

From the Desk of

GEORGE KRAMER

386 North Laurel Street, Ashland, OR 97520

541-482-9504

george@preserveoregon.com

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Ashland City Council
C/O Melissa Huhtala (via e-mail)
Melissa.huhtala@ashland.or.us

RE: Council Position #3

Dear Mayor Stromberg and Members of the Ashland City Council,

Please consider this my letter of interest in filling the current vacancy in Council Position #3, with a term to expire on December 31, 2018. It is my intention to run for election to council in November 2018.

The following responds to the four questions as detailed in the position announcement.

What are the biggest issues facing the City?

Ashland continues to be faced with issues related to its work-force housing supply, affordable housing and homelessness, all of which are, in my opinion, linked with economic development. We need to continue looking for creative solutions such as the Transit Triangle plan that encourage and incentivize other-than-SFR residential development. We must also work to expand the economy beyond tourism and government to create family-wage job opportunities. I believe we can do this by promoting high-tech, medical, and clean industries in addition to the staples of tourism and service jobs. We must continue to re-assess our planning process to minimize obstacles to creative and appropriate residential and commercial development.

Additionally, Ashland's budget process has become overly fractious. The City needs to improve how it prioritizes its budget and how it communicates, both to address public concern and more importantly to assure a sustainable future. Both these issues, housing and budgets, in the largest sense stem from an over-arching need to bring the city together to develop a broad-ranging vision of what we want Ashland to be in the next 20 years. We must work creatively and collaboratively to craft programs and policies that can help to move us toward our larger community goals.

What is your primary motivation for seeking a vacant Council seat?

I have lived in Ashland for over 35 years and can't imagine living anywhere else. As you know, I have been engaged in and with city government in many forms and it seems high time for me to step up and play a more active and direct role. I am a creative, collaborative, problem-solver and bring a wide range of experience to a task. I think that I have the background and skills that would be appropriate to a council seat and hope that I will have the opportunity to put those skills to use to strengthen our community.

What Community and City activities have you been involved with recently?

I was appointed to the Ashland Historic Commission in the early 1980s and resigned as its Chair when I returned to graduate school at the University of Oregon. In years past I have been on multiple special-function committees including the City's public facilities committee, the Ashland Fire Station #2 committee, the bond committee for that fire station and, most recently, the Ad Hoc Committee on City Hall. Professionally I have worked for the City on multiple occasions, including writing all four of Ashland's National Register District nominations, as part of the library design team and many other projects as well. Most recently I worked with staff and helped design the restoration of the Lithia Fountain and Pioneer Mike.

As a community member I have been involved with multiple issues, from the "Maximum House Size" ordinance to working with the Festival to save Carpenter Hall. I currently serve as the Board President of the Ashland Emergency Food Bank and have been active in that organization for many years. My wife Joyce and I are longtime supporters of the Ashland Food Project, the Ashland Public Library and other regional non-profits. Outside of Ashland I serve as a gubernatorial appointee to the Oregon Cultural Trust Board of Trustees and am the former Chair of the Oregon Heritage Commission, as well as service on several state and national professional groups.

What is the role of the City Councilor?

I believe the volunteer council's primary role is working collaboratively with the City's professional staff and the community as a legislative body to evaluate and establish policy for Ashland. It's council's role to listen and determine the community's priorities, and then, working within the limitations of time and money, help craft workable solutions that help Ashland achieve those goals. I appreciate that Council has other duties, including its quasi-judicial role and supporting staff and commissions, but believe that Council is, and ought to serve as, the focal point for the city's direction on the issues before us. In the end, the Council's collective wisdom represents and reflects the interests and concerns of Ashland's residents. It is also, I believe, Council's role to maintain a realistic expectation of what the City cannot do and to educate the public on the limitations that the city faces. I believe process is important. Not every decision is universally popular, nor does every constituent always get what they want. But I do see Council as the mechanism by which Ashland can achieve and maintain a practical, achievable, sustainable, community for a broad, diverse, and changing citizenry.

I look forward to discussing these issues with each of you as the council moves through this decision in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,



George Kramer
386 North Laurel Street
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