



## **INTRODUCTION**

Good morning, everyone. Let me begin by saying thank you for coming to this year's State of the City Address. It's always uplifting to see how many people are interested in their community. My good friend Irv, has introduced our visiting elected officials and VIPS, so in the interest of time, let me simply say once again to all of you, welcome. And I would like to say early thank you to all of the staff who put this together.

I have really enjoyed serving as your Mayor. I learned a lot between the election and my first "State of the City Address" a year ago, I've learned even more since then. I have a more detailed understanding of the challenges we face, but the satisfaction of working with and meeting great people continues to make this a wonderful position. I have found we live in a community of unsung heroes who daily and quietly contribute to the betterment of our city.

Now, you can't serve as Mayor without the people around you. The support from my family is incredible. My Council colleagues have been great. That's not to say we don't have different perspectives on individual issues, but we all have a very strong and very common bond, which is our love for Escondido and our desire to serve the residents of this great City.

And I cannot even begin to describe how much I've learned to appreciate the professional staff that run our City. We're fortunate to have a City Manager that is an encyclopedia of knowledge and organizational history, as well as having a great sense of humor, which you need on occasion. He and our team of department heads are incredibly passionate about keeping Escondido safe, clean, and efficiently run. They work tirelessly to spend our tax dollars wisely. It is a colossal amount of work to run a full-service City of 152,000 spread over 37.5 square miles on a day to day basis. You know there are 8 states that don't have a city as large as Escondido. I would ask that our City Manager, Deputy and Assistant City Manager and Department Heads stand up. And now any other city employee in the room.



## **A FEW ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

I would be remiss if I didn't share a little bit of what the team accomplished during this past year. Housing is always a big topic, and our City approved 526 new units which are part of 28 entitled residential projects and with a grand total of 1,303 units approved for construction. We have 13 more residential projects under review with a total of 1,497 units involved. Yes, Escondido is doing its part to provide places for our residents to live.

At the same time, we remain poised to become a local leader in climate action planning by adopting 2035 targets for emissions reductions (all other cities except for San Diego rely on 2030 targets which means that our plan will be even more trail blazing than those of our neighboring cities). Our City Council has been working on plans and standards that will lead by example.

I like to say that our City is the "gateway to the back country" with incredible opportunities for hiking, fishing, bicycling and enjoying nature. In furtherance of our commitment to our resident's health and wellness, I'm proud to announce a new partnership with REI. Beginning this quarter, REI will begin providing recreational outdoor programming opportunities at Dixon Lake and Daley Ranch. Enhancing the quality of life for our residents has also occurred by connecting neighborhoods through improvements to the Escondido Creek Trail, including completion of the Missing Link bikeway project and enhancements to Creek Trail Crossings.

We have embraced technology in ways that make a tangible difference. Net File – Increased transparency through electronic campaign filings that are available to the public through the City's website. Next Request – Increased transparency through an online platform that enables citizens to search for and request public records through the City's website. Our management team has rolled out Cityworks across multiple departments and divisions this year, which means you can renew and pay business license fees online. We received accolades from the software industry for the practical application of their products in keeping the City graffiti free--- any resident can download the Report It app, report the condition, and it will be addressed within hours.



While we took a little flack for re-locating the facility from Washington & Ash to the industrial area, our Membrane Filtration Reverse Osmosis plant continues to move along, taking Escondido one step closer to water independence. We've received ongoing support from the State and Federal governments in the form of low-interest loans and grants which will save our ratepayers tens-of-millions of dollars over the next 20 years.

The Escondido Police Department works tirelessly to protect our community. Our crime rate is the lowest it has been since the 1980's. Last year, our Fire Department responded to nearly 16,000 calls for fire, rescue and emergency medical assistance. That is 22% more emergency calls than they handled just six years ago when our fire stations had the same number of firefighters and six more paramedics. Advanced technology has enabled our dispatchers to send the closest resource to emergencies using GPS locations.

Addressing quality of life problems in our community, such as homelessness, continues to be a priority. In 2019 alone, we helped over 60 homeless residents get off the street by connecting them with services and resources or by helping them reconnect with members of their family. The impact to families and those individuals is enormous. We recognize that the cycle of arresting, releasing and arresting does not do much in the long run. We are willing to go the extra mile, and to also address addiction and mental health. We have strong partnerships with social services providers and are proud to have the County's Live Well Center as a clean, attractive addition to Mission Avenue where more than 500 dedicated people are employed to help others.

The City is efficiently managing and improving its infrastructure: including resurfacing of over 98-lane miles of roadway, widening of major roadways including East Valley Parkway and El Norte Parkway, retrofitting 750 street lights with energy efficient LED, rehabilitating over 2,000- feet of storm drains and making major renovations to Washington Park through a grant. Our first "smart signal" made its debut last month and our goal is to have them at every signalized intersection in the City.



## **CHANGING THE NARRATIVE - ATTITUDE**

One of the most significant themes for me has simply been to “change the narrative.” What does that mean? That means we’re going to talk (really brag) about Escondido. The City is bigger, better and more dynamic than we give it credit. All you have to do is look around and see what we have to offer in culture, sports, and education to name a few. What city has the unique combination of an open mic for opera and the largest Future Farmers of America chapter in the county, coupled to international artists that attract world tourists. No one.

On top of that, our natural landscape, location and topography also bring a unique edge to Escondido. We are the gateway to a rich, diverse and open back country!

And we embrace our agricultural roots. It makes us good stewards of the land and by extension environmentalists, fiscally prudent, and hard workers committed to smart growth. We all know that Agriculture creates community and pride. And that sense of community has been with us from the beginning of this city. Here is a simple example - when prohibition was enacted, Escondido was still growing grapes and had a vibrant wine industry. A fire caused 9000 gallons of wine to flow down the street. It was reported that helpful residents filled any and all containers at hand. Now that’s community!

## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT call to action**

A second major theme has been community engagement. In the fall of 2018, the City abolished the outdated and ineffective Community Services Commission. Shortly after my election, many encouraged me to not only



resurrect old commissions, but to establish a range of new boards and commissions. I didn't want to go down that path---it seemed just like more bureaucracy to me, and I didn't think our residents should have to jump through so many hoops simply to participate in local government.

So again, working with our team of professionals we developed a Community Advisory Group model. This year the community came together and formed six committees to address the challenges of the city. Those committees are Health and Healthy Living; Recreation and Youth Activities, Homelessness and Housing, Economic Development and Agriculture; Climate Action and Environment; and Arts and Culture. Out of those partnerships and civic engagement emerged many ideas...we have folks now working on creating an Escondido Orchestra, building an Escondido Agricultural Museum, and hosting an Escondido Winefest. We had folks put on the inaugural Veterans Day Parade. Additionally, City staff have ramped up their outreach and engagement efforts with the community by hosting and participating in more than 311 outreach events in 2019 – a 24.9% increase over 2018.

There are two other areas where I have tried to do my own part to engage with our community. The Mayor gets invited to countless activities. I have been invited to openings, ribbon cuttings and tours of the city's organizations. I've been at Scouting's Eagle Honor Courts, Christmas parties for kids, fundraisers, dinners for the Chamber, and so on. I try to get out there and represent the City and I take that role very seriously. When I see how much goes on in this community, it's really very impressive.

Secondly, I try to engage through a little of my own outreach. I quickly reached a great relationship with both Supervisor Gaspar and Supervisor Desmond. I meet regularly with the Mayors of the other North County Cities. The City Manager and I have some great relationships with tribal leaders from Rincon and San Pasqual. We spent a day with them just a month or so ago discussing ways we can all work together to benefit North County. Strengthening traditional tribal values, and promoting them in our young people helps teach our children the best values for residents and neighbors.



I have tried to do my part to make sure Escondido is known, connected, and influential in our region. That teamwork makes solving problems easier and more effective.

## **REVENUE MEASURE**

Although Escondido has a long tradition of safe neighborhoods, involved residents and a vibrant business community, I need to also inject a little reality. Much of our basic infrastructure is aging and in need of repair or replacement.

We work diligently to contain costs and increase efficiencies. Residents report high levels of satisfaction with existing city services, but without new revenues, Escondido will be forced to reduce or eliminate services in order to balance future city budgets. We will still have a growing structural deficit projected over the upcoming 18 years totaling approximately \$176 million. Takeaways by state government and unfunded state and federal mandates continue hitting us. Meanwhile, we have one of the lowest sales tax rates in the County.

The City Council is considering placing a Public Safety & Essential Services Revenue Measure on the November 2020 ballot to address the increased needs of maintaining and enhancing municipal services in the community. A recent survey conducted by an independent research firm involving over 1,000 randomly selected Escondido voters found that 65 percent of the respondents would support a one-cent sales tax increase to preserve and enhance public safety and city services, and secure Escondido's financial future.

The current sales tax rate in Escondido is 7.75 percent, but the city receives just one percent of that revenue, with most going to the state, county and SANDAG. In contrast, 100 percent of the revenue generated by the Public Safety & Essential Services Revenue Measure would stay in Escondido. This would allow us to maintain and enhance police, fire, paramedic response and other city services, improve city roads, parks and other city facilities, and enhance the quality of life in our neighborhoods.



## **WHERE FROM HERE?**

So where do we go from here? What's next for the commencement of this decade?

We still have challenges like most cities. But I would offer we have something that most cities don't have: deep roots and the pride they generate. As Robert Heinlein stated - A generation which ignores history has no past — and no future. Escondidans do not ignore our deep roots because we know it guarantees our future. We also know the value of hometown pride. Think of the video we just watched a few minutes ago. Those were not just scenes of the present but also remembrances of the past. As the saying goes, we stand on the shoulders of giants. We were and are a community who led and still leads with balance, respect and diligence. When you see the fulfillment of visions past in entities like the old hospital, the CCAE, and the mall, you can also hear the echoes of those community members coming together and discussing the challenges of their day.

I'm asking you to get involved, and not wait for someone else to do it. I'm asking you to find your passion whether it is art, homelessness, health, education or whatever it may be and become part of the solution. Let's not accept that we will always have a fill-in-the-blank problem. Let us move forward and fulfill this generation's visions for making Escondido a wonderful place to live, work and raise our children where we continue to wake up every day feeling pride in where we live.

## **CLOSING**

Last year I said we are blessed to live in Escondido. I also said that living here, I think of the bumper sticker I saw when I was stationed in the Marine Corps in the South. It said, "American by birth, Southern by the grace of God." I like the second line because I think of myself as an Escondidan by the grace of God. Now I think of myself as an Escondidan by choice. I know you do too! Please join me once again in reaffirming the values that have made this city, and let us go into the future as a caring community whose values and faith are the bedrocks we build our future on. Thank you. God bless you and your family, and God bless our United States.