
2021 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS BY MAYOR DIANA BRODERSON

As Mayor of the City of Muscatine, I am pleased to provide this inaugural State of the City Address to share highlights of this past year as we all look forward to a more promising 2021.

Many words can be used to describe what has occurred over the past 12 months. Words like unimaginable, frustrating, fearful are powerful but do little to express the depth of feelings experienced. Who could have imagined that a virus would have such an impact on the daily lives of people here in Muscatine and around the world? Who could have imagined the hardships that citizens and businesses would experience as the coronavirus spread throughout our community, our county, our state, and our world? Who could have imagined the changes that we would have to make as we sought to preserve the lives of our loved ones and slow down the spread of the virus? Who could have imagined the mental, physical, and financial impact that many have suffered?

Overcoming hardships is nothing new to this City nor to its residents. Many times, extreme hardships like floods, tornadoes, derechos (our family calls it William's Wind), and now a pandemic, have had to be overcome, and every time we have rallied to help each other. We became a better city, a better community, for it.

We should all take great pride in the resilience of this community and I am especially proud of how Our City has come together in the fight against this pandemic to help each other and to help Muscatine move forward. The pride and dedication of our citizens from all walks of life has been and will continue to be instrumental in the resilience and future of our community.

Words and phrases like “coronavirus”, “quarantine”, “social distancing” and “wearing a mask” became part of our regular conversations in 2020, and will continue to be part of our conversations in 2021. The pandemic brought changes to our way of life like eating in a restaurant, meeting with friends in social gatherings, and participating in many recreational activities. Changes occurred in the workplace as employees and employers adapted to new safety protocols and working arrangements..

We relied on essential workers... the medical community, first responders, factory workers, grocery workers, and many members of city staff. We owe our essential workers a tremendous amount of gratitude for the sacrifices they made and are making.

The City of Muscatine, like other businesses throughout the country, adapted to a rapidly changing world, creating and instituting policies that allowed for minimal disruption of services while still supporting the needs of our employees.

City staff worked with Muscatine County Public Health, Iowa Department of Public Health, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) to develop policies and procedures to preserve the health of employees and visitors to city facilities.

The Muscatine City Council and commissions and committees of the City adapted to virtual meetings, a land few of us knew a lot about a year ago but have now become accustomed to using. The change was implemented to ensure the health and safety of elected officials, staff, and citizens while preserving the transparency of city government.

In addition, City departments responded to the need for limiting contact between staff and the public by moving many of their functions online. Each department also developed other strategies to ensure the safety of the public in their interactions with city offices.

Knowing that the success of small business is one key to the success of a community, the City saw the need to help those small businesses affected by pandemic shutdowns and then by the restrictions on their businesses. The Community Development and Finance departments, working in conjunction with City Council, successfully developed and implemented an emergency small business forgivable loan program to assist the many locally owned businesses impacted by COVID-19.

Essential services such as fire, police, and public works, also adapted to the changing environment. The Fire Department developed and implemented infection prevention and control practices to limit COVID-19 exposure while the Police Department implemented COVID practices and continued services during a time of increased call volume.

Public Works staff continued to maintain the streets, collect refuse, and provide other services by following social distancing guidelines and wearing masks when unable to social distance. As facilities reopened, the Building and Maintenance staff provided a safe environment for staff and visitors, by diligently cleaning every aspect of each facility operated by the City of Muscatine.

MuscaBus suspended fare collection, limited routes, implemented a shuttle service during the early months of the pandemic, and required facial coverings for staff and riders.

Parks and Recreation implemented a virtual recreation center that has been recognized nationally, and the Musser Library not only implemented a contactless curbside pickup while the facility was closed to the public, they also added a virtual programming format for children and adults to stay engaged. In addition, the Library installed outside WIFI for anyone to use at no charge, providing virtual access to everyone in the City of Muscatine.

Despite the hardships brought on by the pandemic, the City of Muscatine accomplished many of their goals for 2020 and now looks forward to a better 2021. One of the most noteworthy accomplishments was surviving the financial impact of the pandemic. Reduced travel and forced business closures raised serious questions concerning the effects to the city revenue streams which in turn, raised questions on what projects and services might have to be discontinued until funds became available.

The Finance Department conducted a COVID-19 Pandemic Financial Impact Analysis, and determined that, combined with careful stewardship of the general fund balance over the last 10 years, Muscatine would be able to maintain all the services that the public expects the city to provide with limited effects to much needed street maintenance projects and staffing needs. The Finance Department also managed COVID-19 related local government relief funding and associated requirements.

Indeed there are many positives from the past year that certainly need celebrating.

The Art Center is well on their way toward re-accreditation through the American Alliance of Museums, and is scheduled to host the Iowa Museum Association conference in October 2022. While we may not have been able to enjoy the garden areas of the Art Center as much as we

would have liked this past year, plans to update the Japanese Garden on the south side and add landscaping to the north side will provide more area for patrons to enjoy in the years to come. The Art Center and the Public Arts Advisory Commission is spearheading the effort to bring more public art throughout the community.

The pandemic brought many obstacles to City operations, none more than the search for a new City Administrator through the first six months of 2020. Following a nationwide search, City staff coordinated a series of virtual meetings between prospective candidates and the City Council, and hosted the final three candidates abiding by CDC guidelines before completing a successful City Administrator Recruiting Process with the hiring of Carol Webb.

The Healthy Hometown Initiative, a program that is gaining momentum and awareness in the community, is replacing the Blue Zone program that has been a part of the City of Muscatine for many years. City staff, working with members of the business and education community, are bringing a revived health consciousness to Muscatine with healthy choices from eating, exercise, recreation, and work. And we can all agree that after many months of staying at home and reduced social interactions, a return to healthy choices is as welcomed as the warmth of summer after a cold winter.

City Council and the Staff Leadership Team held a retreat last fall and collaboratively developed a Strategic Plan focused on excellent customer service, creating a vibrant, healthy, and safe community, and providing reliable public infrastructure. That plan now supports the development of tactical work plans that will be integrated into department budgets and work plans to achieve the goals of the Strategic Plan.

The Plan lays out the mission of the City of Muscatine to provide effective municipal services, excellent customer services, and sound fiscal management that improves quality of life and ensures a sustainable economy. Pandemic or no pandemic, the City holds to this mission statement in every decision we make.

Every department within the City of Muscatine implemented innovative strategies in response to the pandemic and have used the lessons learned to improve their commitment to community service.

Community Development migrated many of their services from in person to virtual including building inspections to ensure code compliance, permit applications, and housing assistance.

Parks and Recreation is looking forward to opening the Aquatics Center this summer after keeping the facility closed last summer due to the pandemic. Other venues were operated safely through the COVID-19 mandates and realized increased activity including Kent Stein Park and the Municipal Golf Course. By adapting to CDC guidelines, the department was able to restructure recreational programs, the use of park playgrounds, athletic facilities, and shelter and building rentals for continued public use.

People are getting back outside with Parks and Recreation taking advantage of the lessons learned over the past 12 months to develop programs and recreational opportunities that highlight safety while helping to improve the health of the community.

Another bright spot for Muscatine is MORC, or rather the Muscatine Organic Recycling Center located in the Muscatine Transfer Station. The vision of Water and Resource Recovery Facility

director Jon Koch, MORC takes food waste and transforms it to usable energy. No other community the size of Muscatine has implemented such a process. The funds generated from the energy produced from this process will increase the options of what the City can provide for the citizens of Muscatine. While MORC currently takes in food waste from manufacturers and grocery stores throughout the region, plans are being made to develop a residential food waste system that will keep that waste out of the landfills.

This year will be a busy one for construction projects in Muscatine so please stay alert when in or around construction activity. Work on the Park Avenue conversion project will continue into the fall as will the work on the 2nd Street Streetscape Project. Phase 5 of the West Hill Sewer Separation will begin later this spring.

Another construction project has seen a lot of interest of late. The Grandview Avenue Corridor Reconstruction Project will rebuild Grandview Avenue from Main Street to Houser while adding sidewalks and landscaping to make the area more walkable. Building on the Road

Construction Project, the City is also embarking on the “Grandview Revitalization Initiative”. The goal of this Initiative is to reinvigorate, reinvest, and refresh the neighborhoods in the south end from the bypass to Carver Corner and from Hershey Avenue to the Mississippi River. The reconstruction project is included as one of the five pillars of the Initiative with residential support, business support, recreational amenities, and economic development as the other pillars. The Initiative is currently in the information-gathering phase and more information about how businesses and residents can help will be announced later this spring.

Combined with being able to complete most of the 2020-2021 pavement management program, the residents of Muscatine and visitors to this community will see a more visually appealing



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southern entrance into the city, better streets, and more sidewalks. The 2021-2022 pavement management program will continue our dedication to improve city streets and sidewalks, and we will not rest in our annual fight against potholes.

There are so many people that need to be thanked for their tireless dedication throughout the past year, many I have not mentioned in this address. Please know that we appreciate all in our community who have dedicated their time and energy to support a thriving community – even in the most difficult of times.

It has been one year since the pandemic changed our lives and with continued perseverance that light at the end of the tunnel will grow brighter the further into 2021 we get. Let's all continue to protect each other by continuing the safety measures until we cross the finish line and put the virus behind us. We will most likely never return completely to a "pre" COVID19 world, but we can embrace the future and all of its possibilities while not forgetting the lessons learned this past year. Your elected officials and city staff are working together to make Muscatine the best it can be and we thank you for your support. We have a great deal to look forward to and I'm confident that UNITY is putting us in the best possible position to realize it all.

We look forward to serving the people of Muscatine throughout the remainder of 2021 and beyond.