



**March 13, 2025**

**Youth Center Ribbon Cutting Remarks**

Thank you, Washington Gorge Action Programs and the White Salmon Valley School District. We would not be here if it were not for the efforts of both of your organizations and care for our youth.

And I am so grateful that we are here today celebrating this shared accomplishment, because especially at this moment in our country it brings forward an example of how leadership should be used: to convene the right conversations that give rise to collective accountability and solutions. And by leadership I don't mean me. I mean so many of us as a collective, this community of adults that care about our youth. Just doing a brief scan of emails over the course of my time serving the city and before, so many familiar names have reached out and engaged on this matter of building a better space for the Youth Center:

2015: Lloyd DeKay and all of our Community Partners

2016: Liz Paulson & Pastor Ryan of Bethel UCC

2018: School Board Member Laurie Stanton

2019: Janet Holen, Former First Lady of White Salmon

And multiple conversations with Doug Campbell, long an advocate for securing a new home for the center.

This has been a long overdue need for quite some time. And considering that the enrollment for the youth center increased by 70% from 2017 through 2024, the urgency was growing by the year. So often elected leadership, and communities at large, fall into the trap nowadays of assuming every solution requires huge amounts of money, and yet here we are celebrating this

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moment not because we were rich with funds, but because we are rich with love. Love for this community, and for the young and old that call it home.

So what changed the focus away from the lack of funds to the abundance of hope? We shifted our thinking: from a mentality of scarcity to one of abundance, from a focus on deficiencies to a celebration of the opportunities present in our community.

We thought about re-using spaces, blind to where ownership may lie, and instead seeing the possibility. We focused on gifts and capacities.

I thank our City Council, which has made resources for youth a priority for years now and authorized the funding that allowed us to bring this idea of the Parks Building as a potential space that could be re-used in a new way.

Thank you to the school board and Superintendent Polkinghorn, for not only entertaining this vision but ultimately making it happen. At each stage of this process that led us here today, time and again, individuals and collective groups put their own interests or motivations aside to work together for a solution that was right-sized for our community, and allowed us to realize this vision that has been years in the making.

True community involves moving beyond self-interest to embrace a collective sense of responsibility and care, and this project is an example of that. I can't think of a better example for the children whose energy, laughs, and misadventures will fill these walls for years to come.

*Mayor Markle*