



## 2021 State of the City

In 2019, the State of the City was best described as transitional. With 5 new council members, a new Mayor, infrastructure deficiencies and utilities in regulatory violation, the city was in administrative, legislative, developmental and regulatory transition. While working through two declared disaster recoveries, the city was able to transition to regulatory compliance and secure the voters' approval of a new Fire Station and the approval of two major water and sewer utility expansion projects. For the first time that I'm aware of in our city, these utility expansions are fully financed without rate increases. In 2019, the city transitioned to strengthened financial and administrative stability. I am so grateful for the work that we accomplished together to overcome those initial issues and get the city moving in the right direction.

In the 2020 address, I declared that the state of the city was strong, with most city finances stable and growing. It quickly became apparent, however, that 2020 was to be a year of obstacles. In addition to developmental work on the new Fire Station and the utility infrastructure expansion projects to greatly improve the city's water system and to connect to NACA for sanitary sewer service, the city expanded the Police Department with the approval of additional police officer positions, and we upgraded the department's patrol vehicle fleet. The city has completed the October 2019 flood and tornado recovery projects and we received COVID recovery funds through the Cares Act. While working on infrastructure improvements, disaster recoveries and coping with a pandemic, the City of Cave Springs managed to undertake and approve, with collaborative community engagement, a new Drainage Manual to protect property owners and meet the current development challenges, a comprehensive Karst Agreement and Karst Regulations to protect the cave system that is at the heart of our city, and a new Master Street Plan, a Future Land Use Plan and a Comprehensive Plan to promote orderly and efficient development practices. This is all work that we achieved with the city council, the city staff, the planning commission and the community working together to make these improvements happen.

COVID fundamentally changed the way we do business. Office Staff, Public Works, Police and Fire personnel have all stepped up to the task, altering processes and making sacrifices to ensure that city services continued uninterrupted. To meet these challenges, the City Hall lobby was closed and remodeled to provide better service with additional spacing. City Council meeting attendance was temporarily limited to participants only, with disinfected preparation and distancing. Public comments were accommodated through Facebook Live and limited public attendance has been permitted over the past few months. Planning Commission meetings are conducted fully on Zoom and Facebook Live to provide transparency and public input, with tonight's City Council meeting now changed to that format.

In 2019, the City of Cave Springs transitioned to regulatory, administrative and financial stability. In 2020 the city was strong enough to overcome the obstacles of a pandemic and the recovery from two disasters, while continuing to provide services, update plans, strengthen financial conditions and remain on schedule with the new Fire Station and utility expansion projects. The transition and strengthening of the last two years, has brought the city to a turning point.



As we embark on 2021, the state of the city is strong and prepared for transformation, with an eye to the future. With a census population expected to surpass 6,000, the city will transform as we ascend to become a city of the first class. The current financial condition of the city will allow us to transform and grow by paying off City Hall bonds and eliminating over \$200,000.00 in General Fund debt. Record high Water Department balances will allow the utility to transform by paying off 4 of the 5 outstanding water bonds and reducing over \$900,000.00 in debt. We will then perform a rate study in an effort to eventually reduce water rates.

Some transformations are within our direct control, while others are not. Transformation of Highway 112, through expansion and realignment, is ultimately the decision of the Arkansas Department of Transportation (“ARDOT”). When ARDOT held a virtual public input meeting, we publicized the meeting and Cave Springs residents’ participation was excellent. I met with city residents, planners and engineers to prepare a response that incorporated residents’ concerns and suggestions in order to provide the best possible influence on ARDOT’s decision.

Construction on the new Fire Station and the water and sewer expansion projects is nearing their start. The new Fire Station will be a substantial transformation to modern, fully functional and self-contained. The sewer project will be a transformation from a limited capacity STEP system to a traditional sewer system with much greater capacity and a vital connection to NACA. The water system expansion will create access through a growth area to our west and will aid in preparation for a water tower requirement in the future.

Cave Springs is much more than a city, it is a community. We saw that community spirit after the 2019 tornado, when neighbors came together to help neighbors. Our Fire Department boundaries extend well beyond the city limits, to not only serve the City of Cave Springs but also to serve the greater Cave Springs Community. Over the past couple of years, the city had to reject multiple requests for utility services in this area of our community. Without the infrastructure to support those requests, expanding the requested services to the west was cost prohibitive. The water and sewer infrastructure projects will be a transformation that will expand capacities and allow us to more efficiently provide services into the community.

The transitions and strengthening of the past two years, has prepared Cave Springs for its next and arguably its biggest transformation. It will enable the city and community to move forward together for a bright and lasting future.

Tonight, I am formally announcing the city’s transformation through annexation. This question will be put forward to voters of the city and the community to the west. With the westward expansion of the city’s water and sewer systems, the city must expand its boundaries to meet the growth and demands that we are experiencing. This expansion will protect the city’s growth potential, and with the water and sewer infrastructure projects and their expanded capacities, allow us to extend much needed services into the community. Expanding our boundaries will protect the new service areas to enable us to meet the future needs of the city and the community to the west. Through an economy of scale, it also allows



us to maintain, and in time reduce utility rates, while providing a better service for all residents of our community.

This annexation, if approved by voters, will provide a number of additional vital services that we have invested in as a city and can now provide to our greater community, such as continued fire protection, police protection, streets and maintenance planning, while allowing residents in the community to our west to continue living the lifestyle that they have built. The question that will be placed before the voters, is that rare win/win situation for everybody. It is for this reason that I am asking every person to review the information that we will be providing, to ask questions and join us as we discuss the plan with citizens and voters.

2021 is the year of transformation to a larger and stronger city. It is the year for Cave Springs to join with the greater community and move **“forward together for the future.”**

