



State of the City Address 2021
Mayor D. Blair Camp
March 16, 2021

Hello, I'm Blair Camp, Mayor of Murray City, and this is my 2021 State of the City Address. I don't expect as many views as "Baby Shark Dance," but thank you for watching.

One of the responsibilities and opportunities I have as mayor is to provide an annual state of the city address to share city achievements with the community and outline the conditions of the city.

"Nontraditional." This is one word that could be used to describe this past year: "nontraditional," meaning "new, and different from an established norm, custom, or method." In fact, I am delivering this year's State of the City address in a nontraditional manner [by video].

May I begin by expressing gratitude to my remarkable staff in the Mayor's Office, including:

Administrative Assistant Kathy Miller,

Chief Communications Officer Jennifer Heaps,

and Chief Administrative Officer Doug Hill.

These are very capable and devoted individuals that do so much for Murray, and I am so fortunate to have them in the mayor's office.

I would also like to recognize our 11 Department Directors who oversee the operations of the city within their individual departments. These are men and women who are professional, knowledgeable, and dedicated to our city.

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; and
Public Works Director Danny Astill.

I would also like to recognize our Justice Court Judge Paul Thompson and Court Administrator Karen Gallegos.

I appreciate our front-line supervisors and all the full and part-time employees that make up the Murray team, delivering the various services that we provide to the public day after day. Furthermore, I acknowledge and thank the members of the Murray City Council for their hard work and their time invested in performing the legislative functions of Murray City. The city council has the responsibility of making many decisions, some are tough decisions, and some are easy, but all are important.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize and thank the approximately 75 volunteers who serve on our 12 Boards, Commissions, and as hearing officers. The service provided by these volunteers is priceless. It has been said that "Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in." Our volunteers provide countless hours in improving the city and I express appreciation to all of them.

A year ago, the state of the city address was presented to a packed crowd in the Doty Education Center at IMC. It was teeming with great optimism as 2020 looked to be a very exciting year for Murray. Well, 2020 did turn out to be an exciting year, but not in the way any of us anticipated. Although a difficult year, it was a year that Murray demonstrated its resiliency.

On March 13, I issued a Proclamation of Local Emergency in response to the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. We immediately closed our Senior Recreation Center, Park Center, museum, and library, and suspended recreation programs. In the coming days and weeks, our park playgrounds were closed and access to our city buildings was significantly reduced.

To further cope with the effects of COVID-19, the city quickly implemented a Pandemic Leave Policy, and telecommuting arrangements were made for employees where possible and practical. Some staggered work shifts were implemented and building entrance restrictions were put into place citywide, all while continuing to provide services via internet and phone.

A mask mandate was put in place in compliance with State and County health regulations, and temperature and symptom checks were implemented for all employees at the beginning of their workday. Internal and external meetings were changed to an electronic format. Many of us had never heard of "Zoom" before the pandemic, and now we have become very proficient in its use. Our staff

meetings have all been on Zoom for the past year. Our public meetings, including city council, planning commission, and boards & commissions have all been utilizing Zoom.

Also during the pandemic, the city implemented a temporary suspension of utility shut offs for delinquent accounts, as well as earmarked over \$100,000 for utility assistance through the Utah Community Action Home Energy Assistance program for residents needing help with their utility bills.

Difficult decisions were made, one after another, to cancel events that we enjoy every year, events that bring our community together such as Fun Days festivities on July 4th, cultural arts productions and programs, public power celebration, Arbor Day program, Christmas tree lighting ceremony, and others.

Only five days after the executive order regarding the pandemic, on March 18, the 5.7 magnitude earthquake hit the Salt Lake Valley shortly after 7 a.m. Murray staff and emergency responders went immediately into action assessing the impact of the quake. All city personnel were accounted for in a short period of time. Thankfully, only minor damage occurred to city facilities and city hall was closed for just one day, reopening after engineering and building personnel inspected the structure.

And mother nature wasn't finished. We can't forget the windstorm on September 8 with hurricane force winds that snapped power poles and uprooted trees throughout northern Utah and all along the Wasatch Front. Thankfully the impact on Murray City was not significant compared to other communities around us. In fact, our power department arborists were able to provide aid to other municipal power cities in their cleanup efforts. We were also able to loan some heavy equipment from our Public Works to other cities. I credit our strong street tree maintenance program as a significant factor in lessening the impact of the storm for us. This tree maintenance plan, performed by our city arborists, keeps limbs pruned away from power lines so that damage during a windstorm is minimized.

The protests that took place in 2020 were unsettling, especially those that turned violent. Thankfully Murray saw only peaceful demonstrations within the boundaries of our city. However, we did have significant damage to a Murray patrol car while assisting the police in Salt Lake City. But more importantly was the awareness and dialogue that came because of the demonstrations. Many members of the community reached out with questions about our policing practices. On June 16, I issued a joint letter with Police Chief Craig Burnett to publicly address many of those questions and concerns, specifically about hiring practices, complaint processes, use of force, body cameras, and officer training.

We also determined to implement a new Public Safety Advisory Board consisting of seven members of the community to foster understanding and communication between residents and business owners of the city and public safety departments, and to review community needs and concerns, expectations, and responses related to police and fire services. On August 4, the city council unanimously voted to create the Public Safety Advisory Board, and after a selection process, the members were appointed on February 2, 2021. We look forward to their service on this new Board.

Because of the pandemic, a major challenge the city is confronting is the uncertainty surrounding the fiscal health of the city. The pandemic hit at a time when we were developing the current budget for FY 2020-21. Due to the sudden instability of the global economy, I requested that each department reduce their capital improvement budget requests to only include funding for urgent projects, while maintaining the level of service that our residents expect. At the request of the city council, an additional 10% was trimmed from general fund operating budgets. There was no cost of living adjustment (COLA) for the employees included in the budget but the employee step plan, which is an important component of a fair compensation program, was funded. Thankfully the revenues were not impacted as much as feared, and some of the capital improvement funds were reinstated at mid-budget year. I will go into further detail in my budget address in April.

I am very happy to note that the new headquarters fire station at 4848 South Box Elder Street was completed in June and is fully operational. Due to the pandemic, we were not able to have a public open house, so the fire department created a virtual tour. The link to the tour can be found on our website. This fire station is a beautiful state-of-the-art facility that will serve our city for many years to come.

Our former headquarters fire station has been demolished to make way for our new city hall which is finally under construction after many delays. I noted last year that the relocation of the cell phone tower was the last major hurdle to clear before construction of the city hall could begin. I'm pleased that agreements were finally signed between the city and cell phone providers, but because of the delays, the new tower is still not completed, although it is under construction. In the meantime, the construction of the new city hall is moving forward with as much as can be done with the cell tower still in place. We anticipate the tower will be removed, and construction accelerated this spring or early summer. The Hanauer Street extension between 4800 South and Vine Street has been completed, and the area is rapidly transforming. It is exhilarating to see this work finally moving forward. The new city hall will consolidate staff functions to improve customer service, including moving the Community and Economic Development Department to the new building, and will provide much needed and updated space for the Police Department. It also will provide a public plaza and public parking. Our current city hall, built in 1939, is very tired and requires constant and expensive maintenance. It is anticipated the new city hall will be completed by October 2022.

Last year I reported that we were in the process of preparing a Request for Proposals to develop the commercial area from 4800 South to 5th Avenue on the west side of State Street, and from State Street to Poplar Street. We have completed that process and are currently in negotiations with the selected developer, Edlen & Company, to create a new mixed-use project on this property. This project will bring new life and vibrancy to this site and to our downtown area. We anticipate that a development agreement will be finalized by the end of this calendar year.

Another casualty of the pandemic is the historic Murray Theater on State Street. The city had received a grant from the Salt Lake County TRCC (Transportation, Recreation, Cultural, and Convention) funds of \$3.6 million as a matching grant for the renovation and restoration of the theater, and preliminary work had begun. However, the impact of the pandemic severely impacted the collection of tourism taxes, causing Salt Lake County to suspend funding for all TRCC projects for 2020 and 2021. The result is that the renovation of the Murray Theater is indeterminately postponed.

I am also disappointed to note that after nearly 60 years in Murray, the R.C. Willey store at 900 East and Winchester Street has closed its doors for good. I am sad to see this iconic retailer leave our city. Unfortunately, we have witnessed other large retailers closing their doors. Shopko, K-Mart, Toys-R-Us, Sports Authority, and 24-Hour Fitness are examples of big box chains that have ceased operations in Murray over the past few years. The changing retail climate is impacting these properties as owners and investors are seeking ways to repurpose these parcels.

The interest in mixed-use projects, containing commercial and residential uses, has skyrocketed over the past couple of years. Several projects in Mixed Use (M-U) zones are in various stages of planning and development. Granton Square on the site of the former Murray Elevators at 84 W. 4800 South is an example of a nice horizontal mixed-use project that has recently been completed. The K-Mart site at 4600 South 900 East has been approved for construction and will begin very soon. This project is another horizontal mixed-use development with commercial buildings on 900 East and residential units to the west. Furthermore, a 130 residential unit mixed use project with 6,000 square feet of commercial space has been approved for 184 East Vine Street on the former site of the Mount Vernon Academy; and likewise, another mixed-use development is in the works on the former Bonneyview School site at 4984 South Commerce Drive.

Owners of properties at the former R.C. Willey site, the Pointe at 53rd Shopping Center at 5300 South State, the Sports Mall at 5445 South 900 East, and the former Shopko store at 5959 South State have either expressed interest in, or made application for, a zone change from commercial to M-U. This has resulted in a brief six-month temporary land use regulation (or moratorium) on M-U projects while concerns over infrastructure in these areas, as well as a review of the City General Plan can be addressed. This temporary land use regulation was passed by the council on February 2 and can be in effect for no longer than 180 days.

Other noteworthy projects in progress include the Abbington Assisted Living Center on the former Hillcrest Jr. High School site, which is nearing completion and will have residents by this summer. On the north end of the former Hillcrest property the new Towne-Place Suites is also nearing completion, and in fact has a temporary certificate of occupancy. The Scandinavian Designs Furniture Store in the former Toys-R-Us location was delayed due to the pandemic, but still plans to open this year. In addition, Security National's second building is under construction at 5300 South & I-15, which will contain 180,000 square feet of Class A office space.

While there are many good things happening in Murray, I know there have been several small businesses and eateries that were not able to make it through the pandemic, and we feel of their loss. However, most have been resilient and have been able to adapt to new ways of doing business.

The premier shopping mall in the state, Fashion Place Mall, has worked hard during the pandemic to remain relevant and open as much as possible. Shoppers are returning and most of the stores are open. It is gratifying to see the crowded parking lots. The Shake Shack at Fashion Place opened their doors for the first time during the pandemic.

Last year in the State of the City Address I noted that the Murray Park pavilions were being demolished and rebuilt. Pavilions #1 through #4 were completed in time for the summer season and pavilion #5, the large pavilion next to the park office, was demolished at the end of the summer and is currently in the process of being rebuilt, along with a small restroom to serve the visitors. This pavilion is expected to be completed in time for the summer season.

Our parks have been extremely busy in the midst of the pandemic, and our recreation staff has strived to coordinate as many recreation programs as has been allowed under the COVID restrictions. I think they have done a commendable job. The hardest hit facility in our recreation system has no doubt been the senior recreation center. The senior center has been closed for over a year now, having been the first to close and the last to reopen due to the vulnerable population that it serves. For many of the participants, the senior center has been their only social interaction. Our senior center staff implemented various programs and activities that could be enjoyed via the internet or in person where social distancing is possible, such as parking lot bingo, evening concerts, history and art Zoom classes, curbside lunches, and support phone calls. I believe that we will be able to open the senior center in the coming months as the vaccination counts increase.

The Murray Library has also worked hard to remain relevant during their closure by providing curbside drop-off and pick-up, making on-line programs available for all ages, and implementing the ability to checkout materials such as audiobooks on-line using an app. This is the type of innovation we have seen across all our departments in keeping business going even when doors were closed.

We continue to increase our communications with our residents through social media and technology. I am pleased with the implementation of our new monthly e-newsletter which launched in May. This newsletter allows the city to reach our subscribers via email in a timely manner and at a very low cost. I encourage all residents of Murray to subscribe to our e-newsletter by going to the city website and selecting "How Do I...?" and then clicking on "Read the Murray City E-Newsletter." You'll find up to date information about what is happening in Murray.

I conclude my message by summarizing the state of Murray City as follows:

1. During the uncertain financial condition created by the pandemic, all city departments were able to reduce their budgets while continuing to provide quality municipal services to its residents and businesses, demonstrating fiscal responsibility as no lay-offs were necessary and all financial obligations of the city were met.
2. Murray City was adaptable and prepared to respond during crisis situations, and willing and able to assist neighboring communities.
3. Murray City has demonstrated once again that we are resilient and self-reliant during trying times.

As a city we will continue to plan for the future, invest in infrastructure, and strive for continuous improvement. We will continue to face the challenges head-on that result from growth and change, and we remain committed to public safety. I am cautiously optimistic as we dive into 2021, knowing that Murray City has not only survived, but thrived even during hard times for the past 118 years.

I express appreciation to all of you who have been diligent in helping to control the spread of COVID-19 by following the guidelines of our state and local health officials. I am looking ahead in anticipation of the return of our community events where we can once again join as friends and neighbors.

Coretta Scott King once said, "The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members."

I thank each of you individually for doing your part in helping to keep Murray City a great place to live, work, shop, and enjoy recreation. I look forward to a great future for Murray City.