

# cityvision

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CITYVISION MAGAZINE VOL. 15 / NO. 1

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FROM THE  
PRESIDENT

**When we talk about** life in public service, there's one notable thing people seldom discuss: that the work we do daily to grow and benefit our communities takes time. Weeks, months, years—sometimes even generations.

As elected officials, the plans we make, the bridges we build, and the connections we foster all work toward a vision for our communities that expands on the work of our predecessors and lays the groundwork for future generations. We water the seeds planted by those who came before us, and then we plant the next seeds for our future. While we know that we may never see the fruits of our labor, we commit to our role in the process, because we love and believe in our communities.

Across Washington, cities have been sowing progress in this way since the first cities and towns were founded and started offering services to their residents. In 1933, the end of Prohibition saw the need for cities to address new public safety challenges. A small group of cities joined forces under a common goal—working together to successfully secure a share of state liquor revenues. Ninety years later, our network has grown to 281 cities and is stronger than ever.

I'm proud to call Washington home. I'm especially proud to represent Spokane, where my kids and grandkids continue to

thrive. My vision for the future of our communities expands upon the work of 90 years of AWC leadership. I want everyone who hopes to build a future here—much like my own family did—to find a place that's welcoming, inclusive, diverse, and which gives a voice in decision-making to all.

The stories within this issue of *Cityvision* highlight AWC's long history of city partnerships and building upon the foundation of each other's successes. Through it all, cities continue to do what they've always done—adapt, innovate, and work together. I hope you enjoy reading about some of the city "firsts" and find inspiration for the future.

This is my first *Cityvision* as president of AWC. Thank you for entrusting me with the honor of guiding the association's future. I look forward to working alongside you.

**Betsy Wilkerson**  
*Councilmember, Spokane*

# Cityvision

Fall 2023

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Home rule, then and now

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**PAVING THE WAY**

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# COMCAST IS INVESTING \$280 MILLION

IN OREGON AND WASHINGTON IN 2023

## COMCAST IN OREGON AND WASHINGTON

- **2K employees**
- **2.8M** residential and business customers
- **4M** homes and businesses with access to Comcast

## EXPANDING ACCESS TO BROADBAND

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- Since 2020, Comcast has invested **\$1 billion** in technology and infrastructure upgrades and network expansion.

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## SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

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- **Subsidized, low-cost high-speed internet** for income-constrained individuals and families.
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- Do you like the digital or print format better, and why?
- Would you like to receive the annual hard copy in the mail?

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Thanks for being a valued reader!

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### Healthy Worksite Summit

March 13-14 | Lynnwood

### Labor Relations Institute

May 8-10 | Yakima

### AWC Annual Conference

June 18-21 | Vancouver, WA

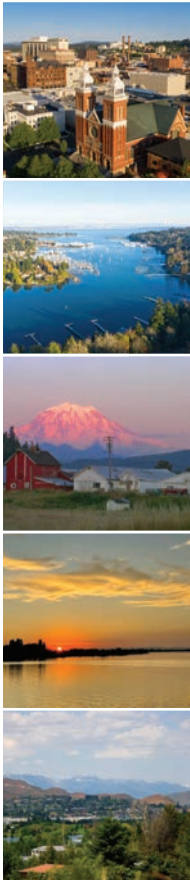
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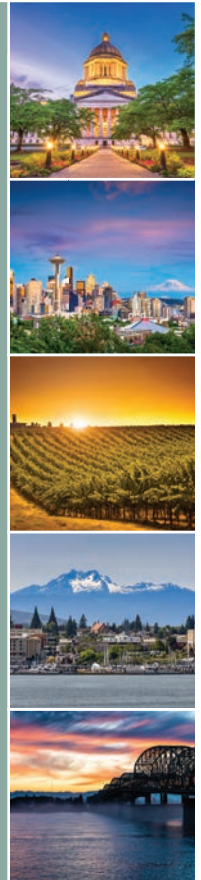
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# Citybeat



## Past Present

Washington's oldest town reveals in its history and bets big on its future.

BY TIFFANY HILL

**S**IX YEARS AFTER THE FIRST OREGON TRAIL settlers reached Puget Sound, Steilacoom—Washington Territory's first town—was incorporated. Named after the Steilacoom Indigenous peoples who had inhabited the area for millennia, the waterfront settlement quickly boomed as a busy port of call for ships ferrying freshly felled timber to San Francisco. Originally, there were two

Steilacoons, both established in 1851. New England sea captain Lafayette Balch founded Port Steilacoom after his proposal to build in nearby Olympia was rejected, and later that year, John Chapman, one of Oregon's first lawyers, settled an adjacent site he named, in a classic act of one-upmanship, Steilacoom City.

In 1854, the newly formed Washington Territorial Legislature decided only one Steilacoom was needed and merged the two settlements into the Town of Steilacoom.

Today, Steilacoom is a bucolic bedroom community of 6,800, most of whom commute to nearby Tacoma and Joint Base Lewis-McChord. And while Steilacoom never sprawled like Seattle or Tacoma, Mayor Dick Muri says

CONTINUED ON P.10 ►



TOOLKIT

# Access Granted

Historic investments and strong partnerships in the rural city of Dayton deliver the future via high-speed internet for all.

BY ALLYSON MEYER

**IN THE 1980S AND '90S**, the City of Dayton orchestrated a bold \$3 million historic preservation initiative, restoring its 1881 train depot (the oldest in the state) and its 1887 courthouse (also Washington's oldest) and refurbishing its Main Street. These investments culminated in the creation of the three Historic Districts—two residential and a downtown Dayton district with 117 buildings (15 built before 1900) that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

After working to preserve its agrarian past, there are now clear signs that the city is embracing its future. On 11,000 acres of wheat fields northeast of town, 87 towering turbines at Puget Sound Energy's Hopkins Ridge Wind Facility have been spinning since 2005, annually producing 404,000 megawatt hours of electricity—enough to power 35,000 homes. Three other wind farms are now located in Columbia County.

By the end of September, when technicians will have finished stringing 231,000 feet—nearly 44 miles—of fiber-optic cable from existing power poles, the Dayton Community Broadband Project will begin delivering another commodity

that is just as critical as electricity to 1,139 households and 140 businesses throughout the city: blazing fast internet connectivity.

"What we currently have offered here is considered very slow and inadequate by both state and federal standards," says Jennie Dickinson, executive director of the Port of Columbia. "The new service will all be hardwired—a fiber cable directly to each home and business."

Unlike the City of Anacortes, which in 2019 pioneered the state's first municipal broadband company, Dayton won't be an internet service provider.

"The goal is to build a tree trunk of broadband through our community and then any internet provider can branch off of that," explains Mayor Zac Weatherford. "I'm not super techy. I don't quite understand it—the data coming in, going out, and all of that. I'm more of, when I click on it, I want it to work, and I want it to be at a fair price. I think this project is going to open the doors to that."

Especially since the pandemic made working from home the new normal, internet connectivity has become a matter of equity, he shared, noting that bringing broadband access to homes and


businesses is every bit as essential as delivering water and electricity.

"I just think it's really important that everybody has [access to] high-speed internet," adds Weatherford. "This project opens up options for anybody living in our community to be able to get broadband services."

The Dayton Community Broadband Project also ticks all the boxes in a statewide Digital Equity Plan overseen by the Washington State Broadband Office, which the Legislature established in 2019 to create universal, reliable, and affordable high-speed broadband, bridging a digital divide that long has existed between the state's urban and rural areas. It all started in July 2021, with a \$2 million Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) grant, which the city matched with \$335,000 from its share of federal COVID relief funds.

"We could not have raised the necessary local match without the City of Dayton's assistance. It was critical to our success," says Dickinson. "We also appreciate the support of the City of Dayton's Council and the Public Works Department as we work through the construction. This is a huge project for our small town."

Like the distinctive dual-tone digital handshake that happened in the days of dial-up internet, the kudos and cooperation go both ways.

"This is a Port project we helped with. We partnered with them, and I think they deserve the credit," Weatherford says. "What makes these small rural communities run is having good relationships and working together as a team to do what's best for everybody." 



# GROWTH FORMULA

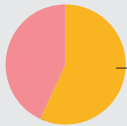
Since 1933, Washington's population has increased by 426%, and the number of people living in cities has increased by nearly 500%. Absorbing that growth, Washington's cities and towns have been offering an ever-increasing number of services to residents.

## 1930s

Washington's population in 1933:  
**1.5 MILLION RESIDENTS**

**The ten largest cities:**

1. Seattle: 365,583
2. Spokane: 115,514
3. Tacoma: 106,817
4. Bellingham: 30,823
5. Everett: 30,567
6. Yakima: 22,101
7. Aberdeen: 21,723
8. Vancouver: 15,766
9. Walla Walla: 15,976
10. Hoquiam: 12,766



**THEN:**  
**57%** of Washington's residents (885,000) lived in a city.

## 2020s

Washington's population in 2023:  
**7.9 MILLION RESIDENTS**

**The ten largest cities:**

1. Seattle: 779,200
2. Spokane: 232,700
3. Tacoma: 222,400
4. Vancouver: 199,600
5. Bellevue: 154,600
6. Kent: 139,100
7. Everett: 114,200
8. Renton: 107,900
9. Spokane Valley: 107,400
10. Federal Way: 102,000



**NOW:**  
**66%** of Washington's residents (5.2 million) live in a city.

Sources: US Census Bureau, 1930 Census; Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM), 2023 population estimates

SLICE OF LIFE

# AGRI CULTURE

Sequim grows its economy (and population) by leveraging the heritage and history of farming and embracing tourism.

BY ALLYSON MEYER

**THE CITY OF SEQUIM** is a place uniquely blessed. Sandwiched between the Dungeness River and Sequim (pronounced “Skwim”) bay on the banks of the Salish Sea in the rain shadow of the Olympic Mountains, precipitation-wise it more closely mirrors Los Angeles than Seattle. Within this arid microclimate, Sequim’s past, present, and future are intrinsically linked to the land.

“One of the things that attracted me to this job was how rural and pristine Sequim is,” says City Manager Matthew Huish. “To hear about its agricultural history adds to the beauty. We’re surrounded by the mountains, the strait, the bay. And we’ve got these beautiful pastoral farmlands all around us.”

Sequim’s agrarian heritage is celebrated each year in uncommon fashion, drawing thousands of tourists to quaint Clallam County for festivals and special events. Some never leave.

The Sequim Irrigation Festival traces its roots back to 1896, when the city first celebrated the prowess of D.R. “Crazy” Callen, who diverted water from the Dungeness River to farmland on the parched prairie. With parades, car shows, arts and craft fairs, and a pancake breakfast (dubbed “Crazy Days”), Washington’s longest-running festival still brings more than 6,000 visitors to Sequim for 10 days each May. But that success story pales in comparison to Sequim Lavender Weekend, when an estimated 30,000 people converge on the “Lavender capital of North America,” doubling the population of the Sequim Dungeness Valley for three days on the third weekend in July.

The inaugural event was held in August 1997, two years before the completion of an \$18 million 4.7-mile bypass that promised to siphon traffic, and tourists, from the town center.

“The lavender industry here was really born when the Washington State Department of Transportation decided to build the 101 bypass, because Highway 101 used to come right through downtown Sequim,” explains Barbara Hanna, Sequim’s communications and marketing director. “There was a community effort through the Chamber of Commerce to start brainstorming ideas to make Sequim more of a destination and put it on the map.”

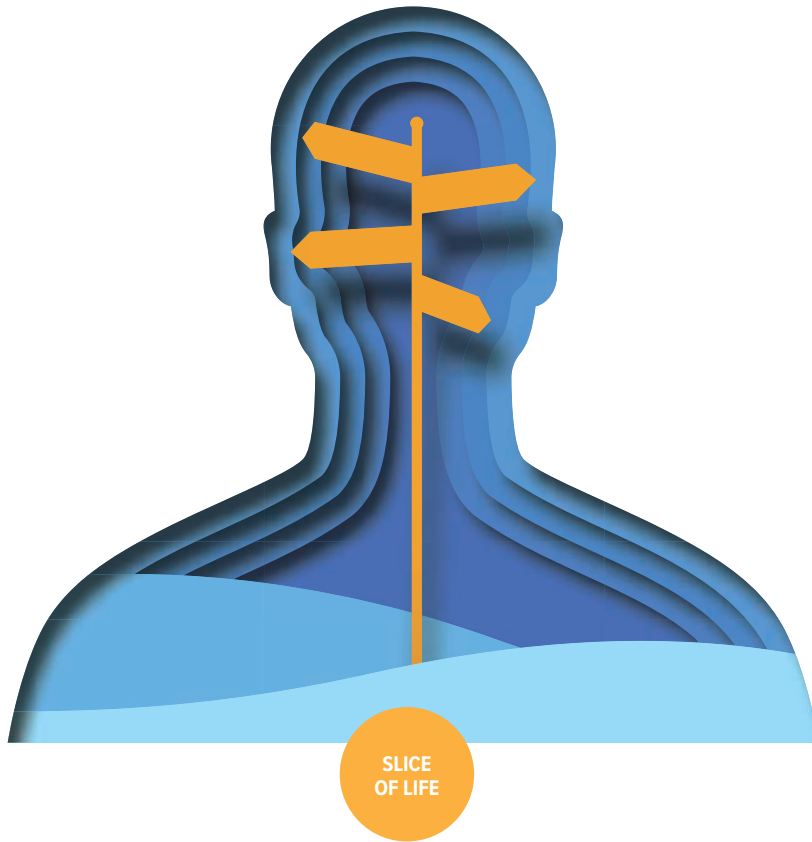
Drought-tolerant lavender was the solution, and the industry has flourished. In its first year, five local lavender farms were represented in the festivities. Now, almost three decades later, the number has grown to 18 participating lavender farms hosting tours, a namesake festival with a beer garden, street fair, food court, and live music by local bands like FarmStrong.

A desire to experience “small-town Americana at its best” helped Sequim bounce back from the impact of the pandemic, she adds, when, after a two-year hiatus, the festival drew record crowds in 2022, and the permanent population increased from 8,032 to 8,319 as more than a few decided to stay for good. For Huish, it all comes down to the city’s lesser-known motto (be kind) and its belief in being, as he puts it, a “small community of kindness” where locals and visitors come together to experience the beauty that is Sequim’s history.

“That’s the fun of living here and being here,” he says. “There’s a charm that is unique to a rural community surrounded by natural beauty.”



For more information:  
[sequimwa.gov](http://sequimwa.gov)



# Chartered Territory

Waitsburg, the only Washington city still operating under its original territorial charter, models innovation in a new era of challenges.

BY TIFFANY HILL

**“IT SOUNDS Fancier** than it really is,” says Randy Hinchliffe, the city administrator, clerk, and treasurer of Waitsburg, a city of 1,185 in rural southeast Washington. He’s referring to Waitsburg’s distinction as the only city in the state still operating under the terms of its original charter, adopted in 1881, eight years before the Washington Territory was granted statehood. The classification also explains its motto: One of a Kind.

“The fact that we’re still operating under our territorial charter sets us apart from the other 280 cities in the state,” says Hinchliffe, who shares city hall with a deputy clerk, a public works director, and four public works specialists. “The charter lays out our general operational rules, but we still follow most of the same

rules as other cities.”

One notable exception was the way Waitsburg conducted municipal elections. For 140 years, voters came to city hall, or the designated polling place, on the first Monday of April to elect or re-elect the mayor, councilmembers, and treasurer, who each served a one-year term.

“It was extremely inefficient and out of line with how voting is typically done,” Hinchliffe explains, noting that annual elections cost the city nearly \$5,000 in legal notices, printing, postage, and other fees. “State law allows us to change our charter when it’s in the city’s best interest to do so.” So, in February 2020, Waitsburg’s council voted to amend its charter to follow general state election laws outlined in the Revised Code of

Washington (RCW), with elected officials all serving staggered four-year terms, and elections happening every two years.

Waitsburg has modernized in other important ways as well. During the pandemic, the city leveraged its share of American Rescue Plan Act funding, and a grant from the Port of Walla Walla, to initiate a \$600,000 overhaul of its antiquated water and sewer system—the city’s largest-ever infrastructure investment.


These days, visitors flock to Waitsburg less for its history, and more for its proximity to outdoor recreation and Walla Walla wine country, its bustling foodie scene, and small-town charm. But there’s precious little real estate available for anyone who might be tempted to stay for good.

**“PEOPLE WANT TO MOVE HERE FOR THE SLOWER-PACED COMMUNITY AND A MORE-INVOLVED QUALITY OF LIFE.”**

“We are a small rural farm community that is very inviting and inclusive, but hasn’t really grown over the years,” explains Hinchliffe, a lifelong Waitsburg resident. “There’s a very low inventory of houses and, in both the short and long term, we could really use the development of new housing to help support the revitalization of our downtown.”

Although its charter is rooted in another era, the sweeping regulatory powers it grants the city (everything from prohibiting “opium smoking houses” to regulating the “transportation and keeping of gunpowder” to licensing and taxing “drinking saloons and beer shops and breweries”) give the city’s planning commission latitude when it comes to tweaking municipal code to spur residential and commercial development.

While plenty has changed in the one-of-a-kind city, in some ways governing happens much as it did in 1881.

“People want to move here for the slower-paced community and a more-involved quality of life,” Hinchliffe says, adding that Waitsburg “is where neighbors still know neighbors.” 

# Elected Officials! Get your essentials

## AWC Elected Officials Essentials workshop

Saturday, December 9, 2023

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Getting elected to city council is just the beginning. Once you start your role, there are many things to learn—and quickly!

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- **Learn important ethical considerations to keep you on the right side of the law**
- **Examine real-world municipal legal scenarios**
- **Explore what makes your work at city hall meaningful**
- **Discover how your leadership helps shape your community**
- **Network with other city leaders**

This event fulfills the Open Government Trainings Act's specific requirements (including public records, records retention, and open public meetings) that must be completed by all elected and appointed officials within 90 days of taking office and every four years thereafter.

**Registration opens October 11.**

**Visit our website to find a location and register!**



[wacities.org/EOE](https://wacities.org/EOE)

*Note: Those not yet in elected office will need to register after November 7. This event is popular, so we encourage you to schedule a registration reminder, and save the date!*



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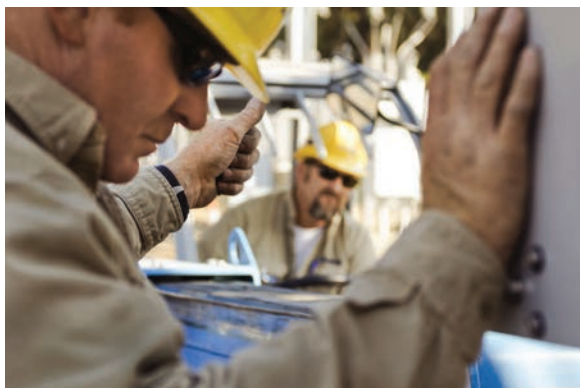
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## Citybeat

*Past Present* continued from page 5

residents appreciate Steilacoom for its slow pace, small size, and rich history.

“We are a historic town and are fortunate to have had leaders in the 1970s who created a historic district,” says Muri, a former state legislator, Steilacoom School Board member, and longtime Pierce County councilmember who was appointed mayor in 2021. “Keeping a historic look and a quaint appearance is very important to our town’s citizens. We have resisted any major commercial development.”

Steilacoom’s historic district encompasses 31 significant homes and sites (including Steilacoom Town Hall) maintained by the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association. The town also celebrates its Indigenous roots at the Steilacoom Tribal Museum, housed in a historic building that’s under restoration with a \$1 million state grant managed by the Town of Steilacoom.

**“WE ARE A HISTORIC TOWN AND ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE HAD LEADERS IN THE 1970S WHO CREATED A HISTORIC DISTRICT. KEEPING A HISTORIC LOOK AND A QUAINT APPEARANCE IS VERY IMPORTANT TO OUR TOWN’S CITIZENS. WE HAVE RESISTED ANY MAJOR COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT.”**

While Steilacoom may be known as the Town of Firsts—including Washington Territory’s first library and Pierce County’s first school—it’s not stuck in the past. As evidence, Muri points to the environmental progress that’s been made in recent history. In 2023, the town installed eight electric vehicle charging stations and purchased its first electric truck, a Ford Lightning, for city employees. The vehicle will be fêted this fall in the town’s tenth annual electric vehicle festival, a partnership with Plug In America (a national nonprofit promoting the use of electric vehicles).

Steilacoom’s nine-member Parks and Environment Advisory Committee was recently created to help guide the town’s \$3.5 million redevelopment of a 71-acre industrial site for housing and open space, including the restoration of a freshwater creek that was shunted into underground culverts more than a century ago.

With funding, allies (like U.S. Rep. Marilyn Strickland, who in late 2022 helped the town secure a \$1.5 million federal Community Project Funding grant), and luck, Muri hopes to see the project completed by 2029, the year Steilacoom turns 175—yet another milestone. **C**

For more information:  
[townofsteilacoom.org](https://townofsteilacoom.org)

# Cityscope

Q&A

## Paving the Way

Vini Samuel reflects on her trailblazing role as America's first woman Indian American mayor, and her legacy as Montesano's roadbuilder-in-chief.

INTERVIEW BY ALLYSON MEYER

Montesano Mayor  
Vini Samuel

**You were born in India and your family moved to Juneau, Alaska, when you were seven. How did you end up in Montesano?**

After receiving a bachelor's degree in history and English from Western Washington University, I decided to study law at Seattle University. I had expected to return to Alaska after I finished law school, but my husband got a job in Olympia. Grays Harbor County is a lot like Juneau, with lots of trees,

fish, and rain. So, when I was starting to look for a job in 1997, we drove down to Montesano and I was like, 'Oh, I know this place.'

**How do you describe Montesano?**

It's a place you can fall in love with. It is Mayberry. It is the best of what small towns are. If you like to be outdoors, there's hiking and fishing on the river right outside your

CONTINUED ON P.12 ▶



door. And if you get in the car you can go to the ocean or you can go to a mountain. I often say, ‘If you don’t like to be outside, this might not be the right community for you.’

**Montesano might be a destination for outdoor recreation, but historically it always has been, and still is, a timber town. How has that evolved over time?**

We’re the birthplace of the first tree farm in the United States. In 1941, Weyerhaeuser dedicated the 120,000-acre Clemons Tree Farm as an experiment to start farming trees instead of slash and burn. Before that, timber was harvested, and the land was left bare; there was no effort to replant and consider future generations. Today, there are over 900 tree farms in Washington state and 80,000 family-owned tree farms in America.

**And one 5,400-acre tree farm is owned and managed by the City of Montesano.**

Our city forester works towards continuing goals for sustainable timber, fish, wildlife, and recreation. The city forest is home to over 15 miles of interconnected hiking and biking trails. We have a proud history of environmental stewardship, and because of that my community feels very much like the outside is an integral part of who they are—nature, wildlife, hunting, and fishing—that’s all part of the lifestyle.

**As a lawyer with a successful local practice, what prompted you to run for mayor in 2015?**

I went to many people who I thought would do a very good job being mayor and none of



Montesano's seal references the city's history of environmental stewardship.

them wanted to run. So my son said, ‘I guess you’ll have to run.’ And I said, ‘I can’t.’ It wasn’t so much about being mayor as it was about the time involved as I wasn’t sure how I was going to work full time and balance being mayor. But he was right. If you complain enough, you better stand up and do something about it. That’s why I ran.

**You’re the first woman to be elected mayor in Montesano’s history and the first Indian American woman mayor in the United States. What does that mean to you?**

You become the symbol of things that are way beyond what you’re doing. What I learned is that the first of anything is always symbolic, and that symbol is really about

the efforts of everybody else all focused on one person. All of a sudden, there’s a larger responsibility for what that symbol means because you’re not carrying your own work, you’re carrying everybody’s work and trying to honor that.

**What do you enjoy most about being mayor?**

I’ve been in private practice my entire career, and as mayor, I’ve learned so many things that never would have been part of my life experience.

**Such as?**

When I started, I didn’t have a lot of construction experience. Now Montesano is under construction. We’re building a better city, one block and one project at a time. Our city has never looked more beautiful.

The entrance to our city is a great example. When I first took the oath of office as mayor nearly eight years ago, improving Montesano’s front door was a top priority. I can’t tell you how many hours I’ve spent on different ideas for developing and funding for that site. It took two terms. I could have given up on the idea after the first setback, or the second, or the third. But nothing worth doing is easy.

**This summer, with a \$630,000 grant from the Washington State Transportation Improvement Board, the city will rebuild a two-block stretch of Pioneer Avenue, Montesano’s main street, replacing curbs, sidewalks, and pavement. In one of your monthly newsletters, you wrote, ‘I love the smell of asphalt in the morning.’**

I swear, I love the smell of asphalt! When I’m on a morning walk or an evening walk and I smell it, I go, ‘Ahh.’ When I smell asphalt, I know something has been built.

**What do you think will be your legacy as Montesano’s mayor?**

No one is going to remember what I did in 100 years, and streets need to be repaved in 20 to 30 years. So the word legacy is meaningless in some ways. My husband told me once, and I think this is true: ‘No one remembers what you did yesterday. It only matters what you do today and tomorrow.’ There’s an old children’s book about planting flowers—planting the seeds. I always think to myself, ‘Did you leave it better than you found it? Did you work hard enough? Did you get enough things to bloom?’



# Montesano

*A look at how the City of Montesano balances environmental stewardship with essential city services.*

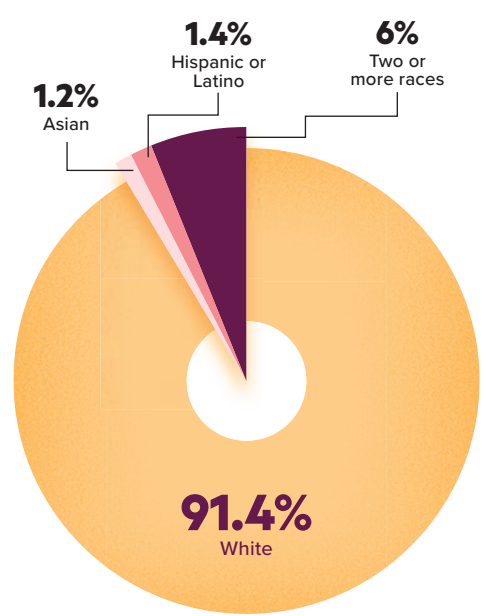
## POPULATION

POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2020 U.S. CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED



SOURCE: CENSUS.GOV

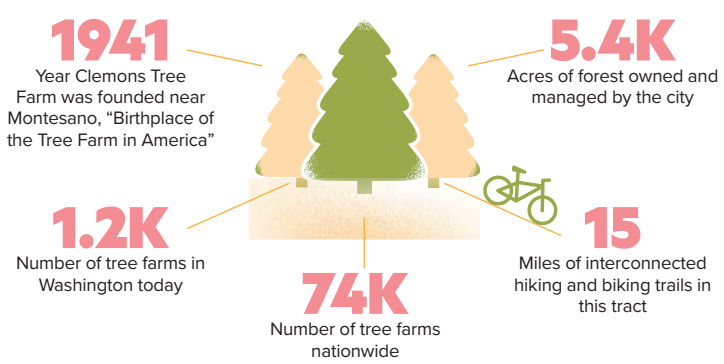
## DEMOGRAPHICS



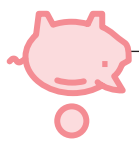
## PEOPLE POWER



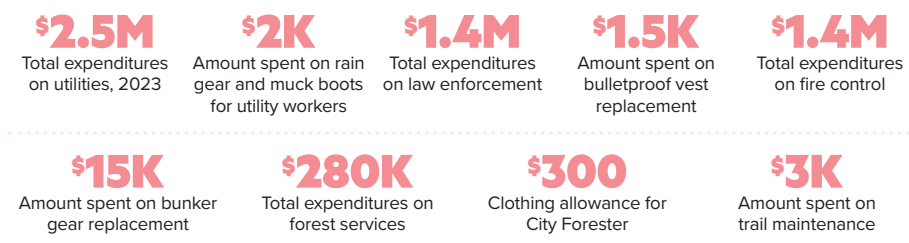
## SEEDING THE FUTURE



## CASH IN

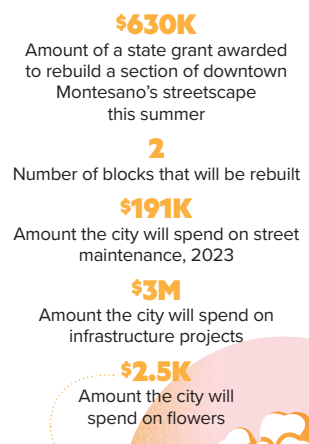


## CASH OUT



## CAPITAL

### IMPROVEMENTS



SOURCES: CENSUSREPORTER.ORG, CITY OF MONTESANO 2023 BUDGET, WASHINGTON TREE FARM PROGRAM, AMERICAN TREE FARM SYSTEM






# COMMON GROUND







Both elected to serve Spokane, two city and county leaders from opposite ends of the political spectrum put their differences aside to model the benefits of cooperative governing.

BY TED KATAUSKAS | PHOTOS BY RAJAH BOSE

The Spokane Pavilion outdoor concert venue (at left); Spokane County Commissioner Mary Kunev (above left) and City of Spokane Councilmember Betsy Wilkerson chat at one of their ongoing get-togethers at the Maryhill Winery tasting room.



**Wilkerson and Kuney** share a laugh on the tasting room's outdoor patio (above), and network inside with community leaders, including Spokane City Councilmember Roberta Greene (upper left, facing page), who inevitably wander over to say hello.

## FOR TWO YEARS NOW

Spokane City Councilmember Betsy Wilkerson and Spokane County Commissioner Mary Kuney have had a standing date—at least quarterly but preferably monthly—to meet on an afternoon at the Maryhill Winery Tasting Room in Spokane's trendy Kendall Yards neighborhood. If it's particularly glorious outside during the summer and fall, they'll secure a patio table overlooking the Spokane River. They meet to sip chardonnay (Wilkerson prefers whites) and merlot (Kuney favors reds), maybe share an appetizer, and catch up on the goings on in their personal and professional lives. There's also lots of laughing and networking with leaders from local businesses, nonprofits, and government who inevitably wander over to say hello and linger as their meeting stretches ever outward, sun sinking toward the horizon.

"We call it our wine and whine meetup," says Wilkerson, who was appointed to fill a vacancy on Spokane's council in 2020. She was elected to the position two years later and is only the second Black woman ever to serve on the city's white, male-dominated council, as well as the first Black councilmember in nearly 20 years. "When I got elected and people from my community found out that Mary was my friend, I said, 'Listen, I've known Mary for years. I don't care what her political allegiance is. I was friends with Mary before I got into this political office, and I'll be friends with Mary after I leave this political office.' That's important to me. We are elected to our seats for four-year terms. But friendships are for a lifetime. And both require work to maintain."

The work of maintaining this relationship also helps cement Spokane's long-standing tradition of city and county cooperative governing.

"The winery is a lovely venue where you have a



**“I’VE KNOWN MARY FOR YEARS. I DON’T CARE WHAT HER POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE IS. I WAS FRIENDS WITH MARY BEFORE I GOT INTO THIS POLITICAL OFFICE, AND I’LL BE FRIENDS WITH MARY AFTER I LEAVE THIS POLITICAL OFFICE. THAT’S IMPORTANT TO ME. WE ARE ELECTED TO OUR SEATS FOR FOUR-YEAR TERMS. BUT FRIENDSHIPS ARE FOR A LIFETIME. AND BOTH REQUIRE WORK TO MAINTAIN.”**

**—BETSY WILKERSON**

glass of wine and an appetizer and just sit and relax for a little bit,” says Kuney, who was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Spokane County Commission in 2017 and in 2022 was re-elected to serve a four-year term. “It’s also a nice way to catch up personally, but also to talk about what’s going on with the city, and what’s going on with the county. We both give each other perspectives that help us make better decisions individually.”

To casual onlookers, Wilkerson and Kuney have little in common. In business attire, Wilkerson’s palette verges from bright pink to lime green (and she has been known to pair a patterned dashiki with black leather pants) while Kuney sticks to conventional suits in shades of navy and gray. Professionally, Wilkerson is a small business owner who runs Moore’s Assisted Living, a residential care facility for mentally disabled adults, while Kuney is a CPA and an entrepreneur who co-founded Summit Tea, a mail-order retail business specializing in imported Japanese and Chinese teas. As a local elected official, Wilkerson’s a Democrat who describes herself as a progressive, while Kuney’s a Republican serving the conservative Spokane Valley

and southeast county. Yet the two friends have never been closer or leaned on each other more, especially as their careers in local government have assumed parallel upward trajectories.

In January 2023, two months after Kuney was named pres-





**Wilkerson and Kuney** in March at YWCA Spokane's Women of Achievement Awards luncheon, where Wilkerson was recognized for her work in public and government service

## CITY LEADERSHIP

**BETSY WILKERSON'S JOURNEY** as a community leader and local power broker began in the winter of 1963, when Louisiana "Lou" Mitchell, a recently divorced hairdresser with four young children, relocated from the heart of Mississippi to eastern Washington, sight unseen, at the invitation of a friend who wanted to open a

ident of the Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC), the Spokane County Commission selected her as its chair. In June, three months after Wilkerson announced her candidacy for Spokane City Council president, the Association of Washington Cities elected her as *its* president.

"I was thrilled to learn that my friend Betsy Wilkerson was elected president of the Association of Washington Cities," Kuney said in AWC's June press release, which noted that with Kuney at the helm of WSAC and Wilkerson's election as president of AWC, both nonpartisan statewide leadership organizations were now headed by local elected women from Spokane, perhaps for the first time ever. "WSAC and AWC have a long history of partnership and working together to get things done. I am confident that this partnership will only strengthen under President Wilkerson's leadership."

While some deem this convergence to be nothing less than historic, Wilkerson views it as a unique leadership opportunity for a region known as being on the sunny side of the state to emerge from the long shadow of western Washington influence and finally have its time to shine.

"What's exciting about Mary and me in these roles is the leadership from eastern Washington," Wilkerson says. "That two women have never held these seats simultaneously—and I may be the first Black woman—yeah, it matters, but it matters less than the fact that both positions are held by local leaders from this side of the state. So, I think it's just an exciting time for eastern Washington."

"A lot of advocacy is skewed a little bit to the other side of the state, on the other side of what we call the Cascade Divide. I see this as important because it shows that, even though we are pretty rural here, we are doing good stuff. This region is producing leaders for our state and moving us forward together."

hair salon. She was drawn in part by the sound of Spokane's motto: "The City of Promise."

"It was the height of the Jim Crow South, and my mom was a Black hairdresser, so she moved us out here looking for a better way of life," recalls Wilkerson, who was 6 years old at the time. "It was cold when I got here. My hands froze because I knew nothing about wearing gloves, so that was my first experience of Spokane. Culturally, it was different, too."

Lou Mitchell settled her young family in Spokane's East Central neighborhood, the heart of a small but vibrant Black community whose growth during the 1930s and '40s had been driven by large-scale government construction projects like the Grand Coulee Dam and Fairchild Air Force Base. (In 1960, the U.S. Census tallied the city's "Negro" population at 2,993, roughly 1 percent of the total; 63 percent of this population lived in East Central, which comprised just three of the city's 40-odd census tracts.)

"In many ways, I grew up in a bubble in Spokane because there was a Black neighborhood," says Wilkerson. "In the neighborhood and through church circles, I was surrounded by Black people, and they all looked like me."

Not so in the city's public schools (98 percent of Spokane's population then was white, compared to 83 percent today). Wilkerson attended Edison Elementary and graduated from Lewis & Clark High School in 1973, and then enrolled at Jarvis Christian College, a historically Black college in East Texas. There, as a young adult, she sought to recreate the cultural bonds of her East Central childhood but was ostracized as a "white girl" when students there, many from the Deep South, learned she was from Spokane. After two years, Wilkerson dropped out of college, married, and moved with her husband to Detroit. But the marriage soon dissolved, and as a single

mother with two little kids in tow, like her mother before her, she decamped for Spokane in search of a better life.

By then, Lou Mitchell had found a more lucrative career as an aide with Spokane Mental Health Treatment Services. She had changed her surname to Moore after marrying a janitor who worked at Sacred Heart Hospital and who, like her, was an ordained minister (together they would later cofound Spokane's Mt. Zion Holiness Church). In 1976, the couple got a loan from the Small Business Administration and bought a three-story, nine-bedroom house in Spokane's Browne's Addition. The building had formerly served as a Salvation Army shelter for unwed mothers. It's where they opened Moore's Assisted Living, and settled in an apartment on the third floor.

Home again, without a college degree, Wilkerson cast about for a meaningful career for herself that also might benefit the city's now-fragmented Black community. She first worked her way up from bank teller to loan officer at Spokane Teachers Credit Union, where she spent a decade doing her part to offset redlining practices that had made home ownership unattainable for many East Central residents. Then she worked as Eastern Washington program manager for the American Heart Association (AHA), flitting about the dry side of the state as a spokesperson for the AHA's "Wellness in a Box" campaign promoting the benefits of a heart-healthy lifestyle (Black people are 30 percent more likely to die of heart disease than white people). In the early 1990s, as her mother and stepfather announced their retirement, Wilkerson took over as owner and administrator of Moore's Assisted Living, an established small business with 18 residents and nine full-time employees.

"I thought, 'I'm going to do the dutiful daughter thing and I'm going to try it,'" Wilkerson recalls. "But I took to it like a duck takes to water, and I never looked back."

As a small business owner, Wilkerson finally found the clout she needed to start inserting herself in Spokane's power circles as a leader and advocate representing East Central's overlooked wants and needs. One after another, she joined or was recruited to join some of the city's most influential committees, foundations, and boards, including the Junior League of Spokane (where she met Mary Kuney and became that organization's first Black president), Spokane's Women Helping Women Fund (a nonprofit serving women and children in need of financial support, where she also served as board president), the Innovia Foundation (Spokane's community foundation, where she helped direct high-impact grants to her East Central neighborhood), Spokane Housing Ventures (a HUD-funded nonprofit that provides housing assistance to more than 6,000 low-income households, where she served as chair), and the Washington State Commission on Judicial Conduct, where she was appointed by Gov. Gary Locke and would serve for 16 years under three different administrations.

"I tell people my classroom was my community," Wilkerson says. "I got to serve in many capacities and learn stuff hands-on that I couldn't have learned in any classroom."

Such as the power of grassroots organizing.

In 2018, at a backyard barbecue hosted by the late Sandra Williams (a local civil rights activist who served on the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs and founded and published *The Black Lens*, a monthly newspaper covering Spokane's Black community), Wilkerson and Williams joined three other community leaders in each pledging \$2,000 in seed money for a \$375,000 fundraising campaign to create the Carl Maxey Center, a hub for Spokane's Black community.

"We saw that there was a gap; there were no services for the African American community or a place for them to gather," says Wilkerson, who volunteered to serve as the nascent nonprofit's president. "We went out and raised the money to pay for the building, so it's ours. We own it scot-free. We wrote grants and got money from the state for the first phase of the renovation, which has been completed. We're now on phase two of the remodel, which is paid for as well.

"We were modeling the Black ownership we wanted to see in our community. We could have rented a building, but we didn't want to be renters; we wanted to be owners, to control our own destiny."

The Carl Maxey Center was named for a legendary local civil rights activist (a boxer with a national title who also was Spokane's first Black attorney), and in addition to being a gathering place for social events, it has a larger purpose to "empower and uplift" Spokane's Black community by offering small business loans and financial assistance for those struggling to pay rent and tuition, as well as providing a free legal clinic that would be staffed by lawyers offering their services pro bono.

Late in 2019, with Wilkerson leading the Maxey Center's rollout, Breean Beggs, a civil rights attorney in the middle of his first full term on Spokane's council, asked Wilkerson if she might consider filling his seat representing East Central's District 2 when he vacated it in January 2020 to serve as council president.

"I didn't tell him no, I told him, 'Hell no!'" jokes Wilkerson, who was then 64. "I had just gotten my Social Security information and I was getting ready to retire. People think I'm joking, but I had started making plans to cut back on my business and I was getting ready to start transferring it over to my adult children and I was going to get my dream job."

Which was?

"Being the lunch lady at the middle school my three grandkids were attending," she deadpans. "There are so many kids



of color who have absolutely no family support and I've always been a big advocate of the public school system. I just wanted to be there and offer encouragement and be a good role model. I wanted to make my grandkids uneasy too. That was just going to be the fun part!"

But then she started thinking of another role model from the Black community: Roberta Greene, a lifelong friend and fellow member of her church who was the first and only Black woman to serve on Spokane's City Council when she took office in 1996 and completed her second term in 2004.

"I was a little intrigued because it had been 20 years since a person of color had been elected to this council—20 years!—in the second-largest city in the state of Washington," she adds. "I was a young person under Roberta Greene. I voted all the time, and I paid attention, but I just never saw myself sitting in an elected position. But when I look back at my volunteer life, unbeknownst to me, every opportunity to volunteer, every leadership position was tracking me to this seat. I wasn't known in the political world, but I was known in the community as someone who could be counted on."

After finally saying yes to Beggs, Wilkerson was surprised to learn she had bested 36 other contenders and earned the Spokane City Council's unanimous vote appointing her to fill his vacated seat. Fittingly, on January 20, 2020, Wilkerson was sworn in at the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration at East Central's Holy Temple Church. When she settled into District 2's office on the seventh floor of city hall the following morning, her mission was clear.

"One of the things I wanted to achieve was amplifying voices that had not been heard in my community," recalls Wilkerson. "That was my priority because folks of color had no voice in Spokane city government. Leadership was operating in an echo chamber, because it was the same people sitting on the same committees throughout the city. The name of the committee would change, but you'd see the same folks everywhere you went, which is not unusual in government."

But one thing surprised her.

"My just being in the room changed the conversation," she stresses. "People would tell me, 'Betsy, you got a lot of power!' And I would say, 'I don't know what y'all call power.' But it was an unrealized power that I'd never even recognized that I had: I could change the conversation, and in some cases the outcome, because I could advocate from a different perspective and a different lived experience."

Only weeks after taking office, she confronted seemingly insurmountable challenges, starting with the pandemic's arrival in March followed by the Black Lives Matter unrest that erupted after the killing of George Floyd in May. After urging



**IN ADDITION TO BEING A GATHERING PLACE FOR SOCIAL EVENTS, THE CARL MAXEY CENTER HAS A LARGER PURPOSE TO "EMPOWER AND UPLIFT" SPOKANE'S BLACK COMMUNITY BY OFFERING SMALL BUSINESS LOANS AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR THOSE STRUGGLING TO PAY RENT AND TUITION.**



her fellow councilmembers to listen to and respond to the demands of protesters, some labeled her a radical.

“How can I be a radical Black woman?” she asks. “I live in Spokane. I don’t have the privilege to be radical. I was very clear that I did not support defunding the police, but I did support reimagining how things could be done differently—not only for the community, but for the police officers as well—but they continue to want to put that label on me because of the color of my skin.”

This brings up another cold reality of only being the second Black woman ever to serve on the council.

“I bear the responsibility of not doing anything that would bring any type of criticism or create barriers for my community,” she explains. “I think that’s not really understood in the dominant culture, but when you’re one of one, that’s another weight-slash-responsibility that you carry. So that was that. I’m a radical.”

Actually, she’s one of two, because a person who *does* understand is her council predecessor, Roberta Greene.

Now a professor of economics at Eastern Washington University, Greene notes: “There’s this saying that ‘Yes, you’re here, but there won’t be any others after you because of what you did or didn’t do.’ You won’t hear anybody say that about Betsy.”

“I love who she is. She’s a strong, strong female. She does

**Wilkerson helped found** Spokane’s Carl Maxey Center (left), a local nonprofit named for a legendary civil rights leader that serves as a gathering place for the city’s Black community.

her homework. Before she comes to a decision, she will interact with those who don’t quite agree, but she will have in her mind what she wants to do. I like her humanity and her empathy. She works well with people. If they don’t look like her, if they don’t love like her, if they don’t talk like her, it’s still that level of humanity and respect for the individual that I see in her interactions with people. That’s what I love.”

At the end of her tumultuous first year in office, Wilkerson realized her first major accomplishment when Spokane’s council voted to change the name of Fort George Wright Drive to Whistalks Way, honoring a Spokane woman warrior who fought in the Indian Wars during the mid-19th century, instead of the U.S. Army colonel who led a violent campaign to suppress Native American resistance to white settlement and had ordered Whistalks’ husband hanged.

“We have one of the largest urban Native American populations in the country here, and they had been trying for 20 years to get this street name changed,” Wilkerson says. “It was painful to them, but they just never had a true champion. So I threw my weight behind that and shepherded it through council. That brought them more into city government and made a place for them, and they felt like they were heard.”

In November 2021, after District 2 elected her to a first full term, Wilkerson scored her second major win when the council voted to enshrine equity and inclusion into Spokane municipal code, establishing a committee helmed by 13 representatives from the city’s communities of color to advise members of the council and the administration on how to factor equity and inclusion into decisions about the city’s budget and policies.

She’ll remember 2022 as the year *The Spokesman-Review* honored her, along with U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, and astronaut Anne McClain, as Spokane’s Women of the Year. Also, it was the year she openly clashed with Spokane Mayor Nadine Woodward, challenging her decision to convert an East Central library into a police precinct.

And 2023? That’s when Breean Beggs, who recruited Wilkerson to the council in 2019, announced that he would not be seeking another term as council president (two months later, the governor would appoint Beggs to serve as a judge in Spokane County Superior Court) and endorsed Wilkerson as his replacement.

“Betsy has an amazing skill of navigating the corridors of power and the status quo without alienating them,” he told *The Spokesman-Review*. “She navigates them, asks penetrating questions, and stands up for values and communities that have been marginalized. I just think it’s her time to lead.”



# MEETS COUNTY LEADERSHIP

**THIS BRINGS US BACK** to that patio at the Maryhill Winery, looking across the table at Mary Kuney, Wilkerson's county government cohort and longtime friend. Upon closer examination, Kuney's biography mirrors more than it deflects Wilkerson's.

When she was in middle school, Kuney's father relocated the family from Iowa to open an insurance agency in Spokane. They settled in Spokane Valley, a sprawling suburb of single-family homes on acreage outside the city center that in 2003 became the third-largest newly incorporated city in U.S. history. After graduating from Central Valley High in 1983, then with an accounting degree from Gonzaga University in 1987, she landed a job in San Francisco, where she lived for three years.

"At that time, everyone left Spokane for the big city," recalls Kuney, who's now 58. "Most people went to Seattle, but I went to San Francisco to really see a change. But three years was enough of driving around and trying to find a place to park. Then we had the earthquake of 1989, and I thought, 'Spokane is pretty nice because it doesn't have natural disasters.'"

So she returned to her hometown, found a job at a big accounting firm (Coopers & Lybrand), and got married (to a general contractor who specializes in building bridges).

Interested in community service, in 1991 she joined the Junior League of Spokane, where she met a kindred spirit: Betsy Wilkerson.

"She was a very gracious lady with a great smile and always happy," Kuney recalls. "We learned about training volunteers, how to put an agenda together, and how to run a meeting. The Junior League was a great start for me to do different things to help youth. I'm very passionate about that, because my mom grew up in an orphanage in Iowa and her perspective was that where you are at today doesn't drive your future—that you can be anybody and anything you want to be."

After a few years of intense involvement with the Junior League, the two went their separate ways, and like Wilkerson, Kuney served her community, joining the board of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Spokane County and the Hutton Settlement, an orphanage/children's home dating from 1919. In 1995, she went to work for the Washington State Auditor's Office where, as assistant state auditor, she specialized in auditing cities, counties, and school districts. In 2005, she left that job



to focus on mothering two little children, and with a friend, launched Summit Tea. She then sold her stake in the business after two years because it was detracting from her family time. Nine years later, with her daughter off to college and her son in high school, she decided to do something with the time she now had on her hands.

"I was volunteering, but I felt like I could do something more for my community," she says. "As a CPA, I had worked with elected officials, and I liked working with government entities, so I thought government might be the right place for me to put my time and attention."

In 2014, she ran for Spokane County Treasurer and didn't make it past the primary. But she caught the attention of Spokane County Auditor Vicky Dalton, who hired Kuney as her chief deputy, a post she held until 2017, when she was appointed to fill a vacant seat on the Spokane County Commission. She ran and was elected in 2018 and again in 2020—the only woman on Spokane County's three-member board.

"I felt it was important to continue to have that female voice," she says. "A lot of people encouraged me to put my name in for the appointment because they felt that a female voice would help the commission make more well-rounded decisions."

In 2021, as vice president of WSAC, Kuney traveled to a leadership dinner in Tacoma, where she reunited with an old friend: Betsy Wilkerson, who just had been named to AWC's board as secretary.

"It was so fun to see her and catch up, because we hadn't seen each other in a while and we didn't realize we both were on executive committees for these organizations," Kuney recalls. "We had discussions about how counties and cities have a lot of similar issues, and especially for Betsy and me being in the *same* city and county, there are a lot of things we can work



**Spokane County** Elections Manager Mike McLaughlin swears in Spokane County Commissioner Mary Kunev on December 29, 2022.

on together.” Wine and whine meetups were born—and many solutions along with them.

Over the past two years, over wine, Wilkerson and Kunev have collaborated on ways the city and county of Spokane can collectively address homelessness (by supporting the creation of a regional homelessness coalition), affordable housing (by repealing a moratorium on condominium development), increasing broadband connectivity in Spokane’s underserved communities (by leveraging up to \$40 million in anticipated federal funding from the Biden administration’s Broadband Equity and Development program), and other initiatives.

Kunev and Wilkerson demonstrate how leaders coming together can equalize the scale of representation that feels tipped toward the western side of the state, and also balance partisan perspectives. In the 2022 Spokane County election, after the state Legislature expanded the commission from three members to five to represent the growth and diversity of its population more accurately, voters re-elected the three Republican incumbents (including Kunev), along with two Democrats, ending a Republican lock on the commission that had existed since 2010.

“Within the Republican or the Democratic party, you’re always going to have issues,” reasons Kunev. “Betsy and I, we just look at it like we care about each other. We’re good friends and we honestly want to know the other’s perspective instead of their opinion. Neither of us feels entitled. These days, a lot of people feel like they’re entitled to their opinion and that theirs is the only one that matters. Betsy and I are both very open people who want to be listening and doing the right thing for our community.”

To that, Roberta Greene adds the perspective of history.

“There’s got to be front-facing civility, but truthfulness at the same time,” she stresses. “When I was on the council, we had some obnoxious people there. But the community deserves to see a council working together and getting things done, being the cheerleaders for our community when they’re in Olympia. We need to find those commonalities, that common ground. Betsy and Mary’s good relationship can only help us and elevate our region in terms of leadership.”

“I wish everybody could come and visit and see the community that we’re all so proud of. We need to make sure that we keep the citizens in the forefront. It’s about what’s good for the City and County of Spokane.”

**“THE COMMUNITY DESERVES TO SEE A COUNCIL WORKING TOGETHER AND GETTING THINGS DONE, BEING THE CHEERLEADERS FOR OUR COMMUNITY WHEN THEY’RE IN OLYMPIA. WE NEED TO FIND THOSE COMMONALITIES, THAT COMMON GROUND. BETSY AND MARY’S GOOD RELATIONSHIP CAN ONLY HELP US AND ELEVATE OUR REGION IN TERMS OF LEADERSHIP.”**

—ROBERTA GREENE



# AWC





# 90 Years of Cities Making History—Together

From the repeal of Prohibition to the rise of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging—charting AWC's advocacy for cities and the issues that have mattered most over nine decades

BY AWC STAFF

## Washington Cities: The Early Years

### THE FIRST TWO DECADES OF THE 20TH CENTURY

were a time of rapid expansion for cities in Washington. The state was relatively new, with 175 incorporated cities and towns. In 1910, Seattle Mayor Hiram Gill called city officials to Seattle to discuss the authority of cities to govern themselves (home rule), as he was deeply concerned about cities losing chartered functions to the Legislature and State

Railway Commission. It was at this conference that the League of Washington Municipalities (LWM) was born—the first of several unsuccessful predecessors to the Association of Washington Cities (AWC), and the first practical demonstration of city officials gathering to seek municipal solutions.

In 1912, the University of Washington established the Bureau of Municipal Research and entered into a policy of cooperation with LWM. This cooperative continued until 1916, when the league disbanded due to lack of participation. Several other attempts to establish a statewide municipal league were made, but the main obstacles to success were a shortage of financial support and a lack of participation by larger cities. It was not until the era of the Great Depression that a permanent group was formed.





# 1930s

## **AWC WAS FOUNDED IN 1933**

after Prohibition was repealed and the issue of liquor control shifted to state and local politics. On October 26, city officials gathered in Yakima to present a united front on liquor control legislation. There, city officials voted to establish AWC to ask the state to share its new liquor tax revenues. AWC drafted the bill that eventually became the Washington State Liquor Act in 1934.

From there, AWC saw rapid expansion. In May 1934, AWC members gathered again at the Olympic Hotel in Seattle for the first annual convention to accomplish organizational business objectives. Since AWC was launched during the Depression, members were acutely aware of unemployment problems, and urged immediate adoption of a new federal work relief program. They also drafted a measure to give cities 25 percent of state highway funds, adopted AWC's constitution, and re-elected its Board Executive Committee.

**IN 1935**, cities secured a share of the gasoline tax for local streets and highways. Governor Clarence D. Martin also signed the Revenue Act of 1935, the most comprehensive tax overhaul in state history. It has remained the foundation of the state's basic tax system ever since, with regular, if relatively minor, changes.

**IN 1936**, AWC intervened in court for its members to contest the power of the State Public Service Commission to regulate municipal water rates outside of city limits. In 1937, cities were given the right to establish recreation facilities and given control over the planning and subdivision of land. In

1938, AWC hired its first full-time lobbyist to represent 156 cities.

"Hardly a single session now passes without the adoption of a number of measures mandatory in cities," AWC's first CEO, Chester Biesen, noted at the time. "It [the state] mandates cities spend money they do not have and most frequently does not provide the means."

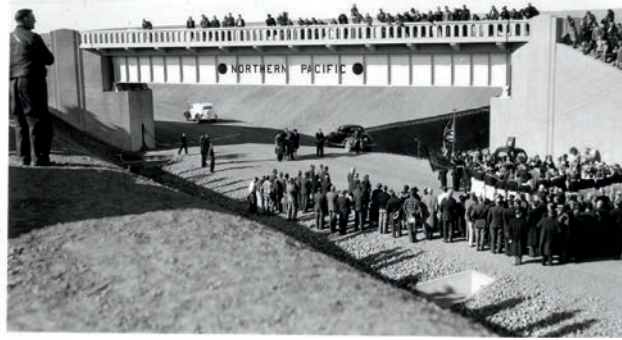
City officials were enthusiastic, interested in AWC's welfare, and were making valued friendships. Through hearing how other city officials had faced problems common to many, a comradery was built, which remains a cornerstone of AWC to this day.

**Through hearing how other city officials had faced problems common to many, a comradery was built, which remains a cornerstone of AWC to this day.**

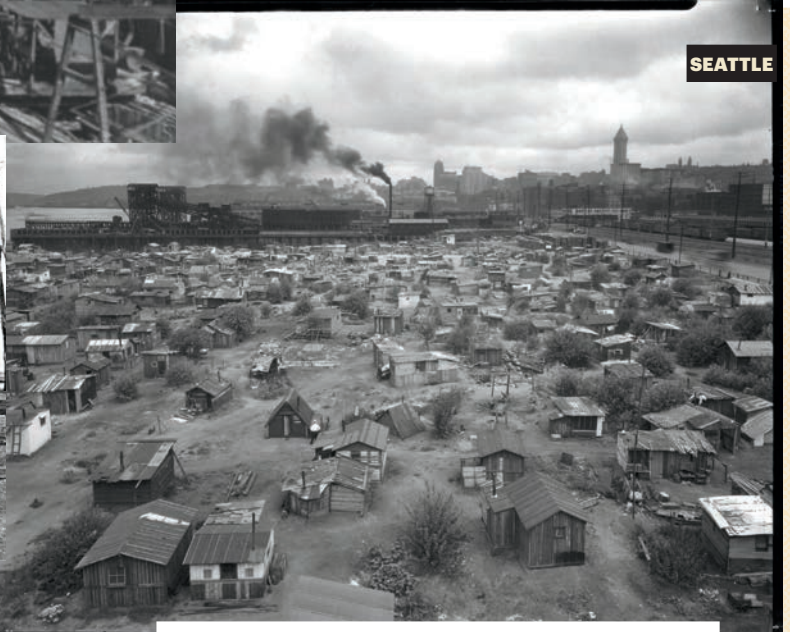
SPOKANE



RITZVILLE



SEATTLE



YAKIMA

NACHES AVE  
DEC. 23 1933



AWC Regional Meeting in Puyallup



Puget Sound Region Meeting PUYALLUP OCT 29, 37

PALOUSE



Scenes from around Washington state in the 1930s

➔ To learn more information about each photo, visit [wacities.org](http://wacities.org) for the digital magazine.





EPHRATA

# 1940s

**AWC's chief concerns until 1946 related to helping cities prepare for civil defense and cooperating with the war effort, including several of AWC's employees being reassigned elsewhere for war-related duties.**

## THE NATION PLUNGED INTO

a world war, and cities faced population increases, shortages of materials and labor, and the challenge of moving tremendous amounts of goods from Washington ports. As Congress began a defense buildup, Washington became a focus for war industries. Contracts and money flowed into the Puget Sound region for ships, planes, and tanks, bringing not only full employment, but a massive influx of war workers and their families.

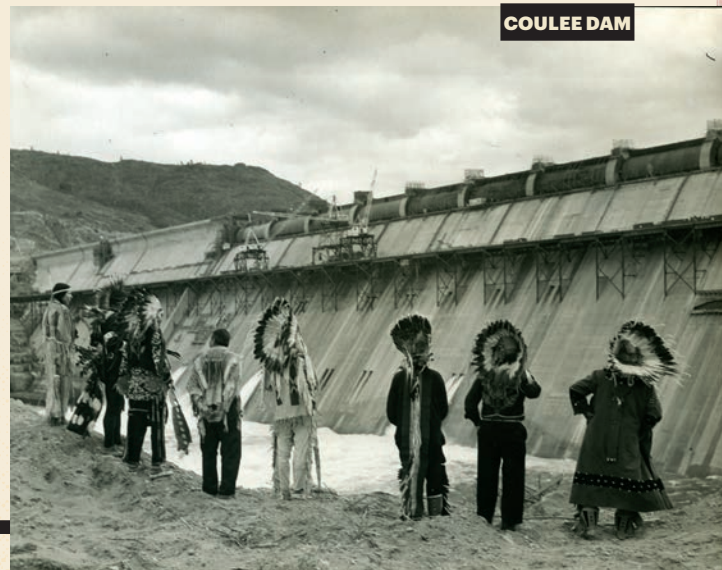
One result of pent-up demand for new housing was the increased suburbanization of Puget Sound cities. As the armed services and war-related manufacturing drew labor, civilian Washington faced a shortage of workers. An inflow of labor from across the country began to diversify the population.

Public housing agencies were part of a national program during the Great Depression to eliminate slums, provide

low-income housing, and alleviate unemployment. During World War II, the Tacoma Housing Authority built and managed housing for war workers and military families. In 1943, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began the massive and top-secret Hanford Engineer Works.

AWC's chief concerns until 1946 related to helping cities prepare for civil defense and cooperating with the war effort, including several of AWC's employees being reassigned elsewhere for war-related duties. Even so, AWC continued to expand and offer new services. During the later part of the decade, AWC was responsible for the passage of legislation establishing a retirement system for all city employees and sponsorship of the "road bill" which required the State Highway Department to maintain all state highways within corporate limits.

In the mid-1940s, AWC also encouraged groups of cities to meet regionally. Two organizations that were particularly active were the Association of Valley Cities (Kent Valley) and the Association of Snohomish County Cities. Valley Cities was a forerunner to today's Sound Cities Association. Both regional associations still meet regularly today. By 1949, AWC had 231 member cities and towns.



COULEE DAM



EPHRATA

# 1950s

**IN 1950, THE U.S. CENSUS** Bureau counted a huge increase in Washington's population—a World War II baby boom.

**IN MAY 1950,** President Harry S. Truman appeared before several thousand spectators at Gonzaga University in Spokane and gave a policy speech centering on racial equality. In his address, which became known as “the Gonzaga Speech,” Truman told the crowd, “We believe that no person—and no group of people—has an inherent right to rule over any other person or any other group.” Between 1950 and 1953, the U.S. was drawn into the first Korean War, and during that same time, experienced a polio epidemic. Millions of dollars were invested in developing and marketing a vaccine. Cities across Washington worked with school districts and local hospitals to organize massive vaccination programs.

During this decade, AWC underwent a major redefinition and reorganization. Its governing board was expanded to ensure equal representation of all cities on AWC's Board of Directors. Grassroots participation in AWC continued to grow as the



YAKIMA



TACOMA



SEATTLE



## 1950s continued

association suggested that all cities form legislative committees to develop a strong legislative program and identify vigorous local leadership to realize the organization's objectives.

A series of schools were added for newly elected mayors and councilmembers, covering topics like job responsibilities and the problems of managing city utilities, land use, and finance. These schools were the forerunners to today's biennial Elected Officials Essentials, held each December in odd-numbered (municipal elections) years.

**IN 1959**, The state Legislature approved a new Planning Enabling Act, giving additional authority for counties to regulate land development and providing an option for counties to establish a planning department and a planning commission. It also called for the creation of a board of adjustment to consider applications for zoning permits and established specific requirements for comprehensive plans that contained a land use element and major transportation routes.

**BY 1959**, AWC had 253 member cities and towns, representing 96 percent of Washington's cities.

AWC Annual  
Conference in Spokane



May 15-17, 1968

## 1960s

**DURING THE 1960S**, cities and towns encountered more complex problems than ever. In response, AWC's working committees became more specialized, covering sales tax, street design, public employees' retirement, streets and highways, planning, and growth.

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution on August 7, 1964, authorized the active involvement of the U.S. in the Vietnam War. Eventually, more than 8 million U.S. military personnel would serve, and fighting would spread from Vietnam to Laos and Cambodia. Washington state lists the 1,122 names of those who died in the Vietnam War—from the more than





*Convention - 3/10/63*



Scenes from around Washington state in the 1960s



58,000 Americans who died over the war's 17-year period. Washington's cities did not see an economic boom as they had in prior wars, with troops traveling overseas in jetliners instead of aboard troop ships. Seattle saw many war protests, including rallies, marches, and in extreme cases, bombings.

**ON FEBRUARY 26, 1963,** Washington Governor Albert Rosellini convened the Washington State Commission on the Status of Women, using government data to assemble information on Washington state women workers. The commission made several recommendations, particularly focusing on the idea that the government itself

and its agencies should end practices such as specifying "male only" and "female only" positions.

The federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 took major steps toward changing American society by prohibiting racial discrimination in public places such as restaurants, hotels, theaters, and schools. The act also required businesses and federally funded programs to abide by equal employment standards. The legislation attempted to rectify discriminatory voting practices, but results were weak in this area.

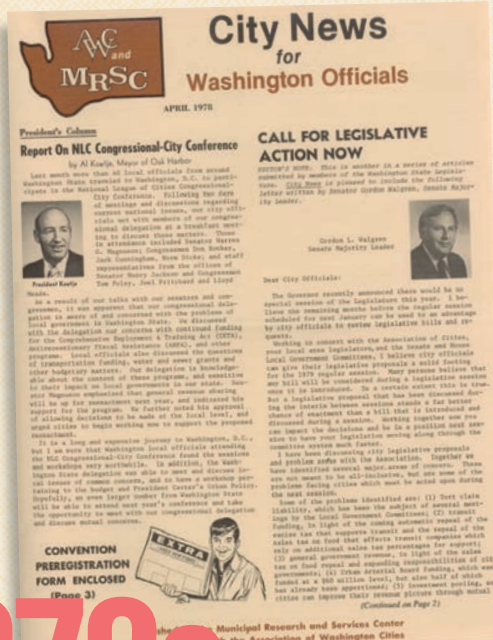
**IN 1967,** the farm workers movement made its way to the Northwest. Founded in Washington in 1967 by two students from Yakima Valley College, the United Farm Workers Cooperative was the first Chicano activist organization in the state of Washington. The large concentration of Mexican Americans in eastern Washington made rural issues central to the activist movement that would soon emerge.

Cities and towns still struggled

with urban growth and overstrained budgets. In 1967, the first general fund appropriation of \$22 million was made to help hard-pressed municipal budgets. A \$200 million highway bond program for urban arterial streets and passage of the Optional Municipal Code represented important legislative gains. The Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) was established in 1969 as an independent, nonprofit foundation funded by a portion of cities' share of the motor vehicle excise tax. Working with AWC, MRSC provided research and service programs for Washington's cities and towns.

**AT THE END OF THE DECADE,** AWC developed a group health insurance plan (the AWC Employee Benefit Trust), enabling member cities to take advantage of low-cost mass-buying power to purchase medical protection for city employees and their families. By 1969, 261 of Washington's 266 municipalities had joined AWC, representing 99.9 percent of the state's total city population.





# 1970s

**IN 1970, PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON** signed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) sponsored by Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson. Often referred to as an environmental Magna Carta, the act required that federal agencies prepare environmental impact statements before taking major action, and it transformed government decision-making, becoming a powerful tool for environmentalists. Washington, like many other states, adopted the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)—its most fundamental environmental protection law.

**IN 1972,** Congress adopted the Clean Water Act to clean up the nation’s polluted rivers and streams. Municipalities were required to treat all wastewater before discharging it into waterways, prompting a boom in municipal wastewater treatment plants.

**In 1974, all of Washington’s cities and towns chose to join AWC for the first time in the association’s history. It has remained that way ever since.**



**AWC Annual Conference in Yakima**

Grants were distributed to help cities plan and implement projects. Provisions for protecting wetlands and managing stormwater drainage were added in later amendments.

To help correct some of the disparities between federal, state, and local revenue collections, Congress passed the State and Local Fiscal Assistance Act of 1972. This federal revenue sharing provided block grants to states and municipalities with fewer strings attached, so communities could address their most important priorities. Many cities used the revenue-sharing money to build capital projects. Others used the grants for recreation, transportation, and public safety.



Scenes from around Washington state in the 1970s and 1980s

MOUNT ST. HELENS



TACOMA



**MOUNT ST. HELENS ERUPTED** on May 18, 1980, killing 57 people. Destruction was widespread but especially severe in Clark County, as boiling gas and mud scoured 200 square miles of forest and destroyed 4 billion board feet of salable timber. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife estimated that nearly 7,000 big game animals on and near Mount St. Helens perished, including all birds and most small mammals. Downwind of the volcano, many agricultural crops were destroyed by ash. Interstate 90 from Seattle to Spokane was closed for a week. Airports in eastern Washington shut down, and sewage-disposal systems were plagued by ash clogs. State and federal agencies estimated that workers and volunteers cleared about 900,000 tons of ash from highways and roads. In a congressional study, the International Trade Commission determined timber, agricultural, and civil works losses reached \$1.1 billion, which would be about \$4 billion in 2023 dollars.

**THE 1981** legislative session was the first 105-day regular session. AWC moved into its current home in 1985, a former residence constructed in 1885 and renovated to retain many of its historical features.

The move to Olympia and city officials' grassroots efforts paid off. The early '80s saw the enactment of several major legislative goals, including a second one-half cent sales tax at the local level. But as crumbling infrastructures began to make headlines across the nation, the critical need for new streets and roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, and park facilities rose to the top of city priority lists.

Money continued to be a pressing need for cities. In 1970, after 15 years of effort to broaden the cities' tax base, AWC successfully lobbied for a bill authorizing cities, towns, and counties to levy a local one-half cent sales tax.

**IN 1972**, the Washington Local Government Personnel Institute was created to provide training and technical assistance in the personnel and labor relations arena. That same year, Washington state voters approved I-276, a predecessor to the state's Public Records Act (PRA).

**IN 1973**, oil imports to much of the Western world were drastically reduced by a coalition of Arab countries known as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The embargo prompted the U.S. government to impose national speed limits, fix gas prices, and impose rations. The gas shortages affected the operations of local police, fire, and utility departments, and local government leaders had to develop ways to deal with the shortage. The crisis ultimately subsided after the embargo was lifted.

**IN 1974**, all of Washington's cities and towns chose to join AWC for the first time in the association's history. It has remained that way ever since.

**IN 1978**, AWC moved its staff to Olympia on a full-time, year-round basis.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL BERMAN





**AWC headquarters—modern day and historical photo overlay**

## 1980s continued

**IN 1986**, the U.S. Forest Service acted to protect the northern spotted owl from decline and extinction by limiting timber sales in mature portions of national forests, where the animals lived. The timber industry said that the measure went too far and would cost thousands of jobs, and environmentalists argued that not enough was being done to protect the owl and other species. A long series of governmental actions and court decisions resulted in a reduction of more than 75 percent of the timber harvested annually from public lands. The reduced number of logs had an

economic impact on dozens of communities in the Northwest.

To deal with the problems of rising health care costs, AWC's Employee Benefit Trust began a wellness program for cities to provide on-site health promotion programs for employees.

The state's tort liability system underwent significant changes in the 1980s, and AWC began a comprehensive study to determine how cities could best deal with rising insurance costs. In response, AWC created its Risk Management Service Agency (RMSA), offering comprehensive property and liability coverage to members.



**YAKIMA**

**AWC's Employee Benefit Trust began a wellness program for cities to provide on-site health promotion programs for employees.**



AWC wellness event

Scenes from around Washington state in the 1980s and 1990s



SEATTLE

# 1990s

## WASHINGTON'S LEGISLATURE

enacted the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990, on the last day of a special legislative session, transforming land use regulation in Washington. The law was part of a growth management “revolution” triggered by voter frustration over the effects of rapidly increasing development. It required the state’s largest and fastest-growing counties and cities to conduct comprehensive land use and transportation planning, concentrate new growth in compact “urban growth areas,” and protect natural resources and environmentally critical areas.

The Telecommunications Act of 1996 represented the first major rewrite since 1934. Intended to develop competition in the telecommunications marketplace, the act created opportunities for both

telecommunications providers and local governments. The act also preserved the rights of local governments to manage their public rights of way and receive fair and reasonable compensation from providers.

**IN 1999**, a 16-inch fuel line owned by the Olympic Pipe Line Company ruptured in Bellingham, spilling 277,200 gallons of gasoline into Hanna and Whatcom creeks. The volatile fuel exploded, killing three youths. In response to the tragedy, legislation was passed giving the state responsibility for regulating intrastate pipelines and improving pipeline safety, as well as allowing the Washington State Utilities

and Transportation Commission to inspect 2,500 miles of intrastate pipelines and to oversee the state’s pipeline safety program.

By the end of the decade, the AWC Board of Directors had appointed an Urban Agenda Committee to review emerging issues. AWC launched two new programs: the Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) program and the Drug & Alcohol Consortium.

The AWC Employee Benefit Trust tackled continued rising health care costs by enhancing worksite health promotion programs for employees, creating the WellCity Program.



# 2000s

**THE TECHNOLOGY BOOM** of the 1990s helped local governments expand their services and capabilities, including allowing payments, recreation class registrations, and job applications to be made online. GIS technology became a major tool for city planners and economic development staff. Residents could watch council meetings from their own living rooms with local cable channel access.

In 2000, the repeal of the motor vehicle excise tax resulted in many jurisdictions facing great difficulty in funding basic services. AWC successfully lobbied for backfill funding for the most adversely impacted communities. AWC also provided extensive technical assistance to help cities deal with the impacts of the repeal via I-695, the first of several \$30 license tab fee initiatives.

In February of 2001, a magnitude 6.8 earthquake hit the state. The Nisqually earthquake shook the ground up and down the I-5 corridor and caused cracks in the dome of the Capitol building. Also in 2001, I-747 limited property tax increases to 1 percent, further limiting city access to funding.

Washington's cities and towns participated in a worldwide moment of silence following the terrorist attacks on Washington, DC and New York City, which killed more than 3,000 people on September 11, 2001. Public officials joined with other local leaders in expressing their communities' grief and calling for religious and social tolerance.

**IN 2003**, AWC welcomed the newly incorporated City of Spokane Valley as its 281st member.

**IN 2005**, the Legislature approved a 16-year, \$8.5 billion transportation revenue package, which at the time was the largest infrastructure investment in state history. The program was funded by a 9.5-cent increase in the state gasoline tax. Voters that year decisively rejected an attempt



to repeal the increase, keeping transportation spending in place.

Also in 2005, Senate Bill 6050 created ongoing funding for city financial assistance and created the Transportation Benefit District funding authority.

The state Supreme Court surprised many when it eliminated the most often-used method of annexation—the property owner petition method. AWC formed a coalition of business, environmental, and other stakeholders to craft and pass replacement legislation and petitioned the court to reverse its ruling—an unprecedented action.

To deal with rising Labor & Industries premiums, AWC formed the Workers' Compensation Retrospective Rating program. AWC began leveraging data storytelling via a new series of *State of the Cities* reports to provide cities and the Legislature with data on the cities' fiscal health, economic development efforts, and infrastructure conditions.

**IN 2008**, the U.S. real estate bubble crashed due to the nationwide subprime mortgage crisis. The Great Recession followed, cascading into a worldwide financial crisis that would take years to recover from and impacted every sector of the economy.

**IN 2009**, this magazine, *Cityvision*, sprung to life, using storytelling to highlight the most relevant city issues of the time.



**AWC began leveraging data storytelling via State of the Cities reports to provide cities and the Legislature with data on cities' fiscal health, economic development, and infrastructure.**

Scenes from around Washington state in the 2000s and 2010s

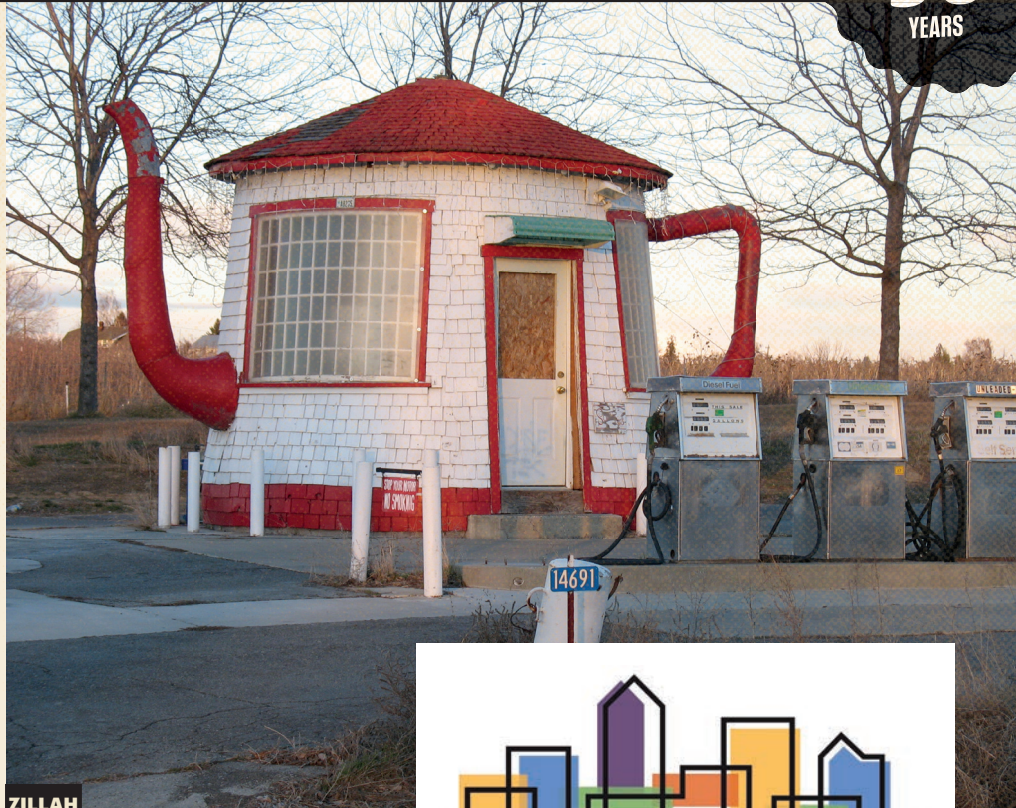
# 2010s

**THE GREAT RECESSION** hit cities hard, causing a decade of challenges in terms of both state and city budgets. Many city revenues were cut to the bone. AWC increased advocacy training to help cities get more involved with the Legislature. The “Strong Cities, Great State” campaign was born, with the goal of increasing cities’ involvement in the legislative process and building stronger relationships with legislators.

After several years of AWC advocacy on long-sought measures addressing the costs and challenges of 1970s-era statutes, modest updates to the Public Records Act (PRA) were made in 2011 and 2017.

**IN 2012**, the state Supreme Court upheld the McCleary decision, requiring the state to meet the constitutional mandate to fully fund K-12 education. Hundreds of millions of dollars more in education were needed, and the ramifications hit the Public Works Assistance Account hardest. Eleven years later, cities are celebrating the return of those funds.

In a callback to AWC’s founding event, cities that year saw the privatization of liquor sales, again impacting state-shared revenues to cities. The legalization of cannabis



ZILLAH

impacted revenue sharing and local decision-making as well, as cities advocated for the ability to site cannabis facilities at the local level.

Statewide transportation, behavioral health, and affordable housing all became more important issues for cities. A divided Legislature meant a series of special sessions, highlighting the ongoing importance of united city voices. Cities lobbied for the passage of the 2015 Connecting Washington transportation package, which included \$16 billion in investments to wide-ranging projects



statewide, breaking the previous record from 2005.

AWC entered a lawsuit to challenge the constitutionality of the 2019 \$30 car tab initiative, and successfully overturned it.

**The “Strong Cities, Great State” campaign was born, with the goal of increasing cities’ involvement in the legislative process and building stronger relationships with legislators.**





Washington state Governor Jay Inslee greeting AWC President Betsy Wilkerson as AWC CEO Deanna Dawson looks on.

# 2023

**THREE YEARS INTO THE 2020s**, the country has already experienced a global pandemic, community demonstrations in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder, the Russia-Ukraine war, the increasingly violent impacts of climate change, and the rapid growth of artificial intelligence. Through it all, cities have adapted, shifting the way they deliver services to establish a “new normal” for residents across the state.

Historic participation in government, together with massive federal investments via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) as well as innovation at every level, have provided some relief and planted seeds for the future of our communities. From infrastructure and behavioral health investments, to striving for communities of belonging and leveraging partnerships and collaborations, cities continue to rise to new challenges through a combination of dedication and commitment to community.

AWC has expanded its work around diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) by developing resources, establishing AWC’s DEIB Cabinet, and adding new training opportunities under the Certificate of Municipal Leadership

**We all gain strength and influence by working together with policymakers, pooling resources, and learning from one another.**

(CML) program. In 2022, AWC advocated for another essential transportation package: the 16-year and nearly \$17 billion Move Ahead Washington funding bill, another record-breaking investment.

**AS AWC PROUDLY CELEBRATES ITS 90TH ANNIVERSARY**, the association is immensely proud of its enduring legacy of bringing cities and towns together to strengthen the foundation of Washington. We all gain strength and influence by working together with policymakers, pooling resources, and learning from one another. **C**



# Citywise



“

Our shared history is not just a reflection of our past  
but a window into our shared future.”

— CITY 101, P. 40 ▶

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40 CELEBRATING DIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON'S PAST 42 AWC'S EVOLUTION FROM 1933 TO 2023

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## Hall of Heroines

Washington has many unsung heroines whose accomplishments enrich our state:

**1902: Madame Luella Boyer**, Everett's first Black woman business owner

**1914: Corrine Carter**, Seattle's first Black policewoman

**1942: Florise Spearman and Dorothy West Williams**, the first Black women to work at Boeing

**1975: Dorothy Hollingsworth**, the first Black woman to serve on a school board in Washington State

**1980: Lois Stratton**, the first Native American woman elected to the state's House of Representatives

**1988: Margarita López Prentice**, the first woman of Mexican heritage to be elected to the Washington State House of Representatives

**Of course**, history doesn't stop with the present. As Sir Antonio Sánchez, PhD, said: "Our shared history is not just a reflection of our past but a window into our shared future."

# DIVERSE BEGINNINGS AND GREAT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Introducing a few lesser-known, yet no less fascinating, figures from Washington's storied past

**BENITA R. HORN**, AWC DEIB CONSULTANT

**T**HE REV. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "We are not makers of history. We are made by history."

Like many, through my public-school education, I encountered history curricula that were selective rather than inclusive. Notable history in the state I call home—history reflective of people who are of non-European descent, was sadly missing. As we look back and celebrate 90 years of AWC, my hope is to share with you some little-known and fascinating history in our state to enrich our understanding of the fabric from which we are made.

Hispanic persons have been instrumental to the development of Washington state. In 1774, Spanish and Mexican explorers were the first non-Indigenous people to arrive here. They claimed and mapped this territory and traded with the Native people. In Washington, the familiar names of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the San Juan Islands, and Rosario Strait are a legacy of Spanish influence. Until 1819 these lands belonged to Spain and Mexico. They left a legacy of culture, history, language, traditions, and food. Examples of foods they introduced to our state include pears, onions, potatoes, peas, and beans, along with the first wheat, wine, livestock, and iron tools.

The Spanish established the first non-Native settlement in the state at Neah Bay. Today that site is memorialized by Fort Núñez Gaona - Diah Veterans Park, created in partnership with the Makah people.

World War II and the internment of Japanese Americans created a shortage of agricultural workers, which led to a labor crisis in agricultural regions of the state. The Utah-Idaho Sugar Company recruited a number of Chicano migrants to the state. Many of them settled in the Wapato-Harrah area of Yakima County, establishing one of the oldest Latino settlements in the Pacific Northwest.

And, of course, we must acknowledge that the state was founded on land belonging to the many indigenous peoples of this area.

Beyond the contributions of diverse groups are the remarkable accomplishments of individuals. As Kit Oldham recounts in an essay about the founding of Centralia archived at HistoryLink.org, on January 8, 1875, George Washington, a free Black person and descendant of slaves, filed the plat for the town of Centerville—which would become modern-day Centralia—and "for the next 30 years, he is a leading citizen, promoter, and benefactor of the town he founds."

Centralia isn't the only city in the state with a Black American origin story. A free man, another George—George Bush—is considered the founding father of Tumwater. Bush had been a successful rancher in Missouri—a slave state. In 1844, with the allure of free land in Oregon, he and his wife headed west along the Oregon Trail. The Oregon Territory had recently abolished slavery, but its provisional legislature had at the same time passed a series of laws meant to



keep Black people from settling there. One of those laws (the “lash law”) mandated that Black people would be publicly whipped—39 lashes every six months until they left the Oregon Territory. So, the Bush family headed north.

In 1850, Congress passed a law giving land in the Washington and Oregon territories to any white settlers who claimed it. Bush was excluded due to his race, but he was so widely respected that Washington’s Territorial Legislature lobbied Congress to carve out an exception for him. Congress complied, granting Bush the same 640 acres that white settlers received.

Although Bush was allowed to own land by virtue of the special exemption he was granted, he was never allowed to vote. Twenty-six years after George Bush’s death, his eldest son, William Owen

## **IN WASHINGTON, THE FAMILIAR NAMES OF THE STRAIT OF JUAN DE FUCA, THE SAN JUAN ISLANDS, AND ROSARIO STRAIT ARE A LEGACY OF SPANISH INFLUENCE.**

Bush, would become the first Black person to serve in the Washington State Legislature—in its inaugural year. He introduced the legislation that established Washington State University.

In 2021, a monument honoring George Bush was unveiled at the Washington State Capitol in Olympia, the first monument on the Capitol Campus dedicated specifically to a Black person.

The Black community has a significant founding presence in Spokane, too. Black settlers first came to the timber and mining town then known as Spokane Falls in the late 19th century. Important sites include the Calvary Baptist Church and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church (both founded circa 1890).

Black voices continue to make history in our cities. Of recent note is the Carl Maxey Center in Spokane’s East Central neighborhood (see “Common Ground,” p. 23). The center was founded in 2018 as a cultural hub and gathering place by community leaders, including late activist Sandra Williams, who was also editor and publisher of *The Black Lens*, the only African American-focused newspaper in eastern Washington. [C](#)

**Benita Horn's** background includes more than two decades of experience on race, social justice, and equity, supporting clients primarily in the government and nonprofit sectors.



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HISTORY

90

YEARS:  
AWC's CEOs

1935-1972  
Chester Biesen



1972-1990  
Kent Swisher



1990-2009  
Stan Finkelstein



2009-2014  
Mike McCarty



2015-2021  
Peter King



2022–Present  
Deanna Dawson

**Note:** Prior to 2009, AWC chief executive officers were titled AWC executive directors.

# YOUR MEMBERSHIP ASSOCIATION—THEN AND NOW

Learn about the past, present, and future of AWC.

**AWC STAFF**

**I**N 1933, after Prohibition was repealed, Yakima Mayor W.W. Stratton called on city officials from both eastern and western Washington to rally together and present a united front on liquor control legislation. The issue was to be presented at an upcoming special legislative session called by Gov. Clarence Martin. It was at this conference, on October 26, 1933, that the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) was born.

Mayor Stratton, who was elected president of the newly formed organization, appointed a six-member committee—three city officials from eastern Washington and three city officials from western Washington. They met one month later and drafted the bill that became the Washington State Liquor Act. From there, AWC became a stable organization, receiving grant funding for a traveling municipal consultant and later hiring its first lobbyist.

More city officials realized the benefits of joining AWC, increasing participation across the state. The association held its first regional meeting, attracting 90 representatives from 30 cities. AWC members took their success forward and made it clear that they favored sharing state revenues with cities and towns, including liquor and gas taxes.

**AWC's Mission**

Ninety years later, AWC has grown to meet the ever-evolving needs of its members with a concrete mission of serving members through advocacy, education, and services.

**Advocacy**

The 1930s marked the start of a successful city partnership with the state that continues to this day. Throughout the years, AWC and its city and town membership have maintained a strong presence in the legislative process. A collective city voice has been a crucial part of legislative deliberations, and AWC has seen many great successes in advocating for cities.

AWC is a 501(c)(4) organization, and while membership is voluntary, it is a point of pride that all 281 incorporated cities and towns in the state are members. AWC is governed by a 25-member board with an Executive Committee that helps inform legislative policy direction, guided by a member-adopted Statement of Policy.

In total, 49 states have their own municipal associations (excluding Hawaii, which incorporates by island/county). State municipal associations gather annually at National League of Cities (NLC) events, engage in federal advocacy, and share best practices for serving the needs of the country's cities and towns.

# AWC HAS GROWN TO MEET THE EVER-EVOLVING NEEDS OF ITS MEMBERS WITH A CONCRETE MISSION OF SERVING MEMBERS THROUGH ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES.

## Education

AWC provides top-tier training throughout the year along with networking opportunities and five major annual conferences:

- **City Action Days** in January or February
- **Healthy Worksite Summit** in March
- **Labor Relations Institute** in May
- **Annual Conference** in June
- **Member Expo** in October

The AWC Annual Conference is important because it hosts the annual AWC Business Meeting, where the membership elects new board members (up to three delegates from each city get to vote) and adopts the Statement of Policy and AWC bylaw amendments.

AWC educational events provide many sessions offering Certificate of Municipal Leadership (CML) credits, along with a wide range of audience-specific education, including Mayors Exchange, Small City Connectors, Elected Officials Essentials, budget workshops, lobby days, and online and on-demand instruction. Mayors and councilmembers who complete at least 30 credits of training in five key competencies can receive a CML.

## Services

Over the years, AWC has responded to cities' emerging needs by creating pooling programs to help address critical city issues. Programs include:

- **The Trust (1970):** The AWC Employee Benefit Trust is Washington's premier local government benefit pool for cities and towns. The Trust provides quality, efficient, and cost-effective benefit and health promotion programs and is guided by a board of trustees. Members pool resources to access low-cost health insurance for members and their families.
- **RMSA (1988):** The AWC Risk Management Service Agency (RMSA) is a member-owned risk pool to share costs, address risks, and exchange information. Unlike insurance agencies, RMSA doesn't make a profit. AWC staff provide services to RMSA, which is governed by a separate board of directors comprised of city officials.
- **D&A (1995):** The AWC Drug & Alcohol Consortium (D&A) helps members stay in compliance with federal drug and alcohol testing requirements.
- **Retro (2004):** The AWC Workers' Compensation Retrospective Rating Program (Retro) provides training and tools that empower employers to lower risks for on-the-job injuries. Retro has its own advisory committee as well.

AWC is also the best resource for research, data, and publications to support cities' needs. From JobNet (for both employers and job seekers), the AWC GIS Consortium, and the AWC Salary & Benefits Survey data, to the City

Condition Survey data and the AWC Tax and User Fee survey data, AWC provides top-notch data cities can use.

## AWC Today

AWC is led by its sixth CEO, Deanna Dawson—the first woman to lead the organization. Join one of Deanna's AWC 101 sessions for Q&A opportunities (see "Trainings" p. 9) and to hear directly from other members about the value AWC brings.

Thousands of city officials have contributed their time, effort, and creative ideas to city goals over the years. Cities' commitment to strong, effective, and responsive local government has been unwavering and is greatly appreciated. AWC is looking forward to another 90 years of serving Washington cities.

To find out more about what AWC can do for your city, visit [wacities.org](http://wacities.org) and engage in scheduled events and legislative efforts. Happy birthday, AWC! 🎂



# Cityscape

## Long Live Home Rule

Why state-granted authority to make local decisions is as important as ever

**IN 1889**, Washington became one of the first home-rule states in the country. The United States Constitution doesn't mention local governments, which means each state defines home rule for itself. The Washington State Constitution provides strong home rule powers: "Any county, city, town, or township may make and enforce within its limits all such local police, sanitary, and other regulations as are not in conflict with general laws." Washington cities also derive home-rule authority from state statute due to the first and 40th legislatures' efforts to clarify this power for the courts. Home-rule authority means that local governments in Washington do not need state permission to make laws at the local level. Today, the authority to make decisions close to home is as important as ever.

### Home Rule: A Brief History

In the summer of 1889, 75 delegates assembled in Olympia to frame the Constitution of the State of Washington. All but one of the delegates to the constitutional convention were born in other states with predominantly agriculture-based economies. Those states had experienced the political influence of the railroad and banking industries—much to the detriment of farmers.

Because of this, the delegates sought to draft a constitution that enshrined self-sufficiency and limited special interest influence. Although nearly half of the delegates were lawyers or businesspeople, they drafted a constitution that represented their farming constituents and delegated power to the people.

Importantly, while the state granted home-rule authority as a stand-alone provision, the first state Legislature included two other provisions that shifted authority to cities:

The first gave authority to incorporate to local voters, not to the Legislature.

The second granted larger cities the authority to create their own structure of governance through a city charter.

In a final safeguard against concentration of powers, that first state Legislature went on to enact detailed legislation providing for four classes of cities, based on population. All cities then had



### THE REPORT:


- Outlines the history of local decision-making (home rule) in Washington
- Examines the case law underlying the interpretation of city powers
- Provides background on preemption of local powers by the state
- Contains examples showing how preemption impacts cities
- Delivers guidance for communicating about the importance of local authority with legislators and your community

statutory authority to pass laws that provided for the general welfare of their residents as long as they did not violate the constitution or conflict with state law.

To address state court decisions that negated legislative intent to provide broad powers to cities, in 1967 the Legislature enacted the Optional Municipal Code, which was adopted by most cities. In recent years, local courts more consistently recognize home rule in Washington state.

### Home Rule Today

It's vital that cities understand and continue to advocate for home rule. To help preserve local decision-making authority, cities must effectively communicate its importance and history.

Those who believe they have local authority should exercise it in consultation with their city's legal counsel and not look to the Legislature for affirmative authority for local decisions. By exercising home-rule powers and using consistent messaging and advocacy, cities can help preserve their autonomy to govern their communities in the best interest of their residents. 

**For more information** about Washington cities' existing authority to make decisions and laws close to home, including references for this article, pick up a copy of AWC's home-rule report, "You Have It, Use It: Home Rule in Washington," at [wacities.org/news/home-rule](http://wacities.org/news/home-rule).

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