

2020 Accomplishments

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in Oregon and is still in effect. The City has and is still providing assistance to the community in the following ways:

The City Administrator activated the emergency operations center and declared a State of Emergency for the COVID-19 pandemic later approved by the Council. The Council has continued to approve the State of Emergency declarations so that assistance from State and Federal agencies can be received by the City, local businesses, and residents.

A dedicated website ashland.or.us/coronavirus was created and is continually updated with new advisories, government restrictions, and assistance programs.

The City applied and was awarded matching funds from Business Oregon to facilitate a COVID-19 Emergency Business Grant program that focused on providing aid to small businesses which had not received CARES Act funding. In July, a total of \$97,500 in grants were dispersed to 36 Ashland small businesses. The City has continued to promote other Business Oregon grant opportunities aimed at helping small businesses during the pandemic.

The Chamber of Commerce partnered with the City and various downtown business owners to create the Ashland Summer Celebration. The Celebration had themed weekends throughout the Summer starting in July. Every week, the Streets Division blocked off sidewalks and roadways for outdoor seating and extra walking and retail space every Friday through Sunday.

The Utility Billing Division continued to provide payment options to the public as City offices closed to in-person visits. The City's partnership with ACCESS was expanded to promote the availability of federal funding to assist utility customers struggling to pay their bills. Utility customers were not charged late fees for any past due balances through June 30.

The Finance Department extended the deadline for paying TOT and Food and Beverage Taxes for the first quarter until August 1. The Finance Department also led the City's efforts to utilize CARES funding to support internal and external services impacted by the pandemic. Total funds anticipated in reimbursement to the City are approximately \$1.15 million.

Finance staff have carefully monitored the effects of the pandemic on City revenue and expenditures avoiding a dramatic drop in related service and TOT and Food and Beverage tax revenues that was initially anticipated. This has afforded the City time to gather additional data and prepare for ongoing service adjustments extending through the next biennium.

The Parks and Recreation Department installed 18 hand washing stations and 24 portable bathrooms for public use around town as businesses and parks facilities closed. Parks and Recreation also collaborated on the Adopt a Neighbor Ashland program to help high-risk residents with shopping assistance. A Senior Phone Buddy program was developed to fight social isolation and outreach calls to vulnerable seniors were made. Outdoor and Online programming for recreation and education programs were developed along with the "Find Your Space" marketing campaign which was recognized by the National Recreation and Parks Association. The Parks Department also supported car camping and meal distribution sites for the homeless population. All this was done while the Department had to lay-off and furlough staff to address the loss of revenue due to COVID-19 restrictions.

The City awarded \$160,000 in Affordable Housing Trust Funds to support affordable housing and emergency shelter options with COVID-19 safe practices. Local organizations who received

the awarded funds included OHRA, Maslow Project, Neighbor Works Umpqua, and Jackson County. In addition, CDBG funds were awarded to non-profits and community groups providing emergency assistance to address urgent needs and the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic. Community Development staff and the Housing and Human Services Commission were instrumental in the awarding of both funding.

In addition to the CDBG funding, Community Development staff administering the program completed the 2020-2024 Consolidated Plan for the use of CDBG funding, the City's five-year grant application to HUD, and completed an update of the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice.

The car camping program was expanded to include three additional free vehicle camping locations with trash, hygiene stations, and basic monitoring by City staff. In December, the City purchased and installed three pallet shelters using CDBG money as a part of a pilot program with the Unitarian Church to provide shelter options while maintaining safe COVID-19 practices for both participants and volunteers facilitating the program.

Ashland Fiber Network offered a free cable modem service for all K-12 and College students and staff who were not current AFN members in the Spring and Fall as schools transitioned to virtual learning.

Our Human Resources Division successfully navigated the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing physical barriers in offices, employee workplace safety policies and stricter cleaning protocols to protect employees and visitors as allowed in City facilities. HR also supported the immediate shift to remote work due to the pandemic.

On September 8, the Almeda Fire spread from the North end of Ashland and to our neighbors in Talent and Phoenix leaving a devastating path of destruction. Various City Departments provided support to our regional partners and communities. While there were countless hours spent by staff in response here are some brief descriptions of each Department's role during the Almeda Fire.

An Emergency Operations Center was activated by the Interim City Administrator to assist the incident command and pull all City resources to respond to the fire.

Ashland Fire and Rescue administrative staff, support staff, all operations personnel as well as all fire and police agencies from Jackson County responded to stop the unprecedented Almeda Fire. Upon the extinguishment of this fire, three people lost their lives, 2,784 residential properties were destroyed or damaged and 188 commercial properties were destroyed or damaged.

The Fire Cause and Origin Investigation into the start of the Almeda fire was conducted over several weeks. This was a joint effort of the Ashland Police, Ashland Fire & Rescue as well as multiple agencies from outside of Ashland to understand and find the cause of this devastating fire.

Our Police Department was also key to a successful evacuation of thousands of people throughout the region.

Every operations division of Public Works responded during the Fire to help assist with traffic control and road closures, turning off water services to hundreds of burnt homes, supplying water to fire fighters, and directly fighting fires near the source of the fire. The GIS Division of Public Works also became the GIS lead for the Almeda Fire assisting regional partners with creating

maps and providing support, training, and tools for the damage assessment field reports. In addition to the Alameda Fire, GIS staff also created South Obenchain Fire situation report maps for the County Emergency Operations Center.

The Parks and Recreation Department helped with fire suppression on Parks properties and cleared hazardous trees and brush after fire. Staff also worked on finding housing for displaced families, staffed an Ashland Response helpline and email, and created a resource webpage to help community members find and give help.

Our Electric Crews initiated cautionary power shut offs in the Quiet Village neighborhood near where the fire began. Crews also worked in coordination with Ashland Fire and Rescue and CERT to ensure all structures in the area were safe before restoring power. This was after spending the morning before the fire, responding to multiple wind caused outages throughout Ashland.

The Administration Department along with the Public Information Officer sent out various press releases and information from partner organizations. A dedicated website was created to archive all the updates and the After Action Review survey at ashland.or.us/almedafire.

Our Human Resources Director facilitated the After Action Review including documenting each Department's response and a survey that over 500 participants filled out about the communication and the evacuation process during the fire.

In addition to the response of the two emergencies, the City continued its regular work and took on new projects.

Our City Council held 22 Business Meetings and 18 Study Sessions and passed 19 ordinances and 28 resolutions. In response to George Floyd's murder, the City Council approved and continually worked on Resolution No. 2020-15 to address Ashland's role in social equity and racial injustice. The Council also said goodbye to three long standing members and welcomed three new Councilors and a Mayor; all enthusiastic and ready to take on their new roles.

Our Administration Department said goodbye to City Administrator, Kelly Madding, in April. Assistant City Administrator, Adam Hanks, took over the role as Interim City Administrator since her departure.

Our City Recorder implemented a new software program called "Conduits" to use for publication of the city's property and lien searches. This program ensures accuracy and will speed up the lien search process for the user while saving paper. Two different software programs will be implemented in 2021: Granicus, an agenda and meeting management software, and DocuSign, an electronic signature software. Our Recorder was also sworn in as Oregon Association of Municipal Records Region V Director for the second time.

Our Community Development Department issued 966 building permits and processed 304 land use applications and transitioned to a 100 percent digital permitting process and implemented the use of Bluebeam software, which has enhanced plan review capabilities and increased collaboration between our customers and department staff.

The Building Safety Division performed comprehensive plan reviews on 331 projects and conducted over 3,650 inspections.

The Planning Division held 64 pre-application conferences, mailed 152 neighborhood notices, and reviewed 283 building permit applications for compliance with the land use code.

Significant construction projects for 2020 included Snowberry Brook II, a 60-unit affordable housing project at Villard and Engle Streets; two major school district projects at Helman Elementary and Ashland Middle School; the construction of Plaza East, Oregon Shakespeare Festival's new housing project on Lithia Way; the seismic upgrades and remodel of Southern Oregon University's Britt Hall; and the addition and renovation at Lithia Motors Pavilion.

As 2020 comes to an end, the Community Development Department anticipates directing resources toward several projects on the horizon for the next year. These projects include the Mid-Town Urban Lofts, a 70-unit studio apartment complex at the intersection of Garfield and Iowa; the Columbia Care 30-unit affordable housing project on Ashland Street; and the development of 16.87 acres of recently annexed land along Highway 99 for the creation of close to 200 units of multi-family housing.

Community Development's long range planning section assisted the City Council and Planning Commission with various efforts centered around clarifying City development standards, improving the planning application process and diversifying the types of housing in Ashland by encouraging development of a greater number of smaller homes and multi-family rental units.

The Planning Commission held two public hearings to solicit comments from the community on the update of the Affordable Housing Standards and provided valuable input throughout that process culminating in the final ordinance which was approved unanimously by the City Council on December 1, 2020. The Affordable Housing Standards Ordinance adoption process was also completed.

Next, our Conservation Division saw residential savings of 489,949 kwh in 2020. This is an increase from 2019 with 320,499 kwh in residential savings. Every category of the Conservation programs saw an increase in energy efficient installations in 2020.

The following programs relating to the Climate and Energy Action Plan were also enacted in 2020:

The Rogue to Go grant funded pilot program for reusable to go containers was continued in 2020 and is now transitioning to become a permanent program run by a local organization that has expanded the program to Medford.

Ashland Electric participates in the Oregon Clean Fuels program, which provides funds to reduce carbon in Oregon's fuel supply. These resources helped support upgraded public electric vehicle charging infrastructure at the Pioneer Street parking lot that was performed by our Public Works and Electric crews. In total, there are currently 12 public electric vehicle chargers available in Ashland.

Climate staff also worked with Forth Mobility and several local stakeholders to install additional community electric vehicle charging stations. Thanks to this collaboration, 17 chargers were donated and installed at key public safety and health facilities, including the airport, hospital, fire station, and service center. Climate staff also applied for and received a Bonneville Environmental Foundation Zero Emission Vehicle grant to create two new vehicle electrification incentives: one for electric vehicles and another for electric bikes.

Both climate-themed commissions came back online in 2020 and have developed substantial workplans. In addition, Climate program staff applied for and received assistance from University of Oregon to have an outreach and program support intern from their RARE program.

City of Ashland is also active in several statewide policy conversations to advocate for strong action and state leadership in climate action.

Moving on to our Electric Division who over the course of 2020 repaired or replaced approximately 100 streetlights, trimmed over 850 trees near overhead powerlines, installed many new solar meters bringing the total number of solar installations in Ashland to over 650, had 38 days with after hour calls for service for outages and other issues during nights, weekends, and holidays. The Department also helped successfully negotiated a new labor agreement with the IBEW Electrical bargaining group, thanks to a team effort from HR, Legal, Electric and IBEW representatives.

Ashland Fire and Rescue completed the required paperwork with the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training. All credentialed staff and line personnel are accredited and certified to operate through January 2023. The Department also received a three-year extension to the Ambulance Service Agreement. Fire and Rescue personnel look forward to continuing providing top-level emergency care to the citizens of Ashland as well as the surrounding community.

With initial COVID-19 lockdowns, Ashland Fire and Rescue service calls fell in the months of March and April compared to 2019. However, even with a reduced visitor and student population due to the closure of OSF and online learning at SOU, calls for service increased from 4,098 in 2019 to 4,448 calls for service in 2020; an increase of 8.54 percent.

AF&R staff and line personnel sit on and chair various local, regional, state, and national groups, lending AF&R as a top service provider in Operations, Prevention, Education, EMS, and Wildfire Protection efforts.

Fire administration observed the retirement of Fire Chief David Shepherd, creating a vacancy in the top spot in the department. Division Chief Sartain was appointed by the Mayor to fill this vacancy until a plan for the replacement is fully examined. The Fire Administration is additionally operating with an unfilled Deputy Chief position due to budget cuts.

In a continued effort to create a functioning Emergency Operations Center at the Grove, an emergency generator was installed, tested, and is now functioning.

Fire operations witnessed the retirement of Captain David Hanstein and Firefighter Jennifer Hadden leaving two positions currently vacant. Listening to the Budget reduction committee's assessment, we are filling the current vacancies with firefighter EMT's, and not firefighter-paramedics, bringing a cost reduction to the general fund for these positions.

Fire operations continue without a dedicated training officer or training facility to increase staff proficiency, and availability to conduct necessary training without leaving the community or incurring overtime. Fire operations also observed a decrease in staffing levels in 2020 from 9/10 to 8/10 which is an 11.11 percent reduction in available staff to respond to calls.

Operations personnel also responded to two deployment requests from the Oregon State Fire Marshal's office for fire conflagration assignments in the protection of life and property for our fellow Oregonians.

The Fire and Life Safety Division had to suspend building inspections unless critical due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Having suspended the inspection program, 344 plan reviews, new construction inspections, and pre-applications were still reviewed, completed, and inspected. An

additional 36 construction site consultation meetings occurred, as well as 39 liquor license applications were reviewed and approved.

The Division also reviewed and recorded 509 fire system inspection reports. These reports revealed that Ashland's commercial fire suppression systems comprising of fire sprinklers, fire alarms, restaurant hood fire protection systems, paint booths, and emergency generators are 86 percent compliant and without deficiencies. Leaving 14 percent or 69 structures systems in danger of not working in the event of needed use.

Community CPR along with Public Education and Trip/Fall Prevention classes were canceled due to budget restraints and COVID-19 restrictions.

The Department is increasing pre-fire planning and training to have a better awareness of Ashland's commercial buildings in the event of an emergency response. This change, along with other needed changes will result in an increase to our ISO rating which will decrease our current ISO score of three to a two, which will reduce the fire hazard insurance premium paid by the citizens of Ashland.

The CERT Coordinator was reduced to a half-time position due to budget reductions. CERT maintains an active roster of 125 volunteers. Even with the COVID-19 restrictions in place, Ashland CERT volunteers provided 2,914.75 hours of service to the community with 604.5 hours of service alone in the Alameda Fire. During the Alameda Fire CERT volunteers assisted fire operations in a rehab role, provided damage assessments in Quiet Village, and staffed the Jackson County Call Center. CERT additionally assisted the Wildfire Division in the distribution of 600 air purifiers to Ashland's vulnerable population. Through Zoom meetings, CERT was able to hold a fall basic training course as well as multiple other training and certification classes.

In 2020, the Weed Abatement Coordinator re-inspected 1,052 lots, received and processed 83 citizen complaints in reference to fire danger, of which 12 were repeat property violators from 2019. 528 preseason mailers were sent to repeat property owners in March and then sent 884 letters just a few weeks ago to repeat property owners who were in violation of the Ashland Municipal Code as community outreach. In 2020, 288 notices to abate violations were issued and after extensive work to abate the hazards without compliance four citations were issued to citizens.

The Wildfire Division unveiled the Fire Adapted Ashland or FAA program website. Under the FAA program, over 600 air purifiers were distributed at no cost to vulnerable residents and the winter shelter, postcards with property-specific wildfire risk online portals were mailed to all residents with access codes and links to homeowner education videos, over 100 home assessments were done on-site along with the development of a volunteer home assessor program to increase assessment capacity in 2021. Partnerships between the Division and Rogue Valley Association of Realtors to institute wildfire inspections during home sales along with agent awareness classes was made. A partnership with Options for Helping Residents of Ashland about wildfire safety for unhoused.

The Ashland Forest Resiliency Project and City Forestlands management celebrated 10 years of work! In 2020, collective accomplishments included 1,500 acres of controlled burning and 1,400 acres of forest thinning. Critical burning was curtailed due to COVID-19 in March 2020. A wildfire science curriculum for K-12 was rolled out under the newly formed Southern Oregon Fire Ecology Education (SOFEE) consortium. Wildfire safety work took place on 43 acres of

City forestlands near homes and in the watershed and planning began for a climate adaptation plan for City forestlands with the Forest Lands Commission.

Our Finance Department welcomed a new Finance Director, Melanie Purcell. A utility payment self-service kiosk was purchased as a way for residents to have another option for making utility payments which will be installed in early Spring 2021. Finance staff has continually updated the Council and community on the current financial situation as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. Staff also recorded and submitted reimbursements for the two emergencies faced this year as stated above and will prepare the next biennial budget for adoption in 2021.

Our Human Resources Division hired Finance Director Melanie Purcell, negotiated two-year labor contracts with IBEW Electrical and Clerical/Technical labor unions, and achieved a new cost-share arrangement on healthcare with two unions and the non-represented City and Parks employees. The arrangement incrementally steps up the employee's share to 10 percent. Once fully implemented, there will be significant savings to the City on Personnel costs.

The IT Department – like all City departments – did a phenomenal job this year of demonstrating the flexibility and dedication in the face of challenges that required compressing several years of technology advances and business-process change into a few weeks.

The Information Systems Division was able to deploy connectivity and security tools that allowed employees to continue the work of the City from their homes, and they provided the technical support for all of those new processes even as the team was figuring out the same transition, themselves.

Some unsung heroes, this year, were the IT Department's Ashland Fiber Network Division team, who support the internet connectivity upon which all that remote work depends. For a short time, the Alameda Fire also left AFN as the only operational cable Internet provider in Ashland, creating a surge in new customer connections and support. Still, AFN also managed to double bandwidth capacity and increase the physical resilience of the system.

Our Municipal Court adjusted their procedures to allow for a fully electronic Court during the pandemic. The Court also implemented a new traffic school program.

Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission finalized and approved the Trails Master Plan and the Lithia Park Master Plan. The Japanese Garden Project was approved, and construction started at the end of 2020. The grant-funded Nature Play Area opened in early 2020 and quickly became a favorite with local families. The Pickleball and Tennis courts were resurfaced at Lithia Park and Hunter Park. Staff began drafting a new mission, vision, and values for APRC. The first stage, core values, was published in the WinterSpring 2021 Playguide. APRC began an extensive Cost Recovery Project in September of 2020 that focuses on the entire department costs and services. The first Ashland Senior Volunteer Fair was held on January 20 with 25 community organizations tabling and over 100 participants discovering rewarding volunteer opportunities. APRC staff maintained 18 parks and 600+ acres of open space, for a total of 807.98 acres. Included in this total is the acquisition of 22.25 acres (three properties) of open space in 2020. Completed fuels reduction on over 100 acres including the Lithia Park Hillside, Bear Creek Greenway, and multiple open space properties such as Riverwalk, Westwood, and Hald-Strawberry.

Our Police Department handled approximately 33,000 calls for service and approximately 3,000 criminal investigations. In response to George Floyd's murder, APD reviewed their use of force

policy. Chief O'Meara continues to speak with concerned community members regarding APD and police brutality. Officers were involved in several direct-action life saving measures including saving suicidal people and rendering life saving measures to overdose patients

Our Public Works Department had many notable projects completed this year including: the Hersey Street Roadway Rehabilitation, the Independent Way Roadway Connection, and the Oak Street Waterline construction, which included new fire hydrants that were utilized during the Alameda Fire. The Master Plans for Water, the Airport and the Talent Ashland Phoenix Intertie or TAP were all approved this past year. Public Works had successful collaboration with Jackson County on a \$4.5 million grant to functionally improve middle Clay Street to current City standards. The Department also had numerous riparian restoration projects underway or in the works associated with the wastewater treatment plants temperature compliance requirements