

Kristin Akervall responses to questions from Wilsonville Spokesman 9/13/2020

*What do you think about Wilsonville City Council's response to the pandemic?
Is there anything you would have done differently if you had your druthers?*

The pandemic brought many needs all at once to our city—some very visible and some less obvious to the general public. We first announced a state of emergency on March 13 to allow for the mobilization of resources to protect our community and coordinate with other public agencies. The City began adopting the social distancing recommendations of the CDC, the Oregon Health Authority, and Clackamas County Public Health. During that same week, we also transitioned public meeting operations to online platforms so that city business could continue—becoming one of the first cities in the state to do so. By March 16 our City Manager had activated our Emergency Operations Center and emergency response was underway to keep city employees and community members safe, and keep operations and necessary response flowing. We have been able to authentically push forward the message “Wilsonville is open for business”. While some closures of public spaces were necessary to comply with state guidelines, the City also made additions to community services to deliver meals to our most vulnerable populations and use SMART buses to pick up groceries for those that couldn’t easily access stores.

I am incredibly grateful for the creativity, sacrifice, and togetherness our city staff showed in the critical weeks following the onset of this pandemic. While there is much we did not know at the time (and we are still learning) I believe the Council supported our staff to do the work we expect them to do—and that is to provide the community with the highest level of service that protects the health and vitality of every community member. Without prioritizing the health of our staff and community, we cannot do any of the additional work that is needed at this time.

What do you think the city will need to do or consider moving forward if this pandemic continues for many more months? Do you see further budget cuts as a possibility? If so, what areas of the city's budget would you like to see cut and why?

During the budget planning process, due to the unprecedented events of the pandemic and anticipation that revenues and expenditures might change as we move through the year, staff carefully reduced the budget by more than \$2 million. The budget, passed by the Council in June of this year, included a budget message that clearly refers to the economic disruption that will likely continue into the future.

However, it also says that the City’s strategy is to focus its attention on advancing the enduring value proposition of living in Wilsonville. The budget is an embodiment of community values focusing on safety, security, and opportunity. So, yes, as stated at the passing of our annual budget, I believe that the budget will likely need to be adjusted as more information becomes clear. But, I also would adhere to the public process of having these difficult discussions within the structure of my fellow budget committee members, as well as listening to staff’s recommendations and input from our community members on areas they feel are critical to meet our common values.

Many Wilsonville businesses are still struggling, and some have closed. If anything, what should be done at the local level and beyond to help them? Do you have any ideas for how to help other affected communities in town?

Local businesses bring so much to our city and I want to support them during this time of need. In April the City Council created a program that distributed \$400,000 in grants to Wilsonville businesses, \$20,000 in a gift card program to support both residents and local restaurants in need of financial relief, and an additional \$60,000 to Wilsonville Community Sharing to assist residents needing help with food, medical, rent, and utility bills. But, the pandemic's effects are beyond what an individual city can mitigate, so ongoing assistance will be required from all sides to help bolster businesses in this environment.

Our short-term response dictates a critical need for cooperation. The city should continue to work with regional partners to share information about additional forms of relief such as the Oregon Cares Fund, Washington County Cares Nonprofit Emergency Assistance Program, and others, as well as connect local businesses with programs that are offering free PPE resources. Additional support can be given in how the City allows modifications to business operations to encourage safe environments for both customers and employees, for example, expediting the process to allow restaurants to expand outdoor seating on public easements. As we learn more about the virus and effective health practices to curb transmission, we must push this information forward to our community members. Ultimately, this will allow us to return to behaviors that encourage economic security and prosperity. As stated by the Secretary General of the OECD, if the pandemic is not brought under control, there will be no robust economic recovery.

Ongoing flexibility will be needed as well as a courageous and strategic vision for the long-term future. I am excited about the work I have done as council liaison to the City's Urban Renewal Task Force to plan for future programs that will bring investment to our city and promote job growth. It is important to remember that prior to the pandemic, since 2010 (the period of the Great Recession) our city saw a 39% increase in jobs and 75% more dollars in annual payroll. COVID-19 has certainly hurt the economy everywhere, but I am confident that with collaboration and thoughtful policy our city can build again.