



State of the City 2021 – Mayor Sean VanGordon

Introduction

Thank you, Council President Moe, for your introduction. Thank you to the audience for joining us at home. For many of you, this is your first time watching a State of the City address. Welcome, I am glad you could join us. We are making history with the first address given online, but it will not be the last.

On January 19, I was selected to serve as your Mayor. It is an incredible honor.

Springfield is the community I have chosen to raise my family. I am a father to twin girls (Katie and Liv), and my wife is my high school sweetheart and debate partner, Elaine. We have one chocolate Labrador, Trajan, who appeared at a State of the City as a puppy. Elaine and I moved to the area from Roseburg to attend college and bought our first home in Springfield in 2007.

My first experience in Springfield was loading package cars at the UPS facility on Olympic during early mornings to put myself through college. I love dawn because there is a moment when sleeping cities wake up suddenly and come alive with activity.

Cities are living things with a rhythm to them, and are constantly changing. With that in mind, I would like to recognize some of the leadership changes we've faced this year.

Leadership Changes

Last year we said goodbye to Christine Lundberg, who dedicated more than 20 years of service to Springfield – first as a member of Council then as Mayor. Christine was a champion for Springfield and our families. No matter what, she put Springfield first. We thank Christine for being a giant in our community and for her numerous contributions over a life of public service.

With Christine's departure, Councilor Pishionari stepped in to serve as acting Mayor. Lending his skills and leadership to guide us through the Holiday Farm Fire and mayoral transition. Thank you, Joe.

I want to recognize and thank Councilor Sheri Moore for her 10 years of service to the Springfield community. She retired in December after dedicating her life first to teaching and then to serving Springfield.

We recently welcomed Councilor Kori Rodley from Ward 3. Her talent, expertise, and passion in the non-profit sector will be an asset to the entire community.

Springfield will soon welcome a new Councilor to serve Ward 1. I'm excited for the new ideas and perspective they'll bring.

Speaking of new ideas and perspective, Nancy Newton stepped into her new role as Springfield City Manager. From day one, she handled challenges with compassion, professionalism, and dedication. I want to thank her for her steady and thoughtful leadership. Her skill set and experience have proven invaluable to us and I'm glad she's here for Springfield.

Before I begin the address, we asked various leaders living in and working for Springfield to share their voices as we reflect back on 2020 and look ahead to the future.

Here's some of what they shared.

Video

Intro to the Speech

In a year that has been difficult, I find comfort in the amazing people who have invested their time and future in this community. Thank you for sharing your perspectives.

Although we face the most complex, series of crises in our generation, I submit my message with a sense of hope and optimism for our future.

While 2020 has ended, how we respond to the challenges it brought will define our work in Springfield over the next 12 - 18 months. These are hard times for businesses, government agencies, and our households. It has been mentally, emotionally, and financially difficult, and the level of loss we experience continues to compound. But my message is one of hope.

I see three areas that will set the framework for how we respond as a community. They are resilience, resourcefulness, and renewing our commitment to each other.

Resilience being how we respond and rebound from difficulty.

Resourcefulness being how we collaborate, innovate, and create to move the community forward.

Renewing our commitment is the choice we make to be part of this community. To address long-term problems that we have, and to respect each other while we work toward our future.

Resilience

Last year, Springfield faced a test of its very character and we responded. We helped each other in small and large ways. Samantha Liesse's four daughters were an example of that Springfield Spirit. They started The Helping Out Club during the pandemic. They gave out hundreds of reusable facemasks, stocked numerous Little Free Pantries, and provided "birthday" bags (complete with cake mix and a toy) to low-income children.

City staff also showed tremendous resiliency by quickly establishing an emergency response to meet the needs of our community. Staff and community partners provided support to emergency operations throughout COVID-19 and the Holiday Farm Fire.

An important function of our Emergency Operations Center or EOC was to support temporary emergency housing needs. Our EOC placed 10 shower trailers at G Street Oasis, and established handwashing stations and portable toilets at City Hall and several sites throughout the city. The EOC also worked closely with White Bird to provide basic – but critical – hygiene supplies, tents, and other resources to help those experiencing homelessness to shelter-in-place. To facilitate this work, Council approved temporary land uses for supply distribution, medical, sanitation and other emergency services.

As vaccines became available, Eugene Springfield Fire became the lead agency for providing vaccines to the county's first responders. Our fire crews are trained to provide vaccines, and will be valuable resources as more vaccines become available.

Eugene Springfield Fire was instrumental in emergency response efforts throughout the year. The Holiday Farm Fire raged into our county destroying homes, and sending thousands of refugees into our community. Eugene Springfield Fire along with many agencies worked tirelessly to save lives and protect homes. At one point, firefighters had used every piece of equipment they owned, and were protecting homes with hand tools. Our community, with

generous hearts, filled Silke Field with donations. With these dual emergencies, the City Council revised rules around RV housing, allocating significant funding to rental assistance, and expanded Meals on Wheels to help feed seniors.

I want to thank our first responders, health care workers, Lane County Public Health, and everyone at PeaceHealth and McKenzie Willamette hospitals who worked so hard to protect this community.

I also want to express to you how proud I am of the Springfield staff. They had many difficult and long days. Time and again, our staff could be counted on. To City staff who may be watching, on behalf of our entire Council, thank you. Your service and dedication has been exemplary and we appreciate you.

Business

I am also extremely proud of our business community for their resilience and creativity in troubled times. Small businesses make up a majority of all employment in Springfield. They pay our salaries. They support our schools and donate to our fundraisers. Their success translates to success in the community, but for most of 2020, they were simply focused on survival. While in a tough economy, they contributed food, supplies, and labor to response efforts. They increased donations to charitable causes like United Way and Catholic Community Service of Lane County.

Merete Hotel Management was an example of an employer and Springfield facility owner who opened their doors to support unprecedented community needs - from housing fire evacuees to standing up a temporary school setting for students needing safe and connected places to re-engage with their peers and teachers.

I'm so proud of our businesses.

But businesses needed our support too. The City (and local governments) provided funds to Small Business Emergency Loans. This was the first of many grant iterations that we supported. Staff marked curbside pickup locations and we created citywide, easy to use and free permits for moving seating outside.

The City and Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce provided more than 8,000 facemasks and hundreds of bottles of sanitizer to over 130 Springfield small businesses. Huerto de la Familia has recently joined this partnership helping provide facemasks to Spanish-speaking business owners. We elevated opportunities to support local businesses through the Discover Downtown Springfield website and Facebook page.

The Chamber was a critical partner. They did the heavy lifting to promote business recovery and worked to support businesses throughout changing regulations.

Our economy did make progress on some fronts. Tru by Hilton became the third hotel to open in Glenwood. THIRD. In recent years, we've watched as Franz Bakery continued its ramp up and expansion - nearly doubling in size. Along Franklin Boulevard, Weyerhaeuser broke ground on a regional headquarters. It's the first new development along that stretch of road in a decade. In Gateway, Richardson Sports finalized their expansion. Pacific Source completed their move into the old Symantec building. In mid-Springfield, Kingsford expanded their manufacturing facility.

Springfield remains committed to its 'open for business' attitude. The City is involved with discussions to develop the old Springfield Buick site, adding housing and commercial space. We're partnering with the Springfield Utility Board to expand access to high-speed fiber internet to more locations in Springfield. We will continue our partnership with the Tallwood Design Institute, and our goal is to see more innovative building designs. We will advocate for state regulations that have the clarity and simplicity to make us economically competitive. We also need to maintain our focus on our long-term goals including an indoor sports and event center, entrepreneurs, manufacturing, and additional public art.

Resourcefulness

Springfield has a long history of resourcefulness. It comes from our optimistic and hardworking nature. We are open-minded, and persistent. There aren't problems that we aren't willing to fix. We are the type of friend that you would be proud to have.

Our Springfield Public Library was extremely resourceful in reinventing the way they do business. In a typical year, Library programming draws the community into City Hall, and is a cornerstone of Downtown Springfield. The Library moved a majority of its programming online. They developed curbside pickup for books, and had 200,000 Library checkouts last year. They added a new YouTube channel, increased Spanish language services, and materials. In a world that seemed so disconnected, our librarians brought us a precious sense of normalcy. The Library, in partnership with the Springfield Public School District, and the Willamalane Park & Recreation District, is working to ensure every Springfield school student has an opportunity to get a Library card regardless of if they live within city limits.

We're grateful to be part of a community that knows we are stronger, and go further, when we go together. I want to extend a special thank you to our Team Springfield Partners – including the Springfield Public School District, Springfield Utility Board, and Willamalane Park &

Recreation District. The creativity and collaboration among Team Springfield partners is what the Springfield community deserves and I'm very proud of our work together.

The school district has been challenged with executing remote learning in schools, and the Springfield School Board has exercised great care in returning students, teachers, and other faculty to school in a safe way. The district and its employees worked to make learning easier, used space for childcare locations, and distributed food to students in the district.

To our Springfield students who showed so much resilience last year - thank you. With the closure of schools, the normal rhythm of your lives and milestones were disrupted. I am grateful for your courage when events were outside of your control.

As the school district found ways to support students and their families, Springfield Utility Board also found ways to help impacted residents. They made it easier to qualify for utility assistance, provided additional funds for Project Share to support low-income residents with their utility costs, and they suspended fees for online payments. SUB also extended payment time for a record number of customers.

Willamalane has shown incredible flexibility. They piloted equestrian trails, used their facilities to prepare meals, and provided smoke respite during the fires. They were even able to expand some park offerings and their efforts helped keep Springfield active and healthy. I've lived next to Guy Lee Park for 15 years, and I have never seen the level of activity in January like I have this year. We will get past this pandemic, and I challenge all of us to keep using our parks.

I would like to expand our partnership with Willamalane and Friends of Trees to plant more trees across the city. Trees provide health, livability, and property value improvements for our neighborhoods.

Renewal (Renew our commitment to each other)

In a year full of discord, we must renew our commitment to each other and our broader community. Springfield is practical and has a can-do attitude; and Springfield is a diverse community where everyone is welcome. We want you to raise your family here, and build a life here. We expect our leaders to put down their political differences to get things done. Springfield supports public safety and our business community.

Being a diverse city means there will be different viewpoints, ideas, and beliefs among our residents. And while we welcome that diversity, I want to state clearly that political violence is

not welcome in Springfield, Oregon. White supremacy and white nationalism are not welcome in Springfield, Oregon.

As the Black Lives Matter Movement rose across the nation in response to the tragic death of George Floyd and to systemic racial injustice, a protest in Thurston this past summer led to important questions in how we respond to these dynamic community events. Our City Manager immediately called for an outside investigation into the event, recognizing that in order to have understanding, we needed to have clarity to know where we can grow and improve. The City is committed to learning and improving from this experience.

SPD will be engaging the community in the coming year in a survey to solicit more feedback into police services and public safety. They will also improve access to information for the community including access to department policies, commendation and complaint processes, and body-worn camera program information.

We have a police force that is incredibly dedicated and our officers are part of this community. As they grow in response to community needs, look for opportunities to stay engaged. Improvement to policing must involve the community. Thank you to everyone who has reached out with support, feedback, concerns, and questions. It makes all the difference.

Housing Efforts

A little over four years ago, we renewed our focus on housing efforts in Springfield. For at least the next decade, housing will continue to be a priority for Springfield.

In the last year alone, the City Council allocated more than \$2.2 million in federal funding to increase the supply of affordable housing in our community - including a project to turn the former School Administration Building on Mill Street into affordable housing.

2021 is going to be a big year for increasing housing options in Springfield. We have a number of developments planned that support a mix of housing types. We're particularly excited for the Marcola Meadows subdivision in mid-Springfield, which includes an anticipated 750 residential homes. This is a huge project and the first phase of construction starts this year.

In 2021, I want to further our commitment to community involvement. The Council is working hard to respond to additional feedback, and to solicit feedback from parts of the community that aren't represented. While I look forward to the return to City Hall, we will continue to provide online access to watch and testify in government hearings. We invite you all to renew your participation in City government as we continue to make it more accessible. With new

leadership, the Council will need to evaluate our goals for the next year, and finish the Mission/Vision/Values project. We want you to continue to be involved in our efforts.

Renewing our commitment to each other must extend to how we operate our justice system. An example is our Municipal Court. Our court is part of a regional effort working to identify paths for better crisis intervention and to assist people with gaining access to mental health and substance abuse services in this community. I would like us to pursue starting a restorative justice program. We should do whatever is reasonable to both promote accountability of action and prevent people from cycling through the justice system. The Council also needs to discuss the state of the fire department, and provide direction on how to improve the effectiveness of the department.

Conclusion

Like many of you, I would love to close the door on 2020's challenges, but the next 12 months are going to be dominated by our response to these issues. It will be hard work.

What gives me a renewed sense of hope is the people of Springfield. Our resilience. Our resourcefulness. Our willingness to commit to each other. It's the neighbors coming together to help one another. It's our businesses being supported by our community as they find new ways to operate. It's the renewed passion in democracy and civic engagement. It's the many, many individuals that responded to help friends, families, even strangers in their time of need. Through our shared hardships, we've become more capable of sharing our vulnerabilities and what's on our hearts and minds. I encourage Springfield residents to continue to engage and share what's on your minds. I am listening and I hear you. We need your involvement to help make Springfield a community of opportunity for everyone.

As you can see, I am giving my first State of the City from the City Council Chambers. While empty, it was full of community leaders, residents, and staff a year ago. Typically, the Council would be seated behind me. People are social creatures. We need each other. We are still part of each other's lives. The community will open again. We will see each other again. I look forward to when these chambers are full.

Major Dick Winters, of Band of Brothers, famously signed a majority of his letters with the two words, "Hang Tough." A reminder to remain resolute in the face of adversity. The challenges that we face are very real, and we are in the middle of a lot of it still.

We have so much work to do, and I am optimistic in our ability to be bigger than this moment. We can get past this. We will get past this. As I close this address, I have asked the members of City Council to share what they've found inspiring through the year and what they would like to work on in 2021. Hang tough, Springfield. Thank you.