

## **City of Wilsonville Citizens Academy**

Each year, the City of Wilsonville hosts a program designed to give civic-minded community members a clear picture of how their local government operates and become more involved in their community.

“In order for Wilsonville to continue to thrive, we need community members who are ready, able and interested in taking leadership roles in local government. The Wilsonville Leadership Academy is designed to create leadership capacity within Wilsonville”, said Mayor Tim Knapp.

Wilsonville’s Citizens Academy includes classroom-style presentations, tours and conversations with City staff and elected officials. The course provides an in-depth overview of City operations, services and programs to prepare participants for future public service as volunteers, board members and/or elected officials.

The City launched the program in 2015, informed by best practices in other municipalities. Initially, the focus of the program was leadership; the curriculum included class projects and reading assignments. Informed by feedback from early participants, the program has evolved and the focus shifted to the following priorities:

- Providing a transparent view of city government
- Offering the necessary insight and guidance that motivates participants to remain engaged with the City as ambassadors, volunteers and/or candidates for City boards and commissions.

The Citizens Academy accepts up to 25 local applicants each year, reserving one spot for a high school student. When space permits, non-local members of the City’s workforce are considered, but priority is given to Wilsonville residents.

We encourage any interested community members to apply for the Citizens Academy. There has been a lot of diversity in our recent participants including; a college student, retired individuals, working parents, and stay at home. They also vary in the amount of time they have called Wilsonville home; some have only lived here a few months and others have lived here for many years. There has also been a variety in neighborhoods that people live in as well as a mix of people living in single family and multifamily homes. Even though our participants have diverse backgrounds, we receive similar feedback that residents loved the program and felt like they learned a lot. Many former participants have expressed great appreciation for the program.

### **The Program**

The core Citizens Academy curriculum is delivered in a classroom setting at City Hall during 2 -3 hour weeknight meetings, which have taken place monthly between January and May. Additionally, daytime tours to the State Capitol Building and the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility are provided.

### **2021 Citizens Academy Program Outline**

#### **Meeting 1**

- Meet & greet
- Introduction to city government

- Legislative Overview

#### Meeting 2

- History
- Conversation with Elected Officials
- Overview of City Boards and Commissions

#### Meeting 3

- Building and Permitting
- City Planning
- Engineering
- Economic Development

#### Meeting 4:

- Wilsonville Public Library
- South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART)

#### Meeting 5:

- Budgeting & Financial Operations
- Parks & Recreation

#### Meeting 6:

- Public Works
- Tours of Water & Wastewater Facilities

#### Meeting 7:

- Wilsonville Police Department
- Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue (hosted at Station 56)

#### Meeting 8:

- Attendance at City Council Meeting
- Graduation

#### Optional Field Trip 1: State Capitol Building Tour

#### Optional Field Trip 2: Coffee Creek Correctional Facility Tour

The classroom-style lectures, conversations and exercises have received positive feedback from community members who have participated. We include training about the council–manager form of government, provide valuable information about how cities, counties and states create laws and provide opportunities for participants to offer public feedback on current City projects.

One aspect that makes the program special is the extra steps we take to help our community learn first-hand from elected officials and department heads. Our mayor and city councilors provide insight about local projects. This gives them a real glimpse of how their city truly runs and provides them with direct

contact to decision makers and the individuals who make an impact to provide their water, sewer, parks, and police services among many other services.

State legislators who serve our city typically make time for a questions and answers during the Citizens Academy's visit to the state capital. Last year, Rep. Courtney Neron, Rep. Christine Drazen, Sen. Kim Thatcher, and Sen. Allen Olsen each spent time answering questions from our group. The participants also got to learn about the committees, see the Timber Unity Rally and see the House of Representatives in action.

Additionally, our tour of Wilsonville's prison (Coffee Creek Correctional Facility), provides a perspective not typically available to residents. A highlight for many participants, the tour demonstrates how the facility partners with local projects and programs such as the Canine Companions for Independence program. Adults in Custody at the prison provide basic training and socialization to puppies which will become canine companions.

We believe the Citizens Academy exposes residents to virtually every facet of how their hometown operates, including riding the SMART bus. Participants have direct access to elected officials, and a unique opportunity to build a reliable network of City staff and engaged peers with a shared interest in serving the community.

### **Outcomes**

The Citizens Academy has been a successful way for Wilsonville to develop active and engaged citizens. Over six years, a number of Citizens Academy graduates have remained engaged in the Wilsonville Community. This is evident in the current make-up of the City's boards and committees.

<b>Board</b>	<b>Citizen Academy Graduates</b>
City Council	2
Budget Committee	2
Planning Commission	3
Development Review Board	4
Library Board	2
Parks & Recreation Board	1
Wilsonville – Metro Community Enhancement	3
Wilsonville Seniors Inc.	2

Additionally, when a seat on City Council was vacated last summer, four Citizens Academy graduates were among the 10 community members who applied to fill the vacant seat.

The City is fortunate to have many engaged citizen participants, and we attribute some of that to the effectiveness of this program. The Citizens Academy has consistently received positive feedback from participants, and seeks to improve the curriculum each year.

A recruitment drive for the 2021 program gets underway in September, including advertisement in the City's newsletter and social media. The seventh Citizens Academy is set to begin in January 2021.