

2021 State of the City Address

Delivered to City Council, 3/9/2021

It is my privilege to present my 2021 State of the City Address. This is my 13th, and will probably be my shortest. That's not because there is less to talk about—just the opposite. There is so much happening in Springdale; I just need to boil it down to a few high points.

Let's start with a quick look back at 2020. If you're like most people I know, a quick look will do. However, it is important that we take time to acknowledge the personal loss so many of our friends and neighbors have experienced; whether loss of loved ones or loss of livelihood, no one made it through 2020 without living through major impacts from COVID-19. We continue to support and pray for those who are still suffering; not only from the virus, but from the widespread effects resulting from it. Certain business sectors are still struggling and need our support. Many of our residents are still experiencing loneliness and depression. We all have opportunities to be God's light in the darkness for

someone. I hope we'll all recognize and take those opportunities when given the chance.

As with any difficulties we face in life, there are also tremendous blessings, if we just know where to look. I hope you've been as encouraged as I have as we see how the people of Springdale have pulled together through this. The residents of this diverse city, our churches, our healthcare providers, our first responders, our school district, our essential workers, our business community, our utility providers, our City employees, our non-profit organizations that work to fulfill their various missions- all have stepped up, and continued to perform their duties with excellence, even while facing enormous challenges.

2020 was also a year of tremendous growth in Springdale. Just think about it- in the middle of a pandemic, the voters in both Springdale and Bethel Heights overwhelmingly approved us becoming one city. In just a matter of days after the election, Springdale Water Utilities was already working to address existing sewer issues, as all other city departments were hard at

work, insuring a smooth transition toward providing services to our new residents.

Both residential and commercial development showed strong growth throughout 2020, and the pace of that growth has only increased so far this year. Thanks to strong support by the people of Springdale for our local businesses, 2020 saw an increase of over 8% in sales tax revenue, when compared with 2019.

Our 2020 Census Complete Count Committee, chaired by Kathryn Birkhead, worked through the uncertainties of the pandemic to encourage participation in the Census. Because of COVID related delays by the Census Bureau, we won't get our population numbers for a few more months, but we are confident the tremendous growth we are experiencing will be borne out in the official numbers when we receive them later this year. Those numbers will benefit our residents for the next 10 years.

Now, let's talk about 2021. There's no doubt, we are all still dealing with the effects of COVID-19, and likely will be, to some extent, for a while. But even so, if you were to ask Patsy Christie, the Director of Planning and Community Development, or Mike Chamlee, our Chief

Building Inspector, or Brad Baldwin, our City Engineer, they would all confirm that their departments are busier than they've ever been. That's a good problem to have, and that's great news for the future of Springdale, and her residents.

We'll also see more changes within our organization this year. Many of our departments will be relocating in a couple of months, as Phase 1 of the Municipal Campus is completed and as Phase 2 begins. During this transition, we'll strive to respond promptly to any of our resident's needs. But, we will ask for patience during those short periods of time while the moves are actually taking place.

We'll also have some noticeable leadership changes come to pass this year. Allyn Lord, the long-time Director of The Shiloh Museum, plans to retire, effective June 11th. Allyn has done an amazing job over the years as she has built and led her staff. Under her leadership, The Shiloh Museum of Ozark History has become a nationally recognized research museum as well as a valuable resource for our region's schools and really anyone interested in learning more about the rich history of the Ozarks. We will certainly miss Allyn, and wish her the

best in her retirement. We also have confidence in the Museum Board, and await their recommendation for Allyn's replacement.

Also, Rose Lawrence, my Administrative Assistant, will be retiring, effective June 18th. That's going to be tough. Rose will have served this city for over 32 years. The first 8 of those years, she spent working in the court for Judge Stanley Ludwig. Then, she moved upstairs and became the Administrative Assistant for Mayor Charles McKinney. She continued that role during the 10 years of Mayor Jerre Van Hoose's administration. When she steps down in June, I will have had the pleasure to work with Rose for over 12 years. I'm sure we'll all have more opportunities to better express our appreciation to both Allyn and Rose as those retirements get closer.

With this Council's approval, we've created and filled a few positions that are already paying big dividends for our city.

Lourdes, (LuLu), Peredo, was hired as our City's Welcoming Coordinator earlier this year. We're excited to have LuLu on board with us. LuLu is working to develop and implement the welcoming strategy for

Springdale. This is very important work, and I look forward to our City having an effective and sustainable welcoming program, as the result of LuLu's leadership.

Last year, Our Senior Center Director, Lori Proud, brought forward a proposal to accept a Tyson grant that would allow us to hire a grant writer for our Senior Center. You approved the position, and Anna McKinney was hired. Anna has been splitting her time between researching and writing grants for the Senior Center, and doing the same work for other city departments. While she has already been a huge help in the area of grants, we quickly recognized Anna also has strong skills in Communications as well as Public Relations. We've already begun utilizing her skills in those areas also, and we know she will continue to be a real asset for our city.

That brings me to Colby Fulfer. About a year ago, you approved a new position of Assistant to the Mayor. The creation of this position allowed me to hire Colby to begin to work closely with Wyman Morgan, as Wyman began to work toward his retirement. That was a way we could provide some succession planning for the vital role Wyman plays in our administration. Over the past year,

Colby has worked closely with Wyman for sure. As a result, he's become heavily involved with almost every facet of our City's organization. Colby has developed relationships and worked closely with all of our departments. Over this past year, he has earned my trust, and just as importantly, the trust of our entire staff. I think Colby will tell you he still has more to learn from Wyman, as Wyman continues to work toward retirement. But the bottom line is, the decision we made over a year ago to create this position and hire Colby could not have worked out any better. With that said, I'm announcing tonight that Colby's official title has changed from "Assistant to the Mayor" to "Chief of Staff". This change was expected and was accounted for in the approved 2021 budget. Department heads will still report to the Mayor. However, Colby will assist, as directed, with coordination and communication between the administration and the various city departments. Colby, like Wyman, is a problem solver. He's a great fit, and most importantly, will help insure that our growing city will continue to provide prompt assistance when our residents need us.

In closing, 2021 will be a big year for Springdale. I've always been an optimist by choice. I don't know why anyone would choose to be otherwise. The truth is, we have been blessed beyond measure. If you've been watching the daily numbers of new COVID-19 cases vs the number of vaccines being distributed, you have hopefully noticed that immunity is now spreading much faster than the virus. There will be some point this year, (hopefully soon), when we're going to see that the most devastating impacts from this virus are now in our rear view mirror. Based on development activity we see planned, our private sector is certainly preparing for a world after COVID. So must we continue to prepare. As a result, I'm confident 2021 will be a year full of groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings in Springdale.

To my wife of almost 44 years; Sandy, thank you for allowing me to serve this city. Springdale has given us both so much. We were both raised here, as were our children, and our grandchildren, for the most part. Thank you for your patience when my body makes it home before my mind and attention does. Thanks to my family and friends who share me with this job. And

finally, thank you to the people of Springdale who have allowed me another 4 years to serve as your Mayor. If my plans hold true, I'll only be in this position for these 4 more years. I really believe by the end of 2024, it will be time for new energy and new ideas. Springdale will need a different skillset than it did when I was elected in 2008. My overriding goal for the next 4 years is to set the table well for whoever follows. I know each of you have the same goal as council members. I've long believed, and continue to believe, the most significant results of our work are not fully realized until long after we're gone. In order to set the table well for those that will follow, we'll have a lot of work to do over these next 4 years. But, by all indications, 2021 is going to give us a heck of a start.

May God continue to bless the people of Springdale, and may God Bless America.