

Richfield



2020
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



Council MESSAGE



This past year has been unlike any we have ever experienced...

Most of 2020 was spent battling a global health pandemic and addressing the immediate needs of our residents that have followed. Unfortunately, we all have friends, family and neighbors that have contracted COVID-19, including loved ones that did not recover. We also saw up close why racial injustice needs to be eradicated. As a city, as a country and as a human race, we need to strive for solutions that will make the world a more just and equitable place where everyone is safe and healthy.

Through the critical events of 2020, we worked diligently to be responsive to residents' needs. We provided Volunteers Enlisted to Assist People (VEAP) with funding to help our residents who were struggling to pay rent. We created a COVID-19 Small Business Forgivable Loan program that provided almost a quarter of a million dollars to local businesses. We also worked with our federal, state and county partners to connect Richfield residents and businesses with additional support and sent multiple city-wide mailers with COVID related information and resources.

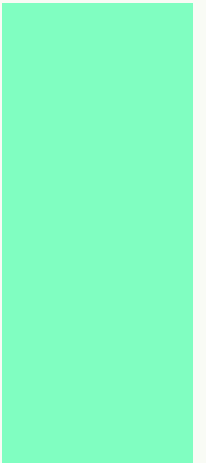
Amid the pandemic's challenges, we are making Richfield a more equitable place to live, learn, work and play. In 2020, we added a social worker to work with the Richfield police force that will help connect community members with the resources they need. Additionally, we started the deployment of body cameras to provide residents with a more transparent public safety experience. Body cameras will be fully implemented in January 2021. Also in January, the city will be welcoming its new Equity and Inclusion Administrator. We are committed to continuing our efforts to diversify our staff, within the police force and across all departments, and embed equity into everything we do to make sure we better reflect and serve our diverse community.

We have all struggled to respond to the challenges of 2020. Through it all, we have sought to be responsive to your needs, especially those most impacted. We look forward to a new year when we will continue to put your needs first. Together we will get through this and continue work to make Richfield a community where everyone thrives.

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TRAILBLAZER RETIRES

AFTER MORE THAN FOUR DECADES, COUNCILMEMBER EDWINA GARCIA RETIRES FROM PUBLIC SERVICE

A person who is considered a trailblazer can be many things, but in general, they are a person who charts a new path for others to follow. Few words better encompass the career of retiring Ward II Councilmember Edwina Garcia.

Garcia was born in New Mexico. It was there that she met her husband, Joe, and gave birth to her daughter, Jill. She eventually moved to Richfield in 1972.

Just prior to the start of her political odyssey in the 1970s, Garcia graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor's degree in political science.

Almost 50 years later, Garcia's political career ended the same place it started, as a member of the Richfield City Council. She was originally recruited to run for an open seat by a friend and became the first woman of color to sit on the council upon taking office in January 1985. During her first campaign she learned the benefit of door knocking and meeting her constituents face-to-face, a trait she exhibited for the remainder of her career.

After one and a half terms as a city councilmember, Garcia decided to run for a seat in the Minnesota State House of Representatives. In 1990, she won her election by focusing

on helping Richfield residents adversely affected by airport noise. Again, becoming the first woman of color to hold a position in that governing body. Through her work, she was able to procure local, state and federal dollars to help buy-out airport affected home owners. During her time in the House she also worked diligently to help Minnesota's veterans and generate positive redevelopment opportunities for Richfield.

She accomplished a lot for her constituents in her four terms as a representative, but thought she could contribute more to the State of Minnesota, so she ran for the post of Secretary of State. Garcia lost her bid for the office, but was able to bring many important issues to the forefront.

"Edwina never set out to be the first 'this' or 'that,'" said former Mayor Pat Elliott. "Whether it is at the local or state level, her primary goal was to serve our community."

Garcia then spent several years working with a variety of foundations and non-government councils and commissions to improve the quality of life for people across the region. Eventually, she came home to where it all started for her politically, the Richfield City Council. She ran and won election in 2012.

Over her last two terms on the council, Garcia championed the diversification of the city's police force, redevelopment, municipal liquor store upgrades and a more equitable government.

When asked about her legacy in Minnesota politics, Garcia believes it is her mentorship of others that will stand the test of time and bring a brighter future for residents.

"From the many mayors, state representatives, council members and other leaders, I have always had an open and nurturing approach," explained Garcia. "Your career in elected office can be over before you know it, but if you mentor the next generation of leaders, no matter where your career takes you, your values and goals will live on."

As someone who has been mentored by Garcia over the past several years, Richfield's mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez could not agree more.

"Edwina's leadership and mentorship has led the way for so many women and women of color in office today," remarked Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. "I would not be in office today if it were not for her support, love and mentorship."



The state of COVID-19 in Richfield

We all know people who have been lost to COVID-19 or fought it firsthand. City, county, state and national public health officials have done all they can to ensure the public remains safe and healthy throughout the pandemic.

Unfortunately, 2,909 residents tested positive for COVID-19 during 2020.

“It is heartbreaking that Richfield residents have been affected so adversely by this devastating virus,” insisted Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. “Being overly cautious in everything you do is important as we wait for all residents to be vaccinated.”

Throughout the year, Minnesota enacted

different policies and restrictions to prevent the virus from getting out of control.

“The data being collected by the State of Minnesota and the contact tracing being done by our public health officials is painting a pretty clear picture of how and when this virus is spreading,” explained Richfield Community Health Services Administrator Jennifer Anderson. “When cases are on the rise or spiking, it is important that we dial back on the activities where people gather in groups outside their household.”

From the start of the pandemic until the beginning of October, daily positive case totals

rarely rose above 10 new cases per day in Richfield, which according to the city's public health officials was a manageable number. However, starting in October, most days saw at least 30 new positive cases, and on November 9 a record high 59 new positive cases.

Proportionally, the city's Latino population has been hit the hardest. Thirty-four percent of all positive coronavirus diagnoses in the City of Richfield have been in the Latino community.

"Richfield is blessed to be a very diverse community with people coming from all around the world and making the city their home. It is one of our community's greatest strengths," remarked former Ward II Councilmember Edwina Garcia. "COVID-19 is affecting our Latino community particularly hard and we are doing everything we can to provide them with the resources they need."

In 2020, 219 Richfield residents were hospitalized because of COVID-19, with 41 of them needing to receive additional attention in a hospital intensive care unit.

Sadly, 30 Richfield residents have passed away because of the virus.

In accordance with Minnesota Department of Health recommendations, the City of Richfield has had to pivot some of its operating procedures to reduce the possibility of virus spread in the community. The Recreation Services Department canceled the majority of its in-person programming at both the Wood Lake Nature Center and community center starting in March.

"These are tough decisions, but we will always

put the safety and health of our community and staff first," stated Recreation Services Director Amy Markle. "We have worked diligently to provide residents with safe recreation alternatives that continue to create community and engage our residents through virtual and self-guided means."

In addition, the Richfield Motor Vehicle and Passport Office had to shift several times between in-person and drop box only services throughout the pandemic. The office is in the process of implementing an online scheduling program, which will allow customers to wait in their vehicles and be notified when it is their turn to see a motor vehicle clerk and have their transaction processed. This change should allow for greater social distancing for both customers and city staff.

Most other city hall services have moved to appointment only.

"Back in the spring, when the virus first came to Minnesota, we had to quickly alter our operations to keep everyone safe," remembered City Manager Katie Rodriguez. "We learned a lot through that process. We have also learned a lot more about the virus over the past several months. I am confident we can adjust our service delivery in a way that keeps our residents, customers and staff safe."

To better understand how COVID-19 is impacting the City of Richfield, visit the Community Health Service's online dashboard: richfieldmn.gov/COVIDdashboard



It is heartbreaking that Richfield residents have been affected so adversely by this devastating virus. Being overly cautious in everything you do is important as we wait for all residents to be vaccinated.

- Mayor Regan Gonzalez ”

KEY TO THE CITY

GIVEN TO DR. MARC JENKINS

Dr. Marc Jenkins has been a major contributor to his field of study on both the world and the local stage. He is one of the world's foremost immunologists, who in 2020 was elected to the National Academy of Sciences, and has helped build a stronger Richfield community. For his professional and personal efforts, he was awarded the Key to the City.

"Dr. Jenkins is credited with so many achievements, but I think his most important accomplishment is that he is a living, breathing example of someone who just loves the community, loves to share his knowledge and loves to contribute to the greater good," said Mayor Regan Gonzalez.

On April 27, Dr. Jenkins was selected to the National Academy of Sciences for his work in immunology. The National Academy of Sciences has approximately 2,400 members and 500 foreign associates.

The academy is charged with providing independent, objective advice to the nation on matters related to science and technology. Notable members include Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk, and Noam Chomsky.

"Being elected to the National Academy of Sciences is a dream come true," said Jenkins. "It has been more than 50 years since a University of Minnesota scientist faculty member has been elected, so it is quite an honor."

Currently, Dr. Jenkins is the director for the Center of Immunology, regents and distinguished McKnight Professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Dr. Jenkin's recent work has revolved around developing an antibody test for the novel coronavirus. His team researched, tested and helped administer clinical trials of the test that aims to determine a person's virus immunity.

He is also known for his mentoring work both inside his profession and in





the Richfield community. He regularly welcomes aspiring students to visit his lab and help them make connections in the various science fields.

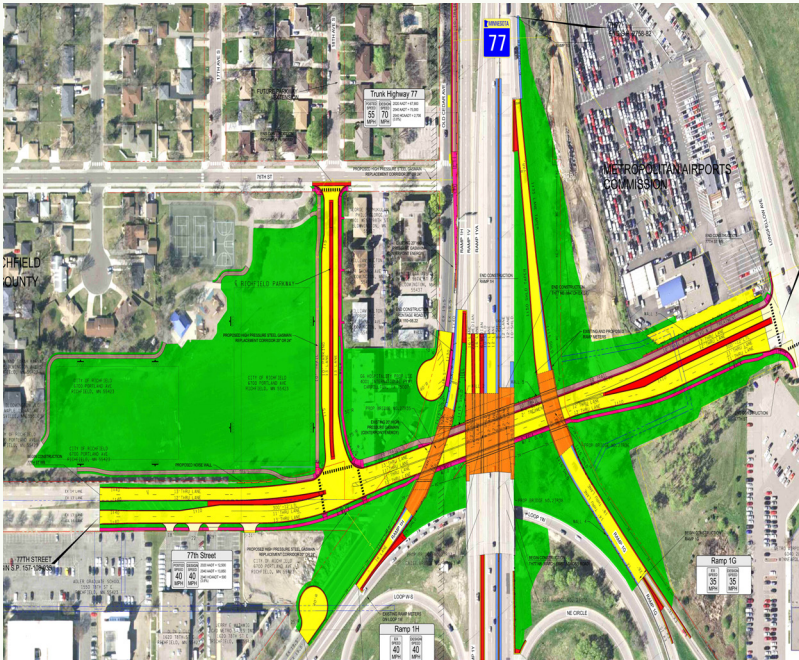
Dr. Jenkins, his wife Karen, and their three adult children, who all still live in Richfield, have all been active members in building a stronger community. Most notably, he served as a member of the Richfield School Board from 2004-2008.

The City of Richfield rarely awards a Key to the City. The last person to receive the Key to the City was exiled Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, back in 2017.

Coming soon

For almost three decades, Richfield and its regional transportation partners worked to add an underpass to the south metro's transportation system. With the Minnesota legislature's passage of the 2020 bonding bill, that journey is coming to a positive conclusion.

To improve I-494, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is seeking to overhaul the section of the interstate that borders Richfield. The goal of the project is



to provide transit advantages to increase the number of people who can effectively move through the area, improve the reliability of the average rush hour trip, and improve safety.

“Almost as soon as I-494 was complete through the Richfield/Bloomington area in the late 1960s, the interstate experienced traffic problems,” explained Public Works Director Kristin Asher. “More than a half a million users travel on it each day and it is congested more than 30 percent of the time. A solution is needed to make it work better for local, regional and statewide travelers.”

Since the 1990s, the City of Richfield has made substantial investments to its transportation infrastructure to pave the way for the I-494 improvement project. The city has spent \$142 million to upgrade 76th Street, 77th Street, and the Penn Avenue and Lyndale Avenue Bridges.

Bloomington too has made a similar investment in its own transportation system

THE 77TH ST. UNDERPASS

to accommodate the future I-494 project.

“Our section of I-494 is one of the most congested sections of interstate in the country,” said Transportation Engineer Jack Broz. “Over the past decades, the city has done its part to provide area travelers with enhanced transportation options. The only thing left was the underpass.”

In the 2020 state bonding bill, the legislature approved \$6 million for the project. That, coupled with \$7 million from the federal government, \$10 million from previously secured state bonding, \$6 million from MnDOT and \$5 million from other sources, will provide the \$34 million needed to complete the project.

The construction of the 77th Street Underpass will complete the I-494 Ring Route, which will allow area residents to efficiently travel east and west from Bush Lake Road to 24th Avenue without the need to get on I-494.

“Improvements to I-494 and the addition of the 77th Street Underpass will lead to increased economic opportunities for Richfield,” pointed out City Engineer Joe Powers. “Residents will have better access to jobs through a more efficient mass transit system, the city’s tax capacity should increase and it should lure more businesses to the area.”

The benefits residents will experience from the overhaul of I-494 and the 77th Street Underpass include minimizing the amount of traffic diverting off of the highway onto our local roads, better pedestrian and bicyclist crossings, and expanded transit services.

“It took decades to acquire the necessary funding to bring the 77th Street Underpass to Richfield, but we never stopped working and believing in the necessity of this project,” stated Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. “The benefits of the underpass are too numerous to count. It will not only benefit Richfield residents, but the entire region.”

The 77th Street Underpass project will break ground in the spring of 2021.



Home Sweet Home





HOMEBUYER PROGRAM

RECEIVES STATEWIDE RECOGNITION

This past spring, the first-ever Minnesota Housing Scorecard was released. It evaluated Minnesota's progress on affordable housing efforts. Specifically, it lauded Richfield's First-Time Homebuyer program.

"Richfield has a long tradition of being trailblazers when it comes to housing," explained Richfield's Housing Manager, Julie Urban. "The First-Time Homebuyer program is just one of many examples of how the City creatively and proactively approaches its housing challenges."

The program was recognized as a successful example of a policy to support and strengthen homeownership.

Richfield's First-Time Homebuyer program was created as a response to the startling disparity between homeownership rates of white households and non-white households. In Richfield, 72 percent of white households are owners, where only 32 percent of non-white residents own their own home. In response, the program aims to provide low and moderate-income buyers with assistance towards purchasing their first home.

The program offers qualifying buyers \$10,000 to be used towards down payment, closing costs and principal loan reduction. If a household is a Richfield renter, or has dependents under age 18, or has a disabled family member, they are eligible for an additional \$5,000 in funding. The loans accrue no interest and require no monthly payments.

Learn more by visiting: richfieldmn.gov/housing

NEW OFF-LEASH DOG PARK

It was years in the making, but our furry friends have a new place to play in Richfield.

On November 5, the City of Richfield added an in-demand amenity to its recreation offerings. And while this addition won't benefit a large number of human residents, it will provide a much appreciated resource to another population: area dogs.

"This dog park has been a longstanding desire of our community," stated Mayor Maria Regan Gonzalez. "We're so excited to see it finally take shape and open to all our enthusiastic dogs and their owners."

Planning for the dog park was spearheaded by the city's Recreation Services Department and the Community Services Commission.

Recreation Services Department Director Amy Markle acknowledged the challenge of finding the perfect spot for the park.

"We had to explore a lot of options for this dog park, taking into consideration all the factors needed to make it something we could be proud of: parking, accessibility, lighting, soil quality and space. Roosevelt Park really shined and checked off most of the requirements for building a successful dog park."

The proposal was first brought to the city's Community Services Commission and then



presented to the City Council for approval.

The park is open daily from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. and is fully enclosed. Parking for the dog park can be accessed off of 77th Street East.

Park amenities include grooming stations, fire hydrants, waste stations, picnic tables and separate spaces for both large and small dogs. Residents can also purchase a memorial plaque for their pet as part of the Pet Dedication Program.

All dogs using the park will be required to be licensed with the city and will need to display their license tag at all times. Licenses can be purchased at the Richfield Municipal Center during regular business hours.

"Our residents will benefit from having an accessible dog park, centrally located for them to exercise and socialize their dogs," explained Lisa Rudolph, chair of the Community Services Commission. "Our dogs will benefit too from the opportunity for increased activity, stimulation, and interaction with other dogs and people."

To learn more about the new dog park, residents can visit: richfieldmn.gov/dogpark.







Birthdays

To say birthdays during the COVID-19 pandemic have been anti-climactic would be putting it lightly, but during the spring the city's Police, Fire and Public Works Departments banded together to bring some birthday cheer to our youngest residents through birthday patrols. By its conclusion, 175 birthday patrols took place over three months.

Street BY STREET

Making the world a more equitable place where everyone can thrive seems so complex and challenging at times that it is difficult to determine where to focus one's energy. Addressing those complex issues with improvements to sidewalks and crosswalks doesn't seem like the obvious answer, but it is one way that the City of Richfield is taking steps to address inequality and make the city more accessible.

For years, the city's well-known Sweet Streets campaign has been committed to a robust public engagement and communications process for each of the major projects taking place in the community. The Sweet Streets campaign has facilitated the reconstruction of major roads in the community, expansion of bicycle infrastructure and utility upgrades. The initiative is focused on eight guiding principles that direct each project.

"With Sweet Streets we began to re-balance our transportation priorities," said Kristin Asher, Public Works Director. "We made a decision to reprioritize transportation away from a 'car as king' model."

Two years ago, a decision was made to make equity itself a bigger part of the process, calling it out as a

unique performance measure for all major projects. Equity, along with the guiding principles, are now the areas that shape Sweet Streets projects.

"When we incorporate equity, the purpose is bigger. The outcome is bigger," explained Transportation Engineer Jack Broz. "Projects are better when you include this piece of the puzzle."

Evaluating the equity piece starts by asking basic questions to the right people: the actual users of those streets, sidewalks and bus stops.

"The challenge is to get input from underrepresented populations," explained Asher. "We always need the help of trusted leaders in our community who can help those users engage in the process and provide the feedback we are missing."

"Our goal is to ask the right questions, and try to give people the information they need," explained Broz. "If we can show people the options that are available, they can give us the context for how the community is using the space. Then we can evaluate the trade-offs of those options and review it with the Transportation Commission and City Council."





ROADS

The new Lyndale Avenue is an example of transportation equity as it has a little something for everyone: on-street bike lanes for bike commuters, flashing crosswalks for pedestrians, and multi-use paths and trails for recreational users.



SIDEWALKS

Transportation equity ensures fair distribution of mobility options and transportation investments that connect people with opportunities and resources. Equity in transportation is about the outcomes—Who benefits and who doesn't? Who participates and who doesn't?



TRAILS

Designing with a focus on equity results in diverse infrastructure that can efficiently move vehicles while also allowing other modes to navigate safely.

Exploring ORGANIZED GARBAGE COLLECTION

On November 10, the city council took the first step towards the possibility of organizing solid waste collection in Richfield. If the process goes smoothly and a contract that meets community goals is approved, residents could see organized collection coming to Richfield by the fall of 2021.

The organized collection of solid waste includes the pick-up and disposal of trash, recycling, organics, and other services including yard waste and bulky item collection. If established, only one hauler will be providing service to a section of the city, with standard fees for service across the board.

Residents should see tangible economic and environmental benefits if the switch to organized collection is made. Pricing structures and services offered will become standardized across all haulers, leading to lower prices and increased efficiency. In addition, organized collection benefits the environment by helping people recycle more solid and organic waste, as well as reducing air pollution and truck traffic on local streets.

Three initial listening sessions have been hosted with more than 100 residents in attendance. To learn more about the project, visit: richfieldmn.gov/organizedcollection.



NEWS & NOTES



DISTRACTED DRIVING CAR

In Minnesota, distracted driving contributes to more than 60,000 crashes, 45 deaths and 204 life-changing injuries a year.

To protect area residents from distracted driving, the Richfield Police Department applied for and was awarded a grant from the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety to build the state's first distracted driving truck.

Two camera systems are specially configured to monitor distracted driving from all view points, recording down and out the side rear windows to document the distracted driving violation on video.

The new vehicle will be shared with other area departments who participate in the Towards Zero Death program, which includes departments in Bloomington, Edina, Eden Prairie, Hopkins, St. Louis Park and MSP Airport.



CLIMATE ACTION PLAN

Climate change is getting worse, not better. To do its part in protecting the planet, the Richfield City Council passed the city's first Climate Action Plan.

A climate action plan is a document that highlights specific goals and actions an organization wants to achieve in their sustainability, mitigation, and resiliency efforts.

The plan also organizes the strategic direction of the city's Sustainability Specialist and Sustainability Commission for at least the next five years.

Specifically, the climate action plan focuses on eight areas and outlines more than 80 actions.

One aspect of the plan focuses on education and volunteerism.

Residents can view the plan by visiting: richfieldmn.gov/ClimateActionPlan



STEM SCHOOL GARDEN

A robust public school system is a hallmark of a thriving city. However, strong schools are more than just good teachers, technology and test scores. They are also ideal places to learn, relax and think.

This past summer the city's Public Works Department partnered with the STEM School to improve its courtyard garden.

Public Works donated 30 perennial plants and wood chips, as well as some horticultural knowledge and planting assistance.

"The original garden had become overgrown," said public works worker Nick Kleve. "Now the students will have an outdoor courtyard to go sit and learn outside."

In the end, it is a project both the school and city can be proud of.

PARADE LIGHTS UP HOLIDAY SEASON

On a chilly December night, thousands of residents waited throughout Richfield for a dose of joy and happiness to come down the streets. That inspiration came rolling through the city in the first-ever Holiday Lights Parade.

The idea for the Holiday Lights Parade came on the heels of the success of the city's Birthday Parades held last spring.

With enthusiastic support for the idea from the Police, Fire and Public Works Departments, Recreation Services Director Amy Markle knew that the event would be a hit.

Traveling at parade-route speeds, the 12-vehicle caravan consisted of festively-lit emergency vehicles, heavy construction equipment, traditional parade floats and even a school bus. Beginning at the Public Works facility in east Richfield, the parade traveled more than six miles to reach all corners of Richfield.

"We knew we needed to provide enough space to avoid attendees congregating and to comply with social distancing" stated Markle. "We wanted to give people the option to watch from home or a parked car. Plus, we wanted it to reach as many people as possible"

Residents were extremely grateful for the efforts of the parade crew. Social media posts and messages to staff all agreed that the event raised the spirits of the community.

"Even Santa and Mrs. Claus could feel the joy as they traveled the route and saw the residents waving and cheering," added Fire Chief Mike Dobesh. "They were touched to see all the joy and spirit on display from our community."







URBAN HOMETOWN

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