

State of the City 2021

Presented by Mayor Debbie Winn on February 17, 2021

Tooele City Council, department heads, staff and residents of Tooele City; I am grateful for the opportunity to address you this evening and present to you the state of the city.

The year 2020 has proven to be one of the most challenging that many of us have ever experienced. Although we continue to see the negative impact of the COVID-19 virus that caused the worldwide pandemic, we are encouraged by the recent distribution of a vaccine in hopes of finally ending this worldwide pandemic. I wish to express my deepest sympathy to all of the families who lost loved ones to this horrible virus.

I am so grateful to the healthcare workers who work tirelessly while putting their own lives at risk to provide comfort and care to those suffering from this deadly disease. I appreciate all of our first responders for their dedication and service to our residents.

Although city hall was closed to the public from March 24th though May 31st, just over two months, we still offered all of our services online, by phone, or by mail. We provided ways for contactless transactions for those who still needed to do business in person. Since reopening city hall on June 1st, we have continued to serve the public in a safe manner. We have installed glass partitions between staff and the public, and we continue to wear masks and adhere to the social distancing guidelines. We have been a leader in the community by showing that we can continue to provide excellent customer service while maintaining a safe environment for our staff and the public.

I would like to share with you some of the great things that took place during the past 12 months, despite the many challenges we have faced.

During the week following the earthquake, our police department personnel were able to move into their new building. Our dedicated officers are now able to work much more effectively. Following a disturbing homicide in 2020, we needed and utilized our new facility to its fullest capability. This included, improved evidence handling, officer briefing spaces, suspect interview rooms and even parking for the many officers from other agencies who came to assist. We absolutely could not have met the investigative demands from this shocking event without our new state-of-the-art police facility. We are planning an open house to be held sometime in May for the public to finally tour the facility.

I am so very grateful for how well our police officers met the challenges of sudden and dramatic cries for police reform. Our police officers already have a reputation for treating all people with dignity and respect and we can be proud of their professionalism. All members of the Police Department weathered the storms of protest and national outrage surrounding events taking

place far from our city. Our dedicated police officers and support staff were already situated so that little change was needed to meet these challenges.

Tooele City is proud of our exceptional volunteer fire department. During 2020, they responded to nearly 500 calls. This number increased over 100 calls compared to 2019. It is my hope that the residents recognize the great service these men provide and the millions of taxpayer dollars saved by providing this professional service as volunteers.

Our Human Resources Department stepped up to the plate as always, as they put a plan in place in response to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. They were able to implement a workforce safety program including COVID testing options for staff, a remote work program and web-based training program; all while ensuring that our employees were paid on time and were taken care of as they dealt with the everchanging situations that the pandemic presented.

Tooele City quickly adapted to the COVID pandemic without laying off one employee. We delayed recall of seasonal workers and reassigned staff to assist with some of these tasks in the early days of the pandemic. Crossing guards, lifeguards and aquatic center staff worked in parks and helped with facility cleaning and renovation. Very few employees worked from home.

The I.T. department was instrumental in our efforts to allow employees to work from home during COVID. They also made it possible for us to continue our efforts to be transparent during this time by live streaming all city council and planning commission meetings on Facebook and made it possible for us to accept public input.

Our Finance Department has done an excellent job in adapting to new ways to serve the public. We are now offering a new IVR system which allows our customers to call in and make a payment of their utility account by phone for those who do not have access or are unable to navigate the online payments function. We have also updated our online payment system which provides real time access to your account balances and history. We have also implemented a new system to accept business license payments and set up utility accounts online.

Our Finance Department was also a key player in the distribution of the CARES funding that the city received through the state. Approximately \$680,000 was distributed to small businesses through a grant program; \$75,000 was given to the Tooele Technical College and their Custom Fit Program to train employees of local businesses who were directly impacted by COVID; the Chamber of Commerce was granted \$7,000 to implement and maintain a website to help our local food vendors continue to do business as they were required to make major adjustments to the way they served the public; and \$300,000 was granted to the Tooele County School District to purchase Chromebooks for students' online learning.

Our Community Development Department has experienced a major increase in building permits. 2020 showed an increase of 188% from the previous year. This is the highest permit year since the late 1990's. Community Development staff worked diligently with the Planning Commission, to bring to the council, a new comprehensive update of the city's general plan. Community Development is also responsible for our emergency preparedness program. When the earthquake struck last March, the Community Development staff proved that we are prepared and ready for what Mother Nature brings our way.

The pandemic has taught us that we can adapt to problems and find new ways to provide services. Our library personnel implemented many new ways to serve over the phone and online. Books and other items were delivered safely to thousands of patrons through a vehicle pickup service. A new extended wi-fi service was installed to enable patrons to connect to the internet outside the library building and several blocks away. This allowed students to do their homework and some residents to work from home. The library staff was also instrumental in promoting the 2020 census count. Tooele City had a 75.6% self-response rate, the highest in our county.

Communities that Care was able to offer Guiding Good Choices classes and QPR suicide prevention training by using virtual format and socially distance in person trainings. They also participated in many other activities in partnership with other community stakeholders including the Save the Family dinner event and other activities to bring families together.

CTC and the Parks and Recreation Department were able to partner with Parent's Empowered to implement a program for our youth, Danny's Summer Passport. Due to the pandemic, activities could be accessed virtually or could be picked up to do at home. We averaged about 80 participants each week. Over 2,600 passports were distributed and promoted through weekly emails to over 500 residents and through social media posts.

20 local families decorated Christmas trees in the downtown area and the lighting of the tree at Veterans Park was done through Facebook live.

We were still able to celebrate the 4th of July including fireworks, Miss Tooele City Pageant, decorating the downtown area, All American Dine Around to support local restaurants, Porch Decorating Contest, and Flag Raising Ceremony.

The "Seek On" statue has been placed in Veterans Memorial Park and we will officially dedicate it this year on Memorial Day. We are looking forward to that day when we can recognize and celebrate the service of our veterans.

This year Tooele City sponsored the first annual Haunted Historic Park at the Tooele Valley Museum and Historic Park. Over thirty local businesses and organizations helped to make the event a success through donations and volunteer hours. Even with COVID restrictions over 2,000 people were able to enjoy the displays and atmosphere at the Haunted Historic Park.

Quirrh Hills Golf Course and the Pratt Aquatic Center have continued to provide recreation for our residents, despite the pandemic. Necessary steps to keep areas clean and sanitized have made it possible to keep the doors open as we adapted to rules set forth by the state.

Our parks department has been able to accomplish several projects during the past year including: the installation of automated sprinklers at Tooele City Park which will help conserve water and no longer require a night waterer. This project was accomplished at a tenth of the budgeted contractor price, due to the knowledge and skill of our parks employees and with added equipment approved by the council.

We now have a beautiful fence surrounding our sacred cemetery. Our employees were able to remove the old fence, reducing the cost of labor, making this project a reality.

We saw the completion of the Elton Park walking path, which is providing additional safe places for community members to walk. Six additional pickleball courts will be completed as soon as the weather warms up and lighting has been installed on the complete court area to provide for residents to play during the cooler summer evening hours.

You may have noticed work being done on the outside of Tooele City Hall. We are in the process of cleaning the brick and then sealing it so that it will be restored to its original beauty.

Tooele City recently signed an interlocal agreement with the Tooele County School District that demonstrates a commitment to work together and share the use of public property and buildings. Partnerships like this show the public that we are using tax dollars in a sensible manner that benefits the entire community. I am grateful to Superintendent Rogers and the Tooele County Board of Education for their willingness to work together for our constituents.

The public works department continues to provide the necessary services for the residents. I appreciate the dedication and professionalism show by these men and women.

The Water Department has implemented a plan to operate the wells more efficiently, resulting in a savings of 10% in energy costs. We have recently purchased property north of city limits for future water expansion.

2020 saw the completion of the drilling of the Berra and Park Wells. We are now ready for the construction of the well house buildings to be built this summer and then bring the wells online and into operation within the next 12 months.

A Water Conservation Plan is currently being designed so that we can help our residents better understand the importance of saving water. For the past few months, it looked as though we would not receive enough snowfall to provide the necessary water needed to get us through the summer. I am grateful for the snow fall we have received in the last few days. Although this will help with

our water situation, we will still need to be cautious with this precious resource and conserve as much as possible.

We recently hired a new Water Reclamation Superintendent to help with improvements and expansion of the Water Reclamation Facility. This facility is currently installing needed updates to keep up with future growth. This year's budget of \$2,000,000 will allow us to begin expansion of the plant and stay ahead of the projected future capacity needs.

Our streets department has been working with limited budget funds to address the replacement of sidewalks throughout the city. Overgrown trees in park strips have caused a huge amount of damage to our sidewalks. Recently the city council approved additional funds to address the sidewalk repairs. In the next few months, we will announce a program that will allow residents to participate in a 50/50 grant program to help with sidewalk replacement. We have also recently completed the Tooele City Transportation Master Plan and the UTAH LTAP Road study which will help us plan for future road projects efficiently. I am appreciative of the efforts put forth by the streets crews as they maintain 147 miles of road with limited funds.

We were able to hire an Economic Development Administrator and grant writer to our staff this year. This has already proven to be a great decision. We were recently awarded a \$393,000 grant to replace much needed sidewalk, curb, and gutter along a section of Smelter Road east of 7th Street. We also secured a grant from UDOT through the safe routes to schools program, to install much needed sidewalk on a portion of West Vine Street near the high school. A grant through this same program, awarded last year, enabled us to complete a section of sidewalk along 7th Street, providing a safe sidewalk for students walking to Sterling Elementary.

Collaboration, partnerships, and working together as a team is the only way to accomplish great things. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with other elected officials in our county. We meet often to discuss the needs of our valley and how we can work together to solve difficult issues. Tooele City is also grateful for the collaboration we share with the Tooele Technical College and Utah State University Tooele Campus, who train and educate our workforce. I am grateful for the communication and support we receive from Tooele Army Depot and Dugway Proving Ground.

The council members and I are committed to being transparent and accountable. We will be proactive in water development and management of all water resources. We will manage future growth through our general plan and infrastructure studies. We are committed to making our community a place that residents can be proud of.

2020 was a most challenging year, but we proved to be resilient. I am honored to serve as your Mayor. May God continue to bless our beautiful city and the people who call Tooele City their home. Thank you.