**STATE OF THE CITY**

By Mayor Gordon Petrie

The City of Emmett successfully completed one of the more challenging years in its history. Thanks to fully-engaged city employees and department heads, we adapted and overcame that adversity and continue to do so.

While the SARS CoV-2 virus still plagues our nation—though signs have emerged portending the diminishment of the current strain—still, another existential threat has exposed itself to Idaho cities: our Legislature. Although the final version remains to be seen, a cabal of ill-informed legislators continue to brew strange remedial legislative concoctions mimicking solutions in search of a problem that supposedly address “*ad valorem* tax reform”. At the same time, legislators remain steeped in the myth that cities make and waste too much money concerning property taxes.

Their strange brew reminds some of the three witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, “Double, double, toil and trouble, / Fire burn and cauldron bubble.” If the cabal gets its way, there will be double trouble, indeed—particularly where fire and bubbling cauldrons of crime occur. *Ad valorem* taxes make up the primary funding source for police and fire protective services.

**Our Future Is A Fiber Optic One**

In 2020, through the efforts of Systems Administration (IT) Director Mike Knittel, Emmett received a Fiber Optic Broadband Grant that doubled the miles of our current cable and conduit routes. This gives us a two-fold benefit: redundant connectivity for our most critical potable water and waste water systems and it opens the door for better broadband opportunities in underserved areas, e.g., the Industrial Park.

While addressing grants, Director Knittel secured grant funding to upgrade the City Council Chambers audio-video features. This particular upgrade increases opportunities for public engagement, thus enhancing transparency during public meetings.

At year’s end, the city completed the upfitting of our Annex building’s second floor (Third and Johns) to accommodate Gem County’s Emergency Operations Center. This particular upgrade includes a new backup generator and data room tying into our fiber optic infrastructure. This means we now possess multiple redundant internet connections to the center, including a platform for both city and county governments to integrate critical data network components. This arrangement supports both entities’ computer and data requirements during emergencies. This administration’s policy has always been to cooperate with other local units of government whenever it is prudent and practical to do so. The Annex EOC upgrades benefitting Gem County fit both criteria.

The city also entered into agreements with Safelink Internet, Tekfinity, and Syringa Networks to bring the city a multi-fiber optic presence interfacing directly with our distribution buildings. This paves the way for ongoing and future broadband expansion while providing more internet provider choices for residents. As a bonus, we collect “rent” from the providers to help fund our Systems Administration (IT).

Finally, in 2020, we completed fiber connectivity to the east and north sides of the main City Park. The project’s completion services the majority of the park with public access Wi-Fi and further allows park patrons to stay connected at high bandwidth speeds. For 2021, Director Knittel and his band of bandwidth builders will continue to add to the city’s fiber capabilities, thus increasing our efficiency and ability to communicate while protecting our assets from cyber-attacks.

**Public Works Gets a Workout**

Public Works had an especially busy 2020 in dealing with new development infrastructure and preparing for the second major makeover of a main city corridor (South Johns) in as many years. The city’s contribution to the upgrade of Washington Avenue last summer was minimal. Washington, of course, is a part of State Highway 52, which gives the state exclusive jurisdiction of its surface—a blessing and a curse.

Public Works Director Clint Seamons and his growing-in-experience construction crew completed the upgrade of sewer and domestic water transmission lines from Fourth to Twelfth Streets on South Johns Avenue. They also planned, engineered and laid the foundation for the Twelfth Street Booster Station installation. The department has scheduled that project for completion in March while saving hundreds of thousands of dollars under their model of installation. Additionally, Public Works secured Idaho Transportation grants for the completion of South Johns ($500,000) and Airport upgrades ($80,465).

As a sidenote, we acquired the additional grant for South Johns because the original LHTAC grant was approved back in 2013 for $1.8 million. Yet, project completion is 2021, eight years later. The 2021 cost? $3 million. What a difference a mere eight years makes: only $1.2 million! (Remember, only a 3% annual increase in *ad valorem*) While additional grants and in-kind contributions by the city have filled the gap, it’s only because of the due diligence of our Public Works Department that we are able to complete the original project as engineered instead of only half.

In 2020, Public Works also completed our Pedestrian and Bicycle Path Master Plan. For the last six years, Emmett has planned for and increased the walkability of the town as a health-benefiting alternative form of transportation. Indeed, walking is our first means of transportation. Our efforts to increase walkability have been noticed by state and national organizations. In turn, this has resulted in more grants and funding opportunities. As a matter of fact, our walkability policy significantly contributed to Carberry Elementary’s ability to finalize Pete’s Path in back of the school. We are grateful to all who contributed, especially the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health, Inc.

It comes as no surprise, then, effecting change is hard. Moreover, changing a culture, even for the betterment, often becomes a particularly daunting task. Nevertheless, with the deployment of the 96-gallon trash receptacles last year, we have increased the efficiency of garbage collection at least two-fold, while significantly cleaning up our alleys. Since their deployment, our city ordinance officer has not received one complaint about alley trash.

For 2021 so far, Public Works has planned the (1) installation of the new Lift Station for Hawthorn, (2) completion of the South Johns makeover with new curbing, gutters, sidewalks and, of course, roadway, (3) upgrades to City Well #6, (4) completion of the survey of our City Cemetery, and (5) updating our sewer, water and roads master plan based upon our growth projections.

**Fire in the Hole**

During 2020, Curt Christensen, Emmett’s Fire Chief, managed Emmett’s slice of the Emergency Operations Center activity related to SARS CoV-2. Early on, his department modified its Standard Operating Guidelines to better protect city firefighters from contracting the virus. And although training and extracurricular activities of the department had to be curtailed or placed on hold, no fire fighter left the department.

Last summer, the Idaho State Rating Board rated Emmett and its department for purposes of fire insurance costs. In 2012, Emmett received a 4 rating, which is typical for cities our size with on-call volunteers. However, last year Emmett edged closer to the next level, a higher 3-rating, which would be atypical for Emmett-like cities. (Less is more under this particular rating system.) Hence, Chief Christensen believes that all the hard work will pay off this summer with a retest by reevaluating our hydrants.

EFD has initiated the construction of its own training facility, made up of surplus steel shipping containers. The containers are already at the training site, near Emmett’s Waste Water Treatment Facility. Over the next several months, with the help of a metal fabricator, Emmett will join the ranks of Idaho Fire Departments running its own training facility. This is huge. Due to the SARS CoV-2 environment, most hands-on training ceased last year.

**Emmett Backs the Blue and the Blue Backs Emmett**

The Emmett Police Department demonstrated its fiscal responsibility by entering into the Motorola Flex Shared Agency Agreement with Gem County in January of last year. Later, the department purchased the Motorola Flex Records Management System. This means the shared agreement gives the department the same rights, licenses and use of software that Gem County has under its contract with Motorola at no additional cost to our department. The purchase of the Motorola Records Management System replaced our current failing system and gives us the ability to share information with Gem County Sherriff’s Office as well as Caldwell, Nampa, Canyon County and any other nearby agencies using Motorola Flex.

The year 2020 saw substantial decreases in traffic and criminal offenses. For example, the total number of 2020 vehicle crashes compared to 2019 decreased by 31%. Contributing factors include an increase in traffic enforcement by the patrol officers and the addition of cross walk beacons, stop signs and speed limit signs.

While our 2020 criminal statistics presented a 22% reduction in criminal reports within the city limits, arrests showed an even bigger reduction: 40%. In 2020, we also participated in a Community Crash Course funded by the Idaho Transportation Department’s Office of Highway Safety. This project helps drivers understand the safe sharing of roads with pedestrians and bikers, thus supporting our walkability policy.

For 2021, the Emmett Police Department will re-structure the Detective Division to include two detectives also performing School Resource Officer duties. When organized, the new team, brings a combination of over 50 years of law enforcement experience.

**Libraries Say Much about Communities**

Alyce Kelley, our fearless Library Director had exactly one fundraiser in 2020 due to SARS CoV-2. Nevertheless, it set a record, raising $10,857. Alyce and her staff always proactively plan events and programs. Hence, when the lock down hit Idaho, our library was one of a handful of libraries in the state to begin a curbside workaround and able to open its doors to serve patrons in the spring. As a result, our circulation shot to above normal within two months: 10,683 in June to 12,204 by August. Throughout it all, the library staff followed CDC safety standards at all times.

In 2021 the library will implement new software for improved patron financial recovery; expand delivery of learning opportunities through in-house and outreach programs; and train up a new Assistant Librarian based upon the imminent well-deserved retirement of Loretta Lewis. We will re-start and continue to develop our Adult/Senior services having the goal of “A Place for Seniors to Age and Stay”, which SARS CoV-2 interrupted, and we will continue our develop of grants, gifts, and in-kind contributions providing no less than $50,000 towards our annual budget.

**The Clerk is a Builder, Too**

Lyleen Jerome, our City Clerk, has spent the last four-and-a-half years building systems allowing city customers to choose among several options for paying utility bills, apply and pay for business licenses, and generally doing business with the city. By increasing her office’s efficiency, she is now able to cross-level one of her clerks to assist Brian Sullivan at the Building and Zoning Department. The need for Brian to review plans and obsolete zoning regulations has increased at least two-fold. Brian will now have the assistance he needs and the clerk’s office will not skip a beat in the cross-leveling.

2020 has positioned Emmett to continue where we left off pre-covid. Your city staff is developing into a dynamic full-spectrum team for building necessary city systems and governance. It focuses on being more efficient by getting better each day. We aspire to serve Emmett residents in ways most city staffs don’t or can’t. We know where we’re going, and we’re getting there.