

Rosemount State of the City address, as prepared for delivery by Mayor Bill Droste, March 25, 2015

[Thank you to the Chamber, sponsors, members in attendance]

Once again, as in every year since 2003, it is my honor to present this report to our citizens as a guest of the Chamber. For almost half of those years, the message was that Rosemount was fighting against difficult national economic trends. And in most ways during those years, we were winning the fight. The picture is a lot brighter this year for the national economy – not perfect, but stronger than it has been. And Rosemount is well positioned to see continued improvement.

Maybe there's still a problem of perception. The recovery has been so slow that it sometimes escapes our notice that it has happened at all. That struck me a few weeks ago as I was driving south on Highway 3 into Downtown. In the space of a few blocks, you can see evidence that things have improved from what they were a few years ago.

Winter cold did not stop progress on the independent senior living development near the Steeple Center. The developer, the Makado Group, is putting in a facility that they have named, "The Rosemount." It will be a mix of independent living, assisted living, and memory care. It's going up at the same time as the City's new Steeple Center addition, immediately adjacent to The Rosemount.

Farther down the street, there's another example of construction crews that ignored *winter* conditions to take advantage of improved *business* conditions. Fluegel's is progressing on an expansion of the store. It will nearly quadruple the square footage for retail. And it's a sign of success, sitting beside the grain elevator that was one of Rosemount's first business ventures. On the other side of South Robert, Rosie's Market is getting closer to opening its doors.

And on the other corner, the Dakota County Community Development Agency plans to begin work later this year on "Cambrian Commons." It will be a 60-unit complex to provide affordable housing for older residents. It may sound as if we're about to have an oversupply of senior housing. But residents over age-65 are one of the fastest growing segments of Rosemount's population. And demographic trends show the demand for housing options will only increase.

Traveling away from Highway 3, there are additional signs of Rosemount's growth. At UMore Park, gravel mining is progressing. And the University's plans for the property are evolving. Earlier this year, the University Board of Regents modified its approach to UMore. The new approach is that the University will not subsidize development, but instead listen to what the market wants.

That change is not a big surprise for us at the City. We've always believed market conditions are the best way to drive development. So we appreciate the clarity that this statement of goals will bring. That, and the continued progress of work between the U and the Army Corps of Engineers to address cleanup on the site, give me encouragement that UMore will lead to more benefits for our quality of life in Rosemount.

In Rosemount's industrial sector, Flint Hills Resources continues to make major investments in its refinery complex, keeping abreast of safety and environmental standards. CF Industries is investing in a new hydraulics facility. SKB Environmental is working with a business partner to extract precious metals, finding a new revenue source in old storage cells on its land. Wayne Transport has added jobs in Rosemount via consolidation of its operations.

And just this week, we welcome the announcement that Sweet Harvest Foods is moving headquarters staff to join its distribution operation in the Rosemount Business Park. The company owns several brands, including the MEL-O honey in the bear-shaped container. With Rosemount's long history as a hub for agriculture, we know they will fit well with our heritage.

All those investments by private firms are crucial to the strength of Rosemount's economy. And they permit the City to make investments in areas that fit the role of government. The City has invested in amenities like new soccer fields on the land donated by Flint Hills. We've improved tennis facilities. We saw a brief but busy introductory season at the splash pad in Central Park. It fulfilled a request I've heard so often from families for a water feature close to home. The splash pad appeals to young children. But the shelter beside it will make it easier to add attractions for older youth, like a bonfire for supervised teen activities. And this year we opened our 27th City park, named "Prestwick," near the subdivision of the same name at Connemara and Akron. Two more parks will open in the next few years as their subdivisions are completed.

Another feature that meets a community need is the activity center I mentioned earlier, adjacent to the Steeple Center. We expect to open it this fall. And once again, as we have so many times in the past, we must pause and thank SKB Environmental for a generous donation to the community. It will allow the facility to open with additional features and space we might otherwise have delayed for another day. The Steeple Center expansion will serve various community groups. Significantly, the meeting rooms and cafeteria will consolidate our efforts for seniors. And in the evenings, it will provide overflow space for the ever-growing calendar of activities staged by the Rosemount Area Arts Council.

In City government we do what we can to encourage this growth. A growing city must be well-run. Along with the special projects, we focus on day-to-day operations. This year we welcome a new member, Shaun Nelson, to the Rosemount City Council. And I can tell you we have subjected him to one of the busiest meeting schedules the Council has set in a long time to work on our goals for the coming year. And our new City Clerk, Clarissa Hadler, has been enjoying the same schedule, following the successful management of last year's elections.

We have also welcomed a new Chief of Police, Mitchell Scott, who's had to plunge in to supervise investigative and organizational efforts that include replacing two experienced sergeants and making sure assignments in the Department address the needs of Rosemount.

Last year, the Police Department responded to 13 percent more calls for service than it had the year before. Most of that increase had to do with traffic stops. Reports of serious crime fell 18 percent, including declines in the most common types, theft and burglaries. Less serious crimes were up 10 percent, led by increases in reports of disorderly conduct. Still, some crimes that affect the quality of life in our neighborhoods, like vandalism and driving under the influence, fell last year.

The Rosemount Fire Department is approaching a milestone that we haven't enjoyed for some time. With five Firefighters added last year and ten planned for this year, the Department will be at full staff. In our efforts to achieve diversity, we are hope to have both men and women on the Department this year.

We need the help of all hands. Calls handled by Rosemount Fire were up 12 percent last year. And the pattern is a familiar one from the last few years. The calls related to fires, real or suspected, fell slightly. Most of the increase in activity was due to calls for help for medical issues and accidents.

We are grateful for the efforts of our citizens who step forward and serve on the Fire Department ... who are willing to attend long training sessions. They answer the call at all hours amid the responsibilities of their family obligations and fulltime jobs. One of them, Pete Lundell, reached his 45<sup>th</sup> year of service a few months ago. And we appreciate major donations from Flint Hills Resources and CF Industries for equipment to help the Fire Department keep us safe.

Rosemount State of the City address, as prepared for delivery by Mayor Bill Droste, March 25, 2015

It's one of the duties of our public safety staff to plan for the coming developments we are tracking in our planning offices. In recent months we have approved new or expanded residential neighborhoods just across the street from us here at Glenrose, at Bella Vista, at Falmoor Glen, Greystone, and Prestwick Place. More planning applications for housing are being prepared. Housing permits issued in Rosemount almost doubled last year. The value of all permits, including commercial, had the same big jump.

One number we don't want to see jumping is our debt level. We continue to minimize our borrowing. The City's debt last year was down by more than a third from what it was in 2008. I find that sometimes people notice new public projects, and they fear we're putting it on a credit card – one that they will have to pay off through taxes. For instance, the new roof on City Hall? That was covered by insurance after a claim for weather damage.

Then there are streets. We all get irritated when we have to dodge road construction, but we want good pavement. In Rosemount, we don't borrow to re-pave streets. The past five years, we've averaged \$545,000 in annual street spending. With few exceptions, that comes from the property tax. It doesn't come from the gas tax you pay at the pump. There is some state money that goes into the main roads. And we're vitally interested in what the Legislature may do in the next few months to change the formulas that determine the state's contribution. In the meantime, we feel the best investment in our street system is to plan holistically. We use roads, sidewalks, and trails to tie neighborhoods together and to help people be active.

To oversee these diverse City operations, we on the Council look for metrics – ways to measure the City's performance. We especially want to keep tabs on why people choose to live and invest in Rosemount, and what we can do to encourage more people and firms to do so. After delaying for a few years for budget reasons, the Council last year commissioned a community survey. It was a telephone poll of 400 households last April conducted by the Morris Leatherman Company. They do the same work for many communities in the Twin Cities.

In the survey, 96% told us the quality of life in Rosemount is excellent or good. That's a slightly higher number than the last time around, in 2007. As I show you a few of these numbers, bear in mind that for most results the margin of sampling error is plus or minus five percentage points.

Rosemount State of the City address, as prepared for delivery by Mayor Bill Droste, March 25, 2015

88% told us Rosemount is moving in the right direction. And 38% said the sense of community here is excellent. I'd always like to see 100. But Bill Morris, who interpreted the results for us at a Council meeting, said that's one of the strongest showings in the metro. He told us:

"The improvement over seven years from 2007 to 2014 is remarkable – very statistically significant, and all of it tending to point in the upward direction. ... You have a citizenry that is very, very connected to local government – exceptionally so. They like the direction that you're moving in. They like the policies that have come out."

I think the crucial factor for folks choosing Rosemount is our neighborhoods. That was one of the biggest factors in why people said they like to live here: housing and neighborhoods. Overwhelmingly, our sample said that they feel safe walking alone at night near their homes, and that their neighborhood is a good place to raise children, and that people have a sense of pride and ownership in the neighborhood.

75% said they'd taken part in Leprechaun Days in the last two years, and there's more interest in neighborhood events and cultural activities like those offered by the Arts Council.

So many factors go into our sense of community: the positive nature of what our schools contribute, the work of groups like the boys and girls scouts, the neighborhood watches and the block parties that are dotted across the City each August during Night to Unite. It's little wonder that the real estate website Movoto ranked Rosemount the 6<sup>th</sup> best place in Minnesota for families.

So the community survey had a lot of positive news. But respondents had some ideas for improvement. They would like a greater variety of retail in Rosemount. They want us to maintain services without a big jump in taxes. They would consider new facilities but not major tax increases to pay for them. So far, we have been very successful managing our spending. Rosemount's tax levy is \$600,000 lower this year than it was in 2008.

We on the City Council are using new techniques to analyze the City budget. But there's another fundamental method to keep costs reasonable and to make sure we're meeting Rosemount's needs. That method is to call on the help of our citizens. Several of them serve on the commissions that advise the Council. They dig deep into the issues and frame the discussions that lead to strong outcomes for City actions. They help us balance what people want, and what the community needs.

The newest of those panels is our Youth Commission. They are Rosemount's future leaders. And they are leading the way to increasing activities and involvement for our young people.

The members of that Commission join the dozens of Rosemount citizens who serve the community without pay. They continue to organize events that draw our City together -- events that attract visitors -- and we like to think, potential resident -- to Rosemount. They run programs to keep our young people active and to enrich our lives through the arts. Last year the City began working with a Volunteer Coordinator, shared with three of our neighbors. She is placing interested volunteers into roles that help City operations. All our volunteers are a great asset to enhancing Rosemount's quality of life.

And we have another crucial resource for our efforts to prepare Rosemount for the future. We are in midst of an invaluable initiative with the University of Minnesota. The U's Resilient Communities Project picked Rosemount to serve as a classroom and research lab for this academic year. During the fall semester and again this spring, faculty at the U chose from a list of research projects proposed by the City. The University picked 29 of those projects and assigned them to more than 400 students in 45 different courses across 16 departments at the U.

The topics also cross departments at the City. Students have researched how to get more people involved in Rosemount's planning processes. They are analyzing the patterns of travel, water use, and park restoration. They are evaluating the prospects for more urban agriculture in Rosemount; for ways to reach diverse populations; for wellness programs to cut employee costs; for ways to retain Firefighters; and for methods to adapt the City's efforts for a warmer climate.

Most of the students are at the graduate level. They are closely guided by their course instructors. We've heard presentations from some of them at Council meetings. And their written reports will also be available to us.

And here's a simple way you can help the students provide us with good data. One group is looking at economic development issues in Rosemount. The students are asking our residents and businesspeople to take an online survey. You can find it via our website at [ci.rosemount.mn.us/survey](http://ci.rosemount.mn.us/survey). There will also be a public meeting to discuss these issues next Tuesday, March 31, at 6 p.m. here in the Banquet Hall. Your input will keep these students and your City stay on the right track.

Rosemount State of the City address, as prepared for delivery by Mayor Bill Droste, March 25, 2015

This and all of the work in the Resilient Communities Project is an excellent opportunity to tap the world-class expertise of the U of M faculty. And we share in the energy and optimism of our next generation. I am committed to using these findings over the next few years to enhance the quality of life for our residents.

All that information provides a background for those long meetings I mentioned earlier, as my colleagues on the City Council and I work to set the goals for City government. We review goals annually. They guide us as we consider individual projects and initiatives. They also provide instruction to City staff as they do their jobs. And they provide a framework for next year's budget and our capital spending plans for the next ten years.

We expect to approve our new goals in the next few weeks. Our consensus is that they will continue to fall into three categories. We seek to **grow Rosemount**, by supporting existing businesses and attracting new ones. We want to support the things that help us **live in Rosemount**, with policies and actions that protect our resources and economic security now and in the future -- factors that are sometimes summarized at "sustainability." And we seek to intelligently **manage Rosemount**, by providing efficient and effective services.

Our area of focus beginning this spring will be to research and plan for new amenities in the community. The City Council has met with groups that volunteer long hours to provide recreation opportunities, especially for our young people. We all agree children need to get and stay active. But the groups are telling us they are close to turning away participants. And in some cases, it's already happened. We are meeting with those groups to understand the demand and their projections. Many leaders are indicating they need more indoor activity space. And they've begun to devise creative partnering solutions that may require some support from the City but will not be wholly reliant on it. I look forward to additional talks with these groups, and as always to input from our citizens.

As I conclude, I would like to share with you some news about our efforts to support the second of our goals categories, supporting living in Rosemount. I am announcing here today that Rosemount has won important recognition for its efforts at sustainability. For the past year, we have participated in an intensive evaluation process created by the non-profit STAR Communities. It has created a national framework for 44 objectives, measuring economic, environmental, and social performance. The ratings are a data-driven way to determine where we are on sustainability initiatives -- and perhaps more importantly, to suggest where our efforts should go in the future. Rosemount is the only community in Minnesota taking part in this effort since it began in 2012, and one of only 30 communities around the nation taking part during this cycle.

Rosemount State of the City address, as prepared for delivery by Mayor Bill Droste, March 25, 2015

This program has reviewed our data. And we have just learned that STAR Communities has certified Rosemount as a 3-STAR Community, recognized for sustainability leadership. We join a group including larger peers like Indianapolis, Des Moines, and Albany, New York at this level.

This is a great accomplishment for a City of our size. In fact, we're the smallest city nationally to receive this award. I congratulate our staff for their extensive work pulling together the materials, including planner Jason Lindahl and City Clerk Clarissa Hadler, who started work on STAR Communities back when she was an intern with Rosemount Community Development. As our staff knows, this is a roadmap, not a destination. Along with demonstrating Rosemount's strength, the result points to areas we may choose to focus on over the next few years after we analyze the data. You can follow along with us in that task by visiting our webpage at [ci.rosemount.mn.us/STAR](http://ci.rosemount.mn.us/STAR), where we will post details of the scoring that gave Rosemount its status as a Leadership Community.

I believe there are opportunities for improvement, as there were in some of the community survey results. But the data and the opinions show that the state of Rosemount is very strong, at the top rank of some of our peers. Through the work of our volunteers, young and old, and through the work of our City government, we intend to keep it that way for all the years to come.

###