

**Mayor Jeff Wood's Remarks For
The State of the City
March 24, 2022**

Thank you Brad for the introduction...and thank you Lieutenant Briseño for that comprehensive report on the state of public safety in Lakewood. And thank you CityTV for that informative and uplifting video.

Good afternoon Lakewood residents, business owners, community members, and friends of our city.

On behalf of my Lakewood City Council colleagues, I have the honor of talking with you about the State of our City.

To summarize it, I would use a few choice words that we have used in the past for good reason in Lakewood...and that reason is very appropriate now.

The state of Lakewood is **strong and caring.**

As a city, we are now strong and financially secure, thanks to the passage of Measure L two years ago.

Does that mean our city can stop being frugal and careful with finances? Never.

But we now have the funds to maintain our city services...make a few strategic enhancements...and carry out needed repairs and renovations to our parks and community buildings, many of which date back to the 1950s and 60s.

Nearly every community building in Lakewood has plumbing, roofing or electrical problems that come with age. Before Measure L...and because of state funding takeaways...the city no longer had the funds to keep Lakewood in the good shape that our residents expect...and that was very worrisome.

Now...fortunately...our city does have those funds.

This past year, the Lakewood City Council authorized the first Measure L-funded repair and renovation project at San Martin Park, which is getting new picnic shelters and a new tot-lot playground. Rynerson Park is also getting renovations now, with new restrooms and picnic shelters.

And parks and community buildings across the city can look forward to similar repairs and renovations, as needed, in the months and years ahead.

The financial stability we now have is also letting us leverage and use county, state and federal funds to make additional enhancements in road repairs and public safety.

In Lakewood, we enjoy being a generally quiet residential community...nestled in the middle of the busy Los Angeles metropolitan area. But, we are not immune to the problems that can occur in our region and state.

One of those problematic trends is the current spike in auto thefts and catalytic converter thefts. And that problem has hit Lakewood too.

We have increased our public education to alert residents to what they can do to help protect their vehicles, including coming to free catalytic converter ID-etching events that the city and the Sheriff's Department have sponsored.

But the problem is bigger than that.

And so the City Council is supporting legislative action at the state level to combat the issue in a deeper way... including bills that would require VIN numbers to be engraved onto catalytic converters prior to the sale of a vehicle...and would prohibit the cash sale of used converters.

But state legislative action may take time...and its outcome and impact is unclear. And so the City Council has decided to take greater action locally to combat the problem of catalytic converter theft, auto theft, and other crimes.

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On Tuesday, the City Council passed a program of enhancements to public safety in Lakewood, which we are calling the "Neighborhood Safety Enhancement Plan."

The plan includes:

- Increased Deputy Sheriff patrols at night in Lakewood neighborhoods, through the use of overtime.
- Lakewood will also hire Private Security Guards to patrol neighborhoods at night, working in close collaboration with the Lakewood Sheriff's Station.

Our first preference will be to use Deputy Sheriffs for the increased patrols, but the Sheriff's Department countywide is currently limited in staffing and not allowing cities to add permanent patrol positions to their contracts.

The Security Guards will not carry out law enforcement actions, but will observe and report to Deputy Sheriffs for fast response. They will also provide a highly-visible overnight presence driving through Lakewood neighborhoods nearly doubling the number of patrol cars normally on Lakewood streets overnight.

The Security Guards will be hired on a three-month contract, and their effectiveness will be evaluated over that time period before a decision is made on continuing their service.

I have received positive feedback from residents who shared that they will feel safer knowing that additional Deputy Sheriffs and Security Guards will be driving down their streets at night... keeping an eye on our community...and being seen by anyone thinking of committing illegal activity in Lakewood.

- Through our new program, we will also expand the number of Automatic License Plate Reading cameras in Lakewood.

The cameras...part of our Advanced Surveillance and Protection System...alert the Lakewood Sheriff's Station when a wanted vehicle has driven by, enabling Deputy Sheriffs to find suspects wanted for criminal activity.

The City of Lakewood's ongoing investment in this high-tech video system...which we've maintained and operated for 9 years now...is above and beyond what most cities do for public safety. And it's paid off with the arrest of several hundred suspects since its installation, including catching wanted suspects before they can commit new crimes in Lakewood.

- We'll also create a new rebate program for residents to purchase home security cameras.

These cameras have proven valuable in deterring criminal activity...spotting it when it does happen...and providing evidence that Sheriff's investigators can use to find the suspects.

- Homelessness continues to be a vexing problem in our region ...both in terms of the tragic toll on homeless people and the impact on the quality of life for local residents.

Lakewood currently invests in a Deputy Sheriff who spends a large percentage of his time outreaching to homeless people in our city about available services, but also enforcing the law when criminal behavior occurs. Lakewood is now close to approval on a grant that will fund a homeless outreach specialist who will work in Lakewood and two neighboring cities. This added position will work closely with our Deputy Sheriff and enhance Lakewood's overall ability to offer services to the homeless, but also increase our ability to enforce the law when criminal behavior occurs.

- Other parts of our Neighborhood Safety Enhancement Plan include:
 - Exploring a regional City Prosecutor for pursuing criminal charges against suspects that the L.A. County District Attorney is no longer pursuing.
 - And stepping up the promotion of programs like Volunteers on Patrol and Neighborhood Watch that allow Lakewood residents to play a valuable role in protecting their neighborhoods and community.

The cost of the Neighborhood Safety Enhancement Plan will be \$400,000. Funds for it will come from Measure L and from Lakewood's share of federal American Rescue Plan funds.

Some elements of the plan will be permanent...such as the investment made in additional license plate cameras.

Other elements will be temporary...at least initially... such as the extra nighttime security patrols...but they will have a long-term benefit on the perception of Lakewood as a community that has extra security and enhanced public safety.

That's been a priority of Lakewood since our community began...and we are committed to making that a priority now...and into the future.

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I have spoken a fair amount today about law enforcement, but I also want to acknowledge and recognize our L.A. County firefighters in Lakewood, who keep us safe and secure in many vital ways, day-in and day-out.

This past November, we were able to gather for our annual Award of Valor Ceremony to honor our public safety personnel...including our firefighters...who once again protected and saved many Lakewood residents over the past year.

Can I ask our firefighters, sheriff's personnel, and civilian public safety staff to stand for a moment so we can thank them for all that they do to protect and serve us?

Our city's return to a secure financial position...and our continuing commitment to public safety...are two of the major reasons why Lakewood is a strong and caring community. But there's another big reason.

And that's the Lakewood residents and non-profit groups who volunteer to help our community and fellow residents in need.

These past two years of COVID have highlighted the benefits of that strong network of local support and community involvement even more.

It ranges from the volunteers with Meals on Wheels...to our service organizations like Rotary, the Lions Club, the Women's Club and Soroptimists...to Pathways Volunteer Hospice, the Greater Lakewood Chamber of Commerce and businesses that give back to the community...and the Pan American Association and Friends of the Lakewood Libraries...to the Lakewood Education Foundation, our veterans organizations...Neighborhood Watch and sheriff station volunteers...and to groups that help with youth sports, scouting and other activities...and our religious congregations.

And there's more of course.

If you volunteer in Lakewood, can you stand up or wave? Let's take a moment to thank all the people in these organizations and others who volunteer their time to help their community and their neighbors in need?

Lakewood is a strong, caring community because we're fortunate and blessed to be the home to so many caring individuals, businesses and organizations who voluntarily give their time and their energy...and by doing so, do good things for their community and their neighbors.

But there's room for more good work to be done.

As you heard from CityTV, my council colleagues and I worked this past year to create a series of short videos to publicize what our Lakewood community groups do...and to encourage other residents to think about volunteering whatever time they can to help.

Our video series is called "Connect with a Caring Community." Look for it and for ideas on volunteering and making Lakewood even better at www.lakewoodcity.org/volunteer.

So, I've talked about the strengths and positive aspects of Lakewood. But we do have problems...and we do face challenges.

One of them is the ongoing threat from the state government to force dense housing on Lakewood and communities throughout California.

Another is from a change in the way that crime is prosecuted...or should I say, "not prosecuted"...by L.A. County District Attorney, George Gascon.

On the Lakewood City Council, we're not taking either of these problems or challenges lightly.

As you may know, our City Council just took a very rare ...but unfortunately very necessary vote of "no confidence" in District Attorney George Gascon.

We did so only after researching what his new policies are doing on the ground in Lakewood...and after meeting with him and his leadership team multiple times to explain our concerns and offering him an opportunity to explain his policies.

Thirty-four cities in Los Angeles County have now passed "no confidence" votes on D.A. George Gascon...and a recall election is being organized, so there is more to come on this matter.

In Lakewood, we have faced problems and challenges like these before and we always do our homework before speaking out. But once we do, we are not shy about making sure that the interests of our community are heard.

We are known in Sacramento as one of the most vocal cities our size in terms of speaking up on legislative issues affecting local communities. And we're proud of that.

We know that legislators and policy-makers hear from other interests in these debates, but we want to make sure they never stop hearing from Lakewood ...and that we never stop advocating to protect the quality of life that our residents themselves have worked so hard to enjoy in Lakewood. We owe that to our residents, don't we?

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And we are always looking for new ways to stay in touch with Lakewood residents. We have a weekly eMagazine with updates on city issues that over 38,000 residents subscribe to. That's one of the largest participation rates in the state.

We also have a smart phone app that more and more residents are using to submit service requests.

We also completed a major redesign of our website this past year, making it even more user-friendly and allowing residents and businesses to engage more with the City online.

And new this year, the city is starting a regular public opinion poll that residents and business community members can take part in. It will include different questions every one to two months, with the promise that it will always be a short, one-minute survey, so it will be easy to participate in.

An independent company, FlashVote, will conduct the survey so that people can be candid...and their individual answers and identity will be kept confidential. It will be a great, new way for our City Council and city staff to stay even more up to date on what the priorities, ideas and concerns are of our residents and business community members.

There's a banner that we have mounted on street light poles across the city. It reads "Lakewood: Great Ideas Last For Generations."

It was developed for our 55th anniversary in 2009, and the message is timeless.

Those great ideas include safe and friendly residential neighborhoods where families can raise their children...where grandparents can retire and take their grandkids for walks...where people of all ages have opportunities for recreation and fun...where business owners and entrepreneurs are welcomed into the community...where public safety professionals and volunteers are recognized for their service...and where kindness, respect, diversity and inclusion are honored and celebrated...most recently at Lakewood's newest event, the Fest-of-All.

We are all blessed and fortunate to live or work in a city like Lakewood that embraces these great ideas...and that works hard to remain a community where these ideas and values can flourish.

Our city is not without its challenges, but our strength and caring nature as a community put us in a very good place to meet those problems head on, as generations of Lakewood residents have before us.

The state of our city in 2022 is indeed strong and caring...and I am thankful to be a resident of Lakewood and to work with all of you in this room and in the greater community to keep Lakewood a great place to live, work and visit for the year ahead...and for generations to come.

Thank you.