

## 2024 State of the City

Mayor Kristofer P. Turnbow

Good evening.

I am honored to be sharing my ninth annual State of the City address with you this evening.

We have so much to be thankful for tonight, and that is because of the heart of the people of this community and the dedication of the people of our organization who strive to make it a safe and beautiful place to call home.

In last year's State of the City address, I promised you that we would not stop working until the threat of a landfill on our city's border no longer existed, and I am so happy to say that we kept our word.

We fought hard and we prevailed against the most dangerous threat our community has ever faced.

We are now protected from the inevitable negative impacts a nearby landfill would have had on our quality of life for generations.

I cannot thank our residents enough for the calls, emails, letters and trips to the capitol. You answered every call to action and stood united to protect your homes, your families and your futures. You battled with us to protect what you love and I am so appreciative of that.

I am also incredibly thankful for members of our city council, who supported and trusted City staff in the work they were doing to lead us to victory, and I'm thankful for our dedicated landfill team and the other members of our staff who helped with this endeavor when their expertise was requested. We shouldn't forget that while we had support from neighboring municipalities and organizations, Raymore was really leading the way throughout the entire effort. We had the most to lose, and we could not accept any outcome that did not include the complete elimination of the landfill threat.

After a year and a half of efforts, our bill moved through both the Missouri Senate and House within eight days of our City Council's approval of a settlement agreement with the landfill developer. There was no other way to achieve success in Jefferson City, as multiple legislators would not allow the legislation to move forward unless we "made the developers whole."

The settlement negotiations were incredibly difficult, with the starting point being more than four times the final agreed upon amount of \$3.2 million. We anticipate some reimbursements from those entities who would have been impacted, but it is important to remember that we would have paid a far greater price had we allowed the landfill development. As I said numerous times, there is no price on the long-term health, safety and well-being of our community.

We also learned that our purchase of the 12 acres was indeed a short sale, meaning the landfill developer lost money on it. This is a strong indication that the developer is not getting rich off of our settlement agreement, as some suggested.

And while our landfill team was working on getting us closer to defeating the landfill, the rest of our staff never stopped dutifully working to take care of our infrastructure, maintain our safety and strengthen Raymore's economy, in spite of the ongoing challenges.

Even though some development opportunities were lost or delayed due to the threat of a landfill, we still celebrated wins with new businesses choosing Raymore as their home base. In the last year, we welcomed the Wheelhouse Baseball Clinic, The Quilted Cow, Abelardo's and Raymore Nutrition, as well as the non-profit organization Bloom International. Culver's celebrated a remodel and Always Chic Salon and Spa expanded and remodeled. We are grateful for those who invested as well as those who reinvestment in Raymore!

At the Raymore Commerce Center, Southern Glazer's, Harmar and Nuuly all had their grand openings within a few days of each other in February of this year. Governor Parson attended the Nuuly opening celebration, and he was gracious enough to allow us to meet with him for a few minutes right after the event. Actually, I was unable to attend because I didn't want to be the guy to give the governor COVID, however City Manager Jim Feuerborn and former Mayor Pro Tem Reginald Townsend spoke to Governor Parson about the necessity of protecting Raymore from a landfill, and also about another important topic: I-49.

In 2022, the Missouri Highways and Transportation Commission initially approved a \$71 million I-49 widening project, in which I-49 was supposed to be widened to three lanes from 155th Street all the way down to North Cass Parkway.

We learned last fall that the project had not only been delayed by several years, but cut to only widen I-49 to 58 Highway. Our disappointment and traffic safety concerns were shared with multiple area leaders and we all asked the highway commission to reconsider the decision at their December meeting.

Mr. Feuerborn and Mr. Townsend shared their concerns with the governor as well, and we were absolutely delighted to learn that tucked into an appropriations bill from this legislative session is an allocation of \$20 million for the interchange and road improvements on I-49 and the 58 Highway interchange. While the project is not completely back to its original scope, we are grateful for this compromise. Our sources tell us that this came straight from the governor's office, so we are thankful for Gov. Parson to take our concerns to heart and hope that the funding remains intact for his final signature.

New businesses on the way include Sanos Orthopedics. They are repurposing the old Office Max building. Site work has started on the multi-tenant building on 58 Highway by Scooter's, which will include a Pacific Dental and other businesses. And we are finally going to have a Chick-Fil-A! Construction starts on the long-awaited restaurant this summer at the corner of 58 highway and Kentucky.

## GROWTH

In addition to the new businesses in Raymore, we also have new housing opportunities. New residents are moving into The Venue townhomes and The Depot luxury apartments. We recently broke ground on the Grant Park Villas, a 48-unit income-targeted apartment development that increases the availability of

affordable housing in Raymore and preserves a number of those units specifically for Veterans.

In the last year, we have also issued 136 detached and attached single family residential permits. The balance of detached single family homes to duplexes, townhomes and apartment units is still very healthy and falls within our targeted limits, with:

70.9% detached single family,  
4.8% duplexes,  
13.6% multi-family townhomes;  
And 10.8% apartment units.

We are pleased to offer a variety of diverse housing options for people in all stages of life with different needs and desires.

Over the last year, we've seen more than \$35 million in residential construction and investment activity and we've seen more than \$18 million in commercial construction and investments into Raymore.

Population estimates recently released by the US Census show that from July of 2022 to July of 2023, Raymore was the fastest growing city in the state and the 66th fastest growing city in the country, with a 4.7% increase in population in one year.

It is absolutely desirable when you have a premier school district that provides quality learning opportunities for our students. Further, I believe it's because of the quality of the people who make up this community and the dedication that every one of our public servants has to making Raymore a desirable and safe place to live, to run a business and to play.

Speaking of playing, we're coming right along with the expansion of the Raymore Activity Center at Recreation Park, as well as new pickleball courts at Recreation Park, a new basketball court at Hawk Ridge Park and new beautiful concrete trails at Recreation and Memorial Parks that will last for decades. It's vital to invest in the things that improve our quality of life like our park system.

The Ward Road reconstruction project is well underway and I know how much our residents on the east side of town have been looking forward to it. We can't wait to celebrate the project's completion at the end of the year.

We're also hard at work with planning for Raymore's long-term future and we've completed the draft of the Comprehensive Plan that looks at what we want to see in the next 20 years.

I would like to take a moment to recognize our longest-running employee, Andy Elliston. Andy works in our Public Works Department and just celebrated a milestone 45-year anniversary with the City in April. Wow. What an accomplishment. He's been here through a lot of changes and we sure do value his loyalty to this organization, his service to the people of Raymore and the hard work he's put in for so many decades.

Now, to address some challenges we face.

We've been sharing for years now that the folks in our Public Works, Parks Maintenance and Police departments are stretched too thin and we could not sustain service at the levels our residents have come to expect. As the city grew, the staffing did not and each person in these areas is responsible for much more than their counterparts in cities of about the same size and population. Our public servants are super, but they aren't

superhuman. It's an incredible challenge and some of the impacts of this staffing shortage were evident in slipping satisfaction numbers in our latest citizen survey.

The easiest fix, with the least amount of strain on our residents' wallets, would have been to pass the use tax in April. Revenue from a use tax would have brought in enough to cover the creation of multiple new positions in each of those departments and fund the ongoing maintenance needs of our most used thoroughfare, 58 Highway.

Unfortunately, it did not pass, so we will have to look at reducing funds for our annual street preservation program. This will reduce the maintenance of our residential streets for the next couple of years in order to fund the needed mill and overlay of portions of 58 Highway, which is our most significant thoroughfare in the City for commercial and residential connectivity.

Traditional sources of revenue to fund City services are eroding and there continue to be more threats to that revenue, including Senate Bill 872 which has been delivered to the Governor for his signature. If signed into law, this would provide a sales tax exemption for materials purchased by electric utility companies and exempt video streamers from the video service provider fee that we collect to maintain the public rights of way.

It is always a challenge to ensure that resources are having the greatest service impact for our residents and that challenge never gets easier in a growing community. Hard decisions are being made in determining how we use our limited resources to fund public service needs.

We have to look at how to have a reliable revenue stream not only to retain our quality workforce but to hire more police officers, more public works maintenance workers, more parks maintenance workers and one that funds our perpetual infrastructure needs. Other than going to voters for a tax levy increase, we have not discovered nor has anyone proposed an alternative to a use tax that would successfully fund these public services.

With that being said, I encourage you to get involved. Volunteer for a board or commission, come to a City Council meeting, register for the next citizens police academy, attend community events, get to know the people who work hard each day to serve this community and build relationships with your neighbors.

While there are many challenges ahead, the state of our City is strong. Let's continue to look to the future and strive to be a welcoming and friendly community, where our members look out for one another and work together to make Raymore a safe, prosperous and happy place to call home.

Raymore, God Bless you and thank you.