

Councilor Concerns: Town Center Plan and Community Engagement

Presented on June 16, 2025, by Councilor Adam Cunningham

Over the past few weeks, I have engaged with numerous residents who have voiced significant concerns about the direction of our city. Many of these citizens I have met for the first time as they have become aware of issues facing our city and realize how much has gone unaddressed or under addressed. Many of these citizens have admitted that they were not paying attention, but that is changing. There is a palpable sense of frustration among our constituents, who feel that meaningful action on critical issues, particularly the Town Center Plan, has been lacking. To quote the late President Jimmy Carter's 1979 Crisis of Confidence speech, "Our people are losing that faith, not only in government itself but in the ability as citizens to serve as the ultimate rulers and shapers of our democracy." This erosion of trust demands our immediate attention as elected officials.

To understand how we got here, let me offer some historical context. On May 21, 2024—391 days ago—our citizens voted down Measure 3-605, an advisory vote on using Urban Renewal financing for Town Center infrastructure and redevelopment. Despite the vote occurring more than a year ago, we have yet to even ask the questions required to understand the reasons behind this rejection. This has resulted in a critical gap in our ability to move forward effectively.

On November 5, 2024—223 days ago—voters elected three new council members, each of whom campaigned on promises and priorities. Among these, Mayor O'Neil made a prominent commitment, as stated on his now-inactive campaign website and shared via social media stating the following:

"I also heard the voices that said renewed citizen input is needed. As Mayor, I will immediately propose a long-term advisory task force of residents, staff, and a city council representative to receive direct input from our community stakeholders on potential refinements to the Town Center Plan, including at town hall and community meetings. I will preside over the initial community meetings as my commitment to this process."

This promise was reinforced in an August 28, 2024, editorial in the Wilsonville Spokesman, where then-candidate O'Neil wrote, "I've heard the voices that said renewed citizen input is needed." A corresponding social media post elaborated:

"Shawn knows the best way for the Town Center Plan to succeed is to ensure all community members have an opportunity to have their voices heard. He is committed to taking actionable and measurable steps to make this happen. His plan includes having residents on an Advisory Task Force to gather ongoing input, as well as holding true Town Halls where actual dialogue and ideas

are heard and exchanged. Shawn is committing to this plan publicly, so you'll know what to expect from him as Mayor."

On February 20, 2025, six weeks after this council was seated, I noted growing restlessness in the community. Residents expected swift action on key issues, including the Town Center Plan. Given my faith in this council and the mayor, at the time, I urged patience, citing the upcoming council goal-setting retreat as an opportunity to address these concerns.

On March 3, 2025, Councilor Dunwell directly asked the mayor if he would honor his campaign promise to form a long-term advisory task force and hold community meetings. The mayor responded, "I stick by that and that was what was going to be presented at our retreat." Yet, no such proposal materialized. In the 161 days since this council first convened, no public mention of a task force, town hall, or community meeting has been made by the mayor.

As equal members of this body, we are accountable, first, to the constituents who entrusted us with their votes based on our promises. We must hold ourselves and each other to the commitments we made. But, when one of us fails to uphold a significant commitment like this, it is incumbent upon this body to take action. In order to move forward and to restore public confidence, I propose the following actionable steps:

- We take material steps to form an Advisory Task Force. Within the next 30 days, we establish a clear timeline for creating the task force, with defined roles for residents, staff, and council representation.
- Schedule an initial town hall within 60 days to gather community input on the Town Center Plan. We must seek to understand the shortcomings which led to the failed vote last year so that we can move forward in a way that honors the voices of our citizens.
- Provide regular updates at council meetings on the progress of these initiatives, ensuring residents are continuously informed and engaged in the process.

Our community deserves a responsive government that listens and acts on its promises. It is time for us to work together to rebuild trust and advance the Town Center Plan with the robust community input our residents were promised and deserve.