

Covington City Council

ANNUAL SUMMIT 2025

Saturday, January 25, 8:00 a.m. – 3:33 p.m.

City Hall Council Chambers, 16720 SE 271st Street, Covington, WA 98042

In compliance with state law, this city council special meeting was held in a hybrid format with in-person, telephonic, and virtual options for public viewing.

SUMMARY

ATTENDED: Mayor Jeff Wagner; Mayor Pro Tem Sean Smith (via Zoom); Council Members Joe Cimaomo, Jennifer Harjehausen, Debby Hartsock, Elizabeth Porter, and Kristina Soltys; City Manager Regan Bolli; Leadership Team Members Krista Bates (City Clerk/Executive Assistant), Noreen Beaufrere (Human Resources), Adam Easterbrook (Police Chief), Ethan Newton (Parks and Recreation), Salina Lyons (Community Development), Mark Orthmann (City Attorney), Casey Parker (Finance), Karla Slate (Communications), and Don Vondran (Public Works); Bob Lindskov (City Engineer); Jenna Decker Sherry (Cascadia Consulting); and Facilitator Jim Reid (The Falconer Group)

THREE BRIEF PRESENTATIONS OPENED THE SUMMIT

After the City Council and Leadership Team members cited the major accomplishments of 2024 (*See Appendix A, page 7*), three brief presentations provided the context for the discussions of substantive policy and operational issues that followed.

1. Regan Bolli briefly described **1% Better**, a philosophy and approach that has led the British national cycling team to go from laughingstock to leader during the past twenty years. British cyclists have won the Tour de France six times since 2003, and, in the last five Olympic Games, the UK's national cycling team has led the other nations across the board of racing categories. Regan stated that the "aggregation of marginal gains" has resulted in monumental achievements in Covington. By becoming 1% better each year, the City has produced dramatic results in the past ten years.

During the brief discussion that followed Regan's presentation, the Council agreed that the City must ensure that the public recognizes and understands the monumental achievements that have resulted from the "myriad of micro betterments." One idea put forward was connecting each resident to a Council member and/or employee. Showing the human side of government is more likely to attract the public's attention, interest, and support.

2. Regan then reported on the implementation of the **2024 Summit Action Items**. (*See pages 8-9 of the Summit Packet.*) Many of them were cited by Council and the Leadership Team as the major accomplishments of 2024 (*See Appendix A, page 7*). Most noteworthy was the voters' approval of the Transportation Benefit District (TBD) sales tax increase by two tenths of one percent to provide a more reliable funding source for transportation projects.

3. Regan also reviewed progress in implementing the **2023-2027 Strategic Plan**. (See pages 11-16 of the Summit Packet.)

Regan highlighted a variety of accomplishments and advancements under the four strategic priorities. He also highlighted challenges in advancing some of the strategies. For example, regarding #43, “Partner with the private sector in formation of a downtown association,” Regan mentioned that some of the businesses in Covington are national chains that will not become involved in this local effort, while “mom and pop shops” would like to be involved but don’t have the time needed to create and maintain the association.

As a result of the briefing, Regan suggested that two items be removed. Under Strategic Priority 3: A Commitment to Health and Safety, #64 and #65 are part of the Parks Department’s work plan and, therefore, do not need to be included in the Strategic Plan. Number 64 is “Update parks rules and associated Chapter 8.40 CMC Parks, Recreation, Open Space, Trails and Public Spaces; and #65 is “Discuss options with Kent School District to maximize use of school district facilities (e.g., athletic fields, gyms, playgrounds, etc.) during non-school hours.”

CITY COUNCIL’S CONSENSUS AGREEMENTS

At this year’s summit, the City Council reached the following consensus agreements:

Transportation

Pages 18-35 of the Summit Packet guided the discussion of transportation.

Traffic Calming:

The Council first discussed traffic calming, including what role residents should play in making requests and paying the costs of the investigation into whether or not traffic calming is needed, and if it is needed, the costs of the traffic calming device and its installation. At the end of the discussion, the Council agreed on three points:

1. When a request is made for a traffic calming device, the City should rely on an initial “test” to determine if a full study should be authorized to learn if traffic calming is warranted. The Council agreed that the test should be based on **85th Percentile Speed**. The draft Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) will be updated to include this initial test criteria.
2. Temporary traffic calming devices, such as speed bumps, could be used to improve safety. The assumption behind the use of temporary devices is that they may help change drivers’ behavior to the extent that the safety issue is resolved and the traffic calming device is no longer needed.
3. Council indicated the City would pay for temporary traffic calming devices; during the budget process proposed improvements would be presented for Council consideration. Ultimately, the Council would determine if the City should pay for any other warranted traffic calming measures.

Traffic Cameras:

Council members stated that their primary interest in traffic cameras is safety. It is not clear if the cameras make streets and intersections safer. While safety is the primary concern, the costs of traffic cameras—from purchase, installation, and maintenance to data collection and analysis to issuing tickets and pursuing violators—may make traffic cameras costlier than they're worth. In addition, changes in the law have narrowed the uses of traffic cameras revenues and now allow the state to take 25% of the net revenue after cameras have been placed for three years. For these reasons, the Council agreed to not pursue traffic cameras as a strategy for improving road safety.

One location that cameras have been suggested for improving traffic flow is near the exit from Fred Meyer onto SE 272nd Street. The backup of cars through the intersection of SE 272nd and SR 516 has meant that left turns off SE 272nd, including the one to get to City Hall, are blocked. The Council requested that staff approach the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to request that the department put up "Do Not Block Intersection" signs at the Fred Meyer exit and near intersections along SE 272nd to improve traffic flow.

Sidewalks:

The discussion about sidewalks focused on the need for sidewalks in Timberlane. It is a community of 916 homes governed by a Home Owners Association; its walkways are private, not public. The Council discussed the establishment of a Local Improvement District (LID) to finance sidewalk construction and improvements along Timberlane Way SE and 194th Ave SE . One question was "Should the Timberlane HOA or the City initiate the creation of the LID?" Other questions that were discussed included: "What would be the boundary of the LID? Would it be just the Timberlane community or might it include affected surrounding or adjacent areas? Who would pay for the sidewalks if an LID were not established? Would the City need to assume the property to be able to pay the costs?"

With more questions than answers, the Council agreed that the City should: 1) Reach out to a consultant(s) that have experience with the formation of LIDs to determine the scale of the costs; and 2) Investigate if funding from the Safe Routes to Schools Program could be used to help pay for sidewalks in or around Timberlane.

Parks and Recreation

Pages 39-47 of the Summit Packet guided the discussion of parks and recreation.

Parks Maintenance Level of Service Standards:

At last year's Summit, the Council expressed an overarching interest in increasing Level of Service (LOS) standards for park maintenance. At this Summit the Council and Leadership Team reviewed a matrix illustrating the tasks that would be conducted to achieve Levels of Service from 1 to 5, with LOS 1 being the highest standard and LOS 5 being the lowest. The matrix showed how often each task would be undertaken to attain each level. *(See page 41 of the Summit Packet.)*

The group also examined Levels of Service standards, and the recommended LOS, for Founders, Jenkins Creek Park (Phase 1) and Town Center. The packet also included Resource Management Plans for both parks and Town Center.

To achieve the recommended LOS for Founders Park, Jenkins Creek Park (Phase 1) and Town Center, an additional Full Time Equivalent (FTE) for parks maintenance would need to be hired. This additional position was included in the 2025 Budget. In addition, staff is looking to hire a seasonal worker to help with cleaning shelters and restrooms which would reduce overtime hours that are being used on weekends.

Council members commented that the LOS standards for Founders and Jenkins Creek Park (Phase 1) will take on new importance because the public will see how well the parks are maintained. Their trust in the City as caretakers of the community will be influenced by their impressions of the parks. The Council appeared to be satisfied with and supportive of the information the staff presented, and they requested an update during the budget process later this year. By then the growing season will have ended, and the Parks Department will have more information about what is needed to maintain all the parks in Covington. In addition, Council requested the resource management plan for the current Jenkins Creek Park and the LOS that it is being maintained.

Metropolitan Parks District:

The Council's interest in establishing a Metropolitan Parks District (MPD) is rooted in its desire to create a stable, reliable, and sustainable funding source for parks and recreation facilities. Many cities of similar size as Covington have created MPDs and found that they help stabilize parks and recreation funding.

The Council is interested in educating the public about the benefits of an MPD and suggested to staff that the effort mirror the public education campaign that resulted in the voters' approval of the TBD sales tax increase in 2024. Furthermore, Council members all agreed that a vote by the people to establish the MPD should wait a little while so that Covington's residents can see that the City is effectively implementing the TBD and judiciously and strategically spending the additional sales tax revenues. Thus, the Council coalesced around August 2026 as the most likely timing for bringing the MPD proposal to the voters. For now, the sense is that the City should ask for the taxing authority at the full rate of \$0.75 per \$1,000 of assessed value, but initially tax at a lower tax rate, such as \$0.25 per \$1,000 of assessed value.

Strategic Communications

Item #2 of the Summit 2024 Action Plan was "A strategic outreach plan should be developed and include key messages including the percentage of the revenue from the TBD sales tax that will be paid by non-residents who use Covington's streets, bridges, and sidewalks." This goal was achieved, as evidenced by the approval of the voters last summer for the proposed increase of two-tenths of one percent in the TBD sales tax. Because everyone on the Council and Leadership Team feels responsible and accountable to the public for ensuring that the use of those funds reflects the community's expectations, the Council briefly discussed the importance of educating the public about the projects the City is funding with the TBD and why those uses are the wisest possible investments.

Karla Slate reminded the Council of the four strategic communications goals for 2020-2024. They are: 1) feed the public's appetite for news; 2) Make City news easier to find; 3) Amplify a vibrant, family-friendly personality; and 4) Make personal connections. Karla and a Council member suggested that in updating the goals for this year and the next few years, a fifth strategic goal could address public education.

The Council also suggested that the messages to the public be “showstoppers,” and the best way to achieve that standard is through the use of pictures. For example, pictures could show the current conditions of transportation infrastructure with a message of “Without the TBD funding, these roads, bridges, intersections, etc. would be staying this way.” Then follow up pictures could show those facilities after they have been improved. The City could also splash on social media pictures of potholes being filled. Finally, the City could periodically publish a list of completed road improvements, and run a column entitled “Did You Know?” that would provide interesting tidbits about projects, their funding, and the benefits of the improvements to specific areas or neighborhoods.

Climate Action Plan

Pages 50-178 of the meeting packet guided the discussion about the Climate Action Plan.

Salina Lyons, Community Development Director, opened the discussion of the City’s Climate Action Plan by expanding on her memo to the Council, which was an overview of Covington’s climate action initiatives that have been supported by a \$410,000 grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce. These efforts align with the statutory mandate under HB 1181, requiring a Climate Action sub-element in the City’s updated Comprehensive Plan, which is due by June 2025. She was then joined by Jenna Decker Sherry of Cascadia Consulting, who helped produce Covington’s 2023 Climate Vulnerability Assessment.

They offered the Council a detailed briefing of the Assessment’s major elements and findings, and introduced the “Wedge Analysis.” It is used to identify emissions growth under a business-as-usual model and determine actionable reduction strategies. As Salina wrote in her memo, “Think of a triangle showing the total emissions we must cut to meet climate goals. This triangle is then divided into wedges, where each wedge represents a strategy or solution for reducing emissions, which is broken down further into small actions and solutions.”

The primary takeaway from the briefing was good news for Covington. Much of what is required by the State of Washington to address the impacts of climate change is already embedded in the City’s policies and planning. Salina pointed out in her memo and presentation that the City has policies and strategies for greenhouse reduction, preservation of the tree canopy and urban forests, multimodal transportation, and landscaping standards that are intended to save water.

Council and Commission Operations

Proclamations:

Council agreed that a form should be provided to organizations that request the City issue a proclamation. They need to submit it so that the City clearly understands what the proclamation would mean to the organization. The Mayor will retain the discretion to accept or reject the request, and, if accepted, the proclamation will be circulated among the Council members before it is formally issued so that everyone understands its intent and meaning. A list of proclamations that are expected to be issued in the coming year will also be circulated among the Council to help ensure that everyone is aware of most of the likely proclamations that are coming up. When the proclamation is on the agenda of a Council meeting, the Mayor and all Council members will pose with the representative(s) of the organization.

Youth Council:

Council reached consensus that there is no longer a need for adult leaders for the Youth Council. Staff will bring a resolution in the near future so that the Council may formally enact this agreement.

Council-Commission Relations:

Some members of the City's Commissions appear to want a closer relationship or at least more constant communication with the Council. The Council's interests are: 1) Support the Commissions in their work; 2) Enable the Commissions to bring to the table their knowledge and expertise and to act independently in performing their duties; and 3) Retain their authority as Council members when reviewing and acting upon Commission recommendations.

The Council is interested in a "temperature check" from the Commissions. Do the members of each Commission feel they would benefit from a two-way conversation about their mission and from hearing the Council's direction or perspectives on the issues? If the Commission members request a Special Joint Meeting with the Council, the parties could discuss: 1) roles and responsibilities; 2) the Commission's stated mission or purpose(s); 3) issues that the Commission members are interested in tackling in the coming year; 4) and the Council's direction or insights. Some newer Commissions seem more likely to take up the offer to jointly meet, but the offer will be extended to all the Commissions.

Council Interviews for the Commissions:

After a brief discussion, the Council agreed to implement 15-minute interviews for both reappointments of current Commissioners and appointments of new members to fill vacancies. In the interest of efficiency, the Council instructed staff to reduce the number of questions to be asked by combining existing questions 1 and 2. The meetings at which the interviews are conducted should be from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. If it looks like that may be too little time, consider convening at 5:45 p.m.

Takeaways from This Year's Summit

As the Summit drew to a close, Council and Leadership Team members cited these takeaways from the day:

- We all work as a team very well.
- Summits give us the opportunity each year to discuss what we hope for and expect in the future.
- Our staff makes the impossible possible.
- We have challenges, but we also have opportunities.
- Together we are working toward bigger things.
- Thank you, Krista! You always ensure that these meetings proceed flawlessly.

APPENDIX A

The Year in Review: 2024

City Council and Leadership Team members cited these major accomplishments of 2024:

- The voters approved the Transportation Benefit District (TBD), which raised the sales tax two-tenths of one percent. In exchange, the Council repealed the vehicle license tab fee. Passage of the TBD demonstrated that the City has gained the public's trust.
- The Business and Occupation Tax (B&O Tax) also passed. A factor was the business community's support of the tax. It has generated \$66,000 since it was implemented in mid-2024.
- Widening of SR 516/SE 272nd Street dramatically improved traffic flow.
- Town Center Lawn played host to a few community events and, therefore, was more integrated into community life.
- The City demonstrated that it is proactive with a clear plan for the future. The challenges facing us aren't pulling us underwater.
- The new entrance to Jenkin's Creek Park is almost ready.
- The opening of Founders' Park illustrates the City's momentum that is gaining for parks and recreation.
- The partnership between city staff and Valley Medical is rewarding and could make Covington the "Pill Hill of South King County."
- Widening SR 516/SE 272nd Street was another project that helped to gain the public's trust and confidence.
- Work on Lakepointe progressed. It's becoming increasingly evident that Lakepointe is going to bring good things to Covington.
- The array of partnerships that the City has created is benefitting the community.
- Covington is becoming more walkable.
- The "Ready-Set-Play" Program won Covington an Innovation in Government Award.
- The City's partnership with the Covington Economic Development Council (CEDC) on the Business-to-Business Program.
- Business View Magazine cited Covington as a "Best Managed City."
- The Council's commitment to finding and implementing reliable revenue sources.
- The continuity of leadership among the Council and Leadership Teams.
- The success of the Clean City program. (A shoplifter who was apprehended by the police said that she was impressed by how clean the community is!)
- Community Care Program gained structure and momentum.
- More proactive communications.
- The City hired someone to play the role of Karma around town, meaning we don't have to rely on a number of people to take on the role.
- TBD retrofits are made possible by grant funds that the City has secured.
- Comprehensive Plan Update was delivered on time by the Planning Commission.
- Pop-up parks.
- Makers Markets.
- The creativity of the Council and staff, working together, showed.
- Shopping cart program.
- The City's translation program is evidence of our commitment to equity, inclusion, access, and transparency.