

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

As delivered to the Springdale City Council, Tuesday, Feb. 25th, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Tonight, it is my honor and privilege to deliver to you and the residents of Springdale the 2020 State of the City Address. This is my twelfth annual address. Preparing this speech each year is not something that comes easily or naturally to me. The difficulty for me is not so much what to include in the presentation, but what to leave out. As you know, there are a lot of great things happening in Springdale. We not only see that for ourselves, but if you're like me, you hear it from people all the time- not only from our residents, but from others around the state. Still, some of you enjoy giving me a hard time when this speech goes on a little too long. I hope to respect everyone's time tonight, while still highlighting important information. But, I'm fully prepared for some good natured ribbing for my long-windedness. So, here we go.

To begin with, I want to mention just a few points of interest about some significant happenings from 2019;

*Sales tax receipts continued to show strong growth throughout 2019. That means local businesses continue to succeed and offer opportunities for people to purchase goods and services in Springdale. Local sales tax is our bread and butter as far as our ability to return services to our residents-and when it comes right down to it, returning services is the only reason city government exists.

*Another leading indicator, building permits, also continued strong growth in 2019. The total number of permits sold last year was 782, compared with 669 in 2018. That number reflects a 20% increase in residential permits, and a 45% increase in commercial permits. Keep in mind, also, that's comparing to 2018 numbers, which was also a year of strong growth. The bottom line is, the trend for development in Springdale continues to move sharply upward. In fact, if the first

few weeks of 2020 are any indication, we can expect that strong growth to continue for the foreseeable future.

*We made strong moves last year, modernizing and increasing our capacity and processes in relation to public safety.

For example, in 2019,

-We began construction of Phase 1 of our Criminal Justice building. When completed later this year, Phase 1 will house our Police Department, a new Dispatch Center, the Information Technologies Department, our City Attorney's offices, and our District Court.

-We approved purchase and began implementation of a new CAD, (Computer Aided Dispatch) system. This will replace an older, outdated CAD system and will greatly improve the delivery of public safety resources to our residents.

-We approved and funded the capital improvements required to join the state wide AWINS radio system. This system will allow our first responders to communicate better; not only with each other, but also with other agencies in our region and around the state. This will mean increased safety for our residents, as well as our first responders.

-SFD received national Accreditation of Ambulance Services. SFD is now one of only about 15 departments in the nation that have achieved both CAAS and CFIA Accreditations in an ISO Class 1 city. (ISO Class 1 is the highest rating possible for a city.)

-In 2019, SFD opened Station 7 on Har-ber Ave., began construction on Station 8 located on E. Huntsville Ave., and began the design of Station 9, which will be located at the corner of Ball Rd. and Carrie Smith, in the NW part of the city. We also added one new ladder truck, one rescue truck, and began design of classroom space and an apparatus bay at the Chief Mickey Jackson Fire Training Facility on Ford Avenue.

*Our Parks Department began operating in our new 120,000 sq. ft. Rec. Center at the corner of Robinson Ave. and Cambridge. In the short time since moving in,

we've already made substantial improvements to a much needed asset for the residents of Springdale. Even with the improvements we've already made, there's more we want to do, as funds become available. So far, (including the \$4.1 mil. purchase price), we have less than \$6 mil. invested. Once the additional improvements are made over time, our residents and those from around the region will utilize programming opportunities made possible by this facility. I congratulate this council on your vision and foresight in acquiring the building. When all is said and done, we will have a facility that would have cost at least 3 times our total investment, had we chosen to purchase property and build a similar facility from the ground up.

*The 120 acre Shaw Family Park began construction last year, and we'll see its completion later this year. The \$10.5 mil. project was made possible by the Parks Bond Issue, which won voter approval by a wide margin in 2018.

*Another Parks Bond project, the improvements to Randal Tyson Park, began design in 2019, and we should be bringing you a final plan soon. This approximately \$5 mil. project will include important upgrades to one of our best known and busiest parks, including improved ADA accessibility to its fields and facilities.

*Last year, our Parks and Rec. Department also engaged a group from the U of A to produce a needs assessment to help guide our future direction and decisions. Significant efforts were made to gather input and ideas from every group and demographic in our city. One of the first recommendations of the assessment was to undergo a comprehensive strategic planning process. That process has begun, and we look forward to sharing the results when completed.

*Here are some figures highlighting 2019 recreational programming;

-We served over 4400 participants in our youth sports leagues

-We served 139 teams in our adult sport leagues

-We added an indoor soccer league with over 50 teams in its first season

-We created youth sports academies in 5 sports with over 750 participants

-We added free fitness classes for members

-We created free umpire/referee clinics, coaches clinics, and multi-sports clinics

-We added daily and monthly rec. center passes as options to the annual memberships. Numbers of all three options continue to grow at a healthy clip.

Ok, that's enough about 2019. Let me point out some exciting thing we will see become realities this year.

*Road Projects- No one that drives around Springdale will be surprised to hear there are a lot of road improvements going on. Many additional projects are currently under design, with others bidding soon, and many will be completed by the end of the year.

*Municipal Campus- As I mentioned earlier, Phase 1 of our municipal campus will be completed later this year. After Phase 1 is occupied, the rest of us in City Hall will move out to other available buildings in our downtown. Phase 2, which is the renovation to our existing City Hall, will then begin. During Phase 2, there will be a lot of moving parts that will impact everything from parking to building access. Since many of our departments, (including Administration), will be temporarily located in other downtown buildings, we need to do everything possible to inform our residents where various city departments will be located. During that time, we ask our residents, as well as city employees, to be flexible and to remember any inconvenience is only temporary, but necessary in order to get to a finished product that will serve everyone better. Phase 2 should take about a year to complete. That means we should all be moved into our new municipal campus in late 2021.

*Animal Shelter- Our new Animal Services Facility will be completed and occupied this summer. We're very excited to see the completion of a building that not only provides the space to accommodate the needs of our growing city, but also will be located to allow our Animal Services staff and Animal Control Officers to better respond to the needs of our residents. Because of this more visible and accessible location, we expect our residents to realize more opportunities to work with our staff and the army of volunteers who are passionate about the safety and welfare

of our four-legged friends as well as the safety and quality of life of our community.

When I begin to mention private development we expect to see taking place in Springdale this year, I always hesitate to just focus on a couple of areas of the city, because it really is happening all over. We're seeing plans, (many that have already been approved), for all types of residential development - from multi-family, to single family, to estate homes. We'll see it all under construction this year, in all corners of Springdale. But, because I get the most questions about a couple of specific areas, I'll touch on those.

DOWNTOWN

Our Downtown will continue its transformation into a District where people will choose to work, live, and shop. We will continue to see the results of commitments from companies like Tyson, as they create even more employment opportunities downtown. But Tyson is not the only one. There are many job creators and entrepreneurs, both large and small that will continue to invest and take the risks necessary to make our downtown momentum continue. We also recognize that in order for our downtown to be all it can be, it has to be an area where people want to live. We are beginning to see that happen. We currently have one mixed use project that has recently broken ground on east Emma Ave. With retail and restaurant space on the ground floor, and quality multi-family spaces above, it will begin to meet coming demand for residential multi-family- and will implement the new form-based codes that our Planning Commission developed and this body subsequently approved. We believe that form-based code will serve as a foundational building block and blueprint for insuring quality development and protecting property values downtown. There's another approved mixed-use development slated to start by this summer. This long anticipated project, also located on Emma Ave., will be built on the site of the old San Jose Manor. Again, retail and restaurant spaces will occupy the ground floor, with over 50 units of 1-2 bedroom apartments in the 4 stories above.

But not all of the planned development involves new buildings. Existing structures that are meaningful to the history of Springdale are also being

repurposed. One example is the old Ryan's building that will become a new gathering place, incorporating a food and entertainment theme. Another prime example is the renovation of the Watson's Building on the corner of Main and Meadow. James and James, a great Springdale company, will make the Watson's building their new home. The signage is already up, and the building is looking great. A short drive around downtown also brings to attention many older homes that have recently been remodeled, or are at some stage of restoration. It has become evident, more and more people are now considering Downtown Springdale when looking for a place to live.

This seems like a good time for an update on Luther George Park. This year, the DSA' (Downtown Springdale Alliance), will receive the completed plans for the renovations to the park. The design has been funded by a WFF Design Excellence Grant. The design process has been thorough, gathering input from a diverse group of residents, businesses, and potential investors. This design is one that, when built, will create a park unlike any in the region. Luther George Park will truly be a destination and will help drive our downtown to a level beyond what even its most passionate cheerleaders ever imagined. As the design process wraps up, a capital campaign to raise private construction funds will commence. Over the next few months, I'll be working with you to identify possible public funding sources so we can determine a realistic amount our City can contribute to make the project a reality. My challenge to you is to work with me to bring forward a plan that will commit at least \$2 mil. over the next 2 years toward the estimated \$8-\$9 mil. construction cost. Once we make that pledge, then the efforts to raise the private funds can really begin.

Also downtown, (thanks to a generous donation by Bank of America), the City of Springdale is now the proud owner of the former Bank of America drive-through facility on Meadow Ave. This not only includes the drive-through building and connected parking, but also the small wooded area directly to the south, running right along a portion of the Razorback Greenway. Nothing is written in stone yet, but future plans for the property could include a permanent home for the Springdale Farmers Market, along with a possible public art initiative or a pocket park.

There's another catalyst that has the potential to spur significant development, not only Downtown, but in almost all of east Springdale. I'm speaking about Opportunity Zones. These zones were established as part of President Trump's tax plan that went into effect last year. Not to get into the weeds, the short explanation is this; within these zones, private funds can be created that allow investment into business and capital projects resulting in substantial tax benefits to the investors. These zones are based on census tracts. Thanks to the work of the Springdale Chamber, State Senator Lance Eads, and Governor Hutchinson, Springdale received four Opportunity Zones, more than any other city in the state, besides Little Rock, (which also received four). The impact of these opportunity zones is just beginning to be seen, but let me just say that since our entire Downtown and the vast majority of our industrial areas are included in an Opportunity Zone, the positive impact on development will be tremendous. Many of the Downtown projects I've mentioned are utilizing Opportunity Zone Funds, encouraging local investors to become part of local projects that help our community, and the investors.

OVERLAY DISTRICT

Another area where we are seeing significant development is our Overlay District. After years of preparation and patience, we are going to see a rapid increase in the number of projects under construction in the District. Our Overlay District is soon to become the most desirable location for retail commercial, medical, educational, and residential development in NWA. Jewels like ARVEST Ballpark, Arkansas Children's Northwest, Sam's Club, and the newly opened NWACC Washington County Center, will be joined this year by the likes of Highlands Oncology Group, and just across Don Tyson Parkway, a new office tower housing BCBS. The George Family has broken ground on a new office tower just north of Children's, and has also announced a new 10 acre retail development, on the corner of Gene George Boulevard and W. Sunset. Add to all this, a variety of residential projects under construction, and road improvements to 64th St., Gene George Blvd. south of Don Tyson Parkway, and a future extension of Don Tyson Parkway to Hwy 112, and it's easy to see why all of NWA is so bullish on our Overlay District.

Now, let me touch on a few other important things that we'll be working on this year.

THE 2020 CENSUS

In just a few weeks, every address in Springdale will begin to receive letters from the Census Bureau with instructions explaining how each resident can participate and be counted in the census. Money for federal programs that is distributed on a per capita basis adds up to about \$3300.00 per resident. Those funds come to our residents through programs that touch everyone, from medical, to education, to city streets. For every resident that isn't counted, that means \$3300.00 annually won't be coming to Springdale. For example, if Springdale is undercounted by just 1000 people, that's \$3.3 mil. annually that won't come to the residents of Springdale either directly or indirectly through programs or services. Consider also that whatever that census count is, we'll live with it until the 2030 census comes around. That means for just a 1000 person undercount, the people of Springdale stand to lose \$33 mil. over the next 10 years. That's \$33 mil. that would have otherwise impacted the quality of life for every resident-either through services received, or by increasing disposable household income.

1/2 CENT SALES TAX EXTENTION

As happens every 4 years in November, there will be many decisions to make in the voting booth. I want to point out just one issue that will touch all of us. This November, Arkansas voters will be asked to approve a ballot initiative, making the 1/2 cent sales tax, (first approved in 2012), permanent. The revenue from this sales tax goes directly to maintaining and constructing roads in Arkansas. 70% of the revenue goes to ARDOT and the statewide system of highways under their jurisdiction. The remaining 30% is split 15%/15% between cities and counties across the state. Without voter approval in November, the tax will sunset at the end of June, 2023. At that point, the residents of Springdale will lose \$1.6 mil. annually. That's money that flows directly to our Public Works budget, and can only be used for local street construction and maintenance, related drainage projects, and as local matches for roads and trails grants. In the near future, I'll be

asking this council to approve a resolution expressing our support for this ballot initiative, insuring the continuation of this much needed funding for our local streets.

Now, switching gears a bit, I feel compelled to touch on the issue of homelessness. As with other cities across our region and across our nation, we need to be ready to help address the issue of homelessness in Springdale. Homelessness is an issue that has no single solution. It's a very complicated issue. If somebody says to you, "Well, this is all we need to do", that's a pretty good indication that they don't know what they're talking about. If the solution was simple, there wouldn't be communities all over the country trying to figure out how to address it. People can and do experience homelessness for a variety of reasons and life circumstances. Their individual needs can be just as varied and complex. That said, there are examples of efforts around the country and even closer to home that incorporate different strategies to work toward eliminating homelessness. There are already local nonprofits, churches, and other organizations that are trying to make a difference. We all know friends, neighbors, businesses, and community leaders who are also passionate about being part of the solution. They deserve our support. Now, I don't yet know what that support looks like. All I know is this; as effective, workable, and sustainable initiatives that promise long-term results come forward, we must support those efforts as a city, in whatever ways we can.

Lastly, as I reflect on the last 11 years that I've served as mayor, I appreciate more than ever before the professionals that serve with me as leaders in this organization. Some of those professionals have given many years of loyal service to the City of Springdale. In recent weeks, a couple of these individuals have shared with me their plans for eventual retirement. No effective dates have been decided. Nothing is going to happen overnight, or maybe even this year. But these discussions have emphasized that it is time to seriously consider succession planning for these key leadership positions. As a result, I will be coming to you in the near future to lay out a transition plan for at least one of those key positions. The plan I'll bring forward will allow us to move forward properly preparing for future staff changes in an ordered and responsible way.

In closing, as always, thank you for your hard work, wisdom, and support as you each work with me to make decisions that help make Springdale such a great city. My thanks, also, to each of our Commissioners, Board Members, and residents that willingly serve in various capacities within our city.

Thanks to the citizens of Springdale, for allowing me to serve the only city I've ever known as home. I'm not finished yet, and I plan to be around for another term, if you'll have me. Please know, I don't take your support for granted. This is not my official announcement-the newspaper only gives you one of those for free, so that will come later.

Thank you to my friends and family for accepting me the way I am. Thanks, Sandy. We've been married almost 43 years, and loved each other much longer than that. Thanks to my kids and grandkids, who cut me some slack when we're all together and I receive a call or a text that they know distracts me no matter how I try to hide it. And finally, as always, I thank God for His love that I'll never deserve or fully understand. A love that is demonstrated constantly, even when I'm too blind to see it.

God bless each of you and God bless the City of Springdale. Good night.