

2021 State of the City



Bryant, Arkansas

Presented to the City Council on February 23, 2021

Executive Summary

Council members attached is the State of the City for 2021. I would like to thank each of you for your service to the residents of Bryant. You have been a pleasure to work with over the past year, and I look forward to continuing our strong and fruitful relationship. Together we can continue to make Bryant the best city in Arkansas to live.

I am proud to announce that the State of the City of Bryant is strong and continuing to grow stronger. While we faced some issues in 2020, the city grew more robust as a result. Sales tax revenues were either at or above 2019 levels except for February. The drop in February resulted from refunds given to businesses by the Department of Finance and Administration (D.F.A.). Even with this significant drop in February, there was a 7 percent growth in sales tax revenue over 2019.

This growth may be attributed to the following causes. 1) With more people staying home and telecommuting, they had more time on their hands, and they spent their money locally instead of spending it in surrounding cities such as Little Rock. Restaurant sales slumped while sales at grocery stores increased dramatically. 2) Federal stimulus funds were provided to individual businesses, and residents allowed them to continue spending in the same manner as they had been doing pre-pandemic. 3) E-commerce sales have also increased. The change in E-commerce may permanently alter the way the American consumer shops. 4) Finally, historically, unemployment in Saline County has hovered around 3 percent for the last several years. During the initial shutdowns related to Covid-19, it reached a peak of 9 percent in March and then started to slowly drop throughout the following months until it has reached 4.8 percent in October 2020, which is the most recent data that was available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. These factors have combined to allow the city to continue to function mostly unscathed so far during the pandemic.

Business permitting and new home construction was very similar to 2019 levels. As a result, we could continue working on numerous projects throughout the city, from updating our Parks to our infrastructure improvements.

Two significant events occurred in 2020 as well. First, the city settled litigation with District 84, the improvement district developing Midtown, which will allow new construction to begin in 2021. Secondly, the city was awarded 4.5 million dollars in grants from Metroplan to aid in constructing the final phase of the Bryant Parkway. We received several state and federal approvals for the Parkway, allowing for right-of-way acquisition and construction to begin during 2021.

In conclusion, with the increased availability of the Covid-19 vaccine and more people receiving it, the city should begin to return to some state of normalcy in 2021, which will allow Bryant to grow even stronger in 2021. I look forward to serving the residents of Bryant in the coming year and seeing what we can accomplish as a city in the next 12 months. By working together, we will make Bryant an even better place to live.

Thank you,



Allen E. Scott
Mayor

Introduction

Today, I present the 2021 State of the City Address for Bryant, Arkansas. Before beginning, I would like to welcome our newest Council Members Lisa Meyer, Ward 1, and Rhonda Sanders, Ward 4 and our returning members from Ward 1 - Wade Permenter, Ward - 2 R. J. Hawk and Star Henson, Ward 3 – Butch Higginbotham and Rob Roedel, and Ward 4 – Brenda Miller. Thank you for your faith in the city and your willingness to serve all of our residents. Without your support, the city would not be as prosperous as it has been or will be.

I would also like to thank my Department Heads and the employees of Bryant. They keep our city running. They are available in all types of weather and all hours of the night to ensure that our city runs as smoothly as it does. They are also continually striving to improve the level of service provided to our residents.

I also thank our local businesses and the Greater Bryant Chamber of Commerce. They have worked tirelessly throughout this year to promote shopping at local businesses. I believe their efforts have helped lessen the economic impact on Bryant during the pandemic.



Thank you, Bryant School District, for all you have done for the city and its most valuable resource, the children. You faced adversity in educating our children this year, the likes of which have not been seen in our lifetimes. Also, you have done everything you could to ensure our children continued to receive a quality education. You also continued to reach out to all the children who experience food insecurity daily. From March 2019 through December 2019, the Bryant School District has provided 219,770 breakfasts and 399,727

lunches to children in the school district.

I especially want to thank all of the residents of Bryant. You have shown that you can persevere and even thrive in times of adversity. Some residents took on the added responsibility of assisting in the education and enrichment of our children who are learning virtually. For Example, Mary Ibis has taken a group of five children and enriched their virtual learning by creating a newsletter for their neighborhood, and they put on an outdoor handbell Christmas Concert. These are the things that make Bryant the best place to live. Additionally, residents have continued to support our local small businesses by visiting local restaurants and stores as allowed during the various stages of the shutdown that Governor Hutchinson mandated. This continued support has helped businesses survive these trying economic times.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to my wife and family. Throughout this year, they sacrificed family time to deal with the issues that were occurring throughout 2020. Without their continued love, advice, and support, I could not be successful as Mayor. When I receive a call or text and

need to address an issue in the evening or attend a meeting, their patience is unparalleled. I cannot thank you enough.

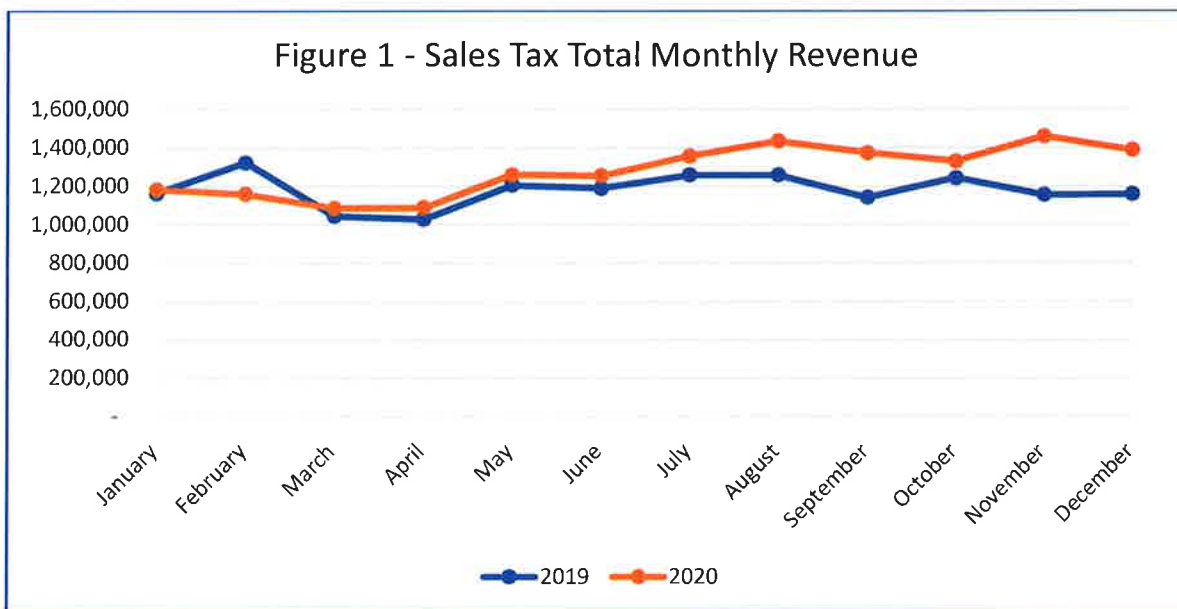
2020 in review

In 2020 our city, state, and nation were hit by the Covid-19 pandemic. A pandemic of this magnitude has not occurred since the influenza pandemic of 1918. The Covid-19 virus reached Arkansas on March 11, and no one knew what to expect. We had seen reports of widespread illness and death worldwide. In rapid response, Governor Asa Hutchinson began implementing measures to slow the spread of the virus potentially. On March 17, he closed public schools through spring break, and then on March 19, he extended that closure until April 17; on April 6, this closure was extended until the end of the school year. The Governor also stated that restaurants and bars would not be allowed to provide dine-in services but could still offer carryout, curbside pickup, or delivery, beginning March 20; state government employees would start working from home; healthcare providers would begin screening all visitors and staff for fever and symptoms, and indoor venues such as gyms would be closed to visitors. Over the next several weeks, other facilities were closed or modified their hours.

As a city, we implemented measures to control the spread of the virus and implement spending controls should city sales tax revenues decrease throughout March and April. All non-essential spending in the city needed the approval of the Mayor before occurring. This measure is still in effect. In addition to the spending controls, the city also suspended the collection of business license fees until the businesses were once again opened. Additionally, as directed by the Governor, the city did not charge late fees or termination fees for our water customers struggling to pay their bills. We happily arranged for payment plans.

The city receives sales tax revenue 2-3 months after they are remitted to the state by the business. We were unsure what impact business closures would have on city revenues and would not know for several months because of this lag-time. To quickly respond to any potential revenue downturn, I had each department provide me with plans for both a 10% and a 20% cut in departmental budgets if needed. Luckily, we have not had to implement these cuts.

I am proud to inform you that throughout this pandemic, the State of Our City is strong and is maintaining strong financial tendencies. As shown in Figure 1, the monthly 2020 sales tax revenue remained solid despite the pandemic. The graph shows sales tax revenues that were received during a particular month from the state. Sales tax revenues were either at or above 2019 levels except for February. The drop in February resulted from refunds given to businesses by the Department of Finance and administration (D.F.A.). Even with this significant drop in February, there was a 7 percent growth in sales tax revenue over 2019.



This growth is likely attributed to the following causes. 1) With more people staying home and telecommuting, they had more time on their hands, and they spent their money locally instead of

spending it in surrounding cities such as Little Rock. Restaurant sales slumped while sales at grocery stores increased dramatically. 2) The federal stimulus funds provided to individual businesses and residents allowed them to continue spending in the same manner as they had been doing pre-pandemic. 3) E-Commerce sales have also increased. The change in E-commerce may permanently alter the way the American consumer shops. 4) Finally, historically, unemployment in Saline County has hovered around 3 percent for the last several years. During the initial shutdowns related to Covid-19, it reached a peak of 9 percent in March and then started to slowly drop throughout the following months until it has reached 4.8 percent in October 2020, which is the most recent data that available from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. These factors have combined to allow the city to continue to function mostly unscathed so far during the pandemic.

A review of permits issued also indicates that the city did well during 2020. There were 117 new residential construction permits totaling 320,234 square feet of new construction, and there were 34 residential remodel permits issued. Sixteen manufactured home permits were issued in the city during 2020. The number of new residential permits is slightly down from 2019. However, this appears to be due to a couple of reasons. One such reason is during the pandemic's initial stages, construction slowed as everyone tried to determine their best practices. The lumber cost also increased dramatically during 2020, and some builders decided to delay new construction until the prices were more favorable. Finally, there were 22 permits issued for accessory buildings.

On the commercial side of permits, there were 14 new commercial construction permits issued and 28 commercial building finish out permits issued. The number of new permits is down three from 2019, while the finish out permits have doubled from 2019 to 28—these numbers indicate steady, controlled growth by our local business owners. We also had 689 business licenses issued in 2020, which included 34 new business permits.

During the pandemic, the city had to transition many functions to virtual or partially virtual. The transition necessitated acquiring additional cameras and sound equipment for the efficient operation of the meetings. The Development Review Committee and the Planning Commission have successfully transitioned to virtual meetings. City Council has transitioned to a hybrid between virtual and in-person. The Council has met in person with the remaining participants having remote access allowing better protection for everyone involved in the meetings.

The city also had to acquire personal protective equipment (P.P.E.). The acquisition was not budgeted; however, we absorbed these costs by controlling our non-essential spending. The city was reimbursed for a portion of our Covid related expenses through federal programs for municipalities. The P.P.E. has been used by all of our Departments, with the majority being allocated to our Police and Fire personnel.

All departments have had employees who have had to isolate due to contracting Covid-19 or have had to quarantine due to being exposed to someone who had the virus. This placed a staffing burden on some of our departments, and we had to modify plans and procedures to protect fellow employees and the public.

Throughout 2020 we strived to maintain or improve the same level of service to our residents as we had in 2019. We were able to achieve this goal even though, at times, it looked a little different than it had previously. Some plans were delayed due to the pandemic, and others continued forward with minor changes.

As Mayor, I continued to maintain accessibility as much as I could throughout 2020. At times this meant transitioning in-person events to virtual events. Coffee with the Mayor still occurred on the first Saturday of every month. It became a virtual event that led to its own unique set of problems. We

started using the Zoom application in conjunction with YouTube to provide you with my monthly updates. As always, I am still accessible by phone. I did not have as many meetings in-person, but between the internet, phones, and appointments through Zoom and other platforms, we managed to get the job done.

Administratively, the city continued to improve employee salaries and benefits to attract and retain quality employees. This was accomplished by planning for certification pay and education pay implementation and improving the employee evaluation system. The city also completed the 2019 financial audit on time with no significant findings. The budget book won an award for the second year in a row.

Perhaps some of the biggest news is that the litigation between District 84 (Midtown Developers) and the City was settled via mediation. This settlement will allow for District 84 to start construction of new homes in the area in 2021.

The city was also awarded 4.5 million dollars from Metroplan to construct the last phase of the Bryant Parkway. Bryant has gotten almost all of the necessary state and federal approvals to begin acquiring right-of-way for the remaining portion of Bryant Parkway and start construction in the Summer of 2021.

The Parks Department was impacted financially by the pandemic. They had to close their indoor facilities under the mandate of the Governor. During the time of closure, they discontinued collecting membership fees for the use of Bishop Park. This was decided because it would not be fair to our residents to continue collecting membership fees when they cannot utilize the facilities. As the Governor gradually lifted the restrictions, they modified the facility schedule to allow sanitizing time. There are still limitations on how many people can use the facility at one time. The loss of membership

dues and the loss of revenues from tournaments and other activities significantly impacted the Parks Budget. A portion of those losses was offset by the layoff of the part-time park staff. However, most of the lost revenue will never be regained.

The Parks Department has continued to make strides at improving the parks throughout the city. Following the long-term plan that we developed in 2019, We continued with the upgrades and improvements of Ashley Park. In 2020, we were able to update a pavilion, build a playground, and install a handicapped-accessible bathroom at Ashley Park. For the first time, I am aware of children in Ashley Park's neighborhoods now have a playground.

The other day, I was at Ashley park talking to some of the kids that were playing. One of them told me that It was a great place to play, and they have discovered that some kids they go to school with actually live close to them—what a great testament to community building. I can see this playground be used when there is baseball practice or games. Plans are continuing on the proposed new pavilion and restroom at Alcoa 40 Park. The following projects are planned over the next several years, as funds allow, in the Parks Department include the following:

- Installation of Additional Lights at Midland Soccer Complex.
- Renovate Springhill Park with new features and fencing.
- Upgrade mechanical system in the Aquatics Center.
- Resurface both the Basketball Court and Tennis Courts at Mills Park.
- Installation of a Skate Park at Alcoa 40 Park.

There are also long-range plans to connect all of the city parks with a trail system to allow pedestrian and bicycle access between them. We are currently planning this through our long-range Parks planning. A strong and viable Parks system is essential for the health and well-being of our

residents. Better access and more attractions will increase our parks' usage and improve our residents' quality of life.



The Parks department also launched an E-Sports League to give people safe recreational options during the pandemic's early months. Most of the baseball, softball, and basketball tournaments that were scheduled had to be canceled. The Parks Department was able to reschedule 24 events using the guidelines issued by the Department of Health. Additionally, The Parks Department worked with the baseball, soccer, and softball organizations to successfully implement their leagues under the new guidelines. Finally, the Center at Bishop and the Aquatics Center schedules were reworked to allow for usage outlined by the Department of Health.

Strides were made in every department on various projects that are underway. Because of the pandemic, we had to slow down on several projects. However, we will continue to work our way through them in 2021 and the coming years.

One of the most significant projects in 2020, but possibly the least known, is the upgrades started regarding Public Safety. After working for almost a year on the plan, the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and I presented a proposal for a new radio tower to be constructed. This tower will remediate some radio coverage deficiencies for Police and Fire when they are out on calls. The increased coverage should allow better responses when our first responders need additional assistance. In conjunction with this, we also started the replacement of police and fire department radios. The current radios are at least ten years old and have become so obsolete they often cannot be repaired when they malfunction. Besides, they cannot take advantage of some modern functions that are now available that enhance our police and fire personnel's safety.

Also, the Police Department was able to raise the starting pay of entry-level police officers. We are hoping that this helps with officer retention in the future. The inventory of aged Tasers was also replaced. This was necessary because the old tasers were no longer supported by the manufacturer and will help ensure the officer and the public's safety if they have to be deployed.

The following table summarizes the total number of calls the Police Department responded to and the top types of calls.

**Table 1
2020 Police Statistics**

Type of Call	Number of Calls
Total Calls for Service	29,756
911 Calls	7,072
911 Hang-Ups	595
Extra Patrol Requests	11,406
Traffic Stops	5,564
Information	1,384
Accidents	1,171
Business Alarms	677

Type of Call	Number of Calls
Welfare Checks	561
Disturbance	496
Motorist Assist	406
Residential Alarm	385
Suspicious Vehicle/Person	370/362



The Bryant Fire Department continued their tradition of excellence by maintaining the ISO 1 rating. This rating is given to less than 1 percent of the 30,000 fire departments in the United States. The pandemic resulted in the need to collaborate with the surrounding fire departments to train new firefighters while the Arkansas Fire Academy was closed during the pandemic. The training facility allowed the entire department to receive quality training without traveling long distances and

saving time and money. The position of Fire Marshal was created for the first time. The Fire Marshal is responsible for enforcing the Arkansas Fire Prevention Code, enforcement of City Ordinances related to fire safety, directives from the Fire Chief, and the public's education in fire safety. He is also responsible for the investigation of suspicious fires or fires from unknown causes. The department continued to seek out grant opportunities to increase and add services and equipment in the department. In 2020, The Fire Department responded to a total of 2,775 calls. November had the highest number of calls with 280, April had the lowest number with 173, The monthly average was 231.25 calls. These calls included medical Assist, structure fires, and illegal burning.

The Public Works Department was also extremely busy during 2020. As a result of the pandemic, during most of 2020, the city waived late fees and cutoffs for non-payment. We just asked that

customers set up payment arrangements. Public Works has continually strived to ensure that the residents' needs are met regarding water, wastewater, stormwater, and streets. Below are the completed Public Works accomplishments for 2020.

Pumps and Controls

- Added telemetry (SCADA) to lift stations 4, 9, 12, and 15.
- Rehabbed infrastructure at lift station 20.
- Upgraded lift stations 6, 10, 14, 22, and 31.

Meter Services

- Continue to reduce the number of repeaters in the system by upgrading as available.
- Upgraded 200 1-inch water meters.
- Upgraded 6-inch meter at the Arkansas Juvenile Assessment and Treatment Center.
- Continue to maintain high efficiency in meter reporting to reduce the number of manual reads monthly.

Street Department

- Completed Street Asset Management Plan
- Completed Phase III of Sidewalk Program
- Completed Henson/Ozark Phase III
- Completed Raintree/Carrywood Projects 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9
- Successfully implemented the Yard Waste Program
- Overlays at Spanway Road, Ozark and Henson Intersection, Providence and Independence Intersection, Mills Park Rd., Evans Loop Rd., Boone Rd., and Midland Rd

Stormwater Department

- Assisted in the review and update of the Stormwater Management Manual
- Updated, rewrote, and helped with approval of the Stormwater Ordinance
- Established the Stormwater Impact Fee and S.O.P. within the Ordinance
- Wrote S.O.P. for Stormwater Warranty Bonds for both public and private infrastructure
- Inspection technique improvements were made for large-scale construction sites and area surveys through drone acquisition and equipment training.
- Added soil & water testing capabilities to inspection & enforcement operations.
- Updated all Stormwater iWorq modules to improve and streamline operations
- Revamped and Updated the Adopt-A-Street Program to help support pollution prevention: Tasks included updating membership & education, contract renewals, signage review & update, and department membership in Keep Bryant Beautiful
- Increased emergency and spill response capabilities with new products & stocking
- Completed and received approval for the A.D.E.Q. Annual Report covering Bryant's MS4 Stormwater permit and completed required updates to the Bryant Storm Water Management Plan (S.W.M.P.).
- Increased Stormwater Infrastructure Inspections for city projects

Water/Wastewater Department

- Completed over 2760 work orders and 89 after hour callouts
- Solids handling operation processed 8,339,633 gallons of waste sludge, producing 1545 tons of dewatered disposal
- Treatment process discharge of over 860,441,000 gallons of effluent released into receiving stream
- Completed four in-house pipe bursting projects saving approximately \$125,000. After the acquisition of equipment in the 4th Quarter.
- Inspected and cleaned over 193,800 feet of the collection system pipeline
- Completed rehabilitation of over 50 manholes throughout the city

As you can tell, the Public Works Department has been extremely busy in 2020 maintaining and improving the city's infrastructure. Numerous completed projects were done to comply with the Consent Action Order (C.A.O.) that Bryant was placed under in November of 2016 to address Sanitary Sewer Overflows. To date, the city has spent approximately 9-million dollars on engineering and remediation efforts to comply with the C.A.O. There is still a significant portion of work to do over the next few years to complete the process and end the C.A.O.

Animal Control was also busy during 2020. Many programs and events had to be canceled or postponed due to the pandemic. However, other programs proved to be more successful. There were 34 vouchers to pet owners through the Spay/Neuter Incentive Program (SNIP) in need of financial assistance to have their pets altered in 2020. This is the most that has ever been distributed in a single year.

2020 was an unusual year for pet adoptions, as we had to rely on our social media and website presence than ever before. Although we had fewer adoptions overall than in 2019, we also had more pets returned to their owners and fewer intakes. Our pets for adoption are currently being shown on nearly 30 partner websites, and thanks to our use of Animal Shelter Manager Software, we do not have to upload animals ourselves. It is done on an hourly basis automatically by the software. We partnered with five new out-of-state animal shelters and successfully transported 62 animals into other shelters

and rescues through these new partnerships. Animals were taken to organizations in Texas, Nebraska, and Wisconsin, all paid for with donated funds. Our local, in-state partners took in 6 additional animals for a total of 68 transfers.



The free Pet Food Pantry has been open for nearly five years now, but this year the need was unprecedented. Throughout 2020, the pantry was available for 25 dates, and we gave away approximately 1,300 pounds of dog and cat food to families in need. Over a ton of food was donated to shelters and rescues in need of assistance in the area, one driving from Jackson, Tennessee, to pick up nearly 2000 pounds of food. Also, approximately 1,000 pounds of food was distributed to Blessing Boxes

throughout Saline County. The total of all the free food distribution was about 4,300 lbs.

We added one full-time Animal Care Technician (A.C.T.) and one full-time Animal Control Officer (A.C.O.) position. Both A.C.O.s and Animal Care Technicians took advantage of a wide variety of online training and conferences, many of which were provided at no cost. Every A.C.O. and A.C.T. is now certified as a Fear Free Shelter, a behavior and procedure program designed to provide a safe and welcoming environment for animals brought into the shelter.

We replaced 13 kennels, added four additional kennels, and replaced two kennel walls with pass-through doors. The pass-throughs give the staff the ability to move dogs from one kennel to another without handling them. This is an improvement for officer safety for handling vicious and severely

frightened dogs in the shelter. Additionally, it meets one of our goals to maintain the Fear Free Shelter Certification.

We are most especially proud of our department's ability to adapt and overcome this year. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to reduce our staff to a skeleton crew, and A.C.O.s were working individually and switching shifts. This schedule, designed to minimize their exposure to one another and the public, was difficult and quite stressful for all involved. However, the animals at the shelter did not notice a difference in their care level. Our staff worked hard to provide the highest customer service level, as all were extremely patient with the public during this unusual time. All have gone above and beyond to provide needed services for those financially impacted by this crisis. Finally, the Bryant Animal Shelter was the only shelter in Saline County to stay open and continue all services throughout the pandemic.

The intake of animals was down slightly in 2020 from 2019. The total number of animals brought into the shelter was 910, including stray, owner surrender, the owner requested euthanasia, and nuisance, sick or injured wildlife. We decreased the length of stay for cats in the shelter by 36%, and we increased our live release rate to 80%, up from 72% in 2019.

Online donations and fundraising proved to be quite successful in 2020, with the shelter collecting approximately \$1350 using the GoFundMe app to provide medical needs for four animals, as well as the cost of out-of-state transports.

In conclusion, with the increased availability of the Covid vaccine and more people receiving it, the city should begin to return to some state of normalcy in 2021, which will allow Bryant to grow even stronger in 2021. I look forward to serving the residents of Bryant in the coming year and seeing what

we can accomplish as a city in the next 12 months. By working together, we will continue to make Bryant an even better place to live.

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Allen E. Scott", with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Allen E. Scott
Mayor