

January 27, 2017

Dear Ashland City Council,

With this letter, I am formally indicating my interest in being appointed to fill the remainder of Pam Marsh's term for City Council Position #6.

I grew up in a small town in Nevada and have lived in Ashland for over 20 years, during which time it has become my second hometown. I have raised my children here specifically because of its safe environment, natural beauty and biodiversity, dedication to its children, and the eclectic mix of small town and world renowned theater, art, and music. I am sure I do not have to tell you all that Ashland is an incredible place to live and work.

My desire to serve the people of Ashland on the City Council comes from my love of this place and the deep connection I feel to people I have gotten to know in many different spheres: the people in the nonprofit sector who are working hard to solve conservation and social challenges, the members of my faith community, some local business owners, the parents of other children in the school system, and of course, my neighbors, close friends, and family.

Ashland is in a unique position to be able to innovate and experiment with various ways of solving the challenges that come with being a small city in the modern world. We have many different people with interesting experiences to draw from who can help us be both resilient and creative. I would like to be part of the effort that keeps our community healthy and lend my knowledge and experience to the task of addressing local issues as they arise.

My father served as a Justice of the Peace for 22 years and I grew up watching him serve the people of his community with thoughtfulness, compassion, and accountability. He ran for office the first time not because he had aspirations of holding public office, but because his community needed a Justice of the Peace with integrity who held court on a regular basis. By the time I graduated from college, I knew I wanted to eventually serve in some formal capacity in local government. Now that my children are older and most of them are off to college, I have the capacity in my life to devote to serving on the City Council.

I do not have a particular issue that is drawing me to serve at this time, but I believe my knowledge and experience in climate change and conservation issues, as well as my relationships with people working on social issues, could serve the Council well and complement the knowledge, expertise, and community connections that already exist on the Council.

I affirm that I live within the boundaries of Ashland and am a registered voter. Thank you for considering my application for City Council Position #6.

Sincerely,

Tonya Graham

RECEIVED JAN 27 2017

g
TLC to JC Elections 1-27
Confirmed lives w/in city
limits + registered to vote
-J

What do you think are the biggest issues facing the city?

Ashland is faced with several issues, some of which will be addressed in the time remaining on this term and others which need to be addressed over the longer term with the City Council making a good start on them over the next two years. Please note that the items on this list are in no particular priority order.

Near Term Issues:

City Government Vacancies

There are a number of vacancies in leadership positions within the City that either exist now or are expected to arrive in the near term with the anticipated retirement of several department heads who have held their positions for many years and carry significant institutional history. Current examples include the City Administrator, Administrative Services/Finance Director, and City Recorder. The City Council will need to fill those positions in a thoughtful way that not only guarantees that we hire or appoint people who are qualified to do the job, but also ensures that those new leaders share the values of Ashland's citizens and are committed to moving the community toward inclusiveness, diversity, economic vitality, and ecological sustainability. It will be critically important that the City Council do all it can in these processes to ensure that they are fair and free of implicit bias for all applicants.

Biennial Budget (2017-2018)

This spring the Council will come together with several community members as the Budget Committee to determine how the City will invest its resources over the next two years. This is where the rubber meets the road in terms of the City's priorities. How we invest our public resources is the clearest indication of what is important to us. In addition to funding standard city services and infrastructure upgrades, the Council will need to determine the highest priority issues facing the City in relation to its strategic plan and how much to invest in each of those issues.

Long-Term Issues

Seismic Upgrade/Rebuild of City Hall

The Council is currently in the process of assessing the safety of City Hall in terms of earthquake risk and determining the best way to address those safety concerns. This will be a large infrastructure project requiring significant financial investment, so how the City decides to move forward to address the risk is very important.

Affordable Housing

When I arrived in Ashland over 20 years ago, I did as many people with newly minted college degrees do. I picked up several “rent” jobs and worked to get my career off the ground while living in an upstairs apartment on North Main Street. I was able to be successful in getting my start because there was adequate rental stock and prices were reasonable. I’ve been fortunate to buy a home in Ashland since then, but I’ve watched as it has become more and more difficult to live in Ashland for people with low income and young people in college or who are just starting out. My young adult children have very little hope of being able to afford to live here because of the cost of housing. My vision for Ashland is that it is a vibrant community that welcomes and accommodates people with a range of incomes and that the people who work here can afford to live here. I do not claim to know how to fix these issues, but I am committed to helping find a way to ensure that we have adequate affordable rental stock and that we figure out how to make home ownership more accessible for people with low income in Ashland.

Climate Change

The climate crisis is the greatest long-term global challenge faced by all communities and requires an immediate and effective response by the City. Fortunately, we are making a good start with the Climate and Energy Action Plan nearing completion. Through several different venues and processes, the citizens of Ashland have signaled clearly that they are very concerned and want appropriately scaled action from the City on this issue. Once the plan is accepted, the task before the Council will be to determine the most effective way to invest in implementing the plan so that Ashland can successfully meet the aggressive, but absolutely necessary, targets it is in the process of setting for itself.

People Who Do Not Have Homes

The issues around people who do not have homes are complex because not all homeless people have similar situations or need similar help. The situation of a family living in their car or on a neighbor’s couch is vastly different than that of a young summer traveler passing through or that of a chronically homeless elder. The “solution” is likely to be several solutions that understand and address that complexity and take advantage of resources available in all sectors of our community. We also need to ensure that our citizens, local businesses, and visitors experience Ashland as a fun, friendly, and safe place. Our downtown needs to be welcoming, lively, and accessible to all, including people without homes, but there also needs to be accountability and responsibility in that access. In that process, the City needs to continue to address this issue by working directly with this population as well as others in county and state government and in the nonprofit sector to ensure that the City takes on aspects of solutions that are appropriate to its role and function.

Getting There

This is certainly not an all-inclusive list of challenges the City is facing, but these are the most important from my perspective. Fortunately, Ashland has a good many strengths to draw from in its efforts to address these issues, including an active and engaged citizenry, a functional and thoughtful City Council, financial resources, significant knowledge and experience within its citizenry, and a team of dedicated professionals working for city government who clearly care about the work they do. While the problems listed above are not easy to solve, they are not impossible either. Working together, we can develop a shared understanding of these issues and determine what the “design specs” are for our solutions so that we take advantage of the resources Ashland has in creating effective solutions that align with our values.

What is your primary motivation for seeking the vacant council seat?

I am very interested in learning more about how local government operates and bringing my knowledge and experience to bear on the issues facing our community. My interests certainly include climate change and sustainability, but I am committed to social justice and taking care of each other in our community. And, I recognize that a healthy community rests on the foundation of a healthy economy and that a diversified, local business sector is key to that healthy economy. There is always a balance that needs to be maintained with the City taking on the responsibility of maintaining and improving municipal services and infrastructural systems while working in partnership with its citizens and neighboring communities to move forward on important community issues. I have extensive experience developing partnerships and integrated, holistic, community-based solutions that I believe would be a nice fit given the challenges the Council has before it.

I have always been civic minded – registering young voters, assisting with local issue and candidate campaigns, and writing the occasional letter to the editor. My first recollection of conversations around voting and public service came when I was about 10 years old and I was helping my father build a plywood sign for out in front of the courthouse in my little town. It was a dual purpose sign that said “Register here today!” and had a sign overlay that made it say “Vote here today!” That carpentry project initiated many conversations with my parents about how we govern ourselves and the civic responsibility each of us carries. I believe everyone has a role to play in serving their community and I am excited by the prospect of serving on the Council as one of the ways that I can personally contribute.

The last twenty years of my professional life have been spent working to solve issues, starting from a place of collaboration and aiming for a win-win solution wherever possible. In that time, I have developed skills that I believe would be helpful to the City Council as it embarks on a busy two years and makes critical decisions that will chart the course for our community well into the future. While I will need to learn more about the specifics of the formal process the City employs in its decision-making, I have transferable experience on decision-making bodies and with governance processes.

I envision the Ashland of the future as a place inhabited by people of mixed incomes where citizens and the City do their part to address climate change and move us toward greater ecological sustainability; our business community is vibrant, healthy, diversified, and strong; and where people of diverse races, ethnicities, and religions choose to call home. Ashland will make many decisions in the next few years that will determine to what extent this vision can become a reality. I would like to be part of that work by serving on the City Council.

What community and city activities have you been involved in recently?

My local activities generally relate to volunteer work through the schools, helping with programs at the Ashland First Congregational United Church of Christ, and assisting with the City's Climate and Energy Action Plan.

AHS Turf Field Campaign

Most recently, I volunteered to assist the Ashland Schools Foundation and the Ashland School District as the co-coordinator of the Turf Field Fundraising effort at Ashland High School. That effort raised enough money for the District to replace the problematic grass football field with a multi-sport, natural fill, turf field at the outdoor stadium that can be used for football, soccer, high school PE classes, and community events. My responsibilities included serving on the Turf Field Committee at the school district, writing grants and fundraising appeals, and assisting with budgeting and outreach.

AHS Senior All Night

I have assisted with the AHS Senior All Night celebration for the past four years. The first two years I served as a chaperone and clean up volunteer. The last two years I served as a co-chair of the volunteer parent committee that organizes the celebration each year. In that capacity, my responsibilities included facilitating the planning meetings, managing the overall effort for creating the event, supporting the various committees, assisting with fundraising, and helping refine the budget to ensure that we kept our expenses within our means. In the first of those two years of co-coordinating the event, we worked hard to create a process that could be easily replicated by future volunteer committees.

John Muir School

I served as the volunteer parent driver coordinator for 9 years organizing drivers to transport the students to a variety of nature activities and field trips. I have also assisted with specific events for the school and served as a parent chaperone on some of their day trips and overnight excursions.

Ashland First Congregational United Church of Christ

I am an active member of my congregation and support a variety of programs of my church, including coordinating hospitality for Sunday services and assisting with events and action efforts as needed. I served as Chair of the Selection Committee for an Interim Pastor two years ago to hire a temporary pastor to lead our congregation while the formal search process was underway for the new settled pastor.

Climate and Energy Action Plan

In my role as Executive Director of the Geos Institute, I worked with our ClimateWise® team to secure resources to assist the City of Ashland in developing its Climate and Energy Action Plan. That effort has resulted in the Geos Institute completing a climate vulnerability assessment and citizen survey that complement the efforts of the City's contractor on the project.

Nonprofit Association of Oregon

While this community engagement is focused on a state level organization, it touches local organizations in Ashland because of the role that NAO plays in the nonprofit sector across the state. I served on NAO's Board of Directors as an at-large member and then as the Treasurer. My term ended in the fall of 2015. My contributions as Treasurer focused on ensuring that the Board had a strong understanding of the organization's finances by working with the Finance Director to develop more effective ways of communicating the organization's financial position to the Board members so that we could better anticipate potential funding challenges.

What is the role of the city councilor?

The City of Ashland has several important documents that guide the work of the City Council, including the Ashland 2020 Strategic Plan and the Council's Goals and Objectives, which help the City meet those strategic plan goals. These documents create a strong framework within which the Council does its work on behalf of the people of Ashland. The Council as a whole must balance and weigh the various goals against the resources it has to invest and the timeliness of the need for various actions in order to chart an effective course for meeting the City's goals.

As a key decision-maker in this process, the City Councilor has several different roles. First and foremost, the Councilor works to translate the goals of its citizens into action to improve the community through ordinances, strategic planning, and the budget process. Part of this is balancing short-term needs with long-term investments and prioritizing what action the City should take, and the scale, timeline, and level of investment of that action.

The councilor serves as an important connection between the Council and the citizen commissions that work to further the goals of the City and identify new issues to be considered. By serving as a liaison to several commissions, the councilor ensures that the Council is kept

informed about developments in those commissions, new concerns or opportunities that are arising, and actions that the Council may be asked to take at some point. In that context, the councilor can bring the perspective of the larger whole of the City to those commission discussions while taking back to the Council the top level ideas and concerns of the committee.

Citizens rely on the councilors to have their ear to the ground in terms of issues that are bubbling up within the larger community, so councilors have a responsibility to maintain their connections in the community and develop new ones that are perhaps not their natural inclination. It is important that each councilor have relationships with multiple sectors to ensure that they have a well-rounded understanding of what the challenges the City is facing actually look like from different perspectives.

Finally, the role of the councilor includes supporting strong governance processes, transparency, and accountability. City councilors should speak up when a process does not include adequate opportunities for citizen engagement or when a process is so focused on engagement that it threatens to fail to reach its objectives. The councilor should do her or his work in such a way that the citizens have faith that even if that councilor does not agree with them in the end, the process was fair and their concerns were given thoughtful consideration. Relationships are particularly important in governing bodies like a City Council, so it is important that councilors treat each other with respect, especially when they have serious disagreements regarding the best way forward. If the process is solid, all councilors should respect the final vote of the Council and model integrity in government for our young people who are just learning how to engage in this experiment we call democracy.