

Norman mayor reflects on 2018

Happy holidays! And I hope it has been a good one for everyone. The ending of one year and the beginning of another is a time of reflection for me, as I'm sure it is for many of you.

I ask myself, as mayor, have I accomplished what I set out to accomplish? And what have I not done that is needed? I look back over 2018 and am pleased with the numerous accomplishments of the Council, staff, and volunteers. I will highlight a few.

Some important infrastructure projects were completed including the most expensive single road project in the city's history: Lindsey Street from I-35 to Imhoff Creek. It was often difficult for the businesses and the neighbors, but the completed project is one of which we all can be proud.

The Main Street streetscape project was also finished and our downtown area should continue to improve with the rezoning of the Center City area and the \$44 million TIF put in place for infrastructure upgrades.

In east Norman, the county, the city, and the federal government, through CDBG funding, cooperated on a \$23 million project improving roads and bridge.

Our water treatment facility continued to expand to insure a sustainable water supply for our residents. These improvements, plus the construction of several new wells, were recommendations of the 2014 Strategic Water Supply Plan, and we will soon begin a pilot study on the impacts of indirect potable reuse on the lake.

Several Norman Forward projects progressed with the opening of Westwood Family Fun Park and the Eastside Library. Griffin soccer fields got a number of upgrades. We broke ground on the indoor tennis facility, and the downtown library continued to take shape. We worked all year with our partners at the University and the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health to secure land for other Norman Forward projects, such as the aquatic center, the multi-sports facility and the senior center. A recently negotiated Memorandum of Understanding with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health will secure a long-term lease on the Griffin Soccer Complex land, providing a funding option for the senior center.

Economic Development is critical for the sustainable growth of our city, and three members of our council participated with community partners and a consultant on a long-term strategic plan for future economic development. We learned a lot about our community's assets and liabilities.

Now we need to implement our action plans. We know what the plan says. The question is what kind of development do we want and what are we willing to pay for? There is a lot of competition right now to attract businesses that provide good jobs. Are we doing enough? Based on the study the answer is "no".

Our Stormwater Citizens Committee has worked for over a year educating themselves on the issues and crafting a solution for the maintenance and upgrading of our stormwater infrastructure.

They delivered a choice of options to the council last April and spent the summer doing open houses in all parts of the city. Based on the information they collected at the open houses and through surveying, they have narrowed their recommendations. Now it is up to us to decide what to put on an April ballot.

As we look back at some of these important accomplishments we see that there are still important challenges. We need to bring a transportation bond issue back to the voters in April, and hope to include a bond for stormwater projects as well.

We still need to take action on funding the senior center and securing the land from the University for that and the aquatic center and the multi-sport center. We need to fill our budget hole, and the majority of council members want to end the UNP TIF.

Then there is the issue of the CART and how we maintain transit services for our residents.

Finally, we have important staffing decisions to make. Most pressing is the choice for a new city manager. The replacement of our city manager is critical and with the help of a consultant that process is now underway. We will also need to replace City Attorney Jeff Bryant when he departs after the holidays.

Personally, I believe his loss comes at a great cost to the city. We are losing a professional with 32 years of experience, institutional knowledge and a passion for his job. I will miss him and wish him and his family the very best.

Thanks for letting me be your mayor, and may 2019 be the best year ever.



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