



News Release

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Fountain Hills Mayor Ginny Dickey Presents State of the Town Address

On Tuesday, January 28, 2020, Town of Fountain Hills Mayor Ginny Dickey presented her State of the Town address at the Fountain Hills Community Center to a full house of business and civic leaders, and residents. The Fountain Hills Chamber of Commerce organized the breakfast event with a number of sponsors. This year's sponsors included SRP, Pro Skill Services, Roof King, Republic Services, Fountain Hills Sanitary District, Patrice & Associates, and Sonoran Lifestyle.

Mayor Dickey focused on the accomplishments and milestones that occurred in 2019 as well as the highlights of what people can expect to happen in Fountain Hills over the next year. Mayor Dickey made a point of sharing credit of the accomplishments with her fellow Town Council Members, staff, and Fountain Hills' businesses and residents. Major themes of the address included quality of life with a focus on public safety, management, the Town's budget and finance, the desert environment and views, new development, and the fiftieth anniversary of Fountain Hills. Mayor Dickey's message was enthusiastically received from those in attendance at the event.

Residents can view Mayor Dickey's State of the Town Address at the following link <https://youtu.be/fMfL8loaHeg>. The full text of the Mayor's State of the Town address is contained on the following pages.

STATE OF THE TOWN

January 28, 2020

Welcome to the 2020 State of the Town Breakfast!

These addresses usually begin with a one-word description... the State of the Entity is... fill in the blank.

Trying to define our unique, beautiful, friendly, safe hometown with one word is... as you can tell... a challenge.

But a good way to encompass our rich history and our promising future – the founding mothers and fathers along with our brand-new residents – is to say that the State of the Town of Fountain Hills is **ENGAGED**.

Bobcat sightings, helicopters, frisbee matches, a bald eagle couple, friends in need, hot air balloons, lost and found pets, historical articles, and photos of sunsets – one more gorgeous than the next... otherwise known as a Monday on social media in this wonderfully ENGAGED Community!

I'm honored to be your Mayor at this momentous time, where we passed the 30-year mark of incorporation just last month and look forward to our next celebration: the 50th Anniversary of the Fountain, the launch of our Community, in December of 2020!

We have accomplished much in these five decades, and we will talk about some of the changes in 2019, and our hopes for 2020 and beyond.

But first, "Thank You" to the Fountain Hills Chamber and all the organizers, generous sponsors, Town and Community Center staff, my Council colleagues and all of you for coming to this once again sold out, free event, and to those who are watching or will later online or on Ch 11.

I'll start by saying that I think "Fountain Hills is the place to be!" Naturally! Let me explain:

Last year, I suggested that the Mayor and Council "owe you our best, every time." That is our motivation, whether at Council meetings, during our regular interactions with staff, or communicating with residents and businesses about the important issues facing us.

You deserve a **safe** and **well-managed** community, with fun activities and joyful experiences that make for life-long memories.

Allow me to address those two key elements:

Safety: I'm pleased to say that our own zip code, 85268, was identified tied as the safest zip code in Maricopa County! We owe many for their efforts to earn that label:

- To you as residents and business owners/operators. Your role in promoting a safe environment is the first step to success;
- To Capt. Larry Kratzer and the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, our contracted police force, with the responsibility to provide expert community policing;

- To Chief Dave Ott and Rural Metro, our contracted fire dept, as first responders to accidents, fires, snakes(!) and health-related emergencies, all at a moment's notice.
- The Crisis Response Team, with roots back to when I first served on Council, adds immeasurable comfort, and
- To our Town Staff, for their diligence to daily identify and address important safety concerns throughout our Town. Their willingness, along with Capt. Kratzer to form the Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Subcommittee... where Vice Mayor Sherry Leckrone, Councilman Dennis Brown and I are also members... was a response to what we identified as an urgent need and they heard the call.

Emphasis has been placed on many specific issues, including speeding, intersection improvements at four-way stops, faster emergency response times due to a relocated fire station, more accurate and detailed incident reporting, increased enforcement of our codes and ordinances, and a Town-wide policy to enforce hands-free driving. I appreciate that citizens reach out to us with concerns. We may not always respond with the solution they prefer, but please know we take it very seriously and will re-evaluate as needed.

Some other safety-related pursuits that are fairly new to us include Speak up, Stand Up, Save a Life, a program our Vice Mayor brought to us.

We've increased attention to suicide prevention, substance abuse, domestic violence and bullying. We have joined an alliance with other municipalities to share information about homelessness.

Councilman Spelich and I attended a first of its kind School Safety Conference. A joint effort by the Arizona Business and Education Coalition, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and Arizona School Administrators, it featured local and national experts including from Sandy Hook Elementary. They talked about keeping campuses... which pertains to both town and school facilities... as safe as possible, not only with physical safeguards but awareness of behaviors.

Councilman Scharnow and I attended a program focusing on quality of life for older adults. "Never Too Old" was a statewide event featuring the most effective practices to make our communities more livable.

I'm looking forward to a possible activity here in town modeled after other cities. This was brought to our attention by Vice Mayor Leckrone to bring groups together and offer resources as we, young and old and in-between, navigate through our sometimes-complicated lives.

It is clear that it remains a priority for the Town to provide the safest atmosphere possible.

So, I say again, "Fountain Hills is the place to be...."

Next, well-managed: As your Mayor, I spend much of my time with the Town Manager and staff addressing a wide array of management issues, both internal to our local governance responsibilities and external based upon the specific needs of our community relating to regional issues.

Those efforts take many avenues, and while we have been successfully managing much of the operation of the Town, adequate funding is a stubborn, constant dilemma.

At the top of the list is the need to address our transportation infrastructure, our streets. We continue to face a deficit in terms of maintaining our roads in an acceptable condition; we are doing everything we can within our limited resources, but we're not keeping up.

We've taken steps to identify longer term solutions, a pavement management program, but at this point, no, we don't need another study, as we have current data and some from years ago that consistently identify the same problem. As a community, we must find a financial solution soon – we can't pass that tipping point where it will be too late.

Finances: Like every community in Arizona, your staff, Mayor and Council have a large responsibility allocating the available funding to address the needs of our community.

We have applied for and received valuable grants to help with sidewalks, roads, parks, safety and more. We are selling the original fire station to help. Fountain Hills is highly dependent on sales taxes and State Shared Revenue, which while our percentage of the total decreases each year, the overall positive economic forecast for AZ could make FY21 better for us locally.

Although small in comparison to some other cities, our 25,000 full and part-time residents, 25 square miles of area, \$200M+ of road infrastructure, municipal buildings and rolling stock, fire stations and equipment, and the staff necessary to manage it all—is everything to us.

We together provide direction to manage, strategize, and appropriate funding, with the flexibility to respond to unknowns. For example, the sink hole on Panorama looks innocuous but it is an indication of an extensive project, as is the necessary stormwater management work for GE Park.

Maybe “unknowns” is a misnomer... as I mentioned last week at Council, we all realize that deferred maintenance, whether on your own home or vehicle, or 40-year-old pipes running under the ground, will eventually often lead to more costly repairs.

Our Town's budget is dominated by public safety, at about half of the \$17M operating amount. Community Services Commissioner Amy Arnold has been graciously sharing historic articles and facts about Fountain Hills. Recently she posted one from 2004... It was about the man we rightfully called “Mr. Fountain Hills,” the late Keith McMahan, who I was lucky enough to have served with. It said Keith supported forming a new district to levy a property tax to pay for fire protection. While a separate district is not a viable these days, it illustrates the longtime recognition of a challenge we are still facing together. Town resources are not enough to successfully fully manage community expectations and requirements.

This is not to say that we have been paralyzed or letting up in our efforts to move forward with positive actions and projects, accentuating what Vision Fountain Hills stated are the things we both do well and those we are passionate about... unparalleled views, outdoor life, quality education, public safety and hometown charm.

Yes, we are a desirable municipality, and another aspect of being well-managed must include the way we handle development.

Not without controversy, the way in which we develop our community often takes center stage. Whether it be wanting to offer a variety of housing options, addressing the

commercially available inventory, or discussing new commercial/industrial development, we spend much of our time reviewing what may best suit our town and recruiting businesses to create a sustainable economic environment. It is an important goal for the Town, one which Keith, who was also with MCO, addressed like this, and I agree: "This should be done sensibly, working with the private sector, marketing firms and Town leaders." I would add, importantly with the residents who already chose Fountain Hills for their homes.

That said, in 2019, several potential major projects demonstrate the incredible interest in Fountain Hills by the development community:

- The Fountain Hills Medical Center at Shea/Saguaro;
- Keystone at Palisades and Westby;
- The CopperWynd expansion;
- The Daybreak project at Shea/Palisades and
- The International Dark Sky Discovery Center.

Similarly, Adero Canyon continues to grow, as does general infill, where 64 new single family and 38 multi-family residential plus 2 commercial permits were issued in 2019. These projects help offset some financial shortfalls with one-time revenue and the added population is good for business and the schools.

Staff is holding a Developers Advisory Forum this week to meet with the development community, share information, understand existing codes and open up a good line of communication that benefits us all.

There's no doubt that development will continue to influence our future direction as we close in on remaining available spaces. Deciding what may be best for the community, with a variety of views, remains a welcome challenge... that's right, development is a welcome challenge, an important one for the Mayor and Council to embrace.

Why? Developers think "Fountain Hills is the place to be...."

Related to development is the Environment: I use that term holistically, as it encompasses much of what we value here. Whether it is protecting dark or battling noisy skies, the condition of our washes, sidewalks, trails and parks, keeping graffiti, weeds and litter in check, signage, or storm damage cleanup, the "environment" in which we live is the most identifiable attribute of the Town short of the Fountain itself.

The preservation of our treasured views and natural desert surroundings, from Four Peaks to your local neighborhood, will always be a priority as that is the #1 reason most of us chose to live and work here!

Now let's talk about Partnerships:

Without collegial relationships, progress is not easy to come by. I'm happy to say that Town staff and elected leaders have enthusiastically moved forward in this arena.

We have scheduled and already participated in regular meetings, trading hosting duties and exchanging plans. We are working with local partners like the Sanitary District on irrigation and Lake water issues and new restrooms at the Park. And we've met with School District on safety, student recognition, mutual facilities and programs like East Valley Institute of Technology.

Council and staff are members of service organizations and foundations helping with everything from dark skies to scholarships to social needs.

We're sharing information and goals with the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation led by Pres. Bernadine Burnette and the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community, led by Pres. Martin Harvier... learning about their economic projects, education and enterprises. The energy and vision they project, be it the new We-ko-pa Casino or the dynamic growth surrounding the Salt River Fields area, is creating excitement for locals and visitors alike.

I also get the opportunity to collaborate and learn from our neighbor East Valley Mayors, and all Municipal and County officials through regular meetings and activities.

Regionally, our memberships on the Maricopa Association of Governments' various committees help shape policy regarding human services, public safety and transportation.

Speaking of, Councilman Scharnow sits on the Board of the Regional Public Transit Association/Valley Metro as they continue to try and assist us to find transit options. He took part in a MAG Aging in Place Conference on the same subject of mobility and accessibility.

Similarly, we belong to the League of AZ Cities and Towns, participating in training, subcommittees, and conferences on legal and legislative issues and more.

Through membership in the Greater Phoenix Economic Council and interaction with local, regional, state and even international business leaders from Canada, Mexico, through Sister Cities and the Consulates, the Town continues to develop important relationships and participate in a way to ensure current and future benefits collectively and at home.

I inferred other ways we can be affected by decisions outside our boundary by mentioning noisy skies. You may know that there were proposed flight path changes that would've been detrimental to some neighborhoods in Fountain Hills and Ft. McDowell.

We enlisted the help of a consultant who represented our interests with the FAA, who in turn asked our Congress Members to advocate on our behalf. We are happy to report that the status quo will reign, pending an appeal.

We also are on alert for State laws that take away local control, like one in the past prohibiting cities and towns from regulating short-term rentals, and others limiting our ability to make decisions under threat of removal of shared revenue. Some examples include vaping prohibitions, zoning changes and setting fees. Our consultant, the League, Council and staff will keep track and report to the community.

In addition to these current issues of safety, roads, finances, development, environment and partnerships, formal planning for our future is on the agenda for 2020.

We will take the important step of defining that future by seeking voter approval of a new 10-year General Plan in November. This will help guide our staff, our citizen commissions, Vision Fountain Hills, Mayor and each Councilmember in decision-making.

It maps out long-term visions and commitments that impact all of us. Everything from being a walkable community to zoning and open space is included. We have had several public

and stakeholder meetings, resulting in a draft that I encourage you to read on the Town's Website.

Why? So, we all contribute, making "Fountain Hills the place to be!"

To talk about some of the accomplishments of 2019, I asked Town Manager Grady Miller and representatives from our Departments to provide an update of their work and a hint at what's to come... once again, in a video.

Video Presentation - https://youtu.be/6PYBpy_Urqq

Thank you to Town Manager Grady Miller and all who appeared in the video, to Mike Ciccarone and everyone who contributed to it with content and organization. Every day is a team effort. I appreciate their professionalism and rely on their expertise and open exchange of ideas to help us make the best choices on behalf of the Community.

Now you've noticed, I'm sure, that I keep saying: "Fountain Hills is the place to be!" The video provides clear evidence of that.

Annual residential sales reported in November reached 537 homes, 258 Condos, 64 multi-family, and 40 lots, plus as mentioned new builds for both homes and businesses.

While the market reflects the desirable nature of our Town, we continue to offer housing options to attract a variety of residents to Fountain Hills.

MSN reported that Fountain Hills is within the top 20 of the best small towns for retirement in the Country. They said: "This safe community holds numerous events throughout the year and is a playground for outdoor enthusiasts. The Town, known for its large fountain ☺, is an International Dark Sky Community, a designation given to places that promote responsible lighting and dark sky stewardship."

Now we want to continue to be a multi-generational community by promoting our schools and offering more for younger citizens, but many of the qualities that make us a great place to retire are the foundation of a positive place to live for everyone.

On that subject, our citizens demonstrate their love of community with increased participation in the Volunteer Expo, Make-a-Difference Day, Adopt-a-Street, the Leadership Academy, Mayor's Youth Council and continued membership on Boards and Commissions.

The special events calendar has upwards of 30 activities per year... again, to talk about partnerships, they are largely organized and sponsored by the Chamber, clubs and organizations, faith-based and civic groups, businesses, Fountain Hills Cultural and Civic Association and more.

Keeping Fountain Hills, the place to be will require courage and dedication. Last year, I outlined two important yet contrasting ideas... realism and optimism. In many regards, these two "isms" continue to direct our efforts for 2020.

The Council will hold the annual retreat on February 25 where assessment and recommendations will surface, many to be addressed in ensuing months. It is an important time as we begin construction of the FY21 budget for approval later in the Spring. The budget issues are not new:

- Exploring revenue options to address our infrastructure. Bonding, a property tax, user fees, etc., need open discussion. Tackling budget challenges should be a community effort to develop a long-range financial plan that serves Fountain Hills.
- Prioritizing our current revenues. Using data-driven analyses that address safety, infrastructure, equipment and other municipal responsibilities may force some choices. Maintaining our publicly-owned assets including Fountain Lake, parks, washes, buildings, and vehicles is vital.
- Addressing adequate staffing by evaluating our needs and how best to meet them.

Retreat discussion may also include improving communication and transparency through public interaction in open meetings, through social and print media, and providing concise responses to citizen inquiries. This is highly related to staffing.

Also, again identifying appropriate growth that best suits our character using a vetting process at the Commission and Council levels. We are encouraging our Economic Development Dept to explore health, education, and home-based occupations fueled by technology upgrades.

Obviously, a lot is going on!

At this time, I'd like to extend my personal "thank you" to Vice Mayor Leckrone and Council Members Brown, Magazine, Scharnow, Spelich and Tolis for their time, talents and commitment to Fountain Hills.

I've lived here going on four decades: I chose Fountain Hills for my family... as did my parents and siblings...because we recognized something very special. Incredible views, a safe, small-town feel in the midst of a metropolitan area, excellent schools, outdoor activities, and of course, our namesake Fountain!

In preserving our unique community while encouraging careful development, events, amenities and economic growth, I hope I've been true to the residents who also chose Fountain Hills.

Earning your trust and faith by providing transparent, inclusive leadership remains our priority. The Retreat, Work Study Sessions and Special Meetings are open to the public, streamed and taped the same as Council meetings. The General Plan process, the new Development Forum, Town Talk Tuesdays with my Council colleagues, Student of the Month, various proclamations, ribbon-cuttings and presentations, which all invite participation, are important ways to connect.

We also invite your participation by responding to the 2020 Census. Economic Development analyst Jodi James made a presentation at the last Council meeting which highlighted the benefit to Fountain Hills and the State of AZ by being counted... not only with funding and projects, but by adding another Congressional seat or 2. Contact us for more info.

We anticipate the excitement of celebrating 50 years as a community, and in fact, next week the Pony Express will bring congratulations from around the State!

Fountain Hills IS the place to be and we all are the best ambassadors to deliver that message.

Creating a safe, well-managed, welcoming community over these 50 years didn't happen by accident. And, no one person did it alone. Former Mayors, Councils, staff, educators and community leaders... some we have sadly lost... each held a vital role. And even when we aren't on the same page, say, about revenue, traffic or development projects, we have all of you... plus businesses, tourism and regional partners, utility providers, realtors, volunteers and public safety personnel, to thank for the vision and dedication to making Fountain Hills the place people will want to be, and call home for the NEXT 50 years!

It's been a joy and a privilege, and I look forward to continued service as your Mayor.

Ginny Dickey
Mayor
1/28/2020