



2021 State of the City

Presented by Mayor Brad Hart

How do you recap a year dominated by unimaginable hardship? Well, as your mayor, I get to tell you about the resilience of a great city—a city that has overcome extreme hardship before and has thrived in spite of it. And we're in the process of doing that yet again.

Each year at this time I get to talk with you about all that has happened and what's planned for our City. As with everything else in these times of a pandemic, this year's State of the City address looks different--but my optimism and resolve remain the same....

This year's "live" message from me is brief, but the newly created "State of the City" page on the city's website provides the details I usually share with you in person. I wish I could share with you all the remarkable work this city did in 2020, but I strongly encourage you to go to that site as soon as you finish watching my message. I know you'll share in my pride about all that has happened in Cedar Rapids in the last year.

And be sure to review our current list of national rankings with eleven new 2020 rankings! Those new rankings include:

- the 14th best run city in America;
- the 2nd most recession resistant city in America;
- a Mini-Megacity to watch based on all our commercial construction;
- and our perfect score of 100 on the Municipal Equality Index.

In March 2020, shortly after last year's State of the City Address, our City and the entire country added some new terms to our daily vocabulary. Words like "quarantine" "social distancing" and "coronavirus" became a regular part of our conversations.

To respond to the covid-19 pandemic, many began working differently—including our City employees. Our Transit service suspended fare collection, had riders enter from the back door, and limited the number of riders. Departments that could began offering services to residents over the phone, by email and online instead of in person.

Essential services like police, fire, public works and utilities employees made changes to shift schedules and work processes to ensure they could continue to serve residents, while keeping themselves and others safe. Our Information Technology team quickly developed solutions to allow Council meetings to take place online, as well as other critical meetings and daily interactions. And of course, masks became a routine part of our daily life—to protect us from unknowingly spreading the virus to others.

I issued a mask mandate in early September based on the strong advice of our medical community. As soon as they advise masks are no longer needed the mandate will end. Thank you to all of you who have masked up to protect others.

I'm extremely proud of how the City pivoted to provide services to our residents during this past year as we all navigated changes due to the pandemic.

But as we all know, the pandemic wasn't our only challenge of 2020. On August 10, we learned the word "derecho" and of the destruction such a storm can bring with it. In a matter of minutes trees were ripped out of the ground, roofs were lifted from homes, and power and communication were wiped out across the entire city. Businesses and residents already struggling with the pandemic faced previously unthinkable devastation.

And once again, City employees and community members stepped up to meet the challenge. Roads were cleared quickly and emergency responders fielded record numbers of calls for help--working tirelessly to do so. Emergency shelters, neighborhood resource centers, and food distribution sites were established. The City knew we would need to help residents with clean up, and committed to hauling public and private tree debris and non-organic storm debris. This has amounted to more than 3 million cubic yards of tree debris collected so far.

We successfully lobbied for individual assistance in the Presidential disaster declaration that resulted in more than \$30M in grants and low interest, long-term loans to Cedar Rapiidians. In addition, we used (CDBG) funds to provide temporary housing, meals provided by local restaurants and money to help people pay their utilities and their rent to avoid evictions.

While we've made huge strides in our recovery efforts, we know there is more work to do. Our efforts to pick up debris will continue through the winter, and we are committed to working into the spring months to remove additional debris to help prepare our community for a season of replanting and renewal.

So many citizens gave back in remarkable ways. It is impossible to name them all, but I do want to recognize and thank people like Willie Ray Farley, Raymond Siddell, Bridget and Jovontae Robinson, Pat Baird, Steve Shriver.

Also, a big thank you to our non-profit partners and churches for the important roles you played. It is said that "no one ever became poor by giving." These people and groups, and others, prove that to be true.

Despite the pandemic and derecho, so much positive progress occurred in 2020 that is worth celebrating. We continue to make progress on Flood Protection, and are committed to finding additional funding sources to help pay for that system; economic development is strong, evidenced by \$343M in new building permits that brings our three year total to more than \$1 billion. Our City budget remains balanced with appropriate reserves.

We still managed to repair or replace ten miles of our streets, and complete 25 projects with our Paving for Progress funds.

We are directly addressing equity issues sparked by George Floyd's, and others', deaths and will, as part of that effort, name citizens to our newly created Citizen Review Board this year.

Affordable housing remains a top priority.

ConnectCR is an exciting project that will help us develop even more ways to use and enjoy our river, with ideas from a recently completed study of river recreation possibilities.

We adopted the framework and timeline for a Community Climate Action Plan that is under way now.

I encourage you to learn more about the vast number of newly created and future City projects and initiatives on the State of the City website. On that site you will find great information about improvements and programs related to economic development, housing, building services, community, parks and recreation, public safety, disaster support and recovery, paving for progress, the flood control system, IT, Utilities, and additional new initiatives.

New initiatives include a small business recovery effort and work with the Nat'l Network for Safe Communities to bring GVI, group violence intervention, an evidenced based approach to address group violence, to Cedar Rapids. Re-Leaf Cedar Rapids will be work with Trees Forever to engage renowned urban planner Jeff Speck to create a long-term plan for reforestation of Cedar Rapids with immediate urgency-providing us opportunities to plant trees today and for years to come, in all neighborhoods, on our streets and in our parks.

I want to acknowledge and thank all the hard working city employees, utilities workers, health care workers, first responders, store employees, residents and volunteers who stepped up over the last year in so many ways, large and small. In the midst of darkness, your light helped us find our way out of the dark.

I will close by thanking our City Manager Jeff Pomeranz, the City Director team, all City employees, and my fellow council members, Ann Poe, Scott Olson, Scott Overland, Dale Todd, Ashley Vanorny, Pat Loeffler, Tyler Olson and Marty Hoeger, for their hard work and dedication to serving our citizens.

While the past year has been overwhelming and life-changing in so many ways, it has also reinforced the resilient nature of the people of Cedar Rapids. This city may know hardship, but its leaders and citizens are determined to make this community – and the lives of all residents – better than before. 2020 showed us we can do so much when we work together and care for each other. Remember, “sticks in a bundle cannot be broken.”

Finally, the energy, compassion and can-do spirit so often on display in 2020 will provide us with much to celebrate in 2021 and in future years, and soon we will be able to celebrate together again. Thank you.