

2022 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 Jim Bagby
 - Councilman Rodney Braden
 - Councilman and Mayor Pro Tem Dewey Destin
 - Councilwoman Tere'sa Hebert
 - Councilman Johnny King
 - Councilman Kevin Schmidt
 - Councilman Bobby Wagner
- City Staff
- Members of the public

Through the strategic planning process, Council has established a **vision statement**, which is the **anchor point** of the City's **strategic plan**. This statement outlines what an organization would like to ultimately achieve and gives purpose to the mission of our city.

Our Vision statement that our council members have established: "DESTIN IS A FAMILY-ORIENTED BEACH AND FISHING COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE, WORK & PLAY AND WHERE VISITORS ARE WELCOMED TO RESPECTFULLY ENJOY OUR COMMUNITY AND ITS RESOURCES."

This statement embodies the plan that is vital for our city because it ensures that the priorities set by the City Council are conveyed in the organization's goals and strategies and are clearly developed to meet those goals to ensure we are meeting our community's needs.

In addition to our vision statement, council prioritized our **Key Customer Groups** to provide guidance for **city priorities**. These **customer groups** are in priority order:

1.) Year-Round Residents

2.) Destin-based businesses

3.) Visitors

Our strategic plan fuels the strategic management process, which is how we will achieve these **strategic goals**.

- **Financially sound city providing service excellence**
- **Enhanced quality of life and safety for families**
- **Economic development and revitalization**
- **Improve mobility and connectivity**
- **Effective, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure**
- **A green and sustainable environment**

From these established goals, council established these objectives for the organization to focus on for 2021. These are in priority order:

To help accomplish the goal of a financially sound city providing service excellence, Council's **top priority objective** within the strategic plan is **to offer livable wages and benefits to attract and maintain high caliber, qualified staff**. Council and staff have worked through the budgeting process to ensure this top priority objective could be achieved so that Destin can recruit and retain our most important resources, our employees.

Thanks to the leadership of our city manager, deputy city manager and Council, a 5% COLA and up to a 2% merit increase was approved to help our staff meet the rising pressure of inflation. Council also approved a one-time longevity award for long-term eligible employees. The **Human Resources** staff was able to negotiate a new health insurance plan, providing increased benefits at more affordable rates. This was just one way the City Council and administration is following through in our commitment to our staff by reducing costs for our employees and expanding limited health care benefits to our part-time workers. We want to ensure that we can strategically attract, engage, and retain the talent within our city government. The compensation study is nearing completion and our consultant plans to bring it before council in March.

Another strategic goal is to improve **mobility** and **connectivity** in Destin. We are helping to meet that goal through the council objective of the **two-lane crosstown connector**. We all know what it is like to travel throughout our city, especially during the busy, tourist season. This project is designed to be an alternative road for our residents to access city amenities within Destin. Just last meeting, the City Council voted to proceed with property acquisitions and to continue to keep pressing forward in the design of this important project. The design, engineering, and right-of-way acquisition is slated for completion in FY2025.

Another effort to **improve mobility** and **connectivity**, as well as **safety** for our residents and visitors, is our council established an objective to design a pedestrian pathway underneath the Marler bridge. Council approved a conceptual plan for this project and staff is working with the

Florida Department of Transportation on future options for safe pedestrian pathways in that area.

The city received over six million dollars in grant revenue in fiscal year 2021, those grant revenues represented over 26% of the City's total revenue. Our **Projects, Grants and Contracts Manager** has worked on a 5-year projection for grant revenue exceeding 27 million dollars. Projects like the Norriego Point Improvements and the Joes Bayou Recreation Area Improvements are funded through the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and are not reflected in the before mentioned revenue numbers. The cost of both projects combined will total more than 30 million dollars leaving Destin's residents and visitors with two legacy parks and providing a substantial boost to our local economy. The city maintains an excellent relationship with local, state, and federal agencies which makes the grant awards at these levels possible. It is our goal to continue these strong relationships and to expand the grant funding as new opportunities become available.

Enhanced **quality of life** and **safety for our families** as well a green and sustainable environment is another strategic goal for the city. The city has established a very ambitious objective with a public beachfront acquisition initiative. This is now a reality thanks to the hard work and partnership between the city, Okaloosa County Board of County Commissioners, Okaloosa County Tourist Development Council, and the Trust for Public Land. We started with \$2 million as a commitment to acquire beach front property and now have over 22 million committed, with most of the funding coming from tourist tax dollars. So far, we have bought back over 100 feet of beach for public use in the Crystal Beach area. The exciting news is this initiative is going to provide even more public beach front access that will remain in our community forever. Our efforts to expand our beach access, open space and **preserve** our beachfront for Destin will continue well into the future.

Another strategic goal is to have effective, efficient, and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure. To accomplish this, our council and staff is in the process to underground utilities within the city. We have negotiated a new franchise agreement with Florida Power and Light that will allow us to move forward with undergrounding utilities along Highway 98 and throughout the city. By moving utility lines underground, this project will beautify the area and protect the lines from storm-caused power outages. **Hardening our infrastructure** to protect our homes and businesses and **reduce the loss of power** is a big win for us. This project is going to take 10 to 15 years and a substantial investment but is a worthwhile endeavor for our city to **improve safety, better reliability, and create an unobstructed gateway throughout Destin**. Staff and Council is working hard to find as many external funding and grant sources as possible to help fund this important project.

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Florida Department of Transportation **on future options for safe pedestrian pathways in that area.**

At this time, I'd like to briefly review some highlights of our departments and how they are helping to accomplish the strategic goals and objectives council has established for our city government.

This past year the **Community Development Department** was focused on improvements in three key metrics in the delivery of their services. These metrics are customer service, productivity, and quality of life projects. The Department has now fully implemented the new COMPASS software system. The early results of this implementation are already showing substantial improvement in customer service. The COMPASS portal enables residents, developers, contractors, and business owners to easily apply for their building permit, development, business tax receipts and engineering applications from their computer in the comfort of their home or office. They can submit necessary documents, track the progress, pay invoices, and receive final documentation via the COMPASS portal without calling or making a trip to the City Hall Annex. Furthermore, the average turnaround time between application submittal and permit issuance for permits and business tax receipts has improved by 80%.

With respect to productivity, the volume of permit application submittals has risen from 1,679 prior to COMPASS to 2,095, that is a 25% increase since the implementation of COMPASS. In addition, the department processed 61 development orders, 771 building permits and completed over 5,169 inspections. Our department continues to work on projects that have direct ties to accomplishing the City's strategic goals of connectivity and safety of our community like the preparation of the Mobility Plan and the redesign of the Cross-Town Connector; as well as the Stormwater Master Plan to address flood prone areas in the city.

Thanks to the leadership of our community development staff and land use attorney, the city is accomplishing the strategic goal of economic development and revitalization by aligning the City's Comprehensive Plan, Future Land Use Map and Zoning Map, which will guide Destin's future development and redevelopment. In addition, the completion of the Harbor Capacity Study will guide our council on ways to enhance the economic vitality and safety of the Destin Harbor. Staff has completed the preparation of the City's Wayfinding Master Plan, which will help our city define the Destin Brand. This initiative is more than just creating a logo or signage, it will produce results that will represent the City's **heritage, soul, and character.**

I personally want to thank the entire staff and leadership of the Community Development Department for their commitment to excellence in all areas of the department's goal of providing consistent, efficient, and high value customer service to the residents of Destin.

Our Code Compliance Department has been working diligently to create a culture of professionalism and individual commitment to improve the quality of life of Destin residents. Starting with a focused effort to gain voluntary compliance through the education of all city codes and ordinances. To provide for the **safety, health, and welfare** of our citizens and visitors

alike, the department has increased staffing; and all officers will become dual certified Florida Code Compliance Officers and Parking Enforcement Specialists. In 2021, our Code Compliance Department addressed almost 10,000 Code Compliance case activities, which is down from almost 14,000 in 2020. This proves that compliance efforts and the education of our city codes is working.

Code's proactive and reactive efforts range from land use and harbor and waterways compliance issues to short-term rental/ long-term rentals, livery vessel, and beach vendor registrations. In addition, code compliance handles beach management and parking compliance activities and much more. Code has also established a designated Patrol Division, Beach, Harbor and Waterways Division, and Registration Division within the Code Compliance Department. The newly created Registration Division and the new Compass software has accelerated our city's registration process. Overall, Code Compliance is maintaining a 90% compliance rate and providing service excellence for our community.

Keeping our citizens informed and communicating what the city is doing is the key role of our **Public Information Manager**. She has done an excellent job enhancing our community and media relations, increasing social media engagement on city platforms, **strengthening relationships** with our strategic partners and most importantly, is a reliable source of information for our residents, businesses, and visitors. In 2021, we had over 368,000 visits to our website and our social media exposure is growing. We also had a **broader outreach** through traditional media and had over 172 stories covered by local and regional media outlets. We will continue to stay at the **forefront** of our communication efforts in this digital age, adapt to new trends, be innovative, to ensure Destin is promoted and highlighted in a positive way as we move forward into the future.

The **City Clerk's Office** worked diligently with Municipal Code Corporation to streamline the ordinance codification process. Processing time for ordinances enacted by the city council was reduced from 6 weeks to less than 3 weeks on average. The volume and diversity of public records requests filed with the city continues to increase and technology has played a key part in allowing staff to be more **transparent**, while providing a **quicker response** in fulfilling record requests. In 2020, staff received 388 public records requests. In 2021, 502 requests were made, and staff was able to fulfill those requests within 3 days of receipt, **94%** of the time.

The **Finance Department** is helping us to remain a **financially sound** city by re-financing several loans in 2021 which will result in \$400k less interest payments over the next seven years. With assistance from other departments, our finance department set up continuing service contract prices in MUNIS to speed up PO issuance and invoice reviews. Staff has worked diligently to re-organize the accounting system to improve transparency and timeliness of reporting, especially for restricted funds. With a fiscal budget totaling over \$34 million dollars, the City Council has continued to **keep taxes low for Destin residents**, while providing service excellence to our residents, businesses, and visitors.

The **Public Works Department** act as stewards of our beautiful city by helping to achieve the strategic goal of “**an enhanced quality of life and safety for families,**” as well as “**providing effective, efficient and aesthetically pleasing infrastructure**” through the ongoing maintenance of, and improvements to, our critical infrastructure. This department provides services to our community and organization in five key functional areas: Pavement Management, Stormwater Management, Beautification, Facilities and Fleet Maintenance, and Emergency Management. Speaking of Emergency Management, our Public Works Department takes a leadership role in all four areas of the City’s Emergency Management Program that include: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery. It is the objective of these four mission areas to **ensure that our community is ready before, during, and after a natural disaster.**

A few of their many successes experienced during the past year include the completion of the Zerbe-Calhoun Pedestrian Improvements Project Phase I that came in \$90,000 dollars under budget. They completed 1,282 work orders from the five key functional areas. Staff inspected 889 storm sewer system components which contributes to proper operation of our drainage systems during severe weather events. Finally, to help keep a green and sustainable environment the Destin Harbor Pump, in operation since 1992, was completely rebuilt, an arduous process that took over six months. This represents a small sample of what this department does, and I would like to thank the men and women of our Public Works Department for their diligence and commitment to Team Destin and recognize how truly thankful we all are for their many contributions to our community.

In 2021, the **IT Department** continued to face many challenges, as well as achieving many accomplishments, to provide service excellence to our departments and for our city. With the assistance of our help desk technician and the use of our ticketing software, processes that flow across the city regarding service requests, such as onboarding, termination/separation, general service requests, phone system support, and other IT related functions, continue to be enhanced and streamlined. The City’s help desk ticket system has become the department’s best tool for monitoring and maintaining service levels. This year, IT handled over 1100 help desk tickets in 2021, which is a 34% increase over the previous year. This departmental tool is **critical to providing excellent customer service and improved response time** for service requests.

One of the key accomplishments in 2021, was COMPASS, which I spoke of a few moments ago. IT remains a **vital role** in this project, and they have worked hard to successfully implement COMPASS into the city’s information technology ecosystem. In fact, they fielded 102 help desk tickets on COMPASS since its inception. IT remains instrumental in making mobile computing and telework a viable option for city employees. Maintaining access to city services and applications for employees while off-site continues to be a top priority by the department. This is still a critical part in the way the city can conduct business during uncertain times as well as in emergency situations.

The **Destin Library** continually updates and adjusts the library's collections, space, and programs to provide the best possible experience for patrons as a vital cornerstone of the Destin community. 2021 saw many new technology items added to include a self-service kiosk that makes checking out materials, paying for copies, and printouts more convenient, thus **improving customer service** and **providing quick, accessible means** for library patrons. The library has always had public access computers, but now they have added a tablet station with six Samsung tablets that library cardholders can use anywhere in the library and connect to the internet. Furthermore, the Okaloosa County Public Library Cooperative has switched its member libraries to a new operating system software, public access catalog, and events calendar for an updated, easier to use website interface.

Even with the pandemic, the Destin community enjoys its Library services. For example, 32% of Destin's population has library cards. Additionally, the Library's physical and digital books circulation increased to 76,600 in FY2021, 10% higher than the previous year. Lastly, the Library wishes to acknowledge the support of the Friends Guild of the Destin Library, who generously provided the funds for the new furniture in the young adult area and are helping with funding for the remodel in the children's section to be completed in 2022.

Our **Parks Department** staff made significant improvements at the Nancy Weidenhamer Dog Park with Destin Forward as a Co-Sponsor, to include sod, mulch, and two dog agility pieces. As noted earlier, we expanded beach access at the Shore at Crystal Beach, which staff maintains, and they rebuilt the handicap ramp to the Clement Taylor Park Pier. The Harbor Boardwalk replacement project is in progress with installation of new "Wear Deck" for the entire boardwalk and is scheduled for completion in 2022. The city hosted a ribbon cutting and official grand opening of Captain Leonard Destin Park and a ground-breaking ceremony took place at the Shore at Crystal Beach Park expansion. We also had the grand opening of the city's very first high school. These are critical milestones that continue to lay a **strong foundation** for our **growing community** by **enhancing the quality of life for our families**.

After opening the city's newest park, Captain Leonard Destin, Hurricane Sally, left behind significant damage. Park and Public Works staff moved 240 cubic tons of sand (that is 16 dump trucks full) and repaired the beach erosion as well as the walking paths, seawall, and irrigation. Also, some of the docks at Joe's Bayou were impacted by Sally. Bids for repair were extremely high and staff made the decision to have the repair work initiated internally by our Public Works and Parks and Recreation staff. Despite weather and material shortages, staff completed the project in time for the busy season. This was **great teamwork** and **innovation** by our staff, and we commend them for their efforts!

If you visited one of our green spaces, participated in one of our many recreation programs or attended one of our events, you have seen the **positive impacts** our **Recreation Department** has here in Destin. Sports tourism continues to grow in our area through the strong partnerships with our renters to provide top-notch adult and youth tournaments. We hosted 12 tournaments in 2021, which brought over 100,000 visitors and participants to Morgan Sports

Center. Staff replaced the 4 scoreboards at Morgan's and in partnership with Destin Water Users, reclaimed water was added to the Destin Sports Complex, which staff is working with Destin High School's Athletic Department for field space.

Flag Football, which started in 2019, has been a huge success. This program has doubled its participants with 224 players in 2021. Recreation staff worked year-round spearheading 261 programs throughout the year with nearly 30,000 participants. We love the engagement of our Destin Seniors who stay active at Buck Destin Park. We know Pickleball is very popular, and we are looking for alternatives to provide more pickleball courts in Destin. Staff always strives to improve upon existing programs and services that **promote quality of health, connect the community**, and impact the local economy in a prosperous way, but with that success also comes challenges. Our recreation amenities are at capacity, and we are looking at alternatives of what we can do for our future to give our community the recreational experience they deserve.

I would like to acknowledge all our **hard-working** staff who display the utmost professionalism and have built so many positive relationships in this community. You all are on the front lines every day as **public servants**, which is more than just a job, it's a calling. Every day we see the results of their commitment to Destin by providing service excellence for not only to our residents but to tourists as well. This City depends on **YOU** and we greatly appreciate everything you do.

The next group of folks I would like to recognize and thank are the men, women and leadership of the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, these folks are true public servants. They work long hours to include nights, weekends, and holidays. These dedicated professionals spend a great deal of time away from their families and risk their lives to protect ours.

The Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office has implemented a Community Resource Deputy, specifically dedicated to Destin. This position will be a great asset to our community to further develop strong bonds and liaison with our local businesses and neighborhoods to address issues of concern and find solutions together. In 2021, the Sheriff's Office made 83 arrests for boating under the influence. For the third year in a row, Okaloosa County is ranked #1 in the State of Florida for boating under the influence arrests. Due to the efforts of our deputies, they saw a significant decrease from 25 boat crashes with injuries in 2020 to 14 in 2021. This was attributed to targeted media, partnering with the local liveries to spread information about the dangers and consequences of boating under the influence, participated in Operation Dry Water, which is a national effort to curb BUI's, and participated in the Designated Skipper Campaign which is a national program through the Sea Tow Foundation.

Another key component of our public safety is the Destin Fire Control District. The district just opened a new station off Calhoun Avenue in July, which will house their newly purchased Engine 19 once it arrives. They secured several grants, one being the Port Authority Grant, which will provide the fire department with a 42' fire boat with more enhanced capabilities to

handle any of the vast fishing fleet or large condos on the water here in our area. They also added a type I Technical Rescue Team, where they can handle all types of advanced rescues from confined space emergencies to building collapse rescues. They are the only team of this level north of Orlando that has this type of certification and training. During the 2021 season the Beach Safety Division aided with over 157,000 preventative acts, rescued 403 people, and responded to 67 major medical incidents.

To our first responders, thank you for your **devotion, bravery, service, and commitment to the safety of our city**, our residents as well as our visitors – not just today, but every day.

Please join me in sharing your thanks and recognition to our outstanding city employees and first responders **-CLAPPING-**

Destin's vision and strategic planning is a collaborative effort across our community. This is the opportunity for our businesses and our residents to work with city staff and our council members to shape the future of Destin. What's great about visioning and strategic planning is that it gives us an opportunity to understand what the community needs, and we get to work together to accomplish that.

To facilitate this planning the Community Development Department is beginning a major public engagement effort to involve our citizens and community partners that will allow us to usher in a unified community development vision. The list of projects currently being worked on includes the Land Development Code update, Harbor Capacity Study, Mobility Plan, Impact Fee program update, and Comprehensive Plan updates. The Council and I highly recommend that, our resident families and the development partners in the city, take time to be part of this effort and help shape the recommendations that will come for Council consideration tomorrow, February 23rd.

Destin is led by a committed and volunteer council who generously give of their time because they are passionate about Destin. They work hard. They work for **FREE**. They have been diligent in investing in Destin's future by **focusing on common goals** and at times, **making difficult decisions on challenging issues**. Our council seeks community input and gives our residents the opportunity to share how they want to see our city evolve in the years to come. It will take all of us to develop a great plan where future generations of Destin will continue to live, work, and play in the place that we love.

During my tenure, **my goal was to maintain the integrity and heritage that Destin was built upon** and to achieve the objectives set within our strategic plan. And, also have shorter meetings...which we achieved some of the time. In all seriousness, my main vision was to **maintain the heritage of our city because if we ever lose our heritage, we're going to lose our identity**. Despite our beautiful beaches, shopping, recreational activities, and the tremendous growth we are experiencing in this great community, the **heritage of Destin needs to remain above all**. How it was founded, the fishermen and their families that made it grow, the integrity and hard work they imparted on generation after generation **is what separates us from every**

other community in the United States, and we need to hold on to that sentiment. We need to espouse and highlight these values as we move forward in everything we say and do. Our heritage is what defines a community, and it takes a community to achieve our vision.

The vision of DESTIN being **A FAMILY- ORIENTED BEACH AND FISHING COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE, WORK & PLAY AND WHERE VISITORS ARE WELCOMED TO RESPECTFULLY ENJOY OUR COMMUNITY AND ITS RESOURCES.**

It has been an **honor to serve** as your mayor and I will be forever grateful for the **trust** you placed in me.

God bless each of you and God Bless the Luckiest Fishing Village in the World.

Thank you.