

## **Meeting the Challenge**

Good evening. It is my honor and privilege to address you tonight as we review last year's accomplishments and outline our plans and needs for the future.

Obviously, our platform is very different this year. In previous years, we would all be gathered in this council chambers, sharing stories, meeting new people and reacquainting ourselves with friends and family. Nonetheless, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you virtually.

Looking back, 2020 was a year of disruption, as we were all thrust into uncertainty and fear. However, I am proud to say that Temple City has, and is, meeting the challenges, of which there are many. If anything, the past year has shown us the strength and resilience of our city. We have witnessed beauty and good come out of our community, such as volunteers sewing and giving away face masks, chalk art on our sidewalks and lawn signs to raise our spirits. Not to mention, the numerous instances of neighbors helping each other.

There were certain moments in 2020 where our community especially shined. I would be remiss to talk about 2020 and not mention the important social justice movement of Black Lives Matter and the calls for police reform that swept our nation. Our small city found its own way to participate in raising awareness and making sure Temple Citizens didn't stay silent and that our voices were heard. This effort was largely organized by the city's youth, in collaboration with Temple Sheriff Station, to make sure the event was peaceful and safe. I was proud and inspired by the way our community showed up to express their concerns. It was truly a powerful day.

I know there's still anxiety about the future, as each day weighs heavily on us all. We share a desire to get back to "normal." And now, with the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines under way, I truly believe that an end to this pandemic is in sight. We will continue to partner with federal, state and county government as the vaccines become more available. Now I know that "lockdown fatigue" is wearing on everyone, but now more than ever, we must continue to follow public health guidelines to ensure that we mitigate the spread of the virus.

Our city was blessed to receive large shipments of much needed personal protective equipment from our sister city in Hualien County, Taiwan. We can't thank them enough for their act of kindness. We also received masks and equipment from HSS Temple City Chapter, representing our local Hindu-American community, the West San Gabriel Valley Realtors and the Temple City Chinese-American Association. Our heartfelt thanks go out to each of these organization for their generous contributions.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge my fellow council members and staff who have exhibited exemplary leadership and guidance throughout the past year:

- Mayor Pro Tem **Vincent Yu**, whom I've had the pleasure and honor of serving with for the past 12 years;
- Councilmember **Cynthia Sternquist**, who has served the city as a commissioner, councilmember and mayor for over 25 years;
- One of my mentors, **Fernando Vizcarra**, who graciously agreed to come out of retirement to serve his city.;

- And **William Man**, who brought a new energy to the council when he was first elected five years ago; and
- To **Bryan Cook**, our city manager, who quickly answered the call when the pandemic hit, steering city hall throughout the many challenges we have faced over the past 12 months and doing it with a calmness and professional leadership demanded in these difficult times.
- City Attorney, Greg Murphy, who expertly guided us through ever-changing laws as well as State and County orders throughout the year.

I also want to give special thanks to all our department heads, staff, commissioners, service organizations and our Chamber of Commerce for their continued work and dedication to our city. If anything the past year has shown us the good that can happen when everyone is working toward a common goal.

I also want to send a special thanks to my family, Jane, Evan and Sean for always being there for me. Their unconditional love and support has been a blessing to me throughout this challenging year.

### **Serving the Community During the Pandemic**

The pandemic unleashed changes that seemed unthinkable just a year ago, with everything “going virtual” among them. As public health protocols often prevented traditionally in-person experiences, many of us now rely on video conferencing and web streaming for connection, entertainment and access to services.

One of our goals for 2020 was to provide the Temple City community with engaging and fun learning opportunities safely at home. I'm proud to say that we've been able to quickly adapt to the situation while continuing to provide services.

The Parks and Recreation Department launched a Virtual Recreation Center, offering a number of resources and programming to keep Temple Citians active. While we experienced annual events like Camp-A-Palooza and the Classic Car Show differently, there were also newly created traditions for residents as well, including the HealthyTC challenges, Craft Club sessions and Family Trivia Nights.

Our fantastic Summer Concerts in the Park typically draw thousands to Temple City Park each summer, but last July, we streamed them on Facebook and YouTube, and we still were able to garner over 8,000 views. Yes, it was a different way of coming together to enjoy music, but we needed to put the safety of the public first.

We even entered into a partnership with Microsoft to provide our residents with free enrichment workshops, including literacy and coding programs for kids and courses for adults looking to start their own businesses or get a better handle on LinkedIn, to name just a few examples. It's something that I hope will continue even when the pandemic ends.

And one of my favorite events from last year was our Zoom With Santa. More than 75 children between the ages of 2-12 had the opportunity to speak to Santa over Zoom. Now rather than asking for traditional gifts, some children asked Santa to "get rid of COVID" and "for their families to be safe." Overall, it was an event that allowed our TC

children to have a moment of holiday cheer and to remind our kids that there is light and magic even in dark times.

I love seeing our youth engaged in the community, which is why the Temple City Youth Committee holds such a special place in my heart. Their efforts in recent months to promote mental wellness by spreading positive messages around the city, such as the billboard on Rosemead Boulevard, provided inspiration for countless citizens. And I am extraordinarily proud knowing our Temple City Youth Committee was behind it.

## **COVID-19 Relief**

### RELIEF GRANTS

When the pandemic hit, the city's immediate goal was to make sure our residents were safe, informed and able to access services and resources. The citywide eviction moratorium was passed and in addition, the city allocated over \$540,000 to support small businesses and renters affected by COVID-19. For renters, the city would help pay up to \$1,000 per month for rent, for up to three months. Temple City was able to provide grants to 56 households and a number of businesses. We are still processing grants as applications continue to come in.

### SENIOR MEAL DELIVERIES AND MASKS

We also had to quickly change our senior lunch program to senior meal delivery service. Each week, our staff delivered meals to over 100 seniors. The city also gave away Temple City cloth masks to over 300 senior citizens.

## OPEN FOR BUSINESS BANNERS

Temple City's business community has been hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. We distributed "Open for Business" banners to more than 35 businesses in town. It's the City's hope that the banners serve the dual purpose of helping those businesses promote themselves and reinforce the message that Temple City is unified in supporting them.

## BUSINESS LICENSE DEFERRAL

The Temple City City Council also instituted a business license deferral and amnesty program as part of its COVID-19 economic response program. The deferral program deferred business license payments for three months, in efforts to support the business community during these challenging times.

## TEMPORARY OUTDOOR DINING PERMIT

When indoor dining was shut down, the city quickly established a Temporary Outdoor Dining permit program to ensure that many of our favorite restaurants could remain open during a tumultuous time— when health guidelines and restrictions changed at a moment's notice. With the restrictions on outdoor dining being lifted, the City's outdoor dining permit program is ready and in place to make sure our restaurants can safely serve customers.

## **Continuity of City Business and Projects**

The business of governing and serving our city continued despite a changing world. It's nearly been one year since city council meetings were moved online. And while we've all become experts at web conferencing, we're still getting used to the quirks that come with technology. The phrase "You're on Mute" has become part of our daily conversation!

## VIRTUAL CITY HALL

While City Hall was closed to the public for some of the year, we found different ways to maintain a similar level of service as before the pandemic. Many of the functions were moved online or through phone. I know our city planners met with customers via telephone and web conferencing and even created an online permit portal.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

Our collaboration with Temple Sheriff's Station is an excellent example of how the City continues to serve the community despite the changes going on. I'd like to thank our previous Captain David Flores for doing a tremendous job and I trust our new captain, Mark Reyes, to carry on the role.

This year is the tenth year of our Neighborhood Watch Program. It continues to provide a foundation for our community-based policing approach. I'd like to thank Bryan Ariizumi and our public safety team for continuing the program virtually with much success. I believe because our community is actively engaged with our public safety team, Temple City continues to place in the Top 50 Safest Cities in California. In fact, last year we jumped 11 spots from 41st place to 30th place on the list and Temple City is one of only

two San Gabriel Valley cities on the list! These achievements are the result of you—countless individuals taking it upon yourself to make Temple City an even safer community.

Additionally, our monthly Law Enforcement Meetings with Temple Sheriff's Station also provide direct lines of communication and accountability regarding local crime and public safety trends.

## CONTINUITY PLAN

In August 2020, the City Council adopted the COVID-19 Continuity Plan which identified the city's service goals and priority initiatives during the pandemic. Intended to be proactive yet fluid, the plan's five goals and nearly 80 recommended actions took into consideration public health orders, minimal service interruption and no-net budgetary impact. The Continuity Plan's goals included citizen engagement, financial solvency, public information, response and recovery planning, and service delivery.

## CITY FRONTLINE WORKERS

The day-to-day work to keep our city running would not have been possible without our maintenance and tree field staff, as well as our code enforcement and public safety officers. They were the city's frontline workers, and I cannot thank them enough.

## LAS TUNAS PAVEMENT

As you can see in the background, Las Tunas Dr. is one of our main business corridors and thousands of cars travel through every day. For the first time in 20 years, we re-

paved our main corridor from city limit to city limit. I know this effort caused some troubles, road closures and a little dust. We cannot thank the community and businesses enough for their patience during this project.

## HOUSING ELEMENT

In December, we kicked off the process of updating our Housing Element, one of the seven required elements for a General Plan. Its focus is on planning for the construction of future housing in the city. With the state's heavy focus on creating more housing, Governor Gavin Newsom allocated \$250 million in funding to assist cities in prioritizing planning activities that accelerate housing production. The city will be applying for those grants to fund the Housing Element update.

## CITY FINANCES

There's no doubt we'll see an impact on our revenues, but as to what degree, we're still uncertain. We're cautiously optimistic we'll remain financially stable. One major benefit of Temple City being a bedroom (or primarily residential) community is that we don't have to rely on a large sales tax base that's dependent on malls, auto dealerships or even tourism. Thankfully, our fiscally conservative approach will allow us to stay financially afloat.

Temple City's robust General Fund reserve—worth about \$20 million or a year of the city's operating costs—is available to help fill gaps in funding for essential services.

Having such a resource is a rarity for most local governments. Our budget focus through the end of the 2020-21 fiscal year is to maintain current service levels. One ex-

ception: Our parks and recreation function encountered several (and hopefully temporary) operational changes as the implications of COVID-19 dictated how we provided community and recreational program moving forward. We're currently modeling some financial projections to better determine what the impacts of COVID-19 could be on city finances over the next two to three years.

## STILL CONNECTED

The city's goal to stay connected and engaged with Temple Citians was imperative in 2020. While the city worked hard to avail resources and services to residents online and virtually, we had to temporarily halt the publication of CONNECT, our award-winning magazine that offers not only information on city programming, but also features insightful articles on all things Temple City. However, we heard from our less technology-inclined residents that they missed receiving something physical and tangible from the city. And so we decided to publish and distribute *Still Connected*, a bite-sized newsletter and resource guide from City Hall to remind everyone in Temple City that—yes—we are “still connected. “

## Looking Forward to 2021

There's much to look forward to in 2021, but we must also remember to apply the lessons learned in 2020. Our goal last year was to maintain service levels—I believe we accomplished that goal.

## TEMPLE CITY LIBRARY

Other city projects that kicked off in 2020 and continued through the year include the construction and expansion of the Temple City Library. The library has always been much more than just a library in our city; it is a safe haven and place for the community to gather (of course prior to the pandemic). I know it is very near and dear to many Temple Citians. This project has been many years in the making, and I am excited to announce that the newly renovated library will open this fall. I would like to thank our partners in the county for their continued support in this project.

## PRIMROSE PARK

For the first time since the city's incorporation in 1960, a new park will open on Primrose Ave. The aptly named Primrose Park will be a neighborhood pocket park that adds much needed green space to the city. It's being funded through a state grant that the city received, and we anticipate that construction will begin soon. I look forward to celebrating the park's opening in late fall.

## **Closing**

When this pandemic ends — and it WILL END! We will all share in a new era of safety and prosperity. Although we will face many challenges in the months ahead, our city, through the hard work and dedication of all of you, will be better equipped with lessons learned in 2020.

Although it has become a cliché, the phrase, "Together we can, and together we will" has never been more appropriate.

In closing, my prayers go out to our frontline workers and first responders, as well as their families who face many challenges of their own. May God bless the families who have lost loved ones and may those we have lost rest in peace.

Stay safe, thank you and may God bless you and the great city of Temple City.