

For most of us, Talent is our home and around us is where our good neighbors and friends live. We bring up our children here. We celebrate here, we share community here, and we work together selflessly to make our lives better for each other as we stand together right here in Talent. Many of the common reasons we love Talent are because of the closeness of our community. It is on that common ground that Talent continues to flourish as the best place to be, to love, and to live. So I posed the question to friends of Talent, "What is the thing you love most about Talent?" The answers were fun to read and worth sharing here tonight.

I asked Ron Hodgdon, local artist and volunteer to six City Committees, what he loved about Talent. He said, *"It is where I continue to discover all the different aspects of a rich-full life with my family. It's the breadth and community of my friends; it suits my creative and business self, my outdoor natural-adventurous self, my community and spiritual self. Talent is actually more than where I live, it is my home."*

In 2015 your City government, under the leadership of your elected City Council, was progressive and productive. Many of the thoughtful, hard working people that serve Talent are here with us tonight. Please indulge me as I proudly introduce to you the finest elected officials and city staff in Southern Oregon. Tom Corrigan, Talent City Manager. Please introduce your Department Heads. Ryan Pederson, Talent Council President. Please introduce the Council. Friends and neighbors, please join me in a mighty thank you for our incredible team.

Our successes in 2015 are some of the most exciting that I have seen in the many years that I have served the City of Talent. I believe that this administration, the elected officials, the staff and the agenda, will come to be known for its genuine connection with the people's desire for Talent.

In November of 2014, the people of Talent voted for improved transparency and citizen accessibility to their government, environmental sustainability, small town economic development, continued improvements to infrastructure, fiscal responsibility and governmental efficiency. It is with the highest level of pride, that I have the opportunity to share the tangible ways this administration is responding to the people's priorities and making them a reality.

I asked Heather Ayers, teacher at Talent Middle School, what she loves about Talent and she said, *"The first thing I love about Talent is its heart: it's a small town that could easily get overshadowed and lost in the shuffle, but demands attention, and it makes people stop for a second look. Secondly, Talent's diversity – its mix of young and old, liberal and conservative, different ethnicities and economic groups – makes it a unique and wonderful place to live."*

**Talent citizens voted for transparency and governmental accessibility.** Transparency is a double edged sword. It is difficult to manage; it requires a great deal of attention and resource to achieve and yet, it is the portal to a healthy trusting relationship between citizens and their government. I chose the word relationship purposefully because I believe that Talent is at its best when we all strive for greater community awareness.

Councilor Abshire has worked to improve transparency for Talent as it relates to the City's financial information in order to provide greater accountability of tax payer's resources. He has long championed for this and I am confident that we will see his efforts come to fruition in 2016. Talent upgraded its accounting software, a program chosen in part for its capacity to provide better, more timely financial information to the citizens of Talent. Councilor Abshire's hard work will not go unfulfilled, and on behalf of all of us, I thank him for that.

This administration has had among the fewest closed door Executive Sessions at Council than we have had in the past five years. We are committed to keeping the closed door meetings to an absolute minimum, always striving for none.

A most exciting tool for transparency is that every Council meeting is recorded, and those recordings are posted to the City website for all to hear.

To improve citizen accessibility to government, Council approved a policy for commission and committee appointments to ensure that access to our governmental process is consistent and equal to all those who apply.

Lana Peery, Technology Services Director, is working with volunteers to build and install a volunteer data management program which will improve the volunteer experience and better match enthusiastic citizens with community efforts in need of champions.

Talent is installing re-codified, better indexed City ordinances and codes to our City website. This will provide the citizens of Talent improved access to the City's rules and regulations. This project has been a year in progress and its completion will be a great relief to Talent's City Recorder, Melissa Huhtala.

These are just a few examples of how your government is improving transparency and accessibility, and we thank everyone involved for their hard work.

When asked what she loves about Talent, Nancy Rush-Yates, teacher and city volunteer, said, *"I think what I love most about Talent is that so many folks here really care about our town and work hard to support it in so many diverse ways."*

**Talent voted for environmental sustainability.** This administration is not only proud of the work we have done, but we are profoundly grateful for the incredible citizen volunteer efforts. Talent loves our planet and all of its inhabitants, and we most certainly walk the environmental talk to our greatest ability.

Dolly Warden, chair of the Bee City USA Subcommittee, said, *"I like being able to walk around town in 40 minutes going to city hall, the post office, the coffee shop, the bank, and back home again. And I like meeting and greeting people I know along the way."*

Our story cannot be told without lauding the efforts of Together for Talent. The committee volunteers are responsible for clean up in Wagner Creek, for exploring ways to stop the use of herbicide and pesticide, and to rescue pollinators. They drive clean up and green up and lead community wide

recycling events. Their armies of citizen volunteers are weeding our parks, sorting trash, and lifting garbage from our precious waterways. We owe them a lot of gratitude. On behalf of Talent, thank you so very much.

Under the excellent leadership of Councilor Collins, with support from Councilor Wise, the City of Talent is exploring ways to quicken the City's response to environmental concerns. Proposed in this year's goals is the formation of a new environmental committee, which would be a recommending body to the Council tasked to develop an energy sustainability plan as its first mission. There are many environmental heroes in Talent. Please join me in thanking Councilor Collins and Councilor Wise for bringing them together to better serve Talent during this critical time for our planet.

Talent is grateful to Sam Becker, the Southern Oregon high school student whose senior project was to get Styrofoam banned in Medford and Talent. It is exciting to announce that he has been successful in both cities.

The City of Talent has so much to be proud of for our green power accomplishments. Recently, Talent was named a Green Power Community by the Environmental Protection Agency, ranking Talent as number one in Southern Oregon, 4<sup>th</sup> in the State and 17<sup>th</sup> in the Nation for our participation in the Blue Sky program.

The City of Talent is now buying 20% of all of its energy for City buildings from only renewable resources.

Tom Corrigan, City Manager, led the building of the new community center. The features include a storm water detention system. It is solar panel ready, has high rated reflective roof shingles, a high efficiency HVAC systems, an energy management system, and low flow plumbing all built To LEEDS accredited standards.

Talent has added a street sweeper to its fleet which is not only providing us with cleaner streets and storm water system, but Talent will also save money as we no longer need to contract this service at a higher cost to the City. Buying a street sweeper was a win-win-win for the City of Talent.

City staff efforts to protect our storm water went further, as the Community Development Department under the leadership of Community Development Services Director Zac Moody, implemented the storm water Education Program that included FLASH articles and updates to the City's website. In cooperation with the Bear Creek Watershed Council, Talent helped create regional signage dedicated for storm water education.

Brammo has generously agreed to provide the City of Talent an electric motorcycle for our police patrols. Brammo and City Manager Tom Corrigan made it all very simple; ask and ye shall receive.

Please join me in thanking our City volunteers, local businesses, and Talent's amazing City staff for making environmental issues a priority and providing meaningful solutions.

Councilor Collins said, *"I love how passionate, creative, and driven our community members are. Local is important to me and I enjoy having access to organic and humanely raised meat, fruit, and veggies from farms here in Talent... Oh yea, and WINE!"*

**Talent voted for small town economic development.** I found it interesting to discuss Economic Development with the community. It really does mean different things to different people. But the one thing most everyone says is that we must always strive to keep Talent's small town appeal.

Councilor McManus and Councilor Pederson understand that request very well. In early 2015, McManus and Pederson unveiled goals designed to discover what the City of Talent needs, in order to support economic growth.

The City and the Talent Chamber of Commerce conducted a survey of local businesses to find out what it takes to be a successful business here in Talent. The resulting report is the beginning of a plan design for 2016. Proposed in this year's goals is a plan to formalize an Economic Development Committee. If adopted, they will be tasked to create a plan to move local business forward and address the community's desire for a small town economy. Thank you to Councilor McManus and Councilor Pederson for moving our Economic Development plans in the right direction.

Also, Talent's Community Development Department received a technical assistance grant of \$20,000 from the Department of Land Conservation and Development. It will partially fund an Economic Opportunity Analysis in 2016. The final report will include an impact analysis of available commercial and industrial lands, address trends on Talent's economic development, and help us discover what Talent's competitive advantage is for attracting small town appropriate light industry.

When asked about Talent, Cynthia Care of Friends of Wagner Creek said, *"I love walking to do my errands in Talent, and greeting friends, old and new. Talent is a wonderful mix of people."*

Councilor McManus said, *"What I love about Talent is that the community represents the true meaning of the city's name. No matter how small we are, our talents in art, business, community support, and agriculture surpasses many to make it the only city in America worthy of its name."*

**Talent voted for continued improvements to infrastructure, fiscal responsibility and governmental efficiency.** While we focus on the improvements and installments to our infrastructure, please know that we make our strides in spite of the constant maintenance demands on Public Works Superintendent Bret Marshall to keep our roads sealed, to keep the water flowing to your faucets and to keep the parks well groomed.

Improvements to parks have been many. In 2015, Talent installed the number one requested amenity by citizen survey. The Splash Pad phase 1 was completed and opened to a large crowd of over-joyed little ones. Also in parks is a new dog pool and pet drinking fountain at the Bark Park and the beautiful new volleyball nets at Chuck Roberts Park.

In 2015, we added a section of property to parks along Wagner Creek just behind the Oak Valley subdivision which has long been designed into the City Parks Master Plan.

When asked, Paul Hadella, chairman of Talent's Parks and Recreation Commission said that he *"loves our clean, well-maintained parks. They offer something for everyone, from dog owners and nature lovers to kids who turned out in droves last summer to enjoy our new splash pad at Chuck Roberts."*

Turning to water infrastructure. In 2015, Talent City Council approved the purchase of new technology that will better monitor our water delivery system. This new technology, called SCADA, will allow operations managers to see how our water system is operating from online, from anywhere at any time. If there is a failure, Talent staff can respond immediately. This will be particularly important for Talent, as we now share water delivery lines with Ashland and Phoenix.

Other improvements to our infrastructure include better information management within our Community Development Department. Our development codes are being revamped, and our City maps including flood plain maps are being updated. The improvements not only make us ready to respond to growth with intentional planning, but they have also resulted in ratings that reduce community flood insurance premiums by 5%.

Talent Police Department, under Chief Mike Moran, works hard to keep our community safe and organized. We have had two promotions to Lt. and Corporal. Talent purchased two badly needed police vehicles, as well as the full deployment of officer body cams to insure transparency in their daily activities. Officers trained in Crisis Intervention for a better knowledge of interacting with people with mental illness. Officers responded to 3920 calls for service and still exceeded their community outreach goals with eight public meeting events.

Darin Welburn, Fire Chief for Jackson County Fire District 5, said, *"I love the small town feel with so many friendly people. I think the working relationships between the various departments are exceptional."*

Fiscal responsibility is an all too often loosely used term thrown around without backup! Administrative Services Director Denise Woodman continues Talent's legacy in finance with another clean unqualified audit report, healthy City reserves, and contingency funds and a 5% unappropriated ending fund balance to provide for City cash flow, when starting the next fiscal year. As of 2015, 15% of all customers receive their bills by email and 16% now have an auto pay feature in order to pay their monthly utility bill. A source of pride for Talent is that our current debt service remains at 4% of the total budget, stating clearly that we are not robbing Talent's future.

Two other important efforts are the City Charter Review and the Round About project on Valley View. The City Charter is the legal document that establishes Talent as a City within the county and establishes the structure under which the City must operate. Installed by the vote of the people, there is no higher authority within our City's government. The Talent Charter has been the subject of challenge several times since its last update in 2002. Some of the best minds in Talent, led by Councilor Cooke, set out to improve the City Charter. There are some very important suggested changes that are being considered, which may appear on the ballot of the upcoming General Election. The City of Talent owes Councilor Cooke many thanks for leading such a fine team in an effort to improve Talent's most important guiding document.

I cannot close this address without an update on the roundabout, known as the Valley View project. The public Plaza is nearly completed. Everyone should be able to now see the beauty of this most useful community space.

As many know, the remaining phase of the Valley View roundabout is designed over the property owned by the Talent Irrigation District. The Talent Urban Renewal Agency is assessing the property in partnership with the Talent Irrigation District so that we can best serve the citizens of Talent and the customers of the irrigation district in negotiations. We are dedicated to the notion that as long as we focus on the positive development of our community, we will have the project completed before 2019, which is when Talent Urban Renewal Agency ceases to exist. Once completed, Talent will finally realize the full potential of this design nearly 15 years in the making with better traffic flow through our downtown retail and into our neighborhoods on the west side of town. We are very grateful for the positive collaboration between the Talent Urban Renewal Agency and the Talent Irrigation District.

I will close with what I love most about Talent. *“Talent is truly a diverse City, with a great many perspectives, all them making it our home. If you hang around long enough, you can see the imprint we all have made together, and that is a pretty amazing thing.”*

Thank you and many blessing to our beautiful little City of Talent.