

Community Council 2008—the inaugural year in review

It has been a busy, productive year for the Community Council. From the time the first Board of Directors took office, November 29, 2007, through the end of November 2008, the weeks were filled with visioning; adoption of the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws; policy-writing and –implementing; planning; acquainting people in its coverage area (Walla Walla County, Columbia County, and the northeast portion of Umatilla County) with the organization’s mission and goals—by public forum, by website, by media releases, and through one-on-one conversations; recruiting members and participants for committees; grant-writing; hiring staff and setting up operations; choosing the 2008-09 Study topic; launching the first Study; and carrying out a grant-funded economic development project.

The 26-member Board of Directors was led by Mary A. Campbell, President; Noah Leavitt, President-elect; Terry Heisey, Secretary; and Jan Foster, Treasurer. Committees actively worked to establish the organization’s operating structure. The Community Council was certified as a Washington corporation January 25, 2008; was recognized by the Internal Revenue service February 29, 2008; and its application for tax-exempt status is pending.

Seventy charter members support the new organization. A number of financial donations and many gifts and services have enabled the group to start its work on strong footing. Sherwood Trust provided a very significant three-year grant. Other grant funding has been received from Blue Mountain Community Foundation, the Art and Clara Bald Trust, the George T. Welch Trust, the JL Stubblefield Trust and the Bonnie Braden Foundation.

The Program Committee, chaired by Noah Leavitt, accepted suggestions for the Community Council’s first Study project and selected the question: *How can the Walla Walla Region best address children’s educational, mental health, and housing stability needs to maximize every child’s right to thrive?* The Study Committee, chaired by Roger Bairstow and guided by an eight-member management team, began a weekly curriculum related to that topic. By the end of April 2009, they will release their findings, conclusions and recommendations. About 50 participants have been taking part weekly in the first months of this process.

A second project, Creating a Value-Added Community, was funded by a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation. A group of 30 people is exploring the economic development of the region and, in 2009, will produce a set of baseline and trend indicators for the region’s economy.

With strategic planning, the hiring of Executive Director Julie Reese, and continued recruitment of members and leadership, and enthusiastic support of the community, the organization is looking to a strong 2009.