

## **2019 SOTC – Renton, WA; 02/28/2019**

“They’re coming to America.”

Certainly not breaking news! This Neil Diamond song became a hit nearly 40 years ago.

The fact is, “they have come to America,” and not just from European nations.

Politicians from the nation’s capital continue to argue over building walls. In Renton we’re focusing our efforts on building an inclusive city for all our residents.

Since this is likely my last “State of the City,” I decided to use Neil Diamond and this video to kick-off my comments this morning. I plan to highlight some of the things I feel we have achieved as a city.

One achievement deals with diversity and inclusion. I feel we have made great progress in making our community more inclusive for everybody.

But before getting into some of the progress we’ve made, I want to go back 12 years when I first moved into the mayor’s office.

Things still looked pretty bright for this region.

As you will recall, overnight the nation was thrust into the worst recession since the Great Depression. At the same time, the population in Renton increased significantly with the annexation of the Cascade/Benson community. My visions of having a big checkbook with lots of money for pet projects dropped as fast as the stock market.

Welcome to City Hall!

But despite all of the challenges we faced for several years, our team of dynamic administrators managed to reinvent how we did business. We dramatically revamped our leadership and management techniques. Our ways of doing business changed, and so did productivity and efficiency.

Most importantly, the culture and morale of our workforce changed to one that provides a high level of quality service to our customers every day.

While some local jurisdictions are struggling with red ink in their budget forecasts, Renton continues to be financially healthy. And our cash reserves remain strong for future years.

We finished 2018 well over budget in revenues while having spent much less than we anticipated.

Not too bad for government work!

As I begin to highlight some of what helps Renton to be a desired place to live, work, learn and play, I want to give credit where it truly belongs.

Most CEOs and leaders of successful organizations share one common strategy: surrounding themselves with talented people able to achieve high goals.

Since taking office in 2008, I have been very fortunate to work with top-notch department leaders. Today, we are a better city thanks to a well-trained, dedicated workforce who are led by these administrators.

It's important to note that we've had nearly every administrator retire during my time in office, and yet their successors here today, have not lost a beat in their commitment for continued improvement.

I want to take a moment to introduce them to you.

**Bob Harrison**, Chief Administrative Officer. Bob joined Renton last May with the retirement of Jay Covington, who was with this city for nearly 28 years. For the past seven years, Bob held a similar position with the city of Issaquah.

**Gregg Zimmerman**: Gregg is the only administrator who I have worked with for the past 12 years.

- He has been with the city for 29 years and is the Public Works Department administrator. And he's threatening to retire early next year.
- Gregg has 162 employees in his department, and they oversee all of our roads, fleet, and all transportation issues.
- He has staff that oversees our utility systems, which includes water, sewer, storm water and surface water needs.
- And his staff operates our airport.

**Chip Vincent** is the administrator over Community and Economic Development. He has nearly 60 employees who are responsible for

- Building inspections, code enforcement
- Planning, engineering and permitting,
- And Economic Development, which has been instrumental in our efforts to recruit quality development and new employers to the city

**Kelly Beymer** is in charge of the Community Services Department. Her 97 employees oversee a ton of different areas in the city, many that contribute to the quality of life of our community including:

- Her staff is responsible for parks and trails and all park planning
- Recreation and Neighborhood Program
- Community events
- Golf Course and Museum
- Human Services, Senior Center and programs
- And her staff is responsible for the maintenance and operation of all city facilities

**Ed VanValey** is our newest administrator. I appointed Ed to Chief of Police last September with the retirement of Kevin Milosevich. Ed is homegrown – a graduate of Lindbergh High School and first started with the city in our park department before entering the Army. He has 21 years with Renton PD.

- Ed oversees 164 sworn and non-commission personnel responsible for the most critical services needed for any quality city.

The Finance, Human Resources and City Attorney Departments have fewer numbers of employees, but play a significant role in the ability for all other departments to be successful.

**Jan Hawn** is the Administrative Services Administrator. She oversees our Finance Department, IT Division and the City Clerk's office.

**Ellen Bradley-Mak** is our Human Resources and Risk Management administrator. Her staff deals with all recruiting and employee needs, benefits, training, and also Risk Management for the City.

Last but certainly not least is **Shane Moloney**, our City Attorney.

- His staff includes civil attorneys and prosecutors who represent this city on all legal matters.

You might ask, "what about the fire department?" As you'll recall, voters approved the formation of the Renton Regional Fire Authority two years ago, which puts the department under its own administration. It's important to know that we still consider them a part of the city family and work closely with them on a daily basis.

As I mentioned a few minutes ago, addressing inclusion is one of our success stories.

***Diversity. Equity. Social justice. Inclusion.***

These are popular buzz-words that many jurisdictions have tossed around for years.

There have been countless studies the last 25 years on the changing demographics of this nation. And there has been plenty of discussion on the need for real progress in understanding and addressing diversity, equity and inclusion.

In Renton, this topic has moved from merely political buzz-words to a recognized new way of doing business.

In the past 20 years, Renton has grown significantly in both population and diversity. Our community is considered “minority-majority,” with more than 51% of our population represented by people of color.

So is Bellevue, and many other local cities.

I feel Renton is helping to lead the way on inclusiveness and equity in this region.

We have made significant progress in establishing meaningful relationships with leaders from all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Early on, I formed the [Mayor’s Inclusion Task Force](#), representing nearly every ethnic and religious group in Renton, as well as our LGBTQ and senior populations.

We have improved communications and services to communities where English is not their first language.

- All city employees receive diversity and implicit bias training so that we have a much better understanding on how to serve our residents.
- We have gone to a “blind” application process that reduces the chance for biases to slip into our recruitment and hiring practices.
- Renton Police established a partnership with the Renton African American Pastors with a commitment to build a better understanding and positive relationships between police and our residents.
- Similar efforts are being developed with other local groups.

- And one major accomplishment: we actively recognize and celebrate the diversity of our community.

Our efforts to become a more inclusive city have been led by **Preeti Shridhar** and **Benita Horn**. As a testament to their success, these two are called upon from jurisdictions around the country to share our strategy and successes.

I should note that in her spare time, Preeti is also in charge of our Communications Department, Government Affairs and just about anything else that comes up in the mayor's office.

Over this past decade, we have significantly improved the level of other city services we provide every day.

Besides inclusiveness, we have embraced the following priorities that were established as our work-plan by the City Council:

- Providing a safe, healthy and welcoming atmosphere where people choose to live
- Promoting economic vitality and strategically positioning our city for the future
- Supporting planned growth and influencing decisions that impact the city
- Providing high-quality customer service with a commitment to excellence

I want to highlight a few of the accomplishments these departments have achieved.

**Public safety has always been a top priority.**

Having a safe community to raise your family or operate a business is critical to any city.

Achieving this goal involves collaboration by nearly every department in one way or another.

We remain committed to help make our residents feel safe in their neighborhoods and throughout the community.

We're also using the commitment and talent of our officers to respond to crime in creative ways to reduce the impact on our residents.

Crime, and the fear of crime, is a big challenge for every city. Chief VanValey is leading a dynamic group of dedicated well-trained police officers, committed to the goals we have for public safety.

Our commitment to making Renton a safe place to live and work is evident in many ways.

- The city council has continually supported requests for additional officers, equipment and training space.
- Ongoing training has created a culture where de-escalation and making every effort to avoid the necessity to use force is the norm.
- A number of new initiatives and ordinances have been instituted to build trust and strong relationships between police and the public.
- We are leading the region on a number of enforcement and investigative tools such as the effective use of drones.
- And despite recruitment challenges for police officers in this region, Renton continues to hire top-notch candidates locally and from across the country.

**Our Public Works Department** is the largest department in the city and includes streets, transportation systems and city utilities including water and sewer services.

This division has been instrumental in a lot of changes that we've seen in Renton since 2008.

- They have managed investments of over \$155 million for improvements and new roads.

- Renton was one of the first cities in Washington to convert all of its street lights to LED, saving hundreds of thousands annually in electrical costs.
- Our transportation staff has worked closely with Boeing to accommodate a record number of 737's launched each month from our airport.
- Renton is finally poised to receive some benefit from the years of contributions to Sound Transit.
  - \$200 million will be spent to build a new transit center planned at Rainier and Grady Way. The addition of Bus Rapid Transit along 405, with two stops in Renton, will be a huge benefit for Renton commuters.

One of the biggest service improvements for our residents was from the Utility Division. Renton was the first city in the state to implement an automated water meter reading system for over 18,000 meters. To date, this system has detected 4,612 leaks at homes and businesses that prevented the loss of 126 million gallons of water and further damage. This saved property owners approximately **\$430,000**.

- Renton was also one of the first cities in the state to implement a comprehensive recycling and composting program. We have diverted nearly 230,000 tons of recyclables and compostable materials from the landfills.

In addition to saving tax dollars while also improving the environment, our Public Works staff have embraced our commitment to improved customer service. We constantly receive letters of appreciation praising our employees of going the extra mile to solve issues for the public.

How we addressed the recent snow storm is a great example.

Quality of Life has remained one of our top goals. Many people measure the quality of their city by the availability of parks, trails and ongoing recreation programs. History shows that this has always been a priority in Renton.

The Community Service Department continues to do an outstanding job of providing quality open spaces and activities for our residents. And they have embraced the



diversity of our city and are making it easier for everybody to take advantage of the services they provide.

Over the past 10 years, we have added seven new parks. The golf course, Farmer's Market and Renton Museum have continued to draw record crowds. So do major events such as River Days, 4th of July celebration, Multi-Cultural Festival, Cruz the Loop, Clam Lights, Senior Resource Expo and other programs.

Community Service employees also play a major role in addressing homelessness issues in collaboration with police and code enforcement. They work closely with local churches and other service providers in providing food and shelter for those in need.

They also provide services for low income seniors and families. The Housing Repair Assistance program, which helps low income seniors remain in their homes, continues to grow each year.

This department successfully lobbied the State for a million dollar grant for the replacement of the Riverview Bridge over the Cedar River. And you have no doubt noticed all the repair work taking place at Coulon Park. After over 30 years of heavy use, we are working to restore all of the park infrastructure and amenities that have become important to our residents.

It's impossible to mention all of the accomplishments from Community Services over the past 10 years.

- Last year alone, they coordinated our Volunteer Program that resulted in 44,000 hours of service to this city
- The Neighborhood Program has grown to over 100 recognized neighborhoods
- The Parks Planning Division was successful at obtaining over \$7 million In grants for local projects

- We began implementation of a city-wide security camera program to help protect city-owned properties

On top of all this, Community Services oversaw the construction of the new fire station that opened this month, and is taking the lead to oversee the construction of the Family First Community Center in the Cascade/Benson neighborhood.

Moving on to our Community and Economic Development Department:

Many years ago, Renton was considered one of the worst cities in the region by developers. Complaints ranged from an onerous permitting process to inspectors lacking in any semblance of customer service.

Back in the early 90s, with the prompt of local business owners and the Chamber, Mayor Earl Clymer began the process of improving the city's reputation.

A lot has happened since those days. Renton has been considered a leader for a number of years with our permitting process, and this city was one of the first in the region to become proactive at self-marketing and economic development.

You certainly recall the "Ahead of the Curve" slogan that was widely quoted for years and continues today.

Much of the success we have enjoyed over the past 15 to 20 years has been due to the collaboration of what we fondly refer to as "Stakeholders." They have included the City, Chamber, Renton School District, Renton Technical College and Valley Medical Center.

Improving the reputation of a city takes time and requires ongoing attention. The partnership between the "stakeholders" continues today.

And think where we are today.

Instead of the worst city in which to develop, Renton has become a sought-after place to invest, locate business and to live and raise families. The goals set years ago to change the way we do business continues to pay huge dividends.

Three internal departments that don't receive as much public attention for their contributions include Administrative Services (our Finance, IT and City Clerk), Human Resources and City Attorney.

Each of these departments plays a huge role in the success of city operations.

They make sure that our financial planning and execution is done correctly.

Our HR department has facilitated training that has resulted in a much improved workforce. They have also helped us achieve some of our goals on diversity through implicit bias training for all employees and changes in our recruitment practices, including blind applications.

And our City Attorney's staff is called upon by all departments to assist in implementing new initiatives, from new development to law enforcement strategies.

The results of these changes, and the commitment by our employees, can be seen throughout the city.

Our community is much more inclusive today and will continue to improve.

We're a safer community with a committed police force dedicated to reducing crime, building community relations and helping to make people feel safer in our neighborhoods.

Of course we have the Landing, Seattle Seahawks, and the Federal Reserve Bank that chose Renton.

We have thousands of new, family-wage jobs, joining the thousands of jobs at Boeing.

The healthcare industry is growing faster here than any other community.

- Renton is headquarters to two of the largest healthcare providers in the country: Providence Health Systems and Kaiser Permanente. Kaiser has built a large office complex here for thousands of employees, while Valley Medical Center, south King County's premiere medical and trauma center, continues to expand.

We have one of the finest hotels in the region located on the shores of Lake Washington and two new additional hotels just blocks away.

Directly behind the waterfront hotel, a 650,000 square foot Class A office campus is nearing completion.

Hundreds of millions of public and private dollars are being invested as part of the revitalization of the downtown and Sunset Neighborhood. A beautiful, new elementary school opened in the downtown area.

And there is a lot more to come in the next few years!

We will continue to see quality investments made in our city, adding more quality jobs and public amenities. Downtown and the Sunset Neighborhood will become destination locations, where people want to go shop, dine and enjoy special events.

Progress will continue to be made in making Renton a community that is truly inclusive. Celebrating community diversity through festivals and events will become more frequent.

Renton is a special community and its future is bright!