

State of the City 2020

By custom and by charter it falls to the Mayor to deliver an annual report to the people of Santa Fe on the overall condition and direction of this special place we call home.

Usually it's an event that involves both celebration and ceremony.

But this year I'd like to dispense with pomp and circumstance. This year—we should all acknowledge—has been a year like no other.

It has brought pain, loss, illness, and tragically, even death.

It has also reminded me of the true goodness of the people the City Council and I are privileged to serve. Of the benefit of having such a capable City Council at this difficult moment. And of our good fortune of having a City workforce with such great competence and dedication. That is the *real* state of our city.

In this extraordinary, COVID-19-altered time, the state of Santa Fe is a reflection of the people of Santa Fe. What makes Santa Fe the city of faith is your love for family, friends, community and city.

We're a people who reach out to each other and who take care of each other. We did it before COVID-19-times, we're doing it now during COVID-19-times and we'll still be doing it long after COVID-19-times are behind us.

Because of your heart and your devotion to keep Santa Fe safe, open and together, the state of our special city is strong, secure and resilient.

If there's a Santa Fe response to the COVID-19 virus, it's this: The pain it's causing in our community helps us appreciate all the more the good we enjoy in our lives.

COVID-19 reminds us how small things can make a big difference: We appreciate every day the importance of a good meal, the support of devoted health care workers and courageous first responders, the security of a safe place to sleep, the sound decisions to halt evictions and to provide aid for the most vulnerable among us. Not everyone has all of those things—not yet. But we're fortunate that we live in a community that provides for as many as possible what everyone should enjoy.

There are so many among us who are making a difference I can't call them all by name. But it's important to share a few examples.

During this pandemic our children and families have been hit hard. We are grateful to Sherry Hooper and the hundreds of volunteers at the Food Depot, to Robert Egger and the chefs and students who worked so hard at the Community College kitchen and to the many Santa Fe Public Schools employees, especially the bus drivers and food service workers who have fed Santa Fe's youth and families.

Our local businesses have stepped up. Pamela Koster and Mindy Hale, the leaders at Falling Colors, contributed \$180,000 to assist small businesses and at-risk workers. Together they've built a fund that has now grown to \$860,000. When her hotel dining room was shut down by COVID-19, Jenny Kimball, the CEO of La Fonda, turned it over to Native American artists so they could create a pop-up version of Indian Market. Here in Santa Fe, tradition and innovation live and work together.

We are all grateful to Ray Sandoval and the Kiwanis for burning away our individual and collective gloom with a Zozobra to remember. If ever there was a year that deserved a good burn, it's 2020—and thanks to Ray and his team of tireless volunteers, first responders and TV partners, this year's Zozobra reached more than 321,000 households in all 50 states and 14 countries across the globe—and was COVID-19-free. Thank you, Ray, for lighting up Santa Fe around the world.

Just as important this City Council has worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic. Forced to meet at a distance, your City Council has done extraordinary work to keep City government moving forward. Each has made a contribution, and all have borne the extra heavy burden these times have demanded.

In particular, I want to recognize the steady hand of Councilor Signe Lindell, the mayor pro-tem, who is prepared to step in at any moment to guide the City; and the hard-working chairs of our three standing committees: Finance Committee Chair Roman Abeyta, Public Works/Public Utilities Committee Chair Chris Rivera, and Quality of Life Committee Chair Carol Romero-Wirth.

I also want to recognize the tireless work of Councilwoman Renee Villarreal, Councilor JoAnne Vigil Coppler, Councilor Michael Garcia, and Councilor Jamie Cassutt-Sanchez. All eight of these Council members do our city proud. We're fortunate to have such dedicated citizen leaders at this difficult time. They're coping with the challenges of the moment and they're committed to Santa Fe's future.

Most importantly my thanks go to you. You've pitched in and helped out. Whether sharing meals, running errands, mentoring kids or reaching out to elders, you're the glue that keeps this city together.

Now with COVID-19 spiking again—and alarmingly so—I'm calling on all of us to re-dedicate ourselves to stopping the spread of this terrible virus. We must all have the discipline to wear face masks, use hand sanitizers, and practice social distancing. Each of us has the responsibility to keep all of us safe.

Thank you all.

It's right to acknowledge that COVID-19 has changed everything in our daily lives, but there's one thing—one profound thing—that has not changed: Our commitment to make Santa Fe City government work for everyone in our city.

Our team continues to work every day to make good on the promise to make Santa Fe the most user-friendly, family-friendly and eco-friendly city in the country. That's our day-to-day work—serving you.

So let's start with the basics. How has your City government responded to the challenge of COVID-19 in terms of daily life, your life and the life of your family?

As soon as the reality of this deadly virus hit us with full force we reacted with speed, determination and resolve.

We proclaimed a public health emergency and, using emergency powers, we put the City of Santa Fe squarely in line with the Governor and the State of New Mexico. We called for self-quarantine, mandated face coverings and we put a stop to evictions that were caused by COVID-19.

We equipped our City employees to work from home and provided PPE to keep them safe.

We distributed 100,000 free face masks and 4,000 bottles of hand sanitizer to keep you safe.

We allocated \$275,000 in emergency funds to help families meet their basic needs during this pandemic.

We stood up an emergency shelter for Santa Fe residents experiencing homelessness, keeping them safe and helping prevent the spread of the virus to all of us.

We extended free wi-fi at our libraries and public schools, providing the digital access you and your children need.

We ramped up senior services to deliver 300% more meals to our vulnerable older residents—providing the help our seniors want, need and deserve.

We distributed 8,500 educational kits to Santa Fe families whose kids had their schooling disrupted by COVID-19.

We created The Santa Fe Promise, a model of cooperation, commitment and community, a promise to keep Santa Fe safe, open, together.

Because of our strong and rapid response, the State awarded us a \$17.5 million grant—more than any community in New Mexico. We're putting this money to work right away, extending aid to our families, friends, and neighbors, supporting local mom and pop businesses and investing in a safe and thriving post-COVID-19 Santa Fe.

We've also been hard at work on a day-to-day basis to deliver the services all of us should expect—and deserve—from our City government.

We know we work for you: Our job is to serve you. That's why we're always looking for ways to be more responsive to your concerns, suggestions and—yes—your complaints. In April we launched a new on-line complaint tracking tool. Using it, our Constituent Services team has recorded and resolved almost 1,500 of your issues—and that's just in the last 5 months.

Despite an enormous drop in our tax revenues, we proposed and adopted a City budget for this fiscal year that called for no layoffs and no salary cuts. At the same time, we enacted a community-oriented reorganization of key parts of City government, creating a new department to bring together public health and public safety, a new department to unify our community development efforts and a new department to improve our community outreach and engagement—providing better teamwork and better service with virtually no impact on the budget.

Responding to neighborhood and downtown complaints about dangerous driving and loud vehicles, the police launched three special enforcement operations across Santa Fe, working toward a safer, quieter city.

We heard your concerns over short-term rentals and nuisance properties that make our neighborhoods less livable. The City Council, led by Councilors Lindell, Romero-Wirth and Villarreal, passed new ordinances to crack down on violators.

To expand the city's housing options, especially affordable units, and to keep our builders working, our Land Use department issued 6,425 construction permits, a 10% increase over the year before. Today we have more than 2,000 housing units under construction in Santa Fe. That takes us nearly half-way to meeting the estimated housing shortage we had when I took office.

By applying the Green Building code, we saved 17.7 million gallons of water, a 25% improvement from last year, just one example of our commitment to implementing the Sustainable Santa Fe plan. For our efforts at sustainability, Santa Fe was awarded a LEED Gold certification, only the second city in the country to achieve this recognition.

Our hard-working, creative librarians circulated almost 50,000 items to you and your family members using COVID-19-safe, curbside delivery.

We hired 13 new police officers and registered a 10% decrease in auto burglaries and an 18% reduction in robberies—and an overall 25% decrease in major crimes compared to last year.

Day in and day out, our unstoppable solid-waste collection team continued to collect trash from every home in our city—and collected 20% more residential trash than last year, overcoming every operational challenge thrown at them by COVID-19.

With the leadership of Councilor Abeyta and Councilor Rivera, we reached out to the teens and young people in our city who might be tempted to engage in gang-related activities. Instead, with neighborhood support, we're offering them a clear path to education, employment, mentoring and a fulfilling future.

And the one statistic you're all waiting for: Since March 1st, when the weather changed, our hard-working pothole crew of just 12 City employees has filled 2,533 potholes—an average of 26 potholes every working day.

Oh, one more thing: This year we carefully relocated 47 prairie dogs to safe, new homes.

Behind those statistics—and many more that we've compiled for you in our list of accomplishments that's now posted on the City's web site—are the employees of the City of Santa Fe, the women and men who work for you.

Your City employees give their best every day to help you and your family live your best every day.

It's been a year of challenge and hard work, a year of achievement and steady progress all in the face of four terrible crises: A global pandemic, a global recession, a nation-wide call for social justice and racial reckoning and the existential crisis of climate change.

It's been a year of hard decisions and I can tell you that in my heart each and every decision has always been about serving the best interests of our whole community.

This is true for last year's temporary furloughs implemented in response to the sudden, steep budget deficit caused by COVID-19. It's true for the issue of statues and monuments and the risk of injury—or worse—that could have come from the kind of demonstrations that turned violent in other communities.

These are the kinds of hard decisions leaders are called upon to make. They're decisions designed to protect the well-being of all of our residents and to put us on the right side of this historic moment.

But life lessons I've learned from my family and my faith will always prompt me to ask how I can do better. Here are three commitments I gladly make to improve as your mayor:

*Communicating with the City Council and the community at large as we move into the budgeting process for FY21-22. We will provide more transparency and better community engagement in developing next year's plan to invest your money.

*Communicating more fully and regularly with our City employees and sharing information with their Union representatives, recognizing that our people are our most important and valuable City asset.

*Communicating with—and listening to—all of the individuals and groups across our diverse city. We must respond to the call of this time for an honest conversation about our shared cultures and blended histories. We must always see our diversity as the source of our strength and never as an excuse for discord.

In this moment, the status quo is unacceptable—our young people are telling us that. Doing nothing is not an option—our consciences are reminding us of that. Going backward is simply

unthinkable. Talk of “winners” and “losers,” competing to see who has suffered more in the past, leads only to divisiveness.

The only way forward is together, with empathy and understanding, based on shared values and fundamental respect. Over the last few months I’ve been on a virtual listening and learning tour across Santa Fe, seeking advice on how we can best come together for community dialog around our statues and our monuments, our histories and our cultures.

Here’s our purpose: peace, justice and understanding across our community. Those conversations will continue as an opportunity for learning and listening and soon I will bring the City Council a proposal to guide us to a fair and collaborative process where all can participate and all can be heard.

This is the longer-term work before us: healing divisions, rebuilding trust, delivering on equity and opportunity. This is our ongoing commitment—serving your children and their children, so the Santa Fe they receive from us will be fairer and safer—a city where everyone can enjoy the fruits of their labor and live the good life.

This is a time when the teaching from the Bible should guide us all: “Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger.”

A state of the city address is, by its very nature, an accounting of the year gone by.

It must also be an agenda for the year to come.

Where will we be one year from now? What do we aspire to? What do we commit to?

One year from now we can all hope and pray that we’re safe, healthy and well on our way to recovering from the impacts of COVID-19.

Here are our hopes and aspirations one year from now:

We’ll be celebrating the construction of the Southside Teen Center.

We’ll be making good use of the extension of free internet connections to all parts of our city, including neighborhoods that are economically challenged.

We’ll see real progress as we move forward with film, housing and education at our midtown campus.

We’ll continue our commitment to sustainability by making all of our street lights energy efficient and more of our fleet electric-powered.

We’ll continue to make progress on our Built for Zero commitment to end chronic and veteran homelessness in Santa Fe.

We'll see our economy rebounding, our local stores and shops being restored to health, and more job training and career opportunities for all of our residents and young people.

We'll be on our way to implementing the recommendations of the Task Force on Public Health and Safety, co-chaired by Councilors Rivera and Villarreal.

We'll be able to announce more progress in producing affordable housing across the city.

A year from now our fervent hope is to be enjoying the fun of our traditional markets and fiestas, the opera, Southside Summer, baseball with the Fuego, the fishing derby, music on the Plaza. To be able to share, in-person, the burning of Old Man Gloom—and once again to see it live-streamed across the country and around the world.

At the same time, with clear eyes we see how much more we have to do to address long-standing inequities, injustices and inequalities—to re-dedicate ourselves to the principle that every individual in this community has the right to realize their God-given potential.

These challenges existed before COVID-19, in our city and across our nation: historic wrongs of income and educational inequality, of racial, religious and gender discrimination, of bias in the workplace and in the housing market. COVID-19 has brought these truths forcefully into focus. The young people here in Santa Fe and across the country have made that message their generation's work, and we owe them a debt of gratitude. We can't pretend that we don't see or hear their message—and once we do, we are called to action.

In the year ahead, this City government will continue to take on the work, not only of investing in our infrastructure, but also of investing in our people. Investing in equity and opportunity, good work and promising careers, healthy families and safe households—taking care of people.

A year from now we will have come through this time of trial stronger, more optimistic, more committed to progress than ever. We will have proven our resilience and demonstrated our capacity to change.

And we will always look at our city with pride, hope and love.

In the meantime, if you or anyone in your family is suffering because of COVID-19, please reach out for help. Know that we care for you.

If you or anyone in your family is suffering financially, enduring economic pain because of COVID-19, please ask for help. We have resources that can make a difference.

If you or a member of your family is dealing with bias, discrimination or prejudice, please speak out. This is a time when we must stand together.

You know, hardly a day goes by that someone doesn't ask me, "So how do you like being mayor?" And then they usually give a little chuckle, as if to say, "I bet you weren't expecting *this*."

None of us was expecting this. No one could have anticipated even a fraction of what this past year has brought our way—or the urgency or haste with which we'd have to make decisions, many of them large and important ones with far-reaching consequences, and some on matters where consensus still eludes us.

But regardless of the circumstances, my answer is always the same. There's no place I'd rather be and there's no work I'd rather be doing. It continues to be the greatest honor of my life to work for you in the greatest city in the world.

Outside Santa Fe there are forces and people at work we cannot control—and sometimes we can't even comprehend. Angry voices seek to divide us, to set us against each other, to distract us from the real work of making our lives and our children's lives better.

We don't live in a bubble. What happens in Washington, DC matters here. So please, make sure you participate in this election; make your voice heard and your vote count—and this year, make sure you have a plan to vote. Make a difference at a time when there is so much at stake, here and across the country.

Here in Santa Fe we'll continue with the task at hand: Finding solutions that work to problems that matter.

We should all take a moment now to count our blessings. To look around at the beautiful and blessed place we get to call home. To reflect on the bounty of the earth and the beauty of the sky. To reaffirm our resolve to take care of ourselves, our family, our community and each other. To come through this time with empathy and with vision—empathy for each other today, and vision to guide us toward our future.

It will take all of us working together to meet the challenges that face us today—and to create a better tomorrow for our children. It's work we will all gladly undertake with joy, with purpose and with love.

Thank you, and may God bless all of us and may God bless our city.