

STATE OF THE CITY AND GOALS FOR 2019

CITY OF STAFFORD, TEXAS

30 JANUARY, 2019

BY MAYOR LEONARD SCARCELLA

We embark on the New Year with optimism. This is most encouraging in view of the escalating divisiveness of the federal government and the intense volatility of the national economy. It should in no way be intimated that there is unanimity in Stafford, far from it. Nonetheless, there is enough agreement on what needs to be achieved to make our residents and businesses reasonably comfortable. Furthermore, the election in just over three months should bring clarity to enough critical issues to ascertain the future direction of our City.

Bringing an enthusiastic outlook to many in the City, including City Council and Stafford Economic Development Corporation Board members, we begin with what is getting the most media attention: the GRID. Specifically, all the fuss is about the anticipated full development of this project, which represents about 100

of the 192 acre tract formerly owned by Texas Instruments. It is planned as a major mixed use project, which will contain retail outlets, restaurants, hotels, and a variety of enticing facilities to, on the promises of the developer Street Level, *transform Stafford and make the City into a point of destination!* In order to make this significant awe inspiring half-billion dollar development, \$52 million in public funding from Fort Bend County, Fort Bend W.C. & I.D. # 2 and the City were committed. Under our agreement, the City will contribute \$18 million, of which \$1 million in cash was paid out last year and another \$5 million cash payments will be remitted this year. Transforming Stafford, although not exactly how it was represented, to a large extent will occur as a result of 2,400 apartment units being constructed on the 60 acres of the tract next to the GRID, which will house 5,000 new residents, thus increasing our population by more than 25%. As for the point of destination, that is more challenging. Immediately coming to mind are small U.S. cities considered points of destination, where people travel strictly for the enticement at that location, namely: Branson, Missouri—entertainment; Pebble Beach, California—golf; Jackson Hole, Wyoming—elite conferences; Cooperstown, New York—baseball Hall of Fame; to name a few. Hopefully, the developers will honor their promise by bringing an attraction with this

type of allure to Stafford. Exactly what that will be has yet to be identified. If all goes as proposed, the entire project will be completed within the next three years, with much of it by the end of next year. Should that occur, we will pay off the full \$18 million in five years, at which time we can start recouping our many million dollars of cash outlays.

Another most encouraging occurrence is the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision allowing for the collection of sales tax on internet sales at the point of origination. Under the Court's ruling, this will necessitate state legislation and administrative procedures to provide a process to collect the tax. Two dozen states have already taken the appropriate steps to collect the tax and distribute it to their local entities. With the new Texas legislative session recently getting underway, there is already a bill filed to implement the law, while the Comptroller is structuring the required rule changes. All necessary enactments are scheduled to begin taking place so that the money will be remitted to the local entities by the end of the year. To do everything in our power to obtain these funds as expeditiously as possible, we began to move literally within minutes after the Court decision was handed down last June to work with the State Comptroller to insure having the enabling authority

to start receiving these substantial additional revenues as soon as possible. The best estimate is the amount of proceeds that will be added to the City funds is a million dollars, or more, annually.

Our emergency personnel is brimming with enthusiasm over the recent action by City Council approving a contract for the construction of a two story police station annex and new fire station/administration complex. These outstanding facilities, both of which are anticipated to be completed this year, will add materially to efficiency operations of both departments. These structures were funded by just over \$6 million in Certificates of Obligation (COs) issued by the City last June.

Despite the fact that Stafford fared better from flood control and property damage standpoints than any municipality hit by the ravages of Hurricane Harvey, as not a single home in our City incurred water damages sufficient to qualify for a FEMA loan or grant, which is in stark contrast with our neighboring cities who had hundreds, even thousands of homes that suffered that degree of flooding, there are areas where improvements to drainage were necessary, namely in parts of the subdivisions of Vaccaro Manor, Missouri City Estates and

Sugar Creek. Each of these projects is either complete or nearing completion. Considering the extensive rains over the last couple of months, these drainage improvements are performing extremely well. All of these projects were funded with the remaining \$3 million of the COs issued last Spring.

No report of this City is complete without addressing the Stafford Municipal School District. In the recent past, there has been significant strife. While not all contentious areas have been totally resolved, an invigorating breath of fresh air is circulating in our City as a result of the new school board President, Chris Caldwell, bringing an open and cooperative perspective, thus allowing Superintendent Robert Bostic the freedom to pursue an innovative course that has long been stifled. As has often been noted, Stafford is one of the most racially diverse cities in the nation, with whites, blacks, Asian and Hispanics each contributing almost an equal number of citizens to our population. Unfortunately, the student composition at SMSD is grossly skewed with Asian students comprising only 7% of the student body while whites have less than 4%. Fortunately, President Caldwell and Superintendent Bostic have put together a select committee to confront this disparity head on. The result: An assertive program of personally meeting with

Stafford parents and students to strongly encourage and solicit these youngsters living in our City to attend SMSD is being formulated. By securing the attendance of the great majority of our Stafford students to attend SMSD not only do we decrease the racial disparity in the system, we also reduce the number of out of district students. But we can't stop there. Our potential this year to become one of the truly premier school districts in Texas is the best in many. With \$50 million in the bank, and \$10 million more to add to the expansive building program, our unwavering pursuit must be to elevating academic achievement to an exemplary status. It is time to leave behind the rhetoric and produce. It is time to deliver on our promise of providing the children of Stafford the optimum in educational opportunities.

We initiate our discussion of City operations with the emergency services sector—police, fire and emergency management. This gives us an opportunity to begin with an extraordinary certification garnered by our police department: the Texas Law Enforcement Best Practices Recognition Award! In the presentation by the Texas Police Chiefs Association to Chief Richard Ramirez the virtues of the department he leads in elevating its practices to a very demanding level and fulfilling a multitude of mandatory requirements were extolled. As

iterated by the presenter, the Stafford PD joins a most select society in the state with this sterling achievement.

Additionally under the control of the Police Department is the Humane Division. This component grows in importance on a daily basis. Unquestioned is escalating support for the protection and care of dogs and cats. With the recent pictures of his dog sitting by the coffin of former President George Herbert Walker Bush while his body lay in state in the National Capitol, and the dog standing guard on the burned out homesite in California, the support for pets has gone viral. Currently and for the past twenty years, the shelter the City has maintained for these pets has been in a shared facility owned by Missouri City. However, with the growth of both cities and the contract under which the two cities operate, when that shelter reaches capacity, with reasonable notice, Stafford must have a shelter of our own. Consequently, we are working aggressively to develop a viable proposal for the City to establish a well functioning, convenient shelter.

Another most important element of the police umbrella is code enforcement. Keeping the City clean and safe has many ordinances regulating numerous operational aspects, including consumer health, high

grass, inoperative vehicles, litter and blighted properties. These areas are aggressively enforced.

Although it's been a decade and a half since the Stafford Fire Department received the top national designation of an ISO Rating of One, this outstanding organization continues to pursue a superlative status under the leadership of Chief Larry DiCamello. While not having the prominence of past eras, the volunteers remain a very important element of the SFD. And they exhibit the pride that commitment and service to one's community brings—a time honored accolade that these devotees wear well and is a forcible reminder of the roots of our heritage when the City's old pumper had to be pushed to start it to go to a fire.

While the emphasis is on fire, like so many things in today's world it is not always as it seems. A substantial portion of all fire department activities revolve around providing emergency medical services, which SFD does most efficiently.

Emergency Management, which performed so admirably during the nine day ordeal of Hurricane Harvey, is wrapping up their final submittals to FEMA. Jennifer Taylor, who led our efforts so capably through

Harvey and its predecessor Ike, has moved on and the Coordinator's baton has been passed to the highly motivated Peter Alvarado. This branch, which is so vital during emergencies, has gained the respect of other similar units throughout the Gulf Coast Region.

Another integral part of this department is that of the Fire Marshal. Addressing permitting, inspections and all the way to arson investigations, this area is most vital in guarding against disasters. Efrem Burns has, this week, been appointed the new Fire Marshal.

Smack dab in the middle of our endeavors is the Public Works Department, which oversees streets, drainage, parks, equipment and building maintenance, permitting, planning and development. Chris Riggs has all of these under his directorship. The challenges are vast and varied; the expenditures significant. The current projects include coordinating efforts with the Grid, placing finishing touches on the Sugar Creek, Vaccaro Manor and Missouri City Estates subdivisions drainage endeavors, inspection of the Police Annex and Fire Station/Administration construction projects, as well as the elaborate SMSD building program, renovations to West Airport Boulevard, landscape revamping to the US90A and US59/69 corridors, a host of local street

revitalizations, park tracks resurfacing, planning the elaborate revitalization development of the FM1092 corridor, to name a few. Initiated last year at the insistence of Mayor Pro Tem Virginia Rosas was the rental residential inspection program which has seen progress despite its short period of operation and which has already improved the appearance and conditions in our subdivisions, as well as areas with many older homes. Parks get a lot of attention—as well they should. Going to a park is a wonderful way of relaxing; consequently, we must pay a lot of attention to these playgrounds. In this endeavor, Public Works is assisted by our Parks Committee under the able leadership of Councilman Cecil Willis. As a result, the parks of the City continue to be enhanced and desirable places for citizens to enjoy themselves.

Of vital importance are our financial operations. Overseen by Finance Director, Dorrance Roderick, not only does it address our daily fiscal activities, but engages in scrutinizing investments, expenditures, revenues and auditing, purchases and budgeting compliance. While there have been those who questioned the openness and efficiency of the City's budgeting and finances, even to the extent of offering a budget ordinance ultimately rejected by Council, the City was the recipient this past

month of the Texas Comptroller's Transparency Star Award for Traditional Finances, due to the outstanding efforts of Carrie Ditta, Senior Accountant. These assertions were completely rebuked and debunked. This award recognizes a city for going above and beyond with their fiscal transparency efforts by opening their books to the public, thus providing clear, consistent pictures of spending and the sharing of information in a user friendly format.

A prominent and vital department is that of the Municipal Court. This City component brings in significant resources from fines and penalties assessed for everything from traffic violations to tall weeds. Under the directorship of Nicole Nguyen, a constant flow of people, many disgruntled, 'waiting for their day in court' appear. This operation is efficient and effective. Unwavering has to be the fast, fair and impartial administration of justice. Our Court has long been recognized for illustrating that criterion in exemplary fashion.

A very prominent element of any well functioning operation is that of Administration. This department, which oversees a myriad of vital activities, is capably led by Tomika Lewis. One prominent issue this time each year is the conducting of the City's officer's election,

which is garnering substantial interest. A little less exciting but most vital are those endeavors revolving around meetings of Council and other formal bodies of the City, such as Planning and Zoning Commission and the Stafford Economic Development Board, as well as numerous committees. In this regard, it involves everything from preparing agendas, taking and drafting minutes for the meetings, and many sundry items. Another vital task that is ongoing in this department along with the IT Department is the implementation of a document retrieval system in each department. Records management and retention is most important to maintain official and legal documents of the City. Never to be downplayed is responding to the public and media—a truly delicate responsibility. Assisting the Mayor and Council members with their many needs and wants is important. All in all, the efficiency of the City is often judged by the astuteness, responsiveness and friendliness of this component.

One division of the City that impacts so much of what is done by our many departments is Information Technology, or IT, as it is commonly referred. Much of what it does, and how it does it, is not understood by most. What is unquestioned is the tremendous cost for this very complicated equipment and ‘software’ whose

lifespan is, in most instances, extremely short. Ryan Young took charge of the department last year with the specific instruction to revamp it and make it more efficient in serving the public and other departments of the City. He and his staff are off to a good start in meeting this challenge.

A department with an even fresher beginning is Human Resources. This new component is in its infancy as it completes its first full year of operations. Under the outstanding leadership of Shanell Garcia, who started the operation from scratch, she has clearly structured its parameters to provide clear assistance to our employees, whether in terms of salary adjustments, health insurance procedures, job opportunities, or a host of other employee interests. From this arrangement, other department heads have also received substantial assistance in structuring job opportunities and evaluating prospective employees. Of equal significance has been the beneficial information City Council has obtained in addressing several complex issues, including a new employee salary structure, and the latest of which being the substantially increased salary for the Mayor as mandated by the voter approved Amendment to the Home Rule Charter just authorized. Speaking of services to the Mayor's office, Ms. Garcia provides me with a

continuum of insight into complicated and sometimes perplexing personnel issues, which is very helpful.

Something of which this City is most proud: its access television station—SMETV. Having been operational for more than two decades as the first governmental station in Fort Bend County. Under the leadership of Caroline Entricht it has been elevated to a level that has enticed many viewers outside of Stafford. This has been made possible to a large extent by its streaming capabilities—a dimension added in the last few years substantially expanding its original cable capabilities. Additionally, the retrieval abilities, where a viewer can watch various City meetings going back several years, make it an inviting research and informational tool. Bolster that with our heightened High Definition capacity and you have a most impressive, respected and admired system.

One of our best utilized and appreciated facilities is the City Swimming Pool, now in its thirty-fifth year of operation. Not only does it allow our citizens of all ages a superior recreational outlet, it provides a competitive venue for the Stafford Stingrays for meets against numerous swim teams in the area who readily express their admiration for the pool and their enjoyment in

competing here. In addition, it is rented by elite skilled swimming groups as a practice facility for high level competition. Under the direction of Susan Ricks, this extolled venue has another much appreciated aspect: allowing SMSD an outstanding competitive pool, and more importantly in the view of many—a place where our elementary students are given lessons and become good swimmers.

Another remarkably well maintained and impressive venue, which is also under the control of Susan Ricks, is the Stafford Civic Center. This outstanding multipurpose facility which continues to impress as it did just last week when the Fort Bend County Mayors and Council Members Association gathered at a dinner banquet here to honor former County Judge Robert Hebert, former County Commissioner James Patterson and former Missouri City Mayor Allen Owen. The Civic Center thoroughly impressed this group of public officials, many of whom had never been to the venue, with its versatility and attractive freshness, in spite of being more than 32 years old. During the year it serves not only as a rental banquet hall, convention center and theater, but also as an auditorium for SMSD. And tonight, as it does each year, it hosts our Annual Town Meeting.

Which brings us to our most acclaimed facility: the Stafford Centre. Beginning its fifteenth year of operation, this unique and stylish convention centre, performing arts theatre, a one of a kind venue, has gathered the commendations and accolades over the years of many top performers, including Willie Nelson, Kevin Kostner and Steve Martin, highly recognized artistic ensembles like the Russian Ballet, not to mention four million guests. With competition at a very keen level as a result an increasing number of outstanding facilities offering top dollar, attracting notable performers becomes most challenging. In view of this, an innovative program has been authorized by Council to entice name celebrities and premier performers. Make no mistake, the scheduling of select events and premium private rentals at the Stafford Centre continues to grow; however, attracting ‘celebrity’ performers requires innovation—and more dollars. In spite of this there is an unwavering commitment of City Council and the Stafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) to do whatever it takes to keep this terrific venue at the top of the totem pole.

And speaking of the SEDC, we must shine the spotlight on this very effective organization that has provided our City with so many sterling opportunities. Leading the current list is the earlier referenced Grid,

with the lengthy negotiations to entice it occurring over many years, and ultimately, this Corporation providing the funding for the subsidies. But there have been so many other outstanding endeavors sponsored by the SEDC which have gotten us to this lofty status, beginning over a decade ago with the Stafford Centre and the US90A Corridor enhancements led by moving the railroad tracks and installation of the two underpasses. This Corporation is managed by a seven member board ably headed by Councilman Wen Guerra. All of the extensive daily operational aspects are very capably managed and given direction by Patti Worfe, the Executive Director. It's funding is from a one-half percent sales tax authorized by our citizens at the end of the last century. It has accumulated healthy fund balances during its two decade existence which affords it the opportunity to aggressively pursue highly beneficial endeavors to elevate the City. In the coming year, it has several enticing projects under consideration.

Besides the zero property tax, Stafford is renowned for having far more employees than it does citizens, with a larger percentage of those workers having well paying jobs. That is a direct result of the opportunities for qualified job seekers provided by the Houston Community College at the HCC Stafford Campus. The

recently opened Workforce Building on that site, has curriculums, with resulting certifications, that afford those seeking quality employment at our local manufacturing companies to be able to do it right here at home. Some complain the taxes charged by HCC aren't generating adequate corresponding benefits for our taxpayer. To rebut: Besides laying the foundation for those seeking these lucrative jobs, it offers all of our citizens a quality education at discounted tuition rates. Supplement that with the dual curriculum courses available to our SMSD students through HCC. Even more exciting is a collaboration currently being structured between HCC, SMSD, the City and our many Stafford employers to connect Stafford students with these employers for excellent, high paying job opportunities even before these youngsters complete Stafford High School. And they will never have to leave Stafford to take full advantage of this appealing program. If we can put this together, and we are well on our way, we will have another attribute of which few other cities can boast. So do stay tuned. There may be announcements which will put another fancy feather in our cap.

So what should be our pursuits in aggressively achieving the unique opportunities that lie before us?

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