Thank you CityTV for that wonderful video. Now it’s time for our keynote State of the City remarks. And new this year, the city is changing up the look and presentation of those remarks. I’m very interested in seeing and hearing that new format, and I hope you are too. So let me bring up on stage our three presenters for this afternoon. First, let’s welcome up Lakewood’s Public Safety Director Joshua Yordt.

Josh has been part of the Lakewood team for nearly five years. He is the city’s first Director of Public Safety, and as part of his work to create a Public Safety Department for the city, his focus has been on community engagement…enhancing and expanding crime prevention programs… and ensuring the city’s public safety partners at the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s and Fire departments have the necessary support and resources to keep the community safe. He has over 27 years of public safety experience, mostly working for cities that receive public safety services from the L.A. County Sheriff’s and Fire departments. He holds a bachelor’s degree from Cal Poly Pomona in Political Science and Public Administration, with an emphasis in Criminology. Welcome Josh.

Next, let’s welcome up Lakewood’s Community Development Director Abel Avalos. Abel grew up in our region, and in fact his first job after high school was working at “Things Remembered” at Lakewood Center mall, for those of you who might remember that store. Abel earned his bachelor’s degree from Cal State Long Beach and a master’s degree in public policy from Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. His professional career spans the private and public sectors, including time with the cities of Anaheim and Bell Gardens and with Irvine-based John Laing Homes. He’s been at the City of Lakewood now for 4 years and in his capacity as Director of Community Development, he manages a team handling economic development, planning, building permits, code enforcement, and home improvements for low to moderate income Lakewood residents. Welcome Abel.

And to be the MC for our group and give the opening and closing remarks, let’s welcome up Lakewood’s Mayor, Steve Croft. Steve was first elected to the Lakewood City Council in March 2005 after having served four years on the city’s Planning and Environment Commission. He was most recently re-elected to the council in June of last year by the voters of the new Council District 2 in Lakewood. He is now serving his fifth term on the council, and this is his fourth time as mayor. Steve is also Lakewood's representative on the Greater L.A. County Vector Control Board, where he was elected President of the Board by his colleagues for 2017. And, he serves as the city’s representative to the California Joint Powers Insurance Authority and the L.A. County Sanitation District. He is a proud member of the Lakewood Lions Club and a board
member of the Lakewood Regional Medical Center and Pathways Volunteer Hospice. And, both he and his wife Tess are active members of the Friends of the Lakewood Libraries.

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming to the podium to lead the discussion of the State of our City, Lakewood Mayor Steve Croft.

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MAYOR CROFT:

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you Lisa for those introductions.

Before we get started, I think that very nice CityTV video presented an excellent sample of the many Lakewood city employees who work hard for us residents and community members every working day. Can I ask our Lakewood employees who are in the room today to please stand so that we can show you our appreciation?

We all know our motto in Lakewood, right? Well, Times Change…Values Don’t…but sometimes event formats do change. And that can be a good thing. At least we hope it will be.

One reason for our change up here on the podium today is to divide up our remarks into shorter individual presentations than before…and with a special focus on a couple of key areas for our city this year. The first key area we want to discuss is public safety.

As you’ve often heard from Lakewood City Council Members, public safety is priority #1 in our community. It’s why many of us moved here…and stay here. Having a safe community allows us all to enjoy so many aspects of a good community life, such as walking around our neighborhoods…going to our parks…enjoying local shopping and dining opportunities…and generally just feeling safe in our homes and community.

But keeping a city safe…especially in a busy and crowded metropolitan area like Los Angeles County…is not easy.

There are always evolving challenges…whether those be new state laws…or district attorney policies that let many so-called “low level” criminals back out on the street quickly with little accountability or deterrent for their crimes.

Or the challenge could be new forms of crime, such as the recent nationwide spike in catalytic converter thefts.

We work hard at the City of Lakewood to advocate for legislative change on the policy level to deal with those evolving challenges…but we also work hard and focus a lot of attention on the local level to give our Sheriff’s Station personnel the resources they need AND to provide resources on our civilian side that can give valuable support to our Sheriff’s personnel.
We’ve been aided in that recently by the residents of Lakewood who approved Measure L to ensure that we maintain those extra resources for public safety in Lakewood.

In Lakewood, we’re able to maintain and even add a lot of public safety resources that other cities our size don’t have…like our Sky Knight helicopter AND the growing network of license plate reading cameras that can spot wanted cars and suspects when they enter Lakewood so that our deputies can react quickly before they potentially commit a crime here.

We’ve developed a great partnership over the decades with the Lakewood Sheriff’s Station, but we’ve enhanced that significantly the past few years…including last year and this year. And so we thought it would be especially valuable for you to hear today about that partnership and its newest features from our civilian Director of Public Safety, Joshua Yordt, who oversees our contract and partnership with the Sheriff’s Department. Come on up Josh.

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**JOSH YORDT:**

Thank you Mayor Croft. Hello and good afternoon everyone.

As Mayor Croft said, we have a special partnership in Lakewood between the city, our residents and our Sheriff’s Station. The partnership goes back to the founding of our city in 1954 when Lakewood became the first contract city with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. And we’ve nurtured the partnership very well over the years. But thanks to the support from the City Council and Lakewood residents, we’ve really been able to expand and enhance that partnership in the past few years.

CityTV’s Annual Report video touched on many of these new initiatives, but I want to focus in on a couple today with some more detail for you.

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First, in Lakewood we have expanded our Community Safety Officer team significantly over the past few years.

These are civilian employees in uniform with special training who respond to service calls like non-injury traffic accidents or burglaries after-the-fact. They take down valuable information for an initial report to be investigated further by Sheriff’s personnel, both for evidence and statistical reporting purposes.
They can also take fingerprint and DNA evidence, which doesn’t happen quickly in many cities OR at all for property crimes. But because of our CSOs, it can happen very quickly and consistently in Lakewood…and even for property crimes…speeding up the gathering of that key evidence and leading to better and faster investigative results in Lakewood by Sheriff’s personnel.

In addition, the support work of our CSOs frees up Deputy Sheriffs to stay on patrol for more minutes and hours every day in Lakewood, and it’s a big reason why Deputy response time in Lakewood is consistently faster than the average in L.A. County.

Our CSOs are also another set of eyes and ears on the streets of Lakewood…ready to react to issues they are trained to handle…and to quickly call into the Sheriff’s Station for issues that require a Deputy.

And last but not least, we have worked hard these past several years to increase community engagement of our city public safety staff and Sheriff’s staff with Lakewood community members…and we have greatly expanded the number of those public interaction opportunities.

We had over a dozen events in 2022 in the form of Coffees with a Deputy…Ice Cream with a Deputy…and even Donuts with a Deputy. Yes, we decided to own that humorous phrase and make good use of it…and it was one of our most popular get-togethers last year. Our next Donuts with a Deputy is tomorrow at 10am, at Granny’s Donuts. There are flyers on the check-in table out front about it, so come on by and talk with us…and have a donut.

And I want to mention that our civilian staff also work hard to create opportunities for our residents to meet our public safety partners at the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Fire Department personnel and equipment have been great additions at our Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness Expo and at our National Night Out event. And, we hope to collaborate with the Fire Department even more to create additional opportunities in the future for the community to meet and interact with fire personnel.

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A second initiative we just started in the final months of 2022 and will be implementing in earnest this year is utilizing a new Homeless Service Liaison who will work in conjunction with our city staff and Sheriff’s Station staff.

This position is funded by a county grant that Lakewood took the lead in securing along with Signal Hill and Hawaiian Gardens. The new contracted liaison is already outreaching to local homeless people, helping them and really encouraging them to get available services, and coordinating with Deputy Sheriffs if there is illegal behavior taking place or illegal encampments.

This effort will enable us to step up our city’s twin approach of doing all we can to offer services and help to local homeless people BUT to also not tolerate illegal behavior or illegal
encampments by homeless people that can reduce the quality of life for our community as a whole.

We’ve heard from many residents and businesses who want us to do all that we can to address homelessness in Lakewood. As many of you know, the city has for several years funded a Lakewood Deputy Sheriff who spends a good portion of his time doing homeless-related work, but there is more work there than one person can do.

So this added contract service will partner with our Deputy Sheriff and expand our work…and we’ve already seen some positive results from this effort in just a few months.

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Another way we want to help businesses in Lakewood is through a new crime prevention program which we just kicked off last week with a roundtable discussion between public safety officials and business representatives.

For any business owners here in the room, or any managers of businesses, we know you and your team are experiencing the ongoing impact of the recent softening of legislation and prosecution related to criminal activity.

The City of Lakewood advocates strongly against any measure which threatens safe and peaceful communities, and we ask that businesses join us in in our stance. By joining this crime prevention program, you will receive education on immediate strategies to safeguard your business and enjoy networking opportunities with fellow entrepreneurs.

Our goal is to provide an all-encompassing program for the business community, emphasizing public safety, and supporting businesses with education on locally available resources. And through the program, the existing positive relationships between the Lakewood business community, the city and law enforcement will strengthen.

We aim to immediately connect with new businesses as they establish in Lakewood…and to personally invite existing businesses which are not yet active within the program to join us.

Look for information on this program in upcoming Lakewood Connect eMagazines or contact the Public Safety Department by calling City Hall.

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For all of these crime prevention efforts and more, Lakewood was honored this past year with the first-ever award from the statewide coalition Californians Against Residential and Retail Theft…or CARRT.

CARRT was impressed with a lot of what they heard Lakewood was doing, including data on some of the results of our efforts.
For example, while catalytic converter thefts in neighboring cities increased by over 75% during the time period after our new safety program started in 2022, converter thefts only increased by 1% in Lakewood during that time period, showing that we were overcoming fast-growing regional trends with that crime.

Speaking of crime data, I want to go into that a bit now and give you a preview of what we will be presenting to residents in the Lakewood Living magazine you got today and elsewhere in the days ahead.

Overall, crime throughout L.A. County, including in Lakewood, rose in 2022 from the unusually low levels experienced during the first year and a half after COVID hit. During that early pandemic time period in 2020 and 2021, overall crime dropped significantly throughout the county and nation as people stayed home more and didn’t travel or interact as much.

Burglaries, for example, dropped dramatically nationwide and in Lakewood.

Unfortunately, but probably inevitably, crime started returning to pre-COVID levels in 2022 as the pandemic’s effects lessened.

But even with the increase from last year to this year, crime remained lower overall in Lakewood than it was five years ago…19% lower in fact.

Lakewood again experienced no homicides in 2022…and none in 2021…which is very notable and very impressive for a community of 80,000 people.

However, auto-related thefts remained a growing issue in our city…as they did countywide and nationwide…with a 9% increase in auto thefts in Lakewood this year compared to last year…and a 65% increase from five years ago.

In some ways, it appears that criminals have redirected their efforts towards auto theft across the nation…and in our community. But we want to combat that here in Lakewood.

And it was that increase in auto-related thefts—and catalytic converter thefts—that led the Lakewood City Council to pass a $400,000 “Neighborhood Safety Enhancement Plan” in early 2022.

We saw some immediate benefits with a flattening in catalytic converter thefts.

And, as you saw in the video, the increased deputy sheriff patrol time that was funded led to 125 more arrests and the recovery of many stolen vehicles and many illegal weapons (and criminal violators) taken off the streets.

As the video also highlighted, the Neighborhood Safety Enhancement Plan has a lot of elements to it, including our security guard patrols at night…and rebates to residents to install video
security cameras and to protect their vehicles against catalytic converter theft. There are flyers about these rebate programs at the check-in table as well.

So to summarize, Lakewood remains a community where public safety is priority #1 and where it shows in terms of having safe streets, neighborhoods and shopping areas.

This is not to say that all is perfect…or that we don’t have challenges.

But as someone who has worked in public safety for 27 years, I appreciate the support and active involvement from our City Council, our city management, and our residents and business community as we work together to take innovative and smart steps to continue to be one of the safest communities in our region.

Thank you.

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MAYOR CROFT:

Thank you Josh for that update on public safety in Lakewood.

At this point, I would like to take a moment to thank all the people in this room who work in public safety in Lakewood. Let me start by asking our sworn Los Angeles County Sheriff’s personnel to stand and be recognized and thanked.

And if you are a civilian working in public safety for us…either a city or county employee…or a Neighborhood Watch Block Captain…please stand so we can thank you.

And we have a second important sworn partner in public safety in Lakewood…and one with whom we have an equally long and well-regarded history…and that is the men and women of the Los Angeles County Fire Department, which has three stations in Lakewood. Can I ask all of our county Fire Department sworn and civilian personnel to stand and wave so we can all thank you for keeping us safe and helping us when emergencies strike?

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The Fire Department is organizing a Women’s Fire Prep Academy starting this Saturday, and they’ve asked us to help publicize it in Lakewood, which we’ve been doing over the past month or so. Tomorrow is the deadline to sign up, but if you know a woman 18 years or older who might be interested in a Fire Department career, tell her this is an excellent chance to get started. There are flyers on the table out front if you’re interested.

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And now to switch gears just a bit…and to speak about another top priority in Lakewood…which is our local economy, businesses and jobs…let me bring up Lakewood’s Community Development Director, Abel Avalos.
Thank you Mayor Croft. Hello everyone. I’m really happy to be here with you this afternoon to discuss our businesses and local economy. As Mayor Croft said, at the city we are doing everything we can to create and support a vibrant local economy that attracts new businesses and helps existing businesses thrive and grow.

Every city faces local challenges with those goals…and Lakewood has its challenges too…but we also have great opportunities.

Something that is both a challenge and an opportunity is our 6% dilemma.

As many of you know, Lakewood has an unusually small amount of its land zoned for commercial or industrial use – only 6 percent. Many cities have 10 to 15% or more. That’s just how Lakewood was initially designed, to be largely residential.

That presents a challenge to a business trying to find the right place for their particular needs. But…it also means that if they can find the right place, they are situating themselves within a heavily residential community with a lot of potential customers…and not just those that live in Lakewood. Because of our geographically central location, Lakewood has always been a commercial hub for a lot of neighboring communities and shoppers.

We have Lakewood Center to thank a great deal for that historical…and ongoing…magnet that pulls in customers from a wide circle beyond our city.

But Lakewood Center…like all shopping malls in America these days…faces challenges in the new Internet shopping environment.

We’re working closely with Lakewood Center as they think through what changes they want to make in the future to remain economically vibrant…and what we think will work well in our community.

This past year, the City Council approved our contract hiring of an economic consulting team that can provide us with expert analysis and advice on how we can deal with these economic challenges, and how we can maximize the opportunities we have for economic and commercial growth. Stay tuned for more news on that in the coming year.

Amidst all the churn in the national and local economy in 2022, Lakewood still saw substantial commercial growth and improvements this past year, which is very good news. Let me give you some examples.
Farmers & Merchants Bank continued with their major investment at Lakewood and Del Amo Boulevards, which included a $10 million-plus renovation of their building and a state of the art digital sign. They have employees relocating to their Lakewood office from their other bank sites around the region…which is an optimistic sign for our city. Their continued renovations will include a multi-million-dollar array of solar-charging shade covers for their parking lot.

Over 200 new businesses opened in Lakewood in 2022, including many small businesses and independent restaurants.

4,300 construction permits were issued for commercial and residential work in 2022, which is the highest yearly total in the past 15 years. Building and remodeling activity, especially commercial activity, declined sharply after COVID began, but clearly it has now rebounded strongly in Lakewood.

And more commercial development and new businesses will be coming to Lakewood in 2023…more in fact than in recent memory.

A creative, new quick-serve restaurant will be coming to the space on Candlewood St. formerly occupied by Souplantation. Demolition of the old building should start in April…and in its place will be Hart House—a restaurant founded by comedian Kevin Hart—that will feature all plant-based foods, including plant-based burgers, sandwiches and nuggets…along with salads, fries, tots…and even milkshakes. Hart House is expected to open near the end of the year…and be the fourth for the small but growing chain.

Another interesting new business will be the Sender One wall climbing experience. The former Office Max on Lakewood Blvd. will get a $2.4 million renovation and be expanded with a second story to create this new facility for families and climbing enthusiasts. There will be a section devoted to children with state-of-the-art tethers to allow them to safely climb 20-30 feet in the air, and a variety of climbing walls for climbers of all skill levels. Construction should start in the summer, with completion by the end of the year.

Interestingly, one of Sender One’s coaches is a contestant on the new HBO Max series “The Climb.” He’s from Lakewood and he’ll be working at the Lakewood location when they open up. Sender One has four sites in operation already in the L.A. area, with three more coming soon, so this is a growing company with an exciting business model. I, for one, am ready for a test climb once they open up! And maybe our City Manager would like to use it for some team building challenges…just a thought.

We’ll also see a large, new industrial and commercial development come to the empty parcel on Carson St. east of Walmart. It will include 4 buildings, totaling 75,000 square-feet—called The Drive—and the 13 tenants will include retail, medical, industrial, commercial and office users. Construction will start soon, with occupancy expected in 2024.

And Harbor Chevrolet and Hyundai on the Lakewood portion of Cherry Avenue has a new owner, and they will be making a major investment there, with entirely new showrooms. Construction will start and be completed this year, with the showrooms opening in 2024. With
the addition in Lakewood last year of the new Timmons Subaru dealership, this project signals the continued revitalization and upgrading of auto dealerships in our city, which as most of us know, are very important sales tax contributors to our community.

So, as you can see, despite all the ups and downs in the economy nationwide and in Lakewood…including chains closing or downsizing…we still have a lot of new businesses coming in or expanding here. We face challenges with our major shopping mall, but we also have opportunities given our central location and the continued geographic pull we have on millions of customer visits every year to Lakewood.

We look forward to continuing to work with our existing businesses…the Greater Lakewood Chamber of Commerce…and any new potential businesses that want to take advantage of all that we have to offer here in Lakewood.

Thank you all.

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MAYOR CROFT:

Thank you Abel.

Well, I hope you appreciated that in-depth look at our economic and public safety situation in Lakewood.

Now, I’d like to mention a few other important subjects and bring everything together for a total look at the State of our City.

The year 2022 was really one of renewal and recovery in Lakewood. Obviously that includes COVID and finally…let’s hope…getting past the worst of the pandemic and back to normal…or at least a new normal.

We’ve seen that now in Lakewood with the return to our full range of community events, like the Block Party and Pan Am Fiesta.

We are seeing that in the rebirth of Lakewood’s financial stability and sustainability which, thanks to Measure L and the good state of our local economy, means that as a city government we will be able to continue to maintain Lakewood’s top-quality services to our residents and businesses on into the future.

That means top-notch street maintenance so that Lakewood continues its proud tradition of having some of the smoothest streets in the region…if not L.A. County as a whole. We repaved 11 streets in 2022…including major portions of Del Almo, Candlewood and Pioneer…and we’ll repave additional streets in 2023.
That financial stability means having the resources in Lakewood now to maintain, repair and upgrade our parks and community facilities on into the future.

We completed renovations to Rynerson Park in 2022 with new picnic shelters and restrooms…and at San Martin Park we installed new picnic shelters and a new tot lot playground that’s a big hit with the younger crowd…and their parents.

We have a strategic plan now for which parks and community buildings need repairs and renovations…and when…and we’re carrying it out in a careful manner that fits our budget and the constraints we have on personnel and contractors to manage those projects. We report on that plan regularly with our Measure L Citizens Oversight Committee.

In 2023, we’ll be finalizing plans for a major renovation of the Palms Park community building and the Weingart Senior Center….and we’ll start making electrical, roofing and HVAC repairs and improvements to park buildings throughout Lakewood. Those are the “behind the scenes” infrastructure projects that the public doesn’t see when completed, but they are vital for keeping our community facilities working well into the future.

And because of our renewed financial stability, we are now able to fully maintain our public safety efforts…and as you heard today…make strategic and innovative improvements too.

We’re also continuing with our racial equity, diversity and inclusion work, which as you saw in the video, garnered Lakewood a prestigious statewide award in 2022. Lakewood is one of the most broadly diverse communities in Los Angeles County and the state, and we intend to keep up that important work…this year and into the future.

Overall, 2022 was a good year for Lakewood…and 2023 and the years ahead look very good too. We do face challenges in Lakewood, but life, of course, is a series of challenges.

As your mayor and with my City Council colleagues, I look forward to taking on those that we face in Lakewood.

The state of our city is strong and, as always, caring, and we start this new year in a very good position with the resources and community cohesion we need to face the challenges and opportunities ahead.

As you and your families and your organizations approach this new year with its challenges and opportunities for you as well, my Lakewood City Council colleagues and I and our city staff send our their best wishes for success, health and happiness.

God bless you, the City of Lakewood and the United States of America. Thank you.