

## Transcript

### **On West Gray, Episode 24: The New Assistant City Manager w/Shannon Stevenson**

**Runtime: 11 minutes**

Tiffany Vrska 0:15

What's up everybody? Welcome to On West Gray, the monthly podcast about all things local government in the city of Norman. I'm your host Tiffany Vrska, the chief communications officer for the city of Norman, thank you all for being with us. Today we're visited by assistant city manager Shannon Stevenson, who joined our team in May. Stevenson is a University of Oklahoma graduate and previously served for the North Central Texas Council of Governments specializing in transportation planning and operations. Prior to that, she worked for the Center for Analysis and prediction of storms at the University of Oklahoma managing a variety of outreach programs and serving as an airline liaison. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to her new role. And as a fellow staffer in Norman, I will say that I am so happy to finally have her here. So Shannon, welcome to the show.

Shannon Stevenson 1:05

Thank you for having me.

Tiffany Vrska 1:07

Absolutely. Welcome to the show. Welcome to the team. I gave a bit of an introduction to our listeners. But I think that you'll have to take a deeper dive here. With all of your background, I'm sure you've worked on a ton of really awesome projects. So what would you say has been your favorite? And how do you think that that experience may translate into what you're bringing to Norman? So

Shannon Stevenson 1:29

yes, again, thank you for having me this morning. Yeah, so working with the North Central Texas Council of Governments, which is the sister agency to the association of Central Oklahoma governments, or ACOG, as everyone knows, here. So I worked for over 23 years in all things, air quality, transportation, and then ultimately transit. So I think some of the more exciting projects that I've worked on, related to Trinity Metro, which is the transit agency in Fort Worth, Texas, as they were implementing their commuter rail known as text rail, and it went from downtown Fort Worth into DFW airport. And so why that's exciting is because Oklahoma is starting to prepare for rail within the region itself. So we're looking at maybe implementing rail, from Edmond to Oklahoma City down to Norman. So I'm excited to be a part of that. And I think I can bring some experiences and lessons learned from North Texas, and especially things to maybe even avoid, and all those good things. And so some of the other projects that I've worked on where we did a lot of event planning for the region, especially as it related to sports and

major events, such as like Super Bowl, or as I was leaving, we were working verbal, yeah, big deal. Right. Right. Very cool. And then as I was leaving, we were working on the FIFA World Cup 2026 preparations. And so there was a lot of planning. And of course, all of those fans expect transit. And so there was a really huge component. So it was a little bit scary, but exciting at the same time. And I'm sure my colleagues will do a great job as they carry that on over the next few years. But I think, again, some of those can help maybe, as we you know, obviously Norman hosts a lot of large sporting events, and especially as we start to enter into the Southeastern Conference in that exciting era. So, um, yeah, I'm super thrilled to be here. All

Tiffany Vrska 3:29

right, it sounds like you have perfect timing. So with that being said, what other responsibilities or tasks have you jumped on to during your first several weeks here at Norman, I think, what are we on? Maybe we 12 ish, something like that. Is that eight, eight? Okay, just kidding. Don't let me get ahead of you there. So

Shannon Stevenson 3:51

no, so yeah, so it's been fast and if furious, and so, but again, super exciting. Um, some of the other projects that I've been involved with are related to the homeless shelter and actually trying to help shore that up as we move forward and also find sustainable solutions for it, looking at other options that are going to be that will best serve those clients, as well as you know, the residents and the citizens and the businesses in Norman. And so I've kind of gotten my elbows deep into that process and working with the community and again, the business partners and those that are impacted by that. So we're continuing to looking for or we continue to look for solutions, and what's going to be the best path forward for everybody, really. And then, of course, given my background in transportation and transit, I've been very involved with some of our public works and transportation folks and then as well as transit in embarking and the Regional Transportation Authority or the RTA and then also working again with a cog already said you It's been exciting.

Tiffany Vrska 5:00

All right, awesome. So I got to ask you, when you learn that you landed the job, what were you most excited about? I know, you went to school and Norman and it was kind of your old stomping ground. Yeah.

Shannon Stevenson 5:11

So I have to, I have to confess. So I had sort of all along had this thought that I was going to make my way back to Norman. And I wasn't exactly sure what that path was going to look like. But I knew, you know, I kept close contact with a lot of friends and colleagues, actually, my backgrounds in meteorology. And so my path to public administration has not necessarily been a traditional one. But as such, I kept a

lot of close contacts with folks at the National Weather Center. So it was always up here for different football games, or jazz in June and all the different events. And so I thought when I kind of made the decision, like, Okay, I think I'm going to try to make this transition, I started looking for different positions or opportunities, and honestly thought I was going to wind up with a position in Oklahoma City, and I'd already made peace with I was going to have to commute and it's okay, I really wanted to live in Norman. So when this opportunity presented itself earlier this year, I just thought the stars aligned. And it was almost serendipitous on how this all worked out. So I'm just super excited to be here. And excited to, you know, use this opportunity to to, to help help the city. And then I'm able to not only just work in the city, but also live here as well. So that's exciting for me. Yes.

Tiffany Vrska 6:21

And it's already been so beneficial, I think, to the team, for you to have those connections at the National Weather Service. And we got to go out to the National Weather Center. I think maybe like your second week, we got to chat with some of our partners out there. And I was so excited because I've been wanting to do that for several years. And it was very cool. I got to nerd out a little bit with you. So thanks for taking me, Shannon, thank

Shannon Stevenson 6:45

you for going and nerding out with me because that's exactly.

Tiffany Vrska 6:50

So this is a brand new position for the city of Norman. Those cities half of our size often have similar types of positions like an assistant city manager for contingency planning, or simply managing the weight of responsible city management. So what do you hope to accomplish working in this capacity for the city of Norman?

Shannon Stevenson 7:13

Yes, so I am, I hope that I'm able to provide some assistance to the mayor, the city council, and of course, the city manager to help move projects along and also provide more accessibility to the residents and make myself available to listen, I really want to learn what's important to them, what issues are concerning them, as well as you know, the businesses themselves. And so I really kind of want to plug in and get engaged and really try to find solutions that would will work for everyone. So yeah, so I think that's, that's, that's what I'm hoping to do, at least in the in the first few years.

Tiffany Vrska 7:53

Absolutely. So, so starting a new job, especially with so much responsibility. And there's just a wide range of things that you have in your hands. And I think it's like drinking out of a firehose for weeks on end. So has there been anything that you've learned about Norman or our municipality in particular, that surprised you or that you found unique?

Shannon Stevenson 8:17

Well, I think the level of passion, I think every community there, there are folks that are excited about their community. But honestly, Norman, I was really surprised to see the passion from not only city staff and the city council members, but the residents themselves and how engaged they are and how, you know, they also want to better their community. And then honestly, the other thing that kind of surprised me is really the level of appreciation for the arts within the community. So and I think that's fantastic. I everything from the public art installations at the parks to of course, you've got your music festivals. You know, I mentioned jazz in June, you've got the Artwalk. I just think it's fantastic. That it's accessible for everyone within the community.

Tiffany Vrska 9:01

Oh, yeah, absolutely. I think just a week or two ago, we had our last public art, dedication, I think it was at Griffin. And so having some some money, a lot of do the Norman forward projects has been just incredible what they've been able to bring to life at different facilities and parks. And I just I love it if there's a norm and forward to I would love to say even maybe more given to the arts because I think that it's a real attraction in the community.

Shannon Stevenson 9:32

It really is a little bit unique and interesting. I know. Other communities have some level of that, but I just don't I didn't see that that level that Norman has committed to so I think it's fantastic.

Tiffany Vrska 9:44

Awesome. So is there anything else that you would like to share with residents or listeners of the podcast?

Shannon Stevenson 9:52

Again, I'm just excited for this opportunity. I really want to help make Norman an even more awesome place to work, live and play. And I just I'm thrilled to be a part of it. All

Tiffany Vrska 10:02

right. Well, thank you so much, Shannon for introducing yourself to everybody. Thanks for joining us in the studio today. Great, thank you. Head over to Norman ok.gov to see the latest city events happenings and initiatives, kinda reminder to remember to conserve water during summer our peak water demand season with temperatures blazing practice odd even watering and aim to avoid outdoor irrigation any day between 9am and 6pm. Questions or commentary about on West grey can be sent into public affairs at Norman ok.gov. Shouts to our producer and editor Mr. Bryce Holland of the city of Norman communications office. Until next time, stay engaged, stay informed and always remember to vote. I'm Tiffany Vrska. Thanks for joining us On West Gray.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>