

2024 LAKEWOOD STATE OF THE CITY REMARKS

January 30, 2024

by Mayor Ariel Pe
City Manager Thaddeus McCormack
Public Works Director Kelli Pickler

MAYOR PE

- Hello...and Happy New Year everyone! It's still January, so we can say that, right?
- It's great to see everyone today...and thank you for joining us for our annual State of the City event.
- I'm sure you all noticed the special goodies we put at your table. I'll be talking more about those in a bit.
- First, let me say thanks again to CityTV for that wonderful video. The format of the video was a bit different than usual **because we did something a bit different at the city this past year**...and that was to create a Vision, Mission, Values statement for our city organization.
- As you heard in the video, the principles in that statement are not new to Lakewood.
- Everything in there are core principles that we've held for a long time in Lakewood. But the City Council thought that it was important to put those principles into a single document to orient and educate future employees...guide our priorities...and remind our community members about what our city is committed to delivering to them.
- You'll be hearing more about our Vision, Mission, Values statement in the future...and you got a card listing them all on your chair today, so take a look when you get a chance.
- One key element is to continue to encourage our community to come together...be engaged...and be involved. That's one of my personal goals too...and one of the things that I love about Lakewood.
- We have so many community events...large and small...where people get to come together, see their fellow residents...even talk with their council members if they want...and enjoy living together in a fun and wholesome community.
- But none of those good things can happen if we don't have a safe city. And that's why our **top organizational goal** continues to be doing everything we can to have the safest possible community here in Lakewood.

- Our city team is united in that effort...and it includes daily, close attention from our highest-level city staff person, along with key members of his team, our public safety department, and of course our partners at the Lakewood Sheriff's Station.
- So here to give us a rundown on the state of public safety in Lakewood is our top staff person, our City Manager, Thaddeus McCormack.

THADDEUS MCCORMACK

- Thank you Mayor Pe.
- As the Mayor said, in Lakewood, public safety is our highest priority. How safe our community is dictates everything else. I know that is true in most cities, but it's really part of our DNA here in Lakewood. It's a key part of my job every day. It's at the core of everyone's job here at the city. And it starts at the very top, with our City Council, who set our priorities, our goals, and our vision.
- The Council has a Public Safety Committee of two council members which meets every month for 1-2 hours with our Sheriff's and public safety leadership team to discuss new and ongoing issues and to fine tune our strategies.
- The Public Safety Committee keeps the full council informed, and the membership of the committee rotates over time so that the entire council is closely involved. Through good times and bad...mostly good..., we look at what's working and what's not, as well as look at emerging issues so we can develop strategies to stay ahead of the curve.
- For example, two years ago, when the thefts of catalytic converters and other property thefts spiked throughout California and the nation, the Public Safety Committee recommended that the council pass what they called the "Neighborhood Safety Enhancement Plan" for Lakewood.
- The council passed that... unanimously...and added \$400,000 to our public safety budget. And we continue to assess and revise that plan to make sure we're addressing new concerns and keeping Lakewood the safest community it can be. In fact, that ongoing review and revise process continues into this current fiscal year, where we added even more elements.
- The Safety Plan includes:
 - More hours for Deputy Sheriff patrols in Lakewood, including an extra two-deputy car that's had a big impact in terms of arrests, confiscating illegal guns, and finding stolen cars. This additional unit gives us the flexibility to target specific types of crimes and areas as needed.

- You know, we're well served by the hardworking men and women of the Lakewood Station Sheriff's station here in Lakewood, but you've probably heard of the limitation on expanding our deployment due to County-budgetary constraints and the large number of vacancies that the Department has experienced. While we have had good luck recruiting deputies for extra shifts in Lakewood, there is a limit to how many of those extra shifts we can get.
- And so the City Council got creative and decided to supplement that by contracting with a private security company...Southwest Patrol...which provides four cars and security guards every night of the week to create a highly visible presence around Lakewood neighborhoods, parks, shopping centers and any areas that need extra attention.
- The security guards have been very helpful. For example, at the 2022 Award of Valor event, we honored a security guard for keenly identifying and talking with a distraught man in his car who it turned out was on the verge of committing suicide by driving into a wall.
- And in 2023, we honored a security guard for spotting two suspicious men walking late at night and then noticing two handguns they had placed under a car. He quickly called that in to the Sheriff's Station which found the unregistered and loaded guns...and probably prevented a violent crime from taking place shortly thereafter.
- The funding in our Safety Enhancement Plan also allowed us to contract with a highly-experienced Community Prosecutor who works closely with the city and our Sheriff's personnel to use legal filings and other tools to cut down on nuisance properties, gang member activity and other quality of life problems. In the year that our Community Prosecutor has been working for us, it's been eye-opening for me to see how the legal system can be used in a positive way to tackle troublesome problems and improve the quality of life in neighborhoods.
- Our Safety Plan has gotten residents involved and empowered too, by offering rebates for them to install nearly 250 home security camera systems over the past two years.
- We've seen how effective video security systems can really be in deterring and catching criminals. For example, we honored a resident at our most recent Award of Valor for noticing an attempted theft of his truck on his home video system. He reported it quickly to the Sheriff's Department and posted video of the getaway vehicle on the Ring video network, where a Lakewood Deputy saw it, and headed quickly to his house...where the Deputy found the suspected thief still in the neighborhood. When he pulled the suspect over, there were car theft tools in his car...and he was on probation for a previous car theft. Great teamwork from a Lakewood resident and a Lakewood deputy.

- So, are all our various efforts paying off?
- Well, overall crime declined by about 10% in Lakewood in 2023 compared to the previous year. Thefts overall are down, including auto burglaries and catalytic converter thefts. And crime overall is lower now than five years ago. So we think we are seeing success through our efforts.
- Lakewood continues to be one of the safest communities in the region. And we're committed to keeping it that way. But we never rest on our laurels. We remain ever vigilant because there are always evolving challenges to stay on top of.
- One of those challenges is the truly odd and disturbing social media phenomenon of organized youth meet-ups designed for mischief, mayhem and misdeeds at shopping malls.
- These have been happening across Southern California, the nation, and internationally...and one happened just a few weeks ago in Torrance at the Del Amo Fashion Mall.
- Unfortunately, Lakewood Center mall has not been immune either. We had one in September...and one was planned in December right before Christmas. But thankfully, in both cases, the Lakewood Sheriffs and our city public safety team...in partnership with the mall's staff and security personnel...got on top of it much better than most malls and thwarted both youth mobs. The most bizarre part of it was that most of the youth were of middle-school age—12 through 14.
- The September incident did result in the mall to closing early for the evening as a precaution. But our intervention prevented any thefts or violence from taking place...and the youth were ultimately dispersed.
- In the December incident, we had more advanced intel, and having learned lessons from the September incident, we developed an even more robust and effective plan, resulting in no disruption at all to Lakewood Center...but we were prepared just in case.
- Adding to the frustration of this new phenomenon is the problem of legal prosecution. Sadly, it is not a crime to use social media to organize a large-scale meet-up at a location...even when the implicit reason or result of the meet-up is to commit chaos and disrupt commerce. That legal hurdle has to change. Lakewood has taken the initiative to talk with our state legislators about this, and we got a sympathetic positive response to our request. So stay tuned.
- Regrettably, there are problems these days with holding so-called "low level offenders" accountable for their crimes, be it shoplifting, auto theft or other property crimes. We haven't kept our frustration and displeasure about that here in Lakewood a secret. We're doing everything we can to advocate legislatively for changes. But we're also taking actions that we can directly control here in our city, such as adding more Deputy Sheriff time,

Security Guard patrols, and the other efforts I discussed so that we continue to keep Lakewood as safe as we possibly can.

- It's great to work for a City Council that provides the overall inspiration and leadership for that goal...and to work with excellent public safety partners in the Sheriff's Department, city staff, and our business community... and, very importantly, to have the support of so many Lakewood residents, including those who volunteer with Neighborhood Watch and the Sheriff's Department.
- We're a great team working together – if I don't mind saying myself...and it's been an honor for me to be a partner with you all this past year...and I look forward to a great year working with you again in 2024.
- Thank you very much.

=====

MAYOR PE

- Thank you Thaddeus. As he mentioned, public safety is a community-wide team effort...and thank you everyone for being part of that team and for creating the successes and declining crime rate that Thaddeus detailed.
- There's another important partner in our public safety team that I want to highlight now, and that's our friends with the Los Angeles County Fire Department, which has three stations in Lakewood.
- Our community was proud to honor many Fire Department personnel from Lakewood just two months ago at our Award of Valor event. And we thank ALL of our Fire Department personnel for keeping us safe and helping us in crisis moments...be it fires, serious traffic accidents, or medical emergencies.
- The county Fire Department is organizing a Women's Fire Prep Academy starting February 11th, and the Department is asking us to help publicize it. If you know a young 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.
- Can I now ask all of our public safety personnel...Fire, Sheriff and city...sworn and non-sworn...along with our Neighborhood Watch and community volunteers...to please stand so that we can express our appreciation for what you do to keep our community members safe?

=====

- I want to shift gears a bit now...and talk about Lakewood's economy.

- We had 4,800 construction permits issued in Lakewood last year...covering commercial and residential projects. That was the highest number in 16 years.
- Lakewood is largely a residential community, with only 6% of our land devoted to commerce...a very small amount for a city. So we're not going to have the number of new business openings you might see in other cities.
- But, Lakewood remains an attractive place for many business owners to locate in and invest their time, money, hard work and talent. And at the city we work hard to make their renovations and openings go as smoothly and quickly as possible. As mayor, I want to personally thank the businesses who chose to locate or renovate here last year, including some of the businesses shown on the screen.
- And more business openings are coming in the near future.
- In March or April this year, we expect to see the opening of "Sender One" in the former Office Max on Lakewood Blvd. Sender One is a wall climbing experience for youth, families and climbing enthusiasts. So get ready for some physically active fun there.
- And "Big Blue Swim School" will be bringing its popular indoor swim school for kids 12 and under to Lakewood. They will completely renovate the former Hometown Buffet on Candlewood Street, starting in late 2024, with an opening in early 2025. They have 250 locations nationwide in just 15 years. They obviously have a good formula for success in teaching kids how to swim. Some of their secrets include water that is always 90-degrees and always shallow, making lessons comfortable and safe.
- While this is not a traditional kind of business at a shopping mall, these are the new kinds of so-called "experiential attractions" that shopping malls are looking for now to bring in customers and families who will end up dining and shopping elsewhere on the property. I know that Lakewood Center has some other "experiential attractions" that they are also working on that aren't quite ready for a prime-time announcement yet, but stay tuned.
- One thing that makes our community attractive to businesses is having excellent infrastructure. That means the smooth, well-maintained streets Lakewood is known for...along with attractive parks and tree-lined neighborhoods, with lots of happy potential customers.
- Now, here to tell us more about what infrastructure and community improvements were completed in 2023 and what to expect in 2024 and beyond is our Director of Public Works, Kelli Pickler.

KELLI PICKLER

- Thank you Mayor Pe.

- First off, I want to put this discussion of community improvements into perspective by saying that a lot of these repairs and improvements...and the public safety enhancements that Thaddeus talked about earlier...would not be possible without Measure L, which was passed by Lakewood residents in 2020.
- If Measure L had not passed, I would be talking with you instead about how to stretch our dollars to keep facilities limping along...or worse, tough decisions regarding what facilities we would need to close. And Thaddeus certainly would not have been talking about the public safety enhancements we have made recently.
- Instead, thanks to Measure L, I can talk with you about how we are catching up with lots of deferred maintenance to keep existing infrastructure in good shape...how we're making some strategic improvements...and how we're planning for renovations to extend the life of our aging facilities and make them attractive and usable for our residents for many years to come.
- Let me start with sidewalks.
- Lakewood is a Tree City USA...and we love that. However, sometimes trees and sidewalks don't get along so well. Prior to Measure L, we did our best but we had a large backlog of needed sidewalk repairs. Last year, we were able to increase our typical \$600,000 annual sidewalk repair budget to \$2.3 million in order to catch up on repairs. This year, we have budgeted \$1.2 million dollars to continue that effort. That's good news for residential neighborhoods and commercial areas around town.
- Lakewood also loves its parks. Our city was uniquely designed so there is a neighborhood park within walking distance of every home. What people want in their parks evolves over time of course. For example, we've added pickleball lines and dedicated pickleball time to some of our basketball courts. And this past year, for the first time, we added a soccer mini-pitch to a Lakewood park. The pitch—which is the official name for a soccer field—came courtesy of Lakewood resident and LA Galaxy star Jalen Neal in combination with the U.S. Soccer Foundation, the Galaxy soccer club and their corporate partner Herbalife. The city used Measure L funds to help with the project, including resurfacing and refurbishing the nearby basketball courts and installing new lights to enhance the entire area of Palms Park where the mini-pitch went in.
- I'm also happy to say that Jalen oversaw his first youth tournament at the mini-pitch this December, and we're looking forward to him and the Galaxy having a close relationship with Lakewood for many years to come.
- For 2024, with a combination of Measure L and county funds, we expect to renovate the playgrounds at Boyar, Biscailuz and Bloomfield parks...and we'll use Measure L funds for long overdue roofing, electrical and HVAC replacements and upgrades at many Lakewood community buildings.

- Another new project is our city’s “Alley Abatement Team.” We’ve dedicated additional staff to remove illegally dumped items...and last year they handled over 2,400 requests. You can help keep Lakewood beautiful too. If you have items that are too big or can’t go in your normal trash or recycling, call EDCO for a free bulky item pickup. In Lakewood, you can have up to six items picked up, six items a year, at no additional cost to you.
- As the Mayor mentioned, Lakewood is known for the top quality of its streets. That is largely due to a 10-year program that repaved every street within Lakewood—something really unheard of in the public works arena that Lakewood should be very proud of. Since that time, the city has kept up its maintenance and repaved 14 additional miles, including major portions of Candlewood, Pioneer and Del Amo last year.
- This year, we are starting the process to repave 16 miles on other major thoroughfares and residential streets and alleys. Fortunately, our streets are in such good condition now that we can rely on just state and other local funds for this type of street maintenance, and save our Measure L funds for other projects, which is more positive news.
- As with public safety, keeping Lakewood’s streets, parks and infrastructure in good shape is a team effort. I’d like to thank the City Council for setting our priorities and providing the vision and leadership...and I’d like to thank the city staff and our many contractors who play a vital role in this effort.
- If you are a city employee or contractor involved in trash and recycling, street sweeping, street and park maintenance, or other city infrastructure, could you please stand so we could acknowledge what you do to keep Lakewood looking good and working well for all of us?

=====

- Thank you all...and I look forward to another productive year of working with our city team to keep Lakewood’s infrastructure in top notch shape.

MAYOR PE

- Thank you Kelli for that.
- As you can see, Lakewood has a busy year ahead in public safety and infrastructure...and that doesn’t include the excellent work done by other city departments and staff that we don’t have time to detail here today. You can read more about those in the Annual Report we put on your chair.
- But there is one more upcoming project that I want to tell you about now.

- 70 years ago, in 1954, the residents of the largest planned community in America at the time made the bold decision to incorporate and become their own city. I think you know the name of that city.
- Well, today is the official start of the 70th Anniversary Celebration of our beloved City of Lakewood.
- And here to help us kick off the celebration is our friendly Tree City USA mascot in Lakewood--Woody the Tree. Come on out Woody.
- Woody is carrying with him our new city podium emblem that we will use throughout 2024.
- Woody and a couple helpers are going to put that new anniversary emblem on our podium.
- Woody is taking on an additional role this year as our 70th Anniversary Mascot...and he'll be appearing at a lot of city events to help us celebrate. Those will all culminate in a big Family Movie Night at Mayfair Park on April 20th with a showing of Back To The Future, with free ice cream and other fun activities for everyone.
- Stay tuned to our Lakewood Connect eMagazine and our social media feeds for details on all those events and some online Lakewood history quizzes where you will be eligible to win more 70th anniversary Lakewood goodies such as you have at your table today.
- I hope you enjoy being the first people in Lakewood to get those goodies this year.
- And Woody, am I correct that you will remain after the event today standing next to the large Lakewood map in case anyone would like a fun photo with you? Thanks Woody!
- And thank you all for coming here today to hear about Lakewood's accomplishments in 2023...what we have planned in 2024...and to help us kick off our celebration of Lakewood's 70 years of success as a city. I hope you have a great day and a great rest of 2024. And as I always like to say: One Community, One Family. Live, Love, Lakewood.
- Thank you everyone.