

## Salem Needs a Visionary City Manager

So... how enthused are you about what the folks at City Hall have done for Salem lately?

Anything come to mind? Something that made you think, “Wow, this town is going to be so much better now! Thank you, Mayor, City Council, and City Manager.”

Problem is, there’s not much wow-inducing creativity coming from our leaders. It’s difficult to even discern what their over-arching vision for Salem is.

Because they don’t have one.

Instead, we’re offered a billion dollar third bridge across the Willamette that’s both unnecessary and unaffordable. Downtown parking meters. A way over-priced new police facility. Streetlight tax on homeowners. Demolishing of historic buildings and an urban forest.

Based on priorities like these, our current Mayor and City Manager seem to favor sprawl, environmental degradation, and wasteful spending funded by “take from the poor and give to the rich” policies.

But it’s hard to tell, since decisions at City Hall aren’t being guided by coherent long-range goals for Salem. Deal with stuff that comes up, then deal with more stuff — that’s the modus operandi.

The retirement of City Manager Linda Norris is an opportunity to fill that position with someone who is more than a budget-balancing bean-counter. He or she needs to have an appealing vision of what Salem should become, along with what’s needed to get there.

It’s tiresome to hear the Mayor and City Manager keep saying “there’s no money for this” when they have around a half-billion dollar annual budget and intentions to spend a whole lot more on questionable pet projects.

Hopefully a nationwide search will turn up some exceptional City Manager candidates who will bring a fresh outlook to Salem.

(I'm not a religious person, but I do have a prayer: O God I don't believe in, keep the Public Works Director, Peter Fernandez, from becoming City Manager; he would be a disaster.)

Salem has a strong City Manager/weak Mayor form of government. As I heard Norris say at a meeting, "The Mayor chooses the City Manager, then the City Manager oversees all of the other employees."

Linda Norris has been way over-controlling and under-collaborative during her tenure as City Manager. Instead of seeking common ground on issues, Norris retreats into a circle-the-wagons mentality when citizens bring up reasonable objections to proposed policies.

She leaves behind a deeply divided city.

Ordinary citizens are fed up with being disrespected by the powers-that-be at City Hall, while moneyed special interests, who not coincidentally provide the campaign cash needed to elect a conservative Mayor and city council majority in a liberal-leaning town, are bowed down to at every opportunity.

The Salem City Manager should be above politics. The person who replaces Norris needs to be a champion for everybody in this town, not just those who already wield money and power.

Most of all, he or she has to have a compelling comprehensive vision of what Salem can become.

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Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at [hinesblog.com](http://hinesblog.com)