

Murray City State of the City Address

February 5, 2019

Good evening members of the city council, residents, business leaders, department directors, and city staff.

I appreciate the opportunity to present my State of the City Address to you this evening.

I am grateful for the opportunity, and proud to serve as the Mayor and CEO of Murray City. I have an exceptional staff in Doug Hill, Jennifer Heaps, Traci Walker, and Jade Paulson, and I express appreciation to them this evening.

I also wish to personally thank the members of the Murray City Council for their hard work and time invested in performing the legislative functions of Murray City government. Thank you council members for your service to Murray City.

I also express my gratitude this evening to the nearly 70 residents who volunteer to serve on one of our 11 boards and commissions, plus many others who volunteer in our parks and recreation programs for seniors and youth. These volunteers serve quietly and without fanfare, yet their impact for good is immeasurable.

I agree with Coretta Scott King who once said: "The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate actions of its members." We are indebted to these volunteers who help make Murray City a great place.

I began my last State of the City address by saying "the State of the City is strong and sound, but not without challenges." I will say that is still the case. Throughout my address this evening I will reference some portions of last years' state of the city message and provide some updates.

About two years ago when I publicly declared that I would be a candidate for mayor, I stated in my announcement "I believe in continuous improvement, and I intend to constantly look for, and identify ways that we can be better and more efficient."

In the time since my term began, I have endeavored to live up to that declaration.

I have asked my departments and divisions to continuously look for ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of our city services.

I have taken the opportunity to make some changes this past year that I believe will have a positive impact on our efficiency, and I'll talk about some of those in this address.

I recognize that change is not always comfortable for people, but I maintain that any organization must consider changes and make periodic adjustments to remain healthy.

Abraham Maslow once said, "In any given moment we have two options: to step forward into growth or step back into safety." As a city, let us step forward into growth.

Murray City has outstanding department and division directors who are knowledgeable, professional, and dedicated. We will provide a copy of the 2018 year-end summary report to the city council and to the public, and encourage you to review the many accomplishments of each department.

I would like to give emphasis to a few of these noteworthy facts this evening.

Our city attorney's office is tasked with ensuring that legal processes are followed in order to minimize the exposure of the city to liability and litigation. This includes areas of land use, planning, public safety matters, complex power department issues, criminal prosecution, civil litigation, records management, human resource matters, general risk, and others.

The Murray legal team is directed by our city attorney, G.L. Critchfield, who points out that their work cannot be measured by numbers, but rather their accomplishments are reflected not only in the numerous ordinances, resolutions, agreements and other such documents that they draft and review, but also in the advice and counsel they provide to the city.

This evening I want once again to acknowledge and thank our excellent Finance and Administration Department under the direction of Danyce Steck. Danyce, a Certified Public Finance Officer, is a seasoned veteran in the arena of public accounting and best practices, and we are very fortunate to have her leading this department.

Once again this year, the finance department has prepared and provided an excellent Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR) which was presented to the city council. It is also available for public review on the City website.

Our finance department received a clean independent audit report and received the Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association.

Also noteworthy is the new "Citizen's Guide to the Budget" developed by the finance department to educate our residents about the services the city provides, the cost of those services, and the sources of city revenues. This guide is available on the Murray City Website.

The finance department also played a major role in developing and implementing the city-wide comprehensive compensation study focused on employee retention. I will mention more about that later in this address.

I have recently implemented organizational changes that have increased the responsibility of the Finance and Administration Department, including utility billing, the City Recorder division (including purchasing) the City Treasurer, and Human Resources Division. I believe these changes will add to the efficiency and effectiveness of each of these divisions, contribute to continuous improvement and include a financial savings.

Our Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Craig Burnett, has continued to experience an increase in call volume relating to the transient and unsheltered population. There have been efforts to focus police presence in areas that are frequented by these individuals, and directed patrol shifts have been used this year.

These are extra shifts wherein officers dedicate their efforts exclusively to the homeless problem in Murray by identifying people, coordinating to clean-up campsites and serving warrants on wanted individuals. These clean-up details have been done in conjunction with our Police Community Services Division and the County Health Department.

As your mayor, I once again call upon all residents of Murray to do your part in discouraging crime in our neighborhoods by installing security lighting or leaving porch lights on, watching out for your neighbors, and reporting suspicious activity to the police department. I believe we can cut down on the crimes if we will be diligent in helping the police.

I also wish to acknowledge and thank our police officers for their appropriate and timely response to the recent gang related shooting at Fashion Place Mall. This is an example of how our officers without hesitation put themselves in harm's way for us.

I cannot overstate my gratitude that the Fashion Place incident resulted in no loss of life, no serious injuries, and minimal property damage. It could have been so much worse.

I would also like to recognize the Murray Crime Advocate Program which has been in existence since 1996. Our two full-time victim advocates, Alissa Black and Julie Johansen do amazing work, mostly behind the scenes. In 2018 these women were able to provide personal advocacy services to over 1,900 victims of crime.

Sadly, domestic violence contributed to approximately 55% of the caseload for the advocates. In addition to domestic violence, these advocates also assisted victims of sexual assault, elder abuse, child abuse, homicide, robbery, kidnapping, assault, stalking, DUI, traumatic deaths, threats, harassment, and suicide. Without the victim advocate program, most of the victims of crime in Murray would not receive assistance or resources. Thank you Alissa and Julie for the exceptional service you provide.

This past June our long-time fire chief Gil Rodriguez retired, and I took the opportunity to appoint Deputy Chief Jon Harris as the new fire chief. I've literally known Chief Harris for his entire career, as I was the Assistant Chief in the fire department when Jon was hired in 1995. Chief Harris is a forward thinker and I expect that he will be innovative in his approach to leadership in the fire department.

In 2018, the fire department responded to over 6000 emergency calls from our city's three fire stations. Nearly 5000 of those were requests for emergency medical services. We offer state-of-the-art fire, paramedic, and rescue services to our residents, businesses, and visitors.

Also in 2018 our fire department was utilized in four wildfire deployments, two in California and two separate deployments to the Pole Creek fire in central Utah. One of our teams working the Mendocino Complex fire was working on the task force with Draper City Battalion Chief Matt Burchett, who was killed in a fire-line accident. We continue to mourn with the Draper fire department, but we are so grateful that our crews came home safely from each of these deployments.

Our Parks & Recreation Department is directed by Kim Sorensen. The Murray City parks system continues to be a great asset and very popular in our community. The Park Center sold over 6,000 memberships and the daily admissions total for the Park Center in 2018 was 42,306.

The pool decks were replaced in both the leisure pool and the competition pool this past year. The daily admission totals to the outdoor pool was 37,270. There were 11,712 participants in recreation programs. The new pickleball courts were finally completed and are very popular and well utilized.

Cultural Arts hosted a total of nearly 30,000 patrons and provided opportunities for 1180 artists from both performing and visual arts, including the recent Murray Mural Project which included 2,918 children between the ages of 6 to 18.

The Fun Days parade and activities were very popular again last year, as thousands lined the street to see the parade. The new “chalk art” contest was well received.

An on-going matter of concern is our park infrastructure. The Capital Improvement Plan funds for the parks will provide long over-due repairs and renovations, such as pavilion replacement.

I appreciate the Council approving the funding for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. That Master plan process is now underway and will continue throughout this year. We are looking forward to future dialog based on the completed plan later this year.

During this past year the Murray Heritage Center took on a new identity and is now known as the Murray Senior Recreation Center. Once again, the center served nearly 11,000 meals in 2018.

At the end of 2018, the Center had 1518 registered participants. We had 114 volunteers who assisted in providing programs and services. These volunteers donated approximately 7,300 hours of service. That equates to a value of approximately \$73,000.

Our Murray Library, under the direction of Kim Fong, continues to maintain its vision of being “your friendly hometown library.” In 2018, the library was awarded two accolades, the first being a Quality Library certification from the Utah State Library. The other was a Four-Star Library designation from Library Journal, which compared the Murray Library with other libraries nationally.

We appreciate the support of the city council in approving the mil levy increase for the library in this current budget year, which will go a long way in helping us plan and prepare for a new library in the future.

The Murray City Power Department, under the direction of General Manager Blaine Haacke, continues to operate effectively and competently. The power fund is in a favorable financial condition and there is currently no outstanding bond debt.

Our Power Department is excited to continue to pursue and invest in power projects that add to the reliability of our system. We continue to have interest in the SMR (Small Modular Reactor) project and are exploring options for participation in a large-scale solar project. We are committed to increasing the amount of “green” energy in our portfolio.

From the perspective of the General Manager, the top five significant successes of the Power Department for last year would be:

- 1- The financial stability and health of the department.
- 2- Improved reliability of delivered energy. This includes a concerted, controlled effort to maintain tree clearances from the distribution lines and service street trees. Our power is on 99.9886% of the time, and that is important for our residents and businesses.
- 3- Keeping the costs of operation, maintenance, and capital expenses down while maintaining a lean workforce.
- 4- Keeping on top of the NERC (North American Electric Reliability Corporation) reliability requirements.
- 5- Working toward a solar roof top rate while collaborating with customers and vendors.

I want to reemphasize what I have stated before, it’s important to note that all residents of Murray benefit from the city-owned utility, even those who are not receiving electricity from Murray Power.

The Power Department pays an annual dividend to the city General Fund, provides trimming of street trees, and subsidizes street lighting in the entire city, which benefits all residents.

The Murray City Director of Public Works is Danny Astill. Public Works includes Engineering, Fleet, Streets and Solid Waste, Storm Water, Sewer, and Water Distribution.

We are pleased to report that Engineering was successful in receiving two Transportation Choice grants, including an additional \$500,000 for the Hanauer Street extension project, and an additional \$731,000 for the east Vine Street project.

The Streets Division used 4,673 tons of asphalt in 11 overlay projects, completed five residential street rebuilds, and mastic or slurry sealed 45 city streets. Street maintenance continues to be a challenge due to funding constraints, but our streets personnel have found ways to stretch the available dollars to deliver the most “bang for the buck.” Our crews filled 641 potholes this year.

The Drinking Water Source Protection Plan update was completed this year. Clean water is a high priority for our Water Department, and they work hard to meet or exceed all state and federal regulations pertaining to quality drinking water. They sampled all active sources in April and October in accordance with the EPA's Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule. In addition, they sampled 45 bacterial sites every month with no positive samples or rechecks.

The recent snow storms serve as a reminder of the exceptional service provided by our crews in removing snow from our public streets. I appreciate their efforts in making our streets safer.

Our Department of Information Technology (I.T.) is led by Robert White. Although Rob was appointed as the Director of I.T. a few months ago, he is a seasoned veteran of Murray City for more than 21 years.

As a result of an organizational change, our I.T. department now includes the Geographic Information Systems Division (G.I.S.). G.I.S. is an invaluable resource used for mapping throughout the city for uses such as public safety, power lines, public utilities such as water and sewer lines, streets, and many other uses on a daily basis.

The I.T. Department provides technical support for every department in Murray City, plus the City Council. Our entire city literally depends on I.T. support to keep city operations functioning. Throughout the last year, they have continued to work on the conversion for the Munis software system for business licensing, permits, and planning and zoning. The Utility Billing system is the last module to be implemented and this will take place over the next several months.

New to the Murray City team is our recently hired Director of Community and Economic Development, Melinda Greenwood. Melinda oversees the Planning and Building Divisions, including business licensing, code enforcement, and Redevelopment Agency issues. The CED Department is extremely active and hardworking, with new developments both residential and commercial throughout the city.

There was a slight increase in the number of licensed business in Murray in 2018, with a total of 3,976, up 25 over the previous year.

Our City Justice Court is presided over by Judge Paul Thompson. It continues to operate well, although not without its challenges. The caseload of the court has been declining over the past several years, but appears to have leveled off, with a slight increase in traffic and misdemeanor cases in 2018.

The court has taken several measures to reduce costs. In addition to a paperless system, the court has also rearranged court times and appearance requirements to increase efficiency. In addition, they are working with the Adult Detention Center to conduct video processes where feasible to reduce the number of transports of inmates.

Last month our Court Administrator, Mike Williams retired after 40 years of courts experience. Mike will be missed. With his departure, we are taking advantage of the opportunity to implement some organizational changes in the court structure that will result in some savings to the City.

Last year in the State of the City address I mentioned that the employee compensation study approved by the city council was underway. That study was comprehensive and took hundreds of hours to complete and implement.

I'm pleased to note this evening that the study and its implementation were completed just prior to the start of the current budget year and addressed the compensation concerns of our police officers, firefighters, and employees in every department of Murray City, and included a new step plan for employees.

I wish to express great appreciation to department directors, finance personnel, human resources personnel, and all others who worked so hard to make this a reality, but especially I extend gratitude to the city council for having the courage and political will to fund this new step plan, even though it required a moderate tax increase to do so.

We have seen an increase in morale across all departments. I frequently receive comments of appreciation from employees, and I pass those expressions of gratitude on to the city council.

I'm happy to note that our new headquarters fire station is now under construction at the corner of 4800 South and Box Elder Street. This building will house fire administration, fire prevention, and emergency response personnel. It is anticipated that this building will be completed in November.

With the relocation of the fire department, we will be able to extend Hanauer Street in preparation for the construction of a new city hall on which we anticipate construction to begin in 2020. An architect and general contractor have been selected for the city hall project and we will soon have conceptual drawings to take to the public.

I am very excited to have construction activity taking place in this underutilized section of our city. I vow to advocate for new projects for this area, particularly private sector development.

The renovation of the city-owned Murray Theater is front and center due to the awarding of \$3.6 million over the next two years in TRCC (Tourism, Recreation, Cultural, and Convention) funds from Salt Lake County. Because this is a matching grant, some challenging decisions will need to be made regarding the source of the matching funds. We do feel fortunate to have been awarded these funds in a very competitive and crowded field of applicants.

I'd like to take a minute and follow up on a few matters from last year's state of the city address. I mentioned my intent to increase our transparency by live streaming our Planning Commission meetings. We have done that. We began recording and streaming these meetings starting with the July 5, 2018 meeting. In addition to the live stream, these meetings are available to view from the video archive on the city website.

I also mentioned my support of a more walkable and rideable community. We have added bicycle lanes to 700 West from 5400 South to Winchester Street, and we continue the task of adding sidewalks and bike lanes on east Vine Street over the next two years.

I am extremely pleased to note the completion of the Canal Trail improvements from Fontaine Bleu to Wheeler Farm. This has become a very popular recreation resource for the residents of the area, and I appreciate the great job that our parks and public works employees have done in overseeing construction, and now maintenance of this fabulous resource.

Last year I announced my intent to bring the Green Bike program to Murray City, particularly around transit stops, Fashion Place Mall, and Intermountain Medical Center. We have been working with Green Bike on costs and feasibility and have developed a concept plan. A small but interesting development has been the introduction of other modes of alternate transportation, such as electric scooters and electric bicycles. At present we have not come to a conclusion on the best direction to proceed, but we will continue to evaluate options and explore possible funding.

Also last year I mentioned my intent to roll out a Murray City Adopt-A-Street program to enable organizations, businesses, and individuals to volunteer to help maintain and beautify the streets of Murray. It has taken many months to work through legal and logistical issues relating to this program, but I am happy to note that the policies and procedures have now been ironed out and the program is ready to go this spring.

It will be implemented through the Public Works department, and details can be found on our city website under "Adopt a Roadway." As I mentioned before, I want Murray to be a place we can all be proud to call home!

Before concluding this evening, I want to take a moment to mention a tragedy that occurred here in our community on November 19, 2018. Just before 7:30 in the morning, our firefighters and police officers responded to a house fire at 5729 South 700 West.

First police officers who were nearby, and then firefighters arrived to find the home fully engulfed in flames. Entrance into the home was literally impossible. A 7-year old girl, a student at Viewmont Elementary, and her grandmother were unable to escape and tragically died in the fire. The subsequent investigation determined the fire an accidental tragedy relating to "electrical overload and resistance heating."

A heartbreaking event like this has a distressing and saddening effect on all of us, including (if not especially) our first responders. For me it brings into focus and perspective the things that really are important. I hope we can use this and other events to help us direct our efforts on the things that matter most to us, our families, our neighbors, and our community.

Maybe it's the old fire chief in me, but I encourage each one of you to take the time to evaluate the safety of your own homes, and plan and prepare for, but mostly prevent these types of tragedies.

This evening I wish to reaffirm that the State of Murray City is strong and sound. However, I note that the State Legislature is in session even as I speak, and there are some on the hill who are proponents of legislation that could be extremely detrimental to the financial stability of Murray City.

We are working diligently to identify and oppose those bills that would harm our city. I strongly encourage each of you to find out who represents your district in the legislature and ask them where they stand on any legislation that threatens the local authority of cities.

In conclusion I want to highlight five areas of priority for the coming year:

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 remain fully committed to the concept of continuous improvement and will continue to challenge my department directors to seek for additional improvement wherever possible.

I recognize that the funds we expend are taxpayer dollars. At our public meetings during the budget process last year, I was approached by some residents who said they recognized the need to fairly compensate our employees and that it costs a lot to provide city services, but implored us to cut cost and be more efficient wherever possible. That's a very reasonable request.

The American author and motivational speaker Tony Robbins said: "I don't worry about maintaining the quality of my life, because every day I work on improving it."

Tonight I borrow that quote from Mr. Robbins and tweak it just a little by saying: "I won't worry about maintaining the quality of Murray City, because every day I work on improving it."

Remember our two options: to step forward into growth or step back into safety." We will step forward into growth.

Thank you.