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Work with Me People! An Interview with Mike Weatherby, Recently Retired Mayor of Fairview, Oregon

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Work with Me People!

An interview
with Mike Weatherby,
recently retired mayor of
Fairview, Oregon



Mayor Mike Weatherby was first sworn in as Mayor of Fairview on January 2, 2003. He was re-elected in November of 2006 and 2010. We sat down with him to discuss how the town and the region have changed over his twelve years in office and his hopes for the future.

Metroscape: *You've been mayor for twelve years, and you're getting ready to step down. What are the most far-reaching changes that you've witnessed in Fairview?*

Mayor Weatherby: When I first came into office, we were still experiencing some building and growth that had peaked in the nineties, but physical change has slowed down since then, especially with the recent economic downturn. Population has stayed pretty much the same. We're nearly at build-out for residential construction, and we did have some commercial growth.

I think the biggest change is recent, and that is the Veterans Affairs East County

Clinic that will be built soon. I think that the VA clinic is going to be a real catalyst. It is the anchor, because you're going to have a lot of satellite businesses going in around there. It's going to change the look of Fairview Village from Halsey. The developer of the VA property is also working on other nearby properties. We're making use of a state program called Vertical Housing that will add both residences and businesses.

Metroscape: *What about the non-physical changes that you've observed in the region?*

Mayor Weatherby: I've observed over the years that Fairview has become a



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leader. It sounds funny because Gresham is the big city out here, and just by their size, they influence this area the way Portland influences everything around it. But I think that we can have influence in other ways, because instead of just being parochial about our city, we can set the tone for the East County region. Our cities are so close together; it just makes sense to collaborate. There are issues that we all are involved in that unite us.

Transportation is one of the most important examples, including TriMet and roads. At 223rd and Glisan, the three cities converge. Each city has its own personality, but that doesn't mean that we can't function as a region. I started holding meetings with the other mayors—at least one four-city meeting and several three-city meetings, including Wood Village, Troutdale, and Fairview. This [group] has become a regional mayors' organization. It has no formal membership and no official title, but it is mayors-only.

As happy as we may be with our cities, the future is advancing a day at a time. Although Metro sees the big picture of change, we take a more practical outlook in terms of the way things work. We need to be working together on the issues that concern all of us.

Metroscape: *How have these changes affected the quality of life for the people who live here?*

Mayor Weatherby: Our ability to work together as a region affects the quality of life, but it's very subtle. For example, we are all interested in contributing ideas to the Halsey project, and each city would like to create something unique that establishes their identity. We've been talking about projects that attract cyclists, and things like having bicycle racks, but different colors [of bicycle racks] for different cities. The cities could install them at different places so people can get off and use facilities, have a cup of coffee, or go

to a sandwich shop or other shops. This is the sort of thing that everyone is excited about.

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Instead of every city doing their own thing, [I wanted to] sit everybody down and talk about the greater vision, the goal, a sense of direction, how we're going to go about it, what's been accomplished, and it's just the start. It's a process. A lot of accomplishments in politics sometimes are not very concrete, and that's sometimes a difficult thing because you can't just go home and point to something you built. It's a change in the sense of direction over the years.

Metroscape: *And are there any changes you've noticed that you think have gotten in the way of creating a better place here?*

Mayor Weatherby: Well, I think that what hasn't really worked out is the transportation. For example, when I was first mayor, I wanted to reinstate the Banfield Flyer. This was an express bus that started at the dog track and went all the way downtown, without stops. When they got Max going, they stopped [the Banfield Flyer]. I guess they thought it might pull some riders away, but I think they should start it again. It serves riders farther north, and it was a success.

It has been a problem not having a bus north of Sandy, especially for workers at the Nacco materials-handling group facility off of 223rd, north of Sandy. Their employees have told the manager there that they want to have a bus, but TriMet says that, according to their computer simulations, it won't work. They did try a bus to Blue Lake Park in the summer for a year or two. It didn't work out, but at least they tried.

Metroscape: *What's your vision of Fairview's future?*

Mayor Weatherby: I think that the VA facility will stimulate a lot of other medical activity and facilities here. We are very close to completely built out for residential, except for a few areas on Sandy, so I think, population-wise, we're close to being topped out. I doubt we will ever reach ten thousand residents. But commercial development and medical facilities probably will grow.

I'd like to see the lower-income residents of our community become more integrated into the rest of the community. We have about one-out-of-four people that are lower-income. We have one of the largest Home Forward housing facilities in Multnomah County here. And it really takes a lot of resources, and it's difficult. We need to avoid thinking of lower-income people as different from ourselves. And I've tried to really make the whole community think about how to upgrade what we call "Old Town" and make the people who live there part of our community.

For instance, when I was first mayor, I called a meeting with Home Forward about the Fairview Oaks. It's a large community—about a thousand people—and I said we need to work together and communicate. I wanted regular meetings instead of waiting until some emergency happens. So now we have quarterly meetings, and we work together to address the needs of the community and to be inclusive. We have developed the park and addressed security issues, and I think being more inclusive is the only way you can grow.

Metroscape: *What do you think needs to be done as you're leaving office to make sure that vision moves forward?*

We need to deal with the divisiveness that was in the City Council and move forward.

Mayor Weatherby: The new mayor, Ted Tosterud, needs to continue to work on this vision of regional collaboration, and I think that will happen. I'm really pleased with that. We need to deal with the divisiveness that was in the City Council and move forward. He has asked me to help him, to mentor and assist him, which I'm really happy to do.

Metroscape: *What are the arguments that you make to the other leaders in the region in support of the case for regional collaboration?*

Mayor Weatherby: Number one, we're all small; we have more of a voice if we join together. Number two, we're dealing with roads. The roads go through all three cities. We're talking about business; we're all so close together that you may have a business in your city, but the people who work there may live in our city...both the workers and the upper-level people.

If we improve our city or you improve your city, if you bring certain things in, it affects the whole area out here, and we need better communication. To move forward for our cities, other than something that's strictly minor and internal, it requires everybody working together.

For instance, with the state legislature, if you want a senator or your representative to do something...if you have all three cities signing on to something, all three mayors supporting it, it's far better than just one. The same is true for the County Commission or Metro.

Metroscape: *What do you think is driving the local leaders to work together? Do you think they're buying your argument?*

Mayor Weatherby: Absolutely. One of my strengths is really working with people and listening to people, actively listening, and a willingness to accept things or change my mind if the argument makes sense.

Metroscape: *What accomplishments are you most proud of?*

Mayor Weatherby: First is the agreement with Home Forward. Secondly, renaming 207th to Fairview Parkway—it puts the city's name right on a freeway entrance. There were little things, like a new type of street light we approved to develop consistency throughout the city.

Also, the creation of the mayor's business roundtable was a biggie. What I was looking for was a tool for bringing people together; bringing the business people together with the city administration and me to talk about issues, particularly concerns or gripes. It was important for people to talk about these issues openly, instead of waiting for rumors to spread. We started the meetings by inviting just Fairview, because we had some real tensions and issues over things like permitting.

But then we opened it up to a larger group from other cities. We included businesses who wanted to work with Fairview, who have contracts or just want to be involved. So, it



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— Mayor Weatherby

developed, and it grew for all businesses. We have elected people who sometimes show up. It's open to them, and it has grown. They meet quarterly over lunch. People fix a sandwich and have something to drink. People want to come. It's a good communication tool. We will typically take a particular business and highlight it. I'm proud that the other City Council members like it and the new Mayor, Ted Tosterud, intends to continue it. I will continue to attend as a private citizen in the future.

Metroscape: *Are there some things that you wished you had been able to accomplish that you were not able to?*

Mayor Weatherby: Well, I wish I had been able to bring in better transportation from TriMet. I think that was very disappointing.

One other thing I wish had happened that I wasn't directly involved in was bringing the aircraft carrier, the USS Ranger, from Bremerton to Fairview as the largest floating museum in the country. That would have been a huge draw. It would have created economic development on the waterfront, and it would have really changed the dynamics of the East Side. It just didn't work out. The nonprofit association that was raising money to bring it here was not able to raise enough money.



A once future vision for Fairview on display in Mayer Weatherby's office.

Metroscape: *As you leave office, how do you plan to stay involved?*

Mayor Weatherby: I'd like to get on the budget committee. I have heard from different people that they want to use me as a resource. I'd like to do that—be available for people, but unintrusive. Other than that, I'm kind of leaving things open to see what happens next. **M**