm Park with an interlocal agreement. ILAs allow us to combine resources, increasing efficiency, bringing services to smaller communities like North Bend, and sharing costs.

The land on which Meadowbrook Farm Park now exists was originally maintained for thousands of years by the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe as a hunting and food-growing prairie. Today, Meadowbrook Farm Park is jointly owned by both cities, and operations have transitioned from the Meadowbrook Farm Preservation Association to Si View Metropolitan Park District. The newly established Meadowbrook Farm Advisory Board now serves to make recommendations for the property to both cities and Si View, and the Meadowbrook Farm Preservation Association provides for educational and interpretive activities and programs on the property.

In February, many of you joined the Public Works Department and project partners for the Ballarat Plaza Workshop. We shared ideas and gathered your feedback on a concept that could quite literally transform a small section of Ballarat Avenue roadway into a landscaped plaza area, with seating, a water feature, a community stage and a built-in telescope. Staff and the city's consultant, Site Workshop, are applying your feedback to design concepts. Construction may begin between October 2025 and January 2026.

Equally important to our parks are well planned trails and river access. They connect us with one another and guide us through nature, while also discouraging use of environmentally sensitive critical natural areas and trespassing onto private property. What began in 2024 through a grant by the Department of Ecology, the Shoreline Access and Trail Plan will provide recommendations for potential future access points and trails. Our goal is to enhance recreation opportunities while protecting the shoreline from recreational use impacts. In February, over 100 community members showed up to listen, talk and connect.

We take your feedback seriously. The Community and Economic Development Department and the city's consultant, Facet, collected your feedback, presented it to the Community and Economic Development Committee in March, and are working on updated plans.

Local engagement of this magnitude is what healthy communities are made of! Your interest and care foster balanced insight, and it really helps to ensure responsive and accountable governance. Thank you for this.

Public Works plans will also progress this year on the State Route 202 Shared Use Trail Project. The project will increase connectivity, with a pedestrian bridge crossing the South Fork Snoqualmie River, and gravel trails connecting you to Tollgate Farm Park.

In addition to trails, the Community and Economic Development Department is in the initial stages of creating a Bicycle Mobility Plan. Once complete, the plan will make it easier to incorporate a more robust cycling program into future capital improvements. Expect outreach this year with invitations to share your ideas.

### **Community Development**

Now, as we continue, let us pause for a moment, to think about *each other*.

I have known many of you for years – decades, even.

I have photographed pivotal life moments, family of all sorts, local infrastructure, transportation projects, community events and birds eye views of our valley from 8,000 feet up. Of all the history and perspectives I have documented, there is one overarching theme that always manages to filter its way up.

It is one of fellowship.

This very deep and very strong small-town sense of care for one another is what I believe keeps us connected, and it shows itself in many ways, be it through service at the Snoqualmie Valley Foodbank, Reclaim, Friends of the North Bend Library, the Mt. Si Senior Center, cleaning up our local trails with Friends of the Trail, through work at Encompass or our local libraries.

There are so many ways we are in fellowship with one another. And believe me, the Council and I listen when you tell us that the need for more services and public space is ever present. We are always looking for ways to help.

In 2024, we asked for resident feedback on ideas for a key downtown property. You have likely driven past 302 W North Bend Way countless times. Located on the corner of North Bend Way and Sydney Avenue, you see a 1,400 square foot building surrounded by asphalt. What was, before 2021, a gas station and convenience store, today is a vacant lot with potentially contaminated soil.

So, if we were able to remediate possibly contaminated soil and redevelop this lot into something that could benefit downtown and the community, what would you suggest?

With over 740 responses, we see that you see the potential for something involving community connection. Staff are working with the Washington State Department of Ecology to understand the site's cleanup needs. We hope to transform the site through a combination of sustainable urban development and environmental quality, while incorporating redevelopment that benefits you and enhances our downtown's unique, cherished identity.

And, I said it when we met last year...I will say it again: We are not a complete community unless we all can afford to live here. North Bend must be a city where working people can work, raise a family, and eventually retire.

230 Main Avenue, a property downtown, was purchased by the city in 2022 for this very purpose. It will provide affordable rental homes for families making no more than 60 percent of King County median income. This year, the 230

Main Advisory Committee recommended the developer, Related NW, to move forward with the project. Staff are working with Related NW to negotiate a development agreement.

## **New Business**

With Council direction and support, staff has also worked toward focusing resources on bringing new businesses to the city that are of value to our residents and thus working to uphold our live and play where you work philosophy, companies that represent industries in retail, manufacturing, IT, Biosciences, and human services organizations, thanks to lead generation from the Community and Economic Development Department and organizations such as the SnoValley Chamber and Greater Seattle Partners.

I am excited to share that I will be joining Community and Economic Development staff for the ICSC Convention in May, where we will have the unique chance to engage with a wide array of businesses in search of a home; businesses that will benefit our community.

What does this mean for North Bend? If an organization proves to be the right fit for our community both in services, employment and design, we may see new business neighbors in the coming year.

## **Public Safety**

Public safety continues to be a top priority for the city. In fact, well over half of general fund revenues are spent on police and fire services, with North Bend's contract for policing services currently representing the city's single largest expenditure.

The City of North Bend has contracted with the City of Snoqualmie for law enforcement and police services since September of 2012, and the time has arrived to review and move forward with a fresh contract or another plan. This past year, we have led discussions about police services while evaluating all provider options, including:

- continuing to contract with the City of Snoqualmie,
- forming North Bend's own police department
- or contracting with the King County Sheriff's Office.

Long-term financial sustainability and maintaining public safety and other city services are essential components of our healthy community. We are confident that an informed, well-researched decision is what is best for North Bend.

Another significant part of public safety is emergency management support. Beginning in 2024, we increased our work in this area. Staff participated in a tabletop exercise this year that included working with local and regional agencies during a simulated emergency event. Together, we identified roles, increased collaboration and located areas that need more work.

Last summer we co-hosted a series of community workshops that focused on wildfire mitigation with Eastside Fire and Rescue and King County Emergency Management. Look for more outreach events this year! As we all know, a big part of community preparedness begins at home, and it should be reinforced by support from your local government.

Please stop by City Hall any weekday! Whether you want to talk about emergency preparedness, permits, have questions about your utilities bill, or just want a quiet place to sit in our public hall, our doors are open, and we are here to help. I enjoy connecting with all our residents, and I want to meet you where you're at. City Hall is a public space. I encourage you to use it, appreciate it and care for it as much as I do.

**In closing**, thank you for the opportunity to reflect on this past year while also looking ahead as we continue with positive momentum through 2025. Together, let us continue the good work of fellowship and connection, always with the goal of supporting and enhancing our uniquely beautiful, highly livable North Bend and Snoqualmie Valley.

*Mary Miller*

Mayor, City of North Bend