

# **STATE OF THE CITY AND GOALS FOR 2021**

## **CITY OF STAFFORD, TEXAS**

**27TH OF JANUARY, 2021**

**BY MAYOR CECIL WILLIS**

**Before we start to explore the State of the City in 2021, let us look back for a second to Mayor Scarella's 2020 opening statement.**

***"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!"***

**Little did he, or for that matter any of us, know what lay ahead. There are and will be many challenges, changes and "opportunities" coming our way in 2021. Just goes to show how much life can change in a moment's notice. We can reflect back to 9/11 and see how the world has changed. Our challenge is to see where we are now and where we want to go in the future. This pandemic shows us we must be more vigilant and prepared for new challenges and opportunities.**

First, I must acknowledge the Citizens of Stafford for your confidence and faith in my ability to lead your City. As I stated over and over in the campaign, we are so blessed to live in the most diverse community in Fort Bend County. The history and the accomplishments of Stafford are due to the citizens and their diversity. The true strength of our City is shown through not only our diversity but through our willingness to work together and be united in our goals for this City and our families. I will use SMSD as one example. The reality of SMSD would not have come about without the overwhelming support of the citizens of Stafford. As we move forward, I am confident that we will stand united and work together as we, together, move Stafford forward. Much more can be achieved when we are all pulling in the same direction. We must continue this most important trait.

The City of Stafford, as well as its businesses and residents, have had to make many changes to their lives and adapt to a new normal. As I tour the City and visit with many individuals in the business sector, I have found they are coping as best they can. Some have applied for assistance through the COVID19 relief programs under Fort Bend County and so far 778 Stafford residents and businesses have received over \$5.5 million

**dollars in some type of assistance including rental, utility and small business assistance. The overwhelming majority are adapting to the new norm. During this “Pandemic” we received the largest sales tax check in our history in August, then again in November we received a larger check. This shows in my opinion that we have built a strong foundation for this City. This foundation was built by a great group of elected officials and the citizens that have preceded us: eternal gratitude goes to those that have provided us with what we have today.**

**The City has modified its standard practices and has adjusted work schedules, distancing and virtual activities. The staff has performed above and beyond expectations. We are extremely fortunate to have the dedication, professionalism and commitment each of them have as they do the job that we need and expect of them. I applaud each and every one of them.**

**However, our dedicated men and women in law enforcement and our first responders cannot perform their duties virtually. These individuals have to be hands on and boots on the ground 24-7, 365 days of the year. I want to take a moment and recognize this great group of individuals. Through these times of uncertainty, they have not missed a beat and we are eternally grateful. On**

**behalf of the City of Stafford and the citizens of Stafford, I would like to commend Chief Richard Ramirez and his staff as well as the Stafford Fire Department for navigating around a number of challenges in order to maintain the excellent protection that is afforded our City. (share picture) We were able to complete 2 integral public safety projects in our new fire station on Mula Rd. and our Police building expansion during 2020 that will help our first responders to continue to provide outstanding service to our city. Because of the efficient work by our Police department, the city saw a 35% decrease in violent crimes and alarm calls were down 10% in 2020 compared to 2019. Hopefully, later this year we will have a formal ribbon cutting on both facilities. I especially look forward to the ceremony naming the Police Building Expansion in honor of our former Police Chief Bonnie Krahn. Again, I say thank you to each and every one of you in the Police Department and Fire Department and we all appreciate and respect the job you do for us all.**

**As mentioned, we are doing things different in many areas. The municipal court under the guidance of presiding Judge Debra Sinclair and Court Director Nicole Nguyen has transformed some of its activities to virtual hearings. The Court department also added a drop box**

for payments that allowed 24 hour “no contact” payments that was a welcome addition for many in the community. We continue to work on ways and equipment to make this department safe and effective for the public.

The Development Services department that includes permits, planning and zoning and the code enforcement divisions while also overseeing the humane division, under the leadership of Director Chris Riggs, is now in the process of converting to virtual plan review and many more online activities, such as permitting procedures. They have worked with businesses to do whatever they could to help them during this unprecedented time including working with them on signage so we all knew who was open and when. The Public Works Department also under Mr. Riggs, will also be coordinating the Cash Road extension as well as the new Trinity Drive Extension into The Grid while they care for our infrastructure throughout the city. This is also another group of employees who are on the ground 24-7, 365 days dealing with drainage, mobility and debris removal to name just a few. We all commend the efforts of these individuals.

**City Council, Planning and Zoning as well as the SEDC have been virtual for a while now. We are constantly**

looking at ways to improve this operation. Our multimedia department, headed by Ms. Carolyn Entricht, and IT department, headed by Mr. Ryan Young, have performed above and beyond expectations to keep the City moving forward. These two departments are the most integral component in assisting our other departments so they can do their jobs whether it be virtual or just keeping the computer hardware functioning properly. The IT Department works to ensure that we can do business with our citizens in the most safe and efficient manner virtually while also working with our internal systems to create a more stream lined approach to the way we do business. Our Multimedia department plays a critical role in ensuring our constituents are kept abreast of important news items through our websites, social media and SMETV. From getting the word out about restaurant hours, to testing locations and vaccines, this department has kept the lines of communication open with our residents.

The City Administration Department, under Ms. Tomika Lewis, continues to amaze me. They continue to perform their duties in a very efficient, professional manner, whether it is getting out the minutes for a meeting, a newsletter or coordinating a meeting. Even while dealing with all of their day-to-day responsibilities, they

**have worked hard to find a new normal with a new Mayor and new style and have excelled at it.**

**Another bright spot in our operation is our HR Department under the leadership of Ms. Shanell Garcia. I might also mention she is one of our own graduates of SMSD. Ms. Garcia and her assistant have modernized and updated the HR Department and have centralized systems to allow our personnel to have the information they need at their fingertips.**

**Ms. Susan Ricks is not only the contract administrator for the Stafford Centre, but she also handles Recreation and Performing arts. She is a woman who wears many hats. She and her staff have been extremely challenged with the operation of two facilities (the Stafford Centre and the Stafford Civic Center) during this pandemic. Ms. Ricks along with Mr. Bryan Blaum of FM Squared, have faced many challenges and are continually formulating plans for the present and future as we return to a state of normalcy. During this temporary pause, they have been giving the Stafford Centre and Stafford Civic Center a facelift with new carpet, paint, etc. We are eagerly looking forward to the days that both of these incredible facilities are back to 100% occupancy. As Mr. Blaum says, "It is only an intermission...the curtain will rise again!"**

**Our finance Department under Mr. Dorrance Roderick, is the custodian of all our funds. His department's task is to make sure we have the funds to pay the bills and make sure the budget we approved is followed. In government, if it is not budgeted, we cannot spend it. During 2020, the city was extremely fortunate to not see huge fluctuations in our sales tax numbers as many of our neighboring cities have. We will continue to ask you, our citizens, to utilize our local businesses to shop and patronize to help keep our sales tax numbers steady.**

**Someone else who has stepped up and has taken on new challenges is Ms. Patti Worfe, the SEDC Executive Director. She has not only been working with new ventures wanting to come to Stafford, but also with our existing businesses. She has taken on the role of working with Fort Bend County on our COVID19 relief funding and making certain we are following all the rules. So far, with the help of Ft. Bend County, she has assisted nearly 200 of our businesses with the Small Business Grant fund that amounted to \$2,915,000 going to our local businesses.**

**The Stafford Economic Development Corp., under the Presidency of Councilman Wen Guerra, has assembled a**

**committed group of citizens who take their assignment very seriously. They are constantly looking for ways to do projects and attract businesses that will not only improve our quality of life but enhance our economy. Your efforts are appreciated by us all.**

**Besides our hardworking staff, the City employs consultants from time to time for specific purposes.**

**One of these is Mr. John Pitts. The City is contracted with his firm to protect the City and SMSD interests during this 87<sup>th</sup> Legislative session. Mr. Pitts has handled this task for many years and has served our interests well in many areas.**

**Another is Mr. Bob Jones of Jones Engineering Solutions. Mr. Jones has served this City for well over 25 years in many capacities. He and his firm provide engineering inspections, review street and drainage proposals as well as construction along with numerous other items.**

**I believe we are well represented and protected in both of these areas. I look forward to our continued affiliation with both of these firms as we move Stafford forward.**

**So, now how do we blaze new trails and accomplish even more for Stafford starting in 2021?**

## **GOALS FOR 2021**

### **GOAL NO. 1.**

**“Continue to promote and embrace the diversity of Stafford”. Stafford is the most diverse community in Fort Bend County. That is something I am proud of as well as we all should be. It just shows one more “First” for Stafford. Unfortunately, in the world we live in, there are always those who try to distract and divide for whatever reason. We, as a community, have accomplished much and will do more by continuing to work together.**

**I have stated many times that it is the citizens and their diversity that have made us who we are and we will continue down that path. Hopefully, we will be celebrating this as I am asking staff to look into resuming our multi-cultural festive celebrations at the Stafford Centre as soon as we are able. This is only one small way to show our pride in our community.**

### **GOAL NO. 2.**

**“Take the necessary steps to start rebuilding our General Fund Balance”.** It is not only important to satisfy the rating agencies, but any prudent family or business lays away funds for a rainy day. 2020 has provided us a living example as to why it is necessary to have an adequate fund balance. This will be a priority as we start the next budget preparations.

### **GOAL NO. 3.**

**“Market and promote the City of Stafford and Stafford Municipal School District (SMSD)”.** I have a meeting scheduled with SMSD tomorrow to start the discussion on a number of topics. “It is time to sing the story of Stafford.” During the current dilemma we are all going through, we must do all we can to promote and help not only our citizens, but also our business community. We will count on you, the citizens of Stafford to help us do this also. Tell your friends, family and co-workers about our great city and encourage them to “Shop Stafford” as much as possible. We can all do this together. I have formed a staff committee to report their ideas to me in February so that we can formulate our plan.

### **GOAL NO. 4**

**Elevate the pursuit of “Commuter Rail”.** In my opinion, it’s past time for this. Every day it is delayed, costs

escalate on acquiring the Right of Way (ROW) and construction costs. It appears to me that there are more that favor it than do not. Commuter rail will also help us to promote economic development opportunities. Congressman Al Green who is a strong proponent has recently contacted me. I hope that new connections will be fruitful when we meet to discuss this along with other mutual interest we share. Congressman Green has been a strong advocate for Stafford through the years and I look forward to continue working with him and appreciate him reaching out to me.

#### **GOAL NO. 5.**

Look into establishing a “Mayors Community Council” as well as a “Mayors Youth Council”. My purpose and goal here is to bring in individuals from all areas of Stafford to first, introduce them to staff so they will know who to contact for what. Secondly, listen to any concerns or ideas they have. This will give us more eyes and ears to be aware of what is going on.

The Youth Council will be an opportunity to expose them to workings of government and community services. We need to start and expose and train our next generation of leaders. Both of these will take some time to implement, but we will get it done.

## **GOAL NO. 6.**

**Look at ways to streamline and enhance City functions and operations. Do things better, smarter and more efficient for everyone's benefit. We are fortunate to have a great staff who I feel confident will come up with innovative ideas. We welcome any thoughts you may have.**

## **GOAL NO. 7.**

**Continue to pursue and promote quality development that benefits Stafford, not just the developers. Stafford lives on sales tax. Look for quality retail, restaurants, entertainment and other sales tax producing businesses that serves this community and elevates it at the same time. Here are some examples of what happens in 'The Grid'. There is more to come in the near future. (Share pictures???)**

## **GOAL NO. 8.**

**Work with SMSD and Houston Community College (HCC) on programs and initiatives that will benefit the three (3) entities. I cannot identify exactly what those would look like but I feel the potential is there. We have a tremendous opportunity with all three of these entities**

like but I feel the potential is there. We have a tremendous opportunity with all three of these entities working together not only for educational opportunities but also for economic benefits.

## **C O N C L U S I O N**

**So, where do we go from here? Together we have accomplished many great things and we can continue to accomplish many more great things in the days ahead. We will have many opportunities coming our way. We must seize those moments and try new programs and ideas. Those programs and ideas must be based on facts and solid principles.**

**I am committed to that goal as I feel our Council is. All of us on Council take our oath of office very seriously. When we are sworn into office, we represent all of Stafford. We are the custodians of your interests.**

**I, as Mayor, and my fellow Council members understand that obligation. This Council is up to the task you have elected us to do. We will not be deterred or distracted from performing our obligations for you.**

**So, let's everyone get on board and move our great city  
into 2021 TOGETHER!**

**Respectfully Submitted,**

*Cecil Willis Jr.*

**Cecil Willis Jr., Mayor**