



## STATE OF THE CITY

**Mayor Judy Ritter**

**January 22, 2018**

Vista Civic Center

### 1. WELCOME

As I reflect on the past year, I realize how much we have accomplished and how much I look forward to what is coming next. Our city's progress is the result of a collective effort on the part of our elected officials, city staff, community partners, business leaders, residents, and many volunteers. I want to thank all of you who played important roles in our work in Vista over these past years.

Thank you to everyone in this room and many more who have shared their ideas on how to make Vista the place it is. When I first addressed you seven years ago as your new mayor, I pledged to improve our public safety, grow our economy, and lay the foundation for a better future. With the crime rate at a twenty-year low; quick, skillful emergency responses; increased city reserves; a renewed downtown renaissance; smoother and better paved roads; and a significant investment in our parks, we are fulfilling that commitment. Today, please join me in celebrating how the state of our City is STRONG.

### 2. COMMUNITY OF NEIGHBORHOODS

We are a community of neighborhoods. Each part of our city has its own distinctive character and contributes to a greater whole. We've always been aware of this unique quality and felt our at-large council member election system was sufficient to represent us all. However, under the threat of a lawsuit, we approved a new city council election system in 2017 which divides the city into geographic voting districts. While this will be a different method of representation for us, the City Council and I maintain high expectations that, as elected officials begin representing the four sections of Vista, collectively, all will work towards fostering a unified city.

Even with a diverse range of considerations advanced from each district, I believe that by defining unified goals; creating a comprehensive road map; and maintaining service levels to support the whole community; we will continue to shape our entire city's collective destiny. Now I want to turn our attention to the priorities selected by the City Council for fiscal years 2016-2018, which are:

- Sustain Fiscal Sustainability
- Improve Traffic and Roads
- Decrease Blight and Improve the City's Image
- Economic Development
- Improve Multi-Family Housing Standards
- Public Safety and
- Parks and Recreation

*These City Council goals and priorities accurately capture the community's concerns and I want to highlight what we have accomplished.*

## **FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY & ECONOMY**

I am pleased to report that the fiscal health of our city is in good shape due to sound financial planning. Sales and property tax revenues are still trending upward. Later this year, we will have reached a 30 percent emergency reserve. This means we are now better prepared to financially provide the vital services needed for our residents, regardless of future economic downturns.

As our local economy continues to improve, the City is better able to invest in our community's needs and priorities, provide vital infrastructure improvements, fund more park upgrades, and deliver the funding necessary for fire protection and law enforcement services – all of which are fundamental to Vista's quality of life. Vista's unemployment rate is a historic low of 2.9 percent, which is down from last year's 3.9 percent. This is a positive indicator of our successful economy.

*We have 18 breweries in Vista with five in the works. New restaurants open or coming are:*

- Swami's Café coming in 2018
- Raising Cane's will demolish former Famous Dave's soon and will open fall 2018
- 508 Tavern on S. Santa Fe is open
- Dog Haus – construction underway. Open in 2018
- Wildwood Grill (formerly La Paloma) is open
- Poki Poki in Vista Village is open
- When Pigs Fly on Main Street is open
- Milk Organics – is also opening in 2018
- Mikko Sushi – is opening in 2018
- Ciao's on E. Vista Way is working on their expansion renovations to be completed later this year.

With our continued support of the 900 plus industries in the Vista Business Park and our Innovate 78 partnership, we will continue to keep, train and attract creative talent to our city and to our region. This talent works in tech startups, life sciences, communications and other exciting industries. New jobs are being created for Vista and North County residents and more opportunities are on the horizon.

The 78 Corridor has a population totaling 630,000, and is home to nearly one-fifth of residents in the San Diego Region. Employment along the Corridor exceeds 290,000 jobs – about 19 percent of the regional total - and the annual gross regional product surpasses \$36 billion, making the 78 Corridor a major player in the regional economy. North County has emerged as a leader of technological innovation; with over 850 tech firms - nearly 42% above the national average. Technology along the Corridor contributes more than \$6.1 billion annually and employs almost 25,000 people. Some examples of Vista companies are:

- Globarket Tire Recycling in which we attracted the company to Vista through the State's RFI process.
- Quibitekk – We worked with the Economic Development Corporation to arrange a site visit to learn more about the company's developing technology and security applications. The company recently presented to various branches of the Department of Homeland Security.
- Solatube – The company won a \$250,000 Cal Competes grant from the State of California to expand. Their company expansion keeps the company in Vista and brings new jobs to the city.

Our top priority is to increase our economic vitality and help create a sustainable community. Last year I mentioned the new Honda Dealership coming to Vista. Construction will be underway shortly and we look forward to the opening of the dealership and to the new jobs and tax revenues the city will receive.

## **INVESTING IN TRAFFIC FLOW & STREETS**

Last year we began construction on a handful of neighborhood sidewalk and traffic safety projects - including adding new sidewalks in the Townsite and Maryland elementary school neighborhoods; installing a traffic signal on Bobier Drive, and constructing a new roundabout at Vale Terrace and Ponderosa Drive. We set aside \$650,000 to reduce traffic congestion and to date have completed several projects:

- Added a new lane at Civic Center & Phillips Street;
- Re-striped North Melrose Drive to add a third lane in both directions;
- Installed a new traffic signal system to better time traffic lights between intersections.

We are committed to relieving traffic congestion and are working hard to create a less congested city. In July, \$150,000 was added to the traffic engineering budget and this figure will be allocated annually to increase the traffic improvement budget. We also paved 72 miles of city roads, making them safer and smoother for motorists.

The success of our downtown is great news; however, we found that more activity created tight parking. In April, we opened the new public parking lot on Citrus, which has greatly reduced the parking issues by adding 119 more spaces. We also added 12 new parking spaces along downtown streets, doubled the number of street lights, and installed directional signs, creating a more safe nighttime environment and helping visitors locate parking and other downtown amenities.

With the additional funding coming from the State's gas tax increase, we anticipate being able to focus more on improving our residential streets.

## **REMOVING BLIGHT**

Graffiti, trash, over grown weeds, and vacant buildings are just some of the serious issues that create problems in our neighborhoods. By removing run down properties and resolving code violations, our neighborhoods are strengthened and our crime rate decreases. That's why the City of Vista is committed to fighting back against blight. Last year we increasingly targeted early signs of problems to keep them from spreading and growing over time.

We used both simple approaches, like adding trash cans at the transit bus stops, and more complex lines of attack, such as purchasing the Pala Vista property on Civic Center Drive and demolishing the vacant building to make room for a community park, to focusing fully on eradicating graffiti throughout our city. Fortunately, some of these problems will go away with new construction.

The old Sycamore Creek mobile home park property and the Vista Village Creekwalk property were formerly hangouts for criminal activity. The private development taking place at both of these locations are a win-win for us because they provide much needed housing - as well as eyes on the street - to deter vandals and criminals.

Last year, our budget included funding for an additional Code Enforcement Officer position to focus on blight. The expanded staffing has exceeded our expectations by working on some of the more challenging cases in the city and closing most of them! We also improved ten business facades in 2017 using matching grant funds, thus improving existing, older buildings along our commercial corridors.

Construction began on Phase II of the Paseo Santa Fe Street Improvements along S. Santa Fe Avenue. This two year project will remove blight from Ocean View to Terrace Drive and continue the same look and feel of Phase 1 along the corridor. To receive news on the construction, I encourage you to sign up for updates at [CityofVista.com](http://CityofVista.com).

We continue to enforce our Multi-Family Housing ordinance with the help of our Code Officers and Sheriff's deputies, making it safer for our residents who live in apartments. As you can see, we are serious about removing blight and improving our image.

Please continue to report city nuisances or vandalism by using the Access Vista City app we introduced last year, calling our hot line, or reporting it on line. With your help, we can quickly tackle those issues and stop them from spreading.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

Quality of life also depends on the safety of our neighborhoods, how we respond to life and property emergencies, and how well we prepare for disasters.

Thanks to the outstanding work of Captain Chuck Cinnamo and the Vista Sheriff's Department. I am proud to say that crime is still heading in the right direction again this year – which is DOWN. Vista's overall Crime Rate Index has fallen to just under 19 percent. This is an 8 percent decrease when compared to 2016, dropping 25 percent since 2013.

Congratulations to the Vista Fire Department for celebrating 90 years in service. In 1927, Vista was a small town of 553 residents, and with the addition of a hose cart donated from the City of Oceanside and 14 community volunteers, the Vista Fire Department was born.

Today, under Chief Jeff Hahn's exceptional supervision, the Fire Department serves over 115,000 district and Vista residents with 89 uniformed personnel. Due to the increase in service calls, a fourth ambulance was added to the Fire Department's fleet to better serve the community and respond to the medical calls.

The recent Lilac Fire, as well as the Anaheim and Northern California wildfires, are a reminder that a wildfire could flare up any moment and that more and more, wildfire is becoming a way of life for us in Southern California. These fire events are horrible tragedies, especially with the loss of life and property. We continue to keep the residents affected by these wildfires in our thoughts. Our Fire and Sheriff responders continually train to ensure they are ready for any type of disaster. While we were fortunate the Lilac Fire did not reach our city limits, our neighbors were less fortunate. We were however, able to provide assistance during the Lilac Fire, and both our Chief and Captain played an integral role in CALFIRE's Incident Command Center.

Thank you to both Chief Hahn and Captain Cinnamo and their teams for their public safety efforts in protecting and serving our community.



## **PARKS & RECREATION**

As we know, parks, recreational areas and open space are valuable features which make Vista so special and I truly believe that spending recreational time outdoors has a positive impact on the community. Parks make life better for us and our recreation programs are an essential community service. There's no better place to get people outdoors than in a green space, on a trail, in a ball field, or at the park.

We have made great strides in investing in healthier and active lifestyle options for Vista residents by spending over \$10 million on park upgrades, new playground equipment, updated restrooms, and better lighting over the past three years.

In August, we opened our two new skate parks. While we got off to a bumpy start with sporadic vandalism in the beginning, I'm happy to report the skate community has stepped up and is now taking a role in keeping the sites clean and safe. This year we will continue our public outreach on finalizing the types of improvements residents envision for Bub Williamson Park. We hope that by the end of the year we will begin working on the park improvements. We will also host two community workshops in March to determine the types of amenities residents want for the future Pala Vista community park I mentioned earlier. I'm excited this project will greatly enhance an important entryway into our city and provide a neighborhood park for the community.

## **GOAL SETTING & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

The City Council and I will be setting our goals for fiscal years 2018 through 2020 during an upcoming public workshop in March. We probably won't see every policy or implementation program everyone wants in the goal; however, I'm confident that the finished product will not be vastly different from the current goals we have, and that it will accurately reflect our collective vision for our city.

And finally, we remain steadfast in staying engaged with our residents and businesses. Please continue to stay involved. Get informed. Call us, write or e-mail us, follow the City on its official social media sites, sign up for weekly news updates, or attend a City Council meeting.

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## **IN CLOSING**

Together, as a community, we will face our new challenges with new solutions. By paving roads, balancing our budgets, responding to emergencies, and providing recreational opportunities, we are fulfilling our commitment and laying the foundation for a better future. In closing, I am honored, once again, to stand before you in a time of remarkable change in Vista. Looking ahead to the projects we have before us, I am confident that the results of our work over the past year will serve as a stable foundation for building a stronger and more prosperous future for Vista.

*Thank you for coming today.*

