



STATE OF THE CITY

Mayor Judy Ritter

January 25, 2016

Morris B. Vance Community Room

1. WELCOME

Good afternoon and welcome to the City Council, and to the mayors from our neighboring cities with us today. Thank you for attending. Welcome also to our City Manager Patrick Johnson, City Attorney Darold Pieper, the Chamber Board, and our many business leaders and community members who are in attendance.

I am honored to stand before you in a time of remarkable change in Vista. We accomplished big things in 2015, making life better for you and your family, the business community, and all Vista residents, right now – and for the future. On Thursday, our City will mark its 53rd year of incorporation. That small rural community in 1963 has evolved into a vibrant city with over 96,000 residents, 13 parks, an expanding downtown, and the beautiful Moonlight Amphitheatre, which captivates people from across the region. As I was preparing my thoughts for this morning, I contemplated how best to summarize Vista this past year and a catchphrase came to mind: “The state of our City is coming into its own.”

As we welcome this New Year, let us take a look back and celebrate the successes of the old. The Vista community should take great pride in the accomplishments of 2015. The Vista we have today is more dynamic, enterprising, fiscally leaner, and is stronger and more strategically prepared to meet the challenges of the future. Our completed projects, forged partnerships, and numerous successful activities prove we are a city that has been thinking smarter, acting more proactively, and successfully securing its place in the region.

2. LOCAL ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Our local economic outlook is good. During 2015, the U.S. economy continued to improve at a slow but steady pace, and locally, the San Diego area economy continued to show signs of recovery as indicated with the downward trend in unemployment. As of September, the San Diego County unemployment rate was 4.6%. 1.5% lower than last year. And Vista’s unemployment rate was 4.1% compared to the previous rate of 5.4%. We are steadily seeing the signs of positive growth and recovery in our local economy which is reflected in increased sales and property tax revenues and they are continuing to trend upward. Our balanced budget, tax revenues, and fees for services have provided the opportunity to invest in our community needs and priorities, providing vital infrastructure improvements; extensive park upgrades and renovations; and the funding necessary to provide services, such as, law enforcement and fire protection, which are fundamental to our quality of life. The economic news is positive and we are cautiously optimistic moving into this New Year. However, not to rain on our parade, but economists have cautioned economic headwinds may be expected from the slowing of economic growth globally.

Therefore we will remain vigilant in our dedication to sound financial planning in order to meet the challenges that may lie ahead for our community. We will continue to build our emergency reserves, so the City can position itself to consistently provide the vital services needed for our residents, regardless of future economic downturns. I am pleased to report our emergency reserves have increased from 16% to 18% in the last year and the City is working towards a reserve level of 20%.

KEEPING THE COMMUNITY SAFE

In Public Safety news, our Fire and Sheriff's Departments are keeping the community safe by addressing crime, responding to life and property emergencies, and preparing for disasters. We experienced a 10% increase in the Fire Department's Calls for Service in 2015. And in December, Fire Chief Rick Minnick retired after 34 years of service and Deputy Chief Jeff Hahn was promoted to Chief. Chief Hahn has 30 years of experience in the fire service. We should be proud that the Vista Fire Department is one of only 148 agencies worldwide to have received the International Commission of Fire Accreditation. Our Fire department is one in 17 across the state and the only accredited City agency in San Diego County. I am confident the Fire Department, under Chief Hahn's leadership, will receive reaccreditation when it comes before the Accreditation Commission in March.

Last year our crime rate was at an all-time low and the Sheriff's Department accomplished this through intelligent and community policing. In technical terms, this was achieved with the use of data analytics to predict and prevent crime in our neighborhoods. Vista also has a new Sheriff's captain after Larry Nesbit was promoted to Commander. Our new Captain is Chuck Cinnamo who served as a Vista Lieutenant a few years back. I expect both Chief Hahn and Captain Cinnamo will build upon the legacies of Public Safety excellence their predecessors have left behind.

IMPROVING OUR ROADS & INFRASTRUCTURE

This past year, we invested over \$18 million dollars in road and sidewalk improvements; making our streets smoother and more drivable and increasing pedestrian mobility and safety. Many of our streets are in better condition than ever before and these improvements will benefit the community for years to come.

We also increased transportation options for Vista residents by marking over 15 miles of new bike lanes. We are also providing safer access for our students by constructing sidewalks near schools through the Safe Routes to School program. As we all know, energy rates are increasing, and by replacing a total of 3,000 city streetlights with energy efficient lamps, the City has been able to lower its annual energy costs by about \$50,000. We've also reduced maintenance costs. We will continue to identify and research new technology which may improve our services and reduce our energy costs.

The City received a \$950,000 grant to improve traffic signal synchronization. 50% of the City's traffic signals will be upgraded with new technology. Due to the excellent condition of our roads, our Pothole Reporting Hotline is not ringing off the hook! However, after the recent rains and the prediction of more to come, Public Works may receive calls about new potholes forming and that's to be expected. We will do our best to maintain our infrastructure, and that may require working around the clock during severe storms. When forecasts began predicting a strong El Niño season, the City began preparing for it – just in case El Niño hit hard. We've already experienced the first significant storm of the season. The Public Works Department will remain alert in keeping our roads clear of debris and our residents informed of possible hazardous street conditions.

Let me pause to tell you a quick story to demonstrate our employees' commitment to getting the job done and to serving our residents: One of the fire trucks was going to be out of service as a result of a six week lag time for a radiator factory part.

This was not acceptable to Public Works as they knew the fire truck was needed to respond to calls for services. So the Fleet Maintenance Mechanics got creative and worked with the City's radiator service provider to fabricate the part instead. This willingness to collaborate and work around obstacles quickly sent the fire truck back into circulation. The creative solution not only saved significant time, but the work was completed at approximately half the cost! This is a great example of the type of work that is accomplished every day by our City employee team.

PASEO SANTA FE

I think it's safe to say this was a good year in removing blight in Vista! Phase I of the Paseo Santa Fe Improvement Project is nearing completion and has already transformed the S. Santa Fe corridor. Our long term vision has become a reality and phase I will be completed in March barring any significant weather setbacks. The vision also includes providing working class residents the opportunity to live and work in Vista and the opening of the Paseo Pointe and the North Santa Fe apartments – moves us closer to this goal.

We received the good news from SANDAG the City has been awarded \$5.7 million to move forward with Phase II. This phase continues the improvements from Oceanview to Terrace Drive. Engineering will begin the design phase this year and construction will occur in 2017.

RECREATIONAL & CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Because I've been involved in the fitness business for many years and have experienced the positive effects a healthy lifestyle creates, near to my heart is the health of our residents. And we've made great strides in investing in healthier and active lifestyles options for Vista residents this past year. Open for a year now, the new Linda Rhoades Neighborhood Center is providing recreational and cultural opportunities such as exercise, sports, and teen programs to those in the community who may not otherwise have had access to them. Lighting, restrooms, and street improvements have been added to the scope of work for the two new skate parks. The project is scheduled for completion by the end of this year.

I've heard nothing but positive feedback from residents who are excited about the renovations taking place at their local neighborhood parks. \$8 million has been invested in renovating, retrofitting, and upgrading our 13 city parks. This includes:

- Installing new shade sails and playground equipment;
- Adding or replacing picnic tables and picnic structures;
- Renovating restrooms;
- Replacing the rubberized surfaces with improved ones;
- Lowering maintenance and irrigation costs by replacing the grass with synthetic turf at the Wave Waterpark; Vista Sports Park, Raintree and Luz Duran parks, and the Moonlight Amphitheatre;
- Installing a pedestrian bridge over the Agua Hedionda creek in Shadowridge to complete the popular hiking loop; and
- Continuing the creek and trail improvements along Buena Vista Creek through Brengle Terrace Park which will be completed this summer.

We introduced a new era in the history of the Moonlight Amphitheatre. The Moonlight Presents program, created to expand the entertainment offerings at the Moonlight Amphitheatre will provide performing arts programming in the categories of 1). Moonlight Cabaret; 2). Performing Live; and 3). Variety.

Our Public Art continues to expand. Through a generous donation, the "horses" sculptures along the downtown Creekwalk were recently installed and a new sculpture, "Prima Vista" will soon be installed in our first city roundabout. And submittals for our 8th Kites Over Vista exhibit are due today at 5 pm, if anyone would like to make that deadline!

BUSINESS & INDUSTRY

Investing in the economic future of Vista and making North County the choice destination for economic development is imperative not only to our city, but to the other 78 Corridor cities of Carlsbad, Escondido, Oceanside, and San Marcos. More than one year into the execution of our Innovate 78 partnership, our region is becoming the hub for innovation. We now have a common approach on how we can work together with companies to understand and address their operating issues. From tech startups to life sciences and communications, we are working to keep and attract creative capital to our region.

During this year we will work with our education leaders to ensure the talent and skills are available in our graduating students in order to meet the needs of the industries along the 78 corridor. And across town, our dining options have increased with the Flying Pig opening and the Belching Beaver Tavern & Grill coming soon. The Italian restaurant, Rosati's is moving into the vacant CPK site this summer and the first Aldi Market in San Diego County is moving into North County Square.

PERSON OF THE YEAR

So many of us in this room today have answered a call to serve our community and that spirit of service is at the very heart of the Vista community which holds us together. This community spirit has improved the lives of countless individuals and made our City a better place.

I would like to recognize one such volunteer, DANNY VILLASENOR, and his wife Linda who is with him today. Danny is the 2015 Person of the Year. Danny and his wife Linda are the owners of Peppertree Frosty, which as we all know, has a very loyal following of generations of Vistans and patrons from surrounding communities. While this award focuses on this past year's community contributions; I have to say that Danny has a record of making significant contributions to our city over many years. His selfless service to the Boys and Girls Club, where he currently serves as President, has touched the lives of many. His investment in the future of our youth will benefit the community as a whole for years to come. Danny was one of the first five members of the Boys & Girls Club and then became an adult volunteer. He is generous in his business ventures, providing free ice cream for club members to encourage academic performance and for the Boys & Girls members of the month. Danny also serves in other capacities throughout the area supporting additional organizations, including Solutions for Change. He willingly gives of his time and generously donates in-kind work back to the community. Danny, please come up and accept this award.

CITY OF VISTA RESIDENT SURVEY

To wrap up my report, I am leaving you with some positive statistics. In October, the City conducted a public opinion survey of Vista residents to determine what issues are most important to maintaining Vista's quality of life. Following is a snapshot of the results.

- Over 83% of Vista residents are satisfied with the City's overall services.
- A majority (56%) of Vista residents visit downtown regularly – at least once a week. Another 35% visit once or a few times a month. Three-quarters (75%) of residents who visit downtown rated it positively, either excellent or good.

Not surprisingly, residents placed the highest importance on repair and maintenance of local streets and roads; providing for local fire protection and law enforcement; and supporting a healthy business climate. The survey is providing a baseline for future tracking of residents' satisfactory ratings and we will use this information in our upcoming City Council goal setting and in determining city priorities.

IN CLOSING

As always, our progress continues to be the result of a collective effort on the part of our elected officials, employees, local and regional partners, business leaders and many volunteers. Looking ahead to the projects we have before us, I can be confident that the results of our work over the past year will serve as a solid foundation for building a strong prosperous future for Vista.

Thank you for coming today.