

STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS 2021

Delivered by Mayor Mark Gamba on February 4, 2021

Broadcast live on Comcast Cable Channel 30 in city limits, Zoom Video Conference, and YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUFk3Ct0vpQ>

It's pretty hard to describe the preceding year without using expletives.

I think in my last State of the City address I ended by saying "the good lord willing and the cricks don't rise..." and about a month later the cricks not only rose, the Tsunami hit, and it hasn't really stopped since then.

The worldwide COVID pandemic which was criminally mis-handled at the federal level, so badly so, that the US accounts for roughly 20% of the deaths worldwide even though we only account for a little over 4% of the world's population.

This obviously caused a great deal of misery. People lost jobs or at least a portion of their income, businesses closed, parents worked from home while simultaneously trying to raise and teach children, our society was generally shut down and folks suffered mental health crises and of course people became ill and people died, often isolated from their loved ones.

In the meanwhile, we had a long overdue racial reckoning, massive, catastrophic, climate chaos driven wildfires, threats of civil war and failed insurrection.

You should all stand up and give yourselves a hand just for surviving more or less intact.

Here's the good news, you happen to live in a place that handled all of that about as well as could be expected. Because of our Governor Kate Brown and her team, and all the hard-working folks at the county level, Oregon handled this pandemic better than all but 4 of the other states.

Here in Milwaukie, we made every effort to help our community in every way we could think of.

Through our partners at NW housing alternatives, and using General Fund dollars, we spent \$25,000 on rental assistance for 10 families last year, and will be spending at least another \$25,000 that was refunded through the CARES act to help more families in the coming months. Using a portion of our CET funds we provided over \$252,000 in grants to 87 businesses that helped them hang in there just a little bit longer.

We provided \$50,000 in utility Assistance for our families struggling to pay their utility bills. No one's water was cut off due to lack of payment.

Our police department created a Prescription Delivery program in the early days of COVID to safely get prescriptions to community members most threatened by the emerging virus.

At the Library we created a Curbside Pickup program so folks stuck at home would still have access to books and movies.

As people were re-discovering walking as a way to get a little exercise and just get out of the house for some fresh air, we rolled out a COVID specific greenway pilot program in the Island Station neighborhood. That was harder than it sounds, and I want to thank our assistant city manager Kelly Brooks and her team for that effort.

In order to keep our staff safe and able to continue to provide top quality service, our amazing city manager Ann Ober and our outstanding IT department, engineered the efficient disbursement of our 61-office staff from on premise, to work from home, in the span of one week, with minimal down time.

She and the directors then redesigned all our in-person services like police and public works so if someone did get COVID, the entire department wouldn't go down.

As of this moment only a few members of our staff became infected. All of them recovered and there were no inter-agency spreads of this highly contagious disease.

Before I move away from the pandemic, I would like to personally entreat each of you to wear masks in public and get the vaccine as soon as your turn comes.

As we are seeing, just like the flu, this disease is mutating, and I suspect we will be living with some form of it for a long time.

The vaccines that are being distributed are highly effective at keeping you from becoming ill should you be exposed, in my opinion, it is likely that, much like the flu shot, we will need to get a shot each year in order to keep this far more deadly disease in check.

The sooner we can reduce the number of hospitalizations, the sooner we can get back to something that remotely resembles normalcy.

In the midst of the pandemic, the murder of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer, sparked worldwide protests, and spurred on a long overdue racial reckoning.

By almost every data set, black, indigenous and people of color fair poorly and, most, if not all of it, is by design.

Milwaukie officially recognized this a few years ago and has been working to right historic wrongs.

About 5 years ago, we began making some changes to the way our police department operates. For starters

Then about two years ago we started our comprehensive plan process with the intention of eliminating the zoning that had been created to keep the BIPOC community from owning housing. We passed our new comp plan this last year and began the process

of re-writing the codes that support it. We should finish our residential housing code this year.

Members of the council encouraged and participated in racial justice demonstrations here in Milwaukie along with hundreds of community members. One of the leaders of those efforts was elected to council in November in a landslide and was sworn in as our newest councilor, I'd like to thank Desi Nicodemus for his work and leadership and offer a hearty welcome to council. I look forward to benefiting from your wisdom and working with you to help make Milwaukie Entirely Equitable, Delightfully Livable and Completely Sustainable.

As part of this effort, we conducted listening sessions with our BIPOC community members this summer, one in Spanish. We learned about some of the struggles our communities of color face. Their experiences are serving as the initial road map for our Equity work.

In August, the council passed a resolution which added Equity, Inclusion and Justice as one of our three council goals. The first article in that resolution read, and I quote: WHEREAS, Black, Indigenous and People of Color have suffered horrific inequities and crimes against humanity in this country for centuries, including slavery, slaughter, rape, theft of land-and-property, medical experimentation, forced relocation, denial of basic human rights, and restriction from generational wealth building.

Among other things the resolution authorized a budget adjustment that allowed for the addition of a full-time employee to oversee those efforts. We welcomed our new Equity Manager John Hennington in November and look forward to engaging with him and our BIPOC community to weed out any systematic racism in our code, zoning, policies and procedures.

To that end, he, Chief Strait, City Manager Ober and our HR director Gary Rebello have initiated on-going meetings with members of our BIPOC community, to review police policies and our Police contract. We deeply appreciate the time and energy that has been dedicated to this work. A special thanks to - Hamid, Jason, Sabina (Sa Bye Na), Nikki, Len, Sara, Corey and Curtis for the hours of hard and critical conversations.

This work will be taking place for years, but these early steps are setting the table for the work we must do in order to make lasting and meaningful change.

If we all work to make the lives of all people better, we will all have better lives.

The next thing 2020 had in store for us was a catastrophic fire season.

More than a million acres burned, in Oregon alone. Thousands of families had to evacuate, over 4000 families never saw their homes again, and at least 11 people were killed. One of the reasons that number wasn't significantly higher is thanks to hundreds of first responders who risked their own lives to get people out in time. We honor them and our hearts go out to all those whose lives were devastated.

Right here in Milwaukie we had the worst air quality on the planet for several days and were in a level one evacuation notice, with level two only a few miles from our border.

These fires were as devastating as they were because the timber industry has mismanaged the forests for decades, and we are just beginning to feel only the mildest effects of climate chaos. If we do not quickly change the way we manage our forests, and our how society behaves, we will look back on this year in a few decades with fondness.

For our part, we have continued to take aggressive steps to minimize climate change. Last year we were the first city in Oregon to declare a climate emergency and updated our targets.

We now aim to have carbon-free electricity by 2030, carbon-neutral building fuels by 2035, and community carbon neutrality by 2045.

City processes and documents have been modified to include climate action as a guiding principle – our new Comprehensive Plan being reflective of this work, with a new Climate and Energy policy section.

Working with Portland General Electric, the city is transitioning to 100% carbon-free electricity for operational use, and helping move forward the development of a new, cheaper and higher quality carbon-free product for small commercial and residential electricity users.

We're also increasing grid modernization in Milwaukie through coordination with PGE on new energy shifting programs, and smart technology being deployed in the community. These efforts are solidified through a freshly signed Memorandum of Understanding with PGE to create a stronger and more transparent relationship between our city and our electric utility.

We are currently working with a coalition of other climate forward cities and NGOs to advocate for a more energy efficient building code, and exploring a pathway for local influence over code requirements, in order to ensure that new buildings built here will be appropriately efficient for the next century of their lives.

By participating in the Energy Trust of Oregon's Strategic Energy Management program to employ energy efficiency upgrades, the city has saved over \$30,000 in utility costs over the last four years and accessed over \$18,000 of incentives.

We've also launched our community-wide Home Energy Score program, one of the actions in the Climate Action Plan, with goals of increasing awareness and understanding of residential energy efficiency in the housing market.

The City has further electrified its own fleet, adding two new hybrid electric vehicles to replace aging fossil fuel vehicles for city operations. That brings our total number of hybrid or EVs to 10.

From regional advocacy to site-level projects on Milwaukie's streets, Milwaukie continues to promote electrified transportation and equitable access to charging through

its climate work. Look for more new charging stations around town in the coming months.

With recent announcements by President Biden, and GM, I expect the market for EVs to heat up dramatically in the coming years.

Preparing for future livability is another important part of Milwaukie's climate work, and there is no better investment today than investment into our urban forest. Trees improve our community in countless ways, from cooling streets and homes and creating urban habitat, to boosting mental and physical health and providing utility cost savings and economic benefits. In 2020, the city and partners planted 1254 trees in the community, and adopted a new, better, public tree code to preserve these plantings and other trees for generations to come.

Under the outstanding leadership of Our Public Works director Peter Passarelli his department has kept our water, sewer and transportation systems in good shape even during the pandemic and on top of that they continue to expand our urban forest program, achieving another year of Tree City USA certification and strengthening regional partnerships for outreach and education to community members.

After a popular Friends of Trees planting event in 2020, the city has schedule two more for 2021 to increase access to trees for yards.

Residents are also encouraged to pick up trees at the numerous tree giveaway events the city has held, including last year's Arbor Day Celebration.

Julian Lawrence, our city arborist and Natural Resource Coordinator has even built a new greenhouse and gone out to collect seeds from warmer dryer climates that are more likely to thrive in the coming decades.

From these actions, Milwaukie is well on its way to reaching its goal of a 40% canopy cover by 2040.

Another concrete example of our work to reduce our climate impact is our investment in our active transportation system. We are in our 3rd year of our SAFE program and under the stellar leadership of our assistant city manager Kelly Brooks and City Engineer Steve Adams we continue to build out our bike and pedestrian systems so that families can choose to walk or bike to many destinations instead of driving.

As part of that, the long awaited, and award winning Kronberg trail that connects both Island Station and Miramonte Lodge to downtown opened a year ago and we are seeing construction under way on the Linwood mixed use paths and River road sidewalks. But you can find examples of this work all over the city.

Finally, some of the work we do is to try to send signals or be an example – to the region, the state, the federal government and to the market.

In that vein, the city recently moved all of our banking services away from Wells Fargo, a Wall Street bank that is heavily invested in the carbon fuels industry, and into a

smaller local bank – Umpqua, that does not invest in fossil fuels. We made it clear during our Request for Proposals that we would be weighting that question in our process.

Not only are they able to provide all of our services, the city is saving money on banking services and supporting the local economy.

My hope is to begin to work with the state treasurer to divest the Local Government Investment Pool from fossil fuels over the next few years. It is critical to cause the market to move towards renewables sooner and because it is inevitable, it is also prudent financially.

The \$7 Trillion Asset Manager Black Rock is making Climate Change central to its investment strategy for 2021. Retirement funds in general have been lagging behind the rest of the market in that change. Perhaps Oregon could begin to lead in that shift.

The council's third goal is to address housing affordability in the city.

We know this has been a very frightening year for many renters and homeowners, due to the loss of income in a market where their income was already insufficient to cover all their bills on top of rent or mortgage.

I mentioned the efforts we made to cover rent for some families who were struggling earlier.

Unfortunately, there are no policy changes that a small city can make to immediately effect the cost of housing. We have several efforts underway that will help create more affordable units and protect renters in some measure.

We've continued to extend renter protection by giving them more time to secure new housing after a no cause eviction.

We authorized an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) pilot program allowing up to 10 waivers to cover the costs of system development charges and a waiver of frontage improvements for accessory dwelling units.

Within six months of the program starting, all 10 waivers have been allocated, and 7 building permits issued for ADUs.

This supports a diversity of housing types and can provide homeowners with an income stream opportunity as well as providing additional, lower cost housing units.

I would expect an extension of the program for more units sometime this year.

Led by our talented community development director Leila Aman, staff has also made progress toward developing a comprehensive affordable housing incentive program to fund new middle housing types, and additional multifamily developments in the City, using the City's Construction Excise Tax Program.

We are also making great progress toward the implementation of the Comprehensive Plan Housing policies through the housing code work. This is a multifaceted effort that will result in a new residential housing code that balances a multitude of goals including the addition of new middle housing types, transportation access and tree canopy.

Work is steadily continuing toward the development of the Sparrow site, and the Coho Point at Kellogg creek site for additional income restricted housing.

The Housing Authority of Clackamas County has also submitted its preliminary Planned Development application for the Hillside redevelopment. This is the first step toward realizing nearly 300 additional units of income restricted housing in Milwaukie.

The City has also approved Northwest Housing Alternatives nonprofit tax abatement to support 28 units of low-income housing on their campus.

As we all know, housing costs have skyrocketed in the region predominantly because developers and bankers chose not to build during the great recession while the population continued to grow unabated. That's why I'm so excited that we should have around 275 units of various types of housing here in Milwaukie begin construction over the next year, and several hundred more in the early planning stages for the near future.

This kind of growth is necessary to attract the kinds of services and amenities that the residents of Milwaukie have long asked for. I would hope to see some of the empty storefronts in Milwaukie begin to fill before too long.

I know it feels like this year has lasted about a decade, and realistically we may only be about halfway through the pandemic. But as brutal as it has been, I believe some good has come out of it. I think it's clearer to more Americans that the lack of a nationwide health care system is deeply detrimental to the health of our people. So maybe, this is the event causes America to catch up with the rest of the world.

I don't think the racial justice reckoning would have had the momentum or the impact it has had, during a normal year. Maybe this is what it took for us to take some big steps towards actual equity, towards rethinking how we provide public safety, towards celebrating our diversity like we did here in Milwaukie with our new mural on the water tower at Harvey.

We will have to work to keep the momentum up, and stand strong in the face inertia, white privilege, and the fear of change. But 2020, and millions of people willing to confront brutality, have kicked the door open.

I think this year may also have awoken the powers that be, to the fact that at least half of America is living paycheck to paycheck, and barely scraping by at that, it makes our whole economy much weaker than they imagined, and much more fragile. Perhaps we will get changes in the federal minimum wage and the earned income tax credit that will begin help the lowest wage workers for a change.

I believe this year has proven that we can no longer deceive ourselves about climate chaos. The devastating fires up and down the west coast may serve as a wake-up call, and the Federal Government may declare climate chaos to be the emergency that we know it to be, and that Milwaukie declared it to be, over a year ago. It might mean that

the feds will then take the bold steps required to begin to stop climate chaos and, in the process, put millions of people back to work.

Milwaukie rose to the challenge this year. Neighbors helped neighbors and put signs up in their windows to help keep spirits up; they painted and distributed little rocks to add small moments of joy to daily walks.

Our ever resourceful and joy inspiring Arts Committee hit it out of the park with our Porch Fest last summer; and our city staff did everything they could to keep the city running well and to help our struggling residents and businesses.

I want to thank you all, for your strength, your perseverance and your kindness.

I particularly want to thank our Leadership Class for being there tonight and taking the time and putting in the effort to prepare yourselves to be the future leaders of Milwaukie.

I want to thank all of our staff for continuing to be extraordinary and stepping up even more in the face of this brutal year.

A special thanks to our public works and library teams who couldn't work from home and were therefore at greater risk during this pandemic.

I particularly want to thank our police force. On top of an already hard job, they continued to do all the work, exposed to the pandemic, and were often painted with the same broad brush of brutality and racism people watched other police forces engage in on tv. This city, and our chief, has and will, continue to work to be the kind of community public safety officers we expect and deserve.

Lastly, I'd like to thank the rest of council who selflessly serve, through long unpaid hours, the residents of our community, each and every one makes us a better city. A special thanks for Wilda Parks who first served as interim mayor, then as an interim councilor, then for four years as an elected councilor. She chose not to run again, but she has, and still does, serve our community in dozens of other ways and was a critical part of our team, and we will all miss her.

It remains the greatest honor of my life to serve as your Mayor, and I thank you for that privilege. Have a good night and stay safe.