
CITY COUNCIL

March 21, 2022

Welcome to our annual State of the City address!

As councilors, we want to take a moment to reflect on the last two years. Two years ago, life as we know it stopped. Our city took crucial steps to protect employees and the public as best we could with the information available to us at the time.

Information about COVID-19 changed daily; recommendations were updated and our staff remained resilient throughout it all. We are here two years later with it now being safe to remove our masks at public gatherings. We wouldn't have been able to do it without our staff who stayed the course, the residents who received vaccinations, and the many medical professionals - including our own Beloit firefighters - who implemented vaccination programs to help reduce the risk of COVID-19 in our city.

However, our community experienced great loss during the pandemic, including one of our own in the Beloit Police Department. Police Officer Dan Daly, known to his fellow officers as "Wolf," passed away in November due to complications from COVID-19. Overall, we lost over 100 Beloit residents to COVID-19 since March 2020.

At the beginning of this year, we also lost former Fire Chief Brad Liggett in 2022. We mourn this loss of life. Thank you to the Beloit Police and Fire Departments and other staff for continuing to work with extreme professionalism during these traumatic times for your departments.

Please join me in a moment of silence as we reflect on the lives lost in our community from COVID, other medical events, violence, and more.

Thank you. As we are hopefully nearing the end of the pandemic, we turn to the future - a future of rebuilding and creating a community for the generations to come. We want to move forward. We look to build upon the successes in our community for an even more vibrant future so that our children and grandchildren can thrive.

Financially, our city has been fiscally responsible with the available funding dollars. We are not rushing into decisions but thoroughly and carefully considering how we can best serve our community and future generations. We are leveraging grant funding to help move much needed projects forward. The city's grant applications have helped Beloit College to receive a \$9 million Neighborhood Investment Fund Grant to renovate the Morse Library on campus to house the new Community Outreach and Engagement Center. When combined with existing programs at Beloit College, it is expected the Center will touch the lives of all 36,000 Beloit residents, especially those who are otherwise underserved.

Our Community Development Block Grant Funds, as we will learn more about later tonight, have focused on meeting the needs of our most vulnerable residents. We just received word that we are receiving \$600,000 to help our residents replace their private lead service water lines. Our city staff is working diligently to introduce that program as well.

We are working together with other community partners to provide new and enhanced opportunities for our youth. We now have splash pads at Vernon and Summit parks for our children to cool off in during the summer - free of charge. The city provided land to the Girls and Boys Club's new facility that will continue to serve our children for generations to come. The Stateline YMCA has been able to re-introduce children's sports leagues like soccer, basketball and volleyball to help our children stay active and build teamwork and communication skills. Our own Parks & Recreation Division has created many fun opportunities to help build the quality of life right here in Beloit. The Beloit Dirty Dash was held last August as a family event; we look forward to it returning at its full scale in August 2022. The inaugural Pumpkin Walk was held in October at Eagles Ridge Park and was wildly successful. In addition to opening the Edwards Ice Arena for open skate, city staff also maintained free outdoor rinks in Riverside and Vernon parks.

A significant improvement and opportunity for our community is the opening of ABC Supply Stadium. The stadium isn't just about baseball - we have been thrilled to see outdoor movie nights, ice skating, and more occur at the stadium. Whether you preferred the name Snappers or Sky Carps, we know that there will be a lot of opportunities for our community.

Last fall, we had the opportunity to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Gateway Business Park. 20 years ago, ground broke on the development area; we have added \$384 million in base value to the Beloit community in this district that started out with a value of \$1.8 million. It has now been transformed to an economic jewel for our community with residential homes, a beautiful park with a walking path, a brewery, and many family-supporting jobs at companies like Kerry, Amazon, Staples, and more. The success of the business park continues with construction currently underway on Spray-Tek, Inc.'s building. We anticipate selling city-owned property soon so that Phoenix Investors can create a 500,000 square foot industrial spec building in the Gateway.

We also received the exciting news in 2021 that Governor Evers approved the Ho-Chunk Nation's plan to build a resort and casino in Beloit. We are hoping for final federal approval soon so that we can finally see dirt moving on this project this year. It's been a long wait, but this will be a huge benefit to our community.

Residential housing growth continues in Beloit. In 2021, we saw increased residential building, including the completion of the first Wright & Wagner Loft apartment building near downtown and the completion of the Hawks Ridge Apartment complex. Overall, 126 units were built or under contract to be built in 2021. We continue to look for ways to increase our housing inventory.

We have seen tremendous success in our tax incremental districts. We look forward to using some of that increment to help increase the availability of affordable housing in the area. Later

on our agenda is the closure of two of those districts; that closure will provide welcome property tax relief for our residents and businesses.

While there is plenty to celebrate, Beloit is not without challenges. Our own high school students have experienced significant trauma and loss this year. We appreciate the work the School District of Beloit is doing to provide mental health support to those who have been impacted by gun violence. As a council and as a city, we want each of our students to know that you matter to us.

Our Beloit Police Department did an excellent job in its community outreach events last week to talk about the serious problems facing our community and our nation as it relates to rising violent crime. Please continue to speak up and support our department's efforts to build a community free of crime.

We also have continued work to do in regard to protecting our city's sustainability. The sustainability forum held last month provided many examples of how the city is already implementing environmentally sustainable practices. Our audience identified crucial priorities, like purchasing electric vehicles for the city's fleet where it makes the most sense, that will provide tangible results for the future. The City Council joined the Green Tier Legacy Communities in 2021. We appreciate the work city staff is currently putting in to document the initial baseline data for the scorecard. We look forward to growing as a sustainable city.

In conclusion, I thank my fellow councilors for their continued partnership and leadership over the past year. I am proud of the impact we are making in Beloit as a team. It is never about us as individuals but on our collective work as a whole and I am confident in our ability to continue making Beloit an even better place to live, work, visit, play and learn in 2022 and beyond.