



**2020 State of the City**  
**Idaho Falls: A SMART City Then and Now**

Good evening. To all in attendance, and to those watching online, welcome to the Idaho Falls State of the City Address. I appreciate having the opportunity to share some thoughts about our community.

January 2020 is the start of not only a new year, but also a new decade.

New opportunities lie before us—the speed of change and innovation is unparalleled. And we can safely assume that more change is on the horizon.

It is therefore a prudent strategy for us thoughtfully to consider our past so that we might capture the essence of our finest community accomplishments and carry that into the coming years.

**A SMART City— A Successful Past**

This year and last, we have, or will be, celebrating a great many significant anniversaries in our community.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Rather, it is meant just to give you an idea of the scale, the longevity, and breadth of the accomplishments in our city.

To my mind, you don't have this many double- and triple-digit anniversaries if you aren't doing something right.

We are fortunate to have these success stories in our midst. Every anniversary is a great story... and what they all have in common is hard work, vision, sacrifice, and dedication. That's what has fueled every Idaho Falls success.

As with the rest of Idaho, Idaho Falls is experiencing population and business growth—the perfect opportunity for more success. I wish to keep this momentum moving forward. That requires the city to maintain a favorable environment for growth.

The best way to do this? Being smart.

I don't mean being clever. Rather, to be a SMART City in the modern sense means to be **intelligent**, but also **sustainable & resilient, fiscally-responsible, safe, future-oriented, cutting-edge, data-driven, comprehensive, inclusive, intuitive**, and perhaps most importantly, **citizen-focused**.

These qualities constitute the standard for which our city will strive in the coming years.

We will be successful because of a carefully-crafted, city-wide culture that embraces data and recognizes and trusts the expertise of city workers and leaders.

## **A SMART 2020**

For 2020, we have high expectations and clear goals for a SMART Idaho Falls. I'd like to highlight a few now.

### **City Enterprises**

First, City Enterprises. Three city departments operate enterprise programs—the Airport, Idaho Falls Power and Public Works.

A city enterprise is a public service that pays for or supports itself by charging user-fees.

These programs charge only what they need to offer the service, that way, no tax dollars are used in their operation.

At the ***Idaho Falls Airport***, 2019 was a record-breaking year with over 350,000 passengers travelling through our airport—a full 10% increase over 2018.

You may have noticed the expansion of the baggage claim area that was completed this past fall to better serve our passengers.

More passengers mean even more expansion. A two-year project for our terminal will kick off this spring. We will increase the TSA

footprint, add new features to our lobby, and build three additional gates—doubling our capacity to serve passengers.

A new flight to Denver has been added to the schedule *and* both Delta and United will be using larger planes for flights they operate currently.

Growth in airport use and capacity signals very healthy, sustainable, regional economic growth. Facilitating this is SMART not just for the city, *but for all of Eastern Idaho*.

At **Idaho Falls Power**, we always have an eye on the future. When it comes to fiber, we have been on the leading edge since 2002 when we first started serving business customers.

Back in 2018 we initiated a pilot program to test the feasibility of residential fiber service. This past fall, the City Council voted to expand the pilot project city-wide.

Over the next four-to-five years, we anticipate that fiber infrastructure will be built out for **every** home and business that desires it to have high speed internet service.

Fiber optics are the next iteration in communications. We are pleased that, along with the City of Ammon, which also has a fiber program, we will continue to be that bright spot in Eastern Idaho where residents and businesses can readily obtain cutting edge technology.

In 2020, Idaho Falls Power will replace 400 city streetlights with more efficient, longer lasting LED lighting.

We will continue to explore future energy resources for our community like the Small Modular Reactor to maintain our low rates and carbon-free energy sources.

Carbon-free electric power isn't just a catch-phrase. It means clean energy for homes, businesses, and other technologies like electric vehicles.

Within the transportation sector, EVs are one of the most effective technologies to reduce greenhouse gases.

But this only holds true if the power charging the batteries is carbon free. And that is what you get in Idaho Falls: clean electrons for clean power technologies, now and into the future.

At our ***Wastewater Treatment Plant***, staff are pursuing innovations in how water is treated and released into the environment—whether that be into the river or into aquifer recharge sites.

We currently don't send our treated wastewater to recharge sites, but we are evaluating the possibility because recharge increases the viability of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, which in turn, supports hundreds of thousands of Idahoans.

Our **Sanitation Division** has waste collection down to a science, and is always improving its capacity to collect still more, including leaves, yard debris, and recyclables.

I should pause here to acknowledge the frustration many resident felt with the dwindling *global* market for recyclable plastics.

I am pleased to report that our community has a very motivated and highly-credentialed group of citizen volunteers working on this topic. They are researching all possible recycling streams and avenues available to us.

If there is a plastics market out there that works, they will find it. In the meantime, I am proud the city added glass recycling in 2019.

As for the **Water Division**—we remain very engaged statewide to ensure Idaho Falls' our supply of safe drinking water.

It is our drinking water that is driving the need to replace our compromised, worn-out water tower.

There are long-term safety concerns associated with our current tower that we cannot ignore. If repairing it still were a viable path, we'd take it. But it is not.

In 2020 we will continue the community dialogue about the replacement options available to us.

## **Public Safety**

Next, Public Safety. Three essential city services that fall under public safety are Police, Fire, and Ambulance.

Prompt response times, high-quality of care, and coordination with the hospital resulted in the American Heart Association presenting the ***Idaho Falls Fire Department*** and EIRMC with several *Mission: Lifeline* recognition awards in 2019.

The app called *PulsePoint*, which can be downloaded by citizens who are trained in CPR, has proven its value in saving the lives of individuals experiencing heart attacks.

Significantly, the app guides users to the nearest defibrillator. Throughout the coming year, Fire Department personnel will be broadening training efforts for the public, thereby empowering community members to help save lives.

In 2020, a top priority for the ***Idaho Falls Police Department*** is to establish a facility for our city's law enforcement professionals and the community they serve.

In 2019, a citizen committee concluded that a new station was necessary.

Today, we have officers and equipment staged in *eight* different places throughout the city—some leased, some borrowed, some loaned.

This piecemeal configuration creates a host of serious issues. It hinders collaboration and it impacts morale, among others. The Chief and I want our officers serving together so they can best serve our city.

In 2020, I am happy to report that the City Council will pursue development and revitalization of the recently-purchased stockyards property along Northgate Mile.

This site was selected for the community's much-needed Law Enforcement Complex. I will be encouraging the Council to opt for the financing option that results in the *least overall expense* for the city.

Timing matters. We know that significant cost-savings for this project will come from commencing construction quickly because in the current market, *construction inflation is a significant cost driver*. That, to me, is SMART.

Despite these challenges, the commitment within our Police Department to thorough police work remains exceptional.

Recently, our detectives pursued leads in not one, but two, cold cases that led to case resolution this past year. This was done with the support and teamwork of patrol, professional standards, and other bureaus and members within the department.



This success is a testament to the progress a dedicated police force can achieve with the use of modern investigative methods and resources, as well as the right training and leadership.

Finally, I am very proud to report that both our police and fire departments have been developing programs to combat one of the greatest threats to today's first responders: *emotional and mental duress*.

These men and women, who risk everything for the public good, often carry their experiences with them long after the sirens are turned off and the cases are closed. In this field of work, many suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Illnesses.

By working with trained mental health professionals, vast improvements can be made—not only for our first responders, but for their *entire families*.

This is an initiative that is deeply important to me because by recognizing this need we are empowering our first responders and paving the road for success and departmental longevity.

## **Quality of Life**

Next, Quality of Life. One of the strongest determinants of citizen satisfaction is the presence, variety, and quantity of quality-of-life indicators found in a community.

This includes the less-visible city services like *planning and zoning, urban renewal* and *building inspection*, as well as the

ever-popular **Library** programming and **Parks and Recreation** offerings—just a few of the assets that make Idaho Falls a family-friendly community.

Later this month, city residents will have the opportunity to experience the grand opening of the newly renovated Bonneville hotel property.

The Bonneville Apartments will contain 35-units. The newly refurbished edifice will retain all of the dignity of its namesake.

We are fortunate that the **Idaho Falls Redevelopment Agency** created a project that respected the beautiful old brick and mortar building in the heart of our historic Downtown.

As we look to the future, we know that housing will continue to be a concern for current and future citizens. We do not have a large enough supply of homes to meet demand which then drives up the value of property and prices.

Wages have not kept pace either, making home affordability even more of an issue. The city cannot and should not resolve all of this, but we can help.

Projects like the Bonneville are terrific, and we need more.

City Planners are working with the local Habitat for Humanity organization and a local developer to determine whether federal

grant dollars can be leveraged to generate new home ownership opportunities for low and moderate income families.

Next month, we have been invited to send a small team of community members—including planners, a realtor, a homebuilder, and others—to a specialized workshop focusing on developing new housing strategies.

Their education will help us generate a citizen-oriented, funding-conscious, and SMART strategy for managing Idaho Falls' response to this stressed national housing market.

In ***Parks and Recreation***, it is not hard to find SMART City thinking.

The Department, together with several other City departments, is working to incorporate xeriscaping throughout our City's landscape.

This conservative approach to landscaping right-of-way, flower beds, round-a-bouts and common areas, will save hundreds of thousands of gallons of water, staff time, and expense each year, thus proving that being SMART about the way we beautify our City also can be aesthetically pleasing.

The ***Idaho Falls Zoo at Tautphaus Park*** is part of a global effort to protect endangered species. The Zoo supports and offers educational programs that allow our young people to experience and study species and evolving habitats.

To further enrich our community, 2020 will bring the long-awaited splash pad to Reinhart Park on the west side. We hope to roll this out early in the summer.

And finally, with a fond look at the past, we will be inviting citizens who care to help us organize a Funland revitalization and restoration effort.

Now that the city owns the Funland assets outright, we can work to make it possible for tomorrow's children to have the same kinds of fond childhood memories that many long-time residents cherish to this day.

## **Administrative Services**

City administrators, accountants and other professionals in the Legal, HR and Municipal Services departments are engaged in aligning city administrative efforts with SMART City objectives.

This includes everything from placing a 24-7 payment kiosk at City Hall for utility payments, to developing economic forecasting tools for budgeting, to managing health insurance with foresight, to managing workforce, workload and workman's comp claims.

A quick example—training a new employee is time consuming and expensive, starting at about \$1800 per employee on the low end and increasing to thousands of dollars depending on the complexity of the job. Human Resource professionals agree that

it is far more cost effective to retain employees whenever possible.

The Council members and I rely upon city staff expertise. We of course wish to retain the best employees train them to hone their current skills and develop new ones. A well-trained city workforce provides excellent work, remains with the city well into the future and is prepared for leadership roles when opportunities arise—all sources of cost savings overall.

This is SMART Management and it is more important than ever.

I wish for all to know that we regularly receive prudent, professional, and intelligent management and services from city employees.

### **Mayor's Office Initiatives**

In my office, planning for the future is a key component of our day-to-day work. The city's Economic Development Director and I are focused on several opportunities for the area and region. This includes:

- planning for the slate of impressive new projects proposed for development at INL;
- preparing for the Costco opening in August 2020; and
- establishing one of only a very few Innovation Districts *in the entire country* right here near MK Simpson BLVD.

Additionally, my office is always working to improve transparency and communication with city residents.

We have numerous social media pages. We have a very robust city website with interactive maps and a feature that allows us to sign up to have meeting notices emailed to us.

This past year, city departments published standardized annual reports—some for the very first time. In future years, these reports will be available online so all citizens can see what our city has to offer.

Finally, the CUSP (Connecting Us, Sustaining Progress) Program. In October 2019, the creation of eight CUSP committees resulted in over 80 citizens stepping forward to identify, document and study needs and data-based solutions for our community.

This months-long effort is expected to result in myriad excellent policy and program options for the Council to consider right alongside the business, faith, non-profit and residential stakeholders throughout the community.

The idea driving CUSP is simple—we who live in Idaho Falls possess the *right* and the *responsibility* to come together and make SMART improvements. CUSP simply provides the opportunity. I look forward to reporting out the committee results later in 2020.

## **IF SMART**

This year, and in the years to come, Idaho Falls will maintain and enhance our status as a SMART city.

On the screen you can see a summary of the SMART Idaho Falls vision for 2020 and beyond.

Items in blue already have been implemented or are underway, while the grey sections are still aspirational. The listing is not comprehensive, but it captures the spirit of what it means to be SMART and future-focused.

## Conclusion

I believe 2020 is a *new year* in which we find success by carrying forward the sound practices that have served us well for 155 years.

The key opportunity a *new decade* presents to us, however, is the opportunity to improve as we pair tired-and-true practices with innovations in technology and the use of data.

This will allow our city to establish new benchmarks in sustainability, fiscal stewardship, safety and security, citizen satisfaction, and quality of life.

As we do this, Idaho Falls will continue to be a model for exceptional success across the state and throughout the Mountain West.

It's my privilege, and it brings me the deepest satisfaction, to be a part of this community.

We are fortunate to have Council members who care, directors at the top of their fields, talented and committed staff, and citizen volunteers who are not afraid to roll up their sleeves and problem-solve. I look forward with great enthusiasm to the coming year.

Tonight, I would like to close with the same simple but true statement I have shared before: ***“The state of our city is strong... and Idaho Falls’ future is bright. I could not be more proud to serve you and to be a part of this great community.”***

Thank you.