

2017 City Update
Presented by Mayor Stan Pickett

January 26, 2017

Good evening. I wish to thank the Chamber of Commerce for the invitation to be a part of their program tonight and for the opportunity to provide an update on the City of Mesquite. We have had a monumental year.

With the leadership of the City Council and our hard working staff, we delivered an array of new services and programs to our citizens. It has been so humbling and I want to thank them. Would all of the City Council in attendance please stand so we may applaud you for your efforts.

And I do want to take a moment to especially recognize Councilman Dennis Tarpley. Many of you know Dennis is not one who likes to be recognized. He prefers to work behind the scenes and give others credit. Well, he's done this for the past 13 years and recently he announced that he will not run for re-election this spring.

Dennis has been a part of so many important decisions that have positively impacted our community through the years. His steadfast leadership has been a hallmark of his distinguished career on the Council.

It's been an honor to have served with him for these many years, but more importantly, I am honored to call him my friend. Please join me in giving Dennis Tarpley a well-deserved round of applause for his unselfish contributions to the Mesquite community.

With the help of Dennis, the entire City Council and all our City employees, we enjoyed quite a year. Many City programs and projects were accomplished and many others were started. As I shared with you last year, the City Council met and established a variety of policy issues. These became the basic principles we used throughout 2016 to make decisions about the direction of our community.

One of those top policy issues is public safety. From hiring Charles Cato as our new Police Chief, to implementing new body cameras for the police officers under his charge, we did a lot in terms of protecting our community.

Mesquite also established a new Safe Zone in front of the Police Station. The zone provides a secure place to meet for parents and children involved in a custodial exchange as well as for the general public involved in internet sales.

And we celebrated the new weather radar with our friends in the city of Garland. It provides better weather forecasting and warnings for our residents and all of the DFW metroplex. It overcomes obstructions such as buildings and the Earth's curvature by connecting to a network of other radars that operate at short range. The radar adjusts its sensing modes to quickly respond to changing weather. In fact, traditional radars update every 6 to 8 minutes, but the new radar in Mesquite updates every 60 seconds!

Both the Police and Fire Departments became more accessible online in 2016. They provide easy access to their calls for service with new links from the City's website and the Police Department launched a new Crime Mapping website. It allows citizens to be more informed about crime activity in their neighborhood. This was a part of the City's increased efforts to become more transparent.

These efforts helped shape our new Government Transparency portal that provides links to a variety of information. From budgets to brochures, we now offer the public instant connectivity and an open window into the business of city governance.

Further enhancing public safety, we also launched the Community Video Partnership in April. This invited residents and businesses across the city to register their privately owned surveillance systems. It allows the Police Department to know where they can find surveillance cameras to assist in crime investigations.

This fall, we teamed up with MISD to support the "Stop on Red, Kids Ahead" program.

This program helps keep students safe while riding school buses, from motorists who fail to stop and illegally pass a bus.

And just last month, we started a video campaign to put our police and fire personnel out there in the public eye. They are partnering to produce a series of Public Service Announcements for social media with a variety of safety messages for our community.

Community quality and appearance is another top policy issue for the City Council, and it really improved in 2016!

We consolidated code enforcement efforts into a new Neighborhood Services Department. This department has led the charge with high intensity enforcement, a new foreclosure process and weekend code inspectors. And thanks to the help of about 30 amazing volunteers, we started our Code Ambassador program. These citizens support the City's focus on code violations. This helps in our efforts to improve the appearance of our community and neighborhoods.

Staying on the topic of neighborhoods, I'd also like to take a moment to acknowledge our terrific Public Works Department. They made tremendous progress with the street bond program! This is beginning to improve the condition of residential streets a great deal and it further enhances the appearance of our neighborhoods. All of this helps maintain property values and increase curb appeal of homes.

In less than one year, we completed our first set of streets! And with the help and patience of those residents, we are able to fix streets more quickly and efficiently than ever before. Fixing streets is not the only way we have improved community appearance.

Another big achievement last year was our T25 Program. It's a collaborative effort among many City departments to identify, mitigate and prevent issues at problem properties. Essentially, we compiled a list of the 25 worst code offenders in the community and went after them aggressively!

These properties are commercial, residential, multi-family and motels. They are typically the locations of habitual code problems, health violations and criminal activity. With an assertive plan, the City took these property owners head on and the results have been amazing!

Many property owners have made significant repairs and improvements. In some cases, buildings have been demolished with plans to rebuild. One example is the old community hospital on I-30 that sat vacant for years. It was torn down and plans for a new medical plaza are in the works.

T25 has been so successful we now have launched the next phase called “T25 – 2.0.” It’s a list of another 27 properties that we’ll tackle this year! Yes, I know - 27 properties, not 25. But “T27” does not sound as catchy as “T25,” so one of our millennial employees threw on the “2.0” to be trendy.

Earlier I mentioned our efforts to be more transparent with information the community wants to see. In 2016 we expanded our communications with the public. This included the use of social media. From our tweets at Council meetings, live Facebook videos from events and posts on Nextdoor to the photos of City employees on Instagram and our “how to tips” on Pinterest, we were very active on social media. This was part of the Council’s policy issue to “Share our Story.”

We also launched a new mobile app that places access to City services into the palms of our citizens’ hands. With the tap of an icon, the public has the instant ability to be informed, to be engaged and to become an active part of our community. Now, everyone can do this. It is simple to download the app. If you don’t know how, just ask your kids or grandkids!

Enhanced communications were also implemented to share Council news with the public. We launched new access to topics discussed in our meetings. Now, an online agenda includes full back-up of information on every item. And we have live and on-demand video coverage of our meetings, both Pre-Meetings and Council Meetings. These two

enhancements compliment the new electronic newsletter called the Council Connection which we started just about this time last year.

Town Hall Tuesdays is another new program we started in 2016. These informational meetings at City Hall created a platform for citizens to get updates on specific topics and to interact with City staff as well as the Council. All of these initiatives to reach out to the community helped us continue our development of a more informed public.

The public should not only be informed, but should also have a quality of life enhanced by economic development. And I'm happy to say economic development in Mesquite reached new heights in 2016.

Businesses, both large and small, are choosing Mesquite. This is evidenced by our commercial permit valuation more than doubling in 2016. Mesquite added more than a half-million square feet of new commercial construction last year. And did you know Mesquite has about 40 million square feet of industrial, retail and office space? Oh by the way, 95 percent of that space is already under lease!

Our industrial companies continue to grow as well. In August, we announced the \$87 million dollar capital investment by UPS. They will embark on a 350,000 square-foot expansion of their existing facility.

Also last year, we welcomed FedEx to town. We celebrated their decision to build a 364,000 square-foot logistics facility at the former Big Town Mall property. Well, I am happy to say it's on schedule to open this spring!

Also, our long-time corporate partner, Pepsi, is continuing with their plans for a \$3.5 million dollar investment at their facility. And at our Mesquite Metro Airport, a new 10,000 square foot private jet hanger was built with plans for two more in 2017!

As we attract new businesses, existing businesses are re-investing in their properties. An example of this, is the fact that commercial remodel permits are up 40 percent from 2015!

And, in the area of retail, our efforts to revitalize shopping centers continue to reap results. Towne Crossing Shopping Center has an entirely new look as it makes way for Mr. Gatti's Pizza Town and Fitness Connection. Over at Market East, plans are in review for a 150,000 square foot expansion of new retail at Emporium Circle. This will springboard into new name brands for Mesquite including Home Goods!

Town East Mall also has plans for an additional anchor later this year. Dick's Sporting Goods will build a 50,000 square foot store and be open by spring of next year!

On the residential landscape, permits for new homes increased in value by 60 percent! Plus, the Hagan Hill project currently underway will add new homes valued from the 280's to the 400's.

From new places to shop for food, like El Rio Grande at Galloway and US 80 and the Walmart Neighborhood Market on the west side of town, to new places to eat food, like the bacon-infused burgers at Bubba's 33 and the tasty menus at Fuzzy's Tacos and R Taco, Mesquite has enjoyed a strong diet of economic growth in 2016.

Last year, we had nearly 400 certificates of occupancy issued for new and expanded businesses, both small and large! This all led to sales tax ending up 4 and half percent over the prior year. Also, commercial property values were up 8 percent for the year!

All this growth and investment translates into another one of the Council's policy issues - "Job Creation."

This community was the recipient of more than 1,200 new jobs associated with 2016 development projects. These jobs were in areas of industrial, retail, restaurants, service, tourism and healthcare.

As 2017 begins, we have already continued our drive towards more economic growth.

Just this week, we launched our BRE Task Force efforts. BRE is short for: Business Retention and Expansion. The City is partnering with the school district, the Chamber, Eastfield College and Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas. The goal is to develop strategies and business relationships to build and sustain our community's economic footprint in North Texas.

To aid us in this effort, the City Council just approved two new Tax Increment Financing districts. These TIFs will lay the groundwork for financing major development initiatives in the Skyline and Peachtree districts.

A good example of laying groundwork and seeing those plans come to fruition is the Villas at Vanston Park. Next month, we will celebrate the opening of this \$23 million dollar private investment. It's a mixed-use, three-story structure and the first major project in the Thomasson Square area in decades.

The Villas features 155 multi-family units - the majority of which are already leased. There's also 9,000 square feet of ground floor retail and office space as well as Mesquite's first-ever parking garage. Additionally, massive renovations by the City to nearby Vanston Park are now underway! All of this positive growth is helping to build a sense of place in this north area of Mesquite.

As a small business owner myself, it's important that this massive growth in the larger sectors does not detour us from also investing in small businesses.

In May, we enjoyed celebrating National Small Business Week by featuring locally owned Mesquite businesses. We also continued our Friday Finds program to highlight small businesses in town.

Most recently, during the Christmas season, our promotional efforts for the "Small Business Saturday" and our gift-giving ideas for "Wednesday Wish List" days allowed us to provide extra support to Mesquite's small business owners.

Moving forward into 2017, Downtown Mesquite will become a focus. Earlier this month we hosted our inaugural stakeholder group meeting. This public input, along with a professional market study, will aid the City in crafting a unified vision for downtown in 2017 and beyond.

And in 2017, we have a lot going on. Here is just a sample of the new and expanded services each of you will see this year.

Our Police Department will have more officers on the streets and a new K9 program. Also, a new lateral program was approved last month. It grants service credit for officers from other law enforcement agencies to be hired. This will aid the department in recruiting police officers with experience and get them on Mesquite streets quicker than ever. This will give Mesquite an edge over other cities, as the competition has become fierce to hire and retain police officers in DFW and around the country.

We will also focus our attention to the future opportunities that lay ahead in the I-20 corridor. Although we have already seen tremendous developer interest in this area, Mesquite will begin a big push, with planning and promotion, to grow this final, undeveloped gateway into our community.

One example of the potential growth for this area is that the City Council just re-zoned 179 acres for new homes. This will be the location of a 284 single-family home subdivision that will be called High Country Estates.

Over at Animal Services, we will add our first-ever professional on-site veterinarian. This will further enhance the operations at the shelter and the welfare for all the animals under the care of our staff.

Not only dogs and cats, but the care of people is very important to your City Council. In 2017, you will see the City step forward with new programs for a variety of people in our community.

Tonight, I have spoken about roads and retail, but our community is more than about bricks and mortar. It's about you - the people we serve!

Our new Housing Voucher Program for the Homeless will give aid to those families in desperate need of some help.

We will build upon our continuing efforts to reach out to the minority population of this community. Examples of this were Vision Mesquite's new "Mayor's Bi-Monthly Prayer Breakfast" programs, the City's support for the "Day of the Dead" event and the "Cinco de Mayo" celebration. And Chief Cato has plans to launch a new program called "UNIDOS" to bridge the gap with the Hispanic citizens in Mesquite.

Also, Mesquite will continue the fight for better water rates for businesses and residents. Last month we joined a few other cities to file a water rate review with the Public Utilities Commission in hopes that a more reasonable rate structure for our water utility customers can be created.

While I have "spoken" about a lot of City accomplishments so far tonight, we have produced a video to "show" you the City programs which positively impacted our community last year. I hope you enjoy it.

As you can see, the City of Mesquite truly cares about our community and that care is driven by our employees. Tonight, I wish to pay tribute to three employees who represent the City's commitment to public service.

First, I'd like to ask Police Officer Don Phillips to join me on stage. On behalf of the entire City Council, it is my honor to recognize Police Officer Don Phillips as the 2016 Mesquite Police Department Officer of the Year.

Officer Phillips has served our community since 1990. For the past 16 years, he has been assigned to the Major Crimes Robbery and Homicide unit. Officer Phillips has helped keep

our city safe through his remarkable investigative skills and professionalism by solving the most serious of crimes.

As the recipient of two Certificate of Merit awards, a Life Saving award and many other honors, Officer Phillips has performed his duties in an exemplary manner.

With the support of his wife, Kym and their two children, Paige and Kyle, Officer Phillips has demonstrated his dedication to Mesquite time and time again. Our citizens, our visitors and our businesses are safer because of Officer Phillips.

Please join me in congratulating Police Officer Don Phillips.

Next, I'd like to ask Fire Captain Kelly Turner to please join me on stage. On behalf of the entire City Council, it is my honor to recognize Fire Captain Kelly Turner as the 2016 Mesquite Fire Department Officer of the Year.

Captain Turner is a positive role model both on and off-duty. He has been with the Mesquite Fire Department for nearly 20 years. During that time Captain Turner has taken on much responsibility and many different roles.

Captain Turner successfully led a conversion to computer-based field inspections for the Fire Prevention Division. He helped to organize and teach Citizen Fire Academy Classes. And, most recently helped spear head the efforts to design, fund and build Mesquite Freedom Park.

Please join me in congratulating Fire Captain Kelly Turner.

Now, I'd like to ask Brian Bader to join me on stage. On behalf of the entire City Council, it is my honor to recognize Brian Bader as the 2016 City of Mesquite General Government Employee of the Year.

Let me tell you about Brian. He has a real tough job. As our Commercial Building Inspector, he is often met with disputes from property owners. However, Brian is known for remaining calm and resolute. You see, he has demonstrated an amazing dedication to improving the appearance and condition of this community.

Brian is the front-line representative of one of this City's most successful programs of 2016 - the T25 effort I mentioned earlier. Brian helped us lead the campaign to aggressively address problem properties in Mesquite. The success of T25 is a direct result of Brian's eagerness and genuine enthusiasm to provide "Real Texas Service" to our community.

Please join me in congratulating Brian Bader!

As I close tonight's presentation, I want to thank each of you for supporting the City of Mesquite this past year.

Recently, I was honored to be able to attend the Presidential Inauguration. While in D.C., I was impressed by all the energy in the city. It got me thinking that regardless of party politics, all of us, as leaders in this community need to strive to: make Mesquite a safer place, a cleaner place, a friendlier place and a more enjoyable place!

In short, we all need to show by our actions more than our words that this community can achieve greater days with unlimited potential!

When we all work together towards a collective purpose, we can attain historic achievements. An example of this is the dedication of Mesquite Freedom Park on September 11. It is the location for a piece of world history, which will forever call Mesquite home. It's a place for us and future generations in Mesquite to learn and appreciate this country's freedoms.

And Mesquite Freedom Park would not have happened if not were the support of our business partners, our non-profits and the community.

I also would like to acknowledge my wife Mary Jo. She has been so encouraging. As my biggest fan, she has always been there for me! Thank you Mary Jo.

At this event last year, I said we were “getting back to the basics” and we did just that. However, to quote our City Manager Cliff Keheley, “We can always do better,” and that is what the City of Mesquite will seek to accomplish in 2017. We will build upon last year’s successes and do even better this year to deliver the services you expect and you deserve!

Thanks again for attending and good night!