

# 2021 Burnsville State of the City

## FINAL ADDRESS

Welcome to the State of the City in the beautiful Ames Center. The Ames Center went dark for a good portion of 2020, but I am happy to see it filled with light and hope today and for the exciting times yet to come.

I am thrilled to be here in person. To those here today, thank you for joining me in celebrating a new day and a new year. I would like to recognize some special guest we have here with us today: Representatives Sandra Masin, Jessica Hanson, and Kaela Berg; Kurt Johnson from Senator Klobuchar's office; Dakota County Commissioner Mary Hamann Roland; Dr.

Theresa Battle, Superintendent of ISD 191; and ISD 196 School Board Director Cory Johnson.

To those joining at home, welcome to the live stream. I am so happy that we are able to make this event accessible to everyone.

A special thank you to the Chamber of Commerce for hosting and supporting this event. The Chamber and City have been partners for many years. That partnership was extremely valuable as we supported each other's efforts during 2020. We look forward to continuing our partnership in the future.

2020 challenged the City in ways we could have never dreamed of. It challenged all of us in every facet of our lives. It altered the way we worked and communicated. It changed the

way we spent our time with friends and family. It tested our resiliency. And it tested what is fair and just.

That is why I am extremely grateful to have a strong vision and values to guide us through challenging times. I am grateful for the leadership shown by the City Council and staff.

Thank you to City Council members Dan Gustafson, Dan Kealy, Cara Schulz, and Vince Workman.

And thank you to our City Manager Melanie Mesko Lee and City Department Leaders:

- Deputy City Manager Gregg Lindberg
- Police Chief Tanya Schwartz
- Fire Chief BJ Jungmann
- Public Works Director Ryan Peterson
- Community Development Director Jenni Faulkner

- Parks, Recreational & Facilities Director Garrett Beck
- IT Director Tom Venables
- Finance Director Jenni Rhode
- Communications & Community Engagement Director  
Carrisa Larsen
- Human Resource Director Karissa Bartholomew
- City Engineer Jen Desrude

(pause)

These great leaders have helped us navigate rough waters and set the course for the next year and beyond.

The City is coming into 2021 in a strong position. We are strong in our commitment to our vision and values. We are on strong financial footing as we have a AAA (Triple-A) Bond

Rating. We developed Strategic Priorities and created a 2021 Budget Road Map to help navigate the opportunities, improvements, and work that lies ahead. We are strong. We are resilient. We are ready.

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## **Vision and Values**

We are ready because in early in 2020, your City Council and city staff set to work on uncovering the vision and values we hold dear. The vision and values were always there, we just needed to uncover them and articulate them clearly.

After some hard work and collaboration, we solidified our Vision: ***Burnsville is a vibrant city, boldly leading, welcoming to all.*** We want people to feel that they truly belong here.

Our Vision is like a lighthouse, shining a light brightly to where we want to go as a City. It was critical as we navigated through Covid-19 pandemic and the civil unrest the country faced over the summer. And we know that it will continue to be a critical element as we make future decisions.

Our Values of ***respect, belonging, stewardship, adaptability, and ethical service*** to our community guided us as we dealt with hardships of closures, faced challenging decisions, and pivoted to provide relief and opportunities to our residents and businesses.

At the end of the day, the people of Burnsville have elected us to be good stewards. These values help safeguard the public trust in all that we do.

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## **Strategic Priorities**

I have talked about Vision and Values as the guiding light for our City leadership. But, as we look to where we want to be and how we best serve the people of Burnsville, we need a strategy.

At the beginning of 2020, the City set course on six strategic initiatives: **1) Safety; 2) Community Engagement; 3) Community Development; 4) Sustainability; 5) Transportation and Infrastructure; and 6) Organizational Services.**

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The most defining strategic priority in 2020 was **Safety**. Safety in all its forms from police and fire, to public health, to social and mental health.

Public safety was hard in 2020 but our team also worked to find and bring joy to others during this time. We saw faces of wonder and excitement as our police and fire fighters surprised kids on their birthdays with drive by parades. Special events like a sidewalk dance party delighted our neighborhoods. It connected us and brought us joy when we needed it most.

We also connected as we celebrated the groundbreaking for Fire Station #1. It is such an important part of protecting our residents. The new Fire station not only provides increased safety for residents and businesses but also provides state of the art tools to keep our first responders safe on the job.

Another way we are connecting with people and to keep them safe is the Purple Video Remote Interpreting or VRI. The Purple VRI is an on-demand service that provides communication between deaf or hard-of-hearing persons in the same location. First responders are able to utilize a computer with a webcam that serves as an interpreter.

And, in 2021 a new first responder's unit was launched that is focused on building community relationships with the added responsibility to proactively address mental health related calls. First responders must answer thousands of calls each year. Thus, Mental health crisis calls are a part of their daily response and affect the lives of so many of our residents. We want to extend our values of respect and belonging through the development of this unit.

The Police Accountability Act continues to be front and center. We are committed to continually reviewing police policies and compliance.

In early 2020, the Police Department deployed 80 new body cameras. Did you know that Burnsville was the first City in Minnesota and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the country to deploy body cameras over 15 years ago? We understood the importance of being fair and just then and that continues today.

The safety of residents, businesses, and first responders is front and center for us. We continue to push for legislative support to serve you in the best way possible. The City is supporting special legislation that would allow for neighboring cities to consolidate and create “fire protection districts” for fire and emergency medical services. The consolidation would

eliminate duplication, but more importantly, it would help our first responders to serve our residents better and address the rise in calls.

*(pause)*

The strategic priority of **Engagement** was extremely challenging in 2020, but we got creative by developing new opportunities to connect and engage.

The first order of business was to ensure we could still conduct business as usual. Our team swiftly utilized technology to pivot to virtual council and committee meetings. It was important to us that we remained accessible and transparent.

Things we learned during this transition will no doubt improve the way we communicate moving forward.

Just because we couldn't connect in person, didn't mean we couldn't connect in other ways. We amped up our use of social media to inform and engage, and our residents responded positively to the additional information.

Events were reimagined so that we could continue to enjoy entertainment and have a different kind of fun. Our teams put together drive-in movies and concerts, and other outdoor events to keep people connected and feel some semblance of normality.

The Parks and Rec Department became a vital part of keeping people connected to their environment and providing an outlet to nature to keep our minds and bodies healthy. One

of the ways that we made sure that everyone has the chance to connect and stay healthy is the development of a fully inclusive playground at Red Oak Park. It includes a large accessible play structure, an inclusive seat spinner, musical instruments, and multiple seating areas, along with other amenities to make the playground more accessible and engaging to a variety of abilities. I want to acknowledge the Burnsville Lions Club through their financial generosity allowed us to make this adaptive playground become a reality. To our Burnsville Lions Club, please accept our heartfelt appreciation and gratitude.

2020 isolated us. We saw the toll it took on people. That is why we take the strategic priority of engagement very seriously. Creating a community of belonging means that we must prioritize engagement. We must continue to find

meaningful ways to connect. To this end, we have promoted staff to keep engagement at the forefront of everything we do.

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The strategic priority of **Community Development** was incredibly important as many businesses struggled in 2020. We care about our business community and want it to thrive.

We knew we needed to act quickly as our businesses faced the perils of the pandemic. When the City was allocated CARES funding, we immediately set into motion a program for our business community. The City of Burnsville set aside \$2 Million of its CARES Funding for local businesses. **This is the highest percentage of CARES Funding that any regional city set aside for its businesses.**

With the Burnsville CARES Funding, we were able to provide grants to over 116 local businesses, non-profits, and the hospital. We also worked with Dakota County to make sure that our businesses could access their CARES Funding. In a span of months, we set up the program, accepted applications, and dispersed the grants into the hands of business owners.

There were other bright spots for our local business community too. Burnsville welcomed 22 new businesses and visited many more! Our Community Development team works to provide tools for businesses, developers, and investors to make it easy to locate and flourish in Burnsville.

We also continued to focus on providing a diverse housing market for our residents. We are lucky to have a great mix of urban townhomes, modern apartments, senior living, and

traditional suburban homes set among over 75 parks and trails. In fact, we have more than 500 new housing units in the permitting phase right now. Taxable market values have increased across all sectors, but especially with new multi-family developments. Once the new multi-family developments come online, the new tax value is estimated to be at \$78.6 million by 2022.

And, we are committed to the success of the redevelopment of the Burnsville Center. The Burnsville Center, CBL portion, was recently purchased by New York-based Kohan Retail Investment Group. Remember the Burnsville Center has four owners, Macy's, JC Penny, Seritage and the Kohan Retail Investment Group. We are working collaboratively to move towards the Center Village concept with mixed uses of housing, hotels, and entertainment. We have prioritized this area for a

tax-increment financing or TIF district and are currently working to get legislative approval.

The City was honored to receive approximately \$1.5M in economic development grants from the Dakota County Environmental Legacy Fund, Dakota County Community Development Agency's Redevelopment Incentive Grant, and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's Host Community Grant to assist in the growth and support of Burnsville development.

We can't do this alone. The City works with our partners on many fronts to create opportunities for economic and community development. Collaborating with the Burnsville Chamber of Commerce, Experience Burnsville, Schools Districts, and others has elevated our vision for our City.

*(pause)*

The strategic priority of **Sustainability** provides an avenue to focus on creating a beautiful, resilient City. Burnsville is continuing to work towards a more green, sustainable future through programs such as pollinator habitats, increased tree coverage, and more.

We recently completed a Sustainability Plan Guide Update. We know Sustainability Plans work. We have had tremendous success as we have already seen a reduction of approximately 30-percent of our annual greenhouse gas emissions since the first plan was adopted in 2009.

Even our City fleet is getting into the act. Our fire trucks are equipped with rechargeable battery equipment.

What is next for sustainability? The goals of the updated plan include increasing tree coverage in Burnsville, creating a more multi-modal transportation system, increasing our greenhouse gas reductions to 40-percent by 2040, influencing the increase of solar facilities, and promoting the proper cleanup of closed landfills adjacent to our drinking water sources.

The landfill is not a new issue, but we are determined to address it. For decades, there has been a desire to remediate the Freeway Landfill and Dump to protect the environment, drinking water supply, and the Minnesota River. The City is supporting efforts for non-bonded State funding allocated for remediation. This solution benefits the City and benefits the entire State by allowing for meaningful redevelopment opportunities.

The landfill effort is a big lift, but there are things we are doing right now that make a difference for sustainability. Grow Burnsville which had 11 major project priorities including expanding local food infrastructure, advancing community sustainability, and expand healthy locally grown food, was recently awarded a large grant.

I am particularly proud of this recent big win for the City. The United States Conference of Mayors and the American Beverage Foundation for a Healthy America announced \$745,000 in grants to nine U.S. cities that were the winners of the 2021 Childhood Obesity Prevention and Environmental Health and Sustainability Awards. Burnsville was one of those nine cities to receive the award.

The City was awarded one of the larger grant amounts - \$125,000 - to pursue Grow Burnsville projects. The grant will be used for creating opportunities for healthy eating for the City's most vulnerable residents: families in poverty, families with nutrition access limitations, and families underserved by park space.

The program will provide access to locally grown healthy food through the development of a "Community and Market Garden." The Community and Market Garden will offer educational and internship opportunities for youth while providing locally grown produce to more families than can be served through existing efforts.

The grant will also be used to pilot a "Food Forest," a new approach for putting underutilized public land and rights-of-

way to work as spaces to grow fruits and vegetables through sustainable permaculture.

Many times, sustainability projects fall to the bottom of list. We knew that moving these initiatives forward could change people's lives for the better. I am so proud and grateful that we will be able to make a real difference towards making sustainability a reality on a personal level.

(pause)

The strategic priority of Transportation and Infrastructure keeps Burnsville working 24/7. Oftentimes we take transportation and infrastructure for granted. We get in our cars and drive without thinking about how we got there. We turn on our faucets without a thought of all the miles of pipe beneath the ground that bring us water. And, when we flush

our toilets, well we simply don't want to think about that. We want that wastewater to be discharged appropriately.

Transportation and infrastructure are the foundation of our community. We understand that we need to enhance and take care of our infrastructure. The City is embarking on a multi-model study to understand how to move people in better and different ways around the community. And we continue to upgrade and improve our streets and roads to increase safety and create avenues for better flow.

Often street and road improvements illicit a groan. As the adage goes, there are two seasons in Minnesota: winter and construction season. We want to alleviate some of those groans by providing real-time construction updates on the City's website. Now, residents and businesses can find out

where streets are being improved or planned to be improved as it's happening.

Regardless if we are improving water distribution or constructing road improvements, there is a dedicated group of public works people who deliver service through thick and thin to our homes.

(pause)

The strategic priority of Organizational Services ensures that we have the right structure and tools in place to serve residents, businesses and customers We took a good look at how we provide customer service and the culture surrounding our service.

The City took the opportunity in 2020 to revamp and enhance customer experience. More room in the City Hall lobby is dedicated to accommodating customer service and there is the availability of English and Spanish speaking assistance.

It is important that we live our vision and values. That purposeful passion was enhanced by several training initiatives. The City invested time and resources in ***Equity Innovation***. The City worked with the YMCA to tailor an Equity Innovation program that would examine equity in the way we serve our residents from policing to policy. We look forward to inviting the community into inclusion and diversity conversations in 2021. This isn't a one-time program but an ongoing effort to live our values and effect true cultural transformation.

(pause)

I have covered a lot today – all six Strategic Initiatives, efforts undertaken in 2020, and things we want to tackle in 2021. If you want to see a more complete report, please go to the City website. I encourage you to visit the website often as we keep moving forward on our strategic priorities to reach our vision of **Burnsville is a vibrant city, boldly leading, welcoming to all.**

(pause)

## **Thank You**

There are literally hundreds of projects, initiatives, and actions taken by our City staff each year that benefit our community. I simply can't list them all - but I do want to acknowledge the wonderful staff we have here in Burnsville.

We have over 280 professionals that work tirelessly every day to keep our City running smoothly. I know that our City staff strive to embody our values as they connect, engage, and serve our residents and businesses.

(pause)

And there are some special residents here today that I would also like to thank - Ben and Shannon Honken. Ben and Shannon are relatively new residents to Burnsville. Last year, when the City held a song contest, they answered the call. The song they wrote expresses how they see Burnsville. It is a great tribute to everything we love about our City. Thank you, Shannon and Ben! Thank you to Jack Kolb-Williams and Scott Jarvie at the Garage for recording and producing the final track.

And thank you to everyone here and virtually for joining me today. God bless you all and God bless Burnsville. I am delighted to leave you with the joyful song entitled You Belong Here written and performed by Shannon and Ben Hocken.