



## Message from the Mayor | Quarterly Message from the Mayor

Dear North Bend Residents,

This summer I passed the 25-year mark as a resident of North Bend. By some measures, that's not long considering the history of the Snoqualmie Tribe in the valley or even the "recent" founders who settled on our city name. On the other hand, I have likely lived here longer than half of our current residents. My daughters grew up along the South Fork of the Snoqualmie River exploring the woods as Girl Scouts, rafted the Middle Fork as highschoolers tend to do, and created friendships to last a lifetime. My wife and I not only engaged in all the things parents do, but we have also had satisfying careers and made our own friendships by getting involved in our community through many of our essential non-profits, and, for me, serving our city directly.

Yes, our beautiful mountain town has gone through many growth spurts and quiet periods since its founding in 1909. We have experienced both in the past few decades, while we now begin winding down on many new neighborhoods planned as far back as the '90s. And yet that which I treasure most and what keeps me here working with, and for, you remains strong: our small-town sense of community persists, much as it was when I arrived and was welcomed by those who came before me.

A healthy community includes leaders committed to creating, enriching, and guiding members toward the best outcomes achievable for everyone that makes up our collective home. I was reminded of this fundamental quality yet again this spring while interviewing applicants for various city commission vacancies. One question I had for everyone was, "Why did you choose North Bend?" Their responses were consistent: people move here because they want to be in a friendly, outdoor, community-minded town. What struck me also was the realization that most applicants were newer residents. They want to give back, make a positive impact, and show commitment to help nourish our community.

Our community has also evolved over the years, and one thing most of us have not had to think about is water supply needs. Valley life is river life, and it is part of what makes our highly livable small town the premier outdoor recreation destination in the Puget Sound region.

### **Our collective lifeblood depends on water.**

Your tap runs with clean, safe water when you need it and it's no simple system to deliver. It is actually a fundamental duty to serve and a requirement of water suppliers by state law. Our city and much of the surrounding unincorporated area is served by one of two systems: the City of North Bend's municipal water system – by which most of us are served water – or by the Sallal Water Association, a member-owned water co-op. For over 50 years, these two water providers had largely different customers and worked near each other to connect property owners, residents, and businesses within their respective service areas. Over time, the city limits expanded and water supply as well as the service infrastructure to deliver it has become more complex. Now, most new customers of Sallal are also within the city limits.

Unfortunately, for some time now, Sallal has lacked adequate water resources to serve property owners and residents seeking to have what most of us take for granted – clean, safe water at our tap. The City stepped in twice in recent years to fill the gap by providing water service to affected property owners. You may also know that the City has attempted to reach a Water Supply Agreement with Sallal for over 15 years. Those efforts have been continually turned aside by Sallal. This June, it became evident that a holistic solution was needed when the Sallal Board of Directors imposed an emergency moratorium prohibiting all new water connections. This is not a situation that can be ignored.

While your elected officials are concerned, we do have a solution. This week, after careful consideration by your City Council, I attended a meeting of the Sallal Board of Directors and offered, on behalf of the City, to purchase Sallal in its entirety for its fair market value. This purchase would merge the Sallal water system with the City's water system. The consolidated water system will ensure that all current and future water customers are able to get the water they need when they need it. The offer, while required to meet state law purchase guidelines, will seek to provide a rate structure to protect current water customers and compensate Sallal customers for their investment.

City Council and I look forward to working with the Sallal Board of Directors to promptly reach an agreement for the betterment of all residents, businesses, and property owners. It's necessary and it's the right thing to do to protect the property rights of all concerned. Being able to provide one consolidated water system under professional management is a true testament to community investment. As a municipal government, we have the legal and moral obligation to ensure all customers have access to water and to do our part to protect the health of the Snoqualmie River. That can best be done by a public agency who answers to you, the taxpayer.

I understand you may have questions and I want to make sure you have access to answers. Our website offers a resource that addresses a wide range of questions and provides maps and more contact information. Take a look at [www.northbendwa.gov/376/East-North-Bend-Water-Update](http://www.northbendwa.gov/376/East-North-Bend-Water-Update).

#### **Other happenings of note.**

#### **Infrastructure & Transportation Improvements**

As we move into fall, let's look back at this last quarter's highlights, milestones and achievements.

We recognize that a big part of responsible water use is to conserve the resource as we use it. August 15th marked our third year of formal water conservation within the City under our [Water Conservation Ordinance](#). Thank you for once again setting a positive example for the entire region by joining us in taking voluntary measures to conserve water. The good news is not only are you doing a great job, but it has also combined with a great "water year" and our mitigation requirements have been minimal. In addition to the efforts of individual users, we continue to upgrade our water distribution system by replacing aging watermains, aggressively fixing reported leaks, and working to complete a 100% replacement of water meters in the city. This year's two major watermain and roadway replacement projects, NE Sixth Street and Second Street, are well underway and anticipated to finish by early fall. Next up, we will return to the Silver Creek neighborhood for work along Ogle Avenue Northeast, Merritt Avenue Northeast, Thrasher Avenue Northeast and Pickett Avenue Northeast.

As staff and Council work to enhance local transportation, we are always looking for ways to mitigate future traffic impacts in areas that will need it, such as roundabouts at key intersections, connecting and filling gaps in sidewalks and trails, and addressing other roadway deficiencies.

A significant investment in our infrastructure is sidewalk repairs and extensions (“gap closing”). In response to your feedback regarding walkability, universal accessibility, and well-maintained roads, we’ve instituted programs to address aging sidewalks and to extend our sidewalks/paths where connections have been lacking.

Work is well underway along the busy corridor of North Bend Way between Ballarat Avenue North and McClellan Avenue. As part of the Sidewalk Gap project, this stretch of road will soon have a sidewalk, storm drainage, an ADA curb ramp, street trees with root barriers, streetlights, and additional parking. Another Gap project will be a sidewalk extension and crosswalk across the bustling Cedar Falls Way and Maloney Grove intersection. Design work is happening now, with construction anticipated to begin next spring.

Contractor crews will soon complete Forster Woods repairs and are hard at work in other areas of downtown North Bend where they are removing and replacing numerous street trees that have outgrown narrow landscape areas. The resulting cracked, broken, and lifted sidewalk panels and driveways are being repaired. The downtown street trees with tree wells will be replaced this fall with new ones that are more suited to these environments.

While these improvements are essential components to maintaining our healthy infrastructure, we understand the noisy, dusty inconvenience of this summer’s work, especially considering that much of it is occurring right in front of, and around, local businesses. Please continue to support these businesses, especially during this time.

### **Community Input Opportunities**

Several significant future planning initiatives and required plan updates were approved in budget adjustments late last year, and your elected officials want to hear from you. We will soon be actively reaching out to seek your input on a variety of topics that will help guide our future.

With that, this summer we have been working to create more ways to connect with you by contracting with a professional survey company to conduct a citywide survey that invites feedback and other opinions on your smalltown community. It will be sent to a completely random sampling of residents, with the intention of gathering a wide variety of responses. If you receive it, please fill it out! Feedback is anonymous and your opinions will help us assess how well we are meeting community needs. It will influence decisions on many fronts, including our financial choices and service adjustments.

Part of our commitment to investing in your city today is also planning for future generations. City Council and staff recognize a need for a plan that fosters sustainable investment, creates family wage jobs, and provides more goods, services, and amenities to better meet residents’ needs. In June, Council approved a motion authorizing a contract for an Economic Development Action Plan. The Plan will incorporate input from community stakeholders, with specific, actionable strategies for city staff, in addition to providing guidance to Council on issues relating to the economic health and well-being of the City.

This quarter, we began reviews which will lead to updating elements of the City's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan organizes goals, objectives, policies, actions, and standards that help guide the day-to-day decisions of your elected officials and city staff. Right now, we are considering the Transportation and Parks Elements. We will welcome your feedback with a variety of opportunities to participate, including public hearings and surveys. The full plan update should be complete by the end of 2024.

In July, contractors wrapped up work on the Train Depot Roof Rehabilitation project, with the help of a \$150,000 grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce. The 35-year-old roof is now replaced with a strong, standing seam metal roof that protects it from decay. While this work was underway, we have been laying the groundwork for future local park improvements. Taylor Park, the home of our North Bend Train Depot and a focal part of our downtown, and Riverfront Park, a four-acre, undeveloped property on the South Fork of the Snoqualmie River, will be the focus of new design work thanks to City Council's approval of \$250,000 saved for this purpose in the 2022 budget. Your input will be sought on these plans as well in upcoming community outreach.

Your elected officials share in your appreciation of our outdoors, and the very real responsibility we have to protect our environment. In June, City Council approved my recommendation for the City to join the King County-Climate Collaboration, also known as the K4C. As a partnership of local governments, we will work together to accelerate climate action by combining knowledge, resources, and advocacy. Efforts include climate change outreach, coordination in response to climate change and solutions, working to secure grant funding and other resources.

### **New Businesses**

We have had the pleasure of welcoming several new, locally-owned businesses to town this last quarter. Quill and Ink Tattoo opened earlier this summer, in collaboration with Twin Peaks Nutrition and Wellness. King's Quality Auto Repair is also new to town, offering a 3,500 square foot five-bay shop. Pioneer Coffee is growing too, having ventured into a drive-through called Vintage Baristas, in addition to their storefront downtown.

### **Budget**

City Council has been working with staff on a community investment plan for the \$2+ million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from the Department of Treasury. We recognize these funds represent a once-in-a-generation investment in our community and an exciting opportunity to strategically invest in initiatives that will have a positive, long-term impact. Last month, City Council supported proposed budget allocations totaling nearly \$1.6 million of these funds for projects that will support economic development, tourism, public facilities improvements, direct aid to our community and city-related infrastructure, while reserving remaining funds for further evaluation. Stay tuned for an update on ARPA projects as we move forward in this process.

### **Community Engagement**

This summer, North Bend welcomed the 12th annual Downtown Block Party. Thousands turned out for the festival and partook in a large Valley Realty Group vendor fair, shopped with local merchants, enjoyed the North Bend Downtown Foundation Beer and Wine Garden, played in the Encompass Kid Zone, and cheered on local performers as well as a wide array of bands and musicians at the QFC stage.

This last weekend, many residents and visitors showed up for the historic Festival at Mt. Si, which incorporated parades, a vendor fair, live music, traditional contests, and a laser show. It was so good to see this community mainstay back.

Coming September 10th is the return of Sip Suds and Si, where neighbors and friends will enjoy tastes of local and regional wine, beer and cider, shop with local merchants and artists, and enjoy live music all throughout downtown North Bend.

Seeing the smiles, art, live music, and overall joy that the return of community events brings to our town is truly heartwarming. Events such as these are twofold in their benefits, as they bring people together, while sustaining local businesses, musicians, artists, and organizations that give right back to the very community that supports them.

With that, I hope you grab onto these remaining final weeks of summer, play outside, support local businesses and service agencies, and continue to add to the vibrancy that is our mountain town.

Sincerely,

*Mayor Rob*