

STATE OF THE CITY AND GOALS FOR 2020

CITY OF STAFFORD, TEXAS

29TH OF JANUARY, 2020

BY MAYOR LEONARD SCARCELLA

As we enter a new decade—and one with many challenges and changes on the horizon— the outlook for the City of Stafford is quite promising. This is mainly the result of standing in stark contrast to what is being advocated by so many other governmental entities and leaders around the country: GOUGING TAXPAYERS. What makes prospects so encouraging for our City going into 2020 is our most unique status in taking less taxes from our residents and businesses than others—and fortunately, the message is spreading. While across the nation the emphasis is on substantially increasing taxes —and if there is any doubt about that just listen to many of the presidential candidates—Stafford illustrates the antithesis of this escalating desire of governments to extract as much money as they can from its taxpayers. This City has an incredible advantage which it has cultivated over the last 2 1/2 decades: Specifically,

Stafford has had zero property taxes for 25 years—something no other reasonably populated city in the nation can claim and for which we have gained national recognition. While even some of our councilmembers and department heads fail to grasp the tremendous benefits of this most unique distinction, our Economic Development Executive Director, while at a national conference in South Carolina last month, had it vividly illustrated to her when she saw just how impressed many members of the nationwide business community attending and interested in locating future establishments across the country were when apprised that Stafford levied no property taxes. With the concentrated promotion of this most luring attribute, which cannot be overstated, we have every reason to see our fortunes rising. In spite of our previous efforts, we must accelerate the communicating of this most substantial advantage to all who will listen—and especially those who may be interested in coming to Stafford. Keep in mind, this is a message no other city can present!

There are numerous other reasons Stafford should be optimistic about its future. In the area of emergency services, we have distinguished ourselves with a highly rated Police Department, a nationally ranked Fire

Department and an Emergency Management team which has guided this City through two recent hurricanes and heavy downpours within the last decade whereby all in the region who endured these natural disasters had to admit that Stafford had risen to the task in a most impressive manner—and better than anyone.

Flipping the page, the recognized and respected Stafford Centre continues to receive accolades for its outstanding productions and significant array of excellent events. Between these functions, come the more general but vital activities of the City, including administration, finance, court, public works, general municipal services, human resources, communications, entertainment activities, information technology, animal welfare and economic development, each of which deserve and will be individually addressed.

Before reflecting on the individual departments, it is appropriate to bring about some specific aspects that play such a substantial role in the operation of the City. First, and foremost, we must avoid a bloated bureaucracy. Over the past four years our elevated hiring has led to a substantial increase in these expenditures. In fact, so flagrant has been the acceleration in costs due to added personnel, the financial rating firm, Moody's

Investor Service lowered our credit rating and put us on a watch list to attempt to assure that our fund balances are improved. A continued escalation of this decline would result in further denigration of our financial credibility. To illustrate just how substantive the personnel component of our operations are, the City has a general fund of slightly over \$20 million. Of that amount \$18 million is directly related to personnel, which includes salaries, healthcare costs, retirement benefits, taxes and other expenditures directly attributable to our employees. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that when bringing in additional personnel to the City there must be corresponding income to adequately cover those costs. I fervently believe that it is totally appropriate, contrary to some public official's views, that these employees, and all of our employees, must assist, to the extent appropriate, in generating the necessary resources to cover the cost of their employment and in saving at every opportunity to help insure the financial integrity of the City. To the credit of the Police Chief and Fire Chief both have recognized the necessity to have employees assist in generating additional income for the City to cover the expenditures of these new employees. In this regard, there will be an elevated emphasis on patrol and fire inspections to assist with this challenge.

Another area of similar concern is the propensity of some of our local officials who believe it is beneficial to pay out large subsidies to developers who are claiming to be able to elevate our economic development. Much has been written and discussed about the Grid, which is the first and the epitome of this particular approach in our City. The contract with the Grid is now entering its third year. As of the end of 2019, the Grid has generated only a little over \$20,000 in sales tax for the City. While the euphoria over the In-N-Out Burger has garnered applause and excitement with long lines requiring up to six police officers at a time to control the motorist entering this new hamburger outlet, some question ignoring the significant pollution continuing on an ongoing basis from these long lines. One most vocal celebrity that I'm sure we'd get an interesting observation from would be Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. But just how much does the City truly benefit. When a customer buys a \$10 hamburger with fries and a drink, considering the up to 80% rebate of sales tax which the City has contracted to pay the Grid, the ultimate benefit to the City from each of these customers waiting in long lines and to get their order is about FOUR CENTS. With the opening of the Outback Steakhouse, Whiskey Cakes and Pluckers restaurants, as well as other establishments, there is the prospect that

we are finally going to see some monies coming to the City from this very hyped development. The much anticipated elaborate golf driving range which is expected to come on board this year is still in the planning process. Once operational, assuming it becomes a reality, will aid in the production of income. One thing is certain and irrefutable: thus far, the City has payed to the developer a million dollars in cash since the agreement was enacted in 2018, will shortly pay them \$2 1/2 million more in cash and ultimately, an additional \$3 million more in cash. Considering these substantial cash payouts and the requirement of paying out several million dollars more in cash and rebating \$10 million in cash in the form of sales tax rebates to the developer, the prospects that the City will soon see significant net revenue benefits remain well into the future. While some assert that the Grid still has eight more years under this contract to complete the various promised facilities and businesses, the clock is ticking and, unfortunately, the interest charges which few have talked about continue to build on a daily basis. In this calendar year the total interest debt will rise to over \$1 million that the City will have committed to pay. With this in mind, all told the grand tally the City will ultimately remit to the developer will very likely exceed \$20,000,000.

Consequently, it will, at best, be several years before the City recoups its investment.

Initially we take an individualized look at the components of the City by beginning with the Police department. With a staff of 81, this provides the City with excellent police protection. Under the most capable direction of Police Chief Richard Ramirez, the department has elevated its effectiveness to the extent that it has been formally recognized by the Police Chiefs Association of Texas. Add the new \$2+ million complex which will be completed in a couple of weeks, the conditions for efficiency in the department are significantly enhanced. As indicated above, one area which will receive additional emphasis is patrolling. Considering the hundreds of thousands of cars a day which travel through Stafford, it is imperative that we have adequate patrols to provide and regulate the safety on our streets and highways. A concerted effort in this area in the coming year will be emphasized.

Another, most critical component of emergency services is our nationally ranked Fire department, which has been supplemented with additional full-time firefighters, and will be getting six more under a Federal Grant in a couple of months. Because of the obvious

increased costs, it is only fitting that these new employees contribute to the necessary funding of the operations of this unit. Fire Chief Larry DiCamillo is developing a plan which will provide additional fire inspections, and revenues, using these new, as well as current staff members, to adequately oversee the large number of businesses in our City which have the need for these thorough assessments. Firefighting efficiency and safety has to be one of our main goals. That will be significantly improved with the completion of the new fire station and administration building on Mula Road, which has a total price tag of \$4 million. Add to that the two new fire pumper trucks costing \$2 1/2 million dollars just being brought on line, and with this elevated emphasis we should see not only a heightened scrutiny of potential hazardous situations—something well worth focusing on—but a more capable operation.

Additionally an area of special concern is our Emergency Management Service. While the recent hurricanes and monsoon like rains have increased our vigilance, we continue to be ever alert to this most critical challenge. Stafford's record in this arena stands second to none. Flooding has been avoided. This year we will continue that heightened focus to extend this unmatched record.

Public Works is the common characterization used to describe a host of activities under that label, which due to this broad component of activity, has recently change its name to Public Works and Municipal Services. The term does not begin to address the scope of this very broad area of activities. Under the excellent directorship of Chris Riggs, this section oversees not only streets, drainage, parks and similar facilities, but also private development, equipment maintenance, zoning and general municipal services. Numerous major undertakings are currently being pursued. Those include not only overseeing the important development within the Grid and the related major West Airport project but also encompasses the extensions of Cash Road and Trinity Road which are assisted by Fort Bend County Mobility Bond Funds. Of special importance is the major revamping of the FM 1092 Corridor under the guidance of the Texas Department of Transportation and the Houston-Galveston Area Council. Funding by TXDot could exceed \$13 million matched with a contribution of about \$3 million from our funds. This should prove to be one of our most important projects, which will greatly enhance our mobility and commerce in the heart of our City. Also under the directorship of Mr. Riggs is the division of Development Services which regulates and permits all construction activity within the City and Code

Compliance. An additional area that has been recently placed under this umbrella is–Animal Protection. The strong support and elevated emphasis on protecting the dogs and cats in our City has matched that of what we are seeing nationwide. Scott McElrath has been designated by Mr. Riggs to be the point person for this enhanced and concerted effort. To his credit, Mr. McElrath has been working to implement and give substance to the City’s new ordinance. One of the major features of this new regulation is to have a committee made up of inspired citizens to ensure that the various components specified are aggressively pursued. Fortunately, we have had numerous citizens respond in a most positive way of being involved. Further, he has been working with Fort Bend County Commissioner Victor Morales to develop a cost effective spay and neuter arrangement for feral cats in a collaborative effort of the City and County. The pieces are beginning to fall in place on this joint program, which is designed to bring with it a very substantive arrangement for dealing with and protecting these small animals.

A component of our operations which is vital is the Administrative Department. Not only is keeping all the minutes and City records imperative, and having them accessible, there are numerous activities, among them

are open records requests, maintaining ordinances, proclamations and retrieving historical and important information. Nothing can be emphasized more than the critical nature of elections, which is the foundation of our democracy. Tomika Lewis, is our City Secretary and head of this department. She also holds the important distinction as the Election Official of the City. With 2020 promising to be one of the most intense and potentially contentious years for elections, not only within our City but throughout the nation, her responsibilities in this area take on heightened significance. Having fair and efficient elections is one of the most vital aspects of not only this department, but the City as a whole. She is capably assisted by Assistant City Secretary Nici Browe in taking minutes of the numerous meetings held in the City and similarly related functions, as well as with requirements of the elections. This department has the somewhat unenviable task of assessing and responding to those who contact the City with a myriad of questions, concerns and problems. In this regard, she and her staff do a superlative job.

Municipal Court, under the leadership of Nicole Nguyen, handles more irate concerns and sees more people than any other function of our City. With the responsibility of collecting payment of all fines and

violations, and appropriately following up on those who do not pay, is a focus of ensuring fairness in this important endeavor. This department has a long standing reputation for holding the line on expenditures. However, due to circumstances, in most instances, not their fault, fell below anticipated budgeted receipts—which is being addressed and rectified. Those who know about activities in and around the courts clearly realize security is a most critical component. This year’s expenditures will have a heightened approach to ensuring the necessary safety and security for this operation.

In today’s world nothing has a more necessary, but sometimes daunting aspect to it than that of Information Technology. Keeping abreast of this most critical function, while avoiding unnecessary and soon to be obsolete equipment, is a significant challenge. Under the directorship of Ryan Young, this department has undergone a restructuring and reassessment, in order to gain the necessary status. Two aspects take on the important profile: making sure the general operations are efficient and in excellent functioning order; and, installing the new and sophisticated equipment necessary to keep the City on the leading edge of this

endeavor. This is a constant quest which will be a serious challenge throughout this coming year.

Three years ago, the Finance, Human Resource and Insurance Departments were under the direction of Karen Austin. With her resignation in 2016, Finance and Human Resource together with the Insurance component, were split. Two years ago, Dorrance Roderick became the Finance Director. Since then, getting the Finance department efficient, and particularly the budget has been a learning process. While progress has been made, elevating the budget to the desired level, has been difficult. Needless to say the Finance department is one of the most critical components in the City. Consequently, a concerted effort is being made, with recognizable progress, not only to address matters related to the budget, but various reports and financial data requested by Council, and especially that of sales tax collections. The effort is continuing with a heightened awareness.

While Human Resources is becoming a much improved and expanded element within our City, this relatively new department, under the excellent and forward thinking leadership of Shanell Garcia, has added a truly new and beneficial dimension to our City. There

has been concentration on all aspects of our personnel situation, however, emphasis on our salary structure has shown an elevated astuteness in this most important area. While refinements are being made, the basic structure has been applauded for its thoroughness and fairness.

Communications has long been a strong suit of Stafford. With the innovation of SMETV in that effort over two decades ago, this City has been one of the leaders in local governmental TV production. Implementing streaming, under the directorship of Carolyn Entricht, not only has allowed the people of Stafford to watch our many meetings and television productions, but is now capable of being seen around the globe. With the feisty Council meetings that we have become known for, there are many who watch, and enjoy, our meetings in places far removed from our City. This year, we are advancing on our move into the area of social media with a strong emphasis on responsible communication. Considering the significant controversy surrounding social media, developing a system that will work for the City, the citizens and those interested in Stafford is, needless to say, a challenge. However, there is no getting around the fact that social media is here to stay and will only become more and more prevalent in people's lives. As we move forward on this it should be

recognized that responsible communication with our citizens and others is our primary and unwavering goal. As you watch SMETV and our website together with our Facebook postings, you will see the deliberate approach that we are pursuing so that, most important of all, our communications with you is accurate and responsible. We'll leave the rumors and gossip to others.

Economic Development is a vital component of our City, not only in general terms but also from the perspective of the Stafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC). Patti Worfe is the Executive Economic Director of our efforts in this area. She is responsible to the SEDC, which is guided by a seven member board under the presidency of Mayor pro tem Wen Guerra. While the SEDC oversees the projects and resources of the Corporation, it's authority is related to those economic development endeavors falling within its purview. Currently, undertakings of the SEDC include major improvements to West Airport Boulevard, construction extensions of Cash Road and Trinity Road and significant involvement in the efforts to assist in expediting the development of the Grid. The allocated expenditures for these very substantive projects is \$9.3 million. Work is proceeding on each of these.

The broad title of Recreation Director belongs to the accomplished Susan Ricks, who is in charge of the full plate of not only recreational programs but the Stafford Civic Center, Stafford Swimming Pool and Stafford Centre. For this discussion we began with the Civic Center. This multipurpose facility has been a feature attraction of this City since 1986. With its broad array of uses, ranging from theatrical, to banquets, auditorium presentations, and a host of special attractions, it is one of the most functional and beneficial assets of this City, and by far, one of the most versatile facilities in the county. This broad array of activities that have taken place here over the nearly last third of a century is most impressive and has gained the admiration of many. Additionally, it is a vital component of the Stafford Municipal School District, housing a long list of various activities for the District during its existence. While maintaining it in tiptop condition is a challenge, it is well worth the time and expense to preserve this outstanding venue.

The Stafford Swimming Pool arrived on the scene a couple years before the Civic Center. This Olympic size pool not only serves all our citizens, and especially our children, quite well, but it has hosted many swimming events for organizations, not only here, but for

organizations outside of the City. Besides being home to the Stafford Stingrays, our local swim team, it entertains competitive meets throughout the summer for swimmers from all parts of the Houston area. And last but not least is a service of immeasurable significance: a training facility for all second and fourth graders of SMSD to learn to swim. The value of this program is beyond calculation. It has taught thousands of our children not only how to swim, but the many aspects of life saving, water safety.

Under the general heading of recreational aspects, Mrs. Ricks puts together many entertaining activities each year ranging from the Santa's Village program before the holiday season, the Employees' Appreciation Dinner, which will be taking place in a couple of weeks to express City Council's, as well as our citizens, sincere appreciation for the outstanding jobs performed by our City employees, and the summer recreation program which allows youngsters in Stafford to take advantage of the various facilities at the school during vacation time. Not only do these programs illustrate activities which our children and employees take great pride but is an outstanding way to celebrate opportunities afforded them.

A beacon for our City, which has brought us many accolades and now entering its 16th year, is the Stafford Centre. This outstanding facility encompassing a state of the art 1,100 seat Performing Arts Theatre and a 20,000 square foot Convention Centre has seen over 4 million people come through its doors as guests of this outstanding venue since the Centre's opening in 2004. A most impressive list of stellar performers have displayed their artistry in the Theatre. This has been something in which the City has taken great pride and which has delighted many large audiences. While revenues have continued to grow, so have the expenditures related to keeping the Centre fresh, attractive and inviting. With a total annual cost now pushing \$4 1/2 million a year, it is imperative that we continue to explore avenues to increase our current annual receipts which are striving to reach \$2 million. Irrespective of these significant costs, it is imperative that we maintain the outstanding image of this one of a kind facility which has motivated so many other entities in our area to emulate it. As the old saying goes: Imitation is the grandest form of flattery!

A component of our City which is unlike any in the state is SMSD—the only Municipal School District in Texas. Now in the midst of an elaborate building program, with costs that will push the outstanding

principal debt of the District to \$100 million, and when doubled by the cost of interest, will exceed \$200 million. When completed, it will provide truly impressive educational facilities. What we do with this most elaborate educational venue is still a matter of intensive debate. The most pressing and compelling issue, and one that is front and center is simply: How do we entice the hundreds of Stafford students who do not attend SMSD because they and their parents have not quite reached the comfort level with the District—and which the taxpayers of Stafford are paying large sums so these students will attend the District—to enroll here? A corollary of that important question is: How do we remove the hundreds of students, known as Limited Open Enrollment students (LOEs) who do not live in Stafford, pay nothing to attend SMSD, congest the campus and all the roads leading to it, yet are a major force in driving the programs, curriculum, staffing and culture of the District? It is the opinion of many in the City that we must retake our fantastic District created exclusively for the children of Stafford. What we have currently with the very large number of LOEs was unimagined when SMSD was founded. SMSD has incredible potential and attributes and should be a district for which the children of Stafford would fight to attend. When it was in its formative stages and for many

years after its implementation that was exactly the case. Never forget that is why the people of Stafford worked so hard, sacrificed so greatly, and endured so much criticism, to establish just such a District. It was definitely not to house the hundreds of LOEs we have had attend the District who have diminished the culture and dreams upon which SMSD was founded. Their day as a pervasive influence on this most unique and cherished educational institution must be brought to a close.

So how do we pursue these important aspects of elevating our City?

GOALS FOR 2020

GOAL NO. 1. TIME TO SPREAD THE WORD ON ZERO PROPERTY TAXES.

Twenty five consecutive years of Zero Property Taxes is a claim no other reasonably populated city in the nation can make. Considering the extraordinary accomplishment this represents, it is fitting we extol the virtues of this attribute by spreading the word far and wide. As other entities and their leaders look for every excuse to raise taxes, Stafford has this unique long

standing achievement of maintaining the Zero Property Tax, thus allowing its citizens and businesses alike to keep more of their money than in any other city. This has long gained us considerable attention; however, the significant impact of this status came clearly into focus when our Executive Economic Director attended a national conference of business executives and public officials' in South Carolina a couple of months ago. The response that she received when she stated that Stafford has "No City Property Taxes", was one of awe and amazement. It was apparent to all in attendance, our City offers a tax incentive of this nature superior to any other similar to it in the country. We must communicate this message because in it we stand to gain the attention and the possible luring of businesses and residents to our City. This goal must be most aggressively pursued. The reward can be substantial.

GOAL NO. 2. RESTORE FUND BALANCES.

The General and Municipal Sales Tax Funds have diminished to an unacceptable level. This resulted in a lowering of the City's credit rating and placing us on a watch list by Moody's Investor's Service. We must mount a most concerted effort to restore these fund balances to where they were five years ago and before.

Not only will this demonstrate that the City has regained its control over unnecessary expenditures, but will send a clear message that this City is fiscally prudent - - a claim that we have long bragged about up until the last few years when these fund balances began deteriorating. How do we accomplish this? We strongly encourage our City employees to assist, where possible, in the generation of income, and the saving of every dollar when it is not necessary to spend. With such a clear and ominous message from the rating agency, not only must we not ignore this warning, but we must begin immediately to rectify the condition.

GOAL NO. 3. ELEVATE STAFFORD CENTRE REVENUES.

The Stafford Centre is one of our most cherished assets. It has not only brought this City significant praise but has enticed over 4 million people to come to this outstanding venue to enjoy a wide variety of entertaining events. However, there is a serious situation related to this venue that must be addressed: It is now losing and has for many years over \$2.5 million each year - - and that number as the Centre gets older will only get larger. We must make a very careful and realistic assessment of our revenues and expenditures related to this unique multi-purpose facility. It is simply

not enough to say “well the Federal Government expects us to lose money so that investors’ interest is tax deductible”. This is no valid reason, and is simply unacceptable. Not only must expenditures be carefully evaluated -- because it is critical that we maintain this 16 year old facility in excellent condition—but we must carefully assess the inadequacy of our revenues and how they can be enhanced. There seems to be little question that improvements can be made in this area. This appraisal is long overdue and must be a compelling goal.

GOAL NO. 4. CONTINUE PROMOTION OF THE STAFFORD STORY.

The Stafford Story is one that has been told, especially most recently as entertaining, fascinating and cherished. Not only has Stafford accomplished things that other cities would not dare pursue, we have attained achievements that others would not even seriously consider. Cases in point: The Stafford Municipal School District and the Zero Property Tax. With this in mind, we should find the most effective means of telling this enlightening and very impressive story to all who will listen. It is one thing to know that you have accomplishment of which you are most proud, it is something else to communicate those in a way that gets

peoples' admiring attention, without appearing to be gloating. That is our challenge and one that we must pursue in a manner that clearly illustrates the significant success of Stafford and why the Stafford Story is so compelling—and in some respects, stands alone.

GOAL NO. 5. ENHANCE PROTECTION OF ANIMALS.

Just watch your television and one of the most inspiring things you will surely notice are the multitude of ads now appearing which promote animals. In them, is the most enticing use of small animals - - and in some instances unusual ones, such as the ostrich. The point is simple, people in America, and Stafford, have a great affinity for their animals. It is a laborious task to make sure we take care of them in a way that is appropriate, respectful and responsible, yet that is our challenge. While there are those who would abuse these little creatures, most people realize the tremendous pleasure and joy that they bring. With that in mind, we are embarking on an aggressive program, including adding a new Humane Officer and necessary equipment, to illustrate that in our City we have a most respectful attitude for these very special pets and that we need to be constantly aware that they must be appreciated and protected. With the new ordinance that Council has adopted, and will soon be implementing, this message

must be clear: In Stafford, we will exert all necessary efforts to afford these little animals the care, attention and admiration they deserve.

GOAL NO. 6. REVAMP POLICE AND FIRE DEPARTMENTS FOCUS.

Much has been expended in recent years for elevating and expanding the Police and Fire Departments. Undeniably these have been most substantive expenditures, however, there has been the attitude among many that we should simply add the personnel, equipment and other assets, so that these departments can perform at the highest level, without any concern as to the availability of revenues that is necessary to accomplish this. And if we drag down the City’s reserves, so be it. In my view, this is a most short sighted approach. While elevating the size of these departments is quite commendable, I believe the assessment must go further. I firmly believe it is the responsibility of those advocating these expansions, and those who benefit from the jobs that they have in these departments, to contribute in a constructive way to cover these costs to provide this quality level of service. Both the Police and Fire Chief, recognize that there is the ability of personnel in their respective departments to

assist with the enhancement of those functions and the revenues required. Our goal has to ensure a generation of funds commensurate with a careful evaluation of expenditures to assure that the relative benefits avoid placing the City in difficult financial straits. This is an area that demands careful scrutiny.

GOAL NO. 7. PRESERVE SALES TAX COLLECTIONS.

Sales tax receipts: This is what the City depends on for the majority of its endeavors. The collection of sales taxes at one time was relatively simple - - the City portion of sales tax was paid by the consumer upon the purchase of the item. The business establishment would then send in the tax collected to the Comptroller. A couple of months later, that amount would be remitted by the State Comptroller, less a small collection fee, to the City. Today, not only do some businesses want to collect the sales tax, but many feel that for some reason, they are entitled to a significant portion of it. With the approval of the contract with the Grid and the so called “380 Agreements”, the City, in most instances, has agreed to rebate up to 80% of the sales tax collected back to those businesses. Considering Stafford does not assess a property tax, which is a huge factor, the rebating of a great majority of the benefits of these agreements take

a heavy toll, and in my opinion, places an irresponsible burden on our City and its citizens. While there are those who say that there are Economic Development benefits to justify this, there have been numerous studies, including those at prestigious universities and by prominent economists, that say cities are being sweet-talked into these agreements when only minimal benefits, if any, ultimately accrue to the city. While the agreements we have made thus far are long term, we should be most careful not to indulge in any further such arrangements. Fortunately, the Texas Comptroller and many members of the State Legislature share my concern about these rebates and is placing limits on 380 Agreements. The saying of some supporters of this practice that, “Something is better than nothing”. Unfortunately, when you reflect on the actual numbers and how much this City is subsidizing outside promoters who have virtually no interest in the City, but are simply using the City to generate large sums of money for themselves, in contrast to the mere pittance for our citizens, it is my strong opinion that this is simply a blatant giveaway of our citizens’ funds. Stafford has always dealt with our business community in a fair and equal way. This so-called ‘economic incentive’ approach is blatantly flawed and discriminatory against those thousands of businesses who have contributed

immensely to the growth and development of this City over many years and have never received a dime. The concerted goal must be to curtail this unwise practice with its preferential treatment before it strangles our City and citizens.

GOAL NO. 8. PROMOTE DIVERSITY.

It has long been the practice of Stafford to elevate and promote the benefits and attributes of diversity. We have said on many occasions that having a diverse racial and cultural population and encouraging everyone to work, play, learn and pray together is a most admirable and desirable path for our City. Unfortunately, that premise has been threatened, and even undermined, as illustrated by the disproportionate student population mix at SMSD. Sociologist and other experts who have carefully studied the benefits of diversity on so many aspects of life have concluded overwhelmingly that to focus on a one race culture to the detriment of a multicultural and diverse population is extremely ill advised. Stafford is one of the most diverse cities in the nation with a population of approximately 25% of each of the major races of African-American, white, Hispanic and Asian-American. Every effort should be employed to accomplish this most honorable goal. One does not have

to look very far from Stafford to see neighboring cities that place strong preference on a one race, as opposed, to a multiracial culture. Their results leave much to be desired.

GOAL NO. 9. DEVELOP A HISTORICAL MUSEUM.

Stafford has a very rich and colorful history. This has been vividly illustrated in so many ways, and most recently, by the presentations of Stafford Historical Society President Sadie Williams and her group at City Council meetings. It would be tragic if the many documents, pictures and artifacts that portray this glorious history were to be lost. Yet, the clock is ticking and before it's too late and many are destroyed and misplaced we need to develop an adequate place to house and display these most valuable, informative and interesting items. Sooner, not later, we should pursue an aggressive goal of establishing a most representative facility to make available and accessible this most vital information and documents. Not only would this add a degree of pride for our citizens, but would attract many non-citizens who are aware of the many impressive accomplishments and events that have occurred since William Stafford and his followers settled here 200 years ago.

GOAL NO. 10. PROMOTE QUALITY GROWTH.

When the growth of Stafford is mentioned, most point to the GRID being developed on the old Texas Instruments 192 acre site. However, if you do a reasonably comprehensive job of touring the City, you will quickly see that there are many improvements springing up throughout our boundaries. There is good reason for this. First and foremost Stafford is one of the most accessible locations in the entire Houston region. It has often been said that you can get to most places in the region faster from a location in Stafford than you can from any in Houston, or some other nearby city. Unquestionably, a most compelling magnet drawing people to our City is the Zero Property Tax. Only we can point to this outstanding attribute which has been in effect for a quarter of a century and which has gained considerable attention and recognition. Furthermore, Stafford has an outstanding reputation as being 'business friendly'. This alone has enticed numerous companies to locate here to avoid much of the red tape and delays that they experience in neighboring cities in starting and operating a business. Maybe most important is the fact that you have to go through Stafford

to get to many other locations within the Houston region. All of these are enticements that keep people, both businesses and residents, desiring to establish their home or business in Stafford. Roll all of these together and it's easy to see why so many people are looking to come here. But we must not simply rest on our laurels. A strong goal must be to make Stafford as attractive as we can so that these interested parties realize that this is the home for which they have long been looking and will meet their needs better than any other.

GOAL NO. 11. PURSUE COMMUTER RAIL.

The city of Stafford has been pursuing a commuter rail project since 2000. It has been said that if Fort Bend County is ever going to be that of which it is capable of being, it needs a mass transit system – – preferably one that is commuter rail. In spite of the continuing effort, little traction has actually been gained in this pursuit. This is sad. The so-called U.S. 90-A commuter rail line would go down South Main from downtown Houston to Rosenberg. This would be a most desirable and beneficial governmental amenity. Unfortunately, that due to the continuing opposition of Union Pacific Railroad, even though they have a 100 foot of right away which would be perfect for it, they do not want a commuter rail line

next to their freight rail tracks. They have used every means available, including their tremendous political clout, to make certain that such a project does not come to fruition. With the continued development in Fort Bend County, it is not only increasingly difficult to perceive such a project, but instead of costing the estimated \$400 million in 2004, today's estimate is several billion dollars. Whether this project will ever gain the governmental and public support necessary—especially the funding—remains to be seen. In spite of these most serious obstacles, we should not abandon the pursuit of this program. Not only does it have tremendous benefits for Fort Bend County, Stafford would gain immensely. However, and most unfortunately, there is a serious precautionary note. A recent proposal suggested at the Gulf Coast Rail District was to have an elevated commuter rail line down the middle of Main Street. This would have the same devastating effects on Stafford that the City fought off 15 years ago, when TxDOT was proposing the continuation of the freeway coming from Houston through Stafford on Main Street, which would have virtually split the City into two parts and destroy it as we know it. Fortunately we were able to not only prevent that proposal but to materially alter it such that it enhanced South and North Main into what they are today, including the quiet zone

running the width of the City from Sugar Land to Missouri City. In fact, such an elevated commuter rail line would likely even be worse with an elevated structure 50 to 60 feet high with trains running on it all day long and completely disrupting the quality of life in the residential and small business areas through the center of town. This goal must be pursued with a clear perspective of the potential benefits and detriments. We cannot capitulate to such a draconian proposal.

GOAL NO. 12. PROCEED WITH THE ENHANCEMENTS TO THE FM 1092 CORRIDOR.

One of the most exciting proposals currently on the drawing board are the significant enhancements being proposed for the FM 1092 Corridor by the Texas Department of Transportation and the Houston-Galveston Area Council, in conjunction with the City. This most elaborate plan, which TxDOT will contribute millions of dollars, while the City over the next few years, will provide about 25% for the cost of amenities, esplanades, sidewalks and extensive landscaping. When completed it will add a totally new dimension to Stafford and significantly improve not only the mobility of this boulevard running from our northerly boundary line down to Avenue E. Significantly, the commercialization

of this most important thoroughfare will be enhanced, according to HGAC to something similar to what one sees when driving down Westheimer in Houston. To illustrate just how significant this proposal is one only need to reflect back to last week's City Council meeting when approval was granted for the elaborate rezoning and construction of most impressive facilities on the 34 acre tract where Weatherford Farms-Southern Floral has stood for over a half century. This elaborate project will be the centerpiece for the revamping of this corridor and will set the tone. These enhancements will not only serve to revitalize the area which back in the mid-70s was a mainstay of Stafford's business activity but will also add a dimension which will totally transform this north-south roadway into a most delightful scenic experience. This goal is well worth watching and striving towards.

GOAL NO. 13. TAKE BACK SMSD FOR THE PEOPLE OF STAFFORD.

Everything is in place. It is time to take back the Stafford Municipal School District for the people, and especially the children, of Stafford. Over the past couple of decades there has been a steady influx of children from outside of our City, namely, those referred to as Limited Open Enrollment students, or LOE's, that flooded

the District supposedly necessary to bring the financial matters of SMSD into order and allegedly avoid paying large sums of money to the state under the Robin Hood Bill. Those days have passed. With the enactment by the state legislature in May of new school finance legislation, we no longer have to be overly concerned about trying to supplement the District's income with students from other areas. Our focus can, and must be clear and unwavering: Entice the children of Stafford to attend SMSD and remove the outside students from the District at the earliest opportunity. What will it take to accomplish this? A concerted effort to illustrate to the people of Stafford, that their children should attend this unique District with some of the most elaborate facilities, such that these youngsters can get the best possible primary and secondary education in Texas. Once the children of Stafford who do not now attend come back to SMSD, there will no longer be any need for LOEs. A proposal currently before the SMSD Board of Trustees will require a strong marketing program by a competent firm at a cost of \$275,000. While that may seem like a lot to put SMSD back on the track for what it was created to accomplish, namely provide the best education possible to all Stafford students—black, white, brown, purple and polka dotted—this District and City will once more be able to take much pride in this transformation. Most

important, it is what the people of Stafford so gallantly fought for against overwhelming odds and some of the most powerful opposition. This has to be one of our most compelling goals for this New Year and the Board must approve this program at its earliest opportunity.

C O N C L U S I O N

What lies before this City in the New Year is a most encouraging prospect. Make no mistake, it is certainly not without many challenges. Nevertheless, so much outstanding development and so many exciting activities and events are occurring, most of which can easily be seen by simply driving around the City, that we must not only be heartened but most enthusiastic. Addressing the issues and pursuing the goals which have been laid out above will provide our City in 2020 with achievements and opportunities which will not only gain the much deserved attention and admiration of many, but even more important, will make the citizens of Stafford most proud.

Respectively submitted,

Leonard Scarcella, Mayor