

# **STATE OF THE CITY AND GOALS FOR 2024**

## **CITY OF STAFFORD, TEXAS**

**JANUARY 24, 2024**

**BY MAYOR KEN MATHEW**

My fellow Staffordians, seven months ago you trusted me to be your Mayor which was history making in Stafford. I am honored and humbled by your selection. I can assure you that I will not be a typical politician. I strongly believe that all elected positions are to make the community better, not for self-serving.

I welcome all those who are here in person, especially Honorable Mayor Pro Tem Xavier Herrera, Honorable Council Members – Ms. Virginia Rosas, Ms. Alice Chen, Mr. William Bostic, Mr. Chris Caldwell, and Mr. Tim Wood.

Let me also welcome our Legal Counsel, Ms. Bridgette Begle, Mr. Bob Jones of Jones Engineering and Mr. Bryan Blaum of FMSquared

For me, the most valuable assets of the City are its employees working in different departments. These departments are managed by Police Chief Richard Ramirez, Fire Chief Larry Di Camillo, City Secretary Roxanne Benitez, Chief Financial Officer Alka Shah, Director of Public Works/Development Services Jose Pastrana, Director of Human Resources Shanell Garcia, Director of Information Technology Ryan Young, Director of Multimedia Robert Frith, Municipal Court Judge Debra Sinclair, Court Director Nicole Nguyen, and Director of Recreation Susan Ricks. All the employees, as far as I know, are dedicated, efficient, productive, and cost conscious.

## Department Reports

Let us now glance through the different departments:

**Police Department:** The Police Department, under Chief Richard Ramirez, had a productive year.

- The Department completed Phase 2 of the Flock License Plate Reader Project. The cameras were instrumental in clearing two kidnapping cases.
- Two officers received commendation awards from the Chief for their efforts to save the life of a young child.
- Captain Williams became the 69<sup>th</sup> Police Officer in the State of Texas to graduate from the prestigious TPCA Leadership Academy.
- Received 46,084 different calls for services.
- Criminal investigations supplemented 7,491 investigations.
- The City agreed to pay for three student resource officers to be assigned to SMSD. Two officers will be paid for by SMSD.

**Fire Department:** This Department is headed by Chief Larry Di Camillo.

- They had 4,305 incident responses.
  - 60% EMS. related & 40% Fire related.
- Average response time was 6.16 minutes.
- Provided assistance to other agencies 121 times.
- Placed a 2<sup>nd</sup> High Water Unit to respond to flooding and storms.

**Information Technology (IT):** This Department is headed by Ryan Young with the assistance of the Network Infrastructure Manager Jonathan Davis. The IT has recently implemented improvements in the City's data center.

IT is working with the Stafford Centre staff to implement new Firewalls, Network Switching, Internet Connections, and Wireless Network improvements.

This will allow the City to market the Stafford Centre as a “State of the Art Facility”.

**Finance Department:** The Finance Department is headed by Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Alka Shah and is responsible for Budget Preparation, Budget Management, Payroll, Procurement, Grant Management, Accounts Payable and Receivable, Investments, and overseeing the Financial Audit.

Moody’s upgraded both the City and SEDC rating from A3 to A2 while Standards and Poor’s raised the rating from A+ to AA-. This amounts to the City receiving a clean or unqualified audit opinion.

Whitley Penn is our outside independent financial auditing firm.

The City also earned an additional \$1.1 million in investment income over the last year, under the guidance of CFO Alka Shah and her staff.

**Administration Department:** This department is headed by City Secretary Roxanne Benitez, with the support of Assistant Secretary Shandra Phillips and the Administrative Services Coordinator Richelle Worthington.

This Department maintains all City Ordinances, Resolutions, Historical Records as well as processes public information requests. They also create agendas and minutes for all City Council, Stafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC), and Council Committee meetings.

In addition, the Administration Department is responsible for all City Elections. Ms. Benitez serves as the Election Official. The City Secretary and her staff have done an excellent job of continuing to streamline



processes. As a result of their increased productivity, they were able to reduce expenses. They continue to be successful in effectively communicating with the public and citizens of Stafford.

**Human Resources:** The Human Resources Department, headed by Shanell Garcia, is responsible for a variety of functions which include Employee Relations, Compensation & Benefits, Employee Training & Safety, Recruiting, and Performance Management.

Human Resources worked with the Texas Municipal Retirement System to implement the Restricted Prior Service Benefit for the City's Retirement Program.

The Employee Engagement Group successfully organized the following events: Veterans Day Recognition, Employee Appreciation Dinner, Pumpkin Decorating Contest, and Christmas Door Decorating Contest.

Currently, we have a total of 251 employees and in the previous year it was 244, which is an increase of 7 employees. Like I said before, the employees are a real asset to the City. They are the ones making things happen.

**Civic Center:** The Civic Center is managed by Susan Ricks. The 37-year-old building can accommodate 900 guests. Ms. Ricks also manages the Swimming Pool, which offers pool parties and swim lessons in the morning and the evening during the summer.

**Stafford Centre:** The Stafford Centre is entering its 20<sup>th</sup> year of operation. Ms. Susan Ricks also manages the Stafford Centre along with contractor, Mr. Bryan Blaum of FMSquared. Several national and international artists perform at this center. In 2023, the City of Stafford hosted our inaugural Juneteenth Celebration and will do so again on June 16<sup>th</sup> this year.

**Stafford Economic Development Corporation (SEDC):** The SEDC is headed by President Wen Guerra. Other members of SEDC include Vice-President Ken Mathew, Treasurer Gwen Goodwin, Secretary Lawrence Vaccaro Jr., Randy Krahn, Damon Leonetti, and William K Bostic Jr.

**Planning & Zoning Commission:** Lana Hoelsing is the Chair. Other members are Vice-Chair Mathew Vairamon, Secretary Clint Mendonca, Aldrin George, Kenneth Grant, Cliff Cowperthwait, and Greg Holsapple.

**Multimedia:** The Multimedia Department, under the leadership of Robert Frith, has made great strides this past year, communicating city information and city services, as well as fostering relationships with local businesses. The Department has strengthened the capabilities of the City website. They provide continuous and consistent communication through our website, SMETV station, and all social media platforms. They created “Stafford Business Spotlight”. The department continues their collaboration with Houston Community College. They have upgraded aging equipment. The City’s radio station is back up and running. It has constant weather information available on it, which is very helpful during inclement weather.

**Public Works:** This Department is led by Jose Pastrana. Their emphasis is to provide excellent and effective services to the residents and businesses. He along with Code Compliance Administrator Scott McElrath, Superintendent Otis Brown, Senior Development Services Specialist Laura Morales, Economic Development Administrator Paul Chavez, and City Planner Thomas Coon are responsible for helping Stafford carry on their mission of planning and development. The Department is comprised of Permits, Inspections, Planning, Zoning, Code Enforcement, and Economic Development.

This Department is also responsible for maintaining streets, drainage, parks, facilities, vehicles, landscaping, rights-of-way, building inspections, engineering design, plan review, and platting.

The Streets, Parks and Vehicle Maintenance Division is headed by Otis Brown. Their responsibilities include Environmental matters, TCEQ compliance, Floodplain Management, supporting Stafford Municipal School District, Facilities maintenance, Traffic signals, right-of-way matters, and coordination of Landscaping.

The Stafford Code Compliance Team is led by Scott McElrath and is made up of Animal Control, Consumer Health, Residential Rental Inspections, and Code & Zoning Enforcement.

**Municipal Court Department:** Judge Debra Sinclair presides over the Court and Director Nicole Nguyen along with her staff facilitates the daily operations. The Court Department continues to operate on a full schedule.

The Court Department continues to use Zoom proceedings in special circumstances, if defendants are ill or out of town. They have continued evening dockets on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 5:00 pm.

**SMSD:** As we all know the school is a component entity of the City. The theme “We are One” is very appropriate. The gem of the school is the STEM Magnet Academy where there is a waiting list to get admitted. The Superintendent of SMSD is Dr Robert Bostic. Under his leadership and guidance, the school has been doing better and better.



## 2024 Goals

### 1. Maintain Zero Property Tax:

Since 1995, for nearly 30 years, the City has done away with Property Tax. Looking at the cash balance, called Fund Balance, there is no urgency for reimposing Property Tax. The following numbers will clearly lead us to say “No Property Tax”.

	<b>FY 2021</b>	<b>FY 2022</b>	<b>FY 2023</b>	<b>12/31/2023</b>
	<b>(The numbers are in Million \$)</b>			
<b>CITY</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>12.2</b>	<b>10.7</b>
<b>SEDC</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>15.1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>25.9</b>

If we did not have property tax in 2021 what is the justification for imposing property tax now? Right now, the City alone has \$4.1 million more than the FY 2021, which is 62% more. If we take the total including SEDC, the difference for the same period is \$11.4 million more, which is 79% higher. Let me quote what our previous mayor Honorable Cecil Willis said at the State of the City Message on Jan 25, 2023. He said “So, count me as a No Vote for property tax in the City of Stafford”. Let me also say “count me also as a No Vote for Property Tax”.

### 2. Infrastructure:

Maintaining the streets and sidewalks in a better condition and improve the drainage system to reduce flooding and standing water.

### 3. Attract Sales Tax generating businesses:

Appeal to retail businesses as sales tax is the lifeline of our City.

#### **4. Support New subdivisions:**

Attracting young families is crucial. It would be beneficial for the school and the City. Their children mostly would choose to go to SMSD and shop locally which brings more Sales Tax to the City.

#### **5. Revitalize the Island Area:**

The island area is the Capital of the City of Stafford. Cleaning and beautifying this area would increase the image of our City.

#### **6. Eliminate Wasteful Spending:**

There are areas where we can find wasteful spending in governmental bureaucracy.

#### **7. Diversity:**

Our City can take pride in having all the major races proportionally balanced. All major races are around 25%. It is better to have that balance. We are very proud to be in Stafford.



## CONCLUSION

Let us all stand together united for the purpose of building a better future for our beloved City. It is the people who have given us that responsibility. We should not disappoint them. As we have seen from the numbers that I have provided, our City is not broke. Our unique City is well and vibrant.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all 251 employees. They are the ones doing the work, making the City better. I appreciate their dedication, hard work, and efficiency.

Let me thank all the people in Stafford, all Staffordians, for giving the entire City Council the opportunity to serve you all.

**LET US STAND UNITED, LET US STAND TOGETHER.**

**Respectfully Submitted,**



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**Ken Mathew, Mayor  
City of Stafford**