

**The State of the City**  
**by Auburn Mayor Pete Lewis**  
**Auburn Area Chamber of Commerce Luncheon**  
**February 19, 2013**

Before I begin, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Emerald Downs for being a great member of this community and for hosting Auburn Area Chamber of Commerce Partnership luncheons and many other community events throughout the years.

This summer Emerald Downs will be bringing a new and exciting community event to Auburn—it's called EMD3-On-3—a basketball extravaganza that will take place August 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>. The event is the brainchild of Bob Fraser, Emerald Downs Vice-President of Operations (Bob, raise your hand). Bob went to Hoopfest in Spokane, a basketball event that attracts over 27,000 visitors, and thought—why can't we do the same thing here in Auburn? And because of Bob's enthusiasm and organizational skills, EMD3-on-3 is going to happen right here, in the North Parking Lot. The city has signed on as a sponsor, so has Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield, Budweiser, Coca Cola, Longhorne BBQ/Odd Fellas and many more. You know, it's people like Bob and Emerald Downs and so many of you in the room that have inspired me over the years, and it is an honor to be here once again to present this annual State of the City.

2012 was a year to remember and a place to start. In 2012 there were 247 new businesses and more than 1,200 new jobs in Auburn. Notable new Auburn businesses and expansions:

- Coastal Farm and Ranch opened last year after remodeling the old Wal-Mart store location for over \$20 million dollars.
- The regional Hospital Cooperative Services Administration Laundry Facility—a \$26 million dollar project—broke ground in August 2012 with anticipated completion in the summer of 2013. This will bring 185 living wage jobs for Auburn.
- AutoZone on A St. SE opened in September 2012.
- Terry Homes II construction is underway with an anticipated opening in the first quarter of 2013.
- The voters passed a \$100 million dollar Downtown Auburn High School Renovation Project. Planning is now underway and the project is expected to break ground in the summer of 2013.
- There were 74 separate Boeing projects in 2012 with a cumulative construction valuation of approximately \$31,000,000.
- Glimcher, that's Supermall to us—and now The Outlet Collection—is creating a regional shopping destination with a \$35 million renovation that will bring 1,000 new jobs overall to Auburn.
- Orion Industries is moving its headquarters to Auburn with 225 technical manufacturing jobs and a \$24 million dollar project.
- Green River Community College has begun its \$34 million dollar Trades Building project.

We saw the opening of more new businesses like:

- Eagle Leather
- Turning Point Studios
- Skills
- AIM Aerospace
- Ply-Gem
- Seattle Food Company
- North America Pipe & Steel
- Apollo Southwest
- LMI Aerospace

Communities – cities – are not built on residential property tax. Cities are created around businesses and maintained by the taxes businesses pay. The Quality of Life that we all want in our city, public safety, the entertainment are paid for by a combination of property tax and sales tax with business being the foundation upon which the city is built.

Our average income keeps rising. Auburn’s Median Household Income for 2012 was \$59,091.

Single Family home sales are up for two years running, inventories are decreasing by more than 44%, and average list prices are currently at \$249,000 up 6%.

There were 4,170 business licenses last year in Auburn.

There were 23 commercial building permits totaling \$13,068,643.

Auburn surpassed all other cities in King or Pierce County with the highest number of single family building permits issued since 2004—that’s 420 building permits pulled with a total construction valuation of over \$86 million dollars.

### **Helping business thrive in Auburn**

Attracting and nurturing business here at home is how we are coming out of this recession. To do that we established a Mayor’s Task Force of more than 20 local business leaders to help create and guide the activities of Auburn’s “Urban Center for Innovation Partnership,” or IPZ.

The IPZ received certification and designation as Washington State’s 15<sup>th</sup> Innovation Partnership Zone and ours is unique because it is the only city-based IPZ certified to date.

Your City Council approved Business Incentives to help restart our local economy.

Sister Cities has gone back to its roots. We have always had a connection for student exchanges and sports exchanges but over the decades since the Sister Cities began in the Sixties, we had forgotten to cultivate business connections.

We've created Web Sites and links for all Sister Cities. Through regular monthly meetings and active participation, relations have been established with the Korean Chamber of Commerce and various business partners. Business Introductions led to the purchase of 165,000 square feet of space and the recruitment of Seattle Food Company from Seattle.

Our Auburn Municipal Airport is in the black and growing. To support that growth we have begun work on a new Airport Master Plan—a NEW master plan for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Auburn airport.

We developed and published a comprehensive list of Local/State/Federal business incentives for on-going business attraction and for specific marketing of Auburn as the place to conduct business.

We assisted; I say again we assisted, Council Member Wagner as he cemented ties with WSU with the launch and final display for the IDEX Project. We have used the IDEX Project to promote Auburn as a City where innovation is applauded and where we are “open for business.”

We worked with Congressman Reichert's Office to establish an official office right in downtown Auburn, the biggest city in his district.

### **Human Services**

Working with private industry, we assisted in the redevelopment of a blighted, downtown apartment complex into fresh new market affordable units. Citizens of Auburn need affordable housing. We have more affordable housing now than most communities in the Puget Sound Region but it is time to upgrade the housing stock we have. Working with our partners we began that work last year.

Now many of us started out poor—or the more politically correct, lower income. My wife Kathy and I started off with a dollar a day for food and we used to have spaghetti rent parties for each other to meet the rent payment.

There is no shame to be poor, but shame on owners that do not provide safe and secure housing in our town and we will continue to take those steps necessary under the law to keep our people safe.

When we saw the number of abandoned uncared for homes increasing in our city we took action. Council passed ordinances speeding up the Code Enforcement process. When we found abandoned, uncared for houses being transferred from lender to lender we got new ordinances from Council to allow us to lien properties, stopping those transfers until our city's properties were cleaned up.

We decided to let our people know where these uncared for abandoned houses were in our city and who owned them. That was the beginning of Auburn's Wall of Shame. On our website we post a picture of each house, the address, the mortgage holder and their contact

information so our citizens can call them as well as potential buyers.

We began work after almost 20 years of grant-writing on the M Street Underpass and it seemed to take forever but we opened the A/B Corridor providing a new north-south route from the transit center to the northern limits of our city.

Our departments and our Council members and our grant writers, working together, brought 26 grants totaling \$16,400,000 back to the citizens of Auburn in 2012.

We took down those sandbags along the Green River and while we did that we recovered more than \$400,000 from FEMA and the State for storm related expenses from last year's storms.

### **K-12. Higher Education and Workforce Development**

Our children's Academic Achievement continued to excel with over 20 state and national academic recognition awards in the past year, including the most recent, the College Board's recognition of the Auburn School District for the Advanced Placement National Honor Roll one of only 53 in the United States.

The City of Auburn was among seven South King County Cities and the City of Seattle to be named an All American City. The National Civic League was impressed that we were able to work together on The Road Map Project to improve reading proficiency among young students in our cities. But we went further than that.

This group worked together on a terrifyingly large federal grant application written jointly with the Road Map Project. Guess what? WE WON a \$40 million Race to the Top grant! There were more than 600 groups that started the process. There were over 300 that submitted grants. There were more than 60 that were finalists. There were a number of smaller grants, but across the United States there were only two that were approved for the maximum amount of \$40 million. WE WERE ONE OF THE TWO THAT GOT \$40 MILLION DOLLARS!

I'd like to be very clear about this. This was a tremendous collaboration that brought together superintendents, education associations, school boards, mayors, educators, community-based organizations and parents in the Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Kent, Renton, Seattle and Tukwila districts.

Here in Auburn there is an individual that stands out and that is our Superintendent and he is indeed super, Kip Herren. His insistence on the Early Learning Program, which first started at Pioneer Elementary, led to an application by the Auburn School District, the City of Auburn and the Kent School District for funding for the Early Learning program, which led to great success for our children. That success was included in the grant application and will have a lasting effect on our children.

We have reason to celebrate. Our Auburn is indeed raising itself up by its bootstraps and I am very proud to be in a city with such a progressive school district.

### **Our Harvard on the Hill**

Besides increasing and solidifying our partnership with our wonderful Auburn School District, we've continued to working with our "Harvard on the Hill"—Green River Community College.

Our increased degree of cooperation with the college has already had tangible results. Besides the College's business connections with its sister colleges across the world, we are partnering with the College on new concepts with our Auburn Municipal Airport.

Our partnership with Green River has also brought other noticeable results close to home. Auburn was having a terrible time with wire theft like other communities around the Sound. Losses from theft and the cost of replacement mounted above \$150,000 last year. Partnering again with Green River, students from the college's welding program worked with our employees and spot-welded over 1,833 junction boxes in 15 days. That ended our wire theft problem.

### **Partnership is our way and our heart**

I talk a lot about partnerships. To be clear, our first partnership is with the Muckleshoot Tribe. Twenty-percent of our city is on the reservation. Our lives, our peoples are intertwined as is our future.

We have partnership in our community with all of our different cultural groups that add so much to what makes Auburn special. We have been meeting to bring together all of our people and we will continue that great work.

We brought into being new organizations called the Innovative Partnership Zone and the South East Area Coalition for Housing or SEARCH. We've continued to partner with Valley Cities, South County Correctional Entity, South King County transportation Board, Sound Cities Association, Pierce County Cities and Towns, Regional Access Mobility Partnership, Pierce County Regional Council, Puget Sound Regional Council, Association of Washington Cities and National League of Cities and U.S. Conference of Mayors.

These partnerships and more are bringing value back to our city in the form of dollars and knowledge as well as a greater ability to make our needs known to every area of government.

We've heard comments in the past about the money we are "getting back" are still taxpayer dollars. That's true. The difference is, for more than a century, we've been paying out. Now it's time for us to get some of those dollars back here in Auburn where they are needed.

### **Auburn businesses earned awards too**

- University of Washington awarded its inaugural Billion Dollar Business Award to Zones of Auburn. Zones is ranked as the No. 1 Largest Minority Owned Business in Washington State.
- Aero Controls received the Silver Boeing Performance Excellence Award. Aero Controls is a local Auburn company with over 175 employees.
- Scarff Ford is among an elite group of Ford and Lincoln dealerships to be recognized with the President's Award by Ford Motor Company. Only three other Ford dealers in Washington State received the award. It's Scarff Ford of Auburn's fourth time.

### **Working to keeping our city safe**

Your city government has been in a partial state of economic emergency since 2002. We were in a recession then and year after year we faced new directives that took away revenues that funded city services for the citizens of Auburn. But the work still had to be done.

Since 2006 the number of employees at the City of Auburn has dropped from 488 to 395 today. At the same time, the City's residential population increased from 48,955 to 71,240.

The Police Department has the highest number of employees, with 115 or 38% of the total General Fund Budget dollars.

But police officers are not the only employees delivering public safety. There are 35 employees in the Water Division, 23 in the Sanitary Sewer Division and 27 employees in the Storm Water Division. They are in separate enterprise funds paid by ratepayers. The Street Division adds another 13 employees in that critical area of Quality of Life/Public Safety for a total of 213 or 55% of your city employees. Every one of those employees is vital to the Public Safety needs.

Over the last six years we've asked your city employees to do more with less, including taking mandatory 40 hour furloughs without pay in 2011 and 2012. They are a dedicated, talented group of public servants and I am proud of the work they do for this city.

In our budget for 2013 and 2014 your Council has decided to spend down some of the cumulative reserve to keep all of your dedicated employees. It will be tough for the next few years. We'll have to continue to keep a watch on the budget as there are few 'extra' dollars anywhere but we will provide for the public safety and our quality of life.

One Quality of Life and Public Safety issue has been the Red Light Camera Program which was sponsored through the state legislature by the cities of Auburn and Lakewood in 2006. At that time we saw the deaths, the dismemberments and broken families caused by the terrible T-bone accidents that were taking place at intersections where motorists were running red lights.

Since that time infractions at those intersections are down. Accidents are down. There have been no T-bone tragedies at those intersections since we put in the cameras. Your Council, and you know how highly I think of them, from the very beginning wanted to ensure this was not a so called 'money maker' for the city. They wisely set aside any net funds raised into an account for local neighborhood traffic calming measures. Since then we have made some improvements but lately we have not done much. You see with the violations down the dollars coming in have dropped as well. That is fine with the City of Auburn. The program is working. No one is dying!

Violations and infractions are down more than 65% since 2007. Violent crime is down. Vehicle Theft is down and our average response time for a "Priority One Theft to Life" call stands at 4.7 minutes.

We transferred over from a local Municipal Court to an interlocal agreement with the King County Court District. Savings to taxpayers could amount to \$3 million per year every year by 2015.

While we have little money in our budget to spare, we do have resourceful employees and Council members who are working all the time to find the funds we need to have the city we want. A city is more than roads, stop signs and storefronts.

### **Quality of Life**

We must build for our future at every chance we get and your city was a good steward of the people's money while at the same time seizing every opportunity possible for that future.

We bought a lake with grants from the State of Washington. It will soon be the first park on West Hill. Working with the State of Washington and King County we put together two parcels and now have the beach area along the Green River. We added a new community garden to our inventory by the Auburn School District Administration building.

It seems so long ago now but out of that terrible snow and ice storm and the loss of hundreds of trees came new tree sculptures in some of our hardest hit parks. The sculptures are a reminder of what we lost while beautifying our parks.

I mentioned that we were named a 2012 All American City, but did you know that for the 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row we were named as a Playful City USA and also received our 7<sup>th</sup> Tree City award?

Can you believe it was only last year we completed the South Division Street Promenade Project and our new Activity Center and Gym at the Les Gove Campus? The new Gymnasium is busy many hours each day with 3,277 hours of programmed time in the Gym in 2012, it is becoming a great place for the community to gather, exercise and recreate.

Out at our Golf Course we increased play by using marketing tools with Amazon Local, Google Offers, Cyber Coupons and Facebook. We created a new website with improved functionality including an online pro shop, online tee times, online tournament entries and tournament results. If you're a golfer and want to save money on rounds of golf, be sure to sign up for Auburn Golf Course's E-specials.

I am very proud of our Council, the Arts Commission and all the volunteers that had a part in completing the Downtown Sculpture Gallery project that resulted in seven permanent pedestals for rotating public art displays. The pedestals were built using State Local Revitalization Funds. Seven different pieces of art are on loan and being displayed on those pedestals. The art will rotate yearly. A "Peoples Choice" vote will determine which art piece will be purchased and added to the City's permanent public collection. I have always thought of this project as our Sculpture Garden as I believe this is one of our places where The Arts will grow.

We created Storefronts Auburn: Four separate storefronts in downtown Auburn showcasing six separate art installations.

Downtown Auburn played host to a new Friday noon-time concert, *Soundbites*, a three-week summer art installation of *Pianos on Parade*, and the most successful *Auburn International Farmers Market* season since its inaugural year and we all had such fun playing or watching the pianos available in downtown.

### **Seniors and Veterans**

The activity at our Senior Center continues to grow. This includes diverse populations, age 50 plus, looking for a variety of programs and services. The daily noon meal provided by Catholic Community Services is always among the highest attended in the county.

In just the first six months of 2012 we served 11,169 meals--up 500 meals from the same time period in 2011.

For veterans we have additional Veteran Services at the Senior Center. Once a month, staff from the King County Veteran's Program and a DVA Service Officer is at the Senior Center from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. to assist veterans and their families in applying for benefits and answering questions. Twice per month, a VFW service officer is at the Senior Center from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. to assist with VA Benefits and Claims. This service is provided from resources from the Veterans and Human Services Levy.

By the way Green River Community College has been acknowledged among the top 15% military friendly schools in the United States and is committed to help veterans, not only in our community, but throughout the region.

Speaking of Veterans, we are the center of the largest region in the state for returning veterans. Auburn supports our veterans. Auburn holds the largest Veterans Day Parade west of the Mississippi. Because this year is the national kick-off for the commemoration of

the Vietnam War, we're planning to dedicate a portion of this year's Veterans Day parade to honor Vietnam Veterans and to give them the "welcome home" parade they never received. You'll hear more about that as our plans unfold.

We need a place for our veterans to get their benefits. We need a place for veterans and people in need of services to get help. That is why we are now engaged in building a Veterans and Human Service Center in our community.

### **Stewards of the environment**

We completed the first phase of our Auburn Environmental Park Wetland Trail Boardwalk Project and in the Park planted more than 1,000 native trees and shrubs. Think about that. More than 100 acres of Wetlands Park for the future of our citizens and we plan to improve it every year. While our partners provided the funds, it's the volunteers and community working together to make these improvements a reality.

Volunteers helped to plant 34 street trees on West Main Street as part of the City's Annual Clean Sweep. This year's Clean Sweep is scheduled for May 4<sup>th</sup> and all volunteers are welcome to help beautify our city.

Working together we obtained two new environmental restoration grants totaling \$627,350 and administered eight existing environmental grants totaling \$1,475,103.

We completed a supply contract with Tacoma Public Utility for future water supply, executing a water supply purchase agreement with Tacoma Water that water to the City in perpetuity. With that approval for a permanent future water supply for the build-out of Auburn we have secured our future.

### **Building and maintaining infrastructure**

In 2012 there were 33 city projects in the construction phase totaling over \$74.2 Million in total project costs.

We received a \$2.33 million federal grant for the Auburn Way South Corridor Improvements between Muckleshoot Plaza and Dogwood St. SE and finally started the project working together with the Muckleshoot Tribe. That sounds so impersonal but this project is so overdue for the safety of all of our children and people who use that corridor.

Through the Puget Sound Regional Council we received two Federal Grants—\$1 Million dollars for design and right-of-way acquisition to improve the S 277<sup>th</sup> St Corridor between Auburn Way North and L St NE; and \$560,000 for the West Valley Highway Overlay project from 15<sup>th</sup> St NW to 37<sup>th</sup> St NW.

We worked for and received a Federal Grant of \$307,550 for 37<sup>th</sup> St NW and B St NW Rail Crossing Safety Improvements.

As part of my neighborhood meeting program Traffic Calming evaluations have been conducted in 12 neighborhoods in 2012. Speed Cushions were installed in a West Hill Neighborhood and Forest Villa neighborhood. And working with our school district we got the funding we will need to build another piece of Safe Routes to Schools, this time on Lea Hill.

## **Transit**

Auburn hosts 12 daily transit routes (two Sound Transit routes, one Pierce Transit route and nine Metro Transit routes); almost 500 transit trips per day serve this city. Passengers can board at one of 200 bus stops or 37 bus stops with shelters throughout Auburn. Think about that. We have Metro; we have Sound Transit bus, we have Sounder trains and we have Pierce Transit all here in Auburn. It is the only place in the region that has all those agencies in one location.

Route 497 from Lakeland to Auburn Station operates in partnership with the City of Auburn, Pierce Transit and King County Metro and continues to grow in popularity. In 2012 the route is on track to carry approximately 45,000 riders.

Auburn also hosts the popular Sounder Commuter Rail Service. Ridership on the Sounder continues to grow. In 2011, 1,000 people a day got on and off Sounder transit at the Auburn Station, accounting for 18% of the annual ridership of the Sounder system. In 2012, that number grew to nearly 1,100 a day.

Auburn is truly a regional hub—for education, transportation and now healthcare. MultiCare took over operations of Auburn Medical Center on October 1<sup>st</sup>. We are excited about partnering with MultiCare to help our hometown hospital become the best regional medical center in South King County.

**Hometown Animal Services** – One more partnership I need to mention is our partnership with the Auburn Valley Humane Society or AVHS. As of January 1, 2013 Auburn took over pet licensing from King County, a new non-profit Auburn Valley Humane Society is operating our very own animal shelter and its programs, and we have our very own city of Auburn Animal Control Officer out patrolling Auburn streets and serving Auburn citizens needs.

Have you seen how all our parts are woven together? We are so much more, so much richer with all that we are doing together.

We are the 7th largest city in King County, the 7th largest city in Pierce County, the 14th largest city in the State of Washington. We're no longer a small town although sometimes we yearn for it.

It is time for us to recognize who we are as a city and the future that is in front of us.

Sometimes we hear our people say why don't we have...? My response is, because we as a community are still not asking.

It's not city hall or the school district, the college or business, it's the community.

Why don't we have our completed Sound Transit Station with its second garage? Because we as a community haven't asked for it. We have earned the right to ask.

Why haven't we seen the Bypass built to State Highway 164 from State Highway 18? Because we as a community have not asked. We have earned the right to ask.

Why hasn't the state invested with us in the redevelopment of Auburn Way South which is their State Highway 18? It's because it isn't on the community agenda.

As a community we have not asked for these projects to become a reality, but we have earned the right to ask by our work, our faith in each other and our commitment to Auburn.

Are we ready to put the bridge back over the railroad from 15<sup>th</sup> SW to 17<sup>th</sup> Street SW for business expansion? The old bridge was taken down in the fifties and was noted as a project for the future in the 1952 comprehensive plan. Are we ready now?

What about the need for a new Lea Hill Bridge and a host of others that should be on a united Auburn agenda?

We want restaurants and we want stores and we want so many things. Well we are the 14<sup>th</sup> largest city in the State of Washington and as a community united we have earned the right to ask.

Auburn believes in partnerships and we have many with many agreed upon agendas. But the first agenda, the first priorities are here at home.

It is time for us to take our place at that table. We have all talked about what we want for so long. It is time to take action.

For our partners the Muckleshoot Tribe what are our joint needs? For our School District and College what are our needs? We have already seen instances where working together on issues we didn't even know existed just a few years ago have made a difference for generations of children to come. What do we need here in Auburn and how can we work on it together?

For our business community what are our needs – here – right here in Auburn? Again we all have regional and state partnerships. Your city is a great believer in them. Your part in a regional coalition is a good thing. We believe in strong regional partnerships.

Still, what are the needs of the business community? Where is your agenda for your needs in Auburn? What business sectors need help and what kind? What businesses in different

parts of our community are doing well and where are the areas that need improvement? What do you as a group want to have take place here in Auburn?

Do The Arts, Tourism and Entertainment have a significant part in Auburn's future? The Arts are an economic generator. Lovers of Art and Entertainment and business should have a common agenda. What do you want?

Are there corridors for business that need to be improved or different zoning or regulations?

Is there a benefit for the City and Tribe for a 164 By-Pass? Other communities have been able to build roads with the state. We need to ask as a community, City and Tribe together for our future.

We've talked and talked about it, and we all know that if Auburn is to have a future we must fix the roads. What is Auburn's—not the region or state—but Auburn's agenda for its roads?

As I mentioned earlier how about that old dream of re-building the bridge over the rail yard from 15<sup>th</sup> Street SW and 17<sup>th</sup> Street SW to revitalize that connection? I reviewed the comprehensive plan recently from 1952 and one of the major items on it was to restore the connection from 15<sup>th</sup> St Southwest to 17<sup>th</sup> Street Southeast with a bridge over the railroad tracks. It's been more than a half century. Are we as a community ready to take action?

What is our united agenda?

Why isn't our community center built when other cities have community centers, aquatic centers and other facilities? Shouldn't Auburn, the center of two counties have a Community Center, our own Great hall as well as a Veterans and Human Service Center?

Isn't it time to come together for the revitalization of the Auburn Way South corridor for increased business? Are there new markets here and abroad that you want to access and what are your needs? Where is your Auburn agenda and how can we work it for Auburn's needs right here, right now.

It's time for us as a leading city of the region to take our place at the table. I ask the Auburn Area Chamber of Commerce to come forward with a specific 21<sup>st</sup> century agenda for Auburn's Business Needs.

I ask the Muckleshoot Tribe to join with us in this new grand alliance. I ask the Auburn School District, Green River Community College, our Veterans groups, our Faith Community, our diverse communities and all the different sectors that make our city unique. I ask you all to bring forward your agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Let's work on Auburn's needs, Auburn's future. We have worked hard for our regional coalitions and partnerships with regional needs but first we need to be very clear on our

needs. As a leading city of the region and the state, working together we can achieve so much more and our time is now.

Now, right now is the time for all of us to come together and begin to work for the future of our 21<sup>st</sup> century city.

Now is our time and I ask in the name of the generations to come for you to become engaged, involved and adamant that Auburn's needs be met.

Therefore I will call for a meeting of all of our partners for a United 21st Century Auburn Agenda and ask all parties to be ready to volunteer for this effort.

It's time for a United Auburn Agenda. It's time for a United Auburn. It is our time.