

# Mayor Erickson

City Marks Leadership Transition  
**Sixteen Years at the Helm**

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## Special edition

### Longest Serving Mayor in City History

At 16 years, Erickson exceeds second longest serving mayor by a three-year margin.

### Smooth Transition

Current Deputy Mayor to serve as incoming Mayor in 2026.

### Significant Achievement

A long tenure characterized by careful assessment of complex issues and early attention to emerging practices has ended with complete initiatives and a solid reputation for collaboration and caring.

Mayor receiving  
Viking presentation

## Reflections on a Job Well Done

By Terrie Battuello, City PIO

As the City of Poulsbo prepares for a change in leadership, it also pauses to reflect on a mayoral tenure that has shaped a significant chapter in the City's modern history. After sixteen years as mayor—eighteen years in Poulsbo leadership overall—Mayor Becky Erickson concludes her service having led the City through a period of sustained growth, renewed civic identity and evolving governance practices.

Her tenure, which began in 2010 as city leader, represents more than 13 percent of Poulsbo's entire history since incorporation in 1908, making her the longest-serving mayor the City has known.

That distinction was never her ambition.



Mayor Erickson's official swearing in by former Mayor Kathryn Quade, 2010.

## A Reluctant Beginning

Mayor Erickson's entry into public life began with concern rather than political ambition. When a petition circulated to annex Poulsbo's eastern urban growth area—including land that encompassed her family's farm, she began examining City growth policies using her analytical training. What she found raised questions: uneven environmental setbacks, looming infrastructure needs, and the likelihood that sewer services would cross her own property.

Having lived through rapid growth in the Kent Valley, where urbanizing growth had dramatically altered community character, Erickson believed growth decisions carried consequences too important to be left unexamined.

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*"As a rural farm owner, I didn't see the need for the city to annex my property," she said, "I knew it was likely to happen, and if it was going to happen, it needed to be done right."*

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That conviction led her first to the City Council in 2008, and then to the mayor's office two years later.

## Preserving a Sense of Place

When Erickson became mayor, Poulsbo's historic downtown—long known for its marina, walkable streets, and Norwegian heritage—was struggling. Like many Main Streets across America, storefronts were dark, vacancies were common, and foot traffic had thinned.

Rather than treating downtown decline as inevitable, Erickson focused on strengthening Poulsbo's community brand. She leaned into the City's Norwegian roots, supporting the installation of a Viking statue at the City gateway as a visible sign of welcome, history, and identity.

From there, revitalization happened one business at a time. The City worked deliberately to recruit and support small businesses, establishing strong anchors along Front Street—an ice cream shop, a brewery, and a museum—each reinforcing downtown as a place to gather.

Today, storefronts are filled, small businesses thrive, and downtown Poulsbo has regained the vibrancy that defines it as the City's cultural and economic heart.

## Governing Through Growth

From her first mayoral campaign, Erickson advanced the principles of smart growth—a planning approach that emphasizes compact development, environmental protection, walkable neighborhoods, and infrastructure investment aligned with growth.

At the time, smart growth was gaining national traction as cities sought alternatives to sprawl-driven development. In Poulsbo, it became a framework for decision-making rather than a slogan.

Over the course of her tenure, Poulsbo's population grew from roughly 9,200 residents in 2010 to more than 13,000 today, an increase of more than 40 percent. Much of that growth occurred during the latter half of her time in office, when the City experienced a roughly 20 percent population increase in just seven years placing sustained pressure on roads, utilities, parks, and public services.

Preparing for that growth—without losing the qualities that define Poulsbo—was always a central theme of her leadership.



Mayor Erickson at one of many ground breakings.

## Roads, Regional Leadership, and Leverage

Transportation was a key part of that effort. Major investments were secured along Noll Road (from Lincoln Road to Highway 305) in several phases in the last decade. The project improved traffic capacity and turning options and added bike access. Modern roundabouts were introduced to improve traffic flow and safety. These projects reflected a shift toward innovative design solutions suited to a growing community.

Additional state and federal investment is needed to complete the broader transportation network, but Erickson expressed confidence that her successor is prepared to carry that work forward.

Mayor Erickson with Brian Kilpatrick, volunteer Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance (EMBA) sharing plans for the Poulsbo Pump Track.



## Data Over Dogma

A hallmark of Erickson's approach has been her resistance to what she calls the "dogma of government"—the tendency to rely on rigid assumptions or inherited practices simply because *"that's how it's always been done."*

Instead, she favored evidence-based decision-making.

One example was the development of impact fee models designed to reflect the true cost of growth. Using her analytical background, Erickson helped guide the City toward fee structures that tied new development directly to its proportionate impact on parks, streets, and public facilities, as authorized under Washington's Growth Management Act.

Her focus, she noted, was not money, but instead generating community benefit. Protecting the essence of Poulsbo, she believed ultimately supported long-term value, investment, and civic participation.

## Ground Level Vision

While many elected officials operate at a policy level removed from daily experience, Erickson made a point of staying grounded. For sixteen years, she held open office hours nearly every Saturday morning, missing only two weekends during her entire tenure.

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*"I can't imagine serving without that interaction," she said.*

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She also made a practice of visiting sites in person—walking neighborhoods, standing at shorelines, and speaking directly with residents before defining problems or advancing solutions.

That same ground-level approach also shaped the City's evolving role in human services. Over the course of her tenure, Erickson supported the integration of behavioral health and housing considerations into municipal operations—placing social workers in courtrooms and alongside first responders, advancing recovery-oriented services, and ultimately formalizing the City's Housing, Health, and Human Services Department. While many of these efforts unfolded quietly, they reflected a consistent belief that cities could respond locally and pragmatically to human need. The scope of that work is detailed in the accompanying sidebar.

## Solving the Right Problem

The philosophy of building solutions only after problems are fully understood proved consequential in addressing pollution in Liberty Bay. When contamination levels rose, traditional testing methods focused on household sewer leaks—a logical assumption, but one that didn't fit the facts. Recognizing that nearby homes were already on sewer, Erickson pushed for a more comprehensive approach.

The result was laboratory microbial source tracking that identified bird waste from stormwater retention areas as the primary contributor. The solution shifted accordingly, leading to redesigned systems and improved environmental outcomes.

Liberty Bay is now cleaner than it has been since the 1970s, and Olympia oyster harvesting has returned. The testing approach pioneered there has since become standard practice for the health district.



## Housing, Health, and Human Services: A Legacy of Compassion

Throughout her tenure, the Mayor consistently recognized that the challenges appearing in courtrooms, emergency calls, and housing requests were not isolated problems, but symptoms of unmet human needs. Mental health, substance use, housing instability, and isolation repeatedly surfaced at the city's front door. Rather than treating these issues as external responsibilities, she worked to make housing, health, and human services a permanent and intentional function of city government.

That philosophy first took shape in 2011, when the City partnered with the Poulsbo Rotary Club to transform a former Public Works structure into a new Coffee Oasis Cafe and teen center, bringing important services to the north end of the county serving youth at risk of homelessness. Then in 2016, social workers were placed in Poulsbo Municipal Court to assist defendants struggling with behavioral health conditions. The effort helped inform the creation of Kitsap County's Behavioral Health Court, now a critical part of the regional behavioral health system. The Mayor worked with County partners to develop procedures, and two City social workers became founding staff members of the court.

In 2017, she extended this approach to first responders. Recognizing that many police calls involved behavioral health crises, she embedded a social worker within the Poulsbo Police Department to co-respond on calls involving mental illness or substance use. The model later expanded countywide, with Poulsbo social workers temporarily assigned to departments in Bremerton, Bainbridge Island, and Port Orchard to help establish similar programs. The same strategy was applied to fire departments, contributing to the spread of Fire Cares programs across Kitsap County.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mayor again acted when federal and county systems proved insufficient to meet local needs. Vaccination sites were established at City Hall in partnership with Public Health, pharmacists provided drive-up and in-home vaccinations, and partnerships were formed to assist Spanish-speaking residents and others facing barriers to access. The City also created a Senior Specialist position to support residents isolated in their homes, leading to phone-buddy programs and meal distribution services. These efforts accelerated the formation of a permanent Housing, Health, and Human Services Department, embedding social safety-net work into the City's core operations.

Housing became a central part of this work. Under the Mayor's leadership, the City advanced its first city-led affordable housing project, Nordic Cottages—eight deeply affordable, one-bedroom homes for older adults and adults with disabilities built on city-owned land and managed in partnership with Housing Kitsap. Designed for long-term affordability and stability, the project reflects a broader commitment to helping residents remain in Poulsbo as they age or face changing circumstances.

Alongside permanent housing, the Mayor supported smaller, adaptive solutions that paired housing stability with opportunity. A former caretaker house, often referred to locally as the barn facility, was converted into housing linked to work and training. This program exchanges housing for participation in park and public-space maintenance, providing hands-on experience, job readiness skills, and a pathway toward employment while contributing to the care of city assets.

In later years, this integrated approach continued through the creation of a Recovery Resource Center to promote diversion and treatment, support for recovery housing and a Recovery Café, and ongoing investments in services that connect housing, health, and community stability.

Taken together, these efforts reflect a defining element of the Mayor's legacy: a belief that cities can—and should—play a direct role in responding to human need. By building systems that link housing, health, and services at the local level, she reshaped how Poulsbo supports its residents, creating civic infrastructure designed to endure long beyond her time in office.

## Preparing: What Comes Next

As she reflects on her time in office, Erickson points to preparation for growth, which she calls *'setting the table,'* as her central accomplishment. Major growth policies are in place, including updated Critical Land regulations, fee structures aligned with impact, and professional management practices, including the addition of a City Administrator—allowing the mayor to focus on long-range vision and the needs of the citizens, rather than day-to-day operations.

She also credits City staff as essential partners, emphasizing the importance of listening, trust, and allowing people to do what they do best.

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*“I’m proud of the team that will support the next mayor,” she said.*

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## Continuity in a Time of Change

Following the thirteen-year tenure of Mayor Mitch Mitchusson, Poulsbo entered a period of shorter mayoral terms, with two mayors serving a combined nine years. Mayor Becky Erickson assumed the lead office in 2010 at a moment when the City was navigating both the pain of leadership transition and the early stages of accelerated growth.

Her sixteen years as mayor brought sustained continuity during a period marked by regional change, increasing governance complexity, and significant population growth. That stability became especially consequential in 2020, when the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with what would have been the end of her final term.

Rather than step away during a public health crisis, Erickson chose to extend her

service, believing it was not the right moment for leadership transition. During that period, the City was able to rely on investments made over the course of her tenure—particularly in parks and outdoor public spaces.

When Erickson took office, Poulsbo had sixteen parks. By the time of the pandemic, that number had grown to twenty-six. Those expanded outdoor facilities provided residents with critical space for recreation, connection, and well-being at a time when indoor gathering was limited, underscoring the long-term value of sustained investment in public infrastructure.

## Investing in the Future

Erickson’s focus on long-term preparation is also evident in the emerging College Market Place, a new district at the north end of town. The planning includes the Poulsbo Events and Recreation Center (PERC), where a sport-oriented community facility—funded in part through the Kitsap Public Facilities District—is expected to break ground next year after years of planning.

The area will also include Olympic College’s Allied Health program, developed with private hospital participation and informed by a workforce study conducted by Johns Hopkins University. The project is expected to bring jobs, training, and opportunity to Poulsbo while strengthening the region’s healthcare pipeline.

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*“These projects take time,” Erickson noted. “They require patience, collaboration, and trust.”*

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## A Mayor's Reflection

Looking across her years of service, she returns to what motivated her at the beginning: the belief that communities are worth the investment.

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*"This is a remarkable town," she said.  
"My neighbors are worth the time and  
energy I spent."*

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Mayor Erickson in downtown Poulsbo

## A Measure of Public Service

On the afternoon of December 17, 2025, the Poulsbo City Council chambers filled with more than 80 people gathered to honor Mayor Becky Erickson and her 18 years of service to the city. At 2 p.m., the room became less a formal venue than it was a place of shared memory, as elected officials, residents, business owners, and city employees stepped forward—one after another—to take the microphone. For more than an hour, a steady line formed, each speaker offering words of gratitude, personal stories, and tangible tributes—expressions of esteem that reflected the highest regard for a mayor whose leadership had shaped lives in ways both public and deeply personal.

As voices rose and stories unfolded, a projected montage played across the chamber walls, tracing scenes from nearly two decades of civic life: groundbreaking and ribbon cuttings, tree lightings and Viking celebrations, moments both ceremonial and ordinary. Together, they reflected the constancy Mayor Erickson brought to a grateful community—an unbroken presence through seasons of change.

During her final City Council meeting, members of the council marked the close of her tenure by presenting the mayor with the Key to the City, a symbol historically reserved for moments of highest civic trust. Originating in medieval cities where gates were locked at night, the key signifies welcome without restriction and confidence fully earned—a recognition the bearer has already carried with honor. City directors shared their own expressions of appreciation, presenting a wooden plaque featuring a maple tree, an emblem of strength, endurance, and deep roots. One director, a former political science teacher who later became a city department head, spoke to the long arc of the Mayor's influence: "I invited the mayor to speak in my classroom to teach students about government, and then spent the last decade with her teaching me—demonstrating every day—how to operate a government with integrity and heart." Other directors echoed the sentiment, each describing how Mayor Erickson had set a high bar for ethical conduct, professionalism, and leadership within their offices.



Mayor-Elect Stern and City Council present the Mayor with a key to the City, Dec. 2025

As a Kitsap County mayor, Mayor Erickson's role also carried regional responsibility. The seat made her the City of Poulsbo representative to on regional coordinating councils and countywide boards. Her participation placing the city at tables where transportation, utilities, housing, public safety, and growth planning intersected. Through those roles, she consistently encouraged interagency collaboration and coordination, ensuring Poulsbo's voice was present, prepared, and respected—often serving as a bridge between jurisdictions and an advocate for solutions that served both the city and the broader region.

Councilmember Gary McVey was among several council members who credited Mayor Erickson with recruiting him into public service. He spoke of her rare combination of vision and follow-through, noting that effectiveness in government often falters when one exists without the other. All three Kitsap County Commissioners traveled to attend the reception, each offering remarks and gratitude for a mayor whose steady presence strengthened countywide cooperation. Puget Sound Regional Council Executive Director Josh Brown, himself a former county commissioner, reflected on Mayor Erickson's standing among the region's highest officials. Sitting at tables with leaders of the largest cities and districts, she was regarded as a peer among peers. When she spoke, he said, they listened. She never arrived at a meeting unprepared, a discipline that required mastering thick stacks of dense policy and complex materials long before discussion ever began.

Residents were equally present among the speakers—those she had encouraged into public service and those who had once come to her with problems and left with inspiration of their own. One woman described approaching the mayor years earlier seeking housing for herself and her children; that single conversation, she said, set her on a journey of self-empowerment that ultimately led her to her own leadership roles in community service. The Fire District Chief thanked Mayor Erickson for her tireless and vocal advocacy for public safety, and for consistently standing up for what was right. Another resident spoke of attending the mayor's Saturday morning office hours and leaving with a clearer understanding of how personal access to leadership strengthens civic trust. He noted that many who took advantage of those hours lived outside Poulsbo, explaining that "the mayor acted on her belief that people need a way to personally connect to their government, and she took it on as one of her responsibilities to make sure that connection existed."

Several officials reflected on the lasting mark of her leadership. One observed that all public servants hope to leave something better than they found it, adding that Mayor Erickson has done that—and more. A KPUD commissioner spoke of admiration for the mayor's commitment to transparency and her ability to shoulder work that might otherwise seem overwhelming or impossible. "Many of my proudest achievements were accomplished by your side," she said. Both the City Finance Director and John Clausen, longtime Kitsap Transit Director, remarked on Mayor Erickson's keen financial sense. The Finance Director noting the steady stewardship that underpinned the city's progress throughout her tenure, and John noting the Mayor's sharp eye made their process stronger.