



NOTE: PRESS RELEASE UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL FEB. 21

Contact: Steve Maher, Our Valley Our Future project coordinator, info@ourvalleyourfuture.org or (509) 630-2090; Steve Lacy, East Wenatchee mayor, 884-9515, slacy@east-wenatchee.com; Frank Kuntz, Wenatchee mayor, 888-6204, fkuntz@wenatcheewa.gov

Cities of Wenatchee and East Wenatchee to hold historic meeting

EAST WENATCHEE — The Wenatchee and East Wenatchee city councils, and their respective planning commissions, will meet on Feb. 28 to discuss *Our Valley Our Future / Nuestro Valle Nuestro Futuro* projects and to build on increased cooperation between the two entities.

It is believed to be the first time the two cities have held such a meeting.

The gathering is beginning organized by Our Valley. The community visioning and development group, which released its first Action Plan in November, will outline the 16 action items that the cities are co-lead partners on, as well as the 'One Community' major game-changer project. The game-changer calls for government agencies to explore collaborating and leveraging their combined resources to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

Members of the city councils and planning commissions will then engage in a broader discussion about how the two entities can work together to complete the various Our Valley projects and other initiatives.

“To my knowledge, there has never been a joint meeting between the councils of our two cities,” said East Wenatchee Mayor Steve Lacy. “As mayor, I have always been interested in exploring ways to collaborate with Wenatchee for the good of valley residents. The results of such efforts in the past have been mixed. This meeting is an important step in assessing the interest of our elected officials and the feasibility for our cities to work jointly on some of the community goals identified in the Our Valley, Our Future process.”

Wenatchee Mayor Frank Kuntz seconded Lacy, saying he, too, can't recall a time when the two City Councils met together. Kuntz said he hopes the Feb. 28 meeting leads to the two cities taking specific steps in furthering Our Valley projects.

“One of the main points in Our Valley, Our Future is how do we work together regionally,” he said. “If we can do that, then we can raise the bar.”

The cities are co-lead partners on action items that fall mostly in the Our Valley Action Plan's “How We Plan and Grow,” “How We Prosper” and “How We Live and Care For One Another”

focus areas. They include such projects as Riverfront Redevelopment, Expanded Retail Sector, Incentives for Affordable Housing, Open Space Preservation, Mixed-Use Planning, Corridor Beautification, Sidewalks and Street Lighting, and a Regional Storm Water System.

The lead partner on the 'One Community' major project is Our Valley itself, although Our Valley plans to hand off the game-changer to an independent civic leaders group once a white-paper on the opportunities and challenges of increased governmental collaboration has been completed. Supporting partners in the game-changer include the two cities.

"It is heartening to see the two cities coming together to discuss developing common solutions. It truly mirrors what residents told Our Valley over and over during our community outreach work," said Steve Maher, coordinator of *Our Valley Our Future / Nuestro Valle Nuestro Futuro*. "The more we can look to the broader community and work collaboratively across boundaries, the stronger we will be as a region. This is what residents want to see."

The action plan — approximately 15 months in the making — includes 149 projects and programs and seven major "game-changer" projects spread out over six focus areas.

The plan's projects and programs are being led by 81 public agencies, businesses, nonprofit organizations and community groups. The lead partners have committed to championing and implementing the actions within a five-year period. By working on these projects, the partner organizations share responsibility in bringing Our Valley's long-term, grassroots vision to fruition.

In January, Our Valley's third phase — the Implementation Phase — began as lead partners incorporated the projects into their work plans. As of early February, work has already started on more than 50 of the Action Plan's 149 projects and programs, Maher said. Our Valley is set up structurally to help lead partners facilitate, organize, plan, communicate, market, lobby, trouble-shoot, and track progress.

Our Valley was started by a small group of diverse community leaders inspired by a TEDx Conference in Wenatchee and driven by a desire to tackle big challenges facing the region — a restructuring economy, lagging wages, threats from catastrophic wildfires, rising poverty levels and a growing housing crisis.

For more information on *Our Valley Our Future / Nuestro Valle Nuestro Futuro*, including a downloadable copy of its Action Plan, please visit www.ourvalleyourfuture.org.

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