



2019 State of the City “Growing Our Future”

A lot has happened over the past year, and this video is a great reminder of many of those outstanding achievements.

We are an award winning city, and so many wonderful things are happening!

That video makes me feel *great* about what we’ve become—a growing and thriving city— but it makes me even more excited for what’s on the horizon.

You know, I remember as a little girl, planting a seed in a flower pot at my grandmother’s house.

She had a green thumb and always had beautiful geraniums in pots around her tiny porch.

I am pretty sure I watered my little pot of soil faithfully — and I can tell you that waiting for that seed to sprout seemed like FOREVER.

I have since planted a few gardens and have learned to trust that seeds do in fact sprout if given the right conditions.

It just takes time to see the growth and then more time and patience still to see the blossoms and then the fruits.

Building a city happens in much the same way.

We’ve planted a lot of seeds through the years. Some are sprouting. Others have bloomed and blossomed.

And many, many others are still like those seeds I planted when I was an impatient little girl.

They require waiting.

My years of public service have taught me that, similar to a garden, growing a city takes time.

I stand before you tonight to tell you that growth...*amazing growth*... is exactly what is happening here in Idaho Falls.

Infrastructure and Growth

Sometimes that growth can be a little inconvenient or messy.

We received a lot of input this past year about the number of Public Works projects going on throughout the city.

From repaving, realigning and street widening...to new road construction and roundabouts...this past year Idaho Falls handled a large number of improvements.

We installed new street signals, made pedestrian and cycling improvements and upgraded water facilities and storm drain infrastructure.

And while inconvenient, these improvements were necessary not only to maintain infrastructure, but also to prepare for future growth.

Every impressive new building project or business opening is preceded by these basic infrastructure elements — this includes the pipes, the power and fiber optic lines, the curbs and sidewalks, the roads and streetlights.

This year saw the completion of a \$10.3 million dollar upgrade to our city's wastewater treatment plant...maybe not the most intriguing project...but it's really important for anyone who sends water down the drain.

And not just wastewater. We spent a lot of time being smart and strategic about the city's freshwater as well.

Earlier this year we, along with 15 other cities, signed an historic water settlement agreement that will protect the City.

Prior to the settlement, Eastern Idaho cities were susceptible to water calls that may have curtailed our supply of water during low water/drought years.

The agreement is the culmination of years of coordination, and more than a little leadership from Idaho Falls.

Besides protecting our access to water, a major goal was to allow for city growth.

We appreciate Director Fredericksen and our Public Works staff for their attention and involvement in this and the many other present and future projects and water issues.

Another major piece of infrastructure that serves our city is the I-15/Highway 20 interchange.

This is managed by the state and is being studied as one of their hotspots for traffic congestion.

We are involved and attentive to this project.

One of our goals is to encourage as many citizens and businesses as possible to participate in providing suggestions and creating solutions.

I am confident that local citizen input is going to be key to obtaining the best possible outcome as those two major highways are potentially realigned.

This project, in particular, highlights our need to be involved in planting seeds today to help determine the development of tomorrow.

It also reminds me of an experience several years ago when I met with developers who liked what they saw in downtown IF and wanted to build just a few blocks south of here.

Economic Development

Although they knew it would take time, we worked with them to plan and prepare and finally break ground on what is now poised to become one of the newest and most exciting developments in the city.

Today valued at more than \$11 million dollars, The Broadway will generate around 40 new jobs and bring new public space, businesses, downtown parking and tourism to our city's center.

We are very grateful for Director Cramer and his dedicated staff in Community Development Services for their efforts to facilitate this and myriad other projects throughout the city.

Through their efforts we are helping restore downtown, including the historic Bonneville, which is coming along—even during this cold winter. (That was another seed that took a long time and lots of patience to nurture.)

These are but a few examples of how our city has grown and continues to grow. But there are more.

Currently we have *five* other large projects underway or completed in 2018 that represent an estimated 1,100 new jobs—most of which will pay excellent wages capable of supporting entire families.

These projects account for more than \$200 million dollars in terms of capital expenditure within the city.

They include projects like INL's *C3 and Cybercore* buildings on the newly renamed MK Simpson Blvd.

And the *Idaho Falls Community Hospital* and the *Idaho Falls Cardio Renal Center*, which not only bring jobs, but are expanding and enhancing healthcare opportunities for our residents and the tri-state region.

And there are more projects on the horizon that we look forward to announcing in the coming months.

It's a very exciting time for Idaho Falls and for our state as well.

Idaho was recently named the fastest growing state in the nation. And Idaho Falls is doing its part.

In fact, building permit records show that in 2018, Idaho Falls processed over \$222 million dollars in new construction.

This is more valuation added to our city than in *any other two years combined* since we started tallying permit records.

Adding to that is the culmination of the Snake River Urban Renewal District—the city’s largest.

Opened 30 years ago in 1988, the district began with city property valued at \$23.9 million dollars.

The value of properties in the district today is more than \$212 million dollars—a more than 789 percent increase.

This example is one of the best in the state and more than proves the value of Urban Renewal and Tax Increment Financing.

A Quality Way of Life

And there are other projects underway like the Museum of Idaho Expansion, the new Education Center at the Zoo and the many great Downtown building renovations.

Years ago, another seed was planted for a similar project that is now bearing some remarkable fruit.

That project was the renovation of the Idaho Falls Civic Center for the Performing Arts.

For years the Civic Center committee researched, planned and fund-raised for that effort.

And the renovations are now coming to fruition.

So many city residents have memories associated with the Civic.

We are anxious to ensure that every future experience in this historic building is special and comfortable.

And by the way, the committee so far has raised \$1.25 million dollars in private funding—an amount greater than what the city has spent.

Besides the committee members, Randy Fife and our Legal Services department are involved with that effort, as is Director Alexander and her award-winning Municipal Services team.

We are grateful to all of them.

All around Idaho Falls, we see other community projects that are in various stages of growth like Heritage Park, improvements at Sandy Downs, new trails and renovated paths at Ryder Park, around Pinecrest Golf Course, at Community Park and along the river.

Perhaps the most meaningful renovations this past year were those done to the City's official War Memorials along Memorial Drive and at the state Vietnam Memorial at Freeman Park.

Those improvements included a brand-new flag pole, restored and renewed memorial plaques, and improved lighting.

Parks and Recreation Director Weitzel and his staff are also hard at work with their new "RECreate IF plan" which will create a framework for the future of Parks and Recreation in our city.

We encourage all to participate in the coming months.

We are very committed to working with the community, and we have every confidence that Director Weitzel—who, I might add, was also appointed to a prestigious national position this year—will be working diligently to develop long term solutions designed to enhance recreation facilities and opportunities within our community.

The Idaho Falls Public Library had a busy year.

Our library patrons checked out enough materials for every man, woman, and child in Idaho Falls to have one library item a month!

And the Extreme Book Nerd Program is growing and has now been copied by four or five other libraries in Idaho and surrounding states.

Kudos to Director Wright and the library staff.

Another contributor to our quality lifestyle is Idaho Falls Power.

Some may not realize that Idaho Falls Power is part of a much larger electrical grid than the local one we manage so well.

Therefore...we cannot always control what happens when equipment that we do not own or control... goes down.

But our linemen, dispatchers, and engineers do marvelous work in terms of re-routing power from other substations to bring residents back online when needed.

When we think about the future for our community, it is hard to imagine it without the very best technology. This includes fiber optics.

Since 2003, Idaho Falls Power has managed its unused and unlit fiber for private sector business, INL, public education, and community safety.

We realize that now is the time to integrate this fiber optic technology more fully into our entire power delivery system... because tomorrow's power grid will be intertwined with the speed and responsiveness of fiber optic communication.

So a few months ago, we initiated a pilot program to determine the feasibility of a citywide deployment of fiber to city residents and businesses.

The pilot involves around 1,200 potential customers and we expect final construction in the pilot area to be wrapped up in late spring to early summer.

Just last week we tested the network and the speeds are amazing.

We are now working hard to conclude agreements with local, private providers so they can offer their services over this amazingly fast network.

If the pilot program bears out and if the service is supported by city residents, it will put us on a path to provide essential and affordable high speed access for every power customer in Idaho Falls.

We are grateful to new IFP Director Prairie for his leadership on this project and we congratulate him on his selection as Chair of the UAMPS Carbon Free Power Project which oversees another one of the most promising projects for Idaho Falls' future—the Small Modular Reactor program at INL.

In the spring of 2018 our utility signed a power purchase agreement to participate in the Carbon Free Power Project.

Besides providing baseload power, the SMR project also allows us to look responsibly toward the future as it will give our city an enviable 100% zero-carbon emissions power profile!

The SMR is also why I was so pleased to hear Governor Little's inaugural address earlier this week.

In it, he pledged his unwavering support for INL and for projects like the SMR that will, in his words, *"expand opportunities for clean and affordable energy for our citizens and throughout the world!"*

Not limited to the SMR project, our unique relationships with the US Departments of Energy, Defense and Homeland Security shape who we are and the quality of opportunities available in Idaho Falls.

The clean-up, research and naval reactors work is supported by federal dollars.

And I work hard to ensure that our leaders in Washington know how well-spent those dollars are.

This community is grateful for the presence of INL, the Idaho Clean-up Project, and the Naval Reactors facility as well as great educational institutions like ISU, U of I and CEI.

I can tell you that, at CEI enrollment increases every semester.

Enrollment for the Fall Semester was slightly over 1,500 and Spring is expected to be at 1,600 by the time the semester begins.

Most community colleges have smaller enrollments in the spring than fall terms, so CEI is bucking the trend—which shows how much pent-up demand there continues to be.

I am confident that we will yet see more and more Eastern Idahoans benefit from CEI as they seek better jobs or further education.

And the best part? It's affordable.

A Resilient Local Economy

Investments in education and research & development projects like these help shore up our local economy and protect us from the typical economic ups-and-downs.

In recent months some of you may have heard whispers of: *“This bull market can’t continue;”* *“We are overdue for a recession;”* or *“Interest rates are rising too fast;”* and other similar comments.

When you hear comments like those, it is important to keep in mind that there is a difference between the “real” economy and the stock market.

The stock market reflects corporate earnings. It has little to do with employment and economic growth.

Unemployment remains at historic lows and the US economy has the best growth rate in the world.

And because the local Idaho Falls economy continues to perform, many don’t realize that our local economy is fortunate to be somewhat insulated from normal market fluctuations and serious recession.

Recall that Idaho Falls is the largest Idaho city east of Boise.

We are a tri-state hub for retail, research, agriculture, entertainment, arts and culture, medical care, and affordable education.

This combination of industries and services gives us confidence that the Idaho Falls economy is well diversified to weather change. For example:

- Though we do not grow the potatoes and barley crops inside city limits, the commerce associated with these agricultural products certainly impact our city. People will always need to eat.
- In addition, travel data demonstrate that people always want to visit Yellowstone. In good times, visitors arrive from all over the country and the world. In lean times, we still get visitors, they often just come in cars instead of planes and they come from places not as far away. But they are still visitors who rest, eat, play, explore and gas-up in Idaho Falls.

My point is, like education and research, these economic sectors are quite stable throughout traditional economic cycles.

This gives us reason to remain confident. Idaho Falls citizen need not become anxious when the gloom and doom economic whispers start up.

We can be more confident; and truthfully, that feels great!

Unfortunately, another national trend, the housing shortage that has swept our nation, has not passed us by.

We do have pent-up demand for local real estate. We hope local builders will hang in there and work with the supplies and labor we have.

And in the meantime, if you know a young person who needs to learn a trade, send them to CEI so they can get experience in the construction trades!

A moment ago I mentioned the many people who come to Idaho Falls by plane.

As we plant the seeds for future growth and success, one of the most important things we can focus on is the health and vitality of our airport.

Airport Director Cloutier, who is also new to Idaho Falls, and his staff, do an amazing job there and we've already seen great improvements with runway enhancements and food services.

And I am happy to announce today that we have completed our passenger count for 2018.

The preliminary numbers show that we had more than 320,000 passengers for 2018—the highest passenger total we’ve had in five years!

We know adding additional air service from the Idaho Falls Airport is important to our ability to serve our existing community as well as to our ability to attract new business and growth.

To that end, the Director has been taking meetings with airlines and having discussions with the FAA.

We’ve also been meeting with community leaders and are working to build support for new routes and new airlines.

We’ve planted a lot of seeds but it is important to know that the seeds of Airline attraction take a lot of time to grow—as many as 18-24 months.

But rest assured, we are diligently working to improve your airport experience and to add new destinations for your travel.

Public Safety

Another vital area of importance for our future is public safety.

Our police and fire departments are constantly recognized for the way they innovate and go above and beyond to serve our community.

We were fortunate to hire 15 new police personnel and seven new firefighters this past year—highly trained professionals who are dedicated to protecting and preserving the extremely high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho Falls.

We were especially proud of staff from Police and Fire, led by Fire Chief Hanneman, who responded to the call from FEMA to lend their expertise to assist residents in Florida affected by Hurricane Michael.

They did an outstanding job and certainly deserve a round of applause!

As we grow, public safety will be one of the most important focuses for us to maintain our quality of life...and a new Police HQ is essential for us to meet the demands of our growing community and the need to provide 21st century policing.

This is especially so because, under the leadership of Chief Johnson, our department has placed particular emphasis on technology that aids in crime solving and enhanced safety.

This includes everything from sophisticated DNA analysis and bomb robots to a Drone Program and updated body worn cameras—which we purchased with a grant of \$135 thousand dollars.

Our PD has also stepped up efforts to support the statewide Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce which rescues child victims across the country and in our own city.

And as our growing city's roads become busier, we have become more efficient at traffic safety.

This not only includes enforcing the recent hands-free driving ordinance, but in 2019 our Department will be introducing Idaho Falls' first motorcycle patrol officers.

Please permit me one final note on Public Safety. Idaho's high suicide rate continues to be of concern.

All of us must seriously regard what we can do to reduce this threat to social harmony and personal happiness.

In 2019 I will be focusing on this problem myself from a policy perspective in coordination with council members, community volunteers, other agencies, and non-profit organizations—you will hear more in the coming months.

And our Police Department also will be working to improve and expand its suicide prevention services throughout 2019 with specially-trained officers and a Mobile Crisis Team.

By working together, I believe we can have a very positive impact on a very serious problem.

The Value of City Growth

So why all the emphasis on how our city is growing?

I believe that every worthwhile, well-paying new job we grow here in Idaho Falls means that someone's child will have a meal, or shoes, or a home.

It may also mean that a parent will be home to read that child a book instead of working a second job.

Or it may mean that a parent will find meaningful local employment that keeps them in town and close to home.

And when these kids grow up—and they do (we tend to grow great kids here)—we must also be able to provide them with the resources they need to succeed as adults.

That means providing a good education and having quality jobs available for them.

It's always hard to raise these great kids only to export their talents to other communities and other states.

I want Idaho Falls always to be strong enough to retain our best and brightest right here at home.

Conclusion

Idaho Falls is growing and the pace is brisk right now.

And through it all, we will continue to light your homes, provide the water, mow the lawns, offer wholesome entertainment and respond when you dial 911.

That's what we do.

And it is done well—affordably and professionally—by city employees who make a positive difference in the lives of Idaho Falls residents every day in so many ways.

I can't thank our employees enough.

And in the year ahead, I invite all citizens to become more informed and involved in our city.

- *Visit* the city website and like our Facebook pages; they are excellent resources for information and planning.

- *Call* us. City employees work hard to dignify every call that comes into the city with an appropriate response.
- *Email* a city council member, attend a council meeting or watch one online.
- *Attend **Budget Watch*** on May 7th. It is a public open house held at the library.

Council members and Department Directors are present with informational displays and personnel who can answer your questions and listen to your suggestions.

This year we also plan to incorporate a preview of the 2019 road improvements and safety enhancements so no one is caught off-guard by the construction cones when the construction seasons hits!

Tonight, allow me to close with the same simple but true statement I have shared before: ***"The state of our city is strong... and Idaho Falls' future is bright. I could not be more proud to serve you and to be a part of this great community."***

I look forward to working together with you to continue planting the seeds for a bright and successful future.