



## **STATE OF THE CITY**

**Mayor Judy Ritter**

**January 28, 2019**

Morris B. Vance Community Room

### **1. WELCOME**

It is my honor, as your Mayor, to welcome you to the Chamber's State of the Community address. Today, January 28 is the day the City of Vista was incorporated. So a Happy 56th Anniversary to us! Here's a little known fact: Our great city was the 12th to be incorporated in San Diego County in 1963, and the twelve stripes on our City Seal represent this fact. Rebecca, San Marcos also met to incorporate on this same day in 1963; however, we held our meeting earlier, thus giving Vista the honor of being the 12th city and San Marcos following as the 13th of the 18 cities making up San Diego County.

### **2. LOCAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK**

I stand before you today, on the same day of our city's inception in 1963, to share the many ways we are continuing to shape the vision our historic leaders began fifty-six years ago. During my twenty years on the City Council, and the last eight years as Mayor, I've seen us come a long way in achieving our defined goals, and while there are still many challenges, I'm very proud of what we have accomplished together in positioning Vista for a better, more successful future. I look forward to continuing this work of building our community and creating opportunity as I enter my third term of service as your Mayor. It is becoming evident, from the outside looking in, that we are creating a more vibrant future for this city. However, always being mindful of our history, we have taken inventory of the many aspects of our historical roots and I pledge to continue striving to preserve our small-town feel.

Like most successful cities, we have seen our city grow over the past years, and more recently, we are facing new housing, traffic, and environmental challenges, and a new medical marijuana industry which are all changing our city. In November, Vista voters approved Measure Z which allows up to 11 medical marijuana storefronts in the city with a seven percent sales tax on gross receipts. Staff is working on the implementation of this, and for those interested, more information is posted on our City website. While there is always change, there is also the constant: That constant being that the City is facing these challenges and our future projections with sound policies and informed and prudent guidelines. For me, this means listening to our residents and our business leaders who are experiencing these and other influences and different trends, and trying to truly understand where they are coming from before formulating any actions.

I believe our goal as a city is to do big things that could not be accomplished without all of us. What good does it do to create jobs if you can't get to the one you have now because you're stuck in traffic or you can't afford to live here? The people in our Community love Vista as a place to live, to work, to play and to raise their children. And it's our job to make sure we use our resources and our revenues wisely to provide them with a good quality of life and to do a good job planning for growth for future generations.

Of course, we can't do that without the collective effort on the part of our elected officials, city staff, community partners, business leaders, residents, and many volunteers. A huge thank you to all of you who played important roles in our work in Vista over these past years. And thank you to everyone in this room and many more who have shared their ideas on how to make Vista the place it is. Today, please join me in celebrating our City's 56th anniversary and how the state of our City is STRONG and the FUTURE is bright.

## **FISCAL SUSTAINABILITY & ECONOMY**

First, let's take a look at our economy and our fiscal sustainability. 2018 was a good year for the nation, and for our local economy, as well. And it looks like 2019 should be solid, too. However, a slowdown is inevitable at some point. That's why I am pleased to report that, at the end of 2018, the City attained a 30 percent emergency reserve. When I first became Mayor, our emergency reserves were less than 10 percent and at one point close to zero. Ultimately, our goal over the next few years is to reach a 35 percent reserve.

One big take-away from that and for 2018 is that diligent planning by our City Council and Patrick Johnson, our City Manager has better prepared the City financially, regardless of future economic downturns. These rainy day funds will tide us over during a typical downturn and will make it possible for us to continue providing vital residential services. The Vista you see today is leaner, stronger, and more strategically prepared than a decade ago to meet the economic challenges in times ahead. This is a really remarkable accomplishment, and it highlights our City's core responsibility to Vista residents. At the heart of the City is a motivated, efficient, and innovative team of city employees dedicated to the long-term operation and maintenance of our city's infrastructure, programs, and services. Later in my presentation, I'd like to shine the light on a few of these operations and programs.

Presently, the City continues to benefit from both the State and national economic climate. The unemployment rate is still very low at 3.4 percent and the assessed valuation of Vista's properties has continued to climb for a sixth year in a row by a healthy 7.2 percent. However, this year we expect the assessed valuation to stabilize. As our local economy continued to improve in 2018, the City was 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 residents' quality of life.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT | PLANNING**

Economic Development is a top priority for us. We have all the ingredients we need with our attractive, vibrant community to continue strengthening our economy, bringing new jobs, and taking advantage of the over 900 innovative, creative businesses in our Business Park. Nine Hundred local, national and international businesses and approximately 24,000 employees in our amazing business park!

One example of innovation is the new Skateboard Training Facility in the Business Park. In 2020, the summer Olympics will welcome skateboarding to its roster of competitions. That's where the new California Skate Parks Training Facility comes in. Recently, I visited the new facility and had the opportunity to see the Chinese women's skateboard team who were preparing for the 2020 Olympics. The team is thrilled to be living in the area for a few months, particularly to train here, because there are no other facilities to help top skateboard professionals get ready for world championships. I also met a few other professional skateboarders who have moved to the area to get ready for global competitions. Who knows, maybe when the 2020 Olympics roll around, Vista will be represented on the podium!

From business needs, to soccer tournaments, to vacation get-a-ways, Vista sees many visitors every year, and overnight accommodations can fill up quickly, especially with sports tournaments or during the summertime. With the Ayers Hotel set to open in the Business Park later this year, we hope to fill that hospitality gap. Our goal is to attract a fourth hotel to Vista and we will be working on that later this year. In the next few months, we'll be celebrating the opening of the new Honda Dealership in downtown Vista. I recently read a Business Journal article reporting that the two best-selling car brands in San Diego County are first Toyota followed by Honda. The story also mentioned that used Honda car sales are on the rise. Which is great news for Vista! The Honda dealership will be selling both new and used vehicles and I will be able to get my Honda serviced right here in Vista. This time next year, I anticipate reporting on how the new sales tax revenues will be helping to fund more services for our Vista residents.

During the past few years, several new housing and retail options have been taking shape after being on hold for several years during the recession. Some of the new housing projects include:

- The Monarch project is building 179 apartment units on the former Sycamore Creek Mobile Home site will also include a swimming pool, a dog run, and a community room. An added benefit is that the developer is completing the public trail from Wildwood Park to Brengle Terrace Park, and this will be a positive amenity for the community.
- Another project includes 124 new town homes which are being built at Delpy's Corner on E. Vista Way & Foothill called the Enclave. The high tiered wall surrounding the project will be heavily landscaped a little later toward completion of the project; they will also include amenities such as a pool and BBQ area, a community room, and a tot lot.
- Sierra Town Homes, is another one, which is 60 condo units located on the northwest corner of S. Santa Fe and Mar Vista Drive across from Sunrise Cafe. The developer is constructing a roundabout on Mar Vista at Avocado Drive and Presley Place as you're coming and going from the freeway and will be making public road improvements to South Santa Fe Avenue right in front of the project area.
- The PERSEA project on the northeast corner of N. Santa Fe Avenue and Cananea Street will build 305 apartments and is being built for the millennial generation in mind.

There are also a mix of market rate and affordable housing projects in various stages of planning along the Paseo Santa Fe corridor, including the 42 unit apartment project called Terrace Loft; and the Paseo Artist Village which will be a mix of retail space and 60 residential units. A new "special event" rental venue from Booze Brothers is in the planning stages for the former Joe's Paint & Glass or Petos building, (whichever you knew it as) on South Santa Fe across from the Paseo Pointe Apartments. This will be an added, unique setting for many types of event opportunities. And also, in the commercial part of the Paseo Point Apartment Building we welcome the upcoming opening of Pacific Premier Bank. Of course, the biggest development underway downtown is the 100 Main Street project on Main Street & S. Santa Fe Avenue. The grand opening of this exciting project is expected in early 2020. The completed project will create a hub of activity and bring more foot traffic to our downtown. The activity and large construction hole you currently see will be 2 levels of underground parking. The first floor of the building will be used for commercial space, maybe a restaurant or retail. The upper floors will house 126 upscale residential apartment units, and will also include a floor with a swimming pool and barbecue area for the residents. We've also got some business projects that recently opened or are currently underway including: A Restoration Hardware Outlet opened last week on January 24th in the former North County Square Babies R Us; a new Sprouts Grocery Store is coming on East Vista Way and Foothill; Dunkin Donuts under construction nearby in the former Sport About building; and the renovation of the Classic Chariots dealership on W. Vista Way is underway. A mini-storage facility is being constructed on the former Security Chevrolet site on E. Vista Way. The contemporary architecture of the buildings will significantly enhance the corridor's appearance.

All of these new or renovated projects will completely enhance the look of our City. If you are interested in the learning more, please check the City's website or ACCESS VISTA app for more information. It seems that our Historic part of Downtown is transforming every few months with new restaurants, breweries, and shops. We have welcomed in several new arrivals downtown such as Dog Haus, Shak's Bistro, Swami's, Mikko Sushi, When Pigs Fly & Raising Cane's. Coming soon to the former CPK or Rosati's space in Vista Village is a restaurant called Culichi Town. Their unique menu adds a flavor of Mexican sushi with a mix of cream cheese and grilled meat to the downtown dining experience. Also look for new changes to the historic bank building in the next year with the new owners Julie and Dave Lowen.

We have also added more street lights and increased the number of parking spaces downtown to create a more visitor-friendly environment. Time and time again, many residents have stopped me in one of my favorite restaurants (which are many, to tell you the truth!) to let me know about their positive experiences in our downtown area. Our downtown is attracting investors and businesses taking a fresh look at our lively downtown. We've got more microbreweries per capita than any other city in the U.S. and this continues to position the city competitively in attracting regional visitors to our city. Adding to the inventory are the newest breweries, Helia and Beach Breeze. This brings the count to 17 breweries with four more pending and a total of 5 distilleries and wineries. One of our greatest strengths as a community is the passion and expertise of our business leaders and our many faith based churches. Kudos to all of you!

## **INVESTING IN TRAFFIC & STREET IMPROVEMENTS**

Part of what makes Vista stand out is the variety of services and programs we provide and offer to our residents. These run the gambit from creating lifelong friends and memories through our Recreation programs; enhancing our neighborhoods so residents feel secure; to beautifying our city; to maintaining our public resources. One way the City is working to strengthen neighborhoods is by investing in critical public infrastructure needs. Last year a handful of neighborhood sidewalk projects were completed, including building new sidewalks on W. Indian Rock, Bobolink, and on North Santa Fe Avenue in the Townsite neighborhood.

The City also inspected many residential sidewalks last year and the data was used to establish a new sidewalk inventory list. This valuable resource will guide staff in identifying areas to focus on in 2019 and into the future. In addition, it will be helpful to our Public Works Department in identifying which sidewalks need to be repaired. I am very pleased to announce we are slated to receive a \$4 million dollar State grant to fund our Townsite Street Improvements. This project will include many amenities based on resident's input, such as, new sidewalks; two pedestrian traffic signals on North Santa Fe Avenue; bike lanes; roundabouts; and high visibility crosswalks on Townsite Drive and West Los Angeles Drive. Ultimately, all of these completed projects and future improvements will enhance safety and pedestrian access for our local neighborhoods.

Residents are also commenting on the fact that our main roads have been repaved and are in good driving condition. The additional revenues coming in from the SB1 gas tax will enable us to build upon the 27 miles of recently paved residential streets and make it possible to focus more resources on improving our residential streets in the next few years.

I know this is very important to our residents. By leveraging our resources and manpower, Vista's streets are safer and smoother for all motorists. While I know it is hard to realize sometimes while sitting through a traffic signal – but we have made progress on relieving traffic congestion. Traffic is a huge concern for us and we are always striving for improvement and innovative ways to manage it.

The big job underway now is the project connecting our traffic signals to each other and to a traffic management center at the Civic Center. This project is underway on the main streets on the south side of the City, including Sycamore Avenue & South Melrose. When completed, this will result in shorter commutes during peak travel hours and make for safer signalized intersections. Later this year, construction will begin on the main streets in the north side of the city, including North Santa Fe Avenue and East Vista Way.

The Paseo Santa Fe construction work on the under-grounding of utilities along S. Santa Fe is continuing into this year. After that phase is completed, later in the year, the above-surface street work, including the construction of the new roundabout at Guajome Drive will begin. Another construction project started last year was the extension of the Inland Rail trail along the Sprinter rail tracks in Vista. Currently the trail is complete from Escondido to San Marcos and when completed, the 21-mile trail will run all the way from Escondido to Oceanside. SANDAG will complete a portion of the Vista construction in a few months and is currently seeking funding to build the final two mile gap between Mar Vista and North Drive. It will be a great amenity for us when it is completed and should be very popular with runners, cyclists, and pedestrians.

## **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. Our Sheriff's Captain, Greg Rylaarsdam and his law enforcement team continue adjusting to the changing landscape and providing excellent service to our City. Today there is very good news to share: and that is that Crime is again down in Vista! There has been a five percent decrease in Vista's overall Crime Rate Index when compared to 2017, and it has dropped 21 percent since 2014.

Continuing that downward trend is our goal and that's why the City Council and I recently approved an additional Sheriff's Deputy to help patrol the city and our community parks. A complex challenge we are facing today is the visible effects of addiction, mental illness, and homelessness on our streets. We are not unique. Communities large and small across the country are facing these same challenges.

We are working with our law enforcement, our non-profit organizations, businesses, and community members on bringing innovative, common sense, collaborative solutions to our community. Our Fire Department recently added a Homeless Outreach Paramedic Program to assist in addressing the homeless Medical issues and services. Later this year, we will complete a strategic plan that we have been working on to address homelessness in our City. More information on the plan will be provided in the coming months. For the safety of our residents, our businesses, and to those who pass through our city, we say thank you to our Captain and the Vista Sheriff's deputies for their daily support watching over Vista.

Last year, our Fire Department, under Chief Jeff Hahn's outstanding supervision, responded to over 14,000 district and city calls for help - maintaining quick 9-1-1 emergency response times, crucial in life and death situations. In addition, Vista fire crews provided essential aid to help combat California's devastating wildfires. Public Safety is the most fundamental service a City provides, and we are grateful that our residents clearly see the work ethic, dedication, and talent that come from our Vista Fire Department and our San Diego Sheriff's Department.

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



## **PARKS & RECREATION**

As we know, parks, recreational areas and open space are valuable amenities that make Vista so special. Did you know that our Recreation Division offers classes, programs, and events - think Movies in the Park, Wave Waterpark, and the Moonlight Amphitheatre - that are attended by people from far beyond our city limits?

Our Recreation classes and sports programs served over 15,000 young children, youth, and adults last year. Staff also increased the after school drop-in and play time at the Linda Rhoades Recreation Center. We have made great strides in providing healthier and active lifestyle options for Vista residents by investing in park upgrades, new playground equipment, updated restrooms, and better lighting. Soon we'll be finalizing the design concepts for Bub Williamson Park with the park improvements taking place later this year. Designs are also underway for the new neighborhood park at the vacant Pala Vista/Civic Center site. The community's input was central to us as we all worked together with the design team. This new park will greatly enhance the Civic Center entry way into our city and provide a much needed park for that neighborhood.

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Vista is rich in a diversity of cultures and experiences. In my conversations with community members, I have been energized by how much our residents care about our city and how much they want to be a part of Vista's success. Our community wants a government that is approachable, transparent, and responsive, and I am committed to delivering on those fronts.

I am grateful for the contributions of our boards and commissions, our Leadership Academy participants, and our volunteers – and I'm eager to get more people involved – particularly those who are not currently connected to their City government. I remain steadfast in staying engaged with our residents and businesses. Please continue to stay involved. Volunteer. Get informed. Call us, write, or e-mail us. Sign up for the Vista News Center's weekly news updates or follow the City on social media, or attend a City Council meeting.

## **IN CLOSING**

In closing, I want you to know that I am a very ordinary person, and I am blessed to live a very extraordinary life filled with amazing opportunities. I am honored to have the privilege to lead the City during a time of remarkable change in Vista. As a community, we will face our new challenges with new solutions. By paving roads, balancing our budgets, responding to emergencies, and providing recreational and cultural opportunities, we are fulfilling our commitment, enhancing our community, and laying the foundation for a better future.

Today we stand 56 years stronger with a vibrant community; a thriving economy, energized downtown, amazing business park; a healthy environment; and a responsible government ready to build a stronger and more prosperous Vista. Looking ahead, we have incredible projects and opportunities before us, and I am confident 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!*

