Creswell, Oregon
State of the City Address
January 11, 2016
Mayor Dave Stram

Last week I was asked if I could summarize Creswell in 2015 with a single word. Well, I couldn’t. But I’ve been thinking about it and have come up with a word. For me, this one word summarizes what last year was about. And the word is, Water. 2015 was the water year in Creswell.

In my State of the City address last January, I talked about water. During the next nine months, our community talked about water. Water was a frequent topic in our local newspaper. Letters were written to the editor about water. During our very dry summer, there were concerns about water. In September, we voted on water. After months of conversation and debate, the people of Creswell passed measure 20-234 adding Section 47 - Water Rates, to our City Charter. In a few moments I’ll be appointing a brand new Water Rate Advisory Committee, as required by our Charter.

Yes, I think that Water is the right word to summarize 2015 in Creswell.

That Water is the word for 2015 points out something very important about what cities do. Cities provide necessary resources so that their citizens can pursue vibrant, meaningful, and fruitful lives. Let me say that again: Cities provide necessary resources so that their citizens can pursue vibrant, meaningful, and fruitful lives. We spent a whole year working on water because water is so absolutely necessary for our well-being. With the addition of Section 47 to our City Charter, the people of Creswell have made a strong statement that they are going to protect our water for generations to come.

Other necessary resources that cities provide their people include protection for homes and property, passable roads for safe travel, delivery of water and removal of waste, utility options for heating and electricity, television service and internet access, public facilities and open spaces, careful management of taxpayer dollars, and open communication about city matters. People who choose to live in cities expect these necessary resources to be provided; they are willing to pay their fare share for them; they count on these resources to be available every day. When cities do their job well, citizens are free to pursue vibrant, meaningful, and fruitful lives.

How did Creswell do in 2015? I’ve thought about a word that would summarize the “State” of our City as we begin 2016. The word I’ve come up with is, Excellent! I say this from my vantage point of having now served as your Mayor for three years. I say this knowing that we have our hurdles to clear, our hang-ups to overcome, and our occasional hiccups. But in spite of hurdles, hang-ups, and hiccups, I believe that the State of the City of Creswell at the beginning of 2016 can be summed up with the word, Excellent.

And with that in mind, I want so say, Thank you. Thank you to our City staff for a remarkable year just ended. Our staff are professional people who, nonetheless in 2015 were asked to participate in additional training to get even better. The council charged Administrator Amberg with this duty, and she arranged for training in customer service,
organizational development, and teamwork building. The staff responded, and I’ve noticed the positive gains at City Hall. Thank you!

Last year we said “goodbye” to our finance director, Layli Nichols. Layli served our city for seventeen years. She was with us when were operated out of a little building on this corner, and she was with us when we moved into the new City Hall. Thank you, Layli, for your dedication to the people of Creswell.

Last year we hired a new finance director, Jim Piper, and also our first community development director, Maia Hardy. They have been outstanding additions! With sadness we are preparing to say “goodbye”, to Maia, who has recently accepted a new position. Maia will not be leaving the area, and we anticipate seeing the good things she will accomplish in her new work.

To all of our staff, those who have been with us for many years - Roberta, Shelley, Michelle, Carolyn, Mike, Cliff, and the men on our public works crew - and those who are newer - Jennifer, Maddie, Jim, Maia, Michelle Amberg, and the new men on our public works crew - Thank you, for a year of Excellent work! You are all appreciated.

To our City Council, my elected colleagues, I want to say, Thank you! In 2015 we saw a fifty-percent turnover on the Council. Councilors Romoser, Campbell, and Pelatt departed due to health and family and job changes. They were valuable members of the Council and will be missed. Councilor Heyman joined us last January, Councilor Miller last month, and tonight Councilor Zetterval is seated with us for the first time. I appreciate each one of you. Oh yes, there another Councilor, not to be forgotten. Councilor Jane Vincent will complete her second full term in 2016. That’s eight years serving on the City Council. You’ve been through the good times and the difficult times; you’ve served with five different Administrators, two Mayors, and too many Councilors to count. You continue to do your homework, ask challenging questions, come prepared to meetings, speak up, and then vote your conscience. I admire your faithfulness to the people of Creswell and your diligence in being a good Councilor. Thank you, Jane!

Twice monthly and sometimes more, we gather in these chambers to conduct the business of our beloved city. Most meetings begin with a dozen people in the audience. I am glad for their attendance. By the time the meeting ends, there may be only one or two audience members left. One of those individuals is nearly always our local newspaper man, Scott Olson. Scott provides an invaluable service to the people of Creswell by being here, taking notes, listening and watching and then reporting on what took place. These are public meetings, but if the public is not here, how is the public to know? Scott provides that service, and we are indebted to him. Thank you, Scott.

2015 was the year the Council pulled the all-nighter. Do you remember? It was our Monday evening, March 10 meeting. We had an especially long agenda, followed by an Executive Session of the council. The meeting began at 6 p.m. and adjourned to go into Executive Session shortly before midnight. When the Council returned to the chambers and reconvened the regular meeting, there was only one person left in the audience. It was Scott Olson. When I rapped the gavel to adjourn the meeting it was 1 a.m., Tuesday morning.

I took these two pictures that evening. The first is of faithful Scott sitting alone at 12:45 a.m.; the second is of Councilor Ted Romoser standing in front of the clock which says, 1:02
a.m. So “Thank you” - to our staff, our Council members, our citizens who come out to meetings and our faithful newspaper man Scott.

“Excellent” is the word I’ve chosen for the State of the City, because of the outstanding work done in 2015 by our Council and Staff. Here are some of the highlights from last year.

In 2015 the City Council increased our police force from three deputies and a one-third time sergeant, to three deputies and a one-half-time sergeant. In 2013 we had two-and-one-third officers and today we have three-and-one-half. That’s a thirty-three percent increase. The cost to citizens is a monthly public safety fee of $6. The benefit to citizens is a much safer Creswell. I’m pleased to say that in 2015, though our policing contract with Lane County went up, the public safety fee did not. Rather, the Council elected to cover the increase through the General Fund.

More good news, this time at the Airport: after years of subsidizing the Airport through the use of General Funds, the Airport finished Fiscal year 2014/15 in the black! Making the airport sustainable has been an important goal for some time and it was achieved last year, with the airport ending the year nearly $26,000 in the black. Congratulations to Shelley Humble, our Airport Manager, for this accomplishment!

Sitting on 44 acres of prime industrial land, the Bald Knob Mill has been shuttered since it caught fire in 2008. The mill property is ideally situated between I-5 and Highway 99 and along a major rail line. It is a critical piece of the economic development plan for Creswell. Thanks to outstanding efforts by City staff, Creswell received two Grants in 2015 to conduct a Phase One and Phase Two environmental assessment. Now you are invited, on January 27, to a Vision to Action workshop to help us imagine a new future for the Bald Knob Mill site. Please come: 10 a.m. to noon at Creswell High School or 6-8 p.m. at the Community Center.

In February the City and the Chamber of Commerce co-sponsored an event called, “Taste of Creswell”, an evening of music, food, networking, and fun where local businesses came to show off their wares and support one another. It was a great success, with some forty-five businesses turning out. I am hopeful that the Chamber and the City will sponsor a similar event in 2016.

During the final months of 2015, the City began work on a multi-year Strategic Plan. Two years ago when I gave my first address, I talked about the need for the City to do planning and goal-setting. We have set 6-month, 12-month and 18-month goals. This is our most serious effort. All of the plans the City makes for the future are informed by the Strategic Plan. Next Monday afternoon the 18th at 4 p.m. we will meet with our consultant and spend two-hours working on the Strategic Plan. You are welcome and invited to come.

Visitors arriving in Creswell from up north will notice a new sign installed in 2015. The Creswell Kiwanis Club made a great contribution to our community last year when they placed a welcome sign at the north entrance to town. The sign says, “Welcome to Creswell . . . The Friendly City.” And it’s true! Creswell IS “the friendly city”.

Of course, friendly is as friendly does. People who are friendly talk to each other. But it’s hard to talk to 5,000 people! Cities have a difficult time communicating with their citizens. In 2015 we asked our Administrator to work on improving communication on city activities and accomplishments. In December, Administrator Amberg began a weekly email called, “Communicator”. In this she shares recent news about what’s happening in the City. I enjoy
reading it and you will too. If you’d like to be added to the Communicator list, drop a note to Administrator Amberg at City Hall.

Two years ago at our January Council meeting we introduced Michelle Amberg as our new City Administrator. There are a lot of good things I could say about Michelle, but since I’m doing one-word summaries tonight, I’ll pick the word, “Trustworthy.” Administrator Amberg has proven to be worthy of our trust. She does what she says she’ll do. She finds answers to problems. She provides information when we ask questions. She makes difficult decisions that need to be made. Creswell is in excellent condition today due, in large part, to the work of Michelle Amberg. We are very fortunate to have such a competent, creative, and trustworthy City Administrator. It is truly a pleasure for me to work with Michelle.

Water is the word for 2015. Excellent is the word for today. And for 2016, I’ll pick the word, Hope.

Great efforts were made last year to bring the Oregon State Police regional office to town. Letters were written and phone calls were made, but the Oregon State Police did not select Creswell. But they did take a very long, very hard look before deciding to settle in Eugene. Though Creswell didn’t get the State Police, there is reason for hope that new businesses will come to Creswell this year.

A jet flew into Hobby Field in 2015 and fueled up. The owner of the jet took a drive around Creswell and took a long look at our town. New buildings were built in Creswell’s commercial sector last year. The Meadowlark RV Park was renovated and opened for business, and have you noticed how full it has been this winter? We have a new Thai restaurant soon to open in downtown Creswell. The Chamber of Commerce reports that they have out-of-state and out-of-country visitors stop in every week, taking a look at Creswell. Our Administrator tells me that others are looking, but she can’t say much, not yet. My hope is that before this year is out, we’ll see new businesses locating here.

In 2016 I hope that our water rates don’t increase very much. And I hope we can gain an understanding of our sewer system needs and take responsible steps to meet those needs, with as little increase in rates as possible.

In 2016 I hope a decision can be made about policing. Portland State University completed a very fine study for us and now it’s in the Council’s hands. It’s available for you to read on the City web site. Decisions need to be made about the level of service we need, how we should provide it, what will it cost, and how we will pay for it. Well be watching what happens with the proposed Fern Ridge Community Policing District. My hope is that interested persons not living in Creswell will step forward and speak up if they want to see a public safety district formed.

I have another hope for Creswell, one I have not shared with many people. I hope we can purchase land and build a community park. Creswell is short on parks and open spaces. On this side of town we have our very special Holt Park, filled to the brim on the 4th of July. On the east side of town we have Garden Lake Park, a nature park with a walking trail and seasonal lake. My hope is for a large park, a multi-use park for Creswellians of all ages and interests. This park would have ball fields and a dog run. My observation, from going door-to-door these last three years, is that 90% of the households have dogs. We need a dog run. I dream of a park with sand volleyball pits. Did you know that Creswell High School has one of the best volleyball programs in the state? I dream of a park with a playground for the young, a skate park for the
teens, and horseshoe pits for the older crowd. I dream of picnic and bar-be-que areas for family gatherings. And I find that my dream is echoed in the 2005 City of Creswell Parks Master Plan. Others had this dream ten years ago but nothing has yet happened. We can’t finance and buy and build this park in 2016, but we can do something to move the dream along to reality. That’s my hope and I’m going to work toward it this year.

What’s it all about, this thing of being a City? It’s about providing necessary resources so that our citizens have the opportunity to pursue vibrant, meaningful, and fruitful lives. As your Mayor, I am pleased to say that the City of Creswell is doing just that, and doing it quite well.

In the 1960’s, composer Burt Bacharach wrote a song titled, “Alfie.” The opening words ask a question that each of us, whether citizen, Councilor, or Staff should ask:

“What’s it all about, Alfie?
Is it just for the moment we live?
What’s it all about
When you sort it out, Alfie?
Are we meant to take more than we give?
Or are we meant to be kind?”

Citizens of Creswell, members of the staff, and fellow Councilors, my hope and prayer for the City of Creswell is that in 2016 we would give more than we take, we would truly be kind to one another, and that we would earnestly seek to make a contribution that will last long after we are gone. That’s what it’s all about.