

**2020 State of the City**  
Mayor W.J. “Jim” Lane

A State of the City address is always a challenging thing. Simultaneously wrapping up the year that was, talking about the key priorities of the moment, and looking toward the future.

This year is particularly challenging – because 2020 has been unlike any year that any of us can remember. In addition, as my public service as an elected official for the City of Scottsdale comes to an end after 16 years – the past 12 as your mayor – I do not want to neglect touching on the many things we have accomplished together, and recognizing the many people who have been part of those achievements.

This State of the City was delayed from its normal position on the early spring calendar as 100 percent of our attention focused on battling the global COVID-19 pandemic. This effort has demanded and continues to receive your municipal government’s absolute best.

I am incredibly proud of the way Scottsdale employees have continued to serve the residents and businesses of Scottsdale during this most difficult period. Our fire fighters and paramedics were among the first frontline COVID-19 public health responders in Arizona. Human services staff helping care for the elderly and other people in need of nutrition and housing. Facilities crews continually modifying and cleaning city buildings so employees can deliver services. Library staff creating entirely new models and methods so the public can continue to receive materials, doubly important with the amount of learning, working and relaxing occurring in homes across the city.

Reputations are forged in times of crisis. I believe the way your city government has responded during this pandemic has strengthened Scottsdale’s reputation for thoughtful, responsive and effective government. Throughout this pandemic we have demonstrated our commitment to the residents of this community, operated with flexibility while faced with constantly changing circumstances, achieved balance to deploy the right amount of government at the right times, and remained optimistic knowing that we will get through this difficult time together.

**2019 In Review**

Before I dive more deeply into the year 2020, one of the primary subjects of any State of the City report is to review and assess the previous year. 2019 may seem like several years ago – but we should not let

the magnitude of what we have experienced during 2020 shroud the previous year – because 2019 was a very strong year in Scottsdale.

Turning back the clock, we see a year that was full of great accomplishments and achievements. Scottsdale’s tourism industry was booming and business sectors like health care, financial services and information technology were buzzing with activity. Our business climate was as bright and vibrant as ever.

The most visible example was – and remains – Nationwide’s development of a 134-acre parcel that will be home to their regional headquarters, and to a number of other corporate tenants as well.

At City Hall, the city’s thoughtful and fiscally conservative approach to serving the community put us in a very strong financial position, which we built upon to make the city even stronger.

Working with our partners – the San Francisco Giants and the Scottsdale Charros – we completed renovating and upgrading Scottsdale Stadium, making the facility even better for its core baseball functions, but also for a multitude of other uses in the years ahead.

You – the voters of Scottsdale – stepped up to the plate as well. During public outreach conducted early in 2019, thousands of public comments were gathered and shaped the final package of bond questions that went to the city’s voters in November.

When the voters approved \$340 million in projects, Scottsdale took an absolutely critical step in reestablishing the city’s commitment to maintaining the critical infrastructure that is elemental to our wonderful quality of life.

This was especially important because we were coming off 2018, a year that included an election of its own – the charter amendment that settled a divisive issue that was being considered in the Preserve. That issue – the Desert Discovery Center, also called “Desert Edge”, was a very difficult one. The community was so strongly divided that it could have had impacts many years down the road.

To the compliments of those involved, however, once the issue was resolved by the voters, the community united once again around a shared commitment to this great city. The approval of the city’s three bond questions is evidence of this uniting effort – many of those projects are already moving forward.

Around Scottsdale in 2019, we saw the continued resurgence of Old Town, which continued to attract investment and positive attention due to its unique blend of bustling businesses, modern urban residential options and historic Scottsdale charm.

SkySong continued to welcome innovative new companies to its expanding campus. After opening its fifth building in the summer of 2019, SkySong 6 was quickly unveiled and began attracting even more tenants. This vast and innovative public-private partnership continues to strongly anchor Scottsdale's McDowell Road corridor, which continues its own re-invention.

Health care, financial services and technology companies around Scottsdale were joined in strong success by our resorts and hotels. At the end of 2019, Scottsdale was in a very good place, and we were looking forward to continuing to build upon that in 2020.

### **Tackling 2020**

As difficult as it may be to remember the great things that were happening in 2019, it is just as easy to forget that the early months of 2020 were strong as well. Scottsdale was abuzz with the events and activities that mark our high season. We welcomed visitors and international attention, and were looking forward to more as winter gave way to perfect spring weather.

In early March, a Scottsdale Fire Department crew treated Arizona's second COVID-19 patient and entered isolation protocol. The city's expanded incident management team went into action. We knew that this disease was new, highly contagious, and potentially deadly. We knew it would disrupt our community and our lives, but since none of us had been through anything like it, nobody really understood how completely this coronavirus would impact us.

2020 has forced us to define quality of life differently than in we did in the pre-COVID world. We have made very difficult individual decisions, and very difficult governmental decisions as well. It has not been easy to strike the correct balance between rights and regulation.

Disagreement is a part of a democratic society, and we have worked through many disagreements related to our local, regional and national response to COVID-19.

As mayor, I have not taken any decision related to our pandemic response lightly. Government is always a difficult balancing act, that has never been more evident. In Arizona and certainly in Scottsdale, the scale almost always tips toward individual rights and freedoms, and away from regulation and bigger

government. Informed by continuing conversations with health care professionals at the county, state and federal levels and with the health care leaders right here in Scottsdale, we have at times pushed the balance in the other direction.

Governing by proclamation is not something I ever wanted to do, but at times this situation required it. The mayor's job in those cases is to gather as much information as possible and to make reasoned decisions on behalf of the greater good.

By and large people have understood, accepted, and carried on with new regulations and new expectations. Disagreements about masks and about which businesses and activities should be opened or closed remain. This contributes to the angst and sometimes outright anger we confront as we attempt to get through this. We are learning that dealing with these issues is an unavoidable part of responding to a situation like this.

I believe we made the correct decisions throughout the year to get it right. I thank the entire community for your understanding and your actions to support a safe and healthy Scottsdale.

As I write this, the COVID-19 numbers remain concerning as we are squarely in the predicted second wave. We must remember that we will only get through this together, and that each personal choice has impacts on the community as a whole. I remain optimistic about the future, even as we face many tough weeks ahead.

The vaccine is arriving – a long-awaited light at the end of the tunnel. As we think about escaping COVID's grip, we must not forget the many families who will never be completely free of its impact.

To everyone who has suffered personal loss in this pandemic, our hearts are with you.

There are a couple of city efforts that I want to point out as particular bright spots during the year.

Scottsdale's Human Services team are dedicated professionals who provide services and connections to some of our community's most vulnerable people. When pandemic restrictions forced closure of our senior and community centers, these staff members immediately developed ways to provide those services differently.

Our seniors continued to receive nutritious meals through a weekly curbside pickup service. We offered career counseling using technology. We created a hotel voucher program to help the homeless find shelter, food, and the possibility of a brighter future. People may try to characterize local government

with stereotypical bureaucratic blindness, but the actions of our staff and the positive outcomes that resulted defy those negative stereotypes.

They did tremendous work and many people are thankful for it. Many of you in the community stepped in to assist as well. On the overall, it has been a shining example of the true nature of Scottsdale – the times got tough, and we kept going collectively to make sure nobody was left behind.

The second group I want to recognize is our business community – who bore many of the most damaging side-effects of restrictions made necessary by this pandemic. Some of our businesses simply could not survive when things had to be shut down to blunt the early spread of COVID-19.

Many other businesses held on as long as they could, knowing that to shut down meant letting go of loyal employees during a most difficult time. Many have struggled through and are continuing to struggle but managing to make it work, thanks to the support of the community, and federal and local assistance programs to help them stay open and keep people on the job.

Scottsdale's Economic Development team deserves a hand here as well. The Mayor and City Council allocated a portion of the city's CARES Act funding allocation to things like commercial utility assistance and small business grants.

Our Economic Development team quickly established a small business assistance center to help owners and managers navigate and apply for these programs and other assistance available from a variety of other agencies. It is worth noting that this center was staffed in part by city employees redeployed from other areas that were not as busy during the pandemic.

One element of this effort – the Scottsdale Small Business Reimbursement Program –provided more than \$600,000 in financial assistance to our business community to reimburse them for supplies and equipment needed to continue serving customers with enhanced protection and safety requirements in place.

Through perseverance and action, with some support from the city, vital businesses like our resorts and hotels, restaurants and small shops have managed through this pandemic as well as anyone could have expected them to. They all deserve our continuing support.

We have taken the steps necessary to tamp things down – which is a phrase my staff tell me I have used once or twice to encourage people to make healthy choices. Let's keep tamping it down.

As we moved from spring into summer, we gained a better understanding of what we were dealing with, even as many difficult decisions and challenges remained.

Then, in Minneapolis, George Floyd was murdered, galvanizing much of the nation around the topics of policing and social justice. We added our voices to those important conversations, but we also suffered the brunt of a senseless attack on our downtown business community.

The destruction that occurred at Scottsdale Fashion Square and businesses around Old Town was a very sad chapter in our community's history. Substantial criticism was leveled at our police department. Whether you agree with how they handled this unprecedented civil unrest in our quiet community, remember that there were no serious injuries to any citizens or police officers – our department protected people over property.

Since the riot occurred, Scottsdale police have continued working to investigate the incident, and hold people accountable. To date, 77 people have been arrested for acts related to the incident, and nearly a quarter-million dollars in stolen property has been recovered.

Either of these events standing alone would have marked a significant point in our national history, but one wrapped inside the other within a period of a few months illustrates the how challenging 2020 has been. I continue to be very proud of the way that we are working through these challenges together.

Throughout it all, Scottsdale continues to be a great community. Even with the furor and uncertainty of the moment, we are welcoming new investment. Exciting projects like the Axon headquarters, The Scottsdale Collection and Palmeraie are bringing additional energy to the city and should be sources of continuing optimism despite difficult months that remain.

It is a mayor's responsibility to work on behalf of the people and with colleagues on the City Council and in the community to help the city move forward in a positive direction.

Despite unprecedented challenges and the most difficult circumstances, we did that in 2020. Our success is always shared, always the result of collaboration – collectively we can be proud of the way we handled the past year.

### **In conclusion**

The product of a city is quality of life, and I have always said that Scottsdale provides a superior product in that regard.

The city also enjoys the service of outstanding professional staff, from our charter officers, to our management team and throughout the ranks. We have relied upon them in so many ways this year, and they have delivered.

Across this great city, from policy to strategy, we have accomplished great things, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. I am very proud to have been a part of it.

Like any city, we have our ups and downs, and we certainly do not always agree on things. Something Scottsdale does well is consider differences of opinion when determining the best course of action. Scottsdale has always been a community truly driven by its citizens, and that has not changed.

This approach has always moved Scottsdale forward positively – for that I am grateful. As mayor, I have personally experienced and benefitted from the support, actions, cooperation, collaboration and respectfulness we have shown through these years.

I will take that with me for the rest of these days. It's a wonderful thing that I hope this city carries on. Thank you.