

17th Annual State of our City

May 11, 2023

Hosted By  **Rotary Club of Centennial**

Centennial Mayor Stephanie Piko State of Our City Speech

As I was contemplating a theme for this year's State of the City, I wanted to frame this year's conversation in the perspective that "We" run Centennial with the mindset similar to how many of you - our wonderful corporate sponsors and partners - run your businesses.

Our citizens are our customers - and it is in the best interest of our customers that we leverage our strengths, embrace our opportunities, highlight our advantages to create a resilient city - in other words we SOAR.

...and by doing so we are able to deliver on our vision of being a connected community, where neighborhoods matter, education is embraced, businesses are valued and innovation is absolute.

Strength in any organization comes from a strong foundation. We have been very fortunate to have a series of former elected officials who were focused on building a unique city that has stayed true to the principle of limited government.

If you are a former elected official, or member of a Board or Commission - can you please stand to be recognized for working to build Centennial's strong foundation.

As elected officials you really need a highly motivated and dedicated staff supporting your efforts. Centennial has again been awarded the Gallup Exceptional Workplace Award for the 7th consecutive year and we continue to be the only governmental entity to receive this honor. It is something that sets us apart and strengthens our place in the workforce.

As you look around this room - it is easy to see the real strength in our community - strong community partners, strong businesses and the people that take part in providing our community with educational opportunities, recreation, libraries and public safety services that have built and support Centennial.

The diversity of our population and industries continues to be key factors for stability and growth - not only for Centennial but for our entire region. When it comes to business - we work to find better ways to ensure that Centennial is business friendly and competitive. Understanding the needs of our business community is imperative,

whether it is struggles with work force development, housing or the regulatory environment.

I had the pleasure of being invited to join the Board of Directors for the Colorado Business Round Table - proudly representing the government arm of the board as it engages with business, education and government. Certainty - is one thing we all appreciate and benefit from and I believe this video highlights that need in Colorado.

Video

It has been a great experience being a part of COBRT - where business and capitalism are a force for good.

I think our council members would agree that the opportunities we have had to gain further insight into the challenges facing our businesses is valuable and time well spent.

OPPORTUNITIES

Your strengths can provide you with some momentum to SOAR, but as we all know momentum can fluctuate - so it is important to capitalize on the opportunities that present themselves in order to keep moving forward.

Our council has dedicated time to strategic planning that has helped us set a course, have the ability to adjust when needed and ensure we have the means necessary to take advantage of opportunities without losing momentum.

Confidence in the fiscal health of our city brings certainty that we can continue to provide exceptional city services while looking for those strategic opportunities to continue to support our community.

Our economic development team has continued to work on ways to incentivize and revitalize our business corridors. We have spent time working with citizens to identify their expectations. You see great success by finding the right new business that replaces and refreshes a tired location - think - Denver Biscuit Co, My Neighbor Felix, Basketball Social, BigBlue Swim School - neighborhoods enjoy their local breweries and Centennial is now home to two different Distilleries - Downslope and Barrel & Branch.

Our City's qualities as a nimble, innovative and collaborative partner have resulted in new opportunities for Centennial like the Westray development – a 3-tower mixed-use project across from Fiddler's Green that will be the City's first Business Improvement District. We have also paved the way for innovative concepts such as a potential 2-acre rooftop commercial urban agricultural greenhouse and 2-story recreation center for sporting tournaments at The District. It's exciting to see Westray and The District taking shape. In fact, more than 600 residential units – The Hensley at The District and Keen at The District -- are currently under construction and should begin leasing this year!

These exciting projects allow us to have diversity and growth while continuing to improve our fiscal sustainability. Our Council is proud of the fact the Centennial remains a debt-free city — we have stayed that way and have still been able to continue to innovate to provide exceptional service to our customers.

Since 2020, we have added many new ways to communicate with our customers (like you all have) and I am happy to announce the release of our new APP - MyCentennial.

I know, I know an APP doesn't sound all that impressive or innovative - but the guts behind this APP are. This GIS based system - allows individuals to see/compare how many other people have reported this same issue and updates all of them simultaneously upon it repair/completion. It also allows people in the field (whether the citizen or contractor) to attach notes and pictures to the work order that can be shared to all of the individuals tagged to that report. AND our Citizen Response Center has the ability to determine who should be responding to the reported request.

The responsiveness and interaction with this APP will relay to our customers that we appreciate their engagement with us and thank them for helping to make Centennial a better place. We want our customers to be reassured that their decision to be a part of Centennial was the right one.

All of us on Council recognize the importance that public safety plays in supporting that feeling. Our ability to be safe to work, play and live in our community is paramount and it comes from an entire network of supporting partners. Centennial Hospital, Centura Health, Arapahoe County's newly formed health department all are there to support our physical and mental health. The South Metro Fire District continues to be at the forefront of 1st responders.

The City of Centennial partners with the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office to provide law enforcement services and beyond. Centennial has a great partnership with the ACSO and has continued to fund this priority for our community. We have been able to expand our Mental Health Co-responder Program - to 6 clinicians that work hand & hand with our deputies to ensure the appropriate resources are dispatched on critical calls.

Centennial is extremely proud to support the efforts of the ACSO to reach out and connect with our citizens and especially our youth. You will see them at our city events, the Mounted Patrol gets lots of attention and are a real favorite. Including the therapy ponies.

Our support for our School Resource Officer program has had a very significant impact in building trust and relationships between the ACSO and the students within our communities. Our SRO Deputies are great - supporting High Schools, Middle and Elementary schools - they support both Littleton Public Schools and Cherry Creek School Districts... I do feel a little sorry for the SRO's that don't get quite as much attention or accolades as these guys do!

Last year you may recall having the opportunity to meet Rex and Zeke at the State of the City - well thanks to the support of the Centennial Rotary Club and the amazing efforts of Diane Lewis and K-9 Back the Blue - I am proud to introduce - 3 additional 4-legged SRO's to the team. K9-Riley, K-9-Otis and K-9-Bear.

K-9 Bear will be assisting Deputy Candace Gray in the Cherry Creek School District! I would like to invite Sheriff Tyler Brown, Deputy Gray and Bear up to the stage.

Swearing In for BEAR

The Centennial Rotary Club donated \$9,000 to support Bear and his training. Additionally - K-9 Back the Blue is an amazing Centennial Charity that has continued to

raise money to support not only the SRO program but all our K-9 deputies that work to make our community safer and protect the lives of our deputies and citizens.

Mark your calendars! August 26th will be this year's REX Run with proceeds going to support K-9 Back the Blue!

Rounding out some of those other areas of opportunity that you will see moving forward into this summer include:

Working with the Centennial Arts and Cultural Foundation to reach out within our community to bring an "Art in Public Places" project featuring local artists and citizen judges together for the first time. Currently - there is a call for artists out to create art for more of the City's traffic boxes. Look for the announcement at Centennial Under the Stars for the selected pieces.

We have also made another investment in Centennial Center Park - a local favorite, this Nationally ranked amenity has been expanded to offer even greater opportunities for kids of all ages to enjoy new aspects of engagement.

We also have a number of transportation projects in the works - including one you may have noticed... the replacement of the Arapahoe Road Bridge - a 75-year-old structure that had definitely seen its better days. I'd like to share some of the items going on with Public Works to continue to serve our customers.

Public Works Video

ADVANTAGES

The one advantage that helps us continue to SOAR is without a doubt our people. The people we all get to work with day in and day out within not only our partner organizations and businesses - but within our neighborhoods and at community meetings are really extraordinary. Our neighborhoods have come together and our outreach to them has expanded.

This has been seen by the excitement generated from our neighborhood events - which we are expanding this year. It has been seen by the level of interest in the goings on within the city - citizens signing up to be on Boards and Commission and participating in our outreach programs on housing and development.

But I am very proud of the recent engagement we saw as our citizens stepped up to join Council in pushing back against the legislative overreach of Senate Bill 213. The State's attempt to undermine a century of local decision-making regarding land-use and completely gut our Home Rule Authority was unprecedented. Key to defeating many of the intrusive aspects of this bill were our citizens - who showed up at town halls, who emailed their legislators and fought for what the City Council expressed was a one-size fits all / top-down approach against local control.

I am happy to say that our work paid off and SB-213 died in its return to the Senate on Monday. What we have now is an opportunity to change the narrative and make local control the most important thing to Colorado's citizens. As we have all felt the impact of the State's "fixes" on your local property taxes and property rights, I would ask you all to

continue to pay attention, lean in and stand up for our communities as more actions are debated over the next year.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize an individual that has been fighting for Centennial since the beginning and has been a partner in helping us educate our citizens, improve our Council's performance and has encouraged us to be proud of the exceptionalism that is Centennial - our partner - who will be celebrating 20 years of service to the City of Centennial - Mr. Robert Widner our city attorney along with his partners at Widner & Juran.

Applause - thank you to Mr. Widner - I know for myself and all of Council we find your counsel to be invaluable - we appreciate all you and your partners have done for the City.

Some great advantages that Centennial has to offer - not surprisingly come from partners that offer top performing experiences for our entire region - beyond Centennial's borders. So I want to give a quick shout out to them and some of the excitement they continue to generate within our community and why citizens love living here.

Arapahoe Libraries continues to be a community favorite and a great partner at all our community events. They continue to offer innovative ways to connect and reach our community members and we look forward to the exciting things they have coming in the future.

This fall, Littleton Public School District will be opening their EPIC campus and it will be EPIC! With 1,000 students already registered it promises to provide huge workforce development advantages to create pathways and skill development to get our students ready for whatever path/career they choose.

CCSD is celebrating the 4th year at the Cherry Creek Innovation campus and last year alone students earned 772 certifications in the fields of health care, technology, home building and more. You can see how impactful these programs can be to students and employers.

So for all of you corporate partners out there, if you have not toured these campuses - you are missing out! I am sure there are a few district representatives you could get in touch with today to set something up!

And our course our partners in recreation - Arapahoe Parks and Rec District and South Suburban Parks and Rec District. With the continued expansion of parks, trails and facilities it is easy to see why families and individuals continue to love living here. Arapahoe County is also working on an \$18 million dollar expansion of Dove Valley Regional Park. We all work closely together to design connections, programs and facilities that are complimentary to one another and allow us all to expand our reach across the entire city.

RESILIENCE

Lastly, resilience is the final piece of our ability to SOAR. and by resilience, I mean more than just your ability to make it through this entire speech! I mean the ability we

all have to look back - evaluate our actions and ensure that we are better equipped the next time we face a challenge or adversity.

We have all had to do that in the past few years and hopefully - many of our organizations are a little better for it.

A couple of areas where we have worked towards a more resilient Centennial?? Addressing homelessness.... with our partners at Arapahoe county, Centennial has hired a homeless coordinator with the goal of being more proactive to the individuals we see unsheltered within Centennial. This program is designed to be a very intentional way to address this issue. We are looking for a safe and compassionate way to address the needs of the individual's experiencing homelessness within our community.

We are also looking for ways to address what have been identified as 2 different crises with hopefully one similar solution. Senior and youth isolation became an apparent issue throughout COVID. So I am thrilled to announce a NEW partnership - Centennial and the YMCA will bring to our community the Centennial YMCA Center of Generations! It is located at The Streets at SouthGlenn and offers us the opportunity to activate a space designed for both our senior population and our youth.... Take a look!

YMCA/Centennial Video

Thank you to the YMCA for being a partner that can help bring this to Centennial.

So as we head into summer - please look within your communities for even more exciting things. Many of your neighborhoods have taken advantage of our neighborhood grant programs - making movie nights, social gatherings and community projects a way of bringing our communities together.

Keep a look out for City sponsored neighborhood celebrations across Centennial and we hope to see you at our Signature Summer Event - Centennial Under the Stars!

CLOSING

It's been my pleasure to be with you today and provide you with some insight as to how Centennial uses its Strengths, Opportunities, Advantages and Resiliency to provide our citizens... our customers with a city that is ready to SOAR.

Thank you for being here today, A special thank you to my husband Jim for his support - he also really appreciates the staff putting my face on the billboard, so he at least sees me once in a while.

I hope you enjoyed your lunch provided by Lunch Wired!

Thank you again to our sponsors for making this event possible, thank you to the Wings Over the Rockies and a huge thank you for the Centennial Rotary Club for not only what you have done here today - but for all the work you do throughout Centennial.

Thank you!