

Saginaw Mayor's

2021 State of the City Address

Good morning. I'd like to thank each of you for attending this very special 2021 State of the City - State of the County Address. And a special thanks to the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce for hosting today's event.

With this being my first State of the City speech, this year is obviously very special for me. It's unfortunate that we can't all be together in the Dow Red Room, but we remain united in our hope for a brighter future and our belief that together we will move forward.

Before I begin, I want to take a minute to acknowledge my fellow council members. I cannot say enough about this group. They have served you well during these challenging times, and I am confident their leadership will continue to move Saginaw forward. Mayor Pro Tem Michael Balls, Council Members Annie Boensch, Bill Ostash, Autumn Scherzer and Reggie Williams. I also want to acknowledge our newly elected members George Copeland, Michael Flores, Monique Lamar-Silvia.

I must also recognize our City Manager, Tim Morales, and his management team. In this year full of challenges, our City Manager and his staff have taken the right actions to promote renewal, restoration and most of all, resiliency. I am inspired by the commitment and dedication of our city manager and his staff. I cannot speak on the State of the City and what has been accomplished in this unique and challenging year without acknowledging Tim's contribution and that of his team.

I'd also like to thank the rest of the city administration and all city employees. On behalf of my council colleagues, I'd like to thank every employee who has worked courageously to continue essential services every day and work to strengthen our city, rebuild our economy, and unify our streets and neighborhoods.

2020 has been a year unlike any the City of Saginaw has seen before. Many would define 2020 as a year of struggle and challenges. There's no question—we are living through history. 2020 started with optimism and a strong outlook for our local economy. As we all know, things seemed to change in an instant in mid-March.

But if 2020 was a year of struggle, it was also a year that brought out the best in our city. I am impressed by the amount of flexibility, innovation, and thoughtfulness that Saginaw staff has put into their work over the past year to continue to provide safe, high-quality services to our community members and businesses through remote protocol, essential workers in place to keep our City safe and operational, and the implementation of new programs to support the most vulnerable in our community.

Let me take a minute to highlight the work of our dedicated departments:

In 2020, the Water and Wastewater Treatment staff continued to provide water service throughout the pandemic. It was reassuring to know that we have the staff and infrastructure in place to maintain water service around the clock to help keep Saginaw families healthy, clean and hydrated. Our Water treatment teams realize that our water quality is essential to your health and the quality of life in Saginaw. In 2020, our Water Treatment Division treated and delivered 5.8

billion gallons of drinking water and performed over 100,000 quality tests to ensure your drinking water is safe. The Wastewater Treatment Division treated 7.5 billion gallons of sewage and storm water. These efforts help protect our public health and the health of the environment.

Given the importance of hygiene and sanitization to prevent the spread of COVID-19, beginning in March water shutoffs were postponed for the remainder of 2020. In early January of this year, nearly \$600,000 was applied to over 2,000 eligible utility accounts in the City of Saginaw. This was made possible through funding provided by CARES Act Funding and Senate Bill 690. I want to commend our Utility Billing Division who worked closely with citizens throughout 2020 and into 2021 to inform them of available assistance programs and to set up realistic payment plans for past due accounts. I also want to acknowledge our entire Finance Division for their work throughout 2020 to streamline operations to provide the easiest, safest customer service possible for our citizens, and for their work with the help of the Office of Management and Budget to monitor revenues and expenditures to increase operational efficiency and effectiveness.

In early May, our Inspections Division sprung to action to assist citizens, developers, and contractors in obtaining the required permits to allow construction and development to begin once again in Saginaw. While City Hall remained closed, Inspections staff members were available to respond to inquiries, process permit applications, review plans, and even conduct virtual inspections when appropriate and needed. Although face-to-face contact was not always allowed, several new processes were implemented to assist builders and contractors to allow development to begin once again in Saginaw.

We increased communication this year to help residents stay on top of changing circumstances. Through our social media pages, we have been able to keep our citizens up to date on changes throughout our government offices and our city, as well as highlight the people and places in our city that are making a difference.

As soon as the shutdown began and we were given the option for virtual meetings, our Technical Services team sprang into action. We hosted (and continue to host) virtual public meetings on Web ex so we could continue to have community engagement and remain transparent, allowing citizens the opportunity to participate in the meetings if desired.

In late October, the City launched its newly redesigned website to improve access to City services and information for citizens. Our Technical Services team has worked hard to integrate City content and to enhance the availability of this information to the public. We know that thousands of people access the City's website each month, and we want visitors, residents and businesses to have the best experience possible when engaging with the City online.

Across the city, perhaps now more than ever, we desire our streets and neighborhoods to be healthy and connected, both physically and socially. Improving our roads has been and will continue to be a key priority for the City of Saginaw. We know that better roads enhance travel and safety in our neighborhoods and ultimately lead to the long-term greater good of our community.

In 2020, our Right of Way Division improved over 13 lane miles of road, including major reconstruction along portions of Hardin Street and Niagara Street. Road construction for 2020 also included mill and resurfacing projects for N. Carolina

Street, Adams Boulevard, and 6th Avenue. Citizens probably noticed work on several railroad crossings and bridges as well. Our teams also completed several ADA sidewalk ramp installations and sidewalk replacements in the city during 2020.

In our downtown area, we began construction on the Tuscola Pedestrian pathway to create more walkability in our downtown and connect the Downtown Delta College campus to Morley Plaza, Riverfront, the Temple Theatre, and the rest of downtown. We also began to improve parking in downtown with the demolition of our parking ramp #1 on Baum Street and began preparation for a new surface parking lot in the downtown area.

Our City Clerk's office—Elections Division worked hard throughout this year to conduct three elections in 2020—beginning in March with our presidential primary, the August primary, and the November general election.

As with everything else in 2020, this year's elections created a whole new set of challenges, not only due to COVID-19 but also a record-breaking voter turnout. Our City Clerk and her staff have worked non-stop to educate voters and secure the resources to protect your vote and ensure ballot accuracy. After receiving a \$402,000 grant from the Center for Tech and Civic Life in September, the City of Saginaw quickly went to work to expand voter education and outreach, support absentee voting, and increase safety protocols to protect voters. No matter how voters chose to vote, whether by absentee or at the polls, they can be assured they were safe and their ballot was secure.

Our Human Resources Department kept busy implementing the constantly changing COVID-19 policies, practices and protocols, and overseeing the health and well-being of our city employees.

Our Police and Fire Department faced a number of unique challenges in this past year, including being on the front line when dealing with the public during this pandemic. Through it all, they did not waiver in their commitment to protect the citizens of this community.

The Saginaw Police Department has faced enormous challenges this year. I'll speak further on our PD's role in our community later in my speech. But right now, I want to highlight the work of our Police Department and its Victim Services Unit. The City of Saginaw is one of the few departments in this region to offer this service to our victims affected by crime and crisis circumstances. This year, the VSU—in partnership with Michigan Doodle Rescue Connect, introduced its newest member, Reba—a mini Australian shepherd who will help serve as a therapy dog for victims experiencing trauma. At a time when so many are facing hardships and loss, it's encouraging to see this additional support for our victims and those affected by traumatic crime. There couldn't be a better time for this sort of resource in our community. I want to thank Michigan Doodle Rescue Connect for their partnership and support

Our Fire Department has faced unprecedented COVID related challenges this year. Despite these challenges, our Fire team has remained committed to Community Risk reduction, continuing their "Sound Off for Fire Safety" program in our community. The Fire Department also continued their partnership with

Saginaw Career Complex, ISD, and Delta by developing a High School Fire Academy—the first in our region.

Beyond a global pandemic and the economic impact of restrictions and shutdowns, this year we were also faced with the impact of Mother Nature.

In early May, as flood waters raged from the Tittabawassee into the Saginaw River, members of our Public Services, Water Treatment, Fire, and Police Departments quickly joined together to develop a thorough emergency plan to insure the safety of our citizens here in Saginaw. I also want to commend the members of the Police and Fire Departments for their assistance in evacuating residents from low-lying areas of the city, and for the assistance they provided during this time to aide neighboring communities like Midland, Thomas Township, and Freeland.

Through it all, we have been able to continue providing essential services to our citizens, and have never wavered in our commitment to maintaining a sound budget.

In speaking of the budget, we are optimistic as we move forward into 2021. We are confident despite the very real impacts of COVID-19 and the reduced revenues that we project over the coming months.

For FY 2020, revenue decreased approximately 9% or \$3.4 million. This is a major hit. But I am confident that the city can navigate through this challenge.

The approved budget for Fiscal Year 2021 is very conservative. Due to the many fallouts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the city will closely monitor and adjust spending due to the reduction in revenues.

The City of Saginaw is fortunate to be on firm financial footing. City administration has worked diligently over the last 10 years to build stability to its financial position. We are maximizing our review of all of our resources to ensure our financial health. We're being proactive, carefully reviewing all expenditures and personnel changes, all with the goal of taking affirmative steps now to guard against drastic measures later.

Despite the setbacks we face, we continue to live in a city where there is growth and development. As we look ahead with cautious optimism, we see signs of recovery and change.

Development activity remains strong in most sectors despite the disruption resulting from COVID-19. This past year, the City of Saginaw has seen over \$48 million in development and new investment. Time does not allow me to mention them all, but I can assure you that business growth did not stop during the pandemic, and our future is about growth.

In August of 2020, Saginaw City Council adopted an ordinance to allow marijuana establishments in certain areas of the City of Saginaw. The licensing process began in January of this year. While we are pleased to welcome these new businesses and the additional investment into the city, we are proceeding very cautiously and working closely with our Planning Commission to insure certain zoning guidelines and setbacks are in place for these businesses. I want to thank the city staff and members of our Planning Commission who have worked so hard to plan and prepare for these new establishments in our city.

In a year defined by unprecedented challenges, the City of Saginaw and our development partners have been there for businesses and key organizations every step of the way.

In August, the City of Saginaw was allocated \$2.9 million in CARES Act funding through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. These funds were distributed throughout our community to prepare, prevent, and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. From this funding, grants were awarded to 17 non-profit agencies in the City of Saginaw and 55 small businesses in the community. Also, \$644,000 was allocated to 4 homeless shelters and the United Way of Saginaw County to help the homeless and families at risk of becoming homeless.

2020 was a challenging year, but we saw many of our restaurants, bars, and businesses rethink their business plans and adapt to the circumstances. Carry out become customary and outdoor dining areas were added or expanded at many facilities. I want to applaud these business owners for their tenacity, ingenuity, and their commitment to succeed. Our small businesses are the heart of our community, and they have sacrificed so much for the safety of our city. AND I want to remind everyone to continue to promote and support our small businesses.

We are fortunate for the support that has been provided from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and the State of Michigan throughout 2020. I want to thank our business development partners, Saginaw Future, who have worked non-stop to ensure vital economic support was available to local business owners and entrepreneurs.

In the spring of 2020, the Small Business Relief program from the State of Michigan provided \$200,000 to local businesses who were facing drastic reductions in cash flow and support of their workforce. In May, Consumers Energy Foundation contributed a \$200,000 to assist over 145 small businesses in our community, of which 53% were owned by women and 27% were minority owned businesses. Also, the Dow Chemical foundation contributed \$80,000 to support 9 different front line non-profit organizations. Additionally, the Michigan Small Business Restart Program provided \$1.15 million to local businesses here in Saginaw who experienced a loss in income due to the COVID-19 crisis. Most recently, the Michigan Survival Grant awarded \$1.2 million to Saginaw County businesses.

I am grateful for our economic development partners like Saginaw Future and the Michigan Economic Development Corporation for their efforts to ensure critical relief made it into the hands of our small business owners and entrepreneurs.

While the pandemic pulled a lot of focus, it was not the only large issue facing our city this year. This year, as temperatures began to rise and COVID restrictions continued, our nation seemed to reach its breaking point as we watched in grief and anger over the unjust killing of George Floyd.

In June, the Saginaw City Council proactively addressed national events by adopting a resolution to condemn discrimination, systemic racism, and social inequity, and we as a council dedicated ourselves to doing everything we can to eliminate those evils from our city.

The cries for justice and equality did not fall on deaf ears. The City Manager, Chief Ruth and I, along with other members of City Council, engaged in community conversations seeking ways to improve our policies and tactics.

Our Police Department received many inquiries about its policies and our Police chief worked intensely to provide information about SPD's long track record of training and policies that protect people in our community and our officers.

In September, City Council adopted an ordinance to establish the Citizens-Police Advisory Commission. This commission is a necessary step in reframing the relationship that the residents of Saginaw have with the police and in developing the community-oriented policing that the City strives for and that our community deserves.

Our goal was not to just put something in place – but to establish a commission that would be representative and would be able to work together to produce recommendations. This commission will have the ability to review policies and make recommendations to the Chief of Police, City Manager, and City Council. I encourage anyone interested in this committee to contact our City Clerk's office to learn about the membership requirements and how you can apply.

Our City policies and services have for years focused on inclusiveness. But we must strive to do better. While we're proud of our results in the areas of public safety, economic development, public works, and art and culture, there is still more work to be done. We as a City Council recognize the ongoing focus and effort required to ensure the City of Saginaw is a welcoming community to everyone.

2020 saw a record number of violent crimes and homicides in our city. This year, violent crime is up all across the United States and throughout major cities in Michigan, including Saginaw. There are several factors that have caused this increase in senseless violence, many of them related to the global pandemic. Regardless of the reason, our Police Department remains focused on preventing and solving these crimes and prosecuting offenders. Our law enforcement teams are making progress on many of these cases. The SPD has implemented many programs to eliminate gang activity and to find these perpetrators of violence and getting them off the street. We will continue this focus as well as building partnerships with state and federal agencies to reduce crime and the fear of crime in Saginaw. I will continue to work with and support the Police Chief and City Administration to insure we do all that we can to address this violence in our city.

We have worked diligently in recent years to lower crime and improve the quality of life in our city. To now see this rise in crime is distressing and heartbreaking. My heart aches for each victim and their friends and family. The loss of life, especially a young one, is a tragedy for all of us. I've said this many times this year, but I want to take this opportunity to once again implore the young people who may hear this message—**make a change**. Please put the guns down.

Throughout this time of great uncertainty, the energy, resilience, and commitment of our citizens is inspiring. Throughout 2020, we have seen numerous citizens and organizations join together in the face of adversity. Even while staying apart, our community has come together to lift each other up through food drives, PPE donations, school supply giveaways, free holiday meals,

toy donations and food giveaways, and much MUCH more. I wish I had time to be specific and name each one, but I know I'd leave someone out. All I can say is—to those who volunteered their time and their resources to help others in our city—I thank you. This shows the true heart of our community.

I can't recap 2020 without taking a minute to acknowledge the city staff members and council members who helped with our Census Awareness Events. In all the madness of 2020, the Census count continued and we realized how crucial it was to the future of our city to get an accurate census count. Through these events, we assisted hundreds of citizens with completing their census. This equates to millions of dollars for the city over the next ten years for vital programs like Head Start, WIC, Bridge Card, public transportation, roads, Section 8 housing Assistance, Medicaid, and Medicare. I want to thank all the city staff and volunteers who helped make these events so successful. We definitely made a positive impact on the future of Saginaw.

Can I please take a moment to call out the fact that in the year that we simply call 2020, when much of the world closed down and sheltered in place, arts and culture continued to thrive in the city of Saginaw. Throughout the summer, into the fall and holiday season—we kept our Saginaw traditions alive virtually in the city. I want to thank the groups and organizations who pressed on past the pandemic to make sure these traditions that we have loved and expected for decades continued. Many of Saginaw's most beloved traditions looked entirely different this year, but the heart of our community remains one of creativity, diversity, and life.

I also want to highlight the Great Mural Project and the phenomenal work they have done to beautify our downtown and old town areas. This includes the magnificent mural on the Court Street Bridge underpass and the phenomenal Asphalt Art Project that took place this past September. The Great Mural Asphalt Art project is just one more way to celebrate the diversity of the Saginaw community, and I want to thank all those who contributed to this magnificent display of public art.

2021 will be a year for healing. But we have some work to do first. We must keep each other safe; get through this final stretch of the pandemic; and build a recovery that moves our city forward. Regardless of problems we face, it is my belief that Saginaw is better positioned to address them than it has been in many years. Our strong foundation has prepared us to take on these obstacles. I am genuinely hopeful for the City's future as we plan our next steps to stimulate recovery and growth. In 2021, we will complete the Five-Year Consolidated Plan and the Annual Action Plan. I encourage all citizens to get involved in this process. We want engaged stakeholders to provide feedback and to help us identify community development and housing needs in our city.

As a City Council we have postponed our annual Strategic Planning session, which is normally held in January until this fall. At that time, we hope we can all come together and meet with citizens to discuss our goals and strategies for the remainder of 2021 and beyond. Until then, we remain committed to reopening and recovery in our business community and to the health and well-being of our citizens, streets, and neighborhoods.

I think we all can agree that there is an abundance of fear, confusion, discord and division in our world today. The news we hear of our nation's political, racial and economic divides threatens to separate neighbor from neighbor. But my goal as your new mayor is for all of us to look beyond our differences and come together to create a better community, one we want to call home.

When I became your mayor in November, someone asked me how I felt stepping into the role during this dark hour of history. I will tell you what I told them-- I am excited, I am energized, and I am undaunted by the mountains that stand in front of us. And, yes, there are mountains in front of us. But they do not frighten me. It's not because of my great talents, abilities or wisdom that gives me hope. I have hope in what we as a collective unit represent. I know what we can become when we stand together as one unified community. I am confident in our city administration, confident in the members of our city council, and extremely confident in the citizens of this city that we will overcome this obstacle. And as difficult as the challenges are that lie ahead - from addressing the needs of this pandemic to the division that threatens our nation, I remain confident that our best days are ahead of us.

All of us are hopeful as we see signs of progress and hear of vaccines to cure this virus that has plagued us throughout 2020. But I want to be clear-- we cannot rely on a vaccine in a vial to save our community. We must remain vigilant and consistent in our fight. Let's look out for our neighbors and our children. Wear your mask, wash your hands, and let's get to work to preserve the city we have all worked so hard to build and restore. Yes, our city has been set back by COVID-19, shutdowns, cancellations and closures, but we will come back, stronger than ever.

But beyond a cure for the virus, we must seek to find a cure for the other evils that are spreading throughout our city. We need a cure for the fear, hatred, division, and the violence that attacks too many homes and neighborhoods in our city and our nation. I encourage all of you to go out of your way this year to love. Show a little extra love to your friends, family, your neighbors, to a stranger— and to our city. The only cure for our city and our world, my friends, is love.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the City and County of Saginaw, Michigan.