



STATE OF THE CITY

Mayor Judy Ritter

January 23, 2017

Morris B. Vance Community Room

1. WELCOME

Good afternoon and welcome to the City Council, and to the mayors from our neighboring cities with us today. Thank you for attending. Welcome also to our City Manager Patrick Johnson, City Attorney Darold Pieper, the Chamber Board, and our many business leaders and community members who are in attendance.

The Vista community should take great pride in the accomplishments of 2016. Our progress continues to be the result of a collective effort on the part of our elected officials, city staff, community partners, business leaders, residents, and many volunteers. We are driving improvements that will keep us uniquely Vista – active and vibrant – for generations to come.

2. LOCAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

I am pleased to report that the State of our City is stronger than ever. The fiscal health of our city is in good shape due to sound financial planning and a small, but steady trend in sales and property tax revenues. I am very proud that our emergency reserves are now at a solid 25 percent - an increase over last year's 20 percent. The City Council and I agreed to have a goal to increase these reserves to 30 percent. Now, we are better prepared financially to provide the vital services needed for our residents, regardless of future economic downturns. From tech startups to life sciences and communications, we are working to keep and attract creative capital to our city and to our region. With our continued support of the 900+ industries in the Vista Business Park and our Innovate 78 partnership, new jobs have been created for Vista and North County residents and more opportunities are on the horizon. We are fortunate that our local economy continues to improve - enabling us to invest in our community needs and priorities, provide vital infrastructure improvements; more park upgrades and renovations; and the funding necessary to provide fire protection and law enforcement services - which are all fundamental to Vista's quality of life.

Vista's unemployment rate is 3.9 percent down from last year's 4.1% and the job growth rate is 2.2 percent. According to a recent study from the Center for Policy Initiative, the City of Vista grew faster than any other city in San Diego County with regard to household income. The report also noted that manufacturing jobs are the highest paying jobs after professional, scientific and technical jobs. That's good news for Vista, because many of these manufacturing jobs are located right in our business park. As you can see from the slide behind me - 30 percent of the 24,000 employed in the Business Park are Vista residents. That means we have a big stake in attracting new businesses, retaining the ones we've got, and helping those companies seeking to expand.

Today, I am very happy to bring you some exciting and breaking news. You are the first to hear this announcement: I am pleased to report that American Honda Motor Company has announced they will open a new dealership in Vista and they have chosen the C.A.R Group, operating as Norm Reeves Honda, as the new Vista Dealership Owner. The C.A.R group is recognized as one of the premier dealers on the Honda brand and has been recognized for their outstanding customer service on numerous occasions. They are finalizing plans on their location and anticipate opening within 18 months. C.A.R Group CEO, Dave Conant was unable to attend today due to a prior commitment; however, Taylor Conant is here and you will soon see him and the rest of their team working in the community on their new dealership. Welcome to Vista and I know you all will welcome Taylor and the rest of the team when you have a chance to meet them.

Our top priority is to increase our economic vitality and help create a sustainable community. We will continue to seek opportunities to work with our business leaders and our local and regional partners to achieve this goal.

INVESTING IN TRAFFIC & STREET IMPROVEMENTS

In 2016, the City invested \$4.2 million dollars in road and traffic improvement projects. This is an important accomplishment for our residents, as 95 percent of those who participated in our 2015 resident survey ranked Traffic Congestion as “Very Important”.

This past September, the City Council and I approved a Traffic Congestion Management Plan outlining almost \$500,000 dollars for projects designed to improve traffic flow. Beginning this July, we will also be setting aside another \$150,000 a year on an annual basis.

KEEPING THE COMMUNITY SAFE

Public safety is a top priority and our Fire and Sheriff’s Departments are keeping the community safe by addressing crime, responding to life and property emergencies, and preparing for disasters. Our Fire Department’s Calls for Service increased a bit last year. Yet, even with the increased service calls, the total fire and property losses are down from 2015. This is a testament to the Department’s emphasis on firefighter training, fire compliance and inspection programs, and public education efforts.

A good report from our Sheriff’s Department, as well. Our crime rate is the lowest in 20 years! That’s great news and I applaud the work the Vista Sheriff’s Office does in analyzing data, tracking crime patterns and anticipating areas where crime may occur. The Intelligence-Led policing strategy efforts are really making a difference in our community and we are determined to keep it that way.

On Saturday, February 25, the Vista Sheriff’s Department is hosting “A Day with the Deputy” at Shadowridge Park from 9 am to Noon. This will be a fun family event with an opportunity for adults to meet our Vista deputies and for kids to check out the patrol cars and equipment. More information is included under the Calendar of Events section on the City’s website. We plan to host the event in the spring at another Vista location, as well. We will also be announcing other events which will provide the community the opportunity to interact with our law enforcement personnel.

Thank you to both Fire Chief Jeff Hahn and Vista Sherriff’s Captain Chuck Cinnamo and their teams for your public safety efforts in protecting our community.

Clean, well-maintained neighborhoods and commercial areas are also cornerstones of a safe community. Keeping Vista that way is the job of our Code Enforcement Office. As you can see from this slide, Code Enforcement receives over 3,000 complaints each year, ranging from quality of life issues, such as front yard debris, inoperable parked cars, excessive pets, and illegal signs, to name a few. This is a public complaint driven process, meaning most of the time, the Code Enforcement Officers follow up on a complaint that the public has submitted. That's why it's important residents keep informing the City about local problems needing attention.

Recently, the City rolled out a new mobile app, called ACCESS VISTA. The app is a convenient way for residents to report problems in real-time to the City. Let's say you are walking downtown and notice graffiti on a street sign. Just snap a photo of it, type in your comments, and hit submit. You can even track what others have submitted and check to see if the problem has been resolved. If you have not downloaded the app yet, pick up one of the postcards on your table to learn more about ACCESS VISTA. Together, as a community, our combined efforts will continue keeping Vista safe, clean, and beautiful!

REMOVING BLIGHT

We have also accomplished a lot this past year to remove blight, which is another top priority for the City Council and me. Of course our Paseo Santa Fe Improvement project – our Number One Blight Removal project - is well underway, and I'll speak about that in a few minutes. But first, let me say it's been over 17 years since the City purchased the Old Sycamore Creek park property. Since then, the City has struggled with the upkeep of it. The property has been vandalized, become a place for criminal activity, and keeps Code Enforcement very busy. I am pleased to report the City has sold the property, which is now in escrow. We expect to close later in the year. This is a win-win for the City and the community as we hand the reigns over to a private party who will develop it into a residential amenity for the city.

The character and beauty of a city's entryways can have a positive impact on a community, leaving a lasting impression on the both visitors and residents. The recent purchase of property on Civic Center Drive, near the corner of Pala Vista Drive, is another check mark against blight. This property is a key entrance way into the city, and in a couple of weeks, the old houses will be demolished. Plans are in the works to develop the property into a community park.

PASEO SANTA FE

The Paseo Santa Fe vision to revitalize the S. Santa Fe corridor has been firmly established with the completion of Phase I of the Streetscape Improvement Project. April, 2016, marked a pivotal point for the community. The "downtown vision" we spoke about for so many years finally moved from "the vision" into "reality". Paseo Santa Fe is already paving the way for future economic development in our downtown area. You only have to look at the business ventures taking place downtown – the new additions of the Flying Pig and Belching Beaver, Rosati's, and the confidence level of developers and business owners renovating or constructing new buildings - to understand the far reaching magnitude of this project.

Phase II is on track to begin this later this year. The construction work will extend from Oceanview Drive to Terrace Drive and will be similar to Phase I. The overhead utilities will be placed underground and after the below- the-ground infrastructure is built, the road and streetscape improvements will follow. Our city core, the downtown area, is on the cusp of a huge transformation. We're creating a balanced downtown community where people can live and shop and be entertained. The transition from a somewhat quieter setting to a vibrant, livable environment will dominate the heart of our city for decades to come.

The investment of developer Jay Wentz in Streetlights Residential's One Hundred Main Street project, being built on the corner of Main Street, will kick-start this momentum along Main Street. The City is committed to the revitalization of the downtown area; and understanding that parking is vital to this area, has invested in the construction of the new Main Downtown parking lot on Citrus. Barring any significant weather setbacks, the downtown public lot will be opened in the spring.

Work will begin soon on the Downtown Lighting project which includes improving sidewalks and lighting to heighten security and walkability. It's great the way our downtown is taking shape and we want to make sure everyone knows where it is, where the amenities are located, and where to park. That's the idea behind a Way-Finding program that Councilwoman Rigby and I were involved in. Easy-to-read signs directing drivers to public parking and points of interest throughout downtown will be installed this spring. A temporary sign, located on a southbound N. Santa Fe Avenue, in front of the Vista Village Transit Station has been posted for the public to take a sneak peek.

PROMOTING A FIT CITY

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. We've made great strides in investing in healthier and active lifestyle options for Vista residents by our investment in our parks and trail system, and in our diverse recreational programs and activities. In July, we added to our park and trail inventory, with the new section of nature trail, linking the existing trail from the west end of Brengle Terrace Park to Wildwood Park. This trail is a key link in our citywide trail system.

In the past two years, the City has spent over \$9 million dollars to renovate all of its parks. This significant investment has far reaching benefits, as it probably touches most of our residents' lives. Amenities, including new shade sails, picnic facilities, playgrounds, equipment, and restrooms have been installed. Two notable exceptions are: the two new Skate Parks and Bub Williamson Park projects.

Skateboard enthusiasts are excited to hear our new skate parks will open on N. Santa Fe Avenue in late spring. The parks will serve both beginners and advanced skaters. Coming in a few weeks, a new traffic signal will be installed near Orange Avenue, to make crossing on North Santa Fe Avenue safer for skate-park users. We are cautiously optimistic the City will be awarded grant funds this summer to enable us to move forward with a complete overhaul of Bub Williamson Park. A new soccer field arena, tot lot, picnic facilities and an off-leash dog park with separate areas for large and small dogs are being designed. This proposal will come before the City Council soon for approval. If the grant funding is secured, construction could begin as early as October. .

Because the health of our residents is near to my heart, I am initiating a "Walk with the Mayor" program in the spring. I invite you to join me on one of these short, informal walks to enjoy casual conversation and the opportunity to get active. The dates will be publicized soon and included under the Calendar of Events section on the City's website. Or, if you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact my office.

PERSON OF THE YEAR

The spirit of service is at the very heart of the Vista community and it unites us and holds us together. This community spirit has improved the lives of countless individuals and made our City a better place.

Today, I would like to recognize a special couple, Karl and Peggy Ramsing. The Ramsings are the 2016 “Person or I should say “couple” of the Year”. Karl and Peggy have left an indelible imprint on our community through their generous donations of time and funds to promote cultural and public art. When you head to the Moonlight Amphitheatre, take in the beautiful art placed downtown, walk by the Horses sculpture along the downtown creekwalk, to name a just – you can be assured the Ramsings were behind it.

Both have encouraged and sponsored art and artist in Vista for many years. The Ramsings have a favorite saying, “Start having fun with a pet project and encourage others ... and see what will result.” Karl and Peggy, please come up and accept this award.

STORM READINESS

When forecasts began predicting a strong El Niño season last year, the City began preparing its streets and infrastructure just in case it hit hard. While it didn’t pan out then, this year we were ready for a strong storm season largely due to the Public Works Department and their preparedness again this year. During these last few days of severe storms, city roads and infrastructure remained intact and we did not have any serious issues. Thank you to Public Works Director Chuck Crist and his staff for their vigilance throughout the storms. I know the Public Works Department will remain alert in keeping our roads clear of debris and our residents informed of possible hazardous street conditions when the next storms occur.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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 monthly e-notices on planning projects or city happenings, or attend a City Council meeting.

Together, as a community, we will face our new challenges with new solutions.

IN CLOSING

In closing, I am honored, once again, to stand before you in a time of remarkable change in Vista. “Shaping a Better Future” for Vista doesn’t come easily – it takes a lot of work and collaboration. 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 solid foundation for building a stronger and more prosperous future for Vista.

Thank you for coming today.