

2020 State of the City Address Speech

Mayor Gary Jarvis

Good evening. I am Mayor Gary Jarvis and I would like to welcome everyone to the 2020 State of the City.

[Recognize any officials in attendance]

- City Council:
 - Councilman Rodney Braden
 - Councilman Parker Destin
 - Councilman Skip Overdier
 - Councilman Cyron Marler
 - Councilman Steven Menchel
 - Councilman Chatham Morgan
 - Councilwoman Prebble Ramswell
- City Staff

As I reflect upon 2019, I am extremely thankful for my family and for the opportunity to serve as your mayor of this great city. I truly appreciate the dedication of my fellow council members as well as our employees. Cities across the nation recognize the importance of developing a **brand** to help stimulate investment, promote business opportunities, quality development, tourism, and a quality of life for residents and future generations. This takes careful thought, consideration and a vision. So, I ask the question, **“What is our brand?”** Is it our beaches? Our world class fishing? Our parks? Our quality of life? Tourism? It’s all the above and more.

Some say that a **Brand** is **“setting an expectation and delivering upon it.”**

My fellow city council members go to great lengths to listen and understand the **EXPECTATIONS** of our residents, businesses and visitors and what they **EXPECT** our great city to be. From this feedback, City

Council established a long-term vision for our city. We also developed a strategic plan to ensure we deliver upon that long-term vision and **brand** for our city. With community input, we are managing this city with clear goals and expectations for the future. The objectives we have in place will contribute greatly to the quality of life for generations to come.

The council's vision statement is **Destin is a family - oriented beach and fishing community where people want to live, work and play and where guests are welcomed to respectively enjoy our community and its resources.**

City Council has identified three key groups that are our priority: The first priority group is our year-round residents. Followed by our Destin-based businesses and of course our visitors.

Council has a clear vision and unified approach for quality development and revitalization as well as improved mobility and connectivity throughout our city. We as a council are thinking forward in prioritizing our goals as a city. We have many services, programs and projects underway to fulfill our mission and continue to make Destin a great place to live, work, play and visit. We will continue these efforts well into 2020 and beyond. The city hosted a strategic visioning session in October of 2019. Council and senior city staff members met to discuss our achievements, where we are as an organization and possible paths forward into the future. During this strategic visioning session, City Council identified key objectives and projects for staff to focus on in 2020. These objectives and projects, help form the city's overall strategic plan. This strategic plan is critical to help guide elected officials and staff in their day-to-day activities as well as long term planning. It also provides our residents, businesses and visitors transparency into the City of Destin's planning and operations. **We have provided this**

strategic plan as a flyer to all participants here tonight and I would like to invite our video viewing audience to access it online at our website, www.cityofdestin.com/strategicplan.

I would like to update everyone on a few of our top Council Objectives for FY20, which is part of the strategic plan.

Beach Acquisition: We have identified multiple funding sources for beach acquisition and are moving forward to secure potential properties in 2020 and beyond.

We have made great progress with Gulf Power, and their parent company Nextera, to work on finalizing a new franchise agreement as well as find innovative ways to underground utilities for our city.

Community Development and our council has worked diligently with our residents and business community to continue to improve our Short-Term Rental regulations which will provide a higher quality of life for our residents and more enjoyable experience for our visitors.

We have successfully hired an experienced Projects and Grant Manager to help the city maximize external funding opportunities for city projects as well as help to ensure our projects are managed as efficiently as possible.

We are working with our community partners to ensure our sheriff services are properly funded for Destin.

Discussions continue to be held in public meetings regarding the viability of a multi-use community and events center in our Town Center Community Redevelopment District.

As we move into the next decade, we have made technology a top priority to further improve our business process, organizational efficiency and customer service. Our City Council and staff have made a

firm commitment to implement a comprehensive municipal management software package. Staff established a software implementation team with representatives from the Community Development, Code Compliance, Public Services, Information Technology and Finance Departments. The goal was to collaborate and find an innovative solution to improve organizational efficiency in permitting, review, inspection, code compliance and financial processes. This goal has now become a reality.

The City of Destin is now implementing a software solution – Energov, of Tyler Technologies, Inc. This is one of the largest and most comprehensive projects the city has ever undertaken. During the implementation process, IT worked with software deployment engineers to make the system available and user friendly to the city staff who will be using the new program. Through this software development, our departments are streamlining business processes. Everyone is very excited to have a new tool that will help serve the City of Destin better, more efficiently, and improve communication with the citizens of Destin. We are leaving no stone unturned as we enter 2020, the city's financial software received a major upgrade, which was completed by IT, with great success. Another major undertaking by IT was the coordination of the scanning and digitization of the Building and Planning division files. This process, as it continues into 2020, will help the city move to a paperless system and provide greater access to documents.

Council is proud of all our departments and the many other accomplishments they have made in the last year.

Code Compliance has two top priority management objectives with the goal to strengthen community outreach and gain voluntary compliance through education and awareness of our city ordinances. With a

mixture of proactive, reactive and enforcement education we have seen positive results. All code vehicles have been striped to promote visibility, light bars have been added for safety, and with support from IT, in-car computers and printers now allow our officers to be more efficient in responding to citizen concerns and spend more time engaging our citizens and visitors on our local ordinances. Community service and education is now the key focus of our code compliance department to improve the quality of life in our city.

Assisting the City Council to implement Land Use policies that enhance the quality of life and promote the economic growth of the city, is the cornerstone of the work of the Department of **Community Development**. One of management's top priority objectives, is to align the comp plan with the Land Development Code. Consistent with that goal, over the past year, the Community Development Department completed a year-long effort of aligning the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) and the Zoning Map to provide both synergy and clarity to the City Land Use policies and regulations. Now the department is turning its efforts to updating the City's Land Use Regulations to be consistent with the alignment.

Through the acquisition of new development review software, the department's planning, permitting, licensing and citizen requests will be automated and connected with a view to streamlining workflow, improving communication, and increased productivity from the office to the field operations. We are thankful for the patience and cooperation shown by the public as this system is being implemented.

Finally, notwithstanding these major system changes, the department is proud to announce that in 2019 it continued to provide the community a high level of service. The department processed a total of **53** major plan reviews, **3007** permits issued, **1602** Business Tax Receipts

issued, and **4564** inspections (*1677 Commercial and 2877 Residential*) performed to further the growth and redevelopment of the city.

For a city to run smoothly you must have a dedicated staff. One of the City's top management priorities is to balance staffing resources with expectations. The city's **Human Resources Department** was extremely busy conducting recruitment efforts, orientations and benefits enrollment. This year we replaced 17 employees due to retirements and turnover. HR has hosted team building events to boost morale, promote teamwork, and foster the core values of our organization. Focusing on employee's health HR held an annual employee health fair and partnered with entities like Fort Walton Beach Medical Center and Walgreens to cover flu shots and medical screenings for our employees and their spouses. Thus, keeping our medical costs low and our workforce healthy. Our HR department also initiated an eight-week leadership training course to our supervisory staff thanks to the partnership with the City of Fort Walton Beach and Northwest Florida State College.

As a city our strategic focus is to operate with a transparent and equitable governance of our city's finances. Council has made it a priority to ensure that we operate in a fiscally sound manner and continue to keep our millage rate as one of the lowest in the State of Florida. I want to thank our council and all our staff for their continuing attention, assistance, and cooperation regarding the financial operations of the city.

Our **Public Services Team** has done another remarkable job this year. Under their new leadership, they have been working diligently to map processes and memorialize procedures, not only to improve internal efficiencies, but also in advance of seeking Departmental Accreditation from the American Public Works Association. Public Works' Staff

completed several infrastructure assessments this year to include our pavement, sidewalks, pavement markings, signage and drainage systems.

Thanks to a 3.6 million-dollar Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund grant, the City was able to complete all initially identified storm water projects which have worked to improve the water quality in and aquatic habitat of our City's waterways, as well as mitigating those areas historically susceptible to flooding. Public Services continues to work with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to use the remaining grant funds to complete two additional projects to mitigate non-point source pollution and improve drainage from two existing outfalls that discharge into the Marler Bayou and Choctawhatchee Bay.

In addition, Public Services oversaw the recertification of our Community Rating System Program that rewards our citizens with a 20% discount on their flood insurance premiums based on a combination of factors, particularly our higher building standards, stormwater management program and drainage system maintenance.

Five major paving projects were completed this year. Gulf Shore Drive, Mattie M. Kelly Boulevard, Stahlman Avenue, Restaurant Row and a portion of Scenic 98 were all resurfaced and restriped. Scores of sections of damaged sidewalk were repaired as well.

Public Services works to keep Destin beautiful every day. This dedicated staff administers our revitalized citywide Adopt-a-Street program which has welcomed several new volunteer groups, manages our right-of-way maintenance contract, regularly operates its street sweeper, conducts an annual city-wide tree-trimming effort, is responsible for removing derelict vessels in the Destin Harbor and Joe's Bayou, maintains the harbor pumping station (which ran flawlessly this year), assists in

community events and so much more. Kudo's to the employees for their can-do attitude.

Now, moving on to the **City Clerk's Office**, who provided administrative support for 128 meetings to include City Council and 9 city committees and boards in 2019. They responded to approximately 550 public records requests and is charged with the maintenance of our records dating back to 1984 when the city was incorporated. As it pertains to the maintenance, retention, and destruction of our public records, the clerk's office does an excellent job of maintaining a viable records management program.

Our **Parks and Recreation Department** are highly valued in our city. This department and everything that they do reflects upon the quality of life of our community, contributes to our economy, our environmental well-being and ensures the health of our youth, adults and seniors. In 2019, staff installed a lighting alert system and resurfaced the walking track at Morgan Sports Complex. Tennis court renovations were completed at Buck Destin Park. Destin's first NFL youth flag football season was a success and the city hosted 18 sports tournaments. And, after many years, the original bleachers at the community center were replaced.

Not only do they bring our community together by providing programs for all age groups year-round, they provide wonderful contributions to our city, which makes our home a desirable place to live.

Our staff is working incredibly hard to bring our parks online for our residents and visitors to enjoy. The city has approximately \$8.5 million earmarked for our public beach initiative to secure permanent public beach parks and we will continue our efforts for more financial funding well into 2020. We are thinking big and going to aim high to provide as much public beach access as possible. The best kept secret is our parks

along the bay. Once work is completed and these parks are open to the public, we will have an unprecedented number of water-front parks for a city of our size to enjoy. Progress is moving forward with the new Captain Leonard Destin Park and we look forward to the park opening sometime in the spring. We hope the renovations and repairs to our existing bay side parks like Joe's Bayou Recreation Area will be completed sometime in 2020.

Our **Library** is where the love of learning takes place and where citizens young and old can come together to learn new things. In 2019, the library received 55,000 visitors. Through the year, the library hosted various reading programs, continued with its STEAM curriculum for middle school students, and during the summer, offered weekly STEAM programs for grades 1 – 5 and code camps for teens. Our summer reading program was a great success with more than 1500 patrons attending 54 programs, and special events. The staff focused on community outreach by making trips to Destin Elementary School, Destin Middle School, and Fort Walton Beach High School on orientation days to registered students for library cards and distribute information about our library services.

My heartfelt thanks go to our first responders. Whether on the road, on the sand or on the water, they truly are the lifeline for all of us in Destin. Every day they ensure Destin remains a place of peace and unity. They sacrifice weekends, holidays and time away from their families to protect ours – and for that, I am forever grateful. Thank you to the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office and the Destin Fire Control District for your partnership, for your friendship, and caring about the citizens we serve.

I would like to close by recognizing our city staff. They are creative, resourceful, and every day we see the results of their commitment to

delivering excellent services to our residents and visitors. Most of their efforts are not seen by the public and their dedication to serve this community is sometimes taken for granted and in most cases goes unnoticed. **So, I want to extend to them a great big thank you.** Thank you for what you do every day for Destin. Thank you to all our boards and committee members who give their time willingly because they care and are committed to our community. Our strength comes from you and your involvement is what makes Destin special.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the City of Destin