

# **Covina State of the City 2016**

## **March 8, 2016**

### **Remarks Presented By Mayor John King**

#### **Slide 1 – Title Slide “State of the City 2016”**

Dawn Nelson, thank you for your kind introduction and for the Chamber’s partnership in the State of the City Address. And thank you to the sponsors, Casa Moreno, and to everyone here for such a warm welcome.

The State of the City Address is one of my very favorite events. It is a chance to get together as a community, reconnect with friends and colleagues, and recognize individuals, businesses and organizations for their outstanding service to our community.

Most important, it is an opportunity to pause, reflect on, and celebrate what we have accomplished, where we are today, and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead in the years to come.

#### **Slide 2 – A City on the Rise**

This is an exciting time for Covina and I am excited to celebrate our accomplishments from the last year, but even more excited for what lies ahead.

Covina is indeed a City on the rise, and together we have come a long way in a very short time.

The foundation of our City is our people.

- Parents raising their children
- Volunteers devoting their time and energy
- Young and old moving to Covina to begin a new life
- Our businesses contributing to our economic vitality
- Our educators, pastors, and heroes

Covina is City of people, from varied and different backgrounds, all gathered here together with a collective sense of pride in this great City!

#### **Slide 3 – Leadership**

The achievements from this last year are remarkable. It was not the kind of year that you want to have as a mayor. One never kicks off their term as the chair and thinks, it’s time to shake our organization to the core and make difficult decisions that will impact our community for

decades to come. It was a transformational year that included significant foundation-laying work.

However, all of that difficult and foundational work accomplished in 2015 is yielding exciting, tangible results, and we have made excellent progress in our six core strategies.

Everything rises and falls on leadership. Our council is deeply committed to our community and works well together. We believe in the spirit, tradition, and future of this town. Our community is rising today largely because of the leadership team this council hired. Their commitment to working with the City Council on the Strategic Plan and addressing key issues proves that this City is moving forward, and not looking back.

The beginning of 2015 marked a period of significant change in the City's leadership. We attracted a new City Manager, Andrea Miller, who also recruited several new department directors. Andrea is dedicated, creative, and the very model of experience and "can do" that we were so badly needing. She has brought energy, righteous and smart change, and directional corrections to our local government.

As we recruited to fill critical positions, we looked for executives with proven expertise; people who owned the T-Shirt that says "been there, done that." Strong professionals are now in these roles to help get the City to the next level.

Each of the new directors was hired following an extensive outside recruitment, and each brings to the table an unparalleled level of professionalism and extensive experience, training and technical knowledge.

- Director of Human Resources and Risk Management Danielle Tellez is implementing best practices in risk management, employee training and development, and recruitment.
- Public Works Director Siobhan Foster is addressing maintenance issues that have been deferred for many years, developing long-term capital improvement and pavement management plans, and establishing a high standard of care for all City facilities.
- Community Development Director Brian Lee is working to ensure the development and building process is user-friendly and encourages rather than discourages investment in the community.
- Interim Director of Finance Dennis Swink is revising the City's budget process and document to promote transparency, implementing long-term financial planning tools designed to ensure resources are available to meet service demands, establishing internal controls, and positioning the organization to attract a highly skilled, talented Finance Director who will serve the City permanently.

- Candice Lee our new city attorney. Candice has brought strong legal counsel to our leadership and has shown the grace, strength, and wisdom that a truly fine attorney can bring to any situation or challenge. We are very thankful to have Candice as a member of our team.

These new executives are working effectively with leaders who have served this community very well for many years and who have experience and proven records of success in Covina –

- Our long time Police Chief Kim Raney who after an entire career of serving this great community, has announced that he will be retiring in the coming year after helping to find someone that will love and serve this community with the same vigor and dedication that he has.
- Parks, Recreation and Library Services Director Amy Hall-McGrade who also has spent her career in the service of our citizens and shares her love and expertise with and for this community at every turn. We could not ask for a more dedicated professional.

Each member of the executive team has a breadth and depth of knowledge and expertise which is just what we need. Our executive team is complete, symbiotic and fully functional. We are proving the old adage that the whole truly is greater than the sum of its parts.

#### Slide 4 – Common-sense Plan for the Future

Within City Hall, we are setting a tone of collaboration.

When we work together, trust and respect one another, come together and share ideas, listen to concerns, develop compromises, and create a shared vision, we achieve great things.

This council and leadership team is united around a common-sense plan for a more prosperous future.

We are in the midst of helping Covina become a truly world class city while retaining our small town charm, our strong community centered values, and our sense of being and place that make Covina so special.

#### Slide 5 – Strategic Planning

In August, the Council embarked on a series of strategic discussions that established a mission for the organization, a vision and a set of guiding principles or values that guide our actions. A clear statement of where the City is going and how it intends to get there was established. This unites all five of us on the council in a common purpose and gives clear direction to our leadership on the way forward.

These important discussions ensure there is alignment in the City Council's vision and expectations for the community and the City as an organization. They build upon the City's strengths, position the City to take advantage of opportunities, and build on the fact that Covina a great place to live, work and invest.

These discussions also formed the basis of our core strategies and a set of multi-year goals that guide decisions, objectives and strategies for each goal, and provide a plan for implementation and accountability.

The six core strategies identified and adopted by the City Council include:

- Provide a safe and secure community.
- Enhance the quality of life.
- Promote a strong, diverse local economy.
- Develop a responsive, inclusive, participatory and transparent City government focused on customer service.
- Secure a sound, sustainable financial strategy for the future.
- Maintain and improve Covina's infrastructure.

#### Slide 6 – Economic Development

The heart of our strategic plan focuses on customer service, making Covina a location of choice for business and developers – important job creators for our city.

A focused effort is underway to streamline our planning and approval process, decreasing the time it takes to achieve approvals. Strides have been made, resulting in a notable difference. We have established a one-stop shop for planning and development, as well as a consolidated development review committee.

Businesses are a vital and critical part of Covina's economy, creating jobs for our residents and graduates. Groups such as the Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Merchants Association, supported by the Small Business Administration and the San Gabriel Valley Small Business Development Centers, are assisting our businesses through training, education, and technical support; loans and grants; and helping to cut through red tape, and opening doors or opportunity wider for our local entrepreneurs.

#### Slide 7 – Zoning

The City's General Plan and Zoning Codes are outdated and do not reflect modern business practices. Period.

Many new and emerging business models are not even addressed. (Alosta Brewery Example)

The City's Planning Commission is conducting a series of study sessions, taking the Zoning Code apart, piece by piece; evaluating the existing regulations; reviewing best practices implemented in other cities; identifying modern regulations; receiving input from the community and local businesses and investors; and will be making recommendations to the City Council in the near future.

Updated codes will enable the City staff to evaluate new potential businesses and find a way to say yes to businesses that would bring much needed revenue to the City and create jobs.

We encourage the Chamber, local developers, and all of our businesses to participate in this process. Attend these meetings; and help us ensure we understand the challenges you have and propose ways the City can support your efforts.

At the same time, we are reviewing regulations and permits that impact business operations to eliminate conflicting provisions and ensure the regulations are reasonable and clear.

We are working to ensure existing businesses have local access to regional resources such as training, staff development, loans, and technical support offered through the Small Business Development Centers.

#### **Slide 8 – Development**

This fresh, customer-centric approach to the Community Development and Planning process is already achieving results.

More than 200 new businesses opened in Covina in 2015. Let's stop and celebrate that for a moment - 200 new businesses in our community.

Thanks to the addition of new businesses and an improved economic climate, the City's Sales Tax revenue has grown at an average of 6% per year over the past three years versus an average of 4% for California as a whole. New businesses include Sage Chevrolet, Howards Appliances and Old World Deli. I can't get into specific amounts of sales tax generated by any one business but Covina continues to be a very good place to locate your business. I'm proud that Old World decided that Covina is the right place to call home and even more excited that we have a genuine auto row back in existence and thriving along Citrus Avenue! Howards coming to Covina was a major victory for our community and shows that business owners and operators are expecting Covina to thrive and be a vibrant location for retailers.

#### **Slide 9 – Building, Construction and Permits**

Another marker of successful economic development is the investment of capital to improve and expand business operations and maintenance, including existing buildings and housing stock.

During the calendar year of 2015 more than \$1million a month in private investment moved through our development counter at City Hall.

We are in continual improvement mode, especially in terms of customer service, but we recognize the hard work of the planning and building divisions for their extra efforts with minimal staffing.

This is an example of how Covina is turning opportunity into action.

We have geared up to handle the workload through the hiring of a new Community Development Director and brought on a new team including a Building Official, building inspectors, plan checkers, and permit technicians. Additionally, we have hired on an as needed basis, additional planners to facilitate this wave of development in our city that begins with millions of dollars of private investment. Breaking ground in the coming year is the construction of 63 new single family detached housing units that will include a brand new 2 acre park at the former Banna Elementary School site. These innovative developments continue the momentum of the changes, helping to build the critical mass that is necessary to generate private investment in Covina.

#### Slide 10 – Kmart

Over the last several months, there have been ongoing discussions about the former Kmart site on Citrus Avenue. This 10 ½ acre site has been vacant for more than a year.

The building has become attractive to the homeless and vandals, and the site is overgrown with weeds.

MLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Meritage Homes, acquired the property, and the City and Foothill Transit have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding to develop this site. While a lot of work remains to be completed, we are hopeful this public-private partnership will feature a mix of commercial and technology related businesses anchored by an event center, a public transit “park and ride,” and housing.

Research tells us that the expectations of empty nesters and millennials are creating new opportunities in the housing arena. Characteristics they are seeking when choosing where to live include: access to multi-faceted transit networks; multiple housing options; walkable communities; and stimulating downtown style environments. We have all of those things right here in Covina and so much more.

Our long-term planning efforts must focus on meeting the needs of the next generation and those looking to downsize and connect. There are plenty of opportunities here in Covina to do just that.

### Slide 11 – City Ventures

City Ventures is a mixed use project on the site of the former Russ Davis Ford dealership. This project along Citrus Avenue will feature commercial properties along the Downtown corridor and housing to the rear. As many of you are aware, this project is still in litigation at present, but we are hopeful this litigation will be concluded next month and development can begin on this site soon after.

### Slide 12 – Other development on the horizon

There are also a number of other exciting projects on the horizon, and while I am unable to provide specific details at these early stages, let me take a moment to provide you with a glimpse.

Vita Pakt, the largest producer of juice concentrate serving nearly 15 countries, has listed its 8 ½ acre site on Barranca for sale. The sale of this site for development affords an exciting opportunity to dramatically change the landscape of that area, linking this site to the downtown, and creating an attractive frontage highlighting the opportunities in Covina for the nearly 6,000 thousand passengers who pass through the Covina Metrolink station each day.

To our great joy, Vita Pakt has decided to maintain its Administrative Offices in Covina. Vita Pakt is an important piece of Covina's rich history as one of the first packing houses and citrus processors in the region, and we are so pleased they will remain here, maintaining their historic presence in our community.

The Alberstons Site on Azusa has a new owner. The new ownership group is motivated to develop this site in a way that benefits the community. A new restaurant (that I think you will all enjoy even though it is not Steak N Shake) has signed a letter of intent, and the City staff is working with the owners to attract other potential commercial users to the site.

### Slide 13 – Workforce Development

Economic development must go hand in hand with workforce development so we can provide skilled labor and appropriate levels of professional support for existing businesses.

We cannot expect manufacturing jobs, or any job, to stay in our region if we do not create workforce training opportunities.

We cannot expect our existing businesses to grow if we are not providing well-suited employees, and we will continue to work with our local schools and institutes of higher education to ensure we are creating opportunities.

An exciting example of this is a project that might take an under-utilized, vacant storefront in the Downtown and transform it into a place where Covina Valley students can learn small business skills in a real life setting, actually operating a business. While all of the details are still being worked out, we are so excited to partner with the Covina Valley Unified School District and pleased that one of our local commercial property owners is working with us on this important effort, helping to fill a void in the Downtown and supporting the education of our students.

#### Slide 14 – Infrastructure Investment

We are investing more in our streets and sidewalks, our parks and library, and City Hall.

Providing the infrastructure for people to get to work through walking, biking, public transit, and streets boosts our local economy. Traffic congestion costs businesses due to time employees spend stuck in traffic. Businesses see tangible benefits in improving access.

The investment that communities make in maintaining their public infrastructure can also stimulate far greater private investment.

We are finalizing a 5 year Pavement Management Plan that could upgrade all of the City's streets in a short time. There is a price tag to that effort and we anticipate we will know what this looks like in the coming months. We will be creative in identifying potential funding sources to make this project a reality and find ways to ensure Covina's infrastructure receives the care it needs. Once the plan is completed, information will be available on the City's website so our community members can determine when work will be completed in their area.

#### Slide 15 – Public Facilities

In the past, a strong local economy involved attracting large companies by offering inexpensive locations and a cheap labor force. The qualities of the particular place mattered little; people migrated to where the jobs were.

That paradigm has changed. Now, communities with lively destinations and business districts, cultural and recreational attractions, a great sense of place with open space, and a deep sense of community pride that are easily reached by walking and public transportation enjoy a distinct advantage.

*Quality of Life* has become a key economic driver. Factors such as quality health care facilities, cultural institutions, vibrant public spaces, and recreation opportunities are crucial in attracting



a skilled labor force and desirable employers. Think for a moment about our great center for the performing arts and the many events, concerts, and festivals that span our parks and community each year.

Covina truly offers an amazing quality of life, and the City Council is committed to maintaining that heritage and prize within our community.

This year, we celebrated the Grand Opening of Cougar Park, a one-acre facility that features a splash pad, playground equipment, outdoor fitness equipment, a community building, a community garden, and historical display panels and a mural.

The Council recently committed \$2.19 million for the acquisition of approximately 2 acres of land at the former Banna School site for the construction of another new park. The community will be invited to participate in the design of that community space.

We continue to review, identify, and evaluate potential locations for a new community and senior center and are looking at improvements to other recreation facilities - all with the goal of creating more open space and attractive gathering areas through an open and collaborative process with our community.

#### Slide 16 – Downtown Specific Plan

Downtown Covina is one of the most charming and unique areas in our community; Downtown Covina creates this tremendously strong sense of place that most communities only dream about.

The preference for walkable neighborhoods is increasing as today's young college graduates flock to downtowns and "close to work or job center" suburbs, creating a workforce that can further add to our local economic growth.

And it is not just sidewalks: but also bike paths and design elements such as street trees that create this sense of place and add value to neighboring properties and increase property taxes.

Development opportunities along Citrus are critical as we work to get people off the Metrolink and encourage them to walk to the Downtown to take advantage of the unique restaurants and shops. Development opportunities exist in Covina, and we are working to maximize these opportunities in a manner that promotes the long-term success and economic viability of the Downtown district.

Features like plazas, wider sidewalks, landscaping, traffic calming, and redesign of the street for pedestrians can spur private investment, increase sales tax revenue, and create new jobs. As development opportunities present themselves, we will ensure we take advantage of opportunities to maintain and enhance the charm of our Downtown while promoting our local businesses.

### Slide 17 – Police

We must continue to aggressively address crime in our city, sending a message that is loud and clear that criminal elements are not welcome in Covina!

When police officers and community members know each other like they do here in Covina; when police know the neighborhood, know the people, and build trust and relationships like they do here in Covina, we send a message that crime will not be tolerated. Relationships and building trust – This is the heart of our approach to tackling crime.

The City and Covina Police Department is working to maintain the trusting relationships we have developed and are committed to respecting these relationships and continuing to build upon this strong foundation. Each of our officers are truly part of the community they protect and serve.

These officers don't just patrol the streets. They coach basketball teams, coordinate after-school programs and they teach our young people leadership, develop conflict resolution skills, and build esteem.

### Slide 18 – Jarno

This year, with the generosity of many of you in this room, Jarno, a 27 month old Belgian Malinois, was sworn in as the first K-9 Officer in the City in many years.

Jarno is deployed on the streets, assisting officers in locating and detaining suspects. We anticipate Jarno will continue his training in the coming months developing into an even more treasured and useful member of the PD.

Jarno is also a local hero, balancing requests for classroom demonstrations and appearances at local service clubs with meeting folks of ill intent at locations and times of their choosing...

### Slide 19 – Citywide Camera System

The Citywide Camera System was launched this year. This system incorporates a combination of a state-of-the-art camera systems designed and installed by Leverage Information Systems and the human element of live monitoring by police personnel.

The initial deployment of cameras includes the Police Station, City Hall, Heritage and Cougar Parks, and Covina's downtown. Cameras at the Police Department and City Hall provide additional security for employees and the public. Additional features include the ability to easily record statements in interview rooms and check on those housed in the Covina Jail without physically entering a cell. Cameras at Heritage and Cougar Park use a mix of fixed and

pan/tilt/zoom cameras and a thermal imaging camera that can alert police if someone is in the park after closing.

We have had success in identifying and addressing criminal activity with the deployment of this new technology and are currently working with the School Districts to expand this technology to Covina's schools.

The City Council's highest priority is your safety. And that means making sure that when you need help, you get it quickly.

#### Slide 20 – Terrorism

Not surprisingly, concerns about terrorism have increased following the attack in San Bernardino. Before this tragic event, Covina's Police Department and the Los Angeles County Fire Department worked together at unprecedented levels to ensure that our first responders are prepared for any crisis. I know that our first responders are well-trained and connected to our community.

#### Slide 21 – Disaster Response

Do you remember the Northridge quake? That temblor shook the earth for seven seconds. The next one--the Big One--could shake the earth for two minutes.

I hope this earthquake will not happen in our lifetimes at all. But it **will** happen; it's long overdue.

We are currently evaluating the City's disaster response plans, training our staff, conducting exercises and working to ensure we are prepared to respond to a disaster in our community should one occur.

#### Slide 22 – Neighborhood Watch

Great neighborhoods create great cities. Neighbors are the fastest first responders when problems arise. So we must continue to empower our neighborhood groups.

Covina has more than 45 neighborhoods engaged in this program and actively promoting crime awareness. These groups are also preparing themselves and their neighbors for emergencies, conducting regular meetings, and serving as the additional eyes and ears for our law enforcement team.

These efforts empower our neighborhood groups who remain valuable partners that turn opportunity into action, every year.

### Slide 23 – Homelessness

It is unacceptable that we have homelessness. It is devastating for the people who need critical services and it impacts everyone's quality of life and our businesses. There is no easy solution, so I am proud of the commitment we made in our community to address this problem by attacking it on multiple fronts.

We have changed the way we address homelessness. Instead of simply and only investing in a bed or a meal, we are now more holistically investing in people.

We have kicked off a new approach, with some incredible partners in our community – the Volunteers of America and Union Station who are teaming up with local faith and community groups – that focus on addressing the roots of homelessness.

Outreach workers are making contact with homeless in Covina to transition them off the streets to shelters with supportive services under one roof. We are on the right path and have been able to change the lives of a handful, but there is still much more to do.

Funding for homeless services in the San Gabriel Valley comes from the County, State and Federal governments, so we will continue to call on these agencies to provide the resources this region needs to address this critical issue and provide the opportunity for all to share in the City's success.

We also recognize there are some in the community who have mental health issues. In cooperation with partners from the County of Los Angeles and the cities of Azusa, Covina, Glendora and West Covina, we were able to form the East San Gabriel Mental Evaluation Team (ESGMET), which is comprised of officers from the partner cities and a clinician from the Department of Mental Health under the direction of the Emergency Outreach Bureau.

The Mental Evaluation Team assists those in need of mental health and social services programs and aids patrol officers to handle calls for service involving persons suffering from a mental health crisis.

### Slide 24 – Customer Service at City Hall

This City Council never forgets that this is your City government, and it is here to serve you.

Under the leadership of our City Manager and Executive Team, we are making City Hall more responsive, results-driven and accountable to the public.

A new reception area is being created in City Hall. This new area will be staffed by a City employee who will receive visitors to City Hall, identify the reason for their visit, and direct

them to the appropriate employee. This will avoid visitors wandering the hallways looking for the correct place in City Hall to obtain the service needed.

A main telephone line to City Hall will also be answered by the new receptionist and calls directed. While callers will still be able to call City departments directly if they have the telephone numbers and prefer to do this, but they will be able to use one telephone number if they are not familiar with the organization or do not know what department is responsible for the issue they are inquiring about.

We are establishing clear performance standards at City Hall and creating a culture of service.

#### **Slide 25 – Transparency and Engagement**

This year, we redesigned and rebranded the City newsletter, Covina Today, to enhance the readability of the publication. The content was expanded to include relevant and timely information on City programs and services, and we were able to increase the frequency of distribution from 3 times per year to 6.

The City's website is out of date and hard to navigate. It is being redesigned so it is more modern, easy to use, and includes relevant, timely information.

At the same time, we are working to enhance electronic access to information and documents.

#### **Slide 26 – Commissions**

Public involvement is crucial to the City's decision-making process, and appointed advisory bodies are an important and valued part of City government.

So much of decision-making process benefits from the advice and counsel of qualified residents.

By advising the City Council and staff, bringing new ideas to the table, and representing all of the diverse elements of our community, members of advisory bodies assist the City Council in making the best, most informed decisions possible, for the benefit of the entire Covina community.

Some of our current commissions offered suggestions about how we can make their service to the community more meaningful. Based on this feedback, we are implementing a structure that adds additional training, clarifies roles and areas of responsibility, ensures members have the tools and resources to effectively carry out their responsibilities, and recognizes the valuable service being provided to the community.

### Slide 27 – Faith Based Groups and the Community Service Day

Our faith based community and community service organizations are so important and these partners assist this community in addressing significant issues. Community Service Day every year brings hundreds together to serve the community and those in need within our region. Many of our churches have food pantry ministries and bring tangible help and love to so many. I am reminded of the Assembly of God's annual event where children from lower income families receive Christmas presents and food to help their family. There is also an event that happens each August in Covina Park sponsored by Project 29:11 that provides school supplies, school clothes, food and health screenings to literally thousands that line up around the perimeter of Covina Park to receive these gifts. Service clubs support our community in specific ways and help sponsor many of the programs that we enjoy such as the summer concerts in Covina Park. We are blessed, and thankful to have so many in our community that take their calling to help others so seriously, and conduct their work of mercy and help here in Covina.

### Slide 28 – Finances

This year, the City Council adopted a budget that was structurally balanced following the elimination of 22 positions and the implementation of cost savings measures. We are continuing to identify ways to reduce our costs and make our organization more efficient and more responsive and ensuring that more of our tax dollars are available to be used for community improvements.

At the same time, we are working to increase revenues by attracting new businesses and development.

The City Council is committed to saving for our future and building a more robust rainy day reserve while continuing to make investments in our community.

### Slide 29 – Conclusion

Covina is truly on the rise and we are moving quickly from good to great! Covina has turned opportunity into action in 2015; and we will continue that momentum in the years to come.

As I mentioned at the very start of this discussion: everything rises and falls on leadership.

Long-term planning is one of the most important functions of leaders, especially those who hold public office. We, as the members of city council, are blessed with the responsibility of governance and decision making for cities and our future. These are responsibilities that we take seriously and undertake with heart, vision, and creativity.

We simply must act and move carefully with an eye on the longer-term opportunities when making decisions on behalf of our community. And we must include more of the public in the process -- thoughtful residents, our business leaders, students and young leaders. And then we

must have the fortitude and strength to make the difficult decisions that are in the best interest of our entire city and its future generations, focusing on long-term investment rather than short-term thinking. ***This*** is the culture we are creating in Covina City Hall.

I close by remembering our two fallen officers and heroes who perished in the service of this community, Sargent Scott Hanson and Motor Officer Jordan Corder. Our community remembers their sacrifice and deeply honors their memory. I wear these two bands to help me recall their service and love for Covina every single day. As a community, as an organization, as people who care about our police, we must never forget these two amazing men of Covina.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today and thank you for your dedication to Covina, our hometown...our wonderful community. God Bless each and every one of you.

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