Bethel Corridor Update

CITY OF PORT ORCHARD – September 2013

“What about Bethel?”
-Tim Matthes, Mayor

One common question at the quarterly Town Hall meetings I hold is: “What about Bethel?” It is a great question, with a not-so-simple answer. I hope this report provides some answers to this very important question.

The Original Plan

In 2004, Kitsap County had created a Bethel Road Corridor Development Plan. Below is a cross-section picture to illustrate what kind of road Bethel would become under the plan. The 100-foot right-of-way would have included four 11-foot lanes, two 8-foot sidewalks, two 7-foot planter strips, two 5-foot bike lanes, and a 16-foot median for access control and aesthetics. Other provisions of the plan included enhanced pedestrian crossings, bus pullouts, commercial connector roads, roundabouts, and undergrounding of utilities.

The estimated project cost according to a presentation by Shea, Carr, Jewell Engineering and Planning Services was $39.5 million: $25 million for construction, $11 million for purchasing right-of-ways, and $3.5 million for redesign, bid documents, and construction engineering for federal aid contracts. The County was unable to secure funding for this plan with a tax base of 250,000 residents. It becomes an even larger problem for a City of 12,870 to fund.

One Bethel commercial property owner said anyone who has looked at this plan knows that it is unrealistic. This plan was designed before the recession began. The revenue constraints that local jurisdictions live in today make this plan unrealistic. A new plan is needed, one that can be funded and completed.

2013 Improvements

Our first priority for the corridor is safety. In 2013, the City started restriping the road to give better visibility in winter weather, cutting back brush, and cleaning out the roadside ditches along the corridor. Public Works has identified ditches where the shoulders adjacent to the blacktop are rutted and full of potholes. City crews are making repairs to these areas this month and next.

We have identified poorly lit sections of the corridor and are going to install five additional lights before winter. We are also providing snow and ice control and street sweeping of the corridor.

It is our hope that these improvements will make the corridor safer for winter driving and allow us time to make bigger, longer lasting improvements in the future.

Future Improvements & Redesign

Some of those longer lasting improvements are in-
specting the road and identifying the areas that need pavement grind out and patch repairs, so we can fund and complete the work in 2014.

In 2014, the City will be establishing the Bethel Corridor redesign criteria for the 2015 Bethel Corridor Improvement Plan redesign effort. The City will look at funding opportunities and restrictions; identify segments; re-evaluate the right-of-way within the corridor; identify right-of-way acquisitions and storm drainage mitigation revisions.

The new design has to fit both the scale of the rest of the area and fit with surrounding infrastructure. We need a plan that is affordable for a city of our size. And we need a plan that can be funded and constructed in many phases over multiple years, because that is the new reality that cities and counties face when looking for funding for these types of projects.

**Bethel Tax Revenues & Expenses**

When discussions were happening regarding the Bethel Corridor annexation, it was touted that the annexation would bring in a lot of revenue. What was never discussed was the costs to provide service and what the impact would be to the City.

Our responsibility to provide services for the new area was effective on the annexation date April 12, 2012; however, the first major distribution of new revenues were not received until October 2012. At the end of the year, the City spent $110,597 more on Bethel for services than it had collected.

The City hired two additional police officers and an additional public works crewmember because of additional work associated with the corridor. Training, equipment, police cars, and a multipurpose utility vehicle were also some of the necessary expenses for the new service area. The Municipal Court’s caseload, both criminal and non-criminal, doubled since 2008 following the two annexations in 2009 and the 2012 Bethel annexation. The Bethel annexation alone increased the monthly average of non-traffic criminal cases, such as Theft 3 and Assault 4 Domestic Violence, from an average of 26 cases to 44 cases a month.

In July, the City Council set its 2014 Goals. First on the list is a Bethel Corridor Plan that includes interim improvements and a redesign policy discussion. The City is in the beginning stages of creating the 2014 budget. Please provide your input during this process. If improvements to the Bethel Corridor are your priority, you have to let the Council know. I encourage you to attend the Finance Committee meetings when they review budget proposals. There will also be a public hearing for the budget in November. If you cannot make the meetings, then email City Hall.

**Future Funding**

Once a new plan for the corridor is approved, phases have been identified, and right of ways have been purchased, we will have to answer the hardest question about Bethel: How are we going to fund it?

The approach of taking surplus revenues from sales tax and property tax and putting it away in a separate fund would take a very long time. It may buy right of ways here and there, but a more extensive approach is crucial if we expect to complete the much-needed improvements. Funding scenarios include state and federal grants, developer mitigation or impact fees, creating a transportation benefit district, or bonding with debt service obligation.

I hope this report sheds some light on the challenges the City faces with making improvements to Bethel. Please call or email me if you would like to discuss this further.