

G O A L S F O R 2 0 1 9

GOAL NO. 1. MAINTAIN ZERO PROPERTY TAXES.

While many have questioned Stafford abolishing City property taxes in 1995, more and more people are coming to embrace this concept—even at a time when the country seems to be moving away from fiscal prudence. What the doubters have come to realize is this is not only a very popular concept, but improves the quality of lives of all our citizens by giving them more of their own money to spend on themselves, while also allowing our businesses to generate more income, which is why they are in business in the first place. Yes, it does require City leaders to more carefully watch our spending, but that tradeoff is small considering the enormous rewards to our people and businesses, and the strong satisfaction they receive. As we move into the twenty-fifth year of this unique policy, we must recommit ourselves to zealously guard this most appreciated and cherished principle.

GOAL NO. 2. ACCLAIM POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS EXCELLENCE.

With the receipt by our police department of the Certificate of Recognition for compliance with the Texas Law Enforcement Best Practices Recognition Program this most important component of our City has elevated itself into a very distinct echelon among Texas police units. Chief Ramirez has every right to take great pride in this achievement. Furthermore, he did it with a highly responsible budgetary approach which adds even more credibility to the achievement. Our fire department has long been in an elite class of national units with its ISO Rating of One, which was first obtained when we had a much stronger contingent of volunteers, no full time firefighters, no 48 hour shifts and a much smaller budget. Times change and in the fervent opinion of our chief, Larry DiCamello, the transition of our department into how it is structured today is necessary and advantageous. Irrespective of one's perspective, it is what it is; there is no turning back. But make no mistake: Stafford has truly outstanding police officers and firefighters who do a terrific job and who have elevated

the City to a level of competence and professionalism that our citizens and businesses should not only be proud, but feel very secure. We should acclaim this outstanding status of safety and security with the goal of not only benefiting from it but using it to advertise and tout the advantages of living, working and owning a business in Stafford.

GOAL NO. 3. GROW THE ECONOMY.

The pride Stafford takes in proceeding into its twenty-fifth year without a property tax is most justified. Few cities across the nation don't give abolishing property taxes a second thought—and probably not even a first thought. So how do we continue this extraordinary status into the next quarter century? Simple: We grow the economy with sound development by emphasizing the unique attributes that we have fostered into this City: excellent infrastructure, outstanding emergency services, appealing appearance and exceptional accessibility. These enticing elements are producing terrific and highly notable results on US90A. New businesses are springing up all along this corridor which Councilman Ken Mathew has repeatedly called, 'Stafford's Gold Mine'. The economy, and sales tax, which flows from this development along this three mile

beautifully landscaped segment traversing the heart of the City is what will help preserve the zero property tax. Following on its heels should be the impressive forthcoming revitalization of the FM1092 Corridor with a substantial infusion of millions of dollars in funds from TxDOT. This should not only restore the luster of this thoroughfare to its prime in the 1970's but elevate it to a scenic economic engine similar to that of Westheimer in Houston, which is what the project is modeled. There are even sparks coming out of potential endeavors on Stafford Road and Cash Road. And there are many beneficial pursuits springing up across the City. Our goal must be to refine and elevate these attributes that are bringing about this interest and enthusiasm and turn it into dollars in our bank account.

GOAL NO. 4. SUPPORT THE GROWTH OF THE GRID.

The Grid is moving forward rapidly, which is very good considering its promise to be completed on the full development of the entire property and going full steam ahead in three years—a most aggressive representation. The City's agreement to underwrite \$18 million of the project's infrastructure will require a payment to the developer this year of \$5 million in cash. Considering the million dollar cash payment last year, the City will be

fortunate to recoup a tenth of the cash it has paid out so far by the end of this year. It is worthy to note on this issue that two of the country's most respected newspapers at opposite ends of the political spectrum and which rarely agree, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*, both wrote stinging editorials about the Amazon HQ2 selection process, seriously questioning the advisability of cities heavily subsidizing corporations to locate in their jurisdictions. After those articles appeared I received calls from local media representatives wanting to know if I felt '*vindicated*' for expressing concerns in the approaches used for enticements awarded the Grid as principles addressed in the articles by these two prestigious newspapers. My response: "Vindication is nice but I'd rather see the City retain its public funds." Irregardless, the deal with the Grid is made. It is important the City give full support to this project so we can begin reaping substantial benefits from our sizable investment. We should fully support their efforts to fulfill their promise *to transform Stafford and make it a point of destination* if we hope to get back our money plus some. This is a worthy and appropriate goal!

GOAL NO. 5. PROMOTE DIVERSITY.

It's been said a lot, as well it should be. Stafford is one of the most diverse City's in the nation with whites, blacks, Hispanics and Asians each comprising about 25% of our population. We've long prided ourselves on people of all races, cultures, and creeds learning, working, playing and praying together. It is the reason this City has achieved so many extraordinary successes over many decades. Unfortunately some believe in promoting their race to the exclusion of the others. This is counterproductive and Stafford will never be the best we can be with that mentality. One clear example: SMSD will not reach the heights of which it is capable as a predominantly two race district instead of a balanced four race school system. Our unwavering goal must be to stringently strive for diversity in all pursuits of our government, and strongly encourage everyone to participate.

GOAL NO. 6. PRESERVE AND ELEVATE LANDSCAPING.

One of the most important components of a city seeking to advance is how it looks. Stafford looks very nice, thank you. In fact in the minds of some, it looks too good. Incredulously, they somehow have the unbelievable mindset that we have been 'too successful' with our landscaping. Admittedly, the City has spent

millions of dollars over many years landscaping the US90A and US59/69 corridors. They both look great. In the minds of some business people, too great. They want their establishments clearly visible from the freeway or highway. In their perspective, the fewer the trees the better. But that is not what TxDOT wants—and the trees are on the highway department's property—and according to TxDOT, it is certainly not what the residents want, who across the state, 'will kill' for beautiful trees along the highways of their city. This is for two reasons: One, it makes them proud of where they live when motorists are traveling through their town; the other and more practical reason, it adds to the value of their homes. So where is the common sense solution? We certainly don't slash and burn 80% of the trees and then replant little saplings as was suggested by our consultant. Not only would it devastate the appearance of our City by beating these glorious trees on the corridors with an 'ugly stick', it would have an enormous cost. No, we should follow the advice of the much wiser and more experienced TxDOT staffer, Ethan Beeson, who recommended trimming the lavish trees to provide for 'windows' through which the businesses can be seen while maintaining the roadways' aesthetic appeal. Preserve our City and its beauty has to be our goal. It is

far too important to let unimaginative minds destroy our impressive image.

GOAL NO. 7. RAISE SMSD TO THE PINNACLE.

All the elements for ascending to the pinnacle are clearly within reach—outstanding facilities, adequate funding, a potentially diverse, intelligent student body, excellent teachers and a solid administration. Can we assemble this winning combination? Can we truly convince parents that at SMSD their very bright children will get a ‘private school education at a public school’? In the mid-1990s, SMSD had the highest test scores in the Houston region, a diverse student body that resembled ‘the children of the United Nations representatives’, excellent teachers and a good group of administrators. However, shortly thereafter the district went into a tailspin and has spent the last couple of decades clawing its way back with quite a few serious bumps along the way. Now, after this very long struggle, it is poised to push to the top. Getting there is never easy and staying on top is even tougher. If we are ever going to ascend to the lofty position of one of the top districts in the state, this is the time. To paraphrase the old movie, ‘I’ve been

waiting for this my whole life'. Can we pull it off and reach the pinnacle of primary and secondary education remains to be seen? We may never have a better opportunity. For certain, it has to be our goal!

GOAL NO. 8. MAKE PLANS FOR A QUALITY ANIMAL SHELTER.

For almost a quarter of a century, Stafford has had an agreement with Missouri City to house its lost and stray animals in our neighbor's shelter. For the most part it has worked pretty well, but a recent shot across the bow by them sent a strong signal that the unwinding of the arrangement may be sooner than later. With that clearly in mind, we have been working with an exceptional consultant, Stacey Suazo, to develop a reasonable, fiscally prudent plan for a quality animal shelter. While a preliminary discussion of alternatives has been presented to City Council, we are awaiting a firm proposal shortly. It must be emphasized that the solution being explored is a long term quality solution even though it may have a short term component. With growing interest in better and more humane care and the No-Kill philosophy gaining in popularity, our goal has to be the ultimate creation of a quality animal shelter

which will serve our citizens, and pets, well into the future.

GOAL NO. 9. CONTINUE THE PURSUIT OF COMMUTER RAIL.

It started almost nineteen years ago in the Congressional Office in Stafford of Tom DeLay, when four mayors, myself included, urged the then powerful Congressman to support the extension of commuter rail from Houston to Rosenberg affording the residents of this county the availability of a desirable and inexpensive train ride from their cities to the Medical Center and Downtown. While quite promising early on with a state sponsored feasibility study that determined it was viable and extremely desirable, Union Pacific Railroad soon flexed its political muscle, which is as strong as any in the country, to derail it by precluding use of their 100 foot right-of-way, which at last check they pay taxes to the local entities of this county on a value of \$15 million, but when you start negotiating with them for its use, they claim its worth \$1 ½ billion. And our CAD folds like a tent in a wind storm when it comes to properly assessing the right-of-way and tracks for the taxing entities, including

our school districts. Congressman Al Green, former Missouri City Mayor Allen Owen, and I have been at the forefront of this ongoing pursuit. In spite of the many setbacks, few disagree that if Fort Bend County, including Stafford, is ever to be the best it can be, this commuter rail project is an imperative. For this City, while extremely challenging, it's a very necessary goal.

GOAL NO. 10. PROMOTE THE STAFFORD CENTRE.

The Stafford Centre, now moving into its fifteenth year, is still considered the gem of this City. Unquestionably, the structure is quite impressive. Even more striking about this unique venue is its attractiveness to entice high profile performers as well as potential users with their special activities to embrace this one of a kind Performing Arts Theatre and Convention Centre. That is the main reason over four million guests have come through the doors. With the new program endorsed by City Council to entice name performers we should see a spike in quality acts in the Theatre. This is the most important component of maintaining the image of this extraordinary venue. Promotion of the Stafford Centre must be a clear goal of our City and one where we exert our strongest effort.

GOAL NO. 11. EXERCISE RESPONSIBILITY IN IMPLEMENTING THE NEW HOME RULE CHARTER AMENDMENTS.

Last November, thirteen amendments proposed by the Home Rule Charter Review Commission were forwarded to City Council for consideration on whether to present these changes to the Charter to the Stafford voters. After fervent debates about the flawed nature of about half of the amendments, which I reiterated were indeed counterproductive, Council decided by split votes, to place all of them on the November ballot. And all passed substantially. Council will now move forward to implement these changes. Several are alarming; certainly two in particular. One will allow all Council members to place as many items as they like on the next agenda up until 36 hours before the meeting—or in the case of our Wednesday evening meetings, many items could be placed on the agenda as late as 6:00 p.m. on Sunday. This could have serious practical effects of creating chaos with addressing important City matters that get caught up in a flurry of less important matters placed after the

agenda is posted. Another amendment—which will have profound impacts—requires that the Mayor shall receive a salary which is commensurate with what a Chief Executive Officer of a similar sized city receives. As interpreted by our City Attorney, the Mayor’s current salary of \$900 a month, which is the amount I have received for over a quarter of a century, must be increased to about \$12,000 a month—a 1,300% increase. This is simply inappropriate! Council will be considering action on this and the agenda matter on February 20th. A goal must be to administer all changes to our Charter responsibly.

GOAL NO. 12. TELL THE STAFFORD STORY.

When we review the list of extraordinary accomplishments that have been recited in this message there is one undeniable fact: Stafford has an incredible story to tell. And further, our achievements are truly unique. Reflecting on our accomplishments, it becomes readily apparent that we have done things that not only no other city has done—no other city is likely to do. To reiterate: Created a municipal breakaway school district which obtained the approval of the federal courts, and; Abolished city property taxes and maintaining the zero tax rate going on a quarter of a century, and, Built and

operated an innovative, quality performing arts theatre/ convention centre complex that has attracted four million guests; and, Moved a railroad track that had been in place since 1853 allowing for the installation of underpasses to significantly elevate mobility. If that isn't compelling enough, add exemplary recognitions granted to our police and fire departments, as well as enduring the ravishes of Hurricane Harvey, the most destructive natural disaster in the history of Texas, better than any other city hit by the full ravishes of that violent storm. Then the obvious question becomes why wouldn't every resident and business want to locate here? Maybe, because we need to get our unique achievements out to more people in truly convincing fashion. So as our final goal, I'd strongly suggest we put our best efforts in telling this incredibly compelling Stafford Story to all who will listen.

C O N C L U S I O N

The prospects for Stafford in the new year are excellent. Yes, we will have to use good judgment in our spending and endeavor to generate more revenues. No, we will not have to gouge our taxpayers and property owners with additional assessments. With the election this past November, most were enthralled, if not

obsessed, with change. Some still are. Considering this City's incomparable record on unique and innovative change, we should employ change when needed—and not just for the sake of change. Those calling loudest for change are often those whose accomplishments leave much to be desired. Before we make it sound simple or easy, make no mistake, this City has had to fight for all of these outstanding accomplishments. The resistance has been strong and intense, and in many instances, by those in most prestigious positions. No one has given us anything—in fact just the opposite. What we achieved was because of our tenacity and fortitude—something many cities do not possess. And one last sign of the times: There are those who claim many benefits should be FREE. That is the prevailing mantra of those who are unwilling to work for, and earn them, but want them given to them. Few things in life are free; especially those things worth having. As illustrated throughout this message, the Stafford Story is very much worth telling, and living. It is a fantastic story of which we should be most proud. We need to tout it and bring it into full bloom in 2019.

Respectfully submitted,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Leonard Scarcella". The signature is written over the printed name and extends upwards into the "Respectfully submitted," line.

Mayor Leonard Scarcella