

Scottsdale Mayor David. D. Ortega State of Scottsdale Address -- 2022

Hello, I'm Dave Ortega, the mayor of Scottsdale. Today is an opportunity for all residents of Scottsdale to reflect on the state of our beautiful city. The state of our city is very strong and resilient. We've been sorely tested by the challenges of the past year, and I am proud of the character that our city has demonstrated.

As mayor, my job is to listen, learn, and lead so I can amplify the successes I encounter every day. I'd like to highlight what I believe are the accomplishments we should all be proud of from the past year and lay out my vision for 2022.

Every individual's circumstances are different, but every one of us has felt the painful and at times tragic consequences of the pandemic. Quite frankly, we're all past ready to be done with it.

I am proud of the actions the city has taken to protect our residents over the past year, and I will continue to be decisive to protect our health and our way of life. We've mobilized city, state, and federal resources to ensure that over 75% of all residents are vaccinated, protecting them from the worst effects of COVID-19.

I continue to ask that you vaccinate to get us all safely back to business and a more normal life. We redeployed more than 60 city staff members to provide needed food and medicine to seniors and immunocompromised residents, conducted wellness checks and created virtual opportunities for our residents to stay connected.

I am proud of the dedication demonstrated by this city's human services and senior center staff. We have responsibly deployed federal cares act and rescue funds to support a series of rent, mortgage, and utility assistance programs to protect families on the verge of losing everything as a result of the terrible pandemic, I will continue to stand by the families of this city and our community will emerge stronger.

We've worked with Scottsdale Economic Development to create a number of programs, to help small businesses weather the storm and preserve the economic vitality of our city. Small businesses are the backbone of Scottsdale, and I will continue to support policies that make this city an entrepreneurship destination.

Amid all the challenges we have faced, the city's emergency and public services have admirably adapted to the pandemic's challenges. We salute the determination and commitment of all city employees, but especially police, fire, human services, water, parks, solid waste, library and development services. We depend on you all.

We invested millions of dollars for ventilation equipment to mitigate the COVID virus at all our major city owned event facilities - at WestWorld at the Center for Performing Arts, the city libraries, City Hall, and at the Museum of the West. These safety countermeasures protect employees, the public and patrons so that venues can return to full capacity.

The pandemic has tested us, but it is not the measure of who we are. Our values and our identity are found in our actions. Last April, the city council unanimously approved a comprehensive anti-

discrimination ordinance. The ordinance represents Scottsdale's commitment to fair treatment of residents, visitors, and employees in our community.

It confirms our identity as a place that is inclusive of all people, a hometown where you can be yourself.

That's who we are.

Last November, Scottsdale's residents voted in favor of the new General Plan 2035. This collaborative plan includes sustainability, drought management, growth, trails, and bike ways, tourism, transportation, and housing.

It is a plan created and supported by our community for the benefit of all. Scottsdale is at its greatest when we strike that perfect balance between quality growth, natural beauty, and strong and safe neighborhoods.

That's who we are.

We've worked tirelessly over the past year to reign in the short term and vacation rental industry to defend the character of our neighborhoods and our quality of life. We listened to a range of voices and revised our ordinances to remove loopholes, modernize penalties, and improve law enforcement abilities. We will continue to advocate at the state level for local control and improve communication for our residents and the short-term rental owners.

That's who we are.

We've seen many individuals and families experiencing homelessness in this city and took action. The Scottsdale police intervention patrol and human services staff working with nonprofit partners were able to guide dozens of people off the streets. I initiated a conversation with the state, county, and our neighbors in Tempe and Mesa to form an East Valley collaboration for regional homelessness. Council agreed that we can do more regionally and for the first time budgeted \$10 million for affordable housing.

That's who we are.

We have been busy this past year building designing and improving this city's infrastructure. We dedicated the Pima- Dynamite Trailhead, the Thomas Road Groundwater Treatment Facility, Fire Station 616, multi-use sports fields and event parking on Bell Road and designed a new neighborhood park in Ashler Hills and a new dog park at Thompson Peak Park.

These are much more than just physical infrastructure, these are the essence of our business and tourism economies, our quality of life.

That's who we are.

In spite of the pandemic Scottsdale development services set new records for the number of building permits, up 35% and valuations increased above pre COVID levels.

That's who we are.

Scottsdale Airport is a national hub of corporate jet travel and increased revenues by 36% during the pandemic. Federal funding grants were used to completely rebuild the runway to operate for the next 20 years, Scottsdale remains a top worldwide destination during COVID - that's who we are. We have shown resilience in the face of adversity and laid out a blueprint for our city's future. General Plan 2035, which voters ratified, ultimately was written to unite us.

Together, we carry our past, cherish our present, and step into our intentional future. Scottsdale is the epicenter for tourism events and resort lifestyle in the state of Arizona. Some say that Scottsdale is too reliant on visitors. I disagree. Scottsdale is the local regional and international destination for shopping arts, entertainment, culture and sporting events.

Scottsdale is the destination of choice. Whether on a day trip, vacation, stay or destination to spend a lifetime. The majority of our future development in Scottsdale will consist of revitalization and infill. Our unique characteristics and distinctive growth areas must reinforce our pedestrian friendly, business- oriented and hospitable spirit.

We must balance resources needed to provide the same distinguished level of services and amenities current residents enjoy. After all, we are caretakers of the built environment and the stewards of the Sonoran Desert.

Conservation of our limited water resources demands our attention. The 22-year drought in the Southwest has forced the Bureau of Reclamation to declare a Stage One shortage and the Central Arizona Project announced reduction of downstream water by 30%. Scottsdale Water, which manages our water resources, asks, and I ask, that we reduce water consumption by 5%.

Stage Two shortage is imminent - we must conserve. Caring for our resources is part of our past and must be part of our future.

From 2000 to 2010, our population grew 6.7% and accelerated from 2010 to 2020 by 11.6%.

Scottsdale maintains the highest bond ratings in Arizona because we expertly manage growth and determine our intentional destiny. I will fight for balanced, sustainable growth.

We hear opposing views point to extremes, attempting to validate their arguments. Some ultra-growth voices cast the dubious claim that any control is zero growth, while some limited growth voices claim rampant building is totally out of control.

Citing extremes is not constructive. One proposal was indeed alarming. Last August, the Arizona multi-family lobbyist came to the Kiva to declare that they intend to bring 50,400 new units into Scottsdale. And at the same meeting, the lobbyist stated that they opposed water rate increases.

Imagine bringing 108,000 new residents in our city and expecting water discounted to boot. Currently 30% of households reside in multi-family living. Adding 50,400 new units would push the ratio over 50% completely reversing our Scottsdale suburban lifestyle.

In Scottsdale, barely 1% of existing land use is designated for commercial uses such as retail, office entertainment and services. Recent massive projects, which claim to be mixed use, consume commercial land entirely for residential use. Converting commercial land to 100% residential erodes our economic viability, and is contrary to our general plan.

I stand firm that mixed use projects must retain 20% commercial use citywide. Outside of the Old Town Character Area Plan boundaries, the General Plan 2035 defines high density as a maximum of 25 units per acre. This guideline must be respected.

Council is revisiting the 2018 Old Town Character Area Plan as to height, density, and infrastructure. Within the General Plan 2035 voters told council to respect the Old Town core, to keep the public open space open along the canal, to enforce setbacks and to retain shaded walkable, pedestrian character. I am sensitive to adjusting gradual high transitions and reducing or eliminating bonuses.

Citywide there are infrastructure limitations, set, roadway, capacities, finite water resources and city-wide open space needs, and there must be economy of scale to provide public safety, fire and police services to the excellent level we have come to expect.

Scottsdale is a Sonoran Desert community with an international reputation where our Western heritage is valued. We must protect our Western heritage investments from our original Old Town core to the pristine outskirts of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve. If we hold to our values, we will thrive as a community.

Through this pandemic period, Scottsdale has continued to emerge as one of the most desirable cities in the world, I've talked about what we went through this last year and success of the General Plan 2035 our guiding principles for this year and the next 10 years.

What challenges should we expect in 2022? Council enacted tighter restrictions on short-term rentals, and we expect pushback from the short-term rental industry. I will continue to ask the Arizona legislature to remand, to Arizona cities, local control and compliance. The state failed to fund in enforcement of short-term rentals within any state office.

We must have the ability to protect our neighborhoods.

Council will consider, case by case, the merits of each multi-family project. Recently, the Arizona legislature proposed a bill that would completely strip Scottsdale of our constitutional zoning responsibility regarding multi-family homes. I will vigorously fight any bill, which circumvents local control.

Council directed that the McDowell Sonoran Preserve Commission study funding mechanisms for fire hazard abatement, maintenance, and operations, rather than seek funds for additional land acquisition. The Preserve sales tax for land purchases expires in 2025.

In 2022, Council must shift gears to identify funds to keep our preserve healthy and accessible in perpetuity. Next year in January, the Scottsdale Civic Center will be rededicated with three new entertainment platforms, botanical gardens and family friendly spaces, Scottsdale initiated action to designate the award-winning City Hall as an historic protected landmark.

At our next state of the city, we will celebrate the reopening of our Civic Center campus, which interlaces performing arts, the library, City Hall, and Scottsdale Stadium, all walkable and accessible to our world-renowned Scottsdale Old Town.

Council authorized a comprehensive sustainability plan and encompassing climate change, green building, heat island, transportation, and energy and water conservation. You will be asked to weigh in on this vital project, which will be completed by December of 2022.

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with a group of students from Mohave Middle School who had come to city hall to learn about local government during our conversation. An eighth-grade student asked me an important question. She asked, "Mayor, what do you give to?" It was a great question because the answer reveals a lot about a person.

What is important to them? Where do they focus their attention, their time, their money? I responded, "It's not about writing a check. For me, it is my time." I have volunteered several years at Pueblo Elementary School as a reading coach. It's not about Storytime rating, it's about spending time one-on-one with a young person, eventually finding the topic which sparks that hesitant reader to want to read, and then ignites that young mind to love reading.

I miss volunteering at Pueblo. Many hundreds of volunteers who give of themselves in our city, at hospitals, as stewards of the McDowell Sonoran Preserve as Old Town Ambassadors, or volunteers in our schools, churches and nonprofits, all of us want to return to volunteer.

We're in Arizona, so we all know what it means to watch the sunset on the horizon and look forward to an even brighter morning.

No one can say what challenges await us. What we do know is that we face them with determination, with our Western attitude. We face the future with optimism and grit, like the West's Most Western Town should.

I look forward to working with Council colleagues in 2022. I know that Scottsdale is even stronger after all we've been through.

If we remain true to our values, we will ensure this great city remains a place of fellowship and opportunity. I look forward to fulfilling that commitment to hold true to our values every day as your mayor.

Thank you very much. May God bless Scottsdale and God bless America.

Mayor David D. Ortega