Thank you to everyone who attended Mayor Michelle Distler's 2018 State of the City on Thursday, February 22 at the Shawnee 18 B&B Theatre. The following is the text from the Mayor's speech. You can also [click here to watch a video](https://cityofshawnee.org/news/what_s_new/mayor_distler_s_state_of_the_city_speechhttps://www.facebook.com/CityofShawnee/videos/10157037622307316/) of the event or [here](https://cityofshawnee.org/news/what_s_new/mayor_distler_s_state_of_the_city_speechhttps://www.flickr.com/photos/cosgsh/)to see pictures from the State of the City.

Thank you all so much for coming today to hear my third State of the City as Mayor of Shawnee. I am honored by the fact that I’ve been able to deliver this speech three times as it lets us all take a moment to stop and reflect on the wonderful community that we are all part of.  
  
First off, I want to thank the Chamber of Commerce for always being a great partner to the City and for hosting the State of the City. The strong, respectful relationship between the City and the Chamber allows us to make great strides forward and that is something none of us should take for granted.   
I also want to thank B&B Theatre for being open to the idea of shaking things up a bit and moving the State of the City here to the B&B Live, which is the Musical Theatre of Kansas City’s new home. This is a pretty incredible and unique space in Shawnee and certainly something that sets us apart. And while there are always strong opinions about incentives, I think this is proof of what they can do. Instead of leaving the City to go to a more modern movie theater in a different city, thousands of Shawnee residents now get to stay here to catch the latest flick or live play, which is nothing short of great for our local economy.   
  
Now I’d like to recognize my fellow Councilmembers. We’ll go by seniority and then alphabetically for our new members. As I read your name, if you could stand for recognition please.  
  
Councilmember Mickey Sandifer  
  
Councilmember Jim Neighbor  
  
Councilmember Mike Kemmling  
  
Councilmember Stephanie Meyer  
  
Councilmember Eric Jenkins  
  
Councilmember Justin Adrian  
  
Councilmember Lindsey Constance  
  
Councilmember Matt Zimmerman  
  
We also have other local, County and State elected officials here so let’s have a round of applause to thank them for all they do.  
  
Our theme for this year’s State of the City is “Shawnee: The People’s Choice”. And yes, we were obviously playing off the whole movie theater vibe, but the more we started thinking about it, the more sense it made. We strive to be “The People’s Choice” every single day. We want Shawnee to be the place people choose to call home, the place businesses choose to set up shop and the place people choose to visit because of all we have to offer. We understand that people have hundreds of choices to make every day and we are honored when Shawnee is the answer to many of those decisions.  
  
You’ve probably noticed quite a bit of change across the City over the past year or so. Let’s take a quick look at some of the biggest City projects that are changing the shape of Shawnee.

This project is one of the largest projects the City has ever launched. When you’re driving downtown, you’ve probably been caught up in the orange cone zone. But this temporary inconvenience is going to be worth it in the end. Stormwater is already flowing through that area more efficiently, which cuts down on flooding. Crews will revamp the road to include three lanes with a constant turn lane in the middle to allow drivers easy access to our restaurants and businesses along the corridor. And what some will likely see as the crown jewels of this project are the new community areas and green spaces you’ll see. The goal is to make this area inviting to families who may want to play in the park, grab a bite to eat or just take a stroll. We want this to be a destination and not just a place to drive by. Which project is this? Let’s reveal it now…. It’s Nieman Now!  
  
This is the City’s first concrete street and it will allow people easier access to hundreds of new homes planned for this area of western Shawnee. And quite a few walkers, joggers and cyclists are using the new section of trail that was built alongside the new Clear Creek Parkway extension, so we’re happy to see that this is something the community can appreciate now and into the future once more development happens. In November, we unveiled the new extension of Clear Creek Parkway. It connects Silverheel near K7 to Clare Road.  
  
This was an amazing example of how residents and the City can work together to get results. Neighbors worked with City staff for more than 10 years, and raised 40 thousand dollars of their own money, to figure out a way to implement a solution to a quality of life issue. I won’t get into all the hoops we had to jump through to make this happen but, in November of 2017, it happened. Whether you agree with the project or not, we recognized this as something that was a huge priority for a large number of our residents and we worked with them to get a resolution. In fact, the whole thing might make a good movie if we have any budding directors in the audience! Another huge accomplishment in 2017 was the substantial progress of the Train Horn Quiet Zone project in western Shawnee.  
  
Looking ahead, we have several exciting projects that will be happening including a new Fire Station 74 on Woodsonia near Johnson Drive. This is to help with response times and to accommodate the growth we’ve seen out in the western part of the City. Safety, as always, is our utmost priority for our residents, and this was a big decision by Council to make this happen.  
  
A new Community Center is something we hear about a LOT from many of you. We’ve hired a firm to conduct a western Shawnee Community Center Viability Study. Over the next several months, you’ll be hearing about opportunities to let us know what you’d want to see in a new community center. What amenities you’d like it to have, what kind of programs are important to you, and then we’ll eventually be able to check out some renderings and put a price tag to it to figure out if this is something that is doable for our community.   
  
Along with the Community Center, we are exploring partnerships with Johnson County Parks and Recreation and Metro United Soccer Club for our Valley of Champions near Johnson Drive and Woodland. Stump Park, Okun Fieldhouse, KC Ice and the Mid-America Sports Complex have long been venues for thousands of sports-minded youths and adults and it is time to explore upgrades to this area.  
These are more examples of how we are listening to our residents and what they want and are taking steps to find out if it is something we can help provide to them so they continue to make Shawnee “The People’s Choice”.  
  
Now it’s time to pull back the curtain on some of our major private development projects going on around the City. Take a look!

As you can see, there are quite a few premier, private projects popping up in Shawnee. Starting with where I’m standing right now, in the renovated B&B Theatre’s Shawnee 18. It is home to the Music Theatre of Kansas City’s new LIVE Theater, which was the vision of MTKC’s Executive Director Cary Danielson-Pandzik. I had the chance to say a few words at the grand opening in December and stayed to watch “It’s a Wonderful Life” and, I’m telling you, this is an unique and professional place to be. The play was incredible and I am looking forward to the next performance coming up in March. This partnership between the silver screen and stage performances is the first of its kind in the country and, to have it in Shawnee is such an awesome opportunity for us. I’m sure many of you have been here to see a movie and know that the B&B also houses an incredible Grand screen, ScreenPLAY that features a fun slide and playground for kids and finally the MX-4D which is an incredible experience complete with wind, rain, fog, bubbles and more! Having cutting-edge entertainment in our City is important for our residents and this has quickly become a destination for people outside the City as well. The Council made the decision to return part of the theater’s investment to them to help with the renovation and that proved to be a wise choice as it has boosted our local economy in many ways. I’d like to thank the Bagby family for choosing to invest in Shawnee.  
  
Now to a project that will be the first of its kind in Shawnee. It will have luxury apartments along with new shopping and dining options and even a small amphitheater, trails and parks. The project at 75th and Quivira will be a true mixed-use development and a place we hope people will seek out when making a choice about where to live, work and play. Now to reveal “the winner”… Westbrooke Green!  
  
We talked about Nieman Now! earlier and we’re mentioning it again because it has already spurred development in that general area. The new Stag’s Creek office building is becoming a modern landmark thousands of people see every day on Shawnee Mission Parkway. Raising Cane’s and Andy’s Frozen Custard are also new additions to our community that have both become frequent stops for folks in Shawnee. And a new Quik Trip going into this same area will also likely be pretty popular. Construction should start next month and it’s scheduled to be complete in  September.  
  
You will soon see work at Shawnee Mission Parkway and Maurer  on Bellmont Promenade, a new development that will bring more places to shop and dine for our residents.  
  
If you go west from there on Shawnee Mission Parkway, you’ll get to the new Johnson County VA Clinic near Hilltop that opened earlier this year. It is serving thousands of local veterans and we couldn’t be more proud to have an outpatient clinic here in Shawnee that is helping our veterans who we respect and honor.    
  
Willow Ridge West, a 132 unit senior independent living development, has been approved for this same area.  
  
This next project is probably one you’ve been anxiously awaiting. The beautiful building will house cutting-edge technology and will have something for every generation of your family from storytime to meeting areas to maker spaces and even a rooftop terrace. And of course books too! The most important thing! The Johnson County Library’s new Monticello branch will open this Fall.  
  
The WestLink Business Center is filling up by the day. Amazon leased about 80 thousand square feet of space and opened a busy warehouse there in 2017. That move brought in more than 100 new jobs to our City. What is really exciting about this area is there is more room to expand and more opportunity to bring in more business in the future. You’ll also soon be seeing a new 100 thousand square foot spec office warehouse building on one of the two remaining lots in Perimeter Park at 83rd and K-7 that’s partially occupied by longtime Shawnee business NazDar.  
Two new hotels will be opening soon on Midland Drive.   
  
The Comfort Inn and Fairfield Inn will serve as new places to stay for out-of-town guests who are visiting Shawnee.   
  
Now to another exciting project that will breathe new life into downtown Shawnee. This is a beloved building that hasn’t been open since 1975. It’s a place that holds fond memories for three local businessmen who bought it and are now busy renovating it in with plans to open later this year. The envelope please! Of course I’m talking about the Aztec Theatre!  
  
Of course these are only a few of the projects going on in the City. I’d love to take the time to tell you about every single one because every single one is truly important to us and our community, but I’m afraid no one wants to be here all week with me, right? But, in all honesty, “stay tuned” this year because we have some really exciting projects in the works that we’ll be able to share soon.  
  
Our City’s Departments have been making major moves this past year. Here are just a few of the highlights.

Achieving accreditation is a massive undertaking and only the best of the best actually get it. I’ll start with the department that accomplished that huge goal in 2017. The Fire Department received the incredible honor of accreditation from the Center for Fire Accreditation International. Let’s stop to give them a round of applause right now. We’ve always known the Shawnee Fire Department is the best but this proved it on an international level and, for that, we are so proud.   
  
But the Fire Department has more than just that going on! They’ll be getting a new Fire Station 74, as I mentioned earlier, out in western Shawnee to help serve our community better. The City Council is also taking a close look at the future of the John B. Glaser Fire Station near Shawnee Mission Parkway and Quivira and whether something more modern is needed to continue to serve our City with the best possible protection.  
  
The Fire Department teamed up with Olathe, Lenexa, Fire District #1 and the Northwest Consolidated Fire District in 2016 to apply for a federal grant to get new self-contained breathing apparatus. And in July 2017, they got 60 of them. This is a great example of how we like to partner up with area agencies to leverage our strengths and achieve a bigger goal like this. That grant helped save our residents right here in Shawnee just over 300 thousand dollars.  
  
Our firefighters answered local AND national calls for help in what was a wild year of weather. A couple big storms smacked Shawnee last summer, unleashing major floods in the area. In September, a team of our firefighters headed down to Houston to help deal with the devastation left behind by Hurricane Harvey.  
  
Our firefighters remain focused on providing our community with knowledge and instruction that could help save lives. They ramped up their CPR classes and continue to train people to be on the Community Emergency Response Team commonly referred to as CERT.  The Shawnee Fire Department also entered a new agreement to provide fire services to Lake Quivira. So, as you can see, our Fire Department is always looking at what’s best for our community and how they can best serve others. And we thank them for that.  
  
So if you talk about the Fire Department, you certainly can’t leave out the Police Department. And, for the record, we talked about the Police Department first in last year’s State of the City so it was the Fire Department’s turn this year.   
  
The Police Department beefed up their force last year, adding five new officers who were partially funded through a COPS Community Policing grant. They also transitioned to a completely digital video solution with in-car and body-worn cameras. A grant also helped fund that. Having more officers, coupled with the new technology, are both things that are helping our Police Department continue to serve and protect our community in the best way possible. In fact, for the second year in a row, we are proud to tell you that overall crime is down in Shawnee.  
Recognizing the changing needs of our community spurred another smart move from the Police Department when they requested increasing the funding for a mental health co-responder to full-time instead of part-time. We work with Johnson County Mental Health on this and it’s proven to be a valuable partnership when it comes to serving our community.  
  
If you’ve been by the Police Department lately, you may have noticed two new, bright green parking spots there. They are not designated for the Mayor, those are the new internet exchange parking spots and they’ve become pretty popular! There are cameras trained on the parking spots that provide a safe place for people to exchange the items they’ve bought or sold online.    
  
Community outreach is always a top priority for ALL of our departments but it is perhaps even more top of mind for our police officers. They are the men and women out on the streets every day helping people in what may be some of their worst or most trying moments. Officers once again had the opportunity to hand out thousands of dollars donated by Shawnee’s Secret Santa. So many great stories come out of this but what is really neat is WHY the anonymous donor does it. He wants our officers to be able to hand out money to those who need it most so he can provide an opportunity for the officers to connect with the community and to build a positive relationship with residents. We are lucky to have Shawnee’s Secret Santa and our officers love the opportunity to help out during the holidays.  
  
The Shawnee Police Department became the second agency in the metro to take part in “Giving the Basics” which is a program that provides hygiene products for those in need. They also take part in countless other community outreach events like National Night Out, Coffee with a Cop, the Torch Run and the Polar Plunge… to name a few. And if you’re on  Twitter, be sure to give “at Shawnee K-S police” a follow. They just joined in January and have already gained quite a following and, if I’m not mistaken, they’re having quite a bit of fun with it too. So give them a follow for sure.  
  
Our \*accredited Public Works Department has been as busy as ever. They were the ones working hard to establish that Quiet Zone I talked about earlier near the train tracks out in western Shawnee. Their work created Johnson County’s third quiet zone along the busiest railroad track in the state of Kansas.  
Let’s run down some big numbers for you now. Our Public Works Department worked to complete more than one point six million dollars of stormwater drainage system repairs. They completed 57 lane miles of street resurfacing. We had a goal of 40 miles per year but you can see they outpaced that promise to taxpayers through strategic steps, making this the most lane miles we’ve ever completed in the City’s history. Things like streets and stormwater might not seem all that exciting to some, but it’s a credit to our Council that they recognize the importance of infrastructure to provide a strong foundation for our City.  
  
 In our 2017 Citizen Survey, residents said flow of traffic and congestion management is one of their top priorities over the next two years. So to answer that call, our employees really dug into coordination timing plans for our traffic signals throughout the City including the major thoroughfares of Shawnee Mission Parkway, Johnson Drive and Nieman. We also introduced flashing yellow arrow lights at several traffic signals and have received positive feedback on how that is helping the flow of traffic in those areas.  
  
And finally, it was record year for storm damage last year. Our Public Works crews worked a ton of hours at storm debris drop-off sites for residents. In fact, they collected over 20 thousand cubic yards of limbs and branches! That’s more than five times what we typically see in a year!  
  
Now onto our Parks and Recreation Department which continues to grow and expand services every year. Let’s go behind the scenes to get a glimpse of all they do!

Pretty great to see all that’s going on in our community. More and more families are attending our events every year. Everything from Old Shawnee Days, the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, Great Grillers, our Concerts in the Park, Scarecrow Festival, Christkindlmarkt and the new “Parked” event… We love hosting these events and seeing our local residents enjoy them and make them part of their own, personal event calendars.   
Our Parks and Rec employees are constantly looking for new, innovative ways to reach all age ranges in our community. They hired a new recreation program coordinator with the goal of increasing youth programming. The Royal Ball brings out all of our local princesses and their Dads in droves every year. And on any given night, you can find most every room in the Civic Centre packed with tiny Tae-Kwon-Do tykes, beautiful ballet dancers or crafty kids creating masterpieces. Many of our older residents enjoy the “SenCom” or Senior Computer classes like “Intro to Facebook” and “Internet Basics”. Their senior day trips that they do in partnership with Lenexa and Merriam are becoming increasingly popular. And of course our pickleball players always keep the Civic Centre loud and fun!  
  
You’ll be seeing big changes at Shawnee Town 1929 soon. Council approved the new five year master plan which includes the addition of the O.W. Fisher Chevy Dealership and Murphy Gas Station. We are so lucky to have this unique destination point in Shawnee that draws in thousands of kids and teaches them more about what life was like in the 1920’s. Shawnee Town is truly a place that sets our City apart.  
  
Our parks and trails are also things that make our City unique. If you ask residents what they like most about Shawnee, you’ll more often than not get the answer of “our parks and trails”. We had the honor of having visitors and dignitaries here from our Sister City of Pittem, Belgium last September when we dedicated the new World War One memorial Plaza at West Flanders Park. The plaza near 55th and Nieman now provides a place to reflect on West Flanders and its key role in the history of the Great War. Part of the sign at the park also pays tribute to our Sister City of Pittem. It was a great honor to unveil this new memorial plaza for our residents.  
  
The City launched four new websites last December including the main city of Shawnee dot org site, one for Shawnee Town 1929 and also for Old Shawnee Days and Great Grillers. We are reaching more residents than ever through our social media channels, including nearly 10,000 people on Facebook, nearly 75 hundred on Twitter, over 12 hundred on Instagram and 11,700 on Nextdoor. That’s in addition to our quarterly newsletter, the CityLine, that is mailed out to all homes and our monthly e-newsletter, “A Few Good Words”. We continue to work closely with local media to get out stories about the City so we can inform our residents on a variety of platforms including print, radio, TV and online. I spend a lot of my time working to get correct information out about our community to our residents in a variety of ways including Third Thursdays, Quarterly Q&A’s and a number of other places including local schools, churches, HOA meetings and Chamber events. One of my favorite projects to be a part of is the Mayor’s Christmas Tree Fund. This year, we worked together to raise $18,400 for Shawnee Community Services and the Shawnee Storm Special Olympics team.  
  
I also want to take time to recognize those that keep things running in the background and support the more visible departments. Police, Fire, Public Works, and Parks and Recreation need the support of our IT team to keep their systems running; our Human Resources team to take care of our employees; our Finance team to keep us stewards of the taxpayer dollars and the bills paid; our Legal department that keeps us honest; and our Municipal Court staff that keeps everyone else honest.   
  
Additionally I want to recognize those employees that keep our city well planned, looking good, and safe including our Planning staff that makes sure things go where they make the most sense; Development Services ensures that sound engineering and construction practices are being followed for planned development and construction of public infrastructure and private development; Codes Enforcement for ensuring that new construction on private property complies with all municipal construction codes; and last but not least our Building Inspections department to make sure everything is safe and as it should be.   
  
As most of you know, we are in a season of change at the City of Shawnee. 2017 brought along the departure of longtime Chamber of Commerce President Linda Leeper. Ann Smith-Tate has taken over the helm and has quickly proven to be a major asset to our community.   
  
Last year brought even more change to the City including a new judge, new prosecutors and three new Councilmembers.   
  
Some major upcoming retirements mark more change in the City. This member of the management team was recently named one of the Top 10 Public Works Leaders of the Year. He’s also been awarded the prestigious Ken Cardwell Heart of America Award that recognizes those who have served the Kansas City Metropolitan Chapter of the APWA in an exemplary manner. This leader is well-known and well-respected in our community, having worked at the City of Shawnee for 32 years. Now for the big reveal…. Development Services Director and City Engineer Doug Wesselschmidt! Let’s give him a well-deserved round of applause.  
  
Perhaps the biggest change was longtime City Manager Carol Gonzales leaving for a job at Mid-America Regional Council after working for Shawnee for nearly 20 years. Deputy City Manager Vicki Charlesworth stepped into the role of Interim City Manager, bringing along 30 years of experience of working for the City of Shawnee. So it’s safe to say our City is in good hands as I work with our Council to search for a new City Manager. This is such an important decision and one we are taking very seriously. We want to make sure we make the right choice for our residents, our employees and our community as a whole as we find the person who will lead our City into the future. And that leader will be walking into a pretty good gig, in our opinion. Shawnee has landed on all kinds of lists, including one of the best places to live and one of the healthiest employers to name just a few. Our 2017 Citizen Satisfaction Survey showed 96 percent of residents ranked Shawnee as a place where they are happy to live. We were excited to see there was a significant increase in satisfaction in many areas since the last time the City conducted the survey in 2015. We are always striving to make things better.  
  
In closing, I would just like to once again thank you all for making this the wonderful community it is. Thank you for looking for ways to move our City forward. Thank you for making Shawnee the People’s Choice. 