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## 2023 State of the City

Tonight's speech is a great honor. This is only the 5<sup>th</sup> time, in Cave Springs' 112-year history, that a mayor has had the opportunity to present a 5<sup>th</sup> State of the City Address. I have never been as well received as I was, when going door to door, this past year. I want to thank everyone for their hospitality and support in making this possible.

In 2019, the state of the City of Cave Springs was **Transitional**. With the financial distress of 2016, no property tax income in 2017 and the approaching census, we prepared to strengthen city financials and for the inevitable transition to city of the first-class. We updated processes, procedures, ordinances and plans to prepare for transition in financial stability, infrastructure improvements, legislative audit compliance and positive media interaction. Despite three disaster recovery projects, in 2019, the total balance of operational accounts increased from less than \$2.85 million to over \$3.64 million.

In 2020 the city was **Strong**. With 2019's significant increase in operational balances and public approval of the temporary 1.25% infrastructure improvement sales tax, the city became stronger. While much-needed infrastructure projects began, the pandemic changed the world. As some cities closed their city halls, we expanded drop box services, and provided limited backdoor customer service, as the lobby was remodeled to improve capacity and spacing. While navigating a pandemic, in 2020, we successfully increased the total balances of operational accounts from just over \$3.64 million to over \$5.08 million.

In 2021, the city was **Transformational**. The 2020 Census reported a new Cave Springs population of 5,495 mandating transformation to city of the first-class. City legislation was approved that made this transformation smooth and in compliance with state statutes. Internet sales tax, successful commercial development and the impact of population growth on the city's share of county sales taxes created a phenomenal growth in revenue, far outpacing the downturn in building caused by the limited availability of buildable lots. While the pandemic impact lingered, in 2021, we increased the total balance of operational accounts from over \$5.08 million to over \$6.18 million.

In 2022, the city condition was **Shakespearean**. Quoting from Hamlet, I discussed "suffering the slings and arrows of the outrageous fortunes" of a pandemic and multiple declared disasters. We did "take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them", overcoming these obstacles through grants, emergency relief funds, continued projects, uninterrupted services and the unwavering provision of needs for the dynamic growth of the city. While overcoming biological and natural disasters, in 2022, we increased the total balance of operational accounts from over \$6.18 million to over \$7.76 million.

Starting 2019 with a total balance of under \$2.85 million, to ending 2022 with a total balance of over \$7.76 million; Cave Springs saw over \$4.91 million in increase to the total balance of operational accounts, in just four years. The city experienced strong residential growth and robust commercial development, with 13 new businesses and 1 under construction of 17 applicants. Of the three commercial applicants, who failed to open their businesses, they failed for reasons beyond City Hall control. We reduced Water Department debt by over \$1 million, lowered water rates by 3%, lowered property tax rates by over 4% and provided an unprecedented level of infrastructure improvements.

Use of almost \$2.17 million in grants, state emergency funds and federal emergency funds, combined with vibrant residential growth and robust commercial development, enabled the exceptional level of infrastructure improvements, while building the strongest financial position Cave Springs has ever known. As we begin 2023, the state of the city is the very strong.

In 2022, I quoted Shakespear to describe how the city's primary focus was on overcoming the turbulence of a pandemic and multiple disasters, while continuing to provide basic services and unmatched infrastructure expansion. Now we must move past a primary focus on overcoming what is happening while providing for today. In this time of Dynamic growth, we must move to focus much more on tomorrow, and what is best for the future of our city. Tonight, to express this shift, to a primary focus on the city's future, I invoke the words of Fleetwood Mac in saying "don't stop, thinking about tomorrow."

We are thinking about tomorrow, when with assistance from the Urban Land Institute (ULI), we develop a Downtown Master Plan. The ULI group is working with Cave Springs through a grant program, where economic development experts and others can be utilized without cost to the city. We were recently approved for over \$5.875 million in added grants, to build infrastructure to serve tomorrow's needs. As we worked with ArDOT, to create a better Highway 112 expansion alignment; we were thinking about tomorrow and the impact for decades to come.

"Don't stop, it'll soon be here." As some of the current infrastructure projects are nearing completion, others are nearing their start. The new fire station, phased implementation of fulltime fire department staffing, potential to house an ambulance crew, sewer expansion, water expansion, highway 112 expansion, sidewalk installations, street improvements, and Downtown Master Plan are just some of the projects to serve an immensely expanding population, that will soon be here.

"It'll be better than before." Soon, we will open the new fire station, move to traditional sewer system, continue to build and resurface streets, build sidewalks and trails, continue to improve different aspects of the city's infrastructure, and develop a Downtown Master Plan that when coupled with the projects created, will build a city that serves people's needs and wants, better than before.

Today, we are developing plans, with a primary focus on tomorrow. We are building infrastructure and amenities to serve tomorrow's needs, that will soon be here and will make this city better. We can no longer focus on responding to what has already happened, because "yesterday's gone...yesterday's gone."

As Cave Springs moves forward with an eye to a better tomorrow, I am reminded of my time working for a Seneca-Cayuga tribal company. They believed that as a community's leaders, it is our responsibility to think about tomorrow, using the impact of today's decisions, on the children in seven generations, as a gage. Their saying to express this belief is, "In every deliberation, we must consider the impact on the seventh generation... even if it requires having skin as thick as the bark of a pine."

As we move forward with city projects, infrastructure improvements, plan developments and new ordinances; we must avoid the temptation of setting arbitrary obstacles to our own successes. We must gage our successes, not on our own perceived accomplishments, but on creating a positive impact for generations into the future...or as Fleetwood Mac would say, "Don't stop thinking about tomorrow."