

## **2021 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

Good evening, I am once again honored, and feel it is a great privilege, to be delivering this, my third State of the City of Lowell Address. I would like to thank all of you who have joined what has become the norm, this presentation via Zoom. Thank you to the City officials and employees in attendance tonight. This year has been unique in so many ways. In retrospect of the last 12 months, it is with a great deal of gratitude and relief, I have come to the realization that Lowell has fared better than most small cities and towns in our nation. We are in a great position.

The CoVID-19 pandemic has temporarily changed much of our daily tasks and processes at the City of Lowell. We have all had to adapt the way we conduct business and meetings, mostly virtually or through conference calls. Most regrettably, we have had to change the way we speak with you, the citizens of Lowell,

limited our contact to phone calls, email, or social media postings. The employees have done well with adapting to changes to the day to day conducting of business, such as we wear masks and distance ourselves to limit any spread of contagion among each other. For that reason, the City of Lowell has remained open for business, because it is our duty. From all accounts, the mandates and restrictions will be over in the near future, but in the meantime, we will continue to do what it takes to work for you, the citizens and local businesses here in Lowell, as we should.

While 2020 has been turbulent for many people, businesses, and local governments, the City of Lowell has seen some good news and bright areas which we will use to propel forward this coming year. City sales taxes were up 21% in 2020 over 2019's numbers and County sales tax was up 8% over 2019. Combined

City and County Sales taxes were up by \$1,085,135 over 2019 collections. Property taxes were up 5.2% in 2020 over 2019.

Which, by any measure, is strong growth throughout the 2020 year. 2020 has also born the fruit sown over the last two years of lower restrictions and a change in regulations on businesses with economic growth which was unparalleled in other areas of the country. In late 2020, the City Council approved more changes to the Land Development Code. These changes include modifications to the Zoning Map, Master Street Plan and Development Code, in order to make future development more appealing for investors and more intentional and congruent with the City's goals.

As I have remarked before, a growing business community means a growing City. Even with the pandemic temporarily closing the doors for many businesses earlier this year, some were

not intimidated or deterred. Business Licenses were up 3.5% over 2019. With some of those new business licenses, comes new commercial construction. While this brings with it some challenges, it also brings more growth and more people to engage in our economy, even while the construction is on-going. Commercial projects which began or were in progress in 2020, include, Parkway Medical on Grant Place, Apple Blossom Industrial Park on E. Appleblossom, La Hacienda on N. Bloomington, Matrix Tennis & Racquet Club on Mills Lane, Starbucks at North Bloomington and E. Monroe, and the Dillard Property Project. The Dillard Property Project is located on State Highway 264 W, directly south from Workman's Travel Center. This project develops property which has sat idle and vacant for decades.

Commercial Businesses that have moved into available Commercial spaces in 2020 include Hartley Flooring, Flooring by Design, Golf USA, Koi Sushi House, Flooring America, Peak Nutrition and Tactical Sportsman Armory. A total of 56 new business licenses for the year.

Construction and building activity are going strong in Lowell. Our Contractor Services Department reported that a total of 188 Business and Residential Building Permits were issued for 2020. There are seven new active subdivision projects going on at this time. It looks like this trend will continue for a while.

The Lowell Fire Department has seen improvement as well. With the help from a local business grant, the department has purchased a new ladder truck to replace the equipment which was in service for more than 15 years. This much needed upgrade to the equipment means an increased fire response which increased

the ability of our personnel to rescue lives and save property. This upgrade was also recognized by the Insurance Services Office who conducted an audit of the department and increased the Public Protection Classification to Class 2. This means real and appreciable savings by each, and every, citizen of Lowell through their applicable insurance policy premiums. This is an excellent example of a return on investment that can be shared by the entire community.

The Lowell Police Department has made many overdue improvements over the 2020 year. The Dispatch center was upgraded with an emphasis on ergonomics and efficiency. The AWIN System will go live very soon which increases officer safety. The department has replaced its aging fleet of vehicles. This lowers maintenance costs, increases effectiveness, and increases employee safety as the newest safety features of

vehicles are utilized. The police department continues to focus and improve on employee training. In light of the pandemic, virtual trainings and departmental trainings have taken center stage, to replace in-person trainings which had been cancelled.

Along with the police department, Chief Kuth has also made strides of development with the Animal Shelter. Two additional employees were added through restructuring, without changing the budget. The Animal Shelter now has two Animal Welfare Officers who are also certified Law Enforcement Officers. These officers provided a more efficient and effective service to the citizens of Lowell. These are just some examples of the changing landscape of the police department. Chief Kuth assures me he and his staff are committed to the City of Lowell, the citizens of Lowell, and to the finest aspects of community service and crime prevention. The Lowell Police Department is committed to be its

best and provide the most professional service in the history of Lowell.

The Lowell Street Department oversaw the conclusion of the North Goad Springs Road project as well as the South Dixieland Extension. These two concluded projects represent a commitment to the improvement of local infrastructure.

Lastly, in the coming year, the citizens of Lowell will see even more improvements in the City. The Kathleen Johnson Memorial Park goers will see a major upgrade in 2021. Some of the additions include a Greenway Trail Connector and Trailhead, a Farmer's Market and public playground. Additionally, the citizens and businesses on the west side of the City will experience sewer improvements and a widening of State Highway 264 and the installation of a roundabout traffic control system at the intersection of 264 and Bellview.

The 2020 year, while historic in many ways, brought to us an additional logistic challenge regarding the advertisement of the US Census. This official study of residents done by the Federal government will not be released until sometime this summer. However, their published estimate from July 2019, shows Lowell's population at 9,544, an increase of 30.3% from 2010. The US Census also provides us with information we can use to determine how better to serve every resident.

The State of the City of Lowell is excellent. This was achieved through the hard work and dedication of an untold many people. These people include our employees, directors and Chiefs, our patrons, and business leaders, and even the commuters traveling to, from, and through Lowell. Because of my promise to all these people to make and keep the City of Lowell the best it can be, I look forward to the City Council's conversations about

renewing the 1% sales tax and reviewing the revenue data with everyone. This revenue is key to the continued success of this City.

For those who have tracked the progress of this administration over the last three years, I have shown my vow to the wise use of taxpayer funds. I have led the City employees and empowered the Chiefs and directors to make the necessary changes to meet the financial challenge we faced. We met that challenge, and, in the extremely difficult times of 2020, we have even exceeded our own expectations and seen unprecedented growth. This growth has been witnessed by many, including the Advertising & Tourism Promotion Commission, the A&P. I urge the A&P to revisit its mission to promote the entire City of Lowell. To use its influence to promote and develop the parks and trails. This, like each of the departments of the City, will

provide a return on investment which the entire community can enjoy.

Together, we can make 2021 the best on record for the City of Lowell. Together, we can carry forward all the progress we have made. Together, we can keep Lowell working for everyone! Thank you for being with us this evening, and may God bless you, your families, and this City.