It’s time to look to the future, Bend
By Ruth Williamson / Bulletin guest columnist

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What makes a town livable? According to a recent Gallop survey by the Knight Foundation, featured on the front page of The Bulletin a few weeks back, it is “fun places to gather, a welcoming atmosphere, beautiful and green spaces to enjoy.” Sounds a lot like Bend.

The Gallup survey seeks to quantify the “connection between economic growth and residents’ emotional attachment to their communities,” both hot topics in our town these days.

In Bend, most would agree, we are very attached to our community, our quality of life, the livability of our town. We also face huge challenges in rebuilding our economy with an eye to the long term. In fact, such values and concerns are at the core of an important body of work: Bend 2030 — our community-based vision and action plan first adopted in 2006.

What’s up with Bend 2030 today? How is it faring in these challenging times?

Many will remember making a contribution to the Bend 2030 vision by taking time to identify what makes our place so special, speaking out in meetings across the community. It was the largest such dialogue in the city’s history.

Hundreds of ideas emerged from this conversation, covering six visionary goals: a well-planned city; a vibrant economy; a quality environment; safe, healthy people; a strong community; and a creative learning culture.

The 2030 vision was adopted by every major governmental agency. Real actions were developed to support these outcomes guided by government, business, nonprofits and community groups — some 64 lead partner organizations in all.

The implementation phase of Bend 2030 began in late 2006, when Bend was still growing at an unprecedented rate and anything seemed possible. A lot has happened since that time — and our vision is more important now than ever.

Three years later, we can point to successes in every sector — in the county, in the city, in our park district, in our schools. In fact, more than 75 percent of the actions identified in the vision are under way or have been achieved.

To name a few: Oregon State University’s ongoing commitment to a Central Oregon campus; curbside recycling; the Deschutes County Greenprint; the Skyline Forest acquisition; the Redmond airport expansion; formation of an arts coalition; commute options learning in our schools; an expanded community volunteer network, and so much more. We need to celebrate these successes.

Bend 2030 serves as a guiding framework for the future. This is particularly important given the challenge of a changing economy. Laying the groundwork for a sustainable future and a balanced basis for growth requires visionary thinking and collaboration. The good news: Our leaders are heeding the call. Behind the scenes, they are striving for creative ways to work
together and insisting on additional efficiencies with our tax dollars.

But there’s more. There’s something less tangible but far more important happening: Our community is coming together. We’re finding common ground in the language of Bend 2030. We’re taking up the challenge to be our best. Yes, we want to figure out the Mirror Pond siltation issue. Yes, we want to connect our inter-urban trail network. Yes, we need both COCC and OSU as cornerstones of our economic and cultural future.

Optimism is contagious. Bend 2030 gives voice to the aspirations of our community. It’s where we meet and celebrate the tremendous possibility of our region. Through our collective voice, and the dedication of our elected leaders, our local government, private enterprise and so many others, Bend 2030 — our community vision — is being realized. This dream bodes well for a promising economic future.

And a very livable Bend.

Ruth Williamson is the chairwoman of Bend 2030.

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