
CITY COUNCIL

MONDAY, MARCH 15, 2021

Welcome to the State of the City.

One year ago, we were gathered in this very same room to call a State of Emergency for the City of Beloit. The City Council empowered city staff to respond to the immediate threat of COVID-19.

There were a lot of unknowns about the virus and over the course of the last year all of our lives were completely changed. We are thankful for all of the sacrifices made by those in our community. Thank you especially to those working on the front lines in health care or as a first responder in the police, fire and public works department, as well as to all of those workers who provided core services such as cleaning and groceries. We know that it was draining on our community, especially on front line workers.

Each decision the City made throughout this time was in the context of doing everything possible to keep our employees and the public safe. Even with these efforts, like communities all over the world, Beloit experienced great loss throughout the pandemic. My own family was touched. Nearly six dozen Beloiters lost their lives to COVID-19. They are mourned by their friends and loved ones. Any loss of life is one too many, and we must continue to work diligently to stop the spread of the virus and provide access to vaccines to all so that we can safely return to gatherings and events. Please continue to follow safety guidelines, get the vaccine when it is your turn, socially distance, and wear your mask when you are with people outside your household.

Our community has certainly struggled and sacrificed throughout this time. But there is hope.

We are proud of the work the City has done in the last year, while responding to COVID-19. Just last week, City staff began vaccinating homebound individuals. Whereas a year ago, little was known about the virus, and staff spent the initial few months securing supplies, adjusting staffing schedules, and implementing unprecedented changes to keep staff and the community safe. Initial concerns about continuity of operations were addressed. We are proud that we were able to provide core services to the community; there were no pauses in critically

important services like policing, fire and emergency medical services, snow plowing, solid waste pickup or recycling, and quality drinking water.

In turn, the community went above and beyond to donate supplies and to sew masks. Local distilleries stepped up to provide hand sanitizer. We received other personal protective equipment items from tattoo shops and supply companies. City staff worked diligently to partner with the Wisconsin National Guard to bring community testing to Beloit. When our Hispanic community members were seeing a disproportionate number of cases, our staff created content in Spanish.

Our Parks & Recreation staff came up with creative and innovative ways to engage residents with virtual activities, curbside pickup craft kits and more. Our Beloit Public Library, despite being closed for two months, kept the wifi on so that job seekers and others could access the Internet while sitting or being parked outside of the building. Drive-up service, digital offerings and virtual storytime became the norm as families looked for ways to stay engaged, informed, and even entertained.

Administering two significant elections are not without challenges during non-emergency times. City employees from all departments and volunteers stepped up to ensure that the elections would be fair, accessible and safe.

The murder of George Floyd created civil unrest across the country. In Beloit, peaceful demonstrations shared the message- that Black Lives Matter. We will continue to strive for justice and equity for all people.

We see hope because our police department had already enacted progressive policies that benefit our entire community like body worn cameras. This establishes transparency and builds trust. Our hiring practices have also been modernized to take appropriate recruiting and outreach steps to ensure the workforce is more reflective of the community we serve.

We see hope when, for the first time in history, we developed formal regional partnerships with our neighbors for shared services. We approved a sewer service agreement and sharing of a fire chief with the Town of Beloit with fire and medical responders, crossing municipal boundary lines. Together, this gives us the opportunity to provide a more comprehensive level of care.

We see hope in organizations like Acts Housing, which has helped more than a dozen low-income families achieve the dream of homeownership. We see hope as 1,200 jobs were created with the opening of the Amazon distribution warehouse. We see hope as our City's sound financial practices have made strides, including through our increased bond rating that will lower our interest rates. We see hope

in our NRSA neighborhoods, which have had a combined \$1.7 million in residential improvements in the last two years.

We see hope with all of the economic development activity, and the construction of ABC stadium and the renovations for the new home of Visit Beloit in the former Angel Museum. We see hope with the significant growth in our community. New transit routes serve the Gateway Industrial Park to help connect the workforce to employers. We are optimistic that we could see a groundbreaking for the Ho-Chunk entertainment destination yet this year.

We see hope that by working together, we will grow even stronger *because of* our diversity, *through* our valued public and private partnerships, and *due to* our community spirit!

It has been an honor to serve as the Council President for the last two years and it is bittersweet to turn over the reins next month. Thank you to my fellow City Councilors and to our Beloit residents who provided me the opportunity to serve on this Body and as Council President for the last two years. We've experienced a lot of change and growth over this time and I am confident that the positive momentum will continue. We have a great deal to feel hopeful about throughout the remainder of 2021 and beyond and we will all move forward as a community. Because...

We are all in this together, Beloit!

Sincerely,

**City Council President
Regina Dunkin**