



Murray City State of the City Address

Mayor D. Blair Camp

February 11, 2020

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to present to you my State of the City address this evening.

Let me begin by saying how grateful I am for the opportunity, and I'm proud to serve as the Mayor and CEO of Murray City. I have an exceptional staff in my Chief Administrative Officer Doug Hill, Chief Communications Officer Jennifer Heaps, and Administrative Assistant Kathy Miller, and I express appreciation to them this evening for their great work and support.

I also express my gratitude to you who volunteer to serve on one of our 11 boards and commissions. Your service is invaluable, and I express sincere appreciation for your contributions to our city. I also acknowledge many others who volunteer in our parks and recreation programs for seniors and youth. In addition, volunteers in the community provided 2700 hours of service doing park maintenance last year. I don't know if there is anywhere else where so much community service is performed that hasn't been court ordered!

The volunteers in Murray City serve quietly and without fanfare, yet your impact for good is immeasurable. I salute and thank you as well as your loved ones who support you.

The author H. Jackson Brown Jr. is quoted as saying "Remember that the happiest people are not those getting more, but those giving more." That must make you a very happy group of people!

As I begin my message tonight, I want to acknowledge our Department Directors. These are men and women who are professional, knowledgeable, and dedicated to our city. I ask you to stand and be recognized as I read your name: City Attorney G.L. Critchfield; Community & Economic Development Director Melinda Greenwood; Finance and Administration Director Brenda Moore; Fire Chief Jon Harris; Human Resources Director Robyn Colton; Information Technology Director Rob White; Library Director Kim Fong; Parks & Recreation Director Kim Sorensen; Police Chief Craig Burnett; Power Department General Manager Blaine Haacke; Public Works Director Danny Astill; and I would also like to recognize our Justice Court Judge Paul Thompson.

I will briefly highlight each of our city departments this evening in this address.

Our city attorney's office is the city's "in-house law firm" which provides high quality legal services to the city. Our legal team prepares legal opinions, ordinances, resolutions, agreements, contracts, and other documents for the mayor, city council, and city departments.

In addition, the attorney's office handles criminal prosecution, serves as counsel to the Redevelopment Agency, defends the city from civil litigation, and manages the risk activities of the city. The operation of city government presents complex and numerous legal issues, and we are lucky to have a legal department that is efficient, effective, and competent.

The Community and Economic Development Department includes the Planning and Building Divisions, and has responsibility for planning and zoning matters, providing staff for the Planning Commission, licensing of nearly 4,000 businesses, managing permits and building applications, providing plan reviews and inspection of new construction, conducting code enforcement, and administration of the city's redevelopment agency.

Our Finance and Administration Department has responsibility of budget development and control, accounting, payroll, payables and receivables, and utility billing. The Finance and Administration Department also includes the city recorder, purchasing, and passport services. The utility billing division issued more than 250,000 utility bills in 2019 and answered nearly 30,000 customer service calls. The City Recorder managed 552 public documents, including agreements, deeds, easements, ordinances, resolutions, and other recorded documents. The Recorder's office also issued a record number of first-time passports, 4,423, and 633 passport renewals.

In 2019, the Murray Fire Department responded to over 1,200 fire calls and nearly 5,000 calls for emergency medical services, resulting in over 2,200 ambulance transports. Our new, state of the art headquarters fire station at the corner of 4800 South and Box Elder Street will be ready for service next month. It is a two-story, 23,000 square-foot, 5-bay station which will house firefighters and paramedics, as well as fire prevention and administrative offices, replacing the former headquarters station which will be demolished to make way for the Hanauer street extension. The fire department also took possession of a new modern Pierce fire engine which is housed at station 82 on east Vine Street.

Our Human Resources (HR) Department supports 400 full time and 396 part-time employees, manages job postings, employee benefits, employee training programs, and human resource policies.

They have also initiated a new employee wellness program and organized the Employee Wellness Council last October. As a city, our employees are our greatest asset, and we value the services they perform every day.

Since implementation of the salary step plan for our employees, our workforce turnover has stabilized greatly, especially in the police department.

The Information Technology Department has oversight of all computer systems in the city. The IT department provides technical support for every city department, plus the city council. In addition, the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) division provides mapping for public safety,

power lines, public utilities, and many other uses. We acknowledge and value the excellent service we receive from our IT professionals.

We certainly have come a long way in technology since 1908, when the first typewriter was authorized for purchase, about five years after the incorporation of the city!

Our outstanding Parks and Recreation Department provides highly utilized programs for citizens of all ages. Our golf course continues to be one of the most popular courses in the area, hosting nearly 62,000 rounds of golf in 2019. All our parks and trails are heavily utilized and enjoyed year-round. If you are wondering if people are still playing Pokémon GO, just visit Murray Park on a Sunday afternoon, and there will be no doubt in your mind!

Murray Park pavilions 1, 2, 3, and 4 were demolished this past fall to make way for our new pavilions which will be completed this spring. Pavilion 5, which is the large pavilion immediately adjacent to the Park Office, will be torn down this fall and replaced prior to Spring of 2021.

Other notable park projects this year include new lighting at the softball field, leisure pool deck replacement with the addition of LED lighting in the pool, and two new playgrounds at Willow Pond Park.

Our outdoor swimming pool, which is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day, sold over 37,000 daily admission passes plus 430 punch passes, and had 51 after-hour pool rentals.

Our recreation division operated 30 youth programs with approximately 7,000 participants, and 15 adult programs with approximately 2,100 participants. Some new programs started this year include Pickleball Tournaments, E-sports competition, a Corn Hole League, and Girls Competitive Volleyball.

Murray Cultural Arts reached over 48,000 patrons during the year through performances, programming, and arts education. The Fun Days parade and activities were very popular again last year, as thousands lined the street to see the parade. Later, a crowd seemed to enjoy watching city officials and others with their heads buried in peach pie at the no-hands pie eating contest!

Our Murray Senior Recreation Center is another treasure of our city that I continue to be very proud of. The many volunteers, the advisory board, and the dedicated staff all combine to make the center something special. The center had an amazing 117 volunteers contribute approximately 6,500 hours in providing programs and services. The Center also served nearly 10,000 meals in 2019. At the end of the year, there were 1,626 seniors registered as participants. The Senior Recreation Center director, Trish Cooke, does an outstanding job, and I can tell you that she is genuinely loved by the center participants.

In my State of the City address last year, I expressed appreciation to the city council for funding the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. That plan has now been completed as the public comment period ended yesterday. It will now go to the city council for consideration and adoption. We appreciate all who have worked so hard on that plan to make it a reality.

I am very proud of our outstanding Police Department. Our officers, detectives, and staff work tirelessly in protecting and serving our community. Most of you would be amazed, if not startled, at the cases handled day in and day out by our police. I appreciate the fact that these men and women are willing to put themselves in harm's way each day for all of us.

The patrol division not only patrols our streets, but also our parks and parkways to improve our safety. An emphasis this last year included extra patrols in school zones to increase the safety of our children. This has been effective, as the number of vehicle incidents in our school zones has been sharply reduced.

I would also like to mention our ongoing support of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program provided by the Police Department in our elementary schools. During the past year, Officer Rebecka Cox, our DARE program manager, taught 25 classes in nine schools, reaching 560 fifth-grade students.

Our Power Department is continuing to pursue and invest in power projects that add to the reliability of our electric system. In addition, we are committed to increasing the amount of "green" (renewable) energy in our portfolio. We have partnered through the Utah Associated Municipal Power Agency (UAMPS) in a Small Modular Reactor (SMR) project, and also have entered into an agreement for participation in a large-scale solar project. The Murray City Power Department continues to operate effectively and competently. The power fund is in a favorable financial condition and there is currently no outstanding bond debt.

Last May, our Power Department had the opportunity to send a crew of four linemen and a supervisor to the Navajo reservation in southeastern Utah and Northern Arizona to participate in an initiative known as "Light Up Navajo!" The Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) is working to reduce the number of homes without electricity and in 2019 partnered with the American Public Power Association (APPA) to connect Navajo homes to the electric grid for the first time. Because of this pilot project electricity was extended to, and dramatically changed the lives of, 233 families that never have had electricity.

It's almost impossible to imagine that just a few hours down the road from here, where an outage of more than a few minutes seems a major inconvenience, people are still living without electricity. Because of the success of the Light Up Navajo initiative, we hope to participate again this year.

I want to reemphasize what I have stated before: all residents of Murray City benefit from the city-owned utility, even those who are not receiving electricity from Murray Power. The Power Department provides trimming of street trees, maintains street lighting, and pays an annual

dividend to the city General Fund, which subsidizes public safety, street maintenance, and other services in the entire city, which is a benefit to all residents.

Our Public Works Department is a complex department with diverse responsibilities. Public Works includes Engineering, Streets, Water Distribution, Solid Waste, Storm Water, Wastewater, and the City Fleet.

Some significant public works projects this past year include completion of Phase One of the Vine Street Improvement Project from 900 East to 1300 East, completion of the Utahna Storm Drain Project, and replacement of the 6400 South canal bridge at 1300 East. In addition, over 5,000 lineal feet of damaged sidewalk was replaced and nearly 6,000 feet of curb and gutter replaced.

Just a couple of fun facts: in 2019 the Streets Division used 3,556 tons of asphalt in five overlay or rebuild projects, and slurry sealed 63 city streets. Our crews filled 1,222 potholes.

In the water system, replacement wells have been drilled at the 45th South Well and the Murray Park Well. In 2019, we installed more main line water pipe than in any year since keeping records, with over 2,000 feet of new pipe in six projects.

Another significant project was the rebuild of the Walden Glen lift station at Walden Park on 5400 South.

Last year the State Division of Drinking Water revised their Improvement Priority System (IPS) Rule. This rule is a tool for the division to track violations and physical deficiencies in water systems. I am pleased to note that we have no violations.

The Murray City Library continues to promote itself as “your friendly hometown library.” Three initiatives this past year at the library supported their effort to eliminate barriers to library use. These initiatives are, first, Limited Use Accounts, which allow patrons to use the library on a limited basis even if they don’t have proof of a current address. Second, Amnesty Month, which was an effort to allow patrons to clear charges on their accounts if they returned “lost” items. Third, Automatic Renewal, which automatically renews items that are not on hold by another user, resulting in a decrease in small fines. We are proud of our library and its forward-thinking leadership.

The mission of the Murray Municipal Justice Court is to provide the citizens of Murray an open, fair, efficient, and independent system for the advancement of justice under the law. Our City Justice Court operates very efficiently. The number of cases heard by the justice court remained relatively unchanged from 2018 to 2019, except for the number of small claims cases, which more than doubled from 23 to 52. Overall, cases heard decreased by about 10%.

The court has worked with the county jail in reducing the number of prisoners transported between the jail and the court by holding video court once a week, drastically reducing

transport fees and increasing safety. In fact, we estimate an annual savings of approximately \$35,000.

In my State of the City address last year, I outlined five areas of priority for the year. They were:

1. Eliminate or greatly reduce empty commercial buildings in Murray City through proactive engagement with property owners through our Community and Economic Development Department.
2. Proactively advocate for new development in the Murray City Center District to reverse the disinvestment in that area over the past many years, working closely with the Redevelopment Agency Board of Directors.
3. Work closely with the Parks and Recreation Department, specifically the Cultural Arts Division, the Finance and Administration Department, and the city council to address funding for the Murray Theater renovation.
4. Continue to improve in the areas of social media use and technology.
5. I affirmed my commitment to the concept of continuous improvement and vowed to continue to challenge my department directors to seek for additional improvement wherever possible.

This evening I wish to comment on each one of these areas individually.

First, to eliminate or greatly reduce empty commercial buildings.

I am happy to note this evening that after an extended vacancy, a new furniture store will soon open in the former Toys-R-Us location on south State Street. The former Sports Authority building on 900 East will soon be the home of EOS Fitness. After several years of being unoccupied, the former K-Mart site on 900 East and Van Winkle will be transformed into an attractive mixed-use development with a combination of commercial buildings and housing units. The former Cotton Shop building will soon be renovated into a high-end men's clothing store.

Our Community and Economic Development staff is in frequent contact with property owners of other buildings throughout the city, such as the former Shopko location and the now vacant Firestone stores to offer assistance as they actively market their properties. In addition, our Community Development staff is continuing dialogue with a potential developer of the old ore sampling mill site on 300 West near 5300 South and are optimistic that we will be able to help facilitate redevelopment of that site.

Second, proactively advocate for new development in the Murray City Center District.

We are in the process of preparing a Request for Proposals for the commercial area from 4800 South to 5th Avenue on the west side of State Street from State to Poplar Street, which will be issued in the coming weeks. We are actively communicating with several development firms who are interested in redeveloping that site and I anticipate a new development agreement for that area this year upon approval of the Redevelopment Agency Board.

Directly to the west of that area, the construction of our new city hall and police department is scheduled to begin in May. If it seems like we've been talking about the new city hall project for a long time, it's because we have! Planning and preparation for a project like this takes much longer than the construction. The city hall complex will be nestled between 4800 South and 5th Avenue, and between the newly extended Hanauer Street and Box Elder Street. The relocation of the cell tower on the property is the last major hurdle to clear before construction begins.

The new city hall will consolidate staff functions to improve customer service and will provide much needed and updated space for the Police Department. It also will provide a public plaza and public parking,

Not only will the new city hall provide a home for city operations, but we also anticipate that this new city center complex will be a catalyst for further redevelopment of that area. Potential developers are already showing interest in the area.

The new headquarters fire station that I mentioned earlier is another significant improvement in this area.

Third, address funding for the Murray Theater renovation.

As I mentioned in the last State of the City address, the city has received a grant through the Salt Lake County TRCC (Tourism, Recreation, Cultural, and Convention) funds of \$3.6 million over two years. The second half of that funding was approved and included in the recently adopted Salt Lake County budget for this year. In addition, the city council approved a \$1 million appropriation in the current budget. That still leaves us with a funding gap of approximately \$2 million dollars to complete the renovation.

We have recently entered into a fund-raising agreement with an organization to seek substantial private donations to help close this funding gap. We believe there is significant interest in the community to see the renovation and repurposing of this historic theater happen.

Fourth, improve social media use and technology.

Our efforts in social media improvements over the past year appear to be successful. We have had an increase in social media following on Instagram and Twitter in addition to our Facebook presence. I invite all of you to follow us on social media if you are not already doing so.

During this past year we have upgraded and improved the city website to make it more user friendly, and we continue to make improvements. We have increased our postings of what is happening in all our city departments in our attempt at improving transparency and sharing current events. We now post supporting documents in addition to agendas for Redevelopment Agency and Planning Commission meetings on-line and are going paperless wherever possible.

We have also improved the process for a "Report of Concern" from a citizen when entered on our website. These reports are now submitted directly into a work order system and sent to the appropriate department or individual to be addressed.

In the future we will have customer portals for utility payments, business licenses, and building permits.

Fifth is my commitment to continuous improvement.

Synonyms of improvement include upgrade, enhancement, progress, and expansion. We have demonstrated continuous improvement in many ways. Here are a couple of examples:

During this past year our Finance Department has outsourced the printing and mailing of our utility bills, which have previously been done in-house. This change has resulted in a savings of over \$10,000 per year.

Not everything is best outsourced. We found that we could increase the quality and efficiency of our facilities maintenance program by bringing our city owned buildings under our in-house maintenance division.

Another example is a cost saving improvement in the justice court. In addition to the video court savings that I mentioned earlier, we have been able to reduce the amount of office space occupied by the court, eliminating the need to lease additional building space. This change will result in a savings of approximately \$65,000 per year. Some of this was made possible by a reduction in storage space requirements due to technology. I appreciate our Senior Court Clerk, Karen Gallegos, and her staff for making this happen.

As I considered my comments for this evening, I asked myself, "What is the State of Murray City?" One of the ways I would describe the state of Murray is evolving, changing, in transition.

One of the ways it is changing is in the housing market. While Murray has traditionally been mainly single-family neighborhoods, the demographics of our region are driving changes. Cost of land and subsequently the cost of housing has dramatically increased. Murray now has a diversity of housing types, including high-density apartments, townhomes, manufactured homes, as well as single-family homes.

Because Murray has been "landlocked" for many years, growth has been mainly in development of smaller parcels and in redevelopment.

We are fortunate to have several new single-family developments happening in Murray, helping to maintain a balance of housing types.

In addition to the housing units already under development, there were 463 new housing units approved in by the Planning Commission in 2019. Of those 463 units, 430 were multi-family units, 24 were single family dwellings, and 9 Accessory Dwelling Units (ADU). An ADU is a self-contained dwelling unit within an owner-occupied single-family residence.

The TRAX and Frontrunner lines through the city continue to influence development along the transportation corridors, adding density to the housing mix in the city.

The increase in development across the entire valley has resulted in traffic challenges for Murray. Since we are in the center of the valley and bisected by both I-15 and State Street, regional traffic problems have also become our traffic problems. Incidents on I-15, especially during peak traffic times will result in near gridlock on many of our city streets as drivers look for alternate routes. Seeking solutions to traffic issues will be a challenge for city leaders and planners for years to come.

Not everyone agrees on whether change, particularly in the housing market, is positive or negative. One argument is that our housing is already too dense, and another is that we need affordable housing stock for the increasing population.

In his book *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, Douglas Adams says: "The story so far: In the beginning the Universe was created. This has made a lot of people very angry and been widely regarded as a bad move."

Whatever your point of view, I encourage all citizens of Murray City to be involved in the public hearing processes that occur at our planning commission meetings and our city council meetings, and let your voice be heard. These are where the decisions about land use and the future of our city are made.

Shifting gears to city finances, In general, Murray City is financially sound. Sales tax revenue, which accounts for nearly half of our general fund income, increased a modest 2% during the past year. We continue to provide outstanding city services with relatively low taxes. Our retail business climate is strong, as Murray continues to be a great place to shop and do business. I am slightly uneasy, however, as I observe that the escalating costs of providing services seem to be outpacing our current revenue sources.

I believe the future financial success in Murray will involve a more diversified tax revenue stream to reduce our reliance on sales tax. Part of this strategy is to redevelop the underutilized commercial properties in our city to help grow our property tax base in the future.

Murray is in a state of change, of transition. The writer George Bernard Shaw once said, "Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything" and I will add that "the alternative to change is status quo."

I am optimistic about the future of Murray City. Murray will continue to be a great place to live and work, and we will continue to provide the services that make Murray the envy of other municipalities.

I end with a quote from the famous American poet Longfellow. "Look not mournfully into the past, it comes not back again. Wisely improve the present, it is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear."

I look forward to the future, and I hope you do too.