I postponed my State of the City address from January, hoping we might be meeting again in person, but that is still not to be. What a year! The past twelve months brought a global pandemic that none of us ever imagined. We also had an earthquake mid-March, just as we were shutting down to try and fight corona virus. The nation, and even Salt Lake City, experienced violent protests after the death of George Floyd. We did have protests in Logan, but fortunately they were peaceful, and the Washington Post even picked up a story about our city police chiefs taking pizza to the protestors and having a conversation with them. Add to that list a 100-year windstorm in September that toppled many trees throughout the city, especially in the cemetery where the tree roots pulled up water lines and service roads, taking city crews from cemetery, forestry and public works three weeks to get it cleaned up.

With all the challenges of this year, I have wondered how to be better prepared ... the earthquake in particular got my attention. Our main Fire Station is nearly 50 years old and has some seismic issues. The roof on the Service Center, where a great deal of our city heavy equipment and vehicles are stored, also provides concern. We will need to invest capital funds in those buildings and are also applying for a FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant to make sure we have the infrastructure to function well in future emergencies.
During 2020, I realize many of our citizens, businesses and organizations struggled, and there have been some rough times. However, in November, NBC did a national news story on Logan, as we had the lowest unemployment rate in the entire country. Our local economy has continued to grow. Overall, as a city, we have been fortunate.

Last March, at the request of the Governor, some of our employees worked from home if they were able to do that, and for a time we closed City Hall, the Library and the Recreation Center in order to “flatten the curve.”

Many of our employees are considered “essential workers.” They simply kept coming to work, doing their job day after day, doing all they could to protect each other. I am extremely proud of our team! They kept picking up the garbage and running the landfill, keeping the lights on, plowing and repairing the streets, keeping our water, wastewater and sewer systems operating, taking care of our parks and trails, running library books to the curb, approving building permits and providing inspections, facilitating economic development and doing the dozens of other tasks in finance, legal, HR and the Recorder’s office required to run a city. And our first responders – the Fire Fighters, EMT’s and Police Officers – just kept working. Our EMT’s went into homes to transport patients to the hospital, not knowing if a patient had Covid or not. Our police helped citizens and made arrests as necessary, wondering if they were being exposed. Our City Council kept up with their duties, either hosting socially distanced or online meetings. We do have an amazing team.
The Council has wisely built-up reserves in all of our funds to prepare for a rainy day. When the pandemic hit in March, just as our budget was taking shape, we took a step back on some projects and expenses, to be cautious and prudent. As the year progressed, our overall revenues did not take the dramatic plunge that other cities have experienced, so we were able to move ahead with most projects.

Here are a few highlights among the many things we accomplished in 2020:

My number one priority and goal as Mayor is fiscal responsibility. The Finance Department plays a key role in accomplishing that goal by helping develop the overall budget and tracking expenses, allowing myself and department heads the tools to manage the budget, and providing financial information to council for their approval. They are critical to the city’s excellent financial status. This year, Finance completed a city-wide transition to new software, a multi-year undertaking which will better serve our departments and citizens for years to come. They also administered over $4M of CARES funds, which required extremely careful expenditure and reporting.

A second major goal is to revitalize downtown. We are focused on a four-block area and our Economic Development Director has played a key role. The Redevelopment Agency – or RDA -- has been building funds for some time for redevelopment projects. The City Council, acting as the RDA Board, approved funds this past year to incentivize two new housing developments in downtown, one on 100 south replacing the former blighted V1 gas station, another on 100 East.
The RDA also purchased the blighted buildings near the corner of 300 North and Main which have been a vacant eyesore for years. We are currently doing asbestos mitigation, and eventually will demolish those buildings to make way for new development.

Although we paused for a while on our Center Block Plaza, we are again moving forward. The revised plans will keep Plaza 45 and the building to the South as requested by the Historic Preservation Committee. We will demolish the Emporium and adjacent building to create a plaza – a gathering place to benefit our citizens -- including an ice rink, splash pad and stage. Plans are nearly complete as we work to finalize the budget for council approval and then submit designs to Planning Commission in the next few months.

The RDA also assisted with the creation of the new Blue Spring Business Park on 600 West and 1000 North with an incentive to help cover part of the cost of new road and utility infrastructure. The project will be a welcome benefit for our tax base. We have also assisted a number of businesses which are expanding or moving to Logan.

A new library is underway and will also be an exciting part of downtown renovation. Council approved funding for the design and construction drawings, and we anticipate construction will begin by December 2021. We will demolish the existing library to make way for a new three-story building which will better serve our 700 daily patrons (at least pre-Covid) and the 238 community groups who meet there. By building up, we will gain additional parking and more plaza space for the library. During Covid, our staff was creative and hardworking, finding new ways to serve patrons with curbside pickup – staff walked outside over 12,000 times to safely deliver materials. That protocol will help bridge
the gap while the old library is torn down and the new building is constructed. While they were closed, staff provided online story time and programming, and went through the entire collection to purge old and dated material and install a new electronic tracking system in each item, all needed steps to move our library forward into the 21st Century.

The Community Development Department helps our city grow (and we have seen a building boom this year in spite of Covid) in an orderly and safe manner as they review plans and developments, issue building permits and do inspections, enforce when there are problems with over-occupancy or run-down properties, manage regular CDBG funds to improve our community as well as extra CARES funds. They have also assisted with our downtown efforts and have helped move toward our goals of remaking historic downtown as a destination for living, working, dining, art and entertainment, and activity. They recently completed a Public Art Master Plan which will come to life in our downtown. The Center Block Plaza will help provide a cohesive and walkable downtown, connecting our historic landmarks of the Eccles Theatre, renovated Center Street, Tabernacle and Courthouse. We strive to strengthen our community with good urban planning, enhanced walkability and a vibrant downtown which will draw new homeowners to fix up, reside in and stabilize our older core neighborhoods close to downtown. We need to densify downtown housing to prevent sprawl, preserve our rural farmland, help air quality, provide affordable housing and utilize existing infrastructure.

A third key goal is to upgrade aging infrastructure as well as investing in new. We have continued to do that in a number of departments, some of which I’ve already mentioned.
The Environmental Department has begun partial closure of the Logan Landfill, and is managing construction of the new $150M wastewater treatment plant which is on budget and on track to be completed in October, followed by startup testing activities. This plant will serve the majority of our valley for many years in the future and is a critical piece of infrastructure for Logan and its neighbors. At the request of other cities for which we provide garbage collection, we will be expanding our green waste program this year to meet those needs. This is a partnership with the forestry department and collections.

Our Light and Power department has been extremely busy and very productive providing new and upgraded service to keep up with city growth and new construction. They have ordered the equipment to construct two new substations this year, a significant and needed infrastructure addition. The city withdrew from the proposed UAAMPS Small Scale Nuclear project, but the department continues to be proactive in examining options for future clean power needs, including a study phase with UAMPS for 5MW of power from a plant that will combine solar and batteries.

The city also joined the Utah Climate and Clean Air Compact, a group of nonpartisan business, city, religious and non-profit leaders who approach those challenges using the Utah Roadmap, developed by the Kem C. Gardner Institute. Public works has replaced 8 out of 10 vehicles as part of a $1.5M Targeted Air Shed Grant, and the remaining two will be done this year, making our fleet cleaner for the environment.
Our Public Works Department includes Engineering, Water & Sewer, Streets & Stormwater, Facilities, GIS, Fleets and Shops. They support projects across the city, including downtown, the library construction, parks and trail projects, CDBG projects, as well as repairing and building new sidewalks.

Water infrastructure improvements include upgraded valves and pumps at the city culinary tank site and building reserves for a new water storage tank in a few years. The new vac truck purchased last year has allowed for enhanced inspection and sealing of sewer lines to prevent infiltration, again enhancing the life of sewer infrastructure.

A very large and complicated infrastructure project was the intersection of 1400 North and 600 West. In addition to the street and intersection improvements, it added new sewer infrastructure for that part of town and made significant storm water improvements. Because it crosses the Union Pacific right of way, the department worked with the UP for over four years to plan the intersection, only to have them change the rules for the maintenance agreement at the last minute. That is really frustrating, and the rules are completely unreasonable. We certainly don't like resorting to litigation, but sometimes that's the only option. UP’s demands will affect the entire state, and UDOT and the Attorney General’s office is supporting our efforts. Once that is resolved, we can open the full width of the intersection across the tracks. In the meantime, Public Works has created temporary solutions to make it usable.
The engineering department also completed design for the new bridge at 100 West and 600 South, and they received a Council of Governments grant for $2.5M to match the city’s $2.3M investment in this important infrastructure. Construction should begin no later than 2023. They are also designing and applying for a UDOT grant for a potential tunnel under Main Street at 600 South that would connect the trail system on both sides of Main Street, a goal we are working towards if we can get funding.

The Parks & Recreation Department was significantly impacted by Covid, with many disappointing cancellations and closures. The Rec Center has been closed or had reduced programming for much of the year. The Aquatic Center was closed all season – although the silver lining there is it allowed us to complete much needed capital improvements – which require warm weather to complete -- before the 20th anniversary next year. The Fireworks and 24th of July events were cancelled for Covid safety reasons, as were many of the Recreation programs. Our playgrounds were even closed for a while. We are still suffering some of those cancellations but hope next season will be better. The bright spot is our parks and trails provided much needed recreational infrastructure for our citizens! Usage experienced a dramatic uptick, as folks enjoyed the ability to get outdoors and recreate safely. The other really good news is golfers returned in droves to the Logan River Golf Course. Our staff built on other improvements they made last year and worked hard to make golf safe during the pandemic and were even able to put funds into the reserve account for future improvements.

Parks completed the 1700 South Park and walking trail in the Logan Soccer Complex, improvements funded in part with grants from county RAPZ tax and the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.
The Legal department supports all city departments and handles our risk management program. With the continued efforts of all our employees, Logan has gone over two years without a lost time accident and continues to be 20% lower than other Municipalities in the state in loss exposure, providing substantial savings on our insurance premiums. Last year our workers comp premium decreased by nearly $35,000.

The City Recorder’s Office helps keep us on track by handling a multitude of documents in an extremely organized and professional way. 2021 is a municipal election year with the term of Mayor and two council seats on the ballot, and the Recorder will run the city election.

Our HR department has had a busy year staying up to date on CARES protocol and assisting our 435 employees.

I mentioned our police earlier, and the way our chiefs handled the protests by listening to the demonstrators. It was a tough year for police officers, as a few bad officers across the nation caused much scrutiny for police. Our police team immediately reviewed city Use of Force policies, and I’m pleased to report we had to adjust very little to be in compliance with best practices. We made some minor revisions, as well as added further training in de-escalation tactics. Our officers also have improved options, tools and training for non-lethal force, and each have a daily training module they complete, highlighting current topics, as well as the 40 hours each officer is required to train annually to recertify. All on top of their routine duties to keep our community safe. Our police officers respond to difficult and traumatic situations on a regular basis, and they have implemented Critical Incident Stress Management Training to help officers deal with the ongoing effects of those events.
Our Fire and EMS department wrapped up the CCEMS agreement, which given the growth of the county and significant increase in county EMS calls, no longer worked well for Logan Citizens. They consolidated service with North Logan, providing more depth of fire and EMS service for both communities. We now have fair and equitable contracts with North Logan, Providence, River Heights, and with the County to cover College and Young Ward and Logan Canyon. Fire also applied for and received a clean-air grant toward three new fire engines and received grants for additional personnel. It is a challenge to recruit paramedics, so they sent six employees to Paramedic School, which will help our ranks significantly. Their crews constantly train and improve their skills in a variety of ways to be prepared to serve our community. It can be a tough job to respond to accidents and fires, and they have also implemented a Critical Incident Stress Management Training for crews and families as we need to keep our first responders both physically fit and mentally healthy in their challenging world.

In summary, we have worked hard to serve our citizens in this difficult year. I know we all hoped when the calendar changed to 2021 there would be a magical improvement. Of course, things are improving as the vaccines are given to the population over the next months, but the challenges have not all gone away as we must still wear masks, social distance, and limit much of what we typically do – especially for fun!

However, I’d like to finish by listing the good things I’ve noted over the past year, and what I enjoy about this job.
I am grateful for the work ethic and determination that comes from the pioneer heritage in our valley. When life is difficult, we just keep doing our best day by day – both employees and citizens.

I am grateful for our neat and clean city, our beautiful mountains and valley, and our wonderful recreational opportunities close by that have helped keep us sane during the pandemic.

I am so grateful for the peace and the civility that we enjoy in our valley, even if we have differing opinions. I’m grateful for the kindness, the helpfulness of our citizens who watch out for their neighbors, and our non-profit organizations that do so much good. I appreciate people who answer the call when they see a need. So many have stepped up to help others.

I am grateful for a good city council to work with and I am grateful to serve as your Mayor. Thank you for that opportunity.