

**City of Norman State of the City Address**  
**From Mayor Breea Clark**  
*November 30, 2021*

To say this last year was eventful would be an understatement. I am so proud to report that challenges of the last 18 months have not slowed down our progress as a community. From our infrastructure to our economy and healthcare to education, all areas have seen improvement. We have kept our focus local with the goal, as always, of improving the lives of Norman residents of all ages and abilities, races and religions. We have delivered on decades-old promises and ensured that we build the kind of quality facilities that both our residents and our staff deserve. I am incredibly proud to share with you tonight exciting achievements that are not only worth noting, but worth celebrating.

As I put this list of accomplishments together, I realized we need to be doing a better job of sharing our victories with our residents.

**Communications**

To help us with this mission, we have recently hired a new Chief Communications Officer, Tiffany Vrska. The City has made several efforts to better communicate with residents while embracing our diversity in terms of both abilities and cultures. We began incorporating live closed captioning and multi-platform online streaming (via Vimeo) of public meetings in August 2021, and we improved our website to allow translation into 8 different languages.

Ms. Vrska seeks increase media development in the Communications office as well; beginning with a new monthly segment – “Service Spotlight” – to strategically highlight various departments and services to offered to citizens. She also hopes to build upon existing City partnerships and increasing our presence at various community events in order to strengthen relationships, boost our image, and maintain existing lines of communication. This will put us in the best positions to collaborate and ultimately drive our community forward together, as well as be prepared to tackle any community-wide occurrences that residents need to be aware of, both of the emergency nature, but also more general knowledge as well.

**Public Works**

Our infrastructure is literally the foundation of our community, and our city continues to invest and improve it in all areas of which our Public Works department controls. We do this in times of calm, but also times of crisis. While COVID has certainly been the world’s focus for the last 18 months, we had an additional set of crises to manage that came in the form of severe weather.

- From the July 2020 Wind Storm, October 2020 Ice Storm, February 2021 Snowmageddon, April 2021 Hail Storm and October 2021 Hail Storm - \$20 million+ in public/private damages in Norman. From picking up our broken tree limbs to salting the roads to sharing in Norman vehicle owner’s pain at the amount of hail damage the fleet received, Public Works has been with us through it all and continued to provide excellent service to our community.

Also continuous has been the Embark Norman transit service we continue to provide at no cost to riders. From the transfer from the University of Oklahoma through the pandemic – Our buses never missed a day of service. Norman residents can depend on Embark Norman to get them to school, work, doctor’s appointment, and more. Great cities have great public transportation, and we can definitely check that box.

· Public Works also secured grants in the amount of \$3 million for 4 new, 35-foot transit buses, 2 CNG and 2 electric; to be delivered in 2022. Speaking of electric, we have also installed five electric vehicle charging stations throughout Norman. Also to look forward to in the near future is the Development of the City’s first Bus Transfer Station at the SW corner of Porter Avenue and Comanche Street.

· In April, Norman residents approved the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive 5-year Street Maintenance Program. With a 64% voter approval rate, a rate that has increased every time we have taken this program to the voters, Norman residents are clearly seeing that our Public Works department does what they say they’re going to do and delivers quality work.

· Our motto is “Building an Inclusive Community.” The men and women in Public Works help us live this motto in its most literal sense. We acknowledge that we have a lot of work to do to ensure all aspects of our community can be accessible to all residents, including those that may live with mobility issues. I am pleased to report we have made significant progress on the City’s 2018 ADA Transition Plan Update including key sidewalk corridors on Main Street and 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW, park enhancements at Lions and Andrews Park and building modifications at NPD and the City Hall Complex

I know we’re seeing lots of orange cones and detour signs, but these are the marks of progress. I am well aware that I may be the only person in Norman that drove down Porter every day over the last few months with excitement in wondering what will be accomplished that day, but if you can’t muster that level of enthusiasm for local construction, I urge you to muster some patience as we continue to improve the flow of traffic, beautify our streetscapes, and make our community more accessible.

**Here are a few of the completed projects all over the city, including:**

- Completion of the City’s \$14.9 million 24th Avenue East Bond Project between Lindsey Street and Robinson Street (2 miles)
- Completion of two, new miles of Legacy Trail on SH-9E from 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to 48<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE; 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW from Robinson Street to Rock Creek Road; 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue NW from Rock Creek Road to Tecumseh Road
- Completion of the City’s East Interstate Drive Reconstruction Project between Main Street and Robinson Street with no major disruption to businesses along the Mile of Cars, Walmart, Best Buy, etc.
- Completion of Campus Corner infrastructure improvements (\$600,000) including sidewalks, curbs, brick pavers, street lights and smart parking meters

**Over the next 12 months, the completion list will grow to include:**

- Coming very soon, Completion of the City's \$3.3 million Porter Avenue and Acres Street Intersection Project, the first of 19 projects included in the 2019 Transportation Bond Program
- Also very soon, Completion of the City's \$10.7 million Transit/Emergency Vehicle/Parks Maintenance Facilities at North Base in December 2021, the first new City maintenance facilities constructed in far too long.
- Completion of the City's Robinson Street & I-35 Interchange Enhancement Project in February 2022; this project was identified and funded in the 2006 University North Park TIF agreement
- Completion of the City's \$4.9 million East Alameda Street Bond Project, the seventh of 8 projects in the 2012 Transportation Bond Program
- Completion of another mile of Legacy Trail on Constitution Street between Jenkins Avenue and Classen Boulevard (\$1.1 million)

**Finally, other exciting developments from Public Works that we can expect in the next 12 months:**

- Start construction on the City's \$6.3 million James Garner Avenue Norman Forward Project from Acres Street to Flood Street. This will create a new gateway to downtown Norman and the OU campus that will pass by our beautiful new library and skate park.
- Start construction on the City's \$4.2 million Porter Avenue Streetscape Project, the second of 19 projects in the 2019 Transportation Bond Program. You can follow along with these projects at [Normanstreets.com](http://Normanstreets.com).
- Begin implementation of the City's first Traffic Management Center, which will be co-located with the Emergency Operations and Communications Center
- Finally, to help address the ongoing issues with our bridge system throughout our community, Council will discuss a possible ballot initiative for the City's first Bridge Replacement Bond Program. We also patiently await guidance from the federal government on the recently passed Infrastructure bill as we are ready to put some of those dollars towards our bridges and other projects designed to make our streets safer.

**Census**

These kinds of local investments and improvements are needed, because our community continues to grow. In 1920, the census had the sleepy little college town clocking in at just a hair over 5,000. In 2020, we have now surpassed 128,000. The ideal ward size is now 16,000 people

for each of our 8 wards. To put that into perspective, the cities of El Reno, Ada, Tahlequah, and Chickasha are all the size of one of our city wards.

Many Oklahoma communities have grown over the past decade, and I am proud to say that we have the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest growth rate in the state and we remain the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in the state of Oklahoma. Some will paint try to paint a picture of our community as one that discourages development or is not business-friendly. Yet our continued growth paints another picture. This impressive Census data accompanied with our historic 1.6 percent unemployment rate, Norman is very much open for business with one of the strongest economies our city has ever seen.

## **Planning & Development**

As we grow, it is important to be both strategic and smart in how we do it. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for affordable housing, food insecurity, and the importance of maintaining good physical health. Our Planning & Development department tackled many of these issues head on in collaboration with several other departments.

While affordable housing is an issue across the nation and not just in Norman, we are thrilled to have three, new single-family residences located on infill lots that were recently completed using HOME Investment Partnerships funding. Located in core Norman, the residences are approximately 1600 sq ft and meet the requirements of our new Visitability Ordinance. These structures will have a 20-year affordability component for rent and will be owned and operated by the Norman Affordable Housing Corporation.

Further, the Request for Proposals for a Housing Market Analysis and Affordability Study is under development, and we anticipate request for proposals and subsequent contract consideration in early 2022.

The Community Development Block Grant Program in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department installed a National Fitness Campaign Fitness Court in Cate Park located within the First Courthouse Neighborhood. This creates equitable access to fitness training programs regardless of if they can afford a gym membership or not. It also creates safe opportunities to exercise outside as we continue to deal with COVID-19. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to visit the court and download the app that provides instructions on how to use this innovative fitness system.

Utilizing funding from the CDBG CV Cares Act Funding, the City of Norman was able to administer \$25,000 to five nonprofits to assist with the increased demand for nutrition services due to COVID-19. In addition, over \$600,000 of rental assistance funding was provided to Norman residents that were directly affected by the COVID-19 Crisis.

Also in response to the COVID-19 Crisis, the City of Norman expanded the seasonal warming shelter to a year-round operation. Our Homeless Strategic Plan under contract with HomeBase, Inc. Gaps Analysis portion is complete and available on the website. The Public Input section is currently underway. I understand that homelessness is an issue that is at the forefront of the minds of many Norman residents. We are working diligently and strategically to make sure we

have a human-centered approach to addressing it. Norman's motto is Housing First, and I can assure you that we are working hard to provide the housing opportunities so badly needed in our city.

Current projects include working with Durand Crosby, the COO with the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, to address immediate needs of a new shelter on the Griffin site, and we are also exploring land acquisition on Griffin for a building a permanent home for the warming center. I look forward to sharing with you our progress as we take a local approach to solving a national problem, and I encourage you to provide input through our survey or attend a community meeting to share your thoughts. Info about these opportunities are posted on the city's website and social media.

### **Courts**

The COVID-19 pandemic also had a significant impact on our Municipal Court. Since late March of 2020, Court staff has worked diligently to assist the citizens of Norman who are dealing with their own effects of the virus, whether it be loss of work, quarantining and teleworking, or worse. The Court has been lenient in continuing court dates and extending payment due dates.

Court's Early Settlement Program continued to thrive without much interruption. The program is designed to offer resolutions to disputes to all citizens before they reach the stage of general litigation. Through the mediation program, disputes may be addressed much quicker and resolutions reached before a case can be heard on the court docket. There are no costs for mediation services for residents of the City of Norman utilizing these services, and the entire process is both voluntary and confidential. In FYE21, the Program received 482 referrals and resolved a total of 289 cases by conducting 24 mediations and addressing the conflict in an additional 159 cases through contact by mediation staff with both parties involved in the conflict. In FYE20, the Program received a total of 444 referrals and resolved a total of 201 cases by conducting 24 mediations.

Additionally, the Court and other city departments have begun collaborating on exploring options for community dockets that better meet the needs of defendants that may be experiencing homelessness and underserved by connecting them with services and corresponding agencies here in our city.

Looking ahead, the biggest project for the Court is the remodel and move into Building A, which is projected to be completed in 2023. While the current Court was state of the art when it was built in the early 1980's, Norman has gotten good use of that facility, and there have been many advancements in technology and court procedures that allow court sessions to be handled more efficiently and competently with adequate space, which we look forward to having.

### **Public Safety**

Building on the much needed update to facilities for our court, I am very pleased to report that Norman's Emergency Operations and Communications Center will be fully-funded and built out to its highest use in a way that will benefit both the first responders and civilian employees like the dispatchers that use it, but also for residents. For too long, the city has built facilities that are "good enough" later leaving both staff and residents with buyer's and builder's remorse. We will

not take chances with our ability to address emergencies in Norman, and I am also excited that this facility will be of state-of-the-art quality, but also fully accessible, something that we cannot say now about the dispatch office currently located in the basement of the police station.

Additional highlights from the Norman Police Department include:

- Being able to re-start the citizens police academy
- We had officers recognized on a national news show for their exceptional actions taken to protect families during a random shooter incident
- Animal Welfare also did an outstanding job, along with patrol and investigations on an illegal zoo investigation. Things are never boring in Norman!

Finally, something I am most proud of is the restructuring of the department to allow our officers to focus more on addressing issues through community outreach including building relationships with residents and having more boots on the ground in our neighborhoods. I couldn't be more excited for this change. I will be the first to acknowledge that things have been tense over the past eighteen months. Many of our residents felt that we needed to reevaluate our approach to policing, and the Norman Police Department listened. Public safety is an incredibly important piece of what we do as a city, and if it isn't working for all law-abiding residents, it's not good enough.

It is incumbent upon elected officials to question the status quo. We need to constantly strive to improve in a way that is more equitable and just for all in our community, not just for those that have benefitted from the status quo. Thank you, Chief Foster and every other person in that department. I look forward to ensuring that Norman PD has the resources it needs to fully staff this new division, build relationships with residents, and continue to lead the state with a new, better approach to public safety.

On Wednesday, December 8, Cpt. Stacey Clement and I will be hosting a Community Listening Session at the central Norman Public Library from 6-7pm on Wednesday, December 8. I encourage you to join us and learn more about this important new division and where we go from here.

Rounding out updates from Public Safety, I am excited to share wonderful, but not surprising, updates from the Norman Fire Department. During the height of the COVID-19 crisis, the NFD administration was able to formulate plans that never compromised their response to any emergency need in our City. Even with a very high call volume, thanks to the internal policies crafted to protect their members as well as the public, not once did NFD ever shut down a company, which was not the case with many fire departments across the state.

The Norman Fire Department also recently underwent an audit from the Insurance Services Office or ISO. This audit happens every five years or so and is a very labor intensive effort for staff. This four year process includes compiling data, reorganizing staff, reorganizing the Public Safety Sales Tax apparatus replacement schedule (which they did and saved several hundreds of thousands of dollars), creating automatic aid agreements with our neighboring jurisdictions, reorganizing responses to both residential and commercial fire alarms, as well as reorganizing the planning, permitting and review of commercial plan submissions and organizing our data entry which includes about 20,000 reports and around 4,000 inspections annually.

These efforts produced big dividends as the Norman Fire Department now has the best dual ISO rating of our split of 1 city and 3 rural in the state of Oklahoma. ISO rates over 50,000 fire departments in the US. Less than 1% have a class 1 rating making NFD is one of only 388 ISO rated departments in the nation. Members of the State Insurance Commission as well as auditors with ISO stated that NFD is the benchmark for the management and deployment of resources in regards to ISO in the State. Their new plans review and permitting process is so efficient that the Norman model is now being replicated at the State level. Their response plans in the rural area with our pumper tankers and brush trucks as well as our deployment in town are also studied and duplicated by neighboring jurisdictions. Our Fire Department has clearly set the bar for how it's done in the state of Oklahoma.

### **Utilities**

Another area in which our community leads the state is in the Utilities department. At our Water Reclamation Facility located off of Jenkins, the state's first Reuse Pilot Project is underway and is removing Phosphorous and Nitrogen as intended. The advanced treatment trailer is now online and we await results of how well we can treat for Contaminants of Emerging Concern. City staff is very confident that the process will yield good results.

To further secure our water supply, staff completed 9 new water wells and construction of well lines to connect to the current system which increased our water supply capacity by 2 million gallons per day.

At the Water Treatment Plant on Robinson, the city recently completed the \$35 million water treatment plant project covered by the last water rate increase approved by Norman voters in 2015. These improvements include added ozone, UV, new chemical building, onsite chlorine generation, a new administration building, and a new shop.

This department also saw a major increase in workload due to extreme weather events in our community. The additional yard waste caused by two extreme winter storms led the compost facility to process 88,500 tons of product versus the normal 30,000 tons.

With the deep freeze in February, we experienced 17 water line repairs, 194 service shutoffs to reduce damage to private residences and businesses due to leaks, and 710 service calls that included checking for frozen lines. Also, during the February 2021 freeze, staff performed multiple pipe repairs, inspection of electrical equipment, and a restart of the Water Treatment Plant to maintain water service to customers during the extreme temperatures.

While we are clearly capable of handling current weather emergencies, the Utilities department also is very forward thinking in protecting our environment. Several sustainability events were hosted throughout our community, including:

- the Lake Thunderbird Workshop and Clean-up Event which had 42 participants and resulted in 918 lbs 4oz of material removed.

- Two E-waste collection events that hosted 642 cars and collected a total of 40,936 lbs of waste, which was significantly larger than the annual average collected from 2004-2020 at 27,689 lbs.
- At our Paint Collection event, 501 cars were served, for a total of 38,220 pounds of paint safely disposed of and kept out of our water supply.
- The Environmental Control Advisory Board instituted “Yard by Yard” and certified their first yard.

Looking forward, there are several projects that illustrate how our hardworking staff is not focused on business as usual, but on business as it can be improved. Not just in how we provide city services, but also in how we are good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

- The Hazardous Household Waste Facility will open in February 2022. This facility will allow residents to drop off these dangerous materials year round instead of having to wait for the annual event that used to be held at the Lloyd Noble Center every November.
- Sanitation also opened a New Container Maintenance facility to allow the City to efficiently maintain assets and maintain operating costs
- Finally, something I am very excited about, new Solar Arrays will be placed at both the Water Treatment Plant and Water Reclamation Facility which will offset approximately 31 percent of electrical usage at the facilities. This is a MAJOR step in helping our community reach our sustainability goals outlined in the Ready for 100 initiative.

## **Parks & Rec**

The Parks and Recreation Department continues to improve the quality of life for Normanites of all ages albeit in a different way through events, programs, and citywide beautification. This year they’ve put a significant focus on community building, and physical and mental wellness as the City continues to return to post-pandemic life. One of the things I’m most excited about is their after-school youth program. The Parks Department offers three after-school program sites: at Whittier and Irving Middle Schools and at 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue Recreation Center. Youth are transported from over ten schools all over Norman to our Recreation Centers for this fun, play-based program that I’m proud to say has become a DHS licensed “Hope Center” program. This means that we not only accept childcare subsidies that allow eligible families to come to our program at little to no cost to them, we also get to refer families to DHS for benefits that they may not know they qualify for. In addition to becoming DHS licensed this year, the program also provides evening and weekend meals to families through our partnership with the school district. Staff is currently working on a collaboration for mental health services for our youth within the program, and this is all while lowering the cost of the program entirely so that even those who don’t qualify for DHS benefits can comfortably afford to join.

It’s things like making sure anyone can join the programs they need without busting their family’s budget that makes our Parks and Recreation Department genuinely unique. Earlier this



Fall, they produced a remarkable series of free events called “Community Play in the Park”. They worked with some of their partner agencies like the Pioneer Library System and the Police and Fire Departments to bring games, inflatable dart battles and water hoses, story time and a meal out to parks in every corner of the City to get neighbors and friends outside gathering and enjoying their parks. It was absolutely heartwarming and exciting to see crowds of Normanites outside enjoying their beautiful park system while building community together.

I can’t talk about Parks & Recreation without covering progress on the transformational Norman Forward initiative.

- During the Pandemic, we opened the Blake Baldwin Skate Park at Andrews Park, which has become a regional draw for young skaters and bikers all across the metro area.
- Ruby Grant Park opened to much fanfare, quickly becoming a destination for Norman Residents to walk, run, play disc golf, go to the dog park, use Normans first accessible playground, and now home to the Public Arts Board art project “GEMS” (Fireflies). It was also the host of the first ever Move with the Mayor 5K. I was proud to be the only Mayor in the state of Oklahoma participating in this important campaign focused on physical wellness. It created a fun opportunity to encourage Norman residents to move their bodies, but also to introduce them to many of our city parks, Norman Forward facilities, and physical activities available right here in our community. From Disc Golf to Pickleball, we did it all!
- We broke ground on the Young Family Athletic Center, named after the family’s namesake after the largest gift to the City of Norman in our community’s history at \$4M. Construction has started on this project, and we hope to be cutting a ribbon in the summer of 2023. We also partnered with NRHS on this project, and we look forward to NMotion, Norman’s first Sports and Performance Center. You can actually follow the construction of the “YFAC” in real-time via a live video feed at [normanparks.com](http://normanparks.com)
- Construction has started on Reaves Park to turn Reaves into a primary festival grounds for Medieval Fair, Norman Fourth Festival, and many more festivals. Reaves will also have a premier Youth Baseball/Softball complex for the children in Norman to play ball for many more generations.
- After more than a decade – we finally broke ground on the long-awaited and previously unfunded Senior Wellness Center that will be located on the SE corner of Norman Regional’s Porter Campus. This facility is long overdue and a promise that I am so thrilled that we could finally deliver to Norman residents. I am excited to watch the development of this important building hopes of cutting a ribbon spring of 2023

Finally, like every department that did their part in adjusting to and supporting residents during this historic COVID-19 crisis, Norman Parks partnered with IMMY, Norman Regional, both fire and police, departments, Cleveland county, and norman public schools to host 10 clinics that vaccinated over 2000 residents. Residents received \$50,000 in gift cards to Norman-owned restaurants, so we did our part to boost our vaccine rates while supporting local businesses and Norman’s economy.

## **DEI**

To help us reach the goal embodied in our city’s motto, in January, we hired Norman’s first Chief Diversity & Equity Officer. Cynthia Allen has accomplished so much in the short time she

has been with us, and we are very lucky to have her on our team. To list a few of her accomplishments,

- We have now established our City's Diversity & Equity Mission & Vision.
- We have launched the City of Norman Diversity & Equity Website .
- We successfully executed the First-Ever City of Norman Sponsored Juneteenth Festival, and I want to send a big thank you to all of the volunteers and organizations that added the first cultural festival to our City of Festivals line-up.
- We integrated the ADA Coordinator Role from Public Works into the Diversity & Equity Department.
- We launched several Employee Resource Groups that focus on our female employees, black employees, LGBTQ+ employees, and First Responder employees.
- This week, Ms. Allen will host our Inaugural Community & Conversation Session.
- Ms. Allen also supervised a Bloomberg Harvard Fellow that helped us lay the foundation for this brand new city office. This was a resource made available to us at no cost through my participation last year in the 4<sup>th</sup> cohort of the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative.
- Several up-and-coming leaders among City staff also benefited from this initiative through their participation in the Innovation track of additional staff training also offered at no cost. Staff Attorney Anthony Purinton used the human-centered approach to problem solving taught there to craft from what we can tell is the first community fridge ordinance in the nation.
- Finally, I am very, very pleased to report that we received a Perfect 100 on the Human Rights Campaign Municipal Equality Index score. This score was in the 40s when I started as Norman's mayor, and we were a feature community in 2020 for the progress we had made then. Thanks to the hard work of city staff and the Human Rights Commission, we continue to be the most inclusive community in the state of Oklahoma.

## **Finance**

Other scores that we are quite proud of include the fact we will soon receive word from our external auditors that our financial statements for the fiscal year ended June 30, 2021 present the financial position of the City fairly in all material aspects.

All of the financial records of the City are open records and are made available free for the asking in paper format and on the City's website. We believe strongly that financial transparency is the heart of the Open Records Act in spirit and in the letter of the law and we take pride in presenting our financial performance to our residents, to external financial agencies and the general public.

Now, for the hard economic numbers. While there was no doubt of a COVID-induced recession, our city has not only recovered, we are stronger than we have ever been before. If sales tax is a measure of the health of the local economy, the City has come out of the COVID period with the strongest economy in our history. We have received record-breaking sales tax returns in three of the last six months and our sales tax revenues are up by more than 20 percent from the same time last year. I cannot urge you all enough to continue to shop local, eat local, drink local and invite your friends to visit and do the same. We know what we can do when we keep our focus local, and I am confident we can keep it going.

### **Arts, Tourism, Etc.**

Part of what makes our community great and worth visiting in addition to our state-of-the-art recreation facilities, local shops and restaurants, and entertainment opportunities, is our love of and investment in the arts. Over the past 18 months, the arts in Norman have used their best asset – creativity – to help heal and give back to the Norman community.

When the world went into lockdown, the arts quickly shifted to programming in the virtual realm. Nearly every organization that is supported by the Norman Arts Council and the City of Norman offered some form of artistic programming online. Lead by the work of the The Depot and their whimsical virtual platform Depot TV and with the expert, often in-kind, help of Norman filmmakers like Chase Spivey and Dennis Speilman (2021 Receipt of a Governor’s Arts Award for his work during the pandemic), the 2nd Friday Art Walk, Norman Music Festival, Jazz in June, NAMRON Players, Firehouse Art Center and many others were able to deliver programming to the community when they most needed it.

The Norman Arts and Humanities Roundtable established the first Equity and Justice committee dedicated to the work of the arts in Norman. This is now a full committee of the Norman Arts Council with a dedicated annual budget to support the work of all of the arts to address issues of equity and justice through programming and education and places equality at the forefront of our missions.

The Norman Arts Council also led the way in advocating for funding to keep Norman arts programs alive during the pandemic. With both CARES Act funding and American Rescue Plan funding awarded to the Norman Arts Council in the form of grants from the City of Norman, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Mid-America Arts Alliance, the arts in Norman survived FY20 and FY21 and they are confident that their important work to keep the culture of Norman alive will continue through the coming fiscal years as well.

Visit Norman continues to do an excellent job of telling our community’s story and encouraging both Norman residents and visitors to get out and about and enjoy all that our community has to offer. They once again organized another Restaurant Week highlighting the local cuisine in our community, and it grows every year.

Visit Norman also won the Beep Baseball International tournament for 2023 which will fill over 2000 hotel room nights as well as the Micky Mantle U16 World Series for the next three years which will fill over 1000 room nights each year.

And in case you don’t have plans for ringing in the new year, OkiCon is coming to Norman for New Year’s weekend. While we have thrived since COVID-19 began in 2020, I could certainly go for a less eventful year in 2022.

### **COVID-19**

COVID-19 caught the world off guard. No one was prepared for what did and what is still happening. I made some very bold decisions at the beginning of this pandemic, and I am proud

to say that we didn't wait for approval to take action to protect Normanites. We led the state in our COVID response, and the numbers confirm that our swift and necessary actions saved lives. Any loss is unacceptable, but our efforts saved more lives per capita than any other large city in the state.

We took a global crisis and tackled it head on with local leadership and local solutions. I want to take a moment again and thank my colleagues on the City Council who through that crisis stood by me and also took bold steps to protect Norman residents. I also want to recognize the Norman Chamber of Commerce, Visit Norman, the Norman Economic Development Coalition and the staff of the City of Norman for their creative work on the "Want this? Wear this" masking campaign. I was a big fan generally, but it turns out I wasn't the only one. This campaign received a Redbud award for Best COVID collaboration from the Oklahoma Travel Industry Association, which proves that not only are leaders in our community able to work together, we win awards when we do. We also received a Merit award for the Out and About social media campaign that originated as a push to keep people safely supporting local businesses that were facing their own difficulties during the pandemic.

Today we had the 96<sup>th</sup> meeting of my Emergency Operations & Communications Team, organized under the Norman Fire Department. It's worth noting that in addition to executing their regular duties that were increased due to COVID and organizing these meetings, NFD also led the charge in organizing our City's effort in dealing with COVID including compiling data, acquiring PPE for our members, public and city staff as well as making submissions for and then receiving COVID relief funds.

These emergency management meetings began meeting on March 18, 2020. At the height of the COVID-19 crisis we met three times a week. We are now down to every 2-3 weeks, but I am prepared to meet as often as needed to keep our team effectively communicating and working together to protect Norman residents. I will urge you all if you haven't already to gotten vaccinated, do it. If you are vaccinated, get boosted. I want this to be past us as much as the next person, but ignoring facts won't make them go away. I have been honored to lead Norman throughout this crisis and all of the challenges that came with it, and I will stick with Norman until it is past us.

### **Norman Regional**

While no one's job has been easy the past 18 months, the real heroes throughout this pandemic have been our first responders and our medical professionals.

Even with dealing with current struggles produced by the pandemic, Norman Regional, our city's second largest private employer, continued to keep an eye on the future and is transforming healthcare in our community with the Inspire Health plan. The Inspire Health plan is a \$280 million dollar investment into the overall health and wellness of our community. It is a comprehensive transformation strategy that includes five major construction projects:

1. HealthPlex Expansion...that also includes an
2. Ambulatory Care Pavilion, and
3. Cancer Center

4. A Freestanding Emergency Department off of HWY 9 will better serve Norman residents to the south and east, and
5. A Behavioral Health Center that will include 48-adult beds and will be located on the historical Norman Regional Hospital Porter campus.
  - a. That location will become the new Porter Health Village where education, resources and services that promote health and wellness will be offered to our residents.
  - b. As touched on earlier, the Porter Health Village will also feature Norman Forward's Senior Wellness Center that will include -Indoor temperature controlled saltwater pool. (Heated), an Indoor walking track, and an indoor fitness area with state of the art work out equipment that rival or be better than any senior wellness center in the okc maps program.

Norman Regional is also partnering with Cleveland County and the City of Norman to bring two innovative health amenities to our community:

1. NRHS's Health at the Well located in the beautiful new Cleveland County Wellness Square, and
2. Norman Regional's NMotion Sports Performance Center to be located inside the new (Norman Forward) Young Family Athletic Center

As you can see, Norman Regional's Inspire Health plan is a forward-thinking transformational effort that will improve the quality of life for Norman residents and beyond.

Since 1946, Norman Regional has a long history of excellence in healthcare innovation, and Inspire Health is yet another example of our community and our health system developing and delivering solutions that improve the health and wellness of our residents. I am very proud of our local Health System doing all it can to promote a healthier community ...a community that fosters healing and healthy living.

### **Awards & Recognitions**

I never want to miss an opportunity to celebrate our hardworking city staff and amazing community partners:

#### **--At Norman Regional Health System**

- WorkHealthy Hospitals (WHH), a grant program of TSET and an initiative of the OHA, has awarded Norman Regional Health System (NRHS) with the WHH Excellence Recognition. This award recognizes the hospital for having implemented the most effective level of culture that supports employee well-being.
- Large business of the year by the Norman Chamber of Commerce in 2020.
- CEO Richie Splitt was also named the 2020 Public Education Ambassador Award winner by Norman Public Schools AND recognized by the Journal Record as one of the most admired CEOs along with Norman Regional CFO Ken Hopkins as one of the most admired CFOs in our state

#### **--Speaking of Norman Public Schools**

- The 2021 Oklahoma Teacher of the Year came from right here in Norman. Congratulations to Jessica Eschbach, an innovative learning coach at Norman North.

- Juan Renteria, our 2021 District Teacher of the Year and Truman Elementary School fifth grade teacher, was named as one of the 12 finalists in the last seven years.
- Norman North's Molly Dettmann was named the Oklahoma Library Association's Outstanding New Librarian. She is also the recipient of this year's Oklahoma School Librarians (OKSL) Technology in Education award. The award is given to an innovative technology leader who seamlessly embeds technology into their lessons.
- Congratulations to the nine Norman Public Schools students who have been named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists!
- David Powell of Norman High School and Laura Vaughn (Irving Middle School) are among the six state-level finalists for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST).
- Matt Jackson, Introduction to Ethnic Studies teacher at Norman High School and Norman North High School, was named Teacher of the Year by the Oklahoma Council for Indian Education Board of Directors.
- Former superintendent Dr. Joe Siano and former Norman educator Gary Gress were named 2021 inductees into the Oklahoma Educators Hall of Fame, they are the sixth and seventh educators affiliated with Norman Public Schools to be inducted into the Hall, which currently recognizes only about 100 educators.

--**Norman Chamber of Commerce**

- President and CEO of the Norman Chamber of Commerce was recognized as the Oklahoma Chamber Executive of the Year of 2021 by the Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce Executives

--**City of Norman Staff Recognitions**

--**Brenda Hall**, our amazing City Clerk, received recognition and appreciation for her leadership having served as President of the Oklahoma Municipal Clerks, Treasurers and Finance Association for the past two years.

--**Anthony Francisco**, Director of Finance, was recognized as Outstanding Member of Oklahoma Municipal Clerks, Treasurer, and Finance Officers Association

--City of Norman's **Finance staff** has received the Government Finance Officers Association's Certificate of Achievement in Financial reporting AND the Distinguished Budget Presentation awards for the most current fiscal year, a feat which we have accomplished for over 20 straight years and no other city in Oklahoma can make that claim!

--**Parks & Rec** received several awards from the Oklahoma Recreation & Park Society

- Mitchell Richardson, Recreation Supervisor of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ave Rec Center- Oklahoma Young Professional of the Year
- Locally Loud - Program of Excellence
- Blake Baldwin Skate Park - Project of Excellence

--In the world of **Public Safety**:

- Four Officers were awarded the Medal of Valor
- Eighteen Officers received Life Saving awards and
- Nineteen received Commendations with Risk

Whenever I have an opportunity to speak about Norman to civic organizations, my fellow mayors here in Oklahoma and around the nation, or frankly to anyone that will listen, I

thoroughly enjoy sharing the successes of our community's recent past, but also my excitement for the near future.

I am honored and proud to be mayor of Norman, and I want you to be just as proud and excited to be a resident of Norman. Together, we will use lessons learned from the past to guide our decision-making as we build on the progress we have made over the last 18 months and keep our community moving forward, because the last 18 months didn't break us. If anything, it has made our community stronger and reminded us of who we really are.

There were times during 2020, especially during the safer at home times, that I just needed to be alone. Where I needed to process all of the unprecedented, and at times unbelievable, things that were happening. My favorite place to go was my porch in the early morning before my family woke up. I'd sit there and smell my coffee and watch the sun rise with my Norman flag slowly moving in the breeze. At one point in all of the craziness, there really was no way to know what the new day would bring. But I would watch neighbors bring each other meals if family was sick. I watched strangers donate masks, food, whatever another stranger needed. I watched people truly realize how important "shop local" is to our businesses and our city, and then act on it. I watched residents literally light up the Healthplex in their show of support for Norman's healers. I watched and I watched and I watched until I knew that I would never again question, let alone forget, what Norman is truly made of.

We live in a great city, friends. Not because we don't have problems, but because we don't run from them. Because we learn from them. We collaborate and create and turn problems into opportunities to be better than we were the day before. Often we lead the way and set the bar for excellence in Oklahoma. Some would call us troublemakers, but I call us trailblazers. One step forward, one day at a time. Let us stand truly United and continue to improve our community, innovate solutions, and invest in our future.

Improve, Innovate, and Invest. As you can see, our community thrived over the last 18 months, but I invite you to join me in believing that our best days are still ahead, Norman. Join me.