



A Message from the Mayor

September 22, 2020

I sincerely regret any confusion or fear the community has experienced due to the campaign of misinformation about the intent and purpose of the La Center Police Department (LCPD) assessment. The campaign alleges the intent of the assessment is to defund the police department, a statement that is not true. The purpose (scope) of the assessment is on the City's website, www.lacenter.wa.us.

Throughout my tenure as Mayor, each City department has participated in and completed an assessment. The outcome of each department's assessment has strengthened the delivery of services to the community while increasing internal effectiveness.

I realize the timing of this assessment in light of the current anti-policing trend in the region is not good; however, the assessment is key to the budget preparation as we look to 2021 and beyond. Law enforcement professionals throughout the state predict there will be numerous changes in law enforcement in 2021, which will increase the 2021-2022 budgets—something we need to ready ourselves for now.

Historically, the La Center card rooms were the primary source of the City's revenues. Two of the City's four card rooms were closed prior to 2017. The two remaining card rooms began seeing a decline in revenue with the opening of the tribal casino which was predicted prior to me becoming Mayor. This year the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the closure of the two remaining cardrooms, creating an estimated one-million-dollar budget shortfall for 2020. Unless the City's financial picture improves, the City Council will be faced with making some difficult policy decisions which may further impact all City services. The LCPD's assessment will help the City Council make informed policy decisions for continued public safety service for La Center. Public safety is important to the quality of living for all La Center residents.





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There has also been inaccurate information circulating in the community regarding the City's acquisition of the TDS building, which will be the new city hall. In late 2018 TDS hired JP King to auction the TDS building. The property is located adjacent to the current City Hall, Sternwheeler Park, and the trail leading through the La Center bottoms – all of which the City owns. The City has discussed the need to consolidate City employees and services into one building and to provide space to accommodate future growth.

Prior to the auction date the City completed a detailed building inspection and Level 1 environmental review. A few deferred maintenance items generally consistent with the age and condition of the building were identified with no current or continuing environmental concerns. The City contracted with an architect to study the necessary space needs and what modifications would be needed to accommodate City staff. During this process it was determined the TDS building was not built to Category 4 engineering standards, a requirement to accommodate the LCPD. Upgrading the building was so cost prohibitive it was decided the LCPD would not be relocated.

Today, there continues to be a great need to consolidate City non-police department staff into one facility in order to capture the financial benefits of a more efficient and effective operation, while providing enhanced customer service to our community and service partners. The funding for the new City Hall comes from the City's capital funds, which are financial reserves to be used for one-time projects as opposed to funding ongoing operations.

The City envisions the new City Hall building as a service center and as a community gathering place. Because the LCPD is unable to be relocated to this building, the City will lease the unoccupied space to other tenants. The need to find a more suitable location/building for LCPD will be an issue the City will need to consider as part of the assessment.

Relocating City offices to the TDS building provides a unique opportunity for the City to generate revenue by renting the main street frontages currently occupied by the City to commercial tenants. This gives the City many different options to explore.





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Before taking a position or buying into the misinformation, I ask residents of this great community to give the City Council time to thoroughly review all City operations and services. I would encourage all residents to attend future City Council meetings (virtual), visit the newly updated City website, and watch the recordings of past City Council meetings to become informed on the myriad of issues facing La Center now and in the immediate future. In addition, please attend my virtual town hall meeting Tuesday, October 6 at 6:30 pm. All are welcome. The virtual town hall meeting link is available on the City website.

Thank you for your understanding and patience during these particularly challenging times.

Mayor, Greg Thornton

