

CITY OF
GRESHAM
Mayor Shane T. Bemis
State of the City Address
March 22, 2017

Well, thank you very much, Lynn — I think — for that introduction. Always my least favorite part of speaking is the introduction, though that was great, thank you.

Thank you, Lynn for the work you continue to do with the Chamber. It's no secret, as Lynn mentioned, I have keen interest in the Chamber of Commerce and the success of our business community and have had for quite a number of years. I'm thrilled to see you at the helm as the CEO leading this business community in Gresham.

You know, the strangest thing has started to occur in recent years, and to be honest with you, I haven't yet fully come to terms with how to handle it.

Increasingly, events like this have started to feel less like periodic updates, and more like existential ponderings. My oldest son, who was four months old when I was first elected to the City Council, has officially enrolled as a freshman at Gresham High School, which now represents literally a full generation since I first came to Gresham and called this incredible community "home" for the first time.

As I said, it is hard to articulate the difference that makes as we consider the state of our city, but I can say one thing definitively: on a very personal level, for me, and likely for many, many people in this room, it certainly increases the stakes of our work.

Fortunately, we continue to have the best partners in the world to help us make progress in this community, and that includes every person in here. Thank you for making the time in your busy schedules to join for this important civic function today, and more importantly, thank you for the work you do here in Gresham, be it in your neighborhood, your business association, your church, school, little league, or City Hall. I want to take just a moment to welcome some of those strong community leaders:

First and foremost, I'd like to welcome my colleagues on the best City Council in Oregon. Council President French, and Councilors Echols, Widmark, Hinton, Palmero, and Gladfelter, thank you so much for your leadership, your partnership, and for always putting your community first. It is no exaggeration to say that it is a tremendous honor to be a member of this team, and it is not hyperbole to stress how very seriously we take that notion of teamwork and unity. City Councilors, please stand and be recognized for your service.

In addition to our Councilors, we are fortunate to be joined today by some other elected and appointed individuals, and I'd like to take a moment to recognize those folks that are here: Dr.

Linda Florence is here with us from Reynolds School District, John Hardstock from the Gresham Barlow School District, Chair Deborah Kafoury from Multnomah County, former Commissioner Diane McKeel, Sheriff Mike Reese, now Commissioner—first time I get to introduce her as a Commissioner and not a Councilor—Commissioner Lori Stegmann from Multnomah County. We have former Councilors here with us today whose footprints are all over the things we'll talk about today and also have become very dear friends. Former Councilor Dave Shiels, former Councilor Jack Horner, and former Councilor Carol Neilson. Thank you all for being here with us today.

I also want to take just a brief minute and thank my family for being here today. My wife Alex, who is my best friend anybody could have and is a wonderful mother to our children and also is now taking a greater responsibility at the restaurant, which allows me to do what I do, so thank you, honey, for all that you do. Also, my mom, Corey, my number one high maintenance constituent, never afraid to write a letter to the editor, and of course, some dear friends Marty Stone, Arliss and Joey Butcher are here as well.

As we prepared for this annual event, I struggled with trying to capture the right message, given the political strife and volatility we have endured as a nation, and the almost eerie time and place in which we find ourselves. Many thought-leaders and political pundits have observed that our nation feels like it is more divided than united at the moment, and that we have entered an era of unprecedented discord and conflict in the public service arena.

That's one of the reasons we chose to hold this event in the Gresham Armory today. Our National Guard citizen soldiers represent the very best of our nation, and how unique we are in the course of human history, to form a collective bond and pursue self-governance more profoundly than had ever been attempted before. Our citizen soldiers spend their time as butchers, bakers, and candlestick makers, working side-by-side with their neighbors in every industry and sector of our economy. And then, when called upon, they put on their uniforms, they lace up their boots, and come to our assistance and defense.

This building represents what is still right about our form of government, and serves as a physical reminder that, as elected public officials, we should strive to serve with the same selflessness, grace, and deference to others that our National Guard troops, and soldiers across America, do every single day. If you are a current soldier or a military veteran, please stand up and be recognized. Thank you for your service.

I have deep concerns with the divisiveness and vitriol that has come to distinguish our federal and state matters, but here, in our community, I believe we represent a much stronger, cohesive bond. Fortunately, we don't have the luxury of getting entangled in our conflicts—at least not if we seek to make progress on community goals. It's a little bit harder to fire off a random mean-tweet at 11:30 at night when you know there's a good chance you're going to bump in to your neighbor the next day at Fred Meyer or Café Delirium. Savor that fact. We are better people and better public servants when we are forced to regard one another and work together. In a nutshell,

I believe that is the common thread we see emerging in Gresham, as we consider the state of our city this afternoon.

As we reflect on our local community in the context of heated national volatility, I want to start with some examples in our police department. Community relations with law enforcement have been the focus of substantial attention in recent years. In fact, a few years ago, I served on a small working group as part of the US Conference of Mayors, with mayors from New Orleans, Philadelphia, Houston, St. Louis, Little Rock, Boston, Gary, and Gresham. Our charge was to develop ways to strengthen police and community relations in America's cities. Much of this work required new approaches, and a concept called "21st Century Policing" which is rooted in six pillars: 1) building trust and legitimacy, 2) policy and oversight, 3) technology and social media, 4) community policing and crime reduction, 5) training and education, and 6) officer wellness and safety.

We have, perhaps, the most ethnically and financially diverse community in the Portland metropolitan area. There are over 60 languages spoken in Gresham homes. I'm not going to claim that we do absolutely everything right, but I do believe that our community has avoided some of the heated divisions and civil unrest experienced by other communities because of the proactive approach we have taken in pursuing these six pillars I just mentioned. This isn't necessarily the flashy element of police services, but it is critically important and I want to convey how hard we have worked to be a leader in this arena.

In the past year, our police department has engaged in 15 community-specific listening sessions to talk about our approach to law enforcement, share information with the community, and learn from their experiences and perspectives as well.

In addition, we have a laser-focus on innovation, and not being pigeonholed by the "old ways" of doing things. Earlier this year we added an exceptional new resource to our police department, in the creation of the Director of 21st Century Policing position. Corey Falls, formerly the Jackson County Sherriff, joined our team, and has hit the ground running.



In an unprecedented structural approach, Director Falls is a member of our police department, but reports directly to the City Manager, and is working to put the copious amounts of data we have to good use, identifying effective and new approaches and efficiencies to keep our community safe, while also designing strategies to ensure that we maintain deep and meaningful relationships with the community that our officers serve. Corey is already a Gresham resident, and has two kids enrolled in Gresham schools. Please give Corey a warm welcome to our city.

2017 has also brought us a new Police Chief, Robin Sells, who I know many of you have already met. Chief Sells takes the reigns of an incredible police department, which I patently believe is the most effective and successful department in Oregon. They do tremendous work, and do so with an exceptionally lean budget, compared to their peer organizations.



This dramatic shift in how we approach critical community issues is occurring across the organization. In our Fire and Emergency Services Department, innovation continues to be a huge focus. Coming off a year of successful deployment of a medical “Quick Response Vehicle,” we are analyzing data and determining how best to approach this type of service delivery in the future. At the same time, we continue our relationship with the CARES program, to bring nursing students to Gresham to help connect directly with our frequent 9-1-1 callers, in an effort to reduce the volume of calls we have for emergency medical services.

We have also embarked on a huge effort called “Mobile Integrated Health,” which seeks to build off of our early efforts in the CARES program, and work directly with hospitals, senior care facilities, public health professionals, health insurance companies, community care organizations, and research partners to completely reexamine the network of health provision in our community, focused on improving service and increasing efficiency. Our objective is to see improvements in the quality of service our residents receive while also proactively finding opportunities to reduce the level of volume we see in calls for service.

This is not a small undertaking. In fact, it’s a huge effort, and I thank Chief Matthews and City Manager Kvarsten for their willingness to approach the unknown. We know we cannot succeed in the years to come by doing things the way they have always been done, and our pledge to you, from this City Council through the entire organization, is to constantly seek improvements and

new efficiencies in every work area. This requires persistence and courage, and I have found both of those qualities to be in ample supply at the City of Gresham.

We are also seeing these innovations take place in community livability, focused on our nation's homelessness crisis. Just a year ago, if a City of Gresham employee was interacting with a homeless individual, I can promise you that employee was a police officer. We simply didn't have a better way to approach the issue. Now, thanks to a partnership with Multnomah County, we have several excellent options available to make progress on that issue.



For one, we have hired the City's first ever Homelessness Services Specialist, a civilian employee housed in the Office of Governance and Management who works to help Gresham's homeless individuals access services, and builds trust with people experiencing homelessness, and those who advocate on their behalf. This is the first employee of this type ever hired by the City of Gresham, and we couldn't have done it without the exceptional partnership we have built with Chair Kafoury, and now Commissioner Stegmann, at Multnomah County.

In addition to the creation of this new resource, we have also put the County's financial resources to work through the creation of the "Clean Start" program. In the year prior to the creation of "Clean Start" the City of Gresham spent thousands of dollars hiring contractors to clean up vacated homeless camps. These contracts were gobbling up precious resources, and represented a huge financial liability—albeit a necessary financial liability because the livability costs to our neighbors of these collections of trash, biological waste, needles, and refuse were even higher.

Knowing this was an issue, we pulled our team together to design a better approach, and I am exceptionally proud of what we have accomplished. The Clean Start program hires previously homeless individuals, and provides them with vocational rehabilitation through their labor, as they patrol Gresham five days a week cleaning up garbage and abandoned camps, returning wayward shopping carts, and even safely removing needles when necessary. It used to take up to several weeks to see action on these chronic livability issues, and we can now deploy this resource the same day we get a call. We are saving the City substantial money, while restoring community livability in the most efficient way, and transforming lives by helping previously homeless people gain skills, support services, and a paycheck.



Do you think this program makes an impact? Let me share a few statistics with you. In Clean Start's first eight months of operations they:

- Removed 5,607 bags of trash –around 32 bags of trash every working day
- Cleaned up 186 biohazards
- Addressed 306 campsites
- And removed 432 abandoned shopping carts

Chair Kafoury, once again, thank you for the opportunity to put these resources to work, and for giving Gresham the flexibility to design a set of approaches that make the world better, and work for our specific community.

Again, our homelessness services specialist and the Clean Start program have been terrific additions in the past year, and they compliment the exceptional work that our multi-departmental NEAT Team provides, and the excellent work we see on this issue in our police department. We routinely hear from our neighbors and businesses that our police department is responsive and attentive to the issues we face. We also hear from our homeless community that their direct interactions with our officers are humane, compassionate, and understanding.

We know that homelessness remains an overwhelming issue in this community, just the same as it is in communities across the country. I have said it before and I will say it again, I have never seen a more complex issue in my public service career, nor have I encountered one where solvency feels so out of reach. To be clear, we have housing affordability issues in this region, and I know that Chair Kafoury and her counterparts in Portland are working to bring more affordable housing to the areas of the region where affordability is most out-of-reach—in particular, to heavily gentrified areas of inner-Portland, which are most to blame for this condition.

However, I believe housing affordability is only one barrier we face to solving homelessness, and until we are ready to directly address the street level opiate and methamphetamine epidemic we also face, we won't get anywhere on this issue. Here are a couple of statistics I didn't

mention earlier when I was talking about our Clean Start program. In addition to the bags of trash, biohazards, and shopping carts they removed, in those same eight months the Clean Start crew also removed 1,200 needles, and 66 items categorized as “drug paraphernalia.”

There is nothing “humane” about letting people waste away, victims of their addictions, with nothing but a thin tent protecting them from the elements. Many advocates in our region want us to approach this question under the lens of freedom and liberty, but when that freedom and liberty have long been traded for the shackles of addiction, we are kidding ourselves. We will continue to approach this issue with humanity, but we will also hold the line on livability, and we’ll work to help people confront addiction, and to encounter law enforcement when they commit crimes.

It’s no secret that Gresham took a different approach than our neighbors to the west on this issue last year. We heavily restricted camping along the Springwater Trail, protecting the environment, and protecting everybody’s access to this recreational amenity. While that approach was largely effective, it was also very expensive, requiring police officers to be present on the Trail seven days a week. In the meantime, Portland had a free-for-all, which created enforcement ambiguity and multi-jurisdictional conflict. I am very hopeful that this will change under the leadership of newly elected Mayor Ted Wheeler.

I don’t tell you this often enough, but I really, really appreciate the prudent sensibility of Gresham residents. Your practicality allows us to approach complicated questions with straightforwardness and honesty, and we do not take that for granted. Just this past year our City Council launched a Homelessness Task Force, which included residents, advocates, service providers, the faith community, and even people experiencing homelessness. The task force came together around a set of recommendations on this issue, and did so with collective hard work and a willingness to listen to each other. Once again, we are very fortunate to have the benefit of working on the local level, because a conversation like that would be impossible right now in Washington DC. Councilors Echols, French, and Palmero, thank you for spearheading that task force and for your tireless work on this issue.

Our approach to homelessness is not the only issue we have pursued from new and innovative angles. This past couple of years you have heard me speak about the City’s commitment to children and families during this speech, and I am proud of the progress we continue to make.

This past July our Commission on Children and Families reported back to Council with a number of very useful recommendations. Among those: launch a group to explore the possibility of a Community Center, and pursue opportunities to expand mentorship programs for at-risk youth. Well, we had a good conversation on the Community Center, even if we didn’t get over the hump on the November ballot, and we have made excellent progress on the Commission’s recommendations on mentoring.

Here's a fun story: At the same time that the Commission on Children and Families was making its recommendations to Council, some city staffers were training to be volunteer mentors with the Family of Friends mentoring program. Family of Friends is a spin-off from the highly effective professional mentoring program known as Friends of the Children, which also recently opened up shop right here in Gresham. Friends of the Children saw the results they were achieving through their very expensive professional mentoring model, and wanted to see what could be accomplished through a much more affordable volunteer mentoring program. That's when Family of Friends was created.

Because this is Gresham, and because innovation and creativity make or break us in an otherwise resource-scarce environment, we put two and two together, and started conversations with the program staff, then housed at Trillium Family Services in inner-Southeast Portland, about starting up their own non-profit association, moving east, and setting up shop in Gresham.

What started as conversations in the parking lot after training sessions quickly escalated to discussions with our City Manager, Erik Kvarsten, who is the most creative member of his profession. Erik realized that we could provide Family of Friends with nearly everything that makes new non-profits likely to fail. We have office space at City Hall, phones, computers, printers, and support staff. We also have some grant-writers and relationships with partners like Multnomah County.

As the discussions continued, we learned that one of the toughest barriers volunteer mentoring programs face is recruiting the actual volunteer mentors. It just so happens that we have excellent connections to our community, and we could help with that too. In just the past few months, we have sought volunteer mentors through the City's newsletter, social media channels, conventional media, and through direct appeals to our partners in the faith community.

So, Family of Friends took the plunge, and they started out on their own this past fall, opening up just down the hall from my office at City Hall. We immediately connected the program staff with our Police Department's School Resource Officers, knowing that they have desperately needed support services to connect kids to when there is an opportunity for intervention. We also got to work identifying resources, successfully competing for a grant through my professional association, the US Conference of Mayors in January. I am also very pleased to report that Chair Kafoury, Commissioner Stegmann, and Multnomah County have come on board as partners as well, identifying resources to bring to the table this fiscal year, and further securing resources for years to come. Their partnership will also help us expand Family of Friend's connections to the County's SUN Schools and to children in families threatened by homelessness.

Please turn your attention to the screen for a short video

{ video }

Bernard and Isaiah are here with us this afternoon. Please give them a hand.

Once again, in an era marked by civic discord and dysfunction on the federal level, look at what can happen when a city, county, non-profit, community partners, and volunteers come together around a common goal of serving our children and families. Do you have a heart to help a kid who needs a positive adult in his or her life? Can you free up a few hours a month to make it happen? Please consider joining the program and making a huge difference. Michelle Kosta and Allison Yoder, please stand up so people can see who they need to connect with to get involved.

While we are on the topic of children and families, and the community coming together to support shared goals, I want to take a moment to recognize the great success we have seen emerging at the Gresham-Barlow School District. We started 2016 with a headline that looked like this:



What's new, right? It's no secret that this can be a tough community when it comes to revenue for public services. However, that is not where we ended the year. As mayor, and more importantly, as a parent, I am incredibly excited to see that this was the headline in November:

Voters approve \$291.2 million Gresham school bond

Created on Tuesday, 08 November 2016 | Written by [Teresa Carson](#) | [Share](#)

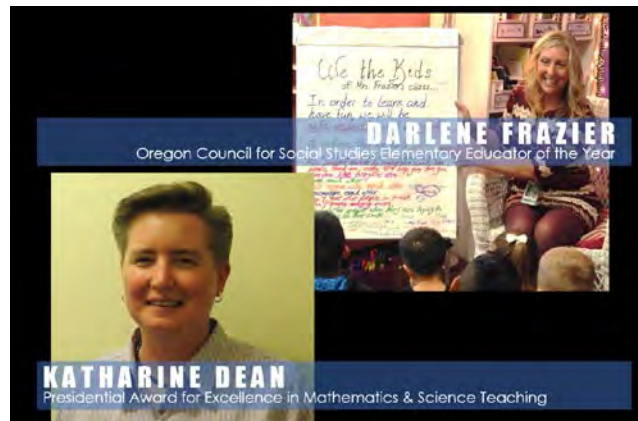


Gresham-Barlow’s investment comes in the wake of good news from Reynold’s School District as well. Just this month, Reynolds held a series of exciting groundbreaking events to kick off the replacement of three elementary schools and improvements at Reynolds High School as well. These investments are the result of the passage of the District’s 2015 Bond and are a big deal for families with kids in these buildings every day.

Our school-aged residents deserve this investment. We get to work with some of those outstanding young people through their involvement with the City’s Youth Advisory Committee, which includes students from our area high schools. These young people are tremendous. This past year they took an unimaginable tragedy, a hate crime committed in our community, resulting in the death of a young Gresham resident, and turned it in to an opportunity to champion understanding and acceptance. They went to the scene of the crime, they worked with a local business owner, and they painted a mural celebrating diversity, unity, and inclusion. Can I ask our Youth Advisory Committee members to please stand? Join me in thanking them for this tremendous work.



There is cause for optimism in our schools, with tremendous educators gaining state and national recognition. Katharine Dean of Centennial High School was honored with the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching this year, and Darlene Frazier from Hogan Cedars Elementary was named “Elementary Educator of the Year” by the Oregon Council for Social Studies. Mrs. Frazier is with us today. Please give her our hearty congratulations.



I know many in this room have children that have been in Ms. Frazier’s class, myself included (my two older kids). Ms. Frazier is an incredible teacher, one that takes reading very seriously. Both of my older boys that had the opportunity to go through her class are prolific readers. Also, every time St. Patrick’s Day comes near, I get reminded of a funny story. My oldest son Derek, went to her class in the first grade and on St. Patrick’s Day, the leprechauns had come in and destroyed everything in the room. That was obviously Ms. Frazier that was the leprechaun that day. So, the next year, St. Patrick’s Day came along, and early in the morning, I hear Derek rumbling in Jacob’s room, and stuff’s getting thrown everywhere. I’m like, “Derek, what’s going on?”

“Well, I’m just making the leprechauns come to Jacob’s room.”

So, thank you Ms. Frazier, for that. Appreciate that.

I am exceptionally proud of the progress we are seeing in our schools, and what this means for our families, and for Gresham as a community, as we compete for strong families with other communities in the region.

Speaking of strong families, raise your hand if you have ever heard of the Crouser Family. These folks are legends, and they are an East County institution. We have never seen Gresham shine on the international level more than we did this past summer when local cousins Ryan and Sam Crouser represented the United States of America and competed in the Rio Olympics, with Ryan bringing home an Olympic Gold Medal. These young men, and their entire families, represent what happens when we get children and families right in our communities. Stand out students, exceptional athletes, really, really, terrific young men, and an entire family of strong contributors to our civic fabric.



Sam and his father Dean have joined us this afternoon. Please give them a warm welcome.

With our focus still squarely on children and families, we know that good schools are just a piece of that competitive regional landscape. We must also have good jobs for our families, in order to be a complete community, and one that provides opportunity for everybody. It is no secret to the people in this room, but I am very proud of Gresham’s economic development efforts.

You have heard me discuss the opportunity at the Gresham Vista Industrial Park in past speeches, and about our close partnership with our friends at the Port of Portland. You've probably seen this slide that shows the various parcels and heard us talk about our aspirations for what could come.



We knew that development would occur on a major scale, with aggressive, pro-business policies put in place by our City Council, and I am thrilled to see it finally coming to fruition. Not only did this past year mark the ribbon cutting for Subaru of America's massive 600,000 square foot distribution center, but it also saw construction begin for over 1.2 million square feet of new industrial flex space on Gresham Vista, which will be completed later this year.

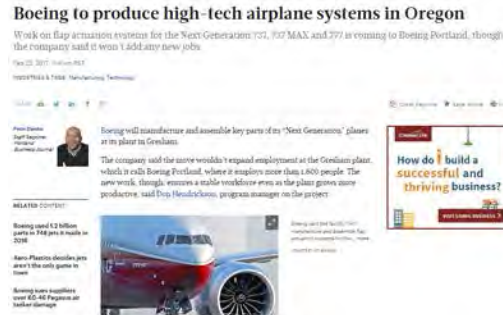


Gresham is extremely aggressive in this arena, but don't take my word for it. Turn your attention to the screen to hear what industry is saying about Gresham:

{ Video about Vista Business Park }

The progress we are seeing on Gresham Vista is awesome, but it is just a part of an economic wave we have seen in our area.

In total, our 2016 industrial permit valuation was over \$80 million dollars. This includes projects at new companies and new developments, and also projects at our core legacy manufacturers, such as Boeing—which announced last month that key parts of its next generation of aircraft will be manufactured right here in Gresham.



Boeing joins Microchip, On Semiconductor, Teeny Foods, Arnprior Aerospace, and Christenson Electric, in making substantial new investments this past year. For comparison purposes, here is how that stacks up against what we have seen in recent years.

Not only is \$80 million nearly double the permit value we had last year, but as you can see on this slide, it crushes the valuation we have seen each of the past few years. Our economy is on the rise, and I could not be more proud of the efforts we have undertaken to attract jobs and economic investment to this community.



We are fortunate to have great partners in the business community on these efforts as well, with the Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce and the East Metro Economic Alliance always stepping forward in that arena.

Our traded-sector and economic development efforts have been coupled with strong progress pending on the redevelopment front as well. We are closer than we have ever been to seeing the dream of the Rockwood Catalyst Site come to fruition, with the groundbreaking planned for this summer. Back in 2008 we were forced to decide whether to accept a crummy building with a gravel parking lot, or hold out for a more favorable redevelopment climate, and the type of signature urban form that Rockwood deserves, and has been deprived of to this point.

So we held out. I believe that was the prudent decision.

With the Rockwood Rising redevelopment project, we have a real opportunity to see new buildings tangibly improve the look and feel of the neighborhood, while also functioning as

physical manifestations of opportunity for Rockwood residents. The entire project is focused on empowerment through education, skills training, creative expression, and access to jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. We have awesome partners in this project, including Mount Hood Community College, Metro East Community Media, Worksystems Inc., KCR Manufacturing, and many others.



There are examples of redevelopment efforts across the country that illustrate the wrong way to improve a neighborhood. They seek to simply spike land values, and push people out. I am proud of our Urban Renewal Commission and staff, who have worked hard to deliver a beautiful project that will improve the neighborhood, while also dramatically enhancing our City's equality of opportunity for those who need to be enfranchised the most.

The Urban Renewal Commission's efforts couple with our nonprofit partners in the area, who continue to make critical progress. Friends of the Children has been up and running for a year, and 2016 brought us a groundbreaking for the Boys and Girls Club, and a grand opening for Open School East just this past fall. At Open School, students advance an average of 2.5 grade levels in math and reading their first year alone, and they receive personalized advocacy and mentoring. We are incredibly fortunate to have these awesome community partners in Gresham.

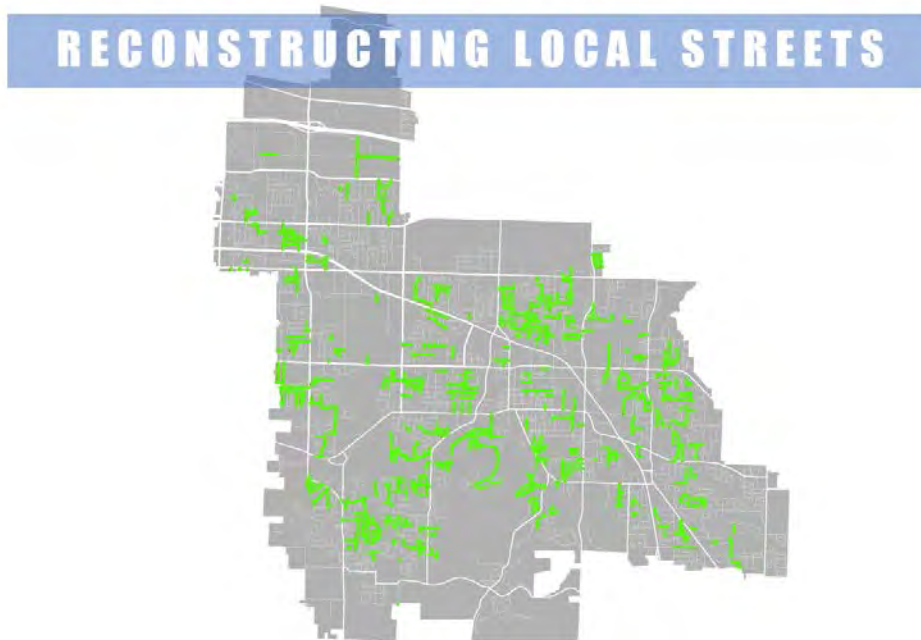


Children and families rely on good schools, great jobs, and access to opportunity, but they also require solid neighborhoods and good public services. It is no secret that Gresham has faced decades of disinvestment in residential street maintenance, as we have watched the state's gas tax return fewer and fewer resources each year relative to inflation and pavement costs. You have undoubtedly seen maps like this, with each of those red streets representing completely

failed infrastructure. Worse, if you live on one of those failed streets and have inquired about the weeds growing in your potholes, the answer we have had to-date just hasn't cut it.



I am extremely happy today to be able to finally say we have a plan –and it's not a small one. With new transportation maintenance resources identified this year by the City Council, I am incredibly proud to report that over the next five years we will undertake the most residential street maintenance ever conducted in the City of Gresham. Over the course of that period, starting with this summer's maintenance season, we will literally turn those red streets green.



Strengthening schools, attracting jobs, and rebuilding infrastructure are all key elements of what it means to be a strong community for children and families. Awesome parks and natural areas are also core parts of that mission. I could not be happier to see the Hogan Butte Nature Park finally open for the public this summer. I've been saying it for some time, and you'll probably need to see it yourself to believe me, but I think Hogan Butte will immediately become one of the most spectacular parks in Oregon, with sweeping views of every nearby mountain, the Columbia River Gorge, and the city of Gresham.



We acquired the land for this park over a decade ago, and have been working to identify grant resources for design and development. I want to take a moment, on this project and also the street maintenance project I mentioned a moment ago, to recognize our Public Works Director, Steve Fancher, who is one of the most creative, dedicated members of our team. Steve takes these sticky problems, he internalizes them, he produces options, he works with Council, then he goes and produces more options, and he perseveres until they become wins for our community. Please join me in thanking Steve for his tremendous service to the City of Gresham.

Another great innovation from our Environmental Services Department is captured in our Wastewater Treatment Plant, which I am sure you have heard me speak about in the past. I want to take just a moment to mention our continued progress. Not only have we achieved net-zero efficiency, with it literally producing more power than it consumes, but we recently began receiving fats, oils, and grease at the plant as well, which is used to produce more fuel for the co-generator engines. This diverts the commercial fats, oils, and grease from the landfill, and produces a new revenue stream for the City at the same time, saving our ratepayers around one million dollars a year.



I want to pause for a moment and reflect on where we started with today's speech, noting how much healthier our civic functions are on the local level than we see at higher levels of government. The work we have done over the past decade at the Wastewater Treatment Plant would have been impossible on the federal level. Instead of being a straightforward, collective effort to save ratepayer funds and improve our environmental footprint, individual components of the project would have been mired in partisanship, entrenchment, and an unwillingness to share the credit. That is why, more than ever, observers of our governmental health have

declared this the age of the City, because we can still have tough, civil conversations on the local level and still pursue lofty goals together.



Here's the thing. This being the era of the city has almost nothing to do with our operation at City Hall. We can do solid work and constantly scan the environment for efficiencies, opportunities, and innovations, but at the end of the day, that collective culture, that community spirit, that civic virtue comes from you. We see it on Friday nights at Gresham, Barlow, Centennial, and Reynolds High School football games. We see it in Scouts, little league, mentorships, and PTAs. We see it at the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, in our neighborhood associations, and churches—a willingness to step forward, transcend the toxicity of Twitter and the mind-numbing 24-hour national media cycle. Regular, goodhearted people in Gresham, and across this country, have made the subtle decision to double-down on their hometowns, and I could not be more excited to be part of this movement.

Ronal Reagan once said, “If we love our country, we should also love our countrymen.” Please turn your attention to the screen for a short video highlighting what it looks like when local residents, right here in Gresham, choose to lead with their hearts.

{Video}

Many of the wonderful people in that video are here with us today. Will you please stand so your community can thank you for what you do?

The stories we just highlighted in that video are not anomalies. I bet each and every person in this room is involved in a significant community effort or initiative –quietly helping their neighbors. At the end of the day, isn't that is what we are called to do? People have an interesting way of defaulting to putting their effort, and service, and time where it will be spent most effectively.

I can promise you that we are ready to leverage that effort at City Hall. We have an ambitious work plan focused on the City's most chronic needs and our most lucrative opportunities. Our focus remains on children and families, but we are also focused on our collective civic health. Gresham, alone, cannot change the outcome of huge national policy fights. Nor can we, by

ourselves, change the rancorous discord and partisanship that has grinded the greatest nation in the world to an embarrassing halt.

But we do get to decide who we will be, as individuals and as a local community, down here on the local level, where things are just a bit different. As we approached Christmastime this past December, our police officers responded to a call involving a single mother and her two children, ages six and one. As the officers worked with the constituent, they learned about her life, the challenges she faces, and the fact that she didn't have any money to give her kids Christmas gifts, save for a small amount of shopping at Goodwill. The officers went back to the Police Department that day and brought the plight of this family to the attention of their colleagues. Out of their own pockets, the officers in our Police Department stepped up in a big way and delivered Christmas gifts for that family, and those kids had enough gifts to fill two patrol cars.



Do you want to know if this City's priority for children and families is manifested at every level of this organization, regardless of the division or function? Just reflect on that example. It's no secret that our cops are busy, responding to over 70,000 calls for service each year. But they took the time to really connect with the resident on the other end of a call, they heard her needs, and filled the gap with their own personal generosity.

Going beyond for our residents is more than a catchphrase. Last August, our firefighters were dispatched to a medical call, where they learned about a local disabled resident who was unable to get in and out of her house because she couldn't climb the stairs. They referred the call to the CARES program I mentioned earlier for follow-up. The CARES nurse worked with a local contractor and called on the services of our fire crew at Station 71, and together, they built that resident the ramp she needed to stay in her home.



They could have cleared the 9-1-1 call once the medical issue was addressed, but they aimed higher and they profoundly met the needs of our resident.

I get a great bellwether on local governments and community civic health when I chat with my fellow mayors from across the country. My recent conversations with these colleagues have all been optimistic, despite the volatility, and regardless of whether I am talking to a Democratic Mayor or a Republican Mayor, big city or small town, because they too are seeing the same hyper-local focus in their cities, and they are witnessing communities across the country subtly deciding to go their own way and renew their commitments to each other.

It is an exciting time to be in this room. We have one eye on the ball, shared goals, a cooperative, strong-hearted City Council, excellent partners, and the best residents any city could hope for. The state of our city is collective, and strong, because each of you wake up every morning and choose to give of yourself to the causes and efforts that you find worthy, right here in Gresham.

Please know that each time you do that, every single time you engage collectively, you are personally restoring the core function that has always made this American experiment successful, despite the challenges. Self-governance is an overwhelming burden because it requires our time, our attention, our vigilance, our advocacy, and our effort. But that burden is worth it when you see the tangible benefit from your time and effort right here in the community you love.

When Derek enrolled in Gresham High School this past fall, that truth hit me to my core. We do this work because it matters, and because communities give rise to people, and those people make up the institutions of power and public service that distinguish us from the rest of the world.

Thank you for your partnership, your time, and your service. It is people like you, throughout Gresham's 112-year history, who came together and made our city such an outstanding community. It was that strong community, and the same Gresham schools, that captured my heart when I came here in 1987 and it was that strong community that gave me access to opportunity and an excellent foundation in collective action. Our selfless residents, giving of their time and talents, ensure that Gresham continues to pass forward those opportunities to our children and families today.

The state of our city is solid, because our residents, the people in this room, form a firm foundation, and actively choose to work together in an unyielding pursuit of the common good.

Thank you very much.