

2021 State of the City Speech

Mayor Gary Jarvis

Good evening and welcome to our annual State of the City.

[Recognize any officials in attendance]

- City Council:
 - Councilman Rodney Braden
 - Councilman Dewey Destin
 - Councilwoman Tere'sa Hebert
 - Councilman Johnny King
 - Councilman Skip Overdier
 - Councilwoman Prebble Ramswell
 - Councilman Kevin Schmidt
- City Staff

2020 has certainly been a challenging year that has compelled local leaders, community members and businesses alike to respond to the COVID-19 global pandemic. As I look back on all the obstacles, we have overcome in 2020, I am extremely proud of the strong leadership and resiliency of our council and staff.

Under the guidance and leadership of our city manager and deputy city manager, staff continues to work hard to help ensure we can accomplish our goals and objectives in these difficult times. During our visioning session, City Council and staff reviewed accomplishments, current projects, potential initiatives and refining a vision for Destin's future.

Tonight, we will reflect on the actions our City Council and staff have taken as well as the new services we have offered to ensure the safety of our community as well as our achievements and vision for the future of Destin. Throughout this past year, amidst a Pandemic, our entire Destin Team has worked together to create a vision for this City, and this vision became an ambitious strategic plan for 2020. This annual strategic plan provides all team members the guidance they need on prioritizing current and future initiatives and projects throughout the organization. This plan also focuses on protecting and enhancing our Destin brand. We are well on our way in accomplishing many of the objectives in our strategic plan as we move into 2021.

The Destin City Council #1 objective has been an extremely bold beach acquisition initiative. We started with a \$2 million dollar commitment by our City Council and now have over \$22 million committed, most of the acquisition funding coming from tourist tax dollars. We have achieved great success in acquiring two beach parcels with a third parcel in the works to expand the Shore at Crystal Beach Park. The most exciting news is we are not done. We continue to

work with the Trust for Public Land to acquire additional gulf-front property. Additionally, we continue to seek external funding sources for future acquisitions that will be forever entrusted for public use. I would like to recognize all the hard work and thank the partnerships we have established between the City of Destin, Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners, Okaloosa County Tourist Development Council, and the Trust for Public Land.

The Information Technology, Community Development, and Code Compliance departments have been hard at work to implement COMPASS (**COM**munity **P**ermitting **A**nd **S**upport System). This EnerGov system is on target to go live in early 2021 and will provide operational transparency to customers and the public. Our City staff has put in hundreds of hours into this program on top of their normal duty requirement. COMPASS will allow our customers access a self-service portal to submit digital applications online and view the status of applications as well as the results of building inspections. Thus, eliminating the need for customers to submit paper applications and plan sets.

In March of 2020, we hired a **projects/grants/and contracts manager**, who has done a tremendous job in streamlining how we manage city projects by creating a project review team to help improve project implementation. And has tackled the huge challenge of overseeing the cities grants, contracts, and managing about \$41 million dollars in external funding over the next few years.

Daily, our **city clerk** staff is in constant communication with our citizenry to help assist in their needs, responds to a significant number of public records requests and working with IT to allow us to continue to virtually host many of our public meetings in the COVID-19 world. And hard at work orienting our new council and committee members to their new positions.

Finance, this department is building a financial system that will drastically improve how we are able to plan, process and deliver services to our internal and external customers. Their goal is a more transparent government for our residents. Our finance director and staff are working hard to align our budget process to work in harmony with our strategic goals and objectives.

Human Resources (HR) continues to work tirelessly to recruit and retain talent as well as to help facilitate constant change in this new world. HR is also currently studying the market to ensure our compensation packages are competitive with similar cities. In 2020, one of HR's greatest challenges was keeping our staff safe during this Pandemic and to keep the City open for business. They accomplished this by developing Business Operations Guidance & Telecommuting policies to assist in preventing workplace risk and exposures due to COVID-19. By focusing on employee's health, near and long term it helps the City keep our medical costs low and our workforce healthy.

Our **IT Department** and **Public Information** Office continue to be innovative and serve not only our organization but serve our community as well. Both departments are working extremely hard to keep the public informed with the many changes taking place. They have also been instrumental in the unveiling of the City's new and improved website by adding additional features to share news and updates with the public we serve.

The **Community Development** Staff accomplished two of the major strategic goals of the City Council. First, they successfully completed the alignment of the City's Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map (FLUM), and Zoning Map. Second, they have completed the preparation of the City's Wayfinding Master Plan – which is the cornerstone of City Council's strategic goal of creating the Destin Brand.

In addition, they have been key, along with the City Land Use Attorney, with development of ordinances to include regulating the heights of buildings in the City; and protecting the City's right of ways (ROW) with waterfronts – to preserve and enhance the City's unique waterfront and beach views.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, Community Development staff implemented innovative ways to continue to provide the full range of development services to the residents and development community of the City,

The Department is proud to note that in 2020 they processed a total of:

41 Major Plan Reviews (Development Orders)

2,932 Permits Issued

1,977 Business Tax Receipts (Active)

4,482 Inspections Performed

Total Valuation of Permits and Projects: \$98,526,951.37

In 2021, the Community Development staff has two important initiatives. First, they will be implementing the automation of the Community Development Project Review and Permitting Processes, which will help making development processes seamless and user friendly for the development community and residents. Second, the staff will be undertaking a complete update of the City's Land Development Code (LDC) – aimed at updating the City's development standards and requirements, so that they dovetail with the City's development vision in the Comprehensive Plan.

Community Development staff are also working hard to implement the City's strategic plan, updating the City's stormwater master plan and the undergrounding of the City's utility lines. In addition, the staff is also overseeing the redesign of the Crosstown Connector from a 4-lane to a 2-lane roadway facility.

Despite dealing with unique operational and external challenges, the Community Development Department continues to provide development services to the residents of this great City.

Code Compliance continues to increase the quality of life of Destin residents and visitors by strengthening our community outreach and gaining voluntary compliance through education of all city ordinances. To provide for the safety, health, and welfare of our citizens, this department has increased staffing; and all are seeking to become dual certified Florida Code Officers and parking enforcement specialists. In 2020, Code Compliance responded to over 13,000 calls for service relating to land use, rental registrations, harbor and waterways, livery vessels, beach

management and parking compliance to name a few. In addition to our harbor patrol, Code Compliance added a night shift officer during peak times. Overall, we are maintaining a 90% compliance rate.

The Public Works Department act as stewards of our beautiful City and promotes the safety of its citizens and our visitors through the ongoing maintenance and improvement of our critical infrastructure. Public Works staff have forecasted needed improvements over the next 5 years to include building upgrades, parking improvements, road resurfacing, road restriping and works to fulfill the City's strategic goal of having a walkable and bike-able community by the additions of new and widened pathways.

This department is also busy overseeing studies to improve pedestrian safety and traffic flow within our City and they coordinate our Adopt-A-Street program that encourages citizen involvement. Public works also is instrumental in hurricane preparations to ensure our community is ready in the event of a natural disaster and are responsible for monitoring water quality to protect and preserve our natural resources.

Regardless of COVID, our **library** has found ways to serve our community. During the summer, the library initiated curbside service where staff curated grab bags of materials, specifically age tailored for patrons to pick-up, they created interactive and self-directed educational programs to help people while social distancing and provided virtual story time. Staff added new online resources such as the Encyclopedia Britannica to make information available 24/7. To improve library operations, staff submitted a grant application to the Institute for Museum and Library Services and was awarded over \$75,000 in funding to update the library's technology.

Soon the Library will have kiosks that patrons can use to self-checkout books and Samsung tablets for faster service and to improve social distancing. The library's tag line is "Empowering Possibilities" and always striving to be an integral part of Destin.

Parks and Recreation continues to find ways to ensure our residents and visitors can access safe but fun environments where for many, exercise and being outdoors is a distraction from day-to-day isolation. Staff has been instrumental in providing new recreational components to enhance the City's brand and working hard to maintain all our beautiful parks. We are excited about our newest park – Captain Leonard Destin and look forward to the redevelopment of Joe's Bayou, development of Captain Royal Melvin Heritage Park, the renovation of Clement Taylor Park and Phase III addition of recreational components to Norriego Point Park, so stay tuned!

Each year, council, staff, and the public, have the opportunity to collaborate during a visioning session, which give us the opportunity to refine the direction of the City. We will now embark on a strategic plan for 2021. As we move forward with our priorities in 2021, we will continue our ambitious public beach initiative and will launch our Compass System to improve customer service. As we see our vision into the future, we will focus at opportunities for a city center, the viability of a City marina and continue to support our amazing City staff. I want to recognize and thank TEAM DESTIN made up of our council, administration, staff, volunteers, and committee members for their dedication to making Destin a better place to live, work and play.

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.

We have overcome major challenges, and it's all because of Team Destin. We've faced new challenges and overcome them with efficiency and excellence. Through perseverance, teamwork, fresh "out of the box" concepts and ideas, and new technology, Destin is continually striving forward and will be an organization that others will look to as an example.

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