

Hello West Chicago, welcome to the annual State of the City Address. Like so many things this year, it looks a little different. We're doing more online through YouTube, Zoom and Facebook – yet we haven't stopped communicating; we've been covered under the safety of masks, yet we've remained transparent; we are keeping our distance, yet we are as close knit a community as ever before.

I am deeply grateful for the privilege of continuing to serve you as Mayor for the next four years and wish to thank everyone in the community who supported my reelection. I assure you all that I will return your vote of confidence by dedicating myself to the many challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It is enormously rewarding to be able to contribute to the vitality of one's hometown.

I would like to acknowledge the group of men and women who make up the West Chicago City Council. They too have answered the call to serve and bring a wealth of diverse experience and talents for the benefit of the City. We have several new faces on the Council, and this is a good time to introduce them to you, as well as recognize those who continue to step up for the community they love so dearly.

Ward One: Aldermen James Beifuss and Lori Chassee

Ward Two: Aldermen Jayme Sheahan and Heather Brown

Ward Three: Aldermen Alton Hallett and Christine Dettman

Ward Four: Aldermen Melissa Ferguson and Sandy Dimas

Ward Five: Aldermen Christopher Swiatek and Matt Garling

Ward Six: Aldermen Jeanne Short and Rebecca Stout

Ward Seven: Aldermen John Jakabcsin and Joseph Morano

And our esteemed City Clerk, Nancy Smith.

If you're not sure which of these fine people represent you, the City website contains an interactive map which allows you to search for your Ward by your address and which contains a photograph with bio and contact information for your local elected official. I encourage you to treat your Ward Aldermen as direct links to the City for questions, concerns or positive feedback.

Thank you to the Western DuPage Chamber and its Board, under the leadership of CEO and Executive Director David Sabathne and his team of professionals. Each year the organization maintains the long-standing tradition of sponsoring the State of the City Address. We appreciate this partnership, and hope that next year we'll be back to acknowledging each of them in person, and networking with Chamber membership at City Hall as we have in the past.

Last but by no means least, I would like to share my appreciation for the loving support I receive from my wife of 30+ years, Julie, who understands and encourages my call to public service. The challenges of the past year have proven yet again she has an indomitable spirit, and is the wind beneath my wings.

2020 was a year like no other, and we must begin by acknowledging the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the toll it has taken on our community. West Chicago was one of the hardest hit communities in DuPage County.

As of April 10, 2021, the DuPage County Health Department reported that West Chicago has 4,278 residents who tested positive for COVID-19; there have been 50 deaths in our community as a result of this disease, eight at our long-term care facilities.

Those who lost their lives were members of our West Chicago family, and I'd like to offer my condolences to their loved ones and acknowledge their loss with a moment of silence.

I would like to recognize and thank all of the people on the front line who have provided support for our community from the onset of this pandemic. These include our healthcare professionals, our first responders, grocery store workers, garbage collectors, pharmacy employees, City staff, and employees of the many companies manufacturing essential goods and equipment who have left the safety of their homes to serve the greater community. Thank you also to all fellow community members who have followed the guidelines to prevent the spread of this disease to others in the community. Your continued diligence in masking up, frequently washing hands and social distancing is very much appreciated as we continue to see these preventative measures work.

Thank you to the many community partners and local elected leaders who have provided much needed resources for those in need, including food distributions, testing sites, and vaccination clinics. Thanks to partner collaborations, West Chicago has vaccinated over 11,000 people.

Early in 2020 when the health crisis became evident, the City launched a strategic, rapid response to keep the community informed. Bi-lingual messaging of early directives from local, State, and federal health experts were distributed on multiple communication channels including social media, electronic newsletters and our LED message board. The City developed and promoted a dedicated micro-website, the COVID-19 Communications Center, to serve as a repository for this information with curated content from health experts including the Centers for Disease Control, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and the DuPage County Health Department about testing sites, safety measures, social service resources, vaccination clinics and more. We invested in an outdoor signage campaign to promote prevention throughout the community, reminding people of the 3Ws (wash hands, wear masks, watch distance) and partnered with the DuPage Mayors and Managers Conference and the DuPage Health Department on a robust bi-lingual social media campaign.

I'd like to commend City staff for rallying in the early days of 2020 to find safe and effective ways to provide essential services with minimal disruption to our customers. Whether working remotely or maintaining a presence in the office or out in the field, staff continued to exhibit the culture of excellence for which the City is known. Through its dedication, resilience, and drive to stay calm and carry on staff has kept our City operational and led to stability in the midst of uncertainty.

The City received a supplemental CARES Act grant in an amount of \$143,200 to assist families facing food insecurity in our community, the Healthy West Chicago initiative and public education about the pandemic. I am extremely proud of the work being done by Healthy West Chicago in educating our community about the importance of good nutrition and physical activity for a healthy lifestyle through its free Cooking Matters series, grocery store tours, and Move with the Mayor walking campaigns. Its mission to ensure that all residents of West Chicago will have access to an optimal state of health and wellness reflects the City's values of providing programs and services that benefit the quality of life for every member of the community.

While Citywide efforts to help our community's residents and businesses through the crisis of an unprecedented pandemic dominated our focus in 2020, we recognized that part of that focus had to provide for the future economic stability of the City. An Economic Development Plan was drafted in 2020 and will serve as a future roadmap for the next several years, ensuring the City's economic base while navigating through global economic shifts. The Plan takes into account the retail challenges of an increasingly online consumer market and the ability to retain a healthy manufacturing sector while eventually transitioning towards a knowledge-based economy.

Notwithstanding the challenges of the past year, we realized major growth in the DuPage Business Center, with the construction of buildings for Alton Industries, Amazon, Greco/DuPage Investment Group, Scannell Properties and Midwest Industrial Funds. Additionally, both vacant used car dealerships are now occupied. Planet Fitness will occupy significant space at the former Hobby Lobby location, and Jalapeño Burger is moving into the Tastee Freeze site. With General Mills having been purchased the year prior, all key vacant sites are either occupied or soon-to-be occupied – significant accomplishments during the year of the pandemic.

Between January 2020 and March 2021, 84 new businesses have opened in West Chicago. The number of jobs generated from these new businesses exceeds 400 - definitely a cause for celebration.

Our existing business community has relied on your support to keep their doors open over the past year. Please shop and dine locally whenever possible.

- If you don't yet feel comfortable dining in, get it to go. Order from our local restaurants and bars via delivery service, to-go, or curbside pickup.

- Buy in advance. Purchase gift cards or book services from local businesses to use at a future date.
- Follow along. Your favorite local businesses are online and sharing specific ways you can support them.
- Shop small online. Websites have not closed and it is important to leave positive reviews for local vendors and businesses.
- Stay looped in. Keep up with your memberships, and with services that are still offered online.
- Say thank you. Many business owners and workers are risking their health to provide critical products and services. Be thankful.

Once our economy fully opens, it will be even more essential to do business locally. The future of our community depends on it.

We will have exciting news to release in the very near future regarding our once in a generation Central Main Street Redevelopment Project in the area between the historic downtown and City Hall. There are developers revising pro forma and submitting development concept plans for townhomes and mixed use commercial buildings/apartments. We look forward to this area's first groundbreaking, which is slated to occur in 2021, with great anticipation. I will keep you informed as things progress on that front.

The Public Works Department staff continued to focus on street repairs and we saw the completion of the Washington Street Reconstruction Project and the Sidewalk and Curb and Gutter Replacement Program. Public Works staff also completed utility permit reviews and assisted the Community Development Department with private development project inspections. Our Street Division completed asphalt pavement patching on Ingaltan Avenue between Elmwood Avenue and Grandlake Boulevard, Alamance Drive, South Oak Street, and Gates Street.

All municipal buildings, City-owned properties, and City street lights were inspected, serviced and maintained. Our Forestry Program objectives continued to focus on the management of the Emerald Ash Borer with soil insecticidal treatments completed in November 2020. As well, the City's annual contractual tree planting, tree trimming, and removal programs were also completed in 2020.

Through the efforts of the Environmental Commission, we reaffirmed our commitment to monarch butterfly conservation with a special proclamation that encourages residents to plant more milkweed in their gardens.

As we look ahead to 2021 goals, Public Works staff will continue to research available alternative funding sources for roadway and capital improvement projects; re-evaluate and update the Capital Improvement Program and five-year Street Improvement Program priority list; and stay involved with the public improvements associated with various private development projects.

I would like to thank our Public Works Director of 19 years, Rob Flatter, for the fabulous job he has done for the City. Rob will be leaving us to pursue an opportunity in the private sector next month. During his tenure, he has contributed greatly to City operations through his advocacy for a well-funded street resurfacing program, and long-term improvements to the City's infrastructure with an eye for aesthetics. Rob was instrumental in privatizing the Waste Water Treatment Plant, which resulted in significant savings, as well as the engineering services for public improvements, which resulted in higher quality work and more grants. We offer him our deepest thanks for his service and best wishes for continued success in his new position.

Our Police Department staff has seen some changes in personnel due to retirement and resignation. We will be announcing a replacement for Chief Michael Uplegger, who after 29 years of dedicated service to this community, has retired. His leadership and that of his predecessors prepared us well for the national fallout that occurred last year in the wake of the tragedies that took place in Wisconsin, Kentucky and elsewhere. The City fielded many phone calls from residents on both sides of the social injustice issue, as well as monitoring peaceful protests that took place in West Chicago. I am proud that since 1990 we have employed a Social Worker to assist our officers, and that our Police Department has been accredited for nearly 20 years, ensuring that we have the proper policies in place to minimize adverse actions against any member of the public regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion or gender. Thank you to all the men and women of our law enforcement community, we value your service.

We have all been impacted in some way, some of us more than others. While we continue to recover, reduce our case numbers, reopen our economy, and learn to adapt to a new way of living, I want to share the gratitude and pride I feel for our community's resilience and my hope for its future – a future in which we all have a stake.

As you may have heard, the City is currently undergoing the process of updating its Comprehensive Plan to take us through the next 20 years. We have launched an aggressive outreach campaign to connect with every member of our community for input. West Chicago Forward aims to engage residents and business owners in the thoughtful planning process that will impact future land use and development, housing, economic development, transportation and infrastructure, parks and open space, community health, and more. If you haven't already done so, please share your thoughts with us through a survey you can find on the dedicated website, westchicagoforward.com, or attend a public meeting which will be posted on the website or on social media. If you require a disability accommodation to attend one of our events, please contact us at info@westchicagoforward.com.

This new Plan will help West Chicago position itself for growth and success in the years to come. Think of it this way, you are being asked to help shape the future of your City for yourself, your families and the next generation of West Chicagoans by sharing your ideas, opinions, and suggestions on improving the quality of community life. It's that simple and yet that powerful, and we want to hear from you.

Until we are once again ready to hold large gatherings in downtown West Chicago, the heart of our community, City staff will continue to coordinate virtual special events to engage all residents. Please make a habit of checking the City's website and the individual Facebook pages created for each special event to stay informed and stay connected.

Meanwhile, let's continue to find beauty and a sense of hope through the natural assets of our community; its parks, trails, and prairie. Our vibrant arts community has continued to nourish the creative soul in all of us through limited yet exceptional art exhibits at Gallery 200, or the messages of inspiration coordinated by the Cultural Arts Commission, which came in the form of Haiku placed on yard signs throughout the community this past summer and fall. Get out for a walk down Main Street beginning in early May to enjoy the upcoming outdoor banner art exhibit, Take Flight.

Community partners are also contributing in ways that enrich the mind and spirit. DuPage SCARCE has installed mini libraries at three different laundromats in West Chicago, and the West Chicago Garden Club is launching a public art project later this spring at the Kruse House Garden that will install a dozen marvelous art bees for the pleasure of visitors. These efforts uplift the spirit and continue to define West Chicago as a community of givers.

I'd like to leave you with a quote from filmmaker, actor, and writer Guillermo del Toro. It is especially appropriate given the fact that the monarch butterfly has become something of an iconic symbol, or unofficial mascot, for West Chicago. He writes, "The butterfly does not look back upon its caterpillar self, either fondly or wistfully; it simply flies on." I would add it does this through a single act of faith. It does not know for certain what obstacles it might meet during its journey, but instinctively and courageously pushes on. And so must we.

Thank you again for your support of the City of West Chicago, we count on it for our every success. May God bless you all, may God bless West Chicago, and may God bless the United States of America.