

Up to the Present, Salem

Salem needs an anti-time machine that will let us experience what's happening now, not the past or future.

Here's a mantra Salem's Mayor, City Manager, councilors, and other city officials should repeat: "Up to the present, 2014 or bust."

Imagine you're a business owner, family, or individual thinking about relocating to Oregon. You're looking for a with-it city that's committed to creative, cutting-edge policies, a town focused on improving quality of life and promoting vitality by embracing positive trends instead of resisting them.

These days standing still isn't an option.

The times always have been a'changing, but now changes are accelerating. Anyone — city, corporation, citizen — who doesn't recognize how important it is to adjust to new realities will be left behind.

Unfortunately, living in Salem feels like being stuck in quicksand while watching everyone around you run happily by. This town makes a habit of being the last to get the memo about where the world is heading.

For example...

Mayors in Portland, Albany, Corvallis, Eugene, Bend, and Ashland have pledged to fight global warming by reducing pollution from greenhouse gases. Not in Salem. I asked the Mayor and City Councilors if they even agreed human-caused climate change was occurring. Only two of the nine responded with a "yes."

Pathetic. It's real, guys. Happening now.

Walkable, bikeable urban cores with well-planned mixed use neighborhoods are increasingly desired by young and old alike. Sprawling subdivisions on the edge of town are passé. Except in Salem, where City officials want to channel people away from downtown and into the 'burbs by building an unneeded \$450 million third bridge.

Hey, dudes, the 1950's are long gone. Except in Salem transportation planning.

Most northwest cities are trying to increase their tree canopy. Great for the environment, residents, and tourism. The City of Salem, though, has a war on trees. It removes large healthy downtown trees for no good reason, allows Salem Hospital a variance to cut down dozens of beautiful trees for an oversized parking lot, and sits by while Black Walnut trees die on the old State Hospital property.

Want to live in an Oregon town where city officials don't care about trees? Welcome to Salem. Alternatively, head to Portland, Corvallis, Eugene, or just about any other place.

Here's more ways we're behind the times.

Aside from Idaho Falls we're the only mid- or large-sized city in the northwest that doesn't allow "tiny houses," a much-desired inexpensive eco-friendly dwelling option available everywhere else in Oregon, but not here.

We're late to the food cart party, but at least we're in the door. Other cities are enthusiastic about downtown food cart pods, though, while Salem officials are skeptical. Oregon heads toward legalization of recreational pot while Salem imposes unreasonable regulations for medical marijuana dispensaries. Portland, Corvallis, and Eugene have plastic bag bans; Salem doesn't.

Time to join the present, Salem. City officials need to realize that reality is a good place to live in. Now.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com