

State of the City Address Johnson – 2021

Ladies and Gentlemen of the City Council and fellow residents, now that the City of Johnson is a first-class city, the Mayor is required by law to report to you about the state of the city and its future needs. Without any doubt, this last year will be remembered for a long time as one of the most challenging periods of time faced by the City of Johnson or any public entity across the state and country.

The challenges of the last year are well known and do not need to be recounted in full as we continue to live through the upheaval of daily life and traditions, the fear and uncertainty, and unfortunately sometimes the loss. Mandatory closures, reduced operations and new regulations have significantly impacted local businesses and even city government. The last year has been consumed with ensuring that our city could overcome all these challenges and continue to provide the level of services expected by the residents of Johnson. Johnson was one of the first cities in the area to take decisive actions to meet the challenges of the pandemic, and I am proud that we have been united in our approach. I am therefore happy to report that we have met these challenges, and that in 2021 the state of our city is strong.

Now more than ever it is important for us as a community to take this opportunity to examine the accomplishments of last year and to set out the tasks that we need to accomplish for 2021 and beyond.

As always, it is important to first thank the members of the City Council, the City Clerk-Treasurer, and the Planning Commission for your ongoing service to our community as well as all the employees, uniformed officers and volunteers for their dedication and hard work in service to the public and to our city.

Despite the well-known challenges, last year saw accomplishments for the City of Johnson:

- 1) The City of Johnson ascended to a city of the first class resulting in some changes that have been incorporated into the city's purchasing and operational processes.
- 2) The completion of the engineering with Hawkins-Weir for the Main and Wilkerson road project.
- 3) The city completed much needed repairs to the Ravenswood cul-de-sac.
- 4) The city purchased a fire truck which will provide the residents and businesses in Johnson with greater fire protection services.
- 5) The city updated the street signs throughout the city.
- 6) The city continued work to update codes and regulations, including much needed work to the city's zoning and subdivision ordinances, the codification of the Johnson Municipal Code and other city ordinance and code modifications.
- 7) The completion of the Interlocal Agreement with Springdale and ARDOT for the Johnson Mill Blvd project.
- 8) The successful completion of a Mutual Aid Agreement with the Springdale Fire Department.

- 9) The execution of the Razorback Greenway Alliance Agreement to have Johnson participate with other cities in Northwest Arkansas in order to facilitate uniformity and consistency with the standards, operations and management of the Greenway trail system.
- 10) While the city lost 17 businesses due to closure, 22 new businesses were opened – a net gain of 5 new businesses for the city.
- 11) The negotiation and purchase of the real property located at 3305 Main Street for the future bridge relocation.
- 12) Finally, we as a city have continued to manage our budget and finances to ensure that we are operating and providing services in the most efficient, professional, and fiscally prudent manner.

These accomplishments stand in the face of the severe operational constraints that have affected the city since March of 2020. 2021 will see the beginning of the realization of the long awaited projects which will be transformational for the City of Johnson, including the commencement of a bond election for the much needed and long awaited Main and Wilkerson street improvement projects.

In going forward in 2021, I want us all to undertake the following tasks:

- 1) Call for an election to authorize the issuance of bonds for the Main and Wilkerson road project. This will be a project involving multiple phases of work over many years, but with the completion of the engineering work and hopefully with the continued stabilization of the effects of the pandemic, the time is right for the city to put this important road project to the voters of Johnson. The next steps to have this election will be:
 - a. The city's selection of a municipal bond advisor and bond counsel to prepare the offering and to meeting the legal bond issuance requirements.
 - b. The City Council's adoption of ordinances to set the ballot title and to call for a special election
 - c. If successful, the bidding of the project and the commencement of work.

I am looking forward to beginning the effort to best inform the residents of Johnson of the need for this project and I hopeful that we will once again be united in support of this plan.
- 2) Continue with the identification of right-of-way acquisitions for future phases of the Main and Wilkerson road project and for trail access improvements.
- 3) Call for an election for the collection of Advertising and Promotion taxes and the establishment of an A&P Commission to bring much needed funding to support improvement to Johnson city parks and to advertise and promote Johnson restaurants, hotels, stores and other businesses. Johnson is uniquely located amongst larger cities that have active A&P commission which provide funding for parks and economic promotion. An A&P tax and commission will secure the future for Johnson's economy and will build on the quality of life for Johnson residents through improvements to park space and more food and entrainment options.