



CITY NOTES

December 24, 2015

2015 - A YEAR IN REVIEW

On Becoming a Waterfront Community>> After years of concerted effort, in 2015, Fort Bragg reconnected to its coast! Last January, the north Coastal Trail opened to the public and this month the south Coastal Trail opened. Fort Bragg now has public access along nearly every inch of its coastline for the first time in over a century. The City's spectacular waterfront park is readily accessible to all and will be a defining amenity for local residents and visitors to our community for generations to come.

A Year of Many Ordinances>> For the Fort Bragg City Council, 2015 was a banner year for legislating. The Council adopted a record number of ordinances in 2015. The new provisions of the Fort Bragg Municipal Code pertain to a wide range of topics including: automated fire sprinklers, purchasing regulations, informal bidding procedures, regulations for Noyo Headlands Park, water conservation requirements, mobile vending (i.e., food trucks), wastewater source control, and social host restrictions.

Digital Upgrades>> In early 2015, the City rolled out a complete update of its governmental website, providing access to a vast amount of digital content as well as interactive features such as the Notify Me and Request Tracker applications. With the completion of the Town Hall Remodel project, the City began livestreaming City Council and Planning Commission meetings on its website. In May, the City expanded its social media presence with the launch of a governmental Facebook page. In July, the City Council approved the Downtown WiFi Project to provide free wireless internet service in the downtown core. The WiFi Project is being implemented through a partnership of the City of Fort Bragg and Mendocino Community Network. It is expected to be up and running in early 2016. Public, Education, and Government (PEG) television was restored this year after a long hiatus following the dissolution of the non-profit (MCTV) that had previously provided the service.

The Old Coast Hotel>> In late April, after months of public process and controversy, the City Council approved a forgivable loan agreement enabling the Mendocino Coast Hospitality Center to use State Community Development Block Grant funds to purchase the Old Coast Hotel property for a homeless services center, transitional housing, and a mental health access center. The project was very divisive and spawned an unsuccessful lawsuit against the City, a failed petition drive to recall the Mayor, and a ballot initiative that appears likely to be deemed discriminatory, unconstitutional, and unenforceable. Hopefully 2016 will bring peace and healing—while allowing social service organizations in our community to continue caring for our most vulnerable and needy residents.

City Projects>> In 2015, the City completed a number of capital projects including Noyo Headlands Park (i.e., the north and south Coastal Trails), the Town Hall Remodel Project, the Green Alleys Project, and the Summers Lane Timber Harvest Project. Our treatment operators also installed sodium hypochlorite generation equipment at the Water Treatment Plant and replaced gaseous chlorine with a sodium hypochlorite process at the Wastewater Treatment Facility. Design and permitting work is

underway for an ambitious line-up of 2016 projects: Chestnut Street Multi-Use Trail, Summers Lane Reservoir, 2016 Street and Alley Rehab Project, Guest House re-roof and exterior paint project, and the City Hall exterior paint project. Additionally, design, permitting and grant-seeking are underway for the Wastewater Treatment Facility Upgrade project which is slated for construction in 2017.

Labor Agreements>> In 2015, the City entered into three-year contracts with its two employee organizations – the Fort Bragg Police Association and the Fort Bragg Employee Organization. The agreements provide for modest increases in compensation and eliminate City contributions to the “employee’s share” of pension premiums. While working hard to contain personnel costs, the Council authorized two new part-time positions (a Grants Assistant and an Audio-Visual Technician), and reclassified a Police Officer to a Sergeant and a Maintenance Worker IV to a Lead Maintenance Worker. The City transitioned to a self-funded health insurance plan this year (in concert with a joint powers authority of 14 other small cities in our region) resulting in considerable savings under the Affordable Care Act and no increase in health care premiums for 2015.

A Balanced Budget>> In June, the City Council adopted lean operating budgets for the General Fund, Water Enterprise and Wastewater Enterprise, and a Capital Projects budget that addresses critical infrastructure repair and maintenance needs. The Council has worked diligently over the past several years to establish sound fiscal policies and financial reserves for unanticipated emergency and contingency needs and for facility and equipment repair and replacement. While the Great Recession has ended, Fort Bragg’s revenues have not rebounded. Fortunately, the Council’s fiscal conservatism has kept the City in sound financial condition.

Staffing Transitions>> Several key City employees retired in 2015 resulting in substantial turnover in the City’s management team. In April, Police Chief Fabian Lizarraga took the helm of the Police Department and Interim Chief Steve Willis stepped down. Assistant City Manager Ginny Feth-Michel retired in June. Her position was reclassified and, in July, Scott Schneider was hired as the City’s first Administrative Services Director. City Clerk Cindy VanWormer retired in September and June Lemos was promoted to serve as City Clerk. Finance Director Rosana Cimolino retired in October and Victor Damiani was promoted to serve as Finance Director. While it is hard saying goodbye to long-time staff and a considerable amount of institutional knowledge is lost with each retirement, we have assembled a capable and motivated team of Department Heads who will help our City accomplish great things in the future.

Stage 3 Water Emergency>> With flows in the Noyo River topping 4,500 cubic feet per second (cfs) earlier this week, memories of last month’s anxiety-provoking 5 cfs flows are fading. That said, the City is working hard to get the Summers Lane Reservoir constructed and filled to stave off another prolonged Water Emergency should flows in the Noyo River drop precipitously again in 2016. The City’s water conservation regulations were tested this fall and our water customers were able to achieve a remarkable 20-30% reduction in water use during the dry spell. Kudos to all for conserving!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS>> Check out the “Upcoming Agenda Items” pages on the City’s website or sign up for meeting notifications using the “Notify Me” feature at <https://city.fortbragg.com>. The following public meetings are coming up:

- Tuesday, January 5th at 6 PM – **Special City Council Meeting** - Fort Bragg Town Hall. This meeting will focus on a multitude of topics relating to the City’s water supply.
- Wednesday, January 6th at 5 PM – **Otsuchi Welcoming Event** – Fort Bragg Town Hall. This is a special City Council meeting to welcome the visitors from Fort Bragg’s Sister City - Otsuchi, Japan.

- Monday, January 11th at 6 PM – **City Council Meeting** – Fort Bragg Town Hall. The tentative agenda includes: Presentation of Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for FY 2014-15; FY 2015-16 First Quarter Financial Report; Water Conservation Ordinance; Emergency Action Plan Update.

City Notes is published on the second and fourth Thursday of each month. If you have questions or suggestions regarding the column, feel free to contact City Manager Linda Ruffing at (707) 961-2823, ext. 118 or LRuffing@fortbraqq.com.