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Government services helping each of us

If you are reading this, pat yourself on the back, as you are more informed than the typical community member about government. Additionally, you have a connection to your local government. Focus group studies show that most folks, including perhaps your friends and neighbors, don't know much about what government is, or to put it simply, that government provides services. There seems to be a bit of rhetoric around government these days: what it is and why we have the services we have. And there is the all important word – services. Government is a collection of services for the public. There are general municipal governments, county and state governments, as well as special service districts. In my experience, each agency endeavors to provide the highest value services and the most good to the greatest number of people and businesses in the community.

The geographic breadth of Metro District 4 spans north and west Washington County, which includes multiple cities and disjointed unincorporated areas as well. I also have a regional view into the other communities that make up our 25-city, three-county Portland metropolitan area. With that view, I have had the opportunity to see and experience several categories of government services. Using broad terms, these service categories include design, community identity, economic development and public safety. Design can include detailed planning requirements so that new development looks good, provides connectivity and includes local amenities like parks. Community identity includes those things that make up a neighborhood's sense of self such as public involvement and events. Economic development includes programs that help businesses grow and prosper as part of the community and employ residents. Public safety services go beyond the basics of police, fire and rescue, and provide other community programs that take care of its own members as a big family. Not every resident uses each category of service at any one time, and our lives and needs change as life circumstances shift from one decade to the next. Over time, these services help us as people, they help maintain and protect our property and bring us together as a whole.

As each of us watch news events occurring elsewhere in the world, we can see how our local communities and nation offer a stable platform to live and enjoy our days. In general, our lives are straightforward and free from chaos. Many of these simple benefits come from or depend on government services. So the next time you hear a friend or neighbor say we should "get rid of government," perhaps you might contribute your story to that conversation, about how your life is a good one, thanks in some part to the services provided by local government. As I said at the start, believe it or not, you are more informed than the average community member, and you can help educate those around you.

Kathryn Harrington
Metro Councilor, District 4
kathryn.harrington@oregonmetro.gov