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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE RESIDENTS OF LAFAYETTE:

News travels fast in a small town. By now you all know that I have resigned as the city administrator. Since I have been here, we have struggled with more serious problems than any small town should be forced to deal with at any one time. We have replaced about one-third of the old water lines in the last 2 years. Two-thirds of the system is over 70 years old and must be replaced as well. Your old sewer plant is wearing out and can no longer operate within the limits of the permit that allows you to dump treated wastewater into the Yamhill River. You are facing fines from DEQ (that could be as much as \$10,000 per day) and the possibility of environmental lawsuits. A new treatment plant or rehab of the existing plant will cost millions of dollars. The city is the fastest growing in Yamhill County and more subdivisions are under construction. Without a new sewer plant and the joint water project with the City of Dayton, you face water shortages and sewer system problems. Taxpayer initiatives have eroded the general fund to the point that the city doesn't have enough money to adequately fund police, fire and parks. With more initiatives on the horizon, this situation will get worse.

Those problems will not go away just because I am leaving. In fact, the next 12 months may be the most important for your city in the last 100 years. With Theresa Sypher's exit from city politics (and probably from the community) and my leaving, there will be a leadership vacuum. Don't let anyone tell you that the problems will go away when we do. I still care very much what happens to Lafayette so I'm going to give you some advice, even if some of you don't want to hear it. I am convinced that a majority of the people in Lafayette are reasonable and will eventually do what is best for the city. There is not a "no growth" option for the city. Enough buildable land existed in the city 20 years ago to have caused all of the problems you are now facing. All of that land has been approved for development for years. You cannot "unring" that bell. You have to face up to the problems and find a solution. Also, don't let anyone tell you that the current city employees are the problem. You have in place a competent and dedicated staff that can solve these problems if they get the help and cooperation of the council and the community.

I can't leave without giving you some advice on the city council itself. Because of expiring terms and vacancies, you will be electing 5 of the 7 council members at the general election in November (including the mayor). With all of the pending issues, this will probably be the most important election in the city in 100 years. In the 3 years that I have been here, the council has spent too much time pursuing personal agendas; gotten caught up in personality conflicts and petty bickering; made important decisions at private meetings with only some of the council members and a few of their friends present; tried to "micro-manage" the city staff on unimportant administrative details; and generally been dysfunctional. You should all demand better than that from your city council. Unless some of you who have not been a part of this chaos start to get involved and provide new direction and leadership, you are facing "melt down" in your city government.

More of you need to:

- **Get informed and attend meetings** of the council and various committees that are wrestling with these serious problems. When doing your research, don't forget to talk to city staff. Too many people are forming opinions who have never talked to anyone at city hall. The city administrator attends all of the meetings and reads all of the reports. The person you're getting your information from may have never been to a single meeting.
- **Run for mayor or the council**, but not if you are another single issue activist or willing to continue making decisions in someone's living room.
- **Make your elected officials accountable** for all of their decisions. You cannot afford decisions that benefit individual councilors or their friends, or that are short-sighted and not cost-effective. That's how you got in the situation you're in now. Demand that the city council stop bickering and work together to find solutions to the problems.
- **Be willing to accept reasonable solutions** even if they are expensive. There are no simple or cheap solutions to these problems. Anyone who tells you otherwise is mistaken or misinformed. If you want to have a functional city, you have to be willing to pay for it.
- **Don't be misled by outsiders or others offering simple solutions.** You have been hearing from developers, disgruntled former employees, single-issue activists and others about what you ought to do about these problems. Most don't live in the city and won't have to "pay" for the decisions in the same way that you will. Make your own decisions at public meetings based upon the best interests of all of the current and future residents of the city.

I will miss Yamhill County and the City of Lafayette. I have accepted a job as city administrator in Cascade Locks and will be moving there in August. I have enjoyed working here and getting to know most of you. I especially appreciated hearing from the large number of people who have told me that the city had made progress in last 3 years. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to get you started down the road of progress. Whether you continue forward or go backwards is now up to each of you.

Sincerely,

Robert S. Willoughby
Former Lafayette City Administrator

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