

Cityvision

THE ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON CITIES MAGAZINE

THE PATH AHEAD

Strategies for leadership
in a dynamic landscape

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Time flies when you are having fun—and even sometimes when you are not. This past year, we have all had to adapt to changing realities that have required us to do things differently. This year as AWC president has flown by, and though it was certainly not what I had expected, it was certainly rewarding and memorable.

Change is inevitable, and those who are able to adapt will, as Darwin put it, survive to be the fittest. But adaptation is not always easy, because it requires us to see the ugly truth, acknowledge our own weaknesses, and change behaviors. It may seem easier to stay the course and resist—though we all know what happens then.

In my opinion, leadership is often best defined when confronted by times of monumental challenge. This past year, I have been witness to many examples of local officials rising up to lead your communities, as illustrated in this edition of *Cityvision*. Leadership requires looking ahead to envision more than only that which is in front of us. It requires us to ask ourselves what we wish to see; it requires the strength to seize the moment to create opportunity; it requires developing new and innovative ways to do things; and it requires us to engage in the difficult, but necessary, conversations of our time.

As the first female Asian American AWC president, I know that these conversations are not always easy to have, regardless of one's own race or ethnicity. The complex issues of today, including on matters of race, equality, equity, and inclusion, require us to lead with open hearts and minds. As local leaders, we serve a multitude of constituents with varying backgrounds, opinions, experiences, and political affiliation—some of which will inevitably be foreign to our own. Yet we should recognize that these are not necessarily opposing views.

It is our job to listen, hear, and seek solutions that will ensure our whole community not only survives, but thrives into the future. I believe we can adapt to meet today's complex challenges of leadership!

Soo Ing-Moody
Mayor, Twisp



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Cityvision

Summer 2021

Federal Way Mayor Jim Ferrell enjoys some of his diverse community's growing public space.

GOAL ORIENTED,

P. 15



1 WELCOME NOTE

5 CITYBEAT

Washington cities get resourceful to secure federal funding, provide human services, and build new community futures. And in our popular **NOTED** feature, we assess diverse municipal roles.

15 CITYSCOPE

Mayor Jim Ferrell reflects on how being a Husky linebacker under legendary coach Don James prepared him to tackle the job of leading Federal Way.

18 feature VINTAGE PERFORMANCE

Walla Walla's creative, committed leadership helps a wine country community continue to thrive even in a year of unprecedented challenges.
BY DEVON O'NEIL

29 CITYWISE

Expert perspectives on leading from below, inspiring remote teams, and punching above your city's weight.

36 CITYSCOPE

Leadership, coupled with collaboration, lays the groundwork for recovery.



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Citybeat

Crisis Communication

Fife works with its neighbors to resolve a potentially volatile housing protest.


ON DECEMBER 24, 2020, a local advocacy organization booked 16 rooms at the Travelodge in Fife and invited dozens of its constituents to shelter there on the holiday eve. But as Christmas Day came and went and the group refused to leave, Tacoma Housing Now, which had paid for a single night, informed the hotel's owner that it was staging a sleep-in: local government would be footing the bill for an extended stay.

The owner eventually called the police, and on Monday evening, December 28, Fife Police Chief Peter Fisher and City Manager Hyun Kim met the owner, Shawn Randhawa, at his property. Randhawa told them he'd had enough; he wanted the squatters—reported by Tacoma Housing Now to number more than 40, including at least one who had tested positive for coronavirus—gone.

"We needed to hear him say that," Kim recalls. He and Fisher didn't want to incite a mass arrest or altercation; local media were already covering the occupation, and they knew their actions would be scrutinized in the context of the heightened tension between law enforcement and the public nationally.

Kim and Fisher asked the owner if they could have a couple of days to find alternative housing for the group. Since the only paying Travelodge guests had already left, Randhawa agreed to be patient while the city worked to find a solution. Negotiating over the phone with a Tacoma Housing Now representative named Arrow, Kim also sent a letter asking for cooperation.

CONTINUED ON P.12 ►



WILL
NOT
LEAVE

SLICE
OF LIFE

Harvesting Hope

Embracing mass timber technology,
Darrington rebuilds its economy

BY LAURA FURR MERICAS

LATER THIS YEAR, if all goes as planned, the Town of Darrington will break ground on a first-of-its-kind manufacturing and research facility focused on the emerging technology of mass timber. The Darrington Wood Innovation Center, which will employ 150, is an exercise in collaborative leadership seven years in the making, born out of economic necessity, promise, and tragedy.

Having lost 90 percent of its timber jobs in the decades-long collapse of that industry, Darrington already was struggling to survive when in 2014 a mudslide buried 47 homes near the neighboring community of Oso and severed SR 530, Darrington's primary link to population centers and jobs. Not long after the slide, Darrington

Mayor Dan Rankin and Snohomish County Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Coordinator Linda Neunzig attended a statewide conference exploring the potential of how mass timber—engineered wood products touted as low-carbon alternatives to concrete and steel—might revitalize the economies of rural, forest-product towns in an era of climate change.

The opportunity seemed tailor-made to Darrington's predicament. "We are completely surrounded by national forests and the timber and logging industry," Rankin says. "We wanted something that fit our community as a whole, not only for jobs."

So the duo, both Snohomish County natives, began forming relationships with

leaders across the state. While Rankin and Neunzig worked with local and regional leaders to devise a mass timber economic revitalization plan for Darrington, the town's congressional delegation—Sen. Maria Cantwell and Rep. Suzan DelBene—worked together in Washington, DC, to secure federal economic relief funding in the aftermath of the mudslide.

With a \$6 million grant from the US Economic Development Administration (which helped secure a \$2 million award from the state's Community Economic Revitalization Board), the town is now moving forward with plans to transform a former 93-acre tree farm into the Darrington Wood Innovation Center. The campus will be built out in phases,

"WE ARE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED BY NATIONAL FORESTS AND THE TIMBER AND LOGGING INDUSTRY. WE WANTED SOMETHING THAT FIT OUR COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE, NOT ONLY FOR JOBS."

starting with a private cross-laminated timber production facility and a mass timber modular manufacturer followed by a sustainable forest products research and education center, with 30 acres of forestland held in trust in perpetuity for recreation and education (thanks to a \$157,000 grant from the Snohomish County Conservation Futures program).

For Darrington, where roughly half of the 1,400 residents commute up to 70 miles each way to find what he calls "meaningful work," Rankin expects the development will be transformative, creating dozens of local family-wage jobs, spurring private investment, and providing an elusive commodity: hope.

"For a small town like ours, this is a huge moment," says Rankin, a sawmill operator who has been Darrington's mayor since 2012. "For the folks that live here, the kids that are coming out of high school here, the kids that have gone on to college and soon will be able to return here and have opportunities—these are the things that make a town whole." **C**



POWER AID

The recently signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) brings much-needed financial assistance to individuals, businesses, and local governments across the nation. Among the details:

\$1.9
TRILLION

Total funding amount of the
AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

\$65.1
BILLION

Funding for
US CITIES AND TOWNS

\$4.4
BILLION

Funding for
WASHINGTON STATE

\$1.2
BILLION

Funding for
WASHINGTON CITIES AND TOWNS

\$1.4
BILLION

Funding for
WASHINGTON COUNTIES

Source: Association of Washington Cities

TOOL
KIT

FORMULA FOR RECOVERY

AWC + NLC = TLC: federal pandemic aid for local governments in Washington and all across America

BY LAURA FURR MERICAS

WHEN THE AMERICAN Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) was approved in March, the federal relief package included a historic \$130 billion to help cities and counties mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic. A behind-the-scenes effort by the National League of Cities along with 49 municipal leagues, including the Association of Washington Cities, was essential in bringing that aid to fruition.


Following the passage of the CARES Act a year earlier, municipal leaders around the country began to rally together around the idea that local governments—particularly smaller towns and villages—had been overlooked. The CARES Act had awarded \$8.2 billion in relief funds to 36 large cities with populations greater than 500,000. But according to Irma Esparza Diggs, senior executive and director of federal advocacy with NLC, that left 99.8 percent of the approximately 19,000 US municipalities shy of the benchmark for receiving aid. Of Washington’s 281 cities, Seattle was the only one with a population above the limit.

“We wanted to make sure that cities had the resources to help businesses survive; to make sure we didn’t have to lay off police officers, firefighters, and public works staff; and to ensure the safety of essential workers,” explains Peter King, CEO of AWC, which worked with Diggs’s team to lobby for direct funds for municipalities regardless of size. To stay on task, Diggs set up weekly calls with municipal league directors. “We really changed how we worked as an organization, working across the organization beyond just our everyday missions, to be able to make this an all-hands-on-deck effort,” Diggs says.

Next, they called on local leaders from across the country, including Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards, NLC second vice president, to share stories from their communities. NLC coordinated meetings with Congressmembers, organized state press conferences, and set up media interviews for league directors and their constituents to speak about how the pandemic was affecting their livelihoods. Their focus was on storytelling and education, eventually becoming a full-fledged campaign dubbed Cities Are Essential.

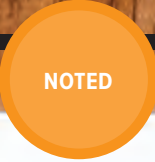
“A big part of our job was to tell the story of who was receiving funding and who wasn’t, which really helped to build support on both sides,” Diggs adds.

While the Department of Treasury finalizes specific guidelines on how funds can be spent and what reporting will be required, NLC has launched a searchable database of projected allocations. As those details get worked out—for example, unlike CARES Act funding, ARP relief can be used to recover lost revenues and can be spent for up to three years—both Diggs and King say local leaders should consult the database to anticipate what ARP relief their community will be receiving and strategize how to best use the flexible funds.

“Assess what your community needs are; assess what your government operations are,” Diggs advises. “Really prioritize the fiscal stability and returning to work of not only your municipal operations, but also your families, your businesses.” 



For more information:
nlc.org



MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBER HANDBOOK

An excerpt from Chapter 9:
Resolving and preventing mayor-council conflict

It is essential that mayors and councilmembers understand their roles and how they relate to each other and staff. Many conflicts in city governments happen due to role confusion, resulting in overstepping the boundaries between the respective roles. Although the boundaries are not always clear, the basic roles of the mayor and council are derived from the basic structure of city government, whether yours is the **mayor-council or council-manager form**. [...]

SEPARATION OF POWERS

Like the federal and state governments, a city government's powers are distributed among three separate branches: legislative, executive, and judicial.

[...]

Under the "separation of powers doctrine," each of the three branches exercises certain defined powers, free from unreasonable interference by the others; yet all three branches interact with each other as part of a "checks and balances" system. [...]

THE MAYOR OR CITY MANAGER'S AUTHORITY

As the chief executive and administrative officer of the city, the **mayor or city manager** is responsible for carrying out the policies set by the council and seeing that local laws are enforced. The mayor or city manager is basically in charge of the day-to-day operation of the city, including the supervision of all appointed officials and employees. The **mayor or city manager oversees the hiring and firing** of all appointed officers and employees, subject to civil laws, where applicable. Except for those in towns, councils have some authority to require confirmation of the appointment of certain officials. Councils may not, however, require confirmation of firings by the mayor or city manager.

RESOLVING AND PREVENTING MAYOR-COUNCIL CONFLICT

In general, the **mayor or city manager also has the authority** to:

- Enforce contracts.
- Bring lawsuits, with council approval.
- Preside over council meetings and, in some classes of cities, exercise some **tie-breaking authority** with respect to council votes and veto authority over ordinances.
- Prepare a proposed budget.
- The mayor performs as ceremonial head of the city.

Consistent with the separation of powers doctrine, the council is not authorized to interfere with the mayor's administration of city government. Councilmembers may not give orders to department heads or to other city employees. To do its job, however, the council needs information on how the city is operating. The mayor, either directly or through other city staff, must provide that information and should do so in a timely and useful fashion.

COUNCIL POWERS

In general, it is the council's role to **adopt policies** for the city and it is the mayor's role to administer or carry out those policies. The council, being legislative, has the power to enact laws and policies, consistent with state law, usually through the enactment of ordinances and resolutions.

The council also has specific authority to:

- Enact a **city budget**.
- Define the powers, functions, and duties of city officers and employees.
- Impose fines and penalties for violation of city ordinances.
- Enter into contracts.
- Impose taxes, if not prohibited by state law.
- Grant franchises for the use of public ways.

AWC and MRSC's Mayor-Councilmember Handbook includes practical tips and a basic legal overview for elected officials. Available at wacities.org.

Personnel issues are a frequent area of conflict. Hiring, discipline, and discharge actions also have legal limitations and potential liability from state and federal laws and the city's personnel policies to civil service and collective bargaining contracts.

In mayor-council cities, the mayor is statutorily in charge when there is an emergency or disaster (RCW 38.52).

Chapter 10 has practical advice for running effective council meetings.

There are 227 strong mayor cities and 54 council-manager cities.

Duties of the mayor or city manager as chief executive officer are set by statute for each class of city, e.g., RCW 35A12.100 (mayors in code cities); RCW 35A13.080 (city managers in code cities).

Strong mayor authority to break ties in certain circumstances, which vary by subject and class of city. In council-manager cities, the mayor votes as a councilmember and does not have any veto power (RCW 35.18.190; RCW 35A.13.030).

The budget is one of the city's strongest policymaking tools and involves setting goals and establishing priorities.



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THE QUESTION

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ASPIRING LEADERS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?



Know what's in your sphere of influence, and focus on what you can do to make a positive impact. It's easy to be outspoken and complain about challenges in your community. The real work is in digging in and looking for actual solutions that create change. Take advantage of opportunities to collaborate with other organizations and jurisdictions. Great partnerships help you accomplish even more by working together.

—CASSANDRA FRANKLIN
Mayor, Everett



My advice to aspiring leaders in local government is to remain curious, seek opportunities to bring people together, and use your privileges as a platform to help others. While it's important to keep the big picture in mind, it's also important to absorb lessons learned and celebrate wins along the way.

—YÊN HUỖNH
Councilmember, Olympia



I would offer two things. First, whether you are running or already elected, serve with humility. Listen to every voice, and be respectful to all persons. When difficulties arise, and they will, remain calm. Stay focused on your role as a local leader. Be confident in who you are. Second, seek to develop partnerships with other local entities. We do things well when we do them together.

—PATRICIA BYERS
Mayor, Yakima

TRAININGS

WELCOME TO THE 2021 ANNUAL CONFERENCE!
JUNE 22–25 ONLINE

This year's conference theme is *Respect. Remember. Reimagine*. We'll explore what it means for Washington's city leaders to listen to diverse perspectives, reflect on the challenges we've all faced, and find inspiration for the months and years ahead.

This year's agenda remains city-focused, with live general sessions, on-demand educational sessions, a virtual exhibit hall, and networking opportunities designed to optimize the attendee experience. Enjoy educational, thought-provoking, and inspiring sessions about a wide variety of city issues—including solutions for local leaders.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION: "WATER THE BAMBOO"
JUNE 23

"The most important things about you are not visible to the eye," said Greg Bell in his 2011 TEDx presentation. Your values—those things below the surface—need attention and nourishment if you are to thrive. Join us Tuesday morning for Greg's keynote session, and learn what you can do to *water the bamboo*.

Crisis Communication *continued from page 5*

“I said, ‘Look, we empathize, but appeasement devoid of accountability is not love; you’re not helping people,’” Kim recalls. “Let’s not put a minority-owned business and 10 employees out of business. You’re perpetuating the cycle of homelessness.”


As Kim and Fisher focused on de-escalating the situation, other city staff scrambled to find housing

“WE NEED TO PROTECT OUR LOCAL BUSINESS OWNERS, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, IF YOU LOOK AT THE NATIONAL MOOD WHEN IT COMES TO TRUSTING POLICE OFFICERS . . . WE WERE VERY COGNIZANT OF HOW WE WANTED TO RESPOND.”

for dozens at the height of a pandemic. Because Fife had no beds to offer, that meant calling neighboring communities and pleading for holiday miracles. The City of Tacoma, Tacoma Rescue Mission, Low Income Housing Institute, and Pierce County Human Services collectively secured the required number of berths at area shelters, one of which hadn’t even opened to the public yet.

On the sixth day of the standoff, hours before the city planned to move the occupants from the Travelodge into other temporary housing, Fisher received a series of startling calls. “The Patriot Guard and others were threatening to go in armed and ‘do our job’ since we weren’t,” he recounts. “So we moved that timetable up quickly to get the situation resolved before people started showing up with guns.”

When police arrived and ordered the squatters to leave, everything went smoothly, although a Tacoma Housing Now representative later disputed that the group’s departure was “voluntary.” (Messages to a spokesperson for the group went unreturned.) Kim knows of just one occupier who took advantage of the alternative shelter that Fife hastily coordinated, and he recalls hearing participants voice frustration with the whole protest. “One gentleman looked at me and said, ‘They really did play us,’” he says.

For their part, Fisher and his 32-officer department exhaled when the job was done. “We need to protect our local business owners, but at the same time, if you look at the national mood when it comes to trusting police officers . . . we were very cognizant of how we wanted to respond,” Fisher says. “I think it was the best possible outcome from what could’ve been a perfect storm.” 

—Devon O’Neil



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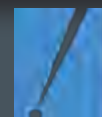
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Cityscope



Goal Oriented

Mayor Jim Ferrell reflects on how being a Husky linebacker prepared him to tackle the job of leading Federal Way.

INTERVIEW BY TED KATAUSKAS

Federal Way Mayor
Jim Ferrell

In your senior year playing football at the University of Washington in 1988, your Husky teammates voted you the most inspirational walk-on player.

I have that award on my desk. I'm looking at it right now in my office.

What else is on your desk?

A book called *The Thursday Speeches* by Peter Tormey, a former player for [College Football Hall of Fame coach] Don James. I have had the tremendous good fortune to have great

mentors, and playing under Don James was a life-changing experience. It taught me a great deal about leadership.

And the book?

The reason they called it *The Thursday Speeches* is because Don did something as coach that was unique at the time. On Thursday, 48 hours before the game, he would start us envisioning success on Saturday with a speech in the locker room. It was kind of groundbreaking, inspirational.

CONTINUED ON P.16 ▶



After graduating from UW and earning a law degree from Gonzaga, you interned at the George H.W. Bush White House.

One thing led to another, and I'm literally sitting in the office of the vice president—my desk was between the chief of staff and Dan Quayle himself. It was amazing.

What did you learn there?

How important it was to pay attention to details. I spent a lot of time with the speechwriters, and that really made me think a great deal about: how do you message leadership, and how do you stay true to your ideals, but also make sure that you're really reaching out to folks in a meaningful way?

From the White House, you started your career as a prosecutor for the City of Renton, which led to a job at the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office.

I worked for the legendary Norm Maleng for nine years, from 1998 until his passing in 2007. Norm was a great leader. He understood that as a prosecutor, most of your power doesn't come from just throwing people in prison for as long as possible. Sometimes the greatest power is reflected in the mercy that you show.

In 2003, you won a seat on Federal Way's city council, and a decade later you left the county prosecutor's office when you were elected mayor, then re-elected in 2017. What have been your signature accomplishments?



Mayor Ferrell in his office at city hall

“BEING AN EXECUTIVE LEADER IS TRYING TO SEE AROUND CORNERS AND TRYING TO PREDICT THE FUTURE A BIT. BUT IT'S ALSO ABOUT MAKING A FUTURE AND DOING SO IN A MANNER THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER.”

When I became mayor, we moved really fast—what I referred to as “hair on fire”—because the city had been in sort of a stasis for quite some time. My whole focus was on economic development and creating a true downtown core. In 2014, we created Town Square Park, on four acres that had been an old movie theater. And in 2017, we built a beautiful performing arts center. We were making some pretty good moves financially for the city, and then Covid hit.

How did that shift the city's priorities?

I was very concerned about the wholesale collapse of the business community, especially the mom-and-pop operations, the smaller restaurants. We were able to get CARES Act dollars and deploy \$4.4 million in funding. We also set aside money for rent protection and

tens of thousands of dollars for our local food bank to address food insecurity.

What's something you've learned about leadership during this crisis?

Being an executive leader is trying to see around corners and trying to predict the future a bit. But it's also about making a future and doing so in a manner that brings people together.

Like the way Federal Way responded to Black Lives Matter protests last summer.

We had hundreds of people peacefully demonstrating for weeks, and on June 19 we had over 100 as we raised the Juneteenth Flag over city hall.

In January, Federal Way issued a proclamation declaring solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, inspired by one of the quarterly meetings

you've been hosting with the local African American community.

It's been a great opportunity to meet with our neighbors and our friends and talk about ways we can recognize the historic injustices and address ways in which we can come together. I believe the way forward is with as much unity as possible, but also with as much honesty as possible. I call it the courtesy of candor. People can tell when you're not being sincere.

What's your top priority if voters give you a third term later this year?

To redevelop the former Target property that the city has acquired in our Town Center into a mixed-use development, because soon we'll have light rail coming right into our downtown—and that'll be transformative. The next term is really about making sure that we come out of Covid stronger. **C**

BY THE NUMBERS

Federal Way

Cityvision looks at how a diverse King County community strives for connection and equitable growth.

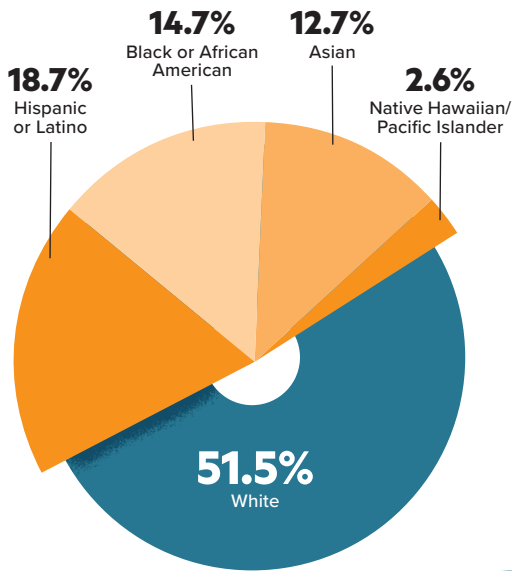
POPULATION

POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2010 US CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED



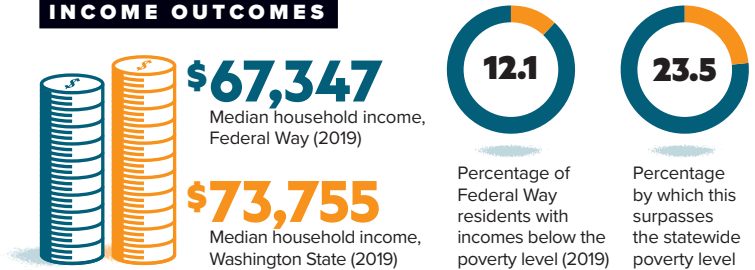
SOURCES: US CENSUS BUREAU

DEMOGRAPHICS

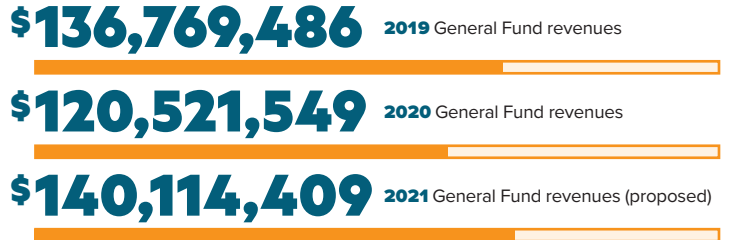


SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

INCOME OUTCOMES

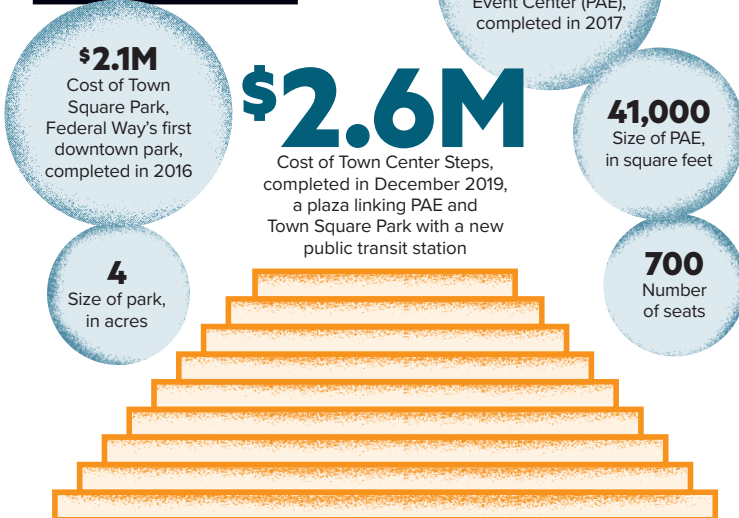


INTERNAL REVENUE



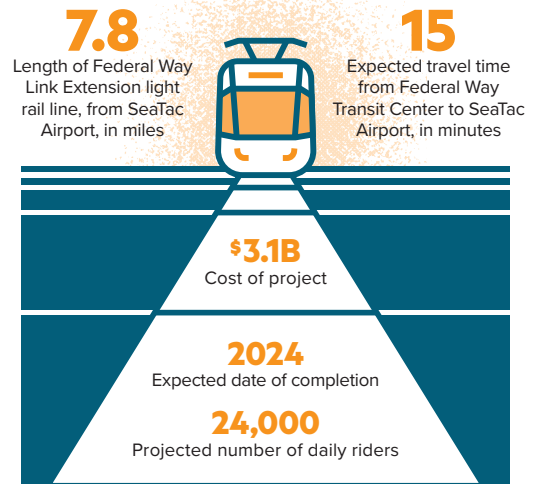
SOURCE: CITY OF FEDERAL WAY

COMMUNITY HUB



SOURCE: CITY OF FEDERAL WAY

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Vintage Performance

**WALLA WALLA'S CREATIVE, COMMITTED LEADERSHIP
HELPS A WINE COUNTRY COMMUNITY CONTINUE TO THRIVE
EVEN IN A YEAR OF UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES.**

By Devon O'Neil



One of Downtown Walla Walla's "streeteries," a city-business partnership for Covid times that may continue into the future



Nabiel Shawa has always felt drawn to Walla Walla, a city that seemed to radiate potential, both economically and culturally. After growing up in Long Beach, a coastal town of 1,400, he owned a cranberry farm there in his 20s, and when the municipality needed an administrator in 1983, he took the job. Then he sold his cranberry farm—partly due to a drop in the market, but mostly because he liked running a city more than he liked growing cranberries.

After serving his hometown in that role for more than two decades, in 2004 Shawa moved up the Columbia River to the City of Washougal. Managing that city by day while commuting across the I-5 bridge for postgraduate coursework in public administration at Portland State University, he never stopped thinking about the midsize gem in southeastern Washington, with its diversified economy, famously friendly residents, and some of the best wine in America.

“I’d had my eye on Walla Walla and knew I wanted to apply if the timing was correct,” Shawa says. In 2009, it was. He became Walla Walla’s city manager at the height of the Great Recession, inheriting a financial situation so dire he laid off 47 full-time staff in the first year to stanch the bleeding—and put the city on a strict fiscal diet until its budget stabilized.

When Shawa was administering Long Beach after the dot-com bust, the city had courted tourists from Seattle who, it turned out, were eager to spend their leisure dollars closer to home. In Walla Walla, he helped promote a similar approach during its recovery: partnering with local business leaders to position Walla Walla as a destination for oenophiles and epicures rivaling Napa and Sonoma. “In a crisis, it’s easy to back off,” he says. “What I found was it was better to lean forward and accelerate.”

Before long, Walla Walla—a 19th-century agricultural hub-turned-tourism hotbed—was back on the upswing. And with a population of 34,000 and an annual budget of around \$120 million, the city continued its legacy of doing most everything on its own.

“It’s the most full-service city I’ve ever worked for,” Shawa says. “Many cities our size don’t operate their own libraries or garbage collection or have a city-owned landfill. Really what that speaks to is the remoteness of Walla Walla. If residents wanted these services back in the day, they had to provide them.”

That by-the-bootstraps resolve would serve the city well when, in early 2020, nearing the end of his career at age 63,

Shawa suddenly faced his first pandemic. And a devastating flood. And a social-justice maelstrom. All in the span of a few months. Walla Walla’s remote location couldn’t protect it from facing the same strains that cities across the state and the nation had to contend with.

The city navigated the pandemic year of 2020 without having to lay off any of its 283 full-time employees while socking away a \$6.3 million reserve fund. To accomplish that feat, city leadership drew heavily on a management tool known as the Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence, a framework of core values and principles (named for former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Malcolm Baldrige) enshrined in a 1987 federal law that created an organizational blueprint for

how US manufacturing businesses could compete better in a global economy (see “Doing Your Framework,” p. 25). Following Baldrige’s fourth core value, Valuing People, Walla Walla prioritized recruitment and hiring during the pandemic. As Shawa notes, “Everything I’ve ever done as a city manager or administrator, I’ve done far better when I have a good team around me.”

Perhaps even more critical to his city’s success in navigating the yearlong crisis, Shawa says, was its key staff and electeds’ ability to model the second Baldrige principle, Visionary Leadership: “Your organization’s senior leaders should set a vision for the organization, create a customer focus, demonstrate clear and visible organizational values and ethics, and set high expectations for the workforce.”

WALLA WALLA'S SEASON of leadership challenges began in January 2020 with the shuttering of Macy’s, a landmark downtown department store that since 1920 had been a key contributor to the city’s tax coffers. Of course, when it rains in Washington, it pours, and in February that came true literally: an epic Mill Creek flood fractured a mile of the city’s three-foot-wide water pipeline, leaving the city’s public works staff scrambling to keep the taps running via deep wells for two months—and cover a \$1.3 million repair bill. (Ultimately, the city declared an emergency, and FEMA funded the project.)

Then the Covid-19 pandemic unleashed its own natural disaster. On March 17, Walla Walla’s city council declared another citywide emergency, closing city hall to the public as the novel health threat bore down on global society and local communities alike. With no precedent to analyze, Shawa and his staff braced for the worst. Walla Walla’s goal is always to have 15 percent of its roughly \$35 million in annual General Fund expenditures in reserve, he says. Going into the pandemic, the city was right about on track, having saved \$5.2 million—enough for a small

A man with grey hair, wearing a blue suit, white shirt, and patterned tie, stands in front of stone columns. He has his hands clasped in front of him and is smiling slightly. The background is a blurred stone wall with columns.

“
EVERYTHING I’VE EVER DONE
AS A CITY MANAGER OR
ADMINISTRATOR, I’VE DONE FAR
BETTER WHEN I HAVE A GOOD
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—NABIEL SHAWA WALLA WALLA CITY MANAGER

Walla Walla
City Manager
Nabiel Shawa

cushion before panic set in. Staff modeled five potential pathways forward, from best-case scenario to worst. The team desperately wanted to avoid laying off staff, so Shawa decided to delay that step until the reserves reached 10 percent. In addition to postponing or slowing previously planned and funded projects, the city froze 13 vacancies, saving around \$1 million including benefits, then waited and hoped that the numbers would stabilize.

A week later, when the governor's Stay Home Stay Healthy order shuttered all nonessential businesses, the city's sales and lodging tax revenues plunged, but thanks to CARES Act funding (\$1.02 million) and an unexpected surge in day-trip tourism, the plan worked. Reserves never touched 10 percent. The city partnered with the Port of Walla Walla and Walla Walla County to distribute grants to more than 300 local businesses and produced three live videos per week to keep citizens informed.

Collaboration permeated every aspect of the response politically, too. Taking another cue from the Baldrige framework (Societal Contributions: "Your leaders should be role models for the well-being of your communities"), the city council—which is made up of seven community members with widely varying backgrounds (including two elementary school teachers and an attorney), a diverse generational mix (from millennials through retirees), and disparate political beliefs—did something unique when Covid case numbers spiked: they all took a pledge to wear masks in public, even though some disagreed with the idea. Later, when cases surged again, Walla Walla's mayor partnered with the mayor of neighboring College Place to deliver a soberly worded countywide message on the importance of compliance.

Meanwhile, finances rebounded faster than anticipated, and the city's tough decisions at the start of spring had proved prudent. "Initially we took a significant hit," Shawa says, "but then we bounced back, and by early third quarter we were on a pathway that exceeded our best, hoped-for model. And that's where we finished the year." Instead of being \$2 million down from 2019's \$6.2 million in sales tax revenue, as city leaders had projected in their doomsday model, Walla Walla finished 2020 at \$5.9 million—a drop of only 5 percent.

MUCH OF THAT MAGIC happened out of view, catalyzed by regular brainstorming sessions among city leadership staff, Mayor Tom Scribner, and Mayor Pro Tem Steve Moss. But a lot of it originated on the streets, too, via the principle of Management By Walking Around. A few years ago, Shawa had invited councilmembers to join him and city staff as they strolled the streets and talked to business owners. "They thought I was crazy, that we'd get screamed at," Shawa says. But it worked then, and it worked again when the pandemic hit, as a way of taking the city's pulse—with Walla Walla's business community taking much of the initiative upon itself.

Kathryn Witherington was a prime player in bringing solutions to life. She'd only been executive director of the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation for a month when the hopping commercial district turned into a sad grid of empty streets and shuttered shops. "It was kind of a crazy time to come in," Witherington says, "but I really thrive when I can help people."

The city's economy is largely driven by wine—more than 120 wineries are based in the valley, where they welcome a



The Downtown Walla Walla Foundation's Kathryn Witherington with Walla Walla Valley Chamber CEO Kyle Tarbet; at right, the city's First Avenue Plaza

half-million visitors, account for \$146 million in spending, and provide 2,484 jobs. But it is also a regional hub for government. The Army Corps of Engineers has a three-state headquarters here; a state penitentiary employs approximately 1,500 people; and the Department of Veterans Affairs has both a base and a hospital. (There are also three higher-education institutions in Walla Walla, most notably Whitman College.) In addition, wheat and onions remain prime agricultural commodities grown in the area—and they spur local spending. "When wheat is priced high, and they've got a great harvest in, our car and furnishing sales do go up," Shawa says.

The Downtown Foundation's mission is to promote the business center's history, culture, and commerce. It is funded primarily by a Main Street tax-credit incentive program, which allows businesses to donate money in exchange for tax breaks. As soon as it became clear that businesses were existentially threatened by the pandemic, Witherington and others—notably the Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visit Walla Walla, the city's destination marketing organization—launched a number of pointed measures to stem the bleeding, from a Think Local campaign to a Peace of Mind Pledge for local businesses to meet or exceed government safety protocols. In addition, the city, the Chamber, and the Downtown Foundation partnered to host a series of weekly town-hall meetings to provide local business owners with updated information about the pandemic and available resources.



WE GOT THEM TO A PLACE WHERE THEY COULD BREAK EVEN, AND IN SOME CASES EVEN FLOURISH.

—KATHRYN WITHERINGTON DOWNTOWN WALLA WALLA FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“More than once I was just loading up my pickup and driving up and down the street, dropping off masks and sanitizer at every business,” says Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce CEO Kyle Tarbet. “And that gave me the opportunity to follow up with every owner and ask them, ‘What do we not know about your specific industry?’ Then I would share some of our best practices.”

The biggest challenge for wine-tasting rooms and restaurants—roughly 60 of which are among the city’s 419 downtown businesses—was a lack of infrastructure to expand outdoors. With help from the CARES Act, the city and the Downtown Foundation introduced “streeteries,” their name for eateries on the street. City council approved code changes to allow restaurants to use Walla Walla’s wide sidewalks and curbside parking spaces to create parklets that would provide more space for socially distanced outdoor dining (with the city providing materials and businesses paying for labor to build the parklets). Witherington worked with the liquor control board to allow eateries an extra two or three tables there. In addition, the city and the foundation purchased 400 tables and 1,600 chairs for

any business in need of outdoor seating. “We got them to a place where they could break even, and in some cases even flourish,” Witherington says.

The collaboration extended into the private sector. Retailers allowed restaurants to build streeteries in front of their stores, betting—correctly—that the move would benefit both. But the “biggest, flashiest” move, Witherington says, was a novel concept dubbed First Avenue Plaza. The city shut down an entire street and filled it with uniform seating and overhead café lighting, creating a place for people to dine, imbibe, and mingle safely outdoors. “We basically created an awesome community center with a neighborhood feel that we’ve lacked in our downtown core,” Witherington says, adding that it is likely to become permanent. “I can’t wait to program it.”

The city didn’t market its streeteries, fearing an overwhelming swell of visitors, but social media filled that void and helped populate it with manageable crowds. Meanwhile, Tarbet and his staff lobbied the governor’s office and federal representatives to eliminate restrictions that hurt sole proprietors or new businesses,



Walla Walla Police
Chief Scott Bieber

opening up the next round of public funding to more establishments in Walla Walla.

In all, Witherington says 11 downtown businesses were forced to close due to the pandemic, including three salons and a coworking space. But 14 new ones opened, five of which were eateries. Throughout the tough times, she's watched competing restaurants support each other with extra supplies or a weekly lunch order for employees. "It's the Walla Walla way," she says.

Overall, the mood downtown has changed. "For a while it did feel really hopeless; we lost sight of the end of the tunnel," Witherington says. "But it's better now. People are feeling hopeful again."

SCOTT BIEBER CAN RELATE to that roller coaster. As Walla Walla's police chief for nine years and a peace officer for most of his life, he thought he'd seen the gamut. Then came 2020. "This past year has been the most stressful of my 36-year career," he says.

For the first few months, his challenges were more or less predictable: shuffling his schedule as officers tested positive for COVID, managing budget constraints, and weighing the need to enforce discretionary contacts like traffic stops with the threat of exposure. Then in June, with downtown reopened and buzzing, the national Black Lives Matter movement streamed into Walla Walla with a series of peaceful protests. The protesters were "very respectful," Bieber says. "I think the biggest crowd we had downtown was probably 800 people. I wanted to protect every-

body's First Amendment rights and make sure they were able to exercise those rights peacefully."

During that movement, however, someone posted a photo on social media of one of Bieber's officers, Nat Small, and a tattoo on Small's forearm that bore a striking resemblance to the infamous Nazi "SS" insignia. The local outrage quickly became a cauldron of controversy and division. It was ultimately a misunderstanding: Small's tattoo, which he had gotten nearly a decade earlier, paid homage to one of his fallen comrades in the Marine Corps' Scout Sniper division (hence the double "S"), Claudio Patino IV, who was killed at Small's side during a firefight in Afghanistan in 2010.

At a time when each political side sought means to support its views, Small's perceived anti-Semitic emblem delivered. Whitman College's president, Kathleen Murray, announced that the liberal arts school would no longer hire Walla Walla police officers for event security. Protesters pressured Bieber to fire Small or, at the very least, force him to alter his tattoo (department policy requires only that any tattoo that might be construed as offensive be covered up during duty).

"I was villainized," Bieber says, "but I thought, you know, here's a guy whose friend died in his arms; he almost died himself protecting everybody's First Amendment rights. Don't we have a responsibility to offer him the same thing?"

As the furor swirled, Bieber called a friend who knew recently retired four-star general James Mattis, the former Secretary of Defense who lived in a town nearby. Within a half hour, Bieber's

phone rang. “Chief,” the caller said, “Jim Mattis here. What can I do for you?”

Mattis had already done some research about the controversy. Bieber asked the general, “Would you mind coming over and having a conversation with Nat?”

“Sure,” Mattis replied. “What do you want me to say?”

Bieber said that was up to Mattis.

Mattis drove to Walla Walla the next day and, according to Bieber, had a long, constructive talk with Small. A few days later, Small decided to alter the tattoo and released a heartfelt statement explaining why.

It read, in part: “Every good thing I do brings credit to [Patino’s] unselfish actions that allow me to be here today. In that sense, I am the truest memorial to my brother, Claudio. At one point, the tattoo on my arm was so important to me, that in my young mind, I would have done anything to keep it. I would have let pride interfere with my success, and I would have let it inhibit my ability to help others. I have seen my community divided, with good people on both sides of the aisle. Neighbors have turned against each other and people are refusing to do business with those whose opinions differ. I regret that I have been an unwitting cause of division in the community that I seek to serve. For those reasons, I have decided to alter my tattoo to eliminate the ‘Double S’ portion. I have not been forced or compelled to make this decision by my superiors at the Walla Walla Police Department or the City of Walla Walla.”

In addition, Bieber joined Shawa and Mayor Scribner in a three-part virtual town hall to explain the department’s policies and respond to citizen comments. The city council convened and

“**MY FAVORITE QUOTE IS:
‘THE CULTURE OF ANY ORGANIZATION
IS SHAPED BY THE WORST BEHAVIOR
THE LEADER IS WILLING TO TOLERATE.’**

—SCOTT BIEBER WALLA WALLA POLICE CHIEF

hosted the special meetings. At the finale, Bieber condemned racism and said his department was banning a controversial neck restraint technique and would look into purchasing dash and body cams in the name of transparency.

“My favorite quote,” Bieber says, as a way of reinforcing his priorities, “is: ‘The culture of any organization is shaped by the worst behavior the leader is willing to tolerate.’” In a period of a few trying months, he seemed to have honored that principle in more ways than one.

BY APRIL 2021, optimism permeated Walla Walla. USA Today named the city the premier winemaking region in America.

DOING YOUR FRAMEWORK Q&A WANDA STURM

The American Society for Quality’s Wanda Sturm talks about a business tool every leader in your city should consider using.



You’re one of the ASQ examiners who help the National Institute of Standards and Technology administer the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. Is that a big deal?

The award—named after the 26th Secretary of Commerce—was established by the US Congress in 1987 to recognize US companies that have implemented successful quality management programs. It’s the nation’s highest presidential honor for performance excellence.

Deciding who gets the award revolves around something called the Baldrige Framework. What is that?

It has eleven core values or principles, and those core values and principles then are divided up into seven criteria for performance excellence. It starts out with leadership. Leadership is the most critical piece of driving the company forward, but leadership can’t do everything. So leadership is aligned and integrated with strategic planning and also with customer focus. And by looking at those three things together, leadership is

able to better talk about where they’re going, why they’re going that direction, how they’re going to get there, and the impact that is going to have on specific customer segments.

What else does the framework do?

It looks at these three things separately but then collectively, too, at how leadership focuses on a company’s strategy and on its customers. Then that is integrated with three other key areas: workforce, operations, and what systems are in place to measure, conduct analysis, and manage knowledge. All six of the criteria produce (business) results, the seventh criterion.

Although the framework was designed as a business management tool, can it also be applied to local government?

Absolutely. It’s more commonly used in business, but it’s also gained popularity with health care and education. I think it would be excellent for a city to take this and use it just to make some improvements. This is a great structure

CONTINUED ON P. 26 ►



The Walla Walla Sleep Center, for residents experiencing homelessness

Shawa says early sales tax numbers hint at this year being the city's best ever—even with the community still officially in a state of emergency. “Just as the onset was unprecedented, the rebound was unprecedented, too,” he says. “I’ve never seen anything like it. We’re coming back like a rocket ship.”

Thanks to booming direct-to-consumer sales that largely offset the loss of in-person tasting-room business, along with a promising pandemic-year grape harvest, many in the local wine industry believe they have weathered the worst of the storm. “We’ve pushed the person in front of us and pulled the person behind us,” says Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance Executive Director Robert Hansen. “The 2020 vintage will be memorable for many reasons, including the quality of the grapes grown and the wines produced during this unprecedented time.”

“Everyone was really thankful for everything the city did to help its businesses. They didn’t sit on their hands at all,” says Hoquetus Wine Company owner Robert Gomez, who launched his local winery in 2020. “If I can survive this, I feel like I can survive almost anything. And I think a lot of people have that feeling.”

The city council passed a biannual budget last fall of \$245 million—right on track with pre-pandemic budgets. In it, the council addressed policing concerns and took input from the Chief’s Advisory Committee, a resident-led work group advising the city on law enforcement response. The budget came with a significant cut to the police department’s funding (only one out of four open positions was to be filled), but the council also approved a separate budget for social service concerns related to law enforcement.

In December, the council earmarked \$190,000 to continue its support of the Sleep Center, a tent city alternative that provides pod housing (in 37 weatherproof huts resembling Conestoga wagons) for citizens experiencing homelessness as a result of the pandemic. And Shawa says Walla Walla is trying to further diversify its economy by pursuing up to a dozen national concert acts annually and hosting shows at the municipal golf course, repurposed as an outdoor music venue dubbed “Range Amphitheater.”

For the city manager whose career arc from cranberry bogs to wine country seems an uncanny complement to Walla Walla’s resiliency and adaptability, reflection came with the season. The sun was shining longer. Grapes were growing. Business was picking up. “Frankly,” Shawa says, “I’m kind of shocked we’re in such a good place. It’s bizarre. I roll the clock back 10 months, and I never would’ve dreamed that we’d be where we are today. But as the saying goes, ‘Never let a crisis go to waste.’” **C**

to use to do that. One of the beauties of Baldrige is that it’s done at the national level, it’s done at a state level, but then you can even take it and use it internally as an approach to how you want to go about improvement in your organization.

Why is leadership such a critical piece in this process?

You need leaders who can state their mission and their vision. As an examiner, one of the key things I look for is how well that is understood throughout whatever entity I am assessing. If I were to walk into Walla Walla city hall and talk to the mayor and the administrator and ask, “What is your mission? What’s your purpose? What are you guys trying to accomplish?” they would tell me something, and then I could go ask someone in a different department the same question, and they would basically say the same thing; it may not be the same words, but it’s the same meaning. What you realize about that is that your leadership has had a great two-way conversation with their workforce.

How would using the Baldrige Framework be different for cities than with businesses?

In government, leaders are elected to positions, and typically they will bring in new people to fill roles; then, even though some of the specifics would change associated with where the city is going and what the direction is, what doesn’t change is who your

customers are. Applying the framework would be one way to have a good transition from one administration to another.

Can the Baldrige Framework be used to help manage a crisis like the pandemic?

Absolutely. Even though this wasn’t developed specifically for responding to a crisis, it does ask you to talk about your organization and its key characteristics, your operational relationships, your customers, and your stakeholders. What’s really good about Baldrige is that the criteria are constantly being updated; the latest criteria even include information about dealing with Covid in terms of your workforce and having people work virtually or remotely. I think the best thing about Baldrige is that it’s not prescriptive: It doesn’t tell you what you have to do; it asks you [to articulate and measure] how you do these things.

Anything else about this whole topic of leadership, and Baldrige and excellence, you want to leave with city leaders?

I would like to see more cities consider this. I think it can make a big difference, not only for the communities they serve but for the people who are working for the city. It really helps them look at things from an overall systems perspective. It’s just a different way to meet people where they are and to give them the information that they need.



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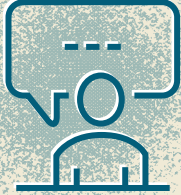


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— CITY 101 P.32 ▶



30 PROVIDING LEADERSHIP FROM NONLEADERSHIP POSITIONS
32 MEETING YOUR BEST ONLINE **34** TACKLING BIG PROJECTS AS A SMALL CITY



Signs of the Times

Here are a few situations to look out for that may suggest your leadership is needed, even if you aren't in a leadership position.

- When there's disagreement about which issues or problems to tackle first, and which to leave on the shelf, because some are "too controversial"
- When everyone else seems to agree on a course of action, but you alone have strong reservations, even if raising them may result in professional repercussions
- When there's more than subtle pressure by special interests to stay quiet, as thinly veiled threats are made on your career, your personal safety, or that of your loved ones

THE ETHICS OF EXPERTISE

Providing leadership when you're not in a leadership position

JENNIFER BLEIKER BLEIKER TRAINING

WHAT DO YOU DO when policymakers are headed in the direction of a decision you feel would be a serious mistake? That's when your work needs more than your expertise: it needs your leadership, even if you're not in a leadership position.

Push past the barriers

Of course, stepping forward can create an awkward—even scary—situation, because it amounts to a role reversal, and you might be accused of insubordination. And it's all too common that before you even get to start in on a problem, you're told not to bother, because "it'd be a waste of time." Don't let such misgivings dissuade you. In these situations, providing leadership is the most responsible thing you can do.

Your ability to provide leadership will be essential precisely when it's the most difficult, unpopular, and possibly personally detrimental to you. It'll require you to stick out your neck and speak up when there's pressure not to do so from colleagues, superiors, appointed and elected officials, and even the public.

But the pressure to keep quiet won't be just external. You'll likely weigh the risk of publicly raising your concerns against your personal needs and goals. You'll be tempted to chalk up your reservations to a lack of political savvy and reflexively think, "I just work here." Yet when the stakes are the highest, that's when the public you serve needs your leadership the most.

Understand differing roles

Setting aside the discomfort of going against conventions, past practices, and overt pressure, you will need to shift roles to diplomatically provide leadership to policymakers. But

you can't simply shift their point of view without first deepening your understanding of theirs. Even though both you, the subject-matter expert, and policymakers are responsible for your organization's mission, your roles in fulfilling that mission are quite different.

Policymakers might appear powerful, as they give or deny your team the green light to work on a proposal, project, or policy. And they have the last say on whether to implement (and fund) your team's final recommendations. But in reality, their decision-making is surprisingly limited. Moreover, they are under tremendous pressure to be responsive to the demands of their constituents and the public at large (albeit frequently to the frustration of technical experts).

It's these differing roles that actually allow you, a subject-matter expert, to provide leadership to the policymakers. Rather than interpreting their responsiveness to political pressure as a sign of defeat or a lack of commitment to the mission, you need to understand it for what it is: a very different set of responsibilities from yours. You can use this difference as a way to provide leadership to them, even when they are making policy-level decisions.

Like you, policymakers are steeped in the pressures and constraints of their current role. Even if they have a technical background and were at one time in an advisory role as you are now, they must weigh the benefits of endorsing work that will come at a steep political cost. But that doesn't mean they won't follow your lead, if you're willing to take it.

Avoiding unnecessary controversy and conflict among stakeholders is central to the role of policymakers. They are beholden to the public, and asking them to endorse an effort that will make them



a political target, without a compelling reason, is putting them in an untenable position. But there is a way for you to provide leadership that lends them cover from political attack.

Appeal to a higher authority

So how do you provide leadership when you're not in a position to? You do it by unapologetically declaring your adherence to your profession's ethics and by earning policymakers' respect that in your role, it would be irresponsible for you to bend to political pressure.

Let's look at an instance you might encounter that compels technical experts to lead policymakers. If you identify an area of work as being high priority but are met with resistance from policymakers who contend it would cause too much political turmoil, is a "third rail," or would be an exercise in futility, you'll need to provide

WHEN THE STAKES ARE THE HIGHEST, THAT'S WHEN THE PUBLIC YOU SERVE NEEDS YOUR LEADERSHIP THE MOST.

leadership on why, in spite of the controversies or a history of failed efforts, it would be irresponsible for you not to work on that issue before any other.

You'll need to help your superiors, both within the organization and political figures outside of it, conclude that given the professional code of ethics you abide by, you must work on those items that are the most central to your mission, even the seemingly impossible. You have to help policymakers understand why you cannot exclude any item from your analysis, no matter how unpopular, controversial, or politically unworkable. While elected and appointed officials are answerable to a disharmonious public with diametrically opposing views and needs; you, as a technical expert, must be held to your professional ethos above all else.

When policymakers are reminded of the differences in your roles—and they understand the basic tenets of your professional ethics, your adherence to them, and your dedication to your organization's mission—they are likely to appreciate your willingness to speak up and provide leadership to them. There's no guarantee they'll agree with your perspective on how to proceed, but there's no question you'll have provided leadership when it was needed most. **C**

With 20-plus years of experience, Jennifer Bleiker has helped professionals apply her firm's Consent-Building approach to gain the trust and respect of opponents, policymakers, and the public across a variety of disciplines, including transportation, natural resources, nuclear waste management, and utilities.



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CITY 101



Stop the Drop

How does your connection stack up? The Washington State Broadband Office has an online tool for measuring your internet speed. The results of the one-minute test will give you an idea of how strong your connection is while helping the state accurately map connectivity across the Washington. Access the tool at: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/building-infrastructure/washington-statewide-broadband-act/speedtestsurvey/>.

MEET RIGHT AND PROPER

Assess how you present yourself in those numerous online appointments.

AWC STAFF

I T HAS BEEN WELL OVER A year since the pandemic disrupted normal life. By now, you probably have the basics of online meetings covered: you know how to join a meeting, how to give yourself a virtual background, and how to quickly mute yourself when your neighbor's dog starts howling.

So now is a good time to take a closer look at how you are presenting yourself digitally to your colleagues and constituents. Self-presentation matters, after all. One way to seriously step up your game is with an online meeting audit.

Start by scheduling a meeting with a friend or coworker over Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or whatever online meeting platform you use most often. Use the questions below as an outline for assessing one another. And be candid! The only way to improve is if you help each other identify the areas where you can get better.

How is your lighting?

It's easy for things to go wrong here. Your room may look too dark, or the subject (that's you) might be washed out by bright window light. Try using lamps, overhead lights, and window shades to fix any issues. Front-facing light tends to work well. And watch out for backlighting: if there's a major source of light behind you, such as a large window, it's likely to make your image too dark. Consider buying a ring light or other video lighting to give yourself more control.

Is the angle right?

Is your webcam too low? Does it look like you are facing away from the meeting? Are you too far away? The most comfortable position isn't always the most flattering. Start by positioning your camera square in front of you at eye level, and try different configurations until you find something you are happy with.

What's going on back there?

Your background—whether it's a virtual background or just the room you're working from—should keep the distractions to a minimum. Make sure there's nothing on your screen that you wouldn't want the public to see.

START BY SCHEDULING A MEETING WITH A FRIEND OR COWORKER OVER ZOOM, MICROSOFT TEAMS, OR WHATEVER ONLINE MEETING PLATFORM YOU USE MOST OFTEN.

Can you hear me now?

Whether you are using a headset or your computer's built-in speakers and microphone, make sure that your voice is clear and distracting noises

are minimized. Be sure to silence your computer's notifications and silence your cell phone.

Are we connecting?

You may not be able to guarantee a stable internet connection, but there are a few things you can do to help yourself out. A hard-wired connection is better than Wi-Fi, so if possible plug your computer directly into your router. Failing that, make sure you are in an area of your home or office that gets a strong signal.

Online meetings are likely here to stay in some form. That's why it's worth working on how you present yourself, even if you are starting to have in-person meetings again. **C**





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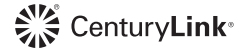
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MOVING MOUNTAINS

Practical tips for smaller communities tackling outside needs

BRENT KIRK CITY MANAGER OF GRANITE FALLS

HOW DOES A SMALL (but growing) city make necessary improvements to a police station without costs getting out of control? By focusing on opportunities for efficiency, the City of Granite Falls was able to create a new police station that is functional, under budget, and in keeping with the city's architectural style.

Like many small cities statewide, Granite Falls provides public safety and central services with a limited budget and constrained resources. For many years, the city operated its police station out of an old building which was formerly a video parlor and a dentist's office. The structure was decaying, and the interior layout was not ideal, safe, or functional for the public or for law enforcement.

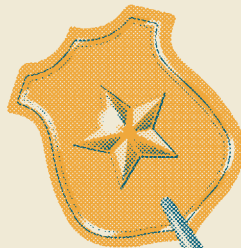
And like many western Washington cities, Granite Falls is growing, with an estimated 2021 population of 4,650, up 40 percent since 2016, and a 2035 population projection of 8,800. In the past, the city operated its police department independently, but in 2013, due to budget constraints, city leaders chose to contract their law enforcement services to the Snohomish County Sheriff.

That decision resulted in a significant reduction in costs and an improvement in public safety for the growing population. Unfortunately, the dilapidated police station building was becoming increasingly inadequate to support the needs of a regional substation for the Sheriff's office, so Granite Falls decided to renovate the current building.

The initial estimated cost to completely remodel the building was \$1.3 million, which was well above the city's financial ability to fund, so the city council settled on a budget of \$500,000 to renovate the front 35 percent of the building, which addressed the most significant safety and layout issues. In 2019, the city was awarded \$400,000 from the state's Capital Budget for the partial renovation and budgeted an additional \$100,000 from its General Fund to cover the cost.

After selecting an architectural firm to create a suitable design layout, Granite Falls advertised for the renovation. The lowest bid the city received was \$750,000. Combined with the architectural fees, the total costs would have been \$825,000 to renovate only one-third of the space (less than 1,000 square feet of the aging building).

With the renovation proposal coming in much higher than expected, and understanding that the city may incur





CITY 101



Small City, Big Project

Based on Granite Falls' recent experience, here are four lessons to consider for any number of daunting municipal projects.

■ **Challenge your assumptions**
Modular buildings cut costs substantially for the city's new police station. What alternative approaches might enhance your project?

■ **Streamline**
Granite Falls avoided time- and resource-intensive competitive bidding. In what ways can you simplify your process?

■ **Stay connected and flexible**
The pandemic upended the city's expected timelines and construction protocols. With frequent, regular communication and openness to compromise, you can avoid costly delays and missteps.

■ **Get creative**
Granite Falls took advantage of surplus purchasing to trim its final tab for the police station project. Are there similar cost-cutting measures your city can take?

THE CITY MANAGER AND THE POLICE CHIEF WERE ABLE TO FULFILL THEIR LIST OF DESIRED FURNITURE AND SUPPLIES AT A FRACTION OF THE COST OF COMPARABLE NEW ITEMS USING THIS METHOD.

additional costs during the construction process due to unforeseeable issues within the structure and its foundation, staff looked for cost-effective alternatives—and learned some valuable lessons.

Lesson #1 – Modular saves money

Staff noticed other cities having success using nontraditional modular structures, so they reached out to several companies specializing in custom modular buildings and found that they offered a comparable quality product for a third of the cost of traditional construction. After sharing the design work and specifications the architect had completed for the original renovation project, the city selected a reputable modular manufacturing company. The estimated cost to demolish the old building and replace it with a new, 2,400-square-foot structure—including state-of-the-art bulletproof glass and security measures throughout—was only \$670,000.

Lesson #2 – Simplify the process when feasible


In February 2020, the city council approved the project and submitted a purchase order through the King County Director's Association (KCDA) to construct the new police station with a target completion of September 2020. Routing the project through the KCDA contract saved staff time and consultant costs typically associated with going out to bid for traditional construction, as well as potential audit issues in the future—something that is often a struggle for small cities.

Lesson #3 – Communicate often, and compromise when necessary

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the construction and installation of the conjoined modular structures were significantly delayed. Indeed, the project could have cost the manufacturer and the city considerably more than the original proposal due to the impacts of plant closures and inclement weather conditions anticipated due to the construction delay. Construction delays typically mean increased costs for overhead, materials, labor, and fees. To mitigate the potential increases, the city quickly established routine weekly virtual meetings with the general contractor, manufacturer, and subcontractors.

During these meetings, the group shared potential impacts due to the pandemic and discussed how the team might support each other to overcome barriers and create efficiencies. For example, both the civil and general contractors coordinated efforts to work together cohesively to grade the lot, engineer proper drainage, construct the foundation, and install an emergency sump due to the seasonally impacted high-water table. This cooperation and coordination reduced potential change orders typically caused by costly delays and limited possible redundancies of effort.

Lesson #4 – Identify cost savings through surplus purchasing when possible

To further manage costs and stay within budget, the city purchased used furniture and equipment through University of Washington surplus inventory and local sellers vacating office space as employees transitioned to working from home. The city manager and the police chief were able to fulfill their list of desired furniture and supplies at a fraction of the cost of comparable new items using this method. The estimate for new furniture and equipment was \$30,000; with the county's support, the city secured "almost new" furniture and equipment for the new building for under \$2,000. 

Cityscape

Dan Rankin at the site of the
Oso mudslide in 2014



Partners in Purpose

Darrington models how leadership, coupled with collaboration, lays the groundwork for recovery.

WHEN CITYVISION LAST visited with Darrington Mayor Dan Rankin in these pages in the summer of 2014, his rural hometown was still grappling with the magnitude of a mudslide that months earlier had wiped neighboring Oso, an unincorporated community of 180, off the map, claiming the lives of 43 neighbors and friends.


“We will never forget this,” Rankin, a sawmill operator who has served as Darrington’s elected leader since 2012, said at the time. “How this community came together and held together and somehow was able to keep gluing these bits and pieces back together . . . Recovery, I’m not sure what that looks like.”

Over the ensuing seven years, Darrington has managed not just to recover, but also to reinvent itself. The city reached out to anyone and everyone who could help, developing relationships and partnerships with leaders from local, regional, and national nonprofits as well as state and federal agencies. Not long after the slide, with the help of nearly 20 stakeholders—including two local school districts and state universities—the town opened Glacier

Peak Institute, a STEM-driven outdoor leadership academy serving at-risk youth throughout the North Cascades. Partnering with the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, Darrington built a mountain bike ride park in 2017, then developed a network of singletrack trails on North Mountain that have made this once-struggling timber town a destination for MTB enthusiasts from around the region.

“There were so many people escaping the cities this year, our trails were packed,” says Rankin.

As were new businesses catering to that crowd, including a craft brewery, cafes, and coffee shops that employ dozens of locals. And soon, Darrington will add 150 manufacturing jobs (see “Harvesting Hope,” p. 6), thanks to a partner-driven economic revitalization project born from the Oso mudslide.

“Leadership played a huge role,” concludes Rankin. “It’s the people who stepped up to the plate with the spirit of community there in their heart. . . . There is good that comes out of tragedy—it’s the good that prevails, ultimately.” 

Mark your calendars



5 great conferences

AWC Annual Conference
June 22-25, 2021

Member Expo
October 13-14, 2021

City Action Days
February 10-11, 2022

Healthy Worksite Summit
March 9-10, 2022

Labor Relations Institute
May 4-6, 2022



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