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20120216 New Woodland mayor keeping an open mind as he settles in

New Mayor Grover Laseke wants to hit the reset button.

After four years of shouting matches and strained relationships between the City Council

"I want to get a good working relationship with the City Council and build the relationships that can make it work," said Laseke, adding that listening to council members will be a crucial. "I want to get to know the councilors and be on the same sheet of music."and former Mayor Chuck Blum, Laseke said its time to put the past aside.

Laseke, 57, said he is applying that open-minded approach to everything in his first week on the job. He used vacation time from his job as Cowlitz County emergency management director to meet with city staff and tour the water and sewer plants.

He said he doesn't think working a full-time job won't affect his performance and availability as mayor. Laseke will spend Monday's at City Hall, while being a phone call or email away when working Tuesday through Friday.

"I don't need to be here all the time," he said. "And when there's a big emergency there's nothing that's stopping me from coming back."

He has already met individually with some council members to start improving relations.

"I'm certainly encouraged by his approach to the council. I think we have an individual who's willing to listen," Councilman Benjamin Fredricks said. "What you're going to see is a much higher level of respect and decorum. ... I don't think you'll read about council members getting thrown out of meetings," which occurred during Blum's tenure.

Fredricks said he expects a "night and day difference" where passionate discussions don't degenerate into personal attacks.

"So far he's doing a great job," said newly elected Councilman Scott Perry. "We've had a couple conversations, and one thing we both agree on is getting more community involvement."

Laseke is the city's top executive under Woodland's "strong mayor" form of government. He's paid \$800 a month as mayor.

He said the transition to mayor hasn't been difficult due to his previous experience as the mayor of Toledo, where he served from 1988 to 1993. Technology and citizen's expectations of government have changed, but that's about it, he said. Laseke wants to expand the use of Twitter, Facebook and other social media to reach residents better.



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Ensuring City Hall is running smoothly and efficiently also tops his list of immediate priorities.

"I want to make sure the end product, which is service to the citizens, is the best we can do," he said.

Laseke's on-term goals include developing a plan to ease gridlock at the intersection of State Route 503 and Interstate 5, where traffic often backs up three or four blocks in both directions.

"We have to figure out a plan on how to make that easier to get through because business will ultimately suffer if we don't," he said.

Laseke said he will lobby the area's state representatives to get the millions of dollars needed to improve the state-owned highway. However, he added, the council also plans to consider creating a transportation district — which would impose a local property tax to help cover the city's portion of any road project.

Regardless of his personal ideas, he said his biggest goal is get more Woodland residents involved in city business.

"(The job) is not about me or the City Council," Laseke said. "It's about understanding the citizens needs and what they want."

Article courtesy of [The Daily News](#).
