

Irvine

2019 STATE OF THE CITY

presented by Mayor Donald P. Wagner





Mayor
Donald P. Wagner



Mayor Pro Tem
Christina L. Shea



Councilmember
Melissa Fox



Councilmember
Farrah N. Khan



Councilmember
Anthony Kuo

*The following is the City of Irvine State of the City Address,
originally delivered February 26, 2019, by Mayor Donald P. Wagner*

Good evening, everyone, and welcome to our remodeled City Hall, a remodel done without spending a dime of public money.

This is my third State of the City talk and, without too much in the way of spoilers, it will sound a bit like the last two. As I said when sworn in last December, the message I took from the recent election was that the Council and I are on the right path. We're seeing progress and improvements on many fronts; and we plan more of the same.

Let me introduce some of the key people directing and implementing that progress, because some of the faces have changed. There is a new energy and commitment to the people of Irvine evident in City Hall: evident in a City Council that reads agendas, takes meetings with staff, and comes prepared; evident in our commissioners who have rolled up their sleeves and immediately gotten to work for you; and evident in the dedication we see every day in the staff.

First, our City Council:

- Mayor Pro Tem Christina Shea;
- Councilmember Melissa Fox;
- And our newly elected Councilmembers, Farrah Khan and Anthony Kuo.
- To Farrah and Anthony, welcome aboard.

Second, joining us this evening are a number of commissioners and board members who commit their time to helping guide this wonderful city. If you are a commissioner or board member, please stand.

Also, thank you to our many partners, working with us every day to improve our City, who are in attendance tonight. Much appreciated.

Finally, I really must welcome here tonight and thank my wife, Megan, the First Lady of Irvine. I had the unique and truly touching experience of having her administer the oath of office to me in December at the start of my second term.

There was a lot to celebrate in Irvine last year, and a lot to look forward to this year. But I want to start on perhaps what could have been a dark note, but ended up in a strong showing of community resolve and mutual support.

"What you do to any of us, you do to all of us, and we're not going to stand for it."

Those are my words last year in response to two disheart-



ening hate crimes visited upon the city several months ago ... first at Irvine Valley College, and then Beth Jacob Congregation of Irvine.

Our community responded beautifully: religious, political, public safety, and community leaders joined us at City Hall to express our joint resolve to stand against hate crimes; a reward from the ADL, doubled by the Council, was offered for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrator of the Beth Jacob vandalism; we then began the new year with an invocation by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner of Beth Jacob in the Council Chamber with leaders from our local Jewish, Christian, Muslim communities, and the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

My Council colleagues, and the entire Irvine community, know that this was not an attack on one small group, but was an attack on every one of us of good faith and good will. It cannot be tolerated.

Let me digress for a moment on the subject of our wonderfully diverse community. Irvine is, of course, very religiously and ethnically diverse. Strangely, I sometimes get asked about how can I, as the Mayor, understand and represent such a diverse community? I say "strangely," because, the question is frankly nonsensical to me. How can I or any of my colleagues represent people with religions or skin color or family circumstances or ethnicities different from our own?

The answer is easy. People come to Irvine – from wherever they come – for the same reason Megan and I came here. People want to make Irvine their home because of our qual-



ity of life. They want a place to raise their families in safety. They want good schools and welcoming neighborhoods. They want a place to work, either starting and growing a business or with one of our many established businesses. They want to access our parks and wilderness trails and bike lanes and open spaces. And it doesn't matter whether they come from Los Angeles, like Megan and I did, or from someplace else. And it doesn't matter what their skin color is, or their religion, or the languages they might speak.

How can Ms. Khan or Ms. Fox, or Mr. Kuo or Ms. Shea, or me ... how can any of us ... represent such a diverse community? With great joy and many, many common interests. So, let me talk for a minute about the strengths of Irvine.

- We are the safest city of our size in the nation ...
 - ... we offer world-class education ...
 - ... we are fiscally sound with a strong economy...
 - ... we have a nationally recognized park system that includes our two newest community parks, 32-acre Portola Springs, which opened a few weeks ago, and the 12.5-acre Los Olivos, which opens this Saturday.
- And in 2018, the Orange County Register's readers voted us "Best Place to Live in Orange County."

Thank you to all who voted for Irvine. No ballot harvesting was needed!

Briefly, let me drill down on each of those strengths. First, public safety. We remain the safest big city in America, according to the latest FBI statistics on violent crime. And recently, we were ranked as the 10th safest city in the world.

I want to thank Police Chief Mike Hamel, his command staff, and each and every member of the Irvine Police Department, for their daily diligence. Being a safe city is hard

work. They do that work every day and make it look easy. As to our schools, about 15 percent of our City's residents, more than 40,000 pre-teens and teens, attended class today in Irvine Unified and in Tustin Unified's Irvine campuses. Cadence Park K-8 School opened in the Great Park Neighborhoods last August, and Loma Ridge Elementary opens this August in Portola Springs. The Loma Ridge campus will bring us to a total of 45 public schools in Irvine.

These students are doing exciting work. Just last weekend, I attended the awards ceremony for the California Cyberhub Mayors' Challenge. Teams from Irvine High and Woodbridge High, along with teams from Sierra Vista and Orchard Hills middle schools, competed with others from around the county. The challenge was to save the nation's electrical grid from terrorist hackers. Fortunately, it was just a test scenario. But in the real world this past year, UCI has begun work on a cybersecurity project aimed at protecting us against precisely this threat and so many more.

Also in the real world, a few months ago a group of teens from our six Irvine high schools sent a small satellite into space. The Irvine CubeSat, a STEM program made up of teams from the Irvine and Tustin districts, had a perfect launch. The students were able to watch the launch on their phones from India streaming over the Internet. When I was in high school, streaming wasn't a thing. Phones had cords, were mounted on the wall, and the only cubes were Rubik's.

Irvine students are preparing for the future and preparing to be our future leaders. They get support in this from businesses such as the Irvine Company and FivePoint Communities; from the great work of the Irvine Public Schools Foundation led by President and CEO Neda Eaton; and through the continuing commitment of this City Council. We stand alone among American cities in the financial



support of our public schools. This school year, the City Council has allocated more than \$10 million in direct and indirect support. We are very fortunate to be able to offer that continued support.

But that money merely supplements the daily efforts of the teachers and administrative staff of the IUSD and TUSD who work tirelessly on behalf of our children. And they are supported in turn by Irvine Unified School District Superintendent Terry Walker, Tustin Unified School District Superintendent Gregory Franklin, and their respective Boards of Education.

Also on the list of Irvine strengths are our parks. One of our public-private projects continues as the Orange County Great Park takes large strides forward.

Last September, we had a second-phase grand opening of the 194-acre Sports Complex. In all, 12 new baseball and softball fields, each with one championship stadium, opened to thousands of players, their families, and our community.

The first phase of the Sports Complex opened in 2017, during my first year as Mayor. Hopefully, you have been there to see it for yourself.

I especially want to urge you to get out to the Soccer Stadium to see our professional team, the Orange County Soccer Club, and cheer them on as they play their home games right here in Irvine.

All of this has occurred through our steadfast public-private partnership with FivePoint Communities. Together we are developing 688 acres in the Great Park.

And last month, the City Council approved an agreement with Pretend City Children's Museum to move from a nearby leased building and into a larger permanent location to

be built at the Great Park.

Separately, this City Council will soon determine the future uses of the 248-acre Cultural Terrace.

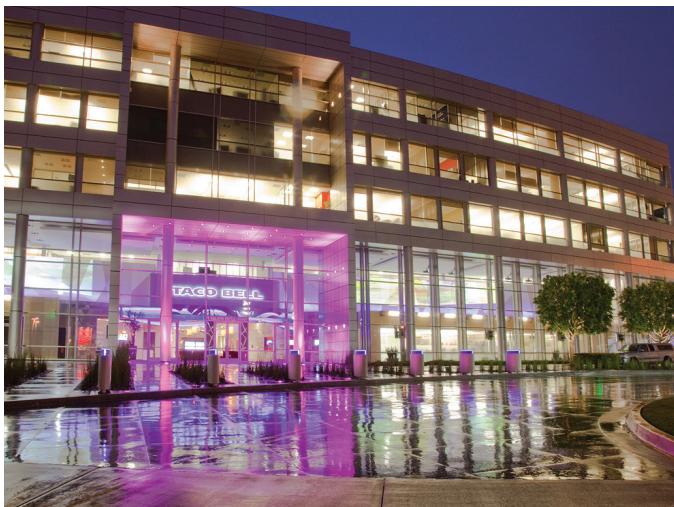
The Cultural Terrace lends itself to any number of artistic, cultural, and entertainment components – museums, a library and community meeting space, a concert venue, botanical gardens, and the like. In 2018, just outside the Great Park boundaries, the temporary FivePoint Amphitheatre, managed by Live Nation, had its first full season of concerts. In 2019, the City Council and senior staff met with the American Museum of Natural History folks to begin exploring a possible presence for them on the Cultural Terrace.

And much more work will be done this year to bring arts, entertainment, and culture to the Orange County Great Park.

Finally, as we go through Irvine's strengths and the reasons this diverse community is so vibrant, I have to touch on our business environment.

We are expanding our job market, through coordination with the Greater Irvine Chamber of Commerce, and through our joint efforts to attract businesses. That work crosses multiple industries. The Orange County Business Journal ranked Irvine as the No. 1 major city in terms of jobs-to-population ratio. We have approximately 275,000 residents, and more than 200,000 jobs.

But to take just one example of the City and Chamber's collective efforts, only last week City Manager John Russo and Chamber members returned from the United Kingdom in another of their trips to explain the merits of Irvine and Orange County as a hub for the life sciences industry. This is the third such visit by the Chamber under the leadership



of Bryan Starr and Linda DiMario. And those efforts are paying dividends.

It's not all about attracting businesses, though; we are also invested in making even more successful those great corporate citizens who are already here. For example, let me highlight three local companies that remain bullish on Irvine: I hope you grabbed a bite to eat at the reception. It was catered by a fine Irvine company, Taco Bell, that has just re-leased its Irvine headquarters through at least 2030. With 800 Irvine employees – who are well-fed, I might add – we are thrilled that Irvine remains home. With 7,000 restaurants worldwide, we know that Taco Bell could relocate anywhere. But Irvine – home to Taco Bell's famous Test Kitchen – is where “innovation happens.”

Second, in 2018, Edwards Lifesciences, Orange County's largest public company, began construction on 7.6 acres to expand its current campus. A company that could operate anywhere chose to buy land next to its already beautiful and updated Irvine facility. With more than 4,000 employees in Orange County and hundreds more to be hired in the new space, we thank Mike Mussallem and Edwards Lifesciences for their commitment to Irvine.

Finally, in another part of the City, the Irvine Company last year began leasing opportunities in the second of its two new corporate high-rises in the Irvine Spectrum. As you look down from the top floor and into Irvine Spectrum Center, you see the newly opened, \$200 million renovation of the former Macy's space that now is home to restaurants, a new Apple store, and much more.

We thank all of our Irvine businesses who have moved here, maybe have just started up here, are innovating here, are hiring here, and are expanding here.

None of this is to ignore our challenges, of course. Although our strengths somewhat inoculate us from the depths of problems some other communities may experience, we are certainly not immune to challenge.

Perhaps the two biggest issues facing us in the last year were homelessness and continuing traffic congestion. I addressed both last year at this time and am happy to report this year that both problems are showing progress – albeit slow – but real progress towards real solutions.

First, homelessness is a national issue. We are not immune. Homelessness has many causes, including mental illness, substance abuse, economic stress, domestic violence, affordability. One single solution does not exist because one single cause does not exist.

But this City – the Council, but more importantly, the citizens – has not stood aside as the problem festered. Rather, we have all acted to help our troubled community members.

The county's homeless point in time count before I became Mayor was 199, meaning that the actual physical count of homeless in Irvine was 199 individuals. A new point in time count was done a few weeks ago. We don't have final numbers, but a very senior county executive officer told me our count today is likely less than 50, and I think that is high. In other words, over the last few years we have seen a 75% reduction in the homeless population . . . because we have worked hard to help those community members. Our police department has two trained, experienced mental health professionals able to engage our homeless and their service providers, speak their language, and respond appropriately to their challenges.

We have also worked extremely hard in Irvine to address a very tough component of the problem by providing permanent affordable housing.



It is true that permanent affordable housing is only one piece of a most difficult puzzle. But it is a piece the people of Irvine have done very well. For example, in 2018, 237 more affordable housing units opened in Irvine, largely reserved for the most at-risk citizens, the extremely low-income, very low-income, and low-income residents, some of whom would be homeless without this support.

We will be at 5,500 permanent affordable units – about five and half percent of our total housing stock! – by the end of 2021.

We have helped create, for some in our community, real housing security. And we have avoided the travesty seen in Anaheim along the riverbed near Angel Stadium. We also avoided the knee-jerk effort by the Board of Supervisors to recreate the county's failures by setting up a tent city on county land next to the Great Park.

What Irvine is doing right is working, and is being copied. The county, with its burgeoning land trust, is going after millions of dollars of state funds to build permanent affordable housing. We applaud that effort.

Also, the Irvine Community Land Trust, which was started in 2006 by the City for the purpose of providing permanent affordable housing, continues its forward progress. The non-profit is chaired by our Councilmember Melissa Fox, and includes Board member and Councilmember Anthony Kuo.

Last year, the Irvine Community Land Trust opened the 80-unit Parc Derian, which has a number of units reserved for veterans and the disabled. This year the Land Trust is developing Salerno. The 80-unit Salerno begins construction this summer for completion in June 2020.

In all, the Land Trust is receiving \$29 million from the City over several years for the purpose of permanent affordable housing.

Elsewhere in the City in 2018, the 157-unit seniors affordable housing complex, Luxaira, opened. Meanwhile, the City supports nonprofit agencies – Human Options being one – that provide emergency shelter to those most at risk, including abused women and their children.

While the regionwide effort is strong, as it should be, for homeless solutions, we have provided a significant amount of support. It is inappropriate for critics to downplay the permanent supportive housing or to say, “Oh, it doesn’t count if the people aren’t actually homeless.” They certainly would count towards the homeless population if the City of Irvine didn’t provide a permanent solution.

The second important unresolved issue is traffic congestion. As I have said before, the first role of holes is to stop digging. The City Council that I lead has stopped the digging that led to our traffic problems.

The City Council has not approved a single housing proposal. And my Council and I pushed back against the Travel Land rezoning. And my Council and I said no to a developer effort to exceed density caps in a planning area. And we said no to a developer planning to put up apartments on the Rancho San Joaquin Golf Course. There has been no reluctance on the part of me or the Council to say no to development that makes our traffic worse.

Shortly after I was elected Mayor, I led the City Council to approve the creation of a Transportation Commission and to hire a Transportation Director to improve our traffic systems. I’m happy to report, we are making progress. Now, Irvine did not get into this situation overnight. And the fixes are not going to be felt overnight. But those fixes have resulted in a smoother traffic flow. Just last week, Transportation Commissioners Chairman Carrie O’Malley and Vice Chairman Steve Greenberg shared with me the



results of a study showing improvement in commute times from the steps we have taken.

For example: In data collected last spring, average travel speeds within 10 of our key corridors showed improvements ... in eight of the 10 corridors during the morning rush hour ... and in seven of the 10 corridors during the evening rush hour.

We have committed more than \$79 million towards traffic mitigation, with 21 specific improvements underway, or completed. For example, we have just completed flashing yellow left-turn lights at five intersections, with more to come, so you don't have to sit staring at a red arrow when there is no oncoming traffic.

Additional travel lanes, such as along University Drive between Campus Drive and MacArthur Boulevard, and new turn lanes, such as on Alton Parkway at the Alton/Jeffrey Road intersection, are being constructed.

We have an agreement with Caltrans that now synchronizes lights at our freeway onramps and off-ramps.

And City staff is exploring an adaptive signal system to monitor traffic conditions and automatically adjust signal timing.

Expect these and other construction projects to be completed this year and in 2020.

Finally, I want to mention one other change that is significant in the way the City does business and in which you can participate. Under the direction of Assistant City Manager Marianna Marysheva, we are implementing a two-year budget for the City. Rather than go from year to year with our budget, we are taking a longer view, budgeting in two-year increments.

We need your help. A series of public meetings are planned

to inform our citizens about the new budget cycle and to get input on that process from you, our constituents. Please take advantage of this opportunity by participating in next month's public Community Meetings. Find information about them on our homepage, cityofirvine.org, and join us.

I can't end this talk about the state of the city – I know some of you are thinking "soon enough!" or, "too late!" – No. I can't end this talk about the state of the city without a brief mention of ice hockey. Because who doesn't think of ice hockey when you think of Irvine?

Well, we have a place for you if you're thinking right now of ice hockey or figure skating.

Great Park Ice, a second public-private partnership, this one between the City of Irvine and an affiliate of the Anaheim Ducks, opened last month at the Great Park. This is a one-of-a-kind, \$100 million, 270,000-square-foot facility, with ice hockey tournaments already under way, and figure skating and public skate hours filling the ice; the Ducks themselves will occasionally train here.

We hope that some of the players make an appearance when Great Park Ice is formally dedicated next week. But in case you can't make the dedication, we brought a piece of the team to you tonight.

Let me introduce the most famous Anaheim Duck of them all – Wild Wing!

I can't top that. I've got nuthin' else.

Wild Wing is going to explain icing to me and help me with my slapshot. "Go Ducks," and, "Go Irvine."

Goodnight everybody.