



City of La Center, WA
210 East 4th Street
La Center, WA 98629

TO THE CITY OF LA CENTER CITY COUNCIL AND CITIZENS

I am pleased to present the City of La Center's 2024 Proposed Budget for your review and consideration. Over the past several years the city has faced financial challenges as a result of the pandemic as well as increasing costs of labor, services and goods. Due to the leadership of the City Council and recent new developments, the city is in a financial position that allows us to weather uncertain times.

The 2024 Proposed Budget continues existing city services and service levels with a balanced budget and eliminates the use of reserve funds. The 2024 budget projects using \$58,000 of money accumulated in our general fund.

The City of La Center had several significant accomplishments in 2023 and the 2024 Proposed Budget implements a number of additional positive changes. Notable 2023 accomplishments included:

- **Junction Development.** In 2021, the city approved site plans for development at the Minit Management location. The proposed development includes a 101-room hotel; an 11,600 square foot multi-tenant commercial building; a 4,510 square foot convenience store with a drive-through window; a 2,800 square foot drive-through restaurant; and a 12-pump automobile fueling island. The convenience store and fuel island are planned to open in January 2024. The hotel has been approved for building permits and construction will begin in the spring of 2024. This development will create new jobs, increase city tax revenue and set the stage for future development.
- **East 4th Street Widening/Brezee Creek Culvert.** Phase one is the improvement of the 4th and Highland intersection where in 2023, the city received a \$1M Safe Routes to Schools grant for the construction. The city is in the final stages of permitting and acquiring the right-of-way for the remainder of the project, that will remove two fish barriers, reopen the length of Brezee Creek to fish, and add pedestrian and bicycle facilities to 4th Street. Bids will occur in 2024 and construction will be completed in 2025. In 2024, the City will continue to seek grants to fund the construction of the project. To date, over \$4M in grant funds have been secured for construction.
- **New Residential Development.** The city is on pace to issue over 100 building permits for new single-family homes in 2023. A number of new lots will become available in late 2023 and early 2024. The 2024 Proposed Budget projects that development will continue in line with 2023 levels but lower than the levels seen in 2020 and 2021. The growth projections are conservative to account for the impacts of rising interest rates and rising home prices. The proposed budget includes issuing 100 building permits for new single-family homes in 2024.
- **Community Center Renovation.** The city received a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Commerce to the upgrade of the kitchen in the Community Center and improve the parking lot at Holley Park. Construction was completed in 2023 and we are excited to have the facility open again for the community. Meals on Wheels has resumed Thursday lunch for seniors using the new kitchen and the community center is available to rent for events.

The growth of the city and the new development at the La Center junction presents both a challenge and an opportunity. Growth and the resulting increased sales tax revenues will allow the city to reduce the dependency on tax revenue from the La Center card rooms, however, the city must grow in a responsible manner that preserves the

community's values. Responsible growth provides the opportunity to enhance public and private services, provide employment opportunities within the city, and diversify the tax base. The 2024 Proposed Budget includes a number of initiatives to address these challenges and opportunities, including:

- **Staffing Levels.** Two new employees are included in the 2024 Proposed Budget. A new full-time Outreach Coordinator for the Administrative Services department and a new part-time Code Enforcement Officer will be hired in Community Development. We also have contracted with Gordon Thomas Honeywell Government Relations who will perform state lobbying and CFM Advocates who will perform federal lobbying on behalf of the city. In addition, we will work with Adurra Group who will assist the city in obtaining additional grant funding.
- **Police Contract.** In 2023, the City Council evaluated contracting for Police Services with the City of Ridgefield, Clark County Sheriff's Office and the Cowlitz Tribal Police. The Council selected the Cowlitz, and a contract is planned to be complete by the end of the year. The 2024 budget includes the contract with the Cowlitz Tribe to serve as the City's Police force.
- **Infrastructure Investment.** Funding for several critical infrastructure projects is identified in the 2024 Proposed Budget. Among the proposed projects are:
 - A new multi-modal trail along Pacific Highway to provide students a safe route to walk or bike to school, funded by a \$200,000 federal grant for design and a \$900,000 federal grant for construction, projected to begin construction in 2025.
 - A community welcome sign at the La Center junction with Interstate 5.
 - City-wide roadway safety improvements funded by an \$880,000 grant from the Washington State Department of Transportation.
 - A floating, ADA accessible kayak dock at Pollock Park to provide access to the East Fork Water Trail.
 - Trail expansions along the river, with the City taking over ownership of the La Center Bottoms.
- **Downtown and Timmen Landing Planned Action Areas.** Work will continue on these two planned action areas to establish the community's vision and set the stage for development and re-development of the areas north and south of the East Fork. In 2023, these projects started with existing conditions and marketing analysis. Through 2024, an action-oriented plan for the future development of these areas will be organized with community and stakeholder input and formally adopted by the City Council at the end of the year. This work will reduce timeframes and risk to developers that build projects consistent with the plans.

La Center is fortunate to have an engaged community, active community leaders and dedicated city employees. Those attributes, along with conservative fiscal management, will help us to continue to support a safe and thriving community with high quality city services. A complete summary of the 2024 Proposed Budget is attached to this letter. I want to thank the city's Budget Advisory Committee for their hard work over this past year in helping to develop the city's 2024 budget proposal. I look forward to receiving public input at the City Council public hearing scheduled for the November 15 City Council meeting. Information is available on the city's web site or by contacting me directly at tstrobehn@ci.lacenter.wa.us.

Respectfully submitted,

Thomas Strobehn

Mayor, City of La Center