When our children were little we liked to measure their growth on a wall in the kitchen. On their birthday they’d come over to the wall and we’d say, “Stand up straight and tall, heels against the wall, chin up”, then we’d make a mark on the wall with a pencil, put the date next to the mark, and all stand back and admire how much they had grown. It was a sad day when we decided we needed to paint the kitchen and those precious marks were all covered up.

When I gave my first State of the City address in February of 2013, I said that our City needed to work on planning and goal setting. For me, one of the great highlights of 2016 was that we completed and adopted a 5-year Strategic Plan (hold it up).

Why is this so important? Because the Strategic Plan (hold it up) serves as our “measuring wall” by which we can chart out our growth as a City.

The Strategic Plan begins with a statement of our Mission, followed by five Strategic Goals. The Mission reads as follows:

“The City of Creswell exists to provide quality, reliable, and affordable city services to city residents and businesses, creating a safe, livable, and attractive community with a unique small-town atmosphere” (from City of Creswell Strategic Plan, 2016-2021, p.3).

The five Strategic Goals are:

1. Accountable Government
2. Economic Development
3. Safety and Preparedness
4. Quality of Life
5. Community Engagement

Tonight I’d like to “get out the pencil” and make “marks on the wall” of our Strategic Plan to show how the city grew in 2016.

**Goal 1 – Accountable Government**

Some monumental tasks were accomplished last year by our staff. City ordinances were codified, the audit was completed and submitted on time, and we received the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award. A Code Enforcement Policy was drafted and adopted and a new software program was launched called OpenGov that provides the public ready access to Creswell’s financial and performance information. Great job – City Recorder Roberta Tharp, Finance Director Jim Piper, Code Enforcement Officer Shelley Humble, and the Parks and Trees Committee!

From 1950-1975 the city operated a landfill off DeBerry Road, west of town. Operations ceased in 1975 but the landfill was never formally closed. Last year, with a great deal of help from the DEQ and great work by our City Administrator and Director
of Public Works, we were able to formally close the DeBerry Road landfill. Well done – Michelle Amberg and Cliff Bellew! On the other end of town, the Airport officially dedicated the Automated Weather Observing System, known as AWOS. Pilots can call in and find out what the weather is like in Creswell. Good work, Shelley Humble, our Airport Manager!

The City of Creswell has a wonderful staff! I am proud of these people who achieved new levels of certification in 2016:

- Cliff Bellew – Wastewater Treatment System Operation, Grade III
- Shelley Humble – Oregon Code Enforcement Association, Level II; and President of the Oregon Airport Management Association
- Michelle Furrer – Oregon Association for Court Administration, Level II
- Mitch Rhodes - State Arborist Certification
- Roberta Tharp – Oregon Association for Court Administration, Level III
- Jennifer Gardiepy - was promoted from Receptionist to Administrative Assistant and also performed the duties of Assistant Court Clerk and City Council Recorder when other staff were on vacation. Jennifer is our “director of first impressions”; she greets visitors to City Hall, answers the phone, and does all manner of helpful things for staff. Jennifer said, “In 2016 I think I made more people happy than upset.”

How did we grow last year in the area of Accountable Government? Quite well!

**Goal 2: Economic Development**

In 2016 Creswell hired our first full-time Economic Development Coordinator, Michael DeHart. Michael is a marvelous addition to our staff and we are excited to see what his leadership will produce.

Economic Development highlights during the last 12 months include: the Economic Vitality Summit, the economic visioning project, the Lane County Bicycle Tourism Studio, and the appointment of an Airport Vision Committee.

In partnership with the Chamber of Commerce we are looking to increase tourism in the coming year. On tonight’s agenda is a proposal to be voted on by the Council, that would contract with the Chamber to provide tourism services to Creswell. We are excited that the Chamber is eager to work with the city to bring more visitors to Creswell.

For the past few years we have worked diligently to re-develop the Bald Knob property. Sadly, the property still sits mostly unused. We haven’t given up on Bald Knob re-development, but in 2017 the City will pursue a new direction and investigate the possibility of creating an Urban Renewal Area. There are many underutilized pieces of commercial and industrial land in the city, and an Urban Renewal Area may be what is needed to generate activity on these properties.
New businesses are coming to town: on the east side of I-5 construction is underway for a Dollar General store while on the west side of I-5 remodeling is taking place to bring a new pharmacy and a coffee grinder to town.

Creswell is growing! The city expanded by 5 1/4 acres in 2016; 14 new lots were created and houses are being built. We’ll need to change our “Welcome” sign soon, because our population has increased from 5,125 to 5,360. Estimates released last November by Portland State University show Creswell to have the fastest growth rate of any city in Lane County (4.59% in FY2015-16). We’re still not a large city and we don’t want to be one. We want to be “unique” with a “small-town atmosphere”, and we want to be “attractive”. Recently I spoke with a young couple who had bought a home in Creswell. At first they were concerned about the daily commute to work in Eugene and Springfield but were delighted to discover that it was actually shorter; they added, “We love living in Creswell!”

Goal 3: Safety and Preparedness

Creswell contracts with Lane County Sheriff Office for 3 full-time Deputies and a ½ time Sergeant. Last November the citizens of Creswell voted on Ballot Measure #20-257 which would have expanded police coverage to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and been paid for through additional property taxes. The citizens of Creswell overwhelmingly voted “NO”! In 2017 there will be no increase to property taxes and police coverage will not expand to 24 hours per day/7 days per week.

With a population of 5,360, and a growth rate of 5%, the question is, “Do we have sufficient law enforcement coverage in Creswell?”

In 2017 the City Council will continue the conversation of public safety. We have to, partly because it’s a large part of our annual budget, but also because it’s a central part of our Mission: to create a “safe, livable, and attractive community”. In this continuing conversation we need your input. Send us an email, come to a Council meeting, or stop us on the street and tell us what you think: do we need more Deputies and if so, how should we pay for it?

The other BIG item on the agenda for 2017 is Community Emergency Preparedness. We’ve heard alarming reports that the West Coast is due for a large-scale natural disaster, now it’s time to get prepared. A very exciting program that has just been launched is called Teen CERT. CERT stands for “Community Emergency Response Team”. The Teen CERT program is designed for young people age 14-20 who want to take an active part in the response to a natural disaster. This past Monday the orientation meeting was held and a dozen interested persons attended. Thank you to South Lane County Fire & Rescue and Fire Chief Wooten for offering the Teen CERT program to Creswell youth!

Everyone needs to take steps to prepare for a natural disaster. All City Councilors will be receiving training from FEMA as part of the Emergency Management Institute;
the New Hope Baptist Church has been working to prepare their facility to be a center of support in a disaster. A meeting was convened 10-days ago with representatives from New Hope Baptist Church, Creswell Stay-at-Home, and the City to begin the conversation about community-wide preparedness. You’ll be hearing much more in 2017 about Community Emergency Preparedness.

**Goal 4: Quality of Life**

Quality of life has to do with BIG things and little things. Last year we built a pocket park. There’s a nice picnic table, a couple of benches, and it’s covered. Though it’s tiny, it’s terrific! - and it gets a lot of use.

On the other end of the spectrum, Creswell may be adding a very LARGE park in 2017. Last year our City Administrator approached Lane County about a 57-acre parcel of land east of the City known as “Cinderella Park.” It’s a former landfill sitting between the current waste transfer station and the Willamette River on Cloverdale Road. What would we do with a former landfill? While there would be some restrictions (no digging), there are exciting possibilities, such as: a boat ramp for the Willamette River, a dog park, hiking trails, a frisbee golf course, and fishing in the lake that’s fed from the Willamette River. Last fall the County Parks Commission voted to recommend the transfer of Cinderella Park to the City of Creswell. We are now awaiting the decision by the County Commissioners. If the transfer occurs, look for the city to add a BIG park in 2017 to go along with our pocket park in 2016.

Speaking of parks, I appreciate the attention our public works crew gives to Holt and Garden Lake Parks. Lawns are mowed, trash is picked up, basketball hoops have nets and the tennis court is striped.

Quality of life in Creswell also comes in the form of math, movies and meals. All these are happening regularly at the City-owned Cobalt Building. Hats-off to Linda Warner for creating a Tuesday/Thursday after-school program where school-age children can go for help with homework or play a game of ping-pong. On Saturday evenings from January through April 1st, free movies are being shown and the popcorn is affordable! Thanks to Jennifer Gardiepy, her crew of volunteers and Willamalane Park and Recreation District. On Thursday’s the Creswell Food Pantry operates out of the back part of the Cobalt Building. Last year they provided Creswell families with food boxes that amounted to 17,805 meals! We are so fortunate to have a dedicated director in Susan Blachnik who is supported by an outstanding Board and many volunteers who care about the people of Creswell.

Quality of life includes planning for the future. The person who fails to plan, plans to fail. We are in the midst of making plans to succeed! The Parks Master Plan is being updated by the Parks and Tree Board; the Waste Water System Facilities Plan has been reviewed by the DEQ; the Water System Facilities Plan is underway, and we are
preparing a Transportation System Plan to address safe roads for motorists, pedestrians, and bicycles.

The one plan that encompasses all these plans is the Comprehensive Plan. With an intended life-span of 20 years, our Comp Plan is now 35 years old! In 2017 we are making a major push to update it. At monthly work sessions our outstanding City Planner, Maddie Phillips, will lead the council through one-topic-at-a-time and the Comp Plan will be completed.

Parks, plans, movies, math, and meals – Creswell continues to grow nicely in the area of Quality of Life.

Goal 5: Community Engagement

I appreciate the sentiment expressed recently on the Point S reader-board: “Creswell – we are stronger when we work together”. That’s what community engagement is all about – working together to build a better Creswell.

Two amazing things happened on the same weekend last May: a dedicated group of people came out for the third Creswell beautification day, planting flowers, painting buildings, and sprucing up our downtown; and, a gathering of builders, volunteers, and local churches descended on two homes to restore them, top to bottom. Creswell Beautification and Hope Restored were two shining examples in 2016 of people working together to make our city strong. The City assisted with fee waivers and Sanipac donated the dumping costs and together, we made a difference!

Other examples of community engagement include the Creswell Arts, Crafts and Food Faire in September - thanks to Judy Serface, Sarah Baker, Jenny Carmichael, and Jean McKittrick for all their work! The Chamber of Commerce put on three very popular events: the Community Garage Sale, the Fourth of July festivities and the Christmas Tree Lighting. The newly formed Creswell Heritage Foundation is working on a plan to restore and re-purpose our oldest building in town, affectionately known as the “Old Schoolhouse.”

As we continue to work on community engagement, watch for the new road being built in 2017. 5th Street from Oregon Ave. to “A” Street will be torn up and a new road laid down, complete with curbs and sidewalks and a bike lane. Working with the Historical Society the City will establish a paved parking area for visitors to the museum.

Several years ago the City established a Community Service Grant program, making funds available to organizations serving our community. Last year the newly formed Creswell foundation, Creswell First!, offered to evaluate and oversee this program. Creswell First! exists to support activities that will benefit the lives of Creswell citizens and we’re excited about this new partnership.

I would be remiss in my review of community engagement if I did not mention the Communicator email sent out by Administrator Amberg. Challenged with the goal of
improving communication, Michelle came up with the idea of an email simply called the “Communicator”. Our Administrator is a gifted writer and the Communicator has been well received. If you’re not getting it, you’re missing out! Go to the City website and sign up.

How did we grow in 2016? Quite well! I see many “marks” on the “wall” of our Strategic Plan! Creswell is growing tall and strong.

To all Creswellians who volunteered their time in 2016 – Thank you! To the members of our City Staff – Thank you! To our team of attorneys at Speer Hoyt, our municipal Judge Scott Palmer, and our City Administrator Michelle Amberg - Thank you! To those who served on the Planning Commission, the Airport Commission, and the Parks and Trees Board – Thank you! To our City Councilors – Thank you! To Jane Vincent, who faithfully served on the Council for eight years - Thank you! And thank you all for allowing me to serve as your Mayor.

Several years ago the Director of our Library, Sue Liudahl, gave me a poem written by Mabel Ewing in 1927 entitled, “Friendly Village.” I’d like to close by reading it:

“There are hills ranging round in immutable chains,
   And a town in their midst that I love –
Just a cluster of homes in the shade of the butte,
   With the blest of heavens above.
As I gaze at the hills with their misty blue heights,
   How they lure me to wander afar,
And forget as I roam o’er their broad grassy slopes
   All the troubles and worries that mar.
But though cares may intrude there is much to enjoy
   In our town at the foot of the hills,
Where the prune orchards bloom, and the soft breezes blow
   Over sweet-scented woodlands and rills.
Yes, this is the valley that we love to call “Home,”
   And wherever I go I’ll return
To the friendliest town that I ever have known –
   To Creswell, my home town, my home!”

We are Creswell, the Friendly City!