

CARSON CITY, NEVADA 2019 SOTC

"As we begin today I want thank the Chamber of Commerce for once again sponsoring the State of the City event. I also want to thank the Chamber for all that it does in and for our community. The Chamber and its members are simply everywhere in our City. You've heard me use the word "ubiquitous" when talking about our Chamber of Commerce and all it does to create a sense of pride and cohesiveness in our City.

Let me also give a big thank you to the members of our community for all that you do to make our city a better place to live. As Nevada's capital city, it is important that our City presents not just the face of an indivisible Nevada but a community that embodies an unparalleled quality of life.

I want to congratulate the public officials who were reelected this past year: Supervisor Bagwell, Sheriff Furlong, District Attorney Woodbury, Assessor Dawley and Treasurer Robertson. And welcome our newly elected public officials: Clerk, Recorder Rowlett, and how about Justice of the Peace Luis, whom I understand is the first woman in the history of Carson City to be elected to the bench. And last but not least, our newest member, Stacy Giomi, now Supervisor Giomi. I will try to remember to call him by his Supervisor title but as I have always known him as "Chief" so I may slip up now and then.

It's hard to believe that this is my ninth State of the City address. In my time as Mayor, I have seen firsthand the ravages of the Great Recession as well as the benefits of a growing economy and what that means to the all-important sustainability of our community.

I am here today to tell you that the state of our city is sound and well on its way to becoming a sustainable community that showcases both the history and future of Carson City and our State. In fact, just out last week, the 2018 Milken Institute Best-Performing Cities Index ranks Carson City in the top 100 Small Cities in America. To illustrate how well we're doing, we went from ranking 141 in 2017 to 63 in 2018. It is because of the efforts of our community members, community leaders and City employees that we find ourselves performing so well.

We are fortunate to have some of the most talented, dedicated and hardworking employees you will find anywhere. In that regard let me make special mention of our Public Works Director, Darren Schulz, who was just this week chosen by the Nevada Taxpayers Association as one of four finalists in the State of Nevada to receive the Cashman Good Government Award

It's no surprise that we're on such solid ground. After we weathered the Great Recession, we made significant infrastructure improvements that will put us in good stead for generations to come. While other communities were digging out of the Great Recession, in addition to also digging out, we invested for the long term in critical infrastructure improvements. Let me tell you about a few of them:

We added a water line from the Town of Minden to Carson City. This water line not only adds to our water assets but it allows us to blend our water alleviating the need for a costly water treatment plant. The water line saved us nearly \$40M, the amount it would take to build a treatment facility.

We opened a brand new no-kill animal shelter.

We upgraded and repaired our failing sewer facilities, a complex project that is now entering its final phase. Related to that, our Public Works Department received excellence in engineering awards from the American Society of Engineers and the American Public Works Association for overseeing the improvements at the Water Resource Recovery Facility.

We revitalized our urban core area with the completion of our downtown streetscape improvement projects including both Carson and Curry Streets.

We built our state of the art Multi-Purpose Athletic Center (MAC).

We opened the Carson City I-580 bypass. I don't need to tell you how long we waited for that and it is not yet done.

We constructed and repaired several miles of open space trails.

We acquired additional open space, including, the coveted 206 acre Hamm property.

We are in the final stages of upgrading our Community Center Theater and pool.

The V&T Railroad Commission refurbished the original steam Engine 18 which allow the train to add another passenger car when making the trip to Virginia City and back.

And we're just getting started.

With so many infrastructure improvements, you might ask what the effect is on our government operations from an efficiency and financial standpoint. I could give you my take on our financial outlook but a better measure is what a leading independent financial rating firm had to say about us.

Earlier this month, Standard and Poor's gave us an upgrade from a "stable" to a "positive" outlook. This is the first positive rating change we've received since a tick-down at the start of the Great Recession. Carson City was able to maintain its AA rating because, as Standard and Poor's stated, we have "strong management, with strong financial policies and practices."

Together with "strong budgetary performance with an operating surplus in the general fund and a slight operating surplus at the total governmental fund level." Further, we have "very strong budgetary flexibility with an available fund balance in fiscal 2018 of 15 percent of operating expenditures" as well as very strong internal liquidity and strong access to external liquidity." We do, however, have a credit weakness, as do many municipalities, in our pension and Other Post Employee Benefits (OPEB) obligations which combined are 8 percent of our total government fund expenditures.

The positive outlook reflects their opinion that there is a 1 in 3 chance that we could see a raise in our rating if we are able to maintain available reserves at or above the target level relative to our expenditures. I assure you, and I think I speak for the entire Board, that we will not only maintain but improve our target levels for available reserves and we will closely monitor our OPEB and pension obligations.

In addition to infrastructure enhancements, we've made significant improvements in our emergency operations.

The Sheriff is re-implementing a traffic control division. This division was eliminated during the Great Recession cut-backs. Also, all law enforcement personnel were provided body cameras. Related to this, we have taken major steps to ensure the interoperability of our communication systems so we can efficiently and effectively communicate not just among our own folks but throughout other agencies as well.

On the topic of fighting crime, our community crime rate continues to decline. Our law enforcement personnel are right up there with the best in the nation and a model for other jurisdictions. As you undoubtedly know, our own Sheriff Furlong, along with other law enforcement agencies, just recently apprehended a serial-murder suspect. This is just one example of how these brave men and women put on their boots every day and tackle a myriad of issues that keep you and me safe. A heart-felt thank you to our men and women in law enforcement.

Speaking of boots, our Fire Department continues to provide excellent service with a goal of responding within 4 minutes to a call for help. Think about that and the obvious dividends when it comes to life safety. Just one example of this is when our firefighters saved the life of an 8 year old boy that was trapped and unconscious in an upstairs apartment fire this past May.

Our firefighters got to this young man in the nick of time and were able to remove him by ladder and immediately start advanced life-support measures. I'm happy to report that this young man has made a complete recovery. For our firefighters and paramedics such heroic efforts are just part of the job. They do it well, not just for us in Carson City but for those in need elsewhere such as providing help and support for our neighbors to the West during the Camp and Carr fires. Our Fire Department is also a model for other jurisdictions. In fact, last year they provided training for the Chilean Bomberos, a group of Chilean firefighters that came all the way to our great city to be trained by the best.

Our Health Department is also keeping us healthy and safe. It provided some 5000 flu shots, including, using a convenient drive-thru clinic and just recently completed a door-to-door community emergency preparedness assessment and implemented a new food establishment rating system. Our Health Department is also helping to address our homeless and affordable housing challenges. On that issue, let me give a hat tip to Mary Jane Ostrander who, on a daily basis, seeks help and lodging assistance for those in need and for our most vulnerable population such as our elderly and disabled.

Our Senior Center continues to provide much needed services to our elderly and disabled. This past year, the Center provided some 135,287 meals, 90,552 through Meals on Wheels and 44,735 at the Center itself. Senior Center personnel also provided 1,772 hours of case management services for seniors in need. Another hat tip goes to last year's Chamber Leadership class for refreshing the Senior Center lobby. If you haven't seen it, take a look and while you are at it maybe make a donation to Meals on Wheels or become a volunteer.

The newly refreshed Senior Center building isn't the only place in the City where you'll find great art. Mark Salinas, our Arts and Culture Coordinator, has made it his mission to display art wherever he can find a blank canvas. Even the walls of City Hall have been touched by Mark. And just wait, all those people coming in to the Reno Tahoe Airport this month will be greeted by Carson City art.

Mark has raised the visibility of our arts and culture efforts not only in our community but statewide and nationally as well. For the first time in ten years we received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts which provided the funds and support for the Big Read. As you know, the Big Read in Carson City was based on the novel, True Grit, and received the Chamber's "Best Event in 2018" award.

On the horizon, the Arts and Culture Coordinator, with the able assistance of our Cultural Commission, is writing the City's public art policy which, when done, will be the first of its kind in Nevada.

I want to welcome our new director of the Culture and Tourism Authority (CTA). David Peterson. In addition to overseeing the CTA, will work closely with the City Manager, department directors and public officials to entice folks to visit our great city with all its amenities. If you didn't already know, the CTA won 1st place for the Events and Outdoors Visitors Guide and 2nd place for the Arts and Culture Visitors Guide in 2018 from the Nevada Press Association as well receiving the 2018 Excellence in Tourism award for the Reno/Tahoe Territory from the Nevada Division of Tourism.

It's not just a great time to visit Carson City — it's also a great time to build in Carson City. Your Planning Department saw the highest valuation of building permits in the City's history. Zoning change applications reached the level last seen in 2007.

We're continuing to make progress on our complete street projects. We began with the transformation of Carson Street in the downtown area. Next is the South Carson Street makeover. To accomplish this, we have acquired South Carson Street from the State of Nevada and have been awarded a \$7.5M TIGER grant from the Federal Department of Transportation to be used in conjunction with local funds. These are highly competitive grants. Carson City's project was one of only 41 out of 452 applications in the nation to receive this grant. Our check was personally delivered by none other than the Secretary of Transportation herself.

Speaking of transportation, ridership on JAC continues to annually increase with ridership growing over 100 percent since 2007 and 9 percent since the previous fiscal year. Translated into ridership this means that in 2018 we saw 195,160 fixed route riders and 28,188 paratransit riders. I am told that JAC is one of only a handful transit companies in the nation to see ridership increases of this magnitude. They are a pretty nice ride. I encourage you to ride on a JAC bus yourself.

We continue to do improvements in our community designed to not only benefit today's generation but the generations of tomorrow. This past December, the City awarded a 15 year Solid Waste and Recycle Franchise Agreement that will bring reduced costs to both commercial and residential customers together with additional services, including, curbside single-stream recycling and green waste pickup.

Our City continues on its march to keep up with technology. We are in the process of a major city-wide technology implementation. This is going to change how the City does business. Not only will these changes make government more transparent, more user-friendly for the public, but it will revolutionize some of the draconian methods that have been used by the City for decades, making it more efficient for our employees.

Another hat tip, this one goes to the clerk/recorders office for conducting an error-free election process. We are fortunate that these folks had the foresight and fortitude to break from the pack and choose an election software and hardware vendor that delivered results. When jurisdictions were reporting difficulties with their election systems on election night, our folks were done and waiting for the go ahead to release information. Well done!

This past year also saw major changes at our own Western Nevada College, not the least of which is the creation of a 21st century learning library and the arrival of a new college president, Vince Solis. I can assure you Vince thinks outside the box and he doesn't let any grass grow under his feet. Welcome to our community, Vince.

I want to also recognize our City library which was named a finalist for the 2018 National Medal for Museum and Library Services. By the way, if you haven't visited our library lately, take a tour. It recently underwent a refresh just in time to play host to some moon rocks from NASA.

From local infrastructure to the moon and everything in between, we seem to have done it all last year. That brings me to the airport. We welcome Ken Moen to our community as our new airport manager. Ken has hit the ground running and already reported on a study completed by the University of Nevada on the economic impacts of the Carson City Airport on the City. This will be used for marketing and upgrading our airport, all with the goal of bringing more economic development opportunities to our town. Nice job.

And of course, this past year saw the departure of Colonel Nick Marano as our City Manager and the appointment of Nancy Paulsen as our new City Manager. Nancy brings twenty years of working in finance with the City. Her experience has well-prepared her for this role.

On the private side, we saw notable milestones to name but a few:

The Nevada Builders Alliance acquired and is renovating the old Jack's Bar which will be known as the Bank Saloon.

The three-story mixed use building at 308 Curry opened for business with the completion of the Curry streetscape project.

This past Nevada Day was one of the biggest in our history. Even the Vice President stopped in for a visit.

The third year of Epic Rides was the largest yet.

The Chamber's Silver and Snowflake Christmas event was spectacular.

Carson City's Greenhouse Project spearheaded by now former Supervisor Karen Abowd will be receiving the prestigious Golden Pinecone Sustainability Award from GREENevada.

Along those lines, Lynn Zonge won the Andy Aldax Carson River Watershed Award for Exemplary Service in Conservation and Protection of the Carson River Watershed and Kristina Britt, a teacher at Bordewich Bray won the Growing Resources for Environmental Education in Nevada. Well done to all of you.

We are the first city in Nevada to become a Bee City whereby we seek to sustain pollinators. Imperiled pollinators such as honey and bumble bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and the like are responsible for the reproduction of nearly 90 percent of the world's flowing plant species and one in every three bites of food we consume.

Here are some things that we can expect to see in 2019:

Community outreach and planning for the South Carson complete street project will continue with construction set to commence in 2020.

Continued growth in residential and commercial projects throughout the City.

Preparations for a major master plan review which will be the first since 2006 as well as a comprehensive review and update of our zoning codes.

A build-out analysis that will tie existing and future water usage to our projected growth and available water resources.

Online planning and permitting software implementation will add efficiency and make the customer interface with our planning and building department easier to use.

Continued code oversight of our downtown extended stay motels.

Upgrades to the security infrastructure at the Assessor's and Treasurer's offices.

A downtown parking study.

Continued implementation of the City Asset Management Plan. This effort, spearheaded by Supervisor Bonkowski, will enable the City to understand and know the condition of every single asset in the City. It will allow decision-makers now and in the future to make more informed judgments on expenditures and the timing of repairs and replacements which will ultimately provide a better level of service to our businesses and residents. It is a fundamental key to the door of community sustainability.

We will also continue installing renewable energy resources that allows us to manage our utility costs as well as addressing issues related to climate change.

These are good times indeed but even in good times we must work through issues prevalent in all communities.

Affordable housing remains a challenge for us. It is no secret that many can't keep up with the rising rents. Additionally, there is a shortage in supply. Although we have a number of

residential units and apartments either in the development or construction stages, the cost to construct these is high. We are always searching for cost effective ways to help people find affordable housing, however, it really depends on market conditions.

That leads me to homelessness. The Sheriff's office and our Health Department estimate that we have seen about a 30 percent increase in homeless individuals in our community. This is a complex problem. There are many reasons for a person being homeless, some of which are related to personal choices but many of which are related to mental illness. The Mallory Center is one of the few resources in our immediate region that has the ability to assist the drug addicted and mentally ill.

They do a great job but they can't do it all. For example, successful long-term treatment requires a support-structure upon discharge and that's where the community as a whole has to step in.

To that end we are fortunate our community has some resources to address homelessness on both the public and private side.

Between our charitable organizations such as The Bridge, FISH, Ron Wood, the Salvation Army, RSVP and a host of others together with our own Health and Human Services Department staff and the Sheriff's staff and its MOST team led by Beca Bach, we know by name and personality just about every homeless person in and around our community. I have personally visited homeless camps with the Sheriff's staff and can say that given the circumstances, our community does a pretty good job addressing the homeless issue. A hat tip to Deputy Sheriff Craig LeGere who daily keeps tabs on those in need.

On this issue, a big heart-felt thank you to our faith-based community for opening your doors to provide nighttime shelter during the winter for those who are homeless.

This is what we do, we face head-on each issue and together, working as a team, we succeed. The perfect example of this teamwork is what we encountered with our rifle and pistol range. After confirming that errant bullets were escaping the range, we hired an expert to assess it and make recommendations. Together with the community and range users, the City is working to resolve the now known safety issues.

The good news is that we will have a working range for all of us to use and enjoy right where it is currently located and it will meet the required safety standards. We are acutely aware of the inconvenience caused by the partial closure of the range and promise that we will work to rectify the safety issues as expeditiously and efficiently as humanly possible.

I realize this is a lengthy State of the City address. As much as I try to cut things down, there is just too much going on in our community that deserves to be highlighted and I don't want anyone or any organization to feel slighted. As I mentioned at the beginning, the credit for all the good things happening in the community we call home goes to you.

Government can do some things, but it takes you, the community, to build sustainability for succeeding generations and a quality of life that is the envy of all. Just as we pledge our nation to be indivisible when we recite the Pledge of Allegiance, so too is our desire to be one indivisible community.

God Bless our Nation and State with a special blessing for our Community and each and every one of you."