

Mayor Kristofer Turnbow

State of the City

September 2020

I want to start tonight by thanking the Council for allowing me to give my annual State of City in a slightly non-traditional format.

Typically, I come before you in May to talk about all of the great things our City accomplished in the past year.

This year, however, our community, our region and our nation faced an unprecedented new challenge in the way of COVID-19 that forced us - in many cases - to accept a new way of life.

This meant we had to cancel events, stop programs and completely alter how we interact with the public on a day-to-day basis.

Even with all of these new challenges and changes, our City Staff worked tirelessly to ensure our streets were safe, our roads and water systems were working well and that our parks were maintained and always ready for visitors.

Our work here at City Hall never stopped - even in the face of a pandemic - and it is because of that I know the state of our City is strong.

COVID-19 Response

When news began to break that COVID-19 had arrived in our region in March, the amount of information from regional partners, Health Departments and the media was flowing at a break-neck speed. At times, it was overwhelming and, at worst, it was downright frightening.

The situation was changing so rapidly that what was our reality on Monday was not our reality by Friday.



Even in the face of uncertainty our COVID REsponse team met daily to assess the new situation, build partnerships with vendors and work seamlessly with our regional partners both in Cass County and throughout the state to ensure our services continued and our employees were protected.

2016 Bond Issue Completion

While many communities saw needed projects delayed or even cancelled in the face of the pandemic, ours pushed forward and completed the final two projects from the 2016 voter approved bond issue. The opening of Westgate Drive creates a much-needed connection at 58 Highway near Kentucky that will promote safety and decrease accidents in the area.

We also saw the completion of construction at TB Hanna making Raymore one of the first in the state of Missouri with an accessible playground and sprayground.

Both of these projects took some time to complete, but we knew we needed to do these projects right as they would serve our residents and continue to push our City forward.

2020 Bond Projects

Of course, we have never been an organization that is willing to rest on our success. As staff was wrapping up the previous Bond issues projects, we were already planning for the next round of voter-approved projects. As you know, in August voters overwhelmingly approved more than \$23.5 million in road and parks projects.

Like in 2016, these projects were developed by looking at those needed improvements and expansions. We used our regular Citizen Satisfaction survey and feedback from the Community Conversations to put together a slate of projects that will once again show that we are leading the region in parks amenities and road projects.

Every road project develops a needed connection to our growing community and every park project connects our residents to our programs, activities and to one another.

Economic Development

With every new stride and success, we continue to make waves regionally and nationally as a community that is ready to take on even bigger challenges. That was on full display this past year when our Economic Development team and our City was named a finalist for the \$425 million Urban Outfitters Development project that ultimately went to Kansas City, Kansas.

You always hate to tell stories about 'The one that got away.' But this story is not about how we missed an opportunity. Rather, this story is about how we beat out hundreds of other Cities and our team went head-to-head with another state's Governor, a US Senator and a metropolitan development team and stayed competitive to the bitter end.

Our team developed new ideas on the fly and implemented some truly creative strategies that are now attracting even more attention to our VanTrust Light Industrial site. Our City has been named by the KC Economic Development Council and the KC Business Journal as one of the communities to watch in 2021 as we continue to fight just as hard for the next development.

Public Safety

When developers look at our community, one of the first things that they always look at are the foundational building blocks of our city; our roads, our water and sewer infrastructure and, most importantly, the strength of our public safety.

With the excellent leadership of Chief Zimmerman and her command staff, we continue to hear from our own residents that they have an incredibly high level of satisfaction with our Police Department.

Our own ETC Citizen Satisfaction Survey showed that 100% of residents felt safe in our City during the day and they feel safe at an incredible 95+% the rest of the time. We set the bar high when it comes to our law enforcement services and we will continue to set the bar high.



That is not to say that there have not been challenges this year. Police Departments across the country are under the microscope. But Chief Zimmerman and the command staff under her have worked tirelessly to develop and build on the success of the past and continue to train and prepare our officers to meet those standards we set. The partnerships each officer has built in the community is invaluable and shows that our department does not just protect and serve, but serves as a leader and role model for so many others.

The Budget

Finally, none of the accomplishments I have mentioned would be possible without the smart, fiscally sound planning done by our staff. The FY 2021 budget is now before the City Council for its consideration. Now, more than ever, I believe this budget shows that we are a community still committed to growing responsibly.

Although we had only budgeted for 85 new homes to be built this past year, we have already exceeded that number as there are more than 130 homes under construction in our City.

Our budget takes into consideration that on-going growth and staff has provided a roadmap for how they will continue to provide quality services and amenities to all of our residents. We continue to see an investment of \$1.7 million in street and sidewalk repairs. We are investing another \$3.1 million into various capital projects throughout the City.

While brick-and-mortar projects are important, what is more valuable is the investment in our people here at City Hall. Under this budget we are able to step every employee through the salary chart and keep health benefits relatively unchanged.

This is a major accomplishment as some cities during the pandemic were forced to furlough or lay off employees who provide critical services each day.

Future Planning

As the Council holds its final discussions on the budget, we will begin to also look toward our City's long-term goals as staff prepares to update the Comprehensive Plan. This plan will build on the City's previous Strategic Plan and Community Conversation to put in place individual, long-term plans for every department and initiative at City Hall.

This project is going to be a major undertaking but will give Council, staff, and residents a concrete path for how our City plans to move forward into the next decade and beyond.

This will be done with Council input, additional Community Conversation in the winter and an extra Citizen Survey that focus exclusively on what our residents would consider a success when it comes to roads, parks, police, growth and economic development.

As staff dives deeper into the details, more information and opportunities for feedback will be made public.

Conclusion

It seems like an understatement to say 2020 has been a challenge.

You can pick from a multitude of issues that have been facing our country as a whole and see the ripple effects it has had on our City.

Still, each and every day our staff provides an unparalleled level of service. Our residents continue to see value in the projects and initiatives we invest in and the Council members I have the privilege to serve with continue to guide this City to its next great accomplishment.

I want to thank you for your time and the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and our residents tonight.