



The Well Seasoned Whistle
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Seasons greetings! In our time presenting The Whistle to the Upper Valley, we admit we've served up some spicy observations. It hasn't always been easy to take our elected officials and the workings of City Hall to task, but we believe that thoughtful opinion in the local press is key to a healthy society. That said, today's column is not about what needs correcting as much as it's an opportunity for gratitude and hope.

First, we thank the community for your interest in The Whistle. In our short four months of existence, The Whistle column has been read by almost five thousand people online in the Echo and gone out to seven thousand in print. Even more impressive, over seven thousand people have clicked into our website, some writing us personally. Sometimes it's hard to hear how many locals feel slighted and ignored, but we said we'd listen and care. And we do! In addition, there has been considerable interest on social media and we've received new supporters on the team as well and good conversations and emails over the course of just four months. Thank you for your interest and trust.

We also appreciate the City Council members and the mayor for choosing to engage instead of turn away from the thoughtful comments made by members of our team on behalf of the majority of residents.

Reading through comments from Leavenworth's UGA Survey distributed by City Hall in 2022 gives us a sense of hope and community, too. The majority of respondents remarked on how much they value the current "feel" of our beautiful mountain valley, the gift of being surrounded by nature and the warmth of our neighborhoods.

In my own opinion, there remains a strong sense of connection amongst residents. I've been watching the unfolding of Leavenworth since 1984 from my vantage point of working in mostly non profit and community building capacities. I've seen many a Christmas Lighting season, many a spring flood, many a smoky August, many a gorgeous hill of Balsamroot, many a pine scented hike up the Icicle, many a backyard BBQ and many a songbird returning to the intentional habitat of our back yard.

What I think *has* changed is the amount pressure from "outside" brought about by what is, again in my opinion, "over tourism" issues, along with the out-of-control cost of real estate that has completely outpaced living wages in The United States. This potent combo has created a crisis as we look to the future, with no way to go back to say, 1986 when I bought my first house for \$35,000. Back then, a fixer upper was restored pretty inexpensively with products from Marson's Lumber and twenty and thirty somethings working as river guides or at Steven's Pass could afford to own. My first house, sold long ago and barely improved since, would now be listed at \$500,000!

I also believe our world has become more complex, meaning that manufacturing a “silver bullet” to solve what lies before us has become next to impossible. If I had one hope for the coming year in terms of City Hall, it would be that they step back far enough to see that our community, built of caring, smart people with good ideas, needs complex solutions. Density is not a silver bullet for affordability here. Ridding our neighborhoods of greenery is not a silver bullet that paves the way for “diverse” housing. Allowing unlimited B and B development in neighborhoods is not a silver bullet for helping residents pay their mortgages. The list goes on.

In the year ahead The Whistle Team wishes you all some measure of peace amidst the complexity, a clear head to see the big picture beyond the messy details, and a stout heart to take the journey one measured step at a time, trusting that we are a community. We lack a silver bullet, but we’ve got each other. And that is enough.

Until then, reach us at LWhistle.com. Find community surveys online in the Echo. Or just keep whistling. We’ll hear you.