

# THE FIRST 120 DAYS WITH MAYOR BARBER

It has been about four months since I became mayor of this amazing city. I want to share what's been happening and our upcoming plans. Together we are all working to preserve and grow the city we love.

This report is adapted from a presentation I've been giving to community groups. This format allows us to share information with a broader audience. We intend to continue providing regular updates on activities, but the form and timing may change.



*Mary K Barber*



# Community Meetings; Building Partnerships

Listening and hearing from our community has been a priority for me so I've spent quite a bit of time meeting our neighbors.

We are also looking at other ways to get out to meet with more community members.

I believe, as I have my entire career, that relationships are the basis for getting things done.

All the elected officials are critical to our agenda. Together we can accomplish so much more than we can individually.

I've spent considerable time meeting with our state and county elected officials, and trying to help them make decisions that help us.

I'm focused on trying to make sure we have control of our destiny and regulations that help rather than hurt us.

Everywhere I go I hear how wonderful our city team is. It makes me very proud, and you should be too.



Join me for coffee with your neighbors the first Monday of each month from 9-10:30 at Davenport Coffee.



Regular meetings with our legislators help us make sure community needs are known and addressed. Top: Mayor with Senator Krishnadasan; Middle: Mayor and Councilmember Em Stone with Representative Caldier; Bottom: Mayor with Representative Richards.



## Meet with the Mayor

**Coffee: First Monday of each month from 9-10:30 at Davenport Coffee**

**1 on 1: Every Tuesday from 2-4; schedule: <https://bit.ly/4jINh7K>**

# Building the Team

My selection as mayor and another resignation meant there were two openings on the city council. Councilmembers Reid Ekberg and Em Stone are filling those seats and quickly learning what's needed to be effective city leaders.

Councilmember Le Rodenberg was elected mayor pro tempore so the city is in great hands.

We are also working on bringing government closer to you and increasing opportunities to provide input. At least two meetings this year will be in locations other than the Civic Center. We also want to allow public comment at work sessions so are working on the guidelines.

Photo credit: Julie Warrick Ammann



Councilmembers Reid Ekberg (below) and Emily Stone (above) joined the council after the mayor's selection by the city council. They offer new experience and perspectives that provide a well-rounded body.



Councilmember Le Rodenberg (far right) was elected by his peers to serve as mayor pro tempore. As such he will serve in my stead as mayor when needed. All councilmembers serve the city through twice-monthly council meetings and study sessions.



Bring  
government  
closer to  
neighbors



Public comment at work  
sessions



Advisory boards



How government works  
sessions



# Retaining & Motivating Employees

Fostering a healthy city environment is at the core of what we do. The team is comprised of professional, subject matter experts who love this city. Recently we added two executive leaders to complete the team: Eric Baker as community development director and Lori Maricle, APR, as communications manager.

Employee retention is also at an extremely high rate which saves us money recruiting and training new staff. It also gives us historical perspective.

That retention is a result of our commitment to having fun as well as to professional development and training. This spring we are starting Harbor Rising, a multi-month program aimed at training future leaders on our staff team.

We were also recently awarded Well City status, saving \$50,000 in health insurance premiums.



Two employees recently participated in a 6-month leadership program, one example of the investment we are making in our employees.

Below: the Well City designation is important because it also means we are focused on healthy employees. It also means our insurance premiums are \$50,000 lower!



Photo credit: Julie Warrick Ammann

Police Chief Kelly Busey listens to Community Development Director Eric Baker as he presents to council during a recent meeting. Staff subject matter experts are critical to a well run city. Below: staff enjoying an impromptu lunch is as important as formal training.



# Infrastructure Improvements

City teams are focused on infrastructure and road improvements to make sure we're keeping things moving smoothly. We're also focused on improving walking and biking paths when we improve our roads. The ultimate goal is connecting the city's neighborhoods to each other and to the waterfront. Examples in the midst of construction include: Burnham Drive, Wollochet/Wagner; planning stages: Peacock Hill, 38<sup>th</sup> Ave.

One of the challenges in places like Peacock Hill is city boundaries. That's why we're working on an interlocal agreement with Pierce County that would cause projects in their urban growth area to comply with our design standards.

Remember, up-to-the-moment traffic impacts and the capital improvement story map are available on the city's website so you can know what's happening.



Left: Example of pedestrian sidewalk along a residential roadway. Making sure our infrastructure is safe, capable and modern is an ongoing effort at the city. We also have a long term goal of connecting our neighborhoods to each other and to the waterfront. Improvements always include this goal, even if the original project might have another objective.

You may have noticed there are places in the city where the sidewalk suddenly stops or the design seems different. These places are often outside city boundaries so governed by Pierce County. It's why we are working to create an interlocal agreement so design and other regulations remain consistent in the area.

Right: The Burnham Drive project is something many of us are watching. These salmon are part of the added design elements which enhance the design. This road project also includes new fish culverts that will help improve the number of fish returning to our area each spring. Finally, wider sidewalks will mean there's room for walkers and bikers.





# Keeping the Small City Charm We Love

Nearly every project we do involves a focus on preserving our smalltown feel. It's the reason most of us moved here. And we are keenly aware it means different things to different people.

We are building the Commercial Fishermen's Homeport to bring our fishing fleet home to moor. This project at Ancich Park has been in the planning stages for more than 10 years. We hope to break ground this summer.

Like many cities, we hear a lot about parking issues and are conducting a study to find out what exactly the problem is, and develop solutions. Stay tuned for more information when it is available..

We hope to begin construction on the Village at Harbor Hill later this summer, bringing much requested amenities and work force housing to the northern parts of town. At the same time, we're working with property owners in the Judson/Harborview area to develop an area development plan that meets the needs of both residents and business owners.



The charm and quaint atmosphere are something we are committed to retaining while our city changes with the times. Council and the staff team try hard to strike this balance.



Our history is important in all that we do, including when it's incorporated into new developments. Keeping the charm of our downtown and celebrating its waterfront history are critical. That's one reason much commercial development is outside the historic downtown area. We hope to begin construction on the Village at Harbor Hill in the north part of town this fall, and also begin an area plan for the portion of town by Judson and Pioneer Way. Change is always balanced with history.

# Comprehensive Plan

After two years of public input, volunteer work and a tremendous amount of staff time, the comprehensive plan (<https://bit.ly/3ECytC6>) was approved by council at a recent meeting. The plan provides the big picture aspirational policies for what we want to be in 20 years.

Now it's time for the "how" and the "what" so stay tuned for more opportunities to have a say in the city's future.

A lot of the focus has been on the housing shortage and how we can meet the (unfunded) mandates from the state to provide affordable housing. Our plan addresses these through Centers of Local Importance (COLIs) where we will build most affordable housing.

It also includes other chapters on everything from arts and culture to the environment, parks, transportation, and land use. It's more than 500 pages that will guide us for years to come.



Left: Aerial view of the city's water treatment plant, its last upgrade was completed in 2015. Staff experts are always involved in planning for new developments. They also keep track of what's needed for current uses. Their expertise in forecasting and modeling is critical for our future needs around transportation, utilities and more.

The housing discussions in the comprehensive plan received a lot of attention, but remember it also includes plans for everything from parks and arts to climate change and land use.



The state has mandated that our long range plans include sections on how we will provide for affordable housing. Since a lot of the city is already built, this is especially challenging for us and will result in increased density. The plan includes ways we can achieve this in what are called Centers of Local Importance. It's likely there will be an increased presence of cottage housing (above left) and condominiums and apartments (above right) as in the above right photos. Mixed-use development, where retail and residential coexist, can be an additional option.



# Economic Development

Our small businesses are the heart of our city. We want to support them and grow them. So, we're working on how to make it easier for them to move through city processes quickly. Now, when a business wants to move here, or renovate, they start with a Business Assistance Meeting (BAM). During a BAM, city staff meet with a business to understand their needs and discuss the next steps. Recently, a business owner who began their move with a BAM had permits approved just three weeks after the meeting.

Several new businesses have opened in the city in the past four months. I encourage everyone to support them so they can stay and be successful. I still want to create an economic development council or some sort of organization in partnership with the chamber of commerce that looks at ways we can continue to grow the economic engine in Gig Harbor.

We value our strong partnerships with the chamber and the Waterfront Alliance. Both groups are strong entities working hard for our businesses. The chamber handles the Visit Gig Harbor program bringing in visitors from around the world.



The city has been working on ways to streamline processes so our small businesses get the service they need faster. It's just one way we're making sure our small businesses are supported.



The city has contracted with the Chamber of Commerce so they can use their expertise to promote tourism in Gig Harbor. This partnership is resulting in more people traveling to our area and supporting our local businesses. It also results in increased local awareness of events.



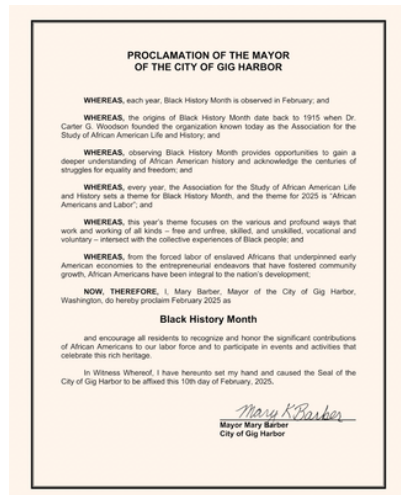


# Community Building

We also want to be a welcoming city to all who want to work, play and live here. The mayor's committee on diversity and engagement recently asked people to tell us how welcomed they felt. As expected, we are doing fairly well, but definitely have some work to do.

In December, I was really distressed that one of the menorahs displayed in the uptown area was vandalized. That's why I worked with County Councilmember Robyn Denson to write an opinion piece about what is accepted and expected behavior. I also invited Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards to attend a Gig Harbor High School Basketball game after some tensions at a game. We had fabulous feedback from the community surrounding those activities.

We have also supported diversity in our community through proclamations and programs for Black History Month, Women's History Month, Catholic Schools Week, Child Abuse Prevention Month, Diversity Month and more.



One way we celebrate our community's various groups and causes is through proclamations (left).

May 31, we will also gather at the Skansie Netshed and surrounding area to celebrate our Croatian heritage.

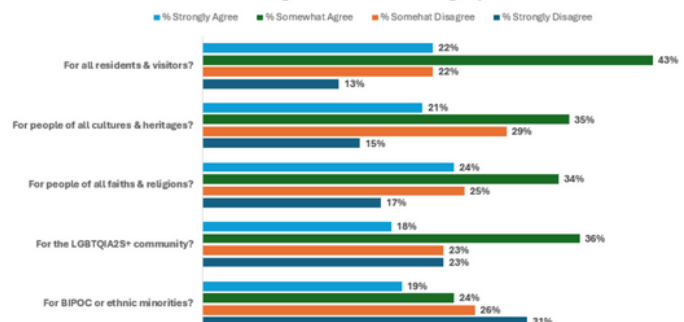
Celebrations like these make our community stronger.



Tacoma Mayor Victoria Woodards and I attended a Tides basketball game to show support for our differences and cheer on the guys. These relationships make us stronger.

## Gig Harbor Community Survey (N=342)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the community of Gig Harbor is doing enough to create a welcoming city...



The mayor's committee on diversity and engagement recently secured data showing the city can do more to be welcoming to all. The committee will be working on plans in the coming months.



# Sports & Other Activities

No community would be complete without activities and events for the residents. And our community has more to offer than many other places. It's another reason we love to live here. Things like:

- The sanctuary ponds built by the residents of Herons Key and now gifted to the community so young people can learn about native flora and fauna.
- Year-round boat storage for human-powered watercraft at Ancich Park.
- The nearly complete first phase of the Gig Harbor Sports Complex, and soon-to-start new sports fields there.
- Possible voter approval of a cultural access tax to fund arts, culture, history and science programs.
- New lease for Little League fields.
- Community center for seniors, teens, early learning, and performing arts.

There are so many worthwhile projects the list seems never ending, but the opportunities are limitless.



Above: Harbor Wildwatch offers monthly opportunities to see what's under the water. This is one of many community events the city supports.

Below: the sanctuary ponds on Harbor Hill offer a peek into native plants for any age, thanks to the efforts of Heron's Key residents to nurture the system.



Above: the Gig Harbor Sports Complex is underway. After many years of planning and fundraising, the first phase including a playground, bocce and pickle ball courts, and an event stage will open soon. Groundbreaking on the multi-sport fields takes place May 3.

Below: Watercraft are a fun part of all downtown events and a key activity. Year-round boat storage is available at Ancich Park, as part of the renovation there.





# Community Safety

We heard you last year when you expressed concern about the increase in speeding, retail theft and overall crime rates in the city. Our focus has resulted in overall reduction in crime.

We've increased the size of the police force and resources afforded them by implementing the public safety sales tax voters approved last fall. We're very close to full employment in the police department. Our police are out in the community more, able to conduct traffic calming maneuvers and even give speeding tickets.

Twice each month the housing, health and human services manager conducts a very popular pro bono law services event. This event and many others are helping increase awareness about the hidden needs in our community. The demand for food, housing and other support seems to increase each month. This department and I are proud to serve on the county's regional approach to homelessness where we'll share research and successes with other cities. Together, we will help reduce homelessness.

Throughout all of these initiatives we are also always looking at the impact state and federal actions may have on our community. Each day presents new challenges and we're doing our best to make sure we're ready to continue providing needed services.

City of Gig Harbor + Tacoma Probono Community Lawyers  
present

## FREE LEGAL AID POPUP

**Upcoming dates...**

2nd Tuesday of the month 4:00pm-6:00pm	3rd Monday of the month 10:00am-12:00pm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• November 12: NO POP-UP</li><li>• December 10, 2024</li><li>• January 14, 2025</li><li>• February 11, 2025</li><li>• March 11, 2025</li><li>• April 8, 2025</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• November 18, 2024</li><li>• December 16, 2024</li><li>• January 20: NO POP-UP</li><li>• February 17: NO POP-UP</li><li>• March 17, 2025</li><li>• April 21, 2025</li></ul>

**HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT:**

Eviction	Family Law Consumer
Landlord-Tenant Issues	Issues Civil Law Concerns

*No registration needed, first come first serve basis.*



**EVENT LOCATION:**  
Civic Center  
Community Room  
3510 Grandview Street  
Gig Harbor, WA 98335

**Questions:**  
Shea Smiley, H3 City of Gig Harbor  
Email: [ssmiley@gigharborwa.gov](mailto:ssmiley@gigharborwa.gov)





Mayor Barber swears in a new police officer as we grow the force to 26 officers allowing for increased community support.

The regular free legal aid event at the Civic Center has been a well attended event supporting those who need help in our community.



# Financial Stability

For some time we've been talking about our challenges balancing the budget. We continue to keep a very close eye on spending and revenue to make sure we're living within our budget while providing the desired services.

We continue to work to diversify our revenue streams so we are less dependent on one single source, like property tax. We heard residents loud and clear last summer when the property tax vote was held.

Our city is relatively unique in that a large portion of people who shop, work and play in Gig Harbor live just outside the city limit. That's one of the reasons we've moved to sales taxes to help with revenue. Doing so allows us to share the burden of the cost of city services with all who benefit from the services. It's why we instituted a transportation benefit district, and are looking at other options.

Like you, we are concerned about state and federal city's revenues and costs of doing business.

## In Closing

It truly takes everyone working together to have an amazing city like Gig Harbor. Please know we are working hard for you, and want to know what you wish we could do differently.



Mary Barber, Mayor  
mbarber@gigharborwa.gov

Sign up for one-on-one meeting: <https://bit.ly/4jINh7K>

Join me for coffee: first Wednesday each month; 9-10:30 at Davenport Coffee

Subscribe to the Gig-a-Byte: <https://bit.ly/3GCafZb>

