

Thank you for the warm introduction, Dave, and thank you to the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring tonight's event as it has done so many times in the past.

The Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce has been an asset to the West Chicago community and the City greatly appreciates its partnership as well as the great level of dedication in which it supports its members.

West Chicago, what a fascinating City.

While I was preparing for this evening's address and reflecting on our City's past and current achievements, I could only think back to our City's origin and the days of the high-powered steam locomotives.

In the 19th Century, driven by the emergence of the steam locomotive and the American Industrial Revolution, our community began to form under the name of Junction.

The Town of Junction was given its name as it was the initial junction that joined the railroads from Chicago with the railroads from Aurora.

Through this special intersection of railroads, an iron river of economic opportunity would be forged along with a foundation for the character of the community that remains to this day.

Steam locomotives were the impressive machines that navigated these tracks of prosperity. These locomotives inspired innovation and pushed boundaries, and they powered through the United States becoming the driving force of the country's economy.

What I find most fascinating about them, though, is that they only moved one way – forward.

The only way the direction of a locomotive could be changed is through the use of a facility called a roundhouse, otherwise, these engines were stuck headed towards one destination.

Luckily, for us in Junction, Illinois, we had a roundhouse.

This allowed those driving the locomotives an opportunity to change their direction. But, only in Junction would they be able to make this important decision of how they would move forward.

The term junction, as defined in the dictionary, has only a few different meanings, including the most relatable to our City's original name, which is "a place or point of meeting".

But, as I think of this term, personally for me, the word junction is not simply a place or point of meeting, but it is also a place and point where a decision must be made in order to move forward.

Where do I want to go from here? What is the path forward?

These are the important questions that are truly asked at a junction. Because, once a decision is made and that engine starts rolling, you can only move forward with that decision.

I share these thoughts and these details about our City's past, because at this time, the City of West Chicago is at its own junction, and we're at a good one at that.

Like the locomotive, we're moving forward, and we're doing so in the right direction.

We've made the right, and sometimes difficult, decisions at other junctions in time. And, we've worked hard, been innovative, and pushed some boundaries; all while moving forward.

Tonight, I will highlight some of our recent decisions while also providing a glimpse into the future of West Chicago that represents this.

Most importantly, I will showcase to you that the state of our City is strong.

Like the powerful locomotive, our engine is running hard and fast, and we are indeed moving forward in the right direction.

At this time I would to thank some very important people.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my wonderful wife – Julie. She's been my rock through the best and most difficult of times and has always been my biggest supporter for the last 25 years as Alderman & Mayor. I wouldn't be standing here today without her. Julie has allowed me to perform a job that I love.

Next before I provide an update on some of the key components of the City, it is important to recognize that one individual does not make the important decisions of this City.

They are made through multiple people with individual talents and wisdom who dedicate their time and efforts towards benefiting the greater good of our community.

These important people are our fellow residents who have been elected by their peers to lead this community by being a part of the West Chicago City Council.

At this time, I'd like to take a moment to recognize each of them for their contributions to this community.

I'd like to begin with taking a moment to welcome our two newest Aldermen: Dan Beebe and John Smith. Welcome, and thank you for your commitment towards helping this City in building a path forward and seeing it through.

I'd also like to congratulate each of our incumbents who won their recent election bids, which includes Aldermen Jayme Sheahan, Alton Hallett, Melissa Birch, Rebecca Stout, and Joseph Morano. Congratulations on your re-elections.

I would like to thank each of our other current Aldermen, including Aldermen Lori Chassee, Heather Brown, Christine Dettmann,

Sandy Dimas, Christopher Swiatek, Jeanne Short, and John Jakabcsin.

Please join me in giving each of these community members a round of applause for their public service. The highlights you'll hear this evening could not be made possible without their dedication.

Thank you, and I look forward to working with each of you on behalf of our community

When laying the tracks for success, you need a lot of support and an equal amount of hard work. I'd like to take a moment to recognize some people who have especially assisted this City with keeping us moving forward in the right direction through their support and hard work.

I'd like to thank our City staff. Our City staff helps keep the locomotive that is West Chicago running each day.

With each of their unique talents and specializations, they take great care of all our residents and keep our engine running efficiently.

On this note of gratitude, I'd like to take this moment to especially thank our City Administrator, Michael Guttman. Michael has been with us for 25 years this upcoming November. He & I have been working together for those 25 years, and I truly can't say enough good things about Michael.

He has always been respectful in responding to our residents, knowledgeable and forthright in advising our city's elected officials, and is highly respected by his staff and peers within his field.

We were very lucky to steal him away from Evanston those many years ago, and we are equally lucky to still have him here.

So please join me in giving Michael a round of applause for his continued service to this community. <Applause>

Thank you.

As I mentioned in my opening dialogue, my goal is to showcase that the state of our City is strong, and our City is moving forward in the right direction by making the right decisions.

We're doing this by consciously and continuously investing in our infrastructure, our economy, our human capital, and our residents.

Speaking of our infrastructure, West Chicago's infrastructure is the foundation of this City – literally.

And, at this time, the state of that foundation is solid.

But, in order for us to maintain this solid infrastructure, we must continue to make great investments into it.

This is not only so our streets and sewers are functioning properly, but also because in order for others to invest in us, we need to make sure that we're investing in ourselves.

Which is why, over the past two years, the City has made investments of over \$13 million dollars into our community's infrastructure.

This includes the completion of over \$4.7 million dollars in infrastructure projects in 2022, and this year's budgeted amount of approximately \$9.2 million dollars towards capital improvement projects and programs.

Significant upcoming projects include:

- The resurfacing of 2.7 miles of multiple City streets as part of the City's Roadway Rehabilitation Project;
- the installation of a new traffic signal at the intersection of Roosevelt Road and Technology Boulevard;
- the final stages of the environmental remediation on West Washington Street; and
- the painting of the Fremont Street Water Tower.

I'd like to take the opportunity to thank Senator Karina Villa who secured grant funds for the last three previously mentioned projects.

Each of these projects are currently at various stages of the review process by the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity staff and we are eagerly awaiting the needed documentation to proceed.

I do need for residents to understand that the City cannot spend any money on these projects until the Grant Agreements are in place, or else we will not be reimbursed.

That is the sole reason why the Fremont Street water tower remains in the condition it is.

In addition to these projects, as a City, we are also thinking ahead and investing in our technological infrastructure through improvements that will be completed this year, including:

- new security cameras around City facilities to ensure members of the public are safe and our facilities are free of vandalism;
- an update to our monument sign on IL-59 and Main Street to ensure messages from the City are larger and more easily read
- as you may have seen, we are also installing monitors in all of our City facilities to provide residents with another way to view information about the City's upcoming services, programs, and events.

We are also making great investments into our water and sewer infrastructure. This includes current and upcoming projects that consist of the replacement of the culvert at Klein Road and also the replacement of one of the City's primary Sanitary Lift Stations along Neltnor Boulevard.

This project will consist of the replacement of approximately 1,000 lineal feet of sanitary forcemain pipeline, various electrical and mechanical upgrades, and the installation of an on-site generator and equipment building.

As I touch base on our water and sewer infrastructure, it is important that I discuss that the City is not immune to the inflation experienced across the globe, as well as the supply chain issues that are severely impacting costs of our infrastructure projects.

To put this into perspective, the City's budgeted costs from this past year for our water and sewer infrastructure was approximately \$2.8 million dollars.

In comparison, the newly estimated costs are approximately \$4.5 million dollars.

This is almost a 65% increase of what was budgeted for maintenance and repairs, compared to what the estimated costs to repair actually are.

With these extraordinary changes in costs, the City needs to be vigilant and mindful of how future maintenance, repairs, and improvements are funded.

So, to offset some of these costs, the City made the difficult, yet necessary decision, to increase its water and sewer rates beginning in July of this year. This will only be the second time the City has raised its water rates since 2006 and its sewer rates since 2008.

That being said, and going forward, these new rates will also be more in alignment with neighboring communities, and the revenues received will be invested directly back into our City's infrastructure.

As I close with the state of the City's infrastructure, I'd also like to bring attention to a very exciting project for the City.

As of last month, the City has contracted with an architectural firm to conduct a Space Needs Assessment Study for the construction of a new City Hall near 119 W. Washington Street.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the appropriate facility size for the current and future needs of the City to best serve our residents.

In addition to providing our community with a new City center, the move from our current City Hall location will also allow for the redevelopment of the current site for transit oriented development to bring additional investment into our downtown that will benefit our economy as well as our residents. Our New downtown will be a destination point that all West Chicagoans can be proud of.

This is the first step towards a very exciting project for our City and community.

This project is something that we've been eyeing as an organization for many years, and we are certainly looking forward to sharing more details in the near future.

While highlighting the City's contributions towards its own infrastructure. I'd also like to take a final moment to highlight one additional project that is being funded by DuPage County. DuPage County will be funding a \$20 million dollar project that will reconstruct and widen Fabyan Parkway to four lanes from IL-38 to the Kane County line. This project is a particularly large investment into West Chicago, that will certainly serve as an economic driver for our City for years to come.

With our infrastructure being very much closely tied together to our community and economic development initiatives, these continued investments will ultimately provide a spark to our local and regional economy.

As I transition to the state of our City's economy, I'd like to begin by saying, that much like our infrastructure, the state of West Chicago's economy is as solid as it has ever been.

The West Chicago City Council's philosophy of investing in ourselves, so others may follow, has provided us a significant return on investment, and we are certainly moving forward in the right direction.

Just this past year, West Chicago has seen a significant investment in its business community, which includes private investment of \$95 million dollars in new construction investment for 2022 and an additional \$66 million in 2023 so far.

In our industrial areas, which includes the DuPage Business Center, there has been continued investment activity, which has accounted for nearly 1.8 million square feet of industrial space worth \$95 million dollars being delivered in just the past 14 months.

This is why the expansion to 4 lanes on Fabyan Parkway and the stop light at Roosevelt Rd. are so important, with a large amount of new truck traffic leaving the business park daily.

In addition, there is also the 700,000 square feet of new industrial space valued at \$48 million dollars that is currently under construction as well. This includes the recent addition to the City's commercial area, Belle Tire, which has completed a new 10,000 square foot vehicle care center in 2022.

With regards to new businesses coming to West Chicago, in just this past last year, the City has welcomed 64 new businesses that employ a total of 427 individuals. A couple include Cilantro Taco Grill, a family-owned fast casual Mexican restaurant, and Children of America, an educational childcare center.

In addition to these new businesses, we have also seen 10 businesses make a significant expansion over the last year, including DuPage Aerospace, Wise Plastics Technologies, OSI Industries, Cheese Merchants, and Suncast to name a few.

This has resulted in the completion and occupancy of nearly 1 million square feet of new construction and the addition of 120 employees.

There has also been significant renewed interest in the downtown over the last year, with the City having welcomed seven new businesses, including the Puerto Rican Cultural Center, as well as the opening of a new restaurant, the Good Morning Family Restaurant.

Speaking of more places to eat and enjoy, there is also another restaurant, Raised Bakery and Café, that is nearing the completion of their renovation; and another restaurant/café that just recently submitted a building permit to begin their build-out of the Wiant House.

There are discussions underway with another prospective business owner looking to establish a new small bistro concept in the downtown area as well.

Apart from restaurants in the downtown area, over the last several months, several commercial properties along the City's major commercial corridors have begun renovations for future retail, restaurant, and service uses. Additions include Tropical Smoothie Café, the expansion of The Journey's Path and a dentist's office to name a few.

This includes the recent renovation of the remaining 30,000 square feet in the formerly vacated Hobby Lobby store along Neltnor Boulevard, which had been vacant for more than a decade. The project's completion last year allowed the occupancy of Kids Empire, an indoor play place, and a new banquet facility.

To assist our current businesses, and to invest in them as well, we've also begun to allow the installation of video gaming devices in certain establishments. The key driver behind this decision was to assist in leveling the playing field for our businesses to compete for customers with restaurants in neighboring towns.

As to what lies ahead for development in West Chicago, the tracks for our future have recently been laid out for us through the City's newly adopted Comprehensive Plan.

This new Plan will provide a roadmap for the future development of our community, and it was so well put together that it was recognized by the American Planning Association as the best planning documents of the year in 2022.

This Plan and this award, not only showcases that the tracks are set before us, but they're also located in the best possible places.

All these wonderful highlights showcase that West Chicago's local economy is most certainly moving forward in the right direction, and I am personally excited to see what the future brings for the development of our business community.

It's important for me to highlight that there is a lot of work that goes into maintaining our City's infrastructure as well as guiding the development of our business community.

I began this evening's address by making the reference that the City is similar to a powerful steam locomotive.

Well, similar to a real locomotive, this City is fueled by hard work; this hard work is completed by our amazing City staff.

They are the one's keeping steam in our engine and they are the one's helping lay the tracks that are this City's future success.

With this comparison in mind, the best way to describe where we're at as an organization, is that we are running at a full head of steam, and our workforce is as ready as ever to be the strong driving force that pushes this City forward into the next stretch of our future.

As I make this statement, I find it important to mention there are always retirements that result in any organization losing a little steam for a period of time.

As for the City, we have seen quite a few retirements over the past two years, and just since January 2022, we have seen 13 different retirements. With those retirements, the City lost the equivalent of 311 years of combined service to this community.

That's a whole lot of steam leaving the engine, and more importantly, a lot of knowledge and understanding of our community gone.

But, as we wish all our retirees the best in their future endeavors, we also welcome new staff members who bring bright new ideas and talents to fuel our organization.

With the filling of these vacancies left by retirements and the filling of already vacant positions within the organization, our City's workforce that consists of 116 employees, has recruited and replaced 20% of our entire workforce since May of last year.

This number of vacancies filled also reflects upon our City's Management Team, which has seen a near complete transition of personnel over the past two years.

This includes the most recent hires from this past year, including our new Assistant Director of Public Works Dave Shah, Chief Building Official Stuart Caravello, Fleet Maintenance and Facilities Management Superintendent Mike Noa, Water Treatment Plant Superintendent Eddie Ramos, Assistant Finance Director Diana Soltess, Economic Development Coordinator Kelley Chrise and Assistant City Administrator Tia Messino.

The City's Police Department has also experienced recent vacancies, as the Department has dealt with 6 retirements since

January of 2022 as well as several existing unfilled positions.

Since this time, the Department has filled these vacancies through the recruitment of 3 new entry level officers, as well as 7 lateral police officers who have worked with other communities.

As an important point of note, in total, within the past two years, West Chicago has hired nearly half of our current Police force while other Departments throughout the country are struggling immensely to find qualified officers.

Ultimately, there has been a tremendous transition of staff throughout our entire organization.

While we are always seeking to keep our workforce fully staffed with the best possible candidates, we are also making sure that we're developing our current staff so they learn and grow into leadership roles within our organization as well.

This is displayed in our most recent promotions, including the promotion of Assistant Finance Director Nikki Giles to Finance Director.

As well as several promotions within our Police Department that include the promotion of the Department's Administrative Assistant Yahaira Bautista to Police Records Supervisor; the promotions of Officers Robbie Peterson, Greg Bowers, Ryan Perry and Edward Berg to Police Sergeant; the promotion of Police Sergeant Adam Reavley to Police Commander; and also the promotion of Police Commander Anthony Cargola to Deputy Police Chief.

Again, we are running with a full head of steam.

As we look towards the future, and put an emphasis on maintaining and attracting the best staff for the City as an organization, we are also making sure that we're providing our staff with the appropriate incentives to keep them here and to ensure that we're providing them with opportunities to develop a better work and life balance.

To reinforce this initiative, in 2023, we will see an update to our City's Personnel Manual that will outline new proactive policies for time off and remote work, so our staff can come to work knowing that they, as well as their time with their families, are seen as a priority to this City.

Ultimately, we are almost completely staffed with driven, intelligent, and talented individuals of great character. I can say with confidence that the state of this organization's workforce is as ready as ever to move this City forward.

As I reference individuals of great character, I find this as the perfect opportunity to transition in to discussing what else we're doing for our residents.

These particular folks are the drivers and conductors of the locomotive that is our City.

It is for them that myself as Mayor, our City Council members, as well as our staff, strive to ensure that there is a solid foundation for them to build a life, and perhaps a family within this community.

And, based on the recent recognition from Fortune Magazine, I'd say that the City is doing well in building that foundation for our residents, especially with regards to raising a family within our community.

Last year, out of two thousand other communities listed throughout the entire country, West Chicago was ranked the ninth best place to live for families by Fortune Magazine.

Not only were we ranked ninth in the entire country, but we were the only municipality throughout the entire state of Illinois to be ranked within in the top twenty five.

This is quite the designation, and I'm especially very proud of it.

This designation showcases that we're making the appropriate investments in our community's public safety and health and human services, and we're going in the right direction.

Two years ago, things were a little more bleak. Along with everyone around the globe, West Chicago suffered through the COVID-19 pandemic, and experienced much loss.

This included the loss of life through the 67 individual community members that were taken from us, as well as the loss of being able to gather together as a community.

It was a difficult time for all, but through loss we came to appreciate what we found again.

Although we can never replace the people who were lost during the pandemic, we are now at a time where we can once again appreciate gathering together at our different community events.

This includes the City's downtown event series, which will return this year with Blooming Fest on this Saturday, May 20; Food Festival on August 26; Halloween Festivities on October 28; and Frosty Fest on December 2.

In addition to the City's downtown events, the community will also see the return of the West Chicago Park District's Taco and Art Fest on August 19, as well as the return of Railroad Days, which will actually be held during new earlier dates beginning on June 22.

And, yes, the City has ensured that we will most certainly have fireworks on Saturday evening for Railroad Days.

I'd like to take a moment, to once again, thank the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce this evening, as they are the people who do such a wonderful job of organizing this event for the community each year.

I'd also like to thank the Mexican Cultural Center DuPage, especially Fernando Ramirez and Sara Phalen, who will be organizing the Mexican Independence Day celebration for our community once again this year on September 16 and 17.

The City and its community partners are certainly working together to ensure that our residents have plenty of opportunities to come together for some seasonal fun.

As I mention coming together, I'd also like to quickly touch on communication with our residents.

In the past year, the City has been making strides in improving how it's communicating with its residents.

We're continuously updating our website, and we're renewing our focus on getting information out digitally, which has largely been a success, and within just a year's time, we've seen:

- an increase of visitors to our City's website by 75%, from 400,000 page views a year in 2021 to approximately 700,000 in 2022;
- with social media, our Facebook page visits have increased by 355% from approximately 31,000 visits in 2022 compared to 7,000 in 2021; and
- the City's e-news subscribers have increased by almost 450% from 2021 to 2022.

These metrics showcase that our residents, are not only using technology to interact with us, but they want to use technology to interact with us.

With regards to public safety for our community, our Police Department has been doing an amazing job in keeping our community safe.

They are catching and responding to more incidents to ensure that our community members are safe and ordinances are being followed.

In addition to keeping the public safe and ensuring City streets are traveled safely, the Department has also initiated several public safety initiatives, including:

- establishing a Community Response Team dedicated to responding to citizen complaints, assisting with traffic enforcement incidents, and attending special events.
- performing updated training on the use of force, active shooter response, and advanced first aid; so our officers are ready to respond to any incident appropriately with the latest training.

In addition to these initiatives, we're also putting investments into technology for our Police Department. This includes:

- adding a new reconnaissance robot, so our officers aren't placed immediately in harm's way during certain incidents;
- updating the Department's tasers, so they work appropriately in situations where they're needed; and
- adding new emergency drones to ensure our officers have every angle covered.

The City is also making strides in ensuring there are opportunities to benefit our residents' health and wellness through are sponsorship and partnership with Healthy West Chicago.

Healthy West Chicago continues to generate new events and programs to benefit our community members through showing them new ways to be active as well as ways to eat more healthy.

Within this past year, they have provided our community with several great wellness opportunities, including such initiatives as virtual cooking classes and nutrition demonstrations, blood pressure clinics, outdoor yoga and zumba classes, and much, much more.

This year, the organization kicked off a new initiative in partnership with the City, the West Chicago Park District, and the West Chicago City Museum called WeGo Exploring.

The new initiative will provide some fun scavenger hunts for community members that will encourage being active while exploring all the great outdoor amenities our community has to offer.

In addition to its numerous community initiatives, Healthy West Chicago has also been able to serve close to 900 participants through nutrition programs while also providing over 350 food kits to community members. With all of their efforts, the organization has served nutritional meals to approximately 2,000 community members just within 2022.

For their efforts, the organization was the recipient of the 2022 National Forum from Washington DC, for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Public Policy Award.

I'd like to congratulate Carly Smithermann, Healthy West Chicago's Administrator, for her efforts that lead to the organization being the recipient of this great accomplishment.

As far as our senior residents, this year, the City Council made the decision to double the City's contribution to the DuPage Senior Citizen Council to ensure their services are available and benefiting our senior residents.

In addition, in 2022 the City hired a contractor to assist senior residents with their fall yard cleanup, which is being considered yet again for this year.

As far as other initiatives that our residents will enjoy, the City has started a very exciting project that involves the reimagining of the City's Sesquicentennial Park.

The project consists of transforming the current park into a new floral area that will serve as a place for our residents to enjoy as well as serve as a new attraction and economic driver for our downtown area.

This project is uniquely special as it is being coordinated with West Chicago's own, Ball Horticultural. Ball Horticultural will be assisting with designing the park, supplying the plants, and ultimately transforming the current grounds into a new revitalized showpiece park area for the City while also highlighting one of our longest standing businesses'.

It's going to be a really enjoyable outdoor area for all to visit, and I'm personally excited for this project to be completed.

As I speak of enjoyable outdoor areas, I'd like to take a moment to also draw attention to a specific situation, or junction, the City has been faced with for a long time.

The former Kerr McGee factory site.

I'm happy to report, that after years of remediation, and years of work with state and federal partners to clean up the site, the City is finally almost at a conclusion.

In addition, as the City moves forward with this site, I am happy to announce that the City was also awarded a \$2 million dollar Federal grant, with the help of Congressman Casten, to transform this site into a new community park.

West Chicago was awarded the funding in 2022, and although planning is currently on-going with the assistance of our residents; I'm certain the new park will be a fantastic addition to our community.

This park will not only be a new park for our community, but also a new chapter for this site that will provide a fitting end for those affected by the site's contamination, which really has been all of us in some form or another.

As I close this evening, I'd like to strongly emphasize to all of West Chicago and all of those in this room - that the State of this City is as strong as ever.

The City is on its way to great things, and we have the solid infrastructure and economy, along with an amazing workforce and community to ensure that we can go wherever we want to go.

We are a high-powered and laser focused locomotive that is currently at the junction, but it won't be for long.

Our engine is moving and the train whistle blowing, so for those not on board yet, all I can say to you is – what are you waiting for?

The opportunity to invest in West Chicago is right now.

I'd like to thank you all for joining me this evening and help keeping West Chicago moving forward in the right direction.

Each of you here today play in important role in shaping where we'll be as a City tomorrow.

God bless you, God bless West Chicago & God bless the United States of America.

Thank you and have a good evening.