

For the first time in several months the Springfield City Council is at full strength. In November, Kori Rodley was elected to serve as Ward 3 Councilor. Sean VanGordon, Ward 1 Councilor, was appointed at the beginning of the year as Interim Mayor to fill a vacancy. On March 8, Damien Pitts was appointed by the Council to fill the vacancy created by Mayor VanGordon's appointment. Both new Councilors visited with Springfield City Club members on April 8.

Although the two Councilors have widely varied backgrounds, they seemed to have more in common than differences. Councilor Pitts has had a wide ranging and varied career, including service in the Army in foreign deployments. He studied at the University of Tennessee, spent time in Utah as a career coach and moved to Oregon about 4 ½ years ago. As only the second black person to ever serve on the Council he said people might assume he is a liberal. "But I was in the army and I'm from the south," he said.



Councilor Rodley is a native Oregonian who grew up in Roseburg. She has been involved in the Springfield political process for several years, including service on the Springfield Budget Committee. She has served with Councilor Pitts on the Lane County Equity and Access Board.

Both Councilors pointed to Springfield's ability to support local businesses as an example of what Springfield is doing well. Councilor Rodley added she thought the City was doing well at encouraging different types of housing, and noted she saw less of the NIMBY attitude that she has observed in other cities.

As to challenges, Councilor Rodley noted that current issues with the Police Department and the difficulty of dealing with the fiscal impact of the pandemic. She said a major concern was how to keep residents who are now precariously housed from becoming unhoused and expressed her hope that a coming infusion of one-time federal resources might address that issue.

Councilor Pitts noted his major focus was on dealing with the culture of the City. He said that his observation was that there is fear among the residents that their culture will be lost. He said that was not the case; that adding diversity would, in fact, benefit all cultures in the city, that the community must be open to change and growth. This was a theme he repeated on several opportunities – that his prime focus is on broadening the cultural image of Springfield. Making the community more inclusive and diverse, he added, would have strong economic benefits.

Both Councilors expressed some guarded support for the new development proposals for the Glenwood waterfront. Each noted it was important that the community recognize that Glenwood is not a blank slate – there are communities there and that it is important that

development in Glenwood consider their needs. As Councilor Pitts put it, “Glenwood change should be based on who is there, not on the goals of some outside developer.”

A questioner raised the issue of a national report that suggests that traffic violence disproportionately affects blacks, indigenous people, and people of color. Councilor Pitts cautioned against relying on national statistics which might not be relevant to Springfield. He saw the issues of traffic safety through his cultural lens – that is perhaps no more or less than people not caring about others and being selfish.

Both Councilors pointed to some positive that has come out of the pandemic. With the Council and other boards and commissions meeting virtually, it is easier for the public to engage; there are more opportunities to participate and become involved. While he agreed, Councilor Pitts warned that increased engagement can lead to increased divisiveness. He added that it is important as part of the increased opportunities to make people feel that they have a place at the table, that it is not simple the same people holding positions and rotating through them one after another. Positive change, he said, would come by attracting more new people to the conversation.

Councilor Pitts added that it is important for the Council to get outside of its comfort zone and be accessible, a view that Councilor Rodley shared. She said it is important to help people understand that it is not what is happening in Washington that people should focus on – it is their own local government where things actually happen. While it may be important to pay attention to national events; if your toilet backs up because the local wastewater system needs repair and attention, that has an immediate personal impact.

More generally on the topic of potential new sources of federal funds, both Councilors first thought of how the City can focus on supporting and reinvesting in local businesses. Councilor Rodley added that clearly the City can spend more on infrastructure maintenance and preservation but agreed with Councilor Pitts that bringing more diversity into the community can have the effect of generating more funds to support infrastructure.