

## **2019 SOTC – Elk Grove, CA; 03/28/2019**

Good Afternoon and welcome.

Thank you to the Chamber, my fellow elected officials, and the many Elk Grove community members and business leaders joining us or tuning in to the online broadcast. As Elk Grove's Mayor, I am honored to speak to you today about the state of our city.

As you may recall, I stood before you at this event last year and proclaimed Elk Grove "A City Under Construction." And while that reference may still hold true today, a shift has happened. In fact, if I had to boil down today's message into a single sentence, I'd say that "We are a City with Momentum."

What does that mean?

Webster's Dictionary defines momentum as "the strength or force gained by motion or by a series of events."

To me, it means we are a city with strength that continues to grow as time passes...

We are Moving closer towards the opening of more new civic amenities than anywhere else in the region.

We are a city Making headway on major projects in favor of new business opportunities;

And we're a city that's Advancing changes in the way we address important social issues like equity and inclusion.

2019 is the year we step on the accelerator and move toward a brighter future.

Many of the building projects I mentioned last year are nearing completion. We are considering new projects and possibilities for our city. We are clearly not the Sacramento suburb we once were. But change shouldn't make us feel uneasy, it should make us feel proud and hopeful that our city is thriving successfully.

To quote the Lebanese American author, Khalil Gibran (Ka-leel Gee-bran),  
“Progress lies not in enhancing what is, but in advancing toward what will be.”

Two months from now, the City will open the new aquatics center and our partner agency, the CSD will operate it under a Management Agreement. While it's true, there have been delays on this project, the Council and staff felt it was more important that the project get done right, rather than quickly. This new facility will deliver the city's first new public pools in more than a decade (Wackford opened in 2004) and serve the sports and recreational needs of the community. The project pairs the skills and strengths of the City together with experience of the CSD to build and operate this new space. The aquatic center will offer three pools, including the largest competition pool in Elk Grove. Other amenities will include a lazy river, café, dual waterslides, and space for spectators, parties, and lounging around.

I know a lot of kids and adults have been waiting a very long time for this facility to open, but the wait is nearly over. We'll host a grand opening celebration over the Memorial Day weekend.

Speaking of grand openings, we will also be opening the new animal shelter this July for our four-legged residents. This new facility, located in the city's southeast area, will increase community access to found pets while providing outdoor animal yards, kennels, veterinary services and a low cost spay and neuter clinic for our residents. Historically, these services have not been provided by City staff or a local shelter, making residents drive considerable distances into Sacramento to look for a lost pet. Now, lost or stray animals will remain in the city to be found or adopted.

The Animal Shelter features more than 21,000 square feet with adoption kennels for 66 dogs and 56 cats and a third adoption kennel for other small animals. The city is in the process of hiring a veterinarian, veterinary technicians, supervisors and other staff to operate the shelter. New partnerships and collaborations with volunteers and local community groups such as The Friends of the Elk Grove Animal Shelter are helping to add more creature comforts and TLC for animals too.

Please join us at the shelter's grand opening celebration later this summer and at a new "Dogtoberfest" event that will debut at the shelter this fall.

As if all this wasn't enough...there is one more city facility opening this year back at the civic center, the new Community Center. This facility will feature Elk Grove's first dedicated Veteran's Hall and Veteran's Grove space and a new home for the Senior Center of Elk Grove. With the largest banquet hall in Elk Grove, the center will also offer space for big celebrations with seating for 500 guests.

With the help of the Arts Commission, the center will feature a number of public art pieces and a dancing fountain that will add additional color and movement to the city's newest gathering place. Look for details about this opening a little later this spring.

But, getting to the aquatic center... the animal shelter... to school ... work, and other places in the city or in the region is quite possibly one of the biggest challenges facing our community these days. Making traffic improvements and considering new transportation alternatives are some of the Council's top priorities for the future.

To address these issues, we will need to consider new options and accept changes in how we travel as a community.

One of the best examples of this kind of change can be seen at our northern roundabouts. There were many residents who did not support the development of the roundabouts on Sheldon at Bradshaw and Waterman Roads. Before the new design, traffic at these intersections during commute times in the morning and afternoon were a nightmare. And since the roundabouts have opened, it's been an easier, safer, and less stressful experience on most days.

Our Public Works Department managed these projects as well as repairs and improvements along Waterman Road that widened existing lanes and shoulders and added new bike lanes between Bond and Sheldon Roads.

Making an impact on our arterial routes is vital to addressing our future travel. Providing alternatives to Elk Grove and Laguna Boulevards for east/west travel is necessary to improve traffic flow. New state grant funding will allow us to proceed with the Kammerer Road extension project. This will improve drainage issues and provide the backbone infrastructure between Promenade Parkway and Big Horn Blvd for the Capital Southeast Connector project, a regional project to reduce traffic congestion and create an alternative route from Interstate 5 to El Dorado Hills, bypassing downtown Sacramento. Construction on this segment of the project could begin as early as late next year.

One of the many results of this project will be traffic relief here in Elk Grove.

Improving our traffic flow doesn't mean giving up our city's character or charm. This fall, our Public Works Department will begin making streetscape improvements on Railroad Street next to the Old Town Plaza. This work will improve parking and encourage new businesses, events, and visitors to explore historic downtown Elk Grove.

Additional federal funding will allow us to complete street improvements on Elk Grove Blvd. between School Street to Waterman Road in 2020.

Investments in our historic district is an important part of our vision for new entertainment, dining, and nightlife in the city. Restaurant and retail projects proposed for Railroad Street and the opening of Elk Grove's fifth craft brewery are positive indicators for revitalization taking place in that area.

Speaking of vision, a few weeks ago, my fellow Council members and I participated in our biannual retreat. Held over two days, these meetings give us a chance to look at "the big picture" for policy and programs through a lens that takes into account our city's values, history, development and regional responsibilities. We use these sessions to determine funding and project priorities for each budget year. As we move forward as a Council, we have established a vision that prioritizes a superior quality of life for all that authentically builds upon the community's diversity and heritage through safe, welcoming and connected neighborhoods. We envision a

variety of residential, educational, and employment choices and amenities that create a strong sense of place.

Why is having a city vision statement and goals important? Because, when we use these in tandem with the General Plan, the city's blueprint for future development, we can work together to keep sight of our long-term needs and wants for our city. We want a vibrant community with a sustainable economy filled with diverse businesses and amenities. We want a safe and resilient community. We must grow and maintain the fiscal health and stability of the city and foster a spirit of innovation and collaboration with regional partners. And we must aim to be a city with infrastructure that meets its current and future needs.

Having a vision and goals provides clarity to the members of our organization whether we are working internally or with other organizations.

Like many homes and businesses, we are using technology to do more than we could before. To continue its emphasis on public safety and crime suppression, the Police Department is instituting an Intelligence Led Policing Model this spring to provide for more timely data analysis that will allow their department to fight crime and address quality of life issues on a more immediate basis. In addition, the Real-Time Information Center will make greater use of existing and expanded video to create safer, more effective police responses to calls for service. The Real-time Information Center is expected to come online this summer.

But Elk Grove's momentum isn't just driven by the projects coming out of city hall. It's influenced by the community and local businesses... it's affected by all of you. Recent updates to the General Plan anticipate where and how we want to grow. Through the General Plan, we condition where others will live, how we will travel, where we will shop, work, and play, and how we address sustainability and healthy living. As projects are considered, their plans will be evaluated against the framework of the city's General Plan in addition to other local, state, and federal regulations.

While the city initiates the development of civic projects like the ones I mentioned earlier, private enterprise submits plans to the city for review of those projects that they want to develop. The City has land use, design, and permitting authority over these projects, but cannot dictate the location of a project. In most cases, an Environmental Impact Report is generated to review potential issues like noise, traffic, and lighting. I offer this important clarification to counter some confusion on the city's authority on these kinds of projects.

Case in point...Many residents expressed dissatisfaction with the location of the new Costco; however, the site was zoned for commercial use and traffic plans mitigated the anticipated problems along Elk Grove Boulevard and Bruceville Road.

Costco wanted to be at that location.

They opened last September, and while tax reports are not yet available for their first full quarter from the County, there is strong evidence to support a successful start with little to no traffic impact. And more new businesses and restaurants are expected to open at The Ridge later this year.

Planning for businesses like Costco and retailers and businesses along the Elk Grove Blvd. corridor was anticipated and the area was zoned for those uses. And it's working.

Last year, I stood before you just as frustrated as anyone with the lack of momentum at the so-called "Ghost Mall"—which over time had become a very apt descriptor for a project that was half built and all but abandoned. While I'm disappointed that the Howard Hughes Corporation shelved the project, there is some good news in all of this.

Those unsightly buildings are down and there is no longer the uncertainty there was a year ago.

Howard Hughes Corporation's decision gives us the chance to re-imagine what this valuable property could be and to make our preferences known to any new

developer. And while the land remains privately owned and zoned for a regional mall, it could be rezoned to allow for new development concepts that meet the needs of the community and can actually be built.

The Wilton Rancheria Tribe, who purchased the property north of the mall site, isn't letting this news halt their progress either. A groundbreaking for the construction of the new gaming resort is expected to happen later this year.

As long as I've lived in Elk Grove, even before I joined the City Council, I've heard about the city's jobs to housing imbalance.

Most residents would agree that attracting new businesses with real living wages and professional career tracks is important.

I believe that the medical industry offers these kinds of opportunities while at the same time providing services that our residents need. Growing our medical industry is and has been a key economic development strategy of the Council for many years.

There has been much discussion recently about the educational and medical district proposed by California Northstate University on commercially-zoned property at I-5 and Elk Grove Boulevard, which as you've probably heard includes a teaching hospital in its first phase.

This project remains in the earliest stages of City review, and has garnered no shortage of opinions and debate, which I think is healthy. But there can be no denying that, if completed, the project will add extensive jobs, capital investment, and tax revenue to our economy and could be an economic engine for Elk Grove for decades to come.

The same could be said for the Dignity Health development district and hospital project approved back in 2012.

I want these kinds of jobs and these kinds of services for our community.

Whatever the outcome of CNU's project, I think it's generating a healthy dialogue about what we need for our community. With a population expected to reach over 200,000 people in the next decade, we need good jobs and good health care. We are fortunate to have businesses interested in bringing us both.

And we are making significant progress on job growth. In fact, based on data presented to the City Council in January, over the last three years, the city has added or retained almost 7,000 jobs, and our jobs to housing ratio now sits close to one point zero. That's up from .86 in 2013. This means we are close to having one job for every house in our City.

To keep this kind of momentum going, we must fairly evaluate these kinds of development proposals, mitigate their impacts when and where it's needed, and generate a win-win situation for our community.

Saying all of this does not mean I'm unsympathetic to the business owners in Stonelake Landing or the residents in Stonelake. As a strong advocate of the city's small business support program, I want businesses of all sizes to succeed in our city. CNU's tenants at Stonelake Landing and the University will need to come to some sort of settlement privately if this project has any chance of moving forward. However, the City is prepared to assist any business in need of relocation with economic development services to retain their business in the City.

While projects like the hospital may generate disagreement among us at times, I believe that Elk Grove is home to many loving people that embrace inclusion and celebrate our diversity.

The American clergyman and writer Edward Everett Hale once wrote "Coming together is a beginning... keeping together is progress... working together is success."

Indeed, one of Elk Grove's defining characteristics that we celebrate is our extraordinary diversity. Diversity of race, religion, ideas, and lifestyles. But diversity in and of itself does not lead to inclusion, and merely celebrating our diversity is not



enough--we must ensure that every aspect of our city is inclusive, because only then will we find lasting unity.

Over the past year, our city has worked hard to identify and implement new ways to promote equity and inclusion for all.

Nine city staff have joined GARE, a national network of governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all.

Updates to the city's personnel rules and regulations have been made to incorporate recommendations from our Diversity Audit. And the City's hiring process has been changed to remove applicant names throughout the recruitment process to counteract potential biases.

Clearly, racial tension still remains a reality in our region. Actions and reactions to recent decisions in Sacramento and elsewhere have a profound effect on cities and Police Departments everywhere. The Elk Grove Police Department is hiring more officers to preserve and protect our community and we are doing more than ever before to recruit new and lateral officers who reflect the diversity of Elk Grove.

Our Police Chief has formed a Community Advisory Board that's assisting his department with developing strategies and community policing concepts that are generating a two-way dialogue and encouraging greater awareness and understanding.

These internal changes are influencing our work with and for the community. We collaborated with CSD and community members to host Elk Grove's first MLK Breakfast this year and we came together as an Elk Grove delegation at the region's March for the Dream event. Working with our Multicultural Committee, we hosted our 7th annual Multicultural Festival, launched our first Lunar New Year celebration, and marked the victory of light over darkness at the annual Festival of Lights for the second year.

There is no quick fix, but rather it's a culture we have to create and nurture. It will take time, but we have momentum on our side.

As I prepare to close today, I am proud to say that the state of our city is strong. As we open new facilities and address our traffic issues, expand our shopping and entertainment options, and continue making progress toward a more inclusive and equitable community, we will only get stronger.

We've got momentum and working together we can keep moving forward toward a better Elk Grove for all of us.

If this speech has failed to get you excited for the progress happening in our city, perhaps this closing video from our Public Affairs team will.

Thank you. God bless you, God bless our city and God bless this great country we call the United States of America.