

Good evening and thank you for attending West Chicago's State of the City Address.

We've all experienced a few unprecedented past years due to the pandemic, and this is the first time we've been able to have this event in-person since the pandemic started. So, I'd like to initially recognize this by saying how great it is to see each of you in person this evening.

COVID-19 took much from all of us, and it has certainly changed all our lives – probably, forever. Each of us in this room has most likely been impacted, in one way or another, and our community is no different. Our City lost over 60 people since the pandemic began. That's over 60 people who were mothers or fathers; grandmas or grandpas; sons or daughters; aunts or uncles; or perhaps just a friend.

Ultimately, West Chicago lost people – these were *our* family and friends. So, at this time, I'd like to acknowledge this tremendous loss with a brief moment of silence out of respect for each of them and their loved ones.

Thank you.

COVID-19 is still a reality, and I hope we all can continue to be vigilant in how we take care of ourselves and each other as we move forward as a society.

As mentioned, I am grateful to be here as the Mayor of West Chicago, and I am grateful to have each of you join us this evening.

While on the topic of gratitude, I'd like to thank Dave Sabathne who serves as the CEO and Executive Director of the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce, along with his amazing staff and the Chamber's Board,

which is the Sponsor of this year's event. The City is greatly appreciative of our partnership with you, and your dedication to this community continues to show through each new development and investment in West Chicago.

I would also like to recognize and thank our members of the West Chicago City Council for their dedication to this community. Each of our City Council members bring their own unique perspectives and talents to their roles as public servants to this community, and I'd like to make sure that each is recognized this evening for their continued commitment to West Chicago.

In doing so, I'd like to ask that you each stand at this time, so you can be recognized with a round of applause.

Thank you for your continued service.

I'd also like to thank our city staff. Our staff continues to adapt and evolve to meet the challenges of the present and the future. The city greatly appreciates each of your efforts in serving our community members.

And, lastly, she's dealt with me for over 30 years...so, I find it very important to acknowledge my wonderful and supportive wife – Julie. Your love and support has guided me through the most difficult of situations. Thank you for being you.

So, here we are in spring once again - the season of renewal. We see the signs of renewal in the blooming flowers and trees; the reemergence of warmer weather – at least sometimes, as we are in the Midwest – and we also see it in people.

We're more active and revitalized after experiencing the long dormant fall and winter seasons, and life in general seems to be more energized for all of us as the season changes.

As mentioned, the pandemic changed all our lives. And, similar to the fall and winter seasons, life was somewhat dormant for a time. And, I think, and I hope, that we are now moving forward into a new chapter. A chapter of renewal.

All around the globe, municipalities and communities are experiencing this sense of renewal, and West Chicago is no different.

As a city, we're restoring and renewing components of some our critical infrastructure. And, in 2021, we completed over \$3.7 million in infrastructure projects. Some notable completed infrastructure projects included:

- The rehabilitation of two of the City's Water Wells that are critical to providing treated water to our community;
- improvements to our wastewater treatment system to aid in the cleaning of wastewater prior to being discharged back into nature;
- the entire reconstruction of Commerce Drive;
- the resurfacing of approximately 1 ¾ miles of Prince Crossing Road, which the majority of the project was paid for with 70% of the funding coming from CMAP's Surface Transportation Program;
- and the rehabilitation of over two miles of City streets between Route 59 and Bishop Street from Forest Avenue to Dayton Avenue, which was partially paid for with 44% of the funding for the project being provided through the Community Development Block Grant Program.

The City is, and has been, fully committed to its investment in its infrastructure and has a number of projects scheduled to commence this year as well. Some notable projects include:

- The cleaning, repairing, and painting of the Fremont Street Water Tower which will be funded with \$750,000 in grant dollars;
- the resurfacing of approximately 1 ¼ miles of roadway in the Cornerstone Lakes Subdivision and within the Ingalton Hills Area;
- the rehabilitation of just under one mile of roadway in the areas around Sophia Street;

- the rehabilitation of just over 1 ½ miles of roads from Augusta Avenue to Glen Avenue on Barber and Blakely Streets, as well as Allen Avenue; and also Augusta Avenue from Joliet Street to Route 59, Bishop Street from Roosevelt Road to Forest Avenue, and Glen Avenue from Joliet Street to Bishop Street;
- and, in addition, the City will also be rehabilitating an additional two Water Wells, repairing various sanitary sewer lines throughout the City, and conducting additional repairs and replacements to our potable water and wastewater systems.

The City's investment in the maintenance and renewal of its infrastructure can only be matched in its on-going efforts to revitalize and develop our business community.

In focusing on the some of our more notable economic development projects, I would like to highlight:

- The issuance of building permits for the lift station at the Cascade Drive-In Movie Theatre that will eventually bring the renewal and return of this favorite community attraction;
- the on-going development of the DuPage Business Center that has seen the completion of two large industrial/logistics developments;
- the awarding of three grants to current businesses through the Façade Program;
- and, also the expansion of the Ball Horticultural facilities.

With regards to Ball Horticultural, I'd like to recognize how this amazing organization has made West Chicago its home officially 100 years as of 2022. I'd like to congratulate Anna Ball and her team on their continued success, and also thank them for always being a great partner of our community.

In 2022, we're seeing three more projects under construction at the DuPage Business Center for Scannell Properties, Suncast Corporation, and Midwest Industrial Funds. Each of these organizations have completed prior projects at the business center. In addition to these developments, I would also like to highlight:

- The new Belle Tire that will be located at 440 W. North Avenue;
- The proposed QuikTrip Gas Station at Neltnor Boulevard and North Avenue which should lead to a frequently requested traffic signal at the entrance to the Prestonfield Subdivision;
- the townhome development on Central Main Street with the potential to add additional apartment spaces as well;
- and, also the initiation of a site plan for the Kerr-McGee Superfund Site which will serve as the start of design of a park for that area. The design process for this project will also include a significant amount of public engagement, so this new park will specifically serve as a true extension of our community's creative ideas.

- As we remain committed to the overall development of West Chicago, the City has also enacted several economic and community development initiatives as a means to renew its vision for the future and to establish the tools to support that renewed vision. Some of these initiatives include:
  - The approval of a new Comprehensive Plan that will provide a roadmap for years to come for the development of our City;
  - the early termination of the old, and the approval of a new, Downtown TIF District in conjunction with our community partners to reinvest our commitment to our City's downtown area;
  - the approval of a new Economic Development Plan that will provide key milestones and objectives to help us reach some of the City's economic development goals;
  - the creation of the City's first Economic Development Commission;
  - and, also the relaunch of the City's Economic Development website, *West Chicago Now*.

As the City continues to push forward with its infrastructure and development goals, it is important for us to also remain aware of additional financial opportunities to support our projects. In doing so, in 2021, the City secured grant funding for several infrastructure projects previously mentioned, but also is positioned to receive approximately:

- \$3.6 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding;
- \$600,000 for an environmental remediation project at the West Washington Street site ;
- and, in 2022, the City secured \$600,000 for the installation of a traffic signal at Roosevelt Road and Technology Boulevard.

While the City makes every effort to make plans for the future ahead, sometimes it can be difficult to see what the future may bring.

With the pandemic, COVID-19 greatly affected City with 1/3 of the City's staff being affected by the virus at one point in time or another. This required staff to sometimes be away from work at unexpected times and often work electronically from home. In addition, the City needed to transition to hosting virtual community meetings and staff meetings, which made "Zoom" a household name for all of us.

Ultimately, technology became an even more vital tool than it had already been.

To adapt with the more frequent use of technology, the City recently updated its website, and is continuing to review and update the site to make seeking and finding information more efficient while also providing community members more opportunities to conduct business with the City electronically.

Adapting to changing trends, and being able to pivot when new challenges present themselves is essential to any organization or municipality's survival. And, the City did exceptionally well during these unprecedented times.

In addition to adapting to and pivoting with the challenges that the pandemic brought, the City also experienced many changes in leadership amongst its staff due to retirements.

Within the past year, we've seen the retirement and hiring of new staff for multiple positions. And, in 2021 and 2022, we've seen new hires in the positions of:

- Public Works Director
- Police Chief
- Public Works Streets Superintendent
- Marketing and Communications Coordinator
- Economic Development Coordinator
- and, Human Resources Coordinator

In addition to these staff changes, the City also anticipates the retirement of three additional Division Heads this year.

Although, we are greatly appreciative of all our City staff and their service to our community, with these changes in staff we will not only see some new faces throughout our community, but we will also see some new ideas - which is exciting.

As I discuss these recent staff changes, I also would like to take a moment to recognize Nancy M. Smith.

Nancy was not a member of City staff, but she sure worked diligently in her role as City Clerk in a manner that you'd think she was a full-time staff member.

Nancy was the longest serving City Clerk ever for the City of West Chicago and served in her role for almost 31 years. She took her position extremely seriously and carried herself with great professionalism and pride. She was hardworking, and kind.

Apart from her service with the City, she also served in the U.S. Army and worked at the Pentagon where she met her husband Don.

She said the hardest part about working at the Pentagon was trying to get Don's attention. They were married 55 years last Nov. She was an auxiliary member of the VFW Post 6791 and Commander of the American Legion from 2000 -2002.

Nancy attended her last City Council meeting on February 7th as an audience member before passing away on Wednesday, February 9th.

Nancy loved her community, and she loved her Don.

Nancy was an amazing person. She never had a bad word to say about anyone and always had a smile on her face. In this day and age EVERYONE should be a Nancy.

The City, and I personally, will greatly miss Nancy. Just so everyone knows, I did find her candy stash.

As we continue to adjust to this great loss, I'd like to also recognize an additional City staff member, and West Chicago resident, Valeria Perez. Valeria is now serving in the role of Deputy Clerk while Nancy's vacancy is addressed. She has done an outstanding job in adapting to the situation and is, and has always been, an essential member of the City's Administration Department's team.

As we continue with the theme of renewal, I'd like to especially draw attention to the revival of all our community events this year. The City has already approved and is planning many of our in-person special events that include:

- Blooming Fest, which is this weekend on May 21st
- Railroad Days which will be from July 7<sup>th</sup> through July 10
- Food Fest which is on August 27th, and will be in the evening hours this year;
- and, Mexican Independence Day on September 11th.

In addition, as the City reopens for fun in the community, West Chicago is also a sponsor of the upcoming art exhibit at Cantigny Park, Alebrijes: Creatures of a Dream World.

This special event will have over 40 different sculptures created by Mexican artists featured throughout the grounds of Cantigny Park, so I encourage everyone to go and enjoy this event when it opens in June.

I also encourage everyone to keep your eyes open for some additional events around the City that are being planned by the City and our community partners to embrace this unique art exhibit.

As we all enjoy some much-needed fun, it's also important that we continue to stay healthy in the meantime. And, I would just like to take a moment to state that Healthy West Chicago, under Program Administrator Carly Smitherman, has been doing great in sharing new events, programs, and resources with our community members to do just that.

In addition, I'd like to express my gratitude to all of Healthy West Chicago's new and existing financial partners, including:

- Ball Horticultural
- OSI Industries
- Amazon Fulfillment Center
- Pritzker Realty Group
- West Chicago Public Library District
- West Chicago Elementary School District 33
- And, DS Containers

Because of each of you, this organization has secured over \$100,000 total for the next 3 years that will directly assist our community in learning how to be healthy while having some fun.

Thank you.

In closing, I'd like to state, as a resident, and as the Mayor of West Chicago, I am very excited and hopeful for the future ahead for this City. I truly believe we have put the worst behind us, but we need to remain careful & cautious. Covid is still here.

And, as we begin our chapter of renewal in this community, I look forward to seeing how our story unfolds because the best is yet to come.

Again, it was wonderful seeing everyone this evening. It's great being seen.

I thank you for your support of the City of West Chicago and this community, and I look forward to seeing you, in-person, around town.

May God bless you, may God bless West Chicago, and may God bless the United States of America.