



## 2024 State of the City

I am doing something a little different for the 2024 State of the City address. In recent years, I evoked Shakespear's "Hamlet" and Fleetwood Mac's "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow" to depict the turmoil of transcending COVID and the perpetual need to plan for the future of a fast-growing city. As Mayor, I am always planning for a brighter future for Cave Springs. Instead of a play or song to make the point, this year I will apply science.

Planning for the future of a city is not without its challenges. In government, a city closely parallels a particle as it applies to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principal of quantum mechanics. The principal states that if you know the location of a particle, you can not know its momentum and vice versa. There are variables that alter the particle's momentum, trajectory, and location.

With a city, as with a particle, you can know the exact position and through history, how it got there. With variables like changes in the economy, decisions by elected officials, equitable application of planning regulations, taxes, and utility rates; the momentum and trajectory of a city's development can be significantly altered regardless of where it is at a given time or how it got there. Unlike particles, cities have tools available to minimize the effects of the variables.

Tools for financial variables include emergency management disaster relief, emergency management mitigation funding, grants, minor employee assistance to significantly reduce costs on contract projects, low interest loans and low interest bonds. Each of these tools make substantial cost reductions to extend the project volumes without increasing taxes and fees.

The City uses Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Master Street Plan, 20 Year Vision Plan and is developing the closer focused Downtown Master Plan and Sanitary Sewer Master Plan. Long-term strategic plans are guidance tools to diminish negative variables. In life, things do not and should not always go as planned, so plans should be reviewed and revised about every 5 years.

The 2020 Census revealed notable accomplishments for our city, over the 10-year Census period. A few of the notables, as compared to the rest of Arkansas, include fastest population growth per capita at 218%, 11<sup>th</sup> fastest actual population growth adding 3,766 people and growth from the 145<sup>th</sup> to the 63<sup>rd</sup> most populous city, up 82 positions. As a result of the growth, Cave Springs transformed from a city of the second class to a city of the first class. Residential, commercial, territorial and infrastructural growth offsets negative variables.

For more immediate matters, a 5-Year Plan is one of the most effective tools that I use. For a short-term tool to be truly effective, it must periodically be reviewed and evaluated as well. So tonight, as we look at the state of the city; I am doing so through the lens of the past five years. This is akin to a reverse Five-Year Plan, to review, evaluate and determine the effectiveness of the past plan and support inferences used to formulate current revisions for the future.

Cave Springs growth was dynamic over the 5 years, from 2019 through 2023. It closely reflects the changes in the 2020 Census and demonstrates the successful use of a chest full of tools, against Heisenberg Uncertainty Principal type of variables, making the state of the city robust.

The General Fund Balance has grown from \$741,000.00 in 2019 to over \$2,730,000.00 at the end of 2023 for a 5-year increase of almost \$1,989,000.00, while an additional \$675,000.00 was set aside for the Community Building restoration. During this time, we built a new fire station, added 5 police officers, 7 fulltime firefighters and 3 civilian employees. In addition to daily operations, the park playground was improved for added safety and reduced maintenance. City Hall renovations added safety & efficiency, while backyard drainage, a new roof, parking lot seal and paint projects provided for growth-related needs and upkeep.

Street Fund Balance decreased from almost \$580,000.00 in 2019 to almost \$554,000.00 at the end of 2023 for a 5-year reduction of just \$26,000.00. In addition to basic operations, we completed 4 disaster recoveries, 9 drainage projects and resurfaced a record 34 streets, about 4 times the number of projects, repairs, maintenance, and improvements of any previous 5-year period, while upgrading equipment for efficiency and reliability.

The Sewer Fund was restructured to move future growth funding from sewer rates that residents pay, to impact fees paid by the developers who create and profit from added demands on the system. Combined Sewer Balances increased from almost \$523,000.00 in 2019 to almost \$943,000.00 at the end of 2023 for a 5-year increase of over \$420,000.00. In addition to basic operations, we have successfully settled a lawsuit and are constructing a lift station and main line to a regional, traditional sewer system.

The Water Funds were restructured to move future growth funding from water rates that residents pay, to impact fees paid by the developers who create and profit from added demands on the system. Combined Water Balances increased from over \$983,000.00 in 2019 to over \$1,563,000.00 at the end of 2023 for a 5-year increase of over \$580,000.00. In addition to basic operations, we reduced debt and rates, absorbed a wholesale rate increase, expanded service into a growth area and improved technology and equipment for added efficiency.

Looking back at the results of the last 5-years, basic city reserves have increased from \$2,847,000.00 in 2019 to over \$6,471,000.00 at the end of 2023, for a 5-year increase of over \$3,624,000.00. Through over \$8,043,000.00 in alternative funds such as grants and emergency management assistance, plus the addition of impact fees, we have improved infrastructure, updated technology, added efficiencies, increased services and improved facilities to provide for dynamic growth, while building reserves for future needs.

Today's 5-year plan includes the completion of and transition to a traditional sewer system to NACA. There will be additional expansion opportunities for sewer and water main extensions. The plan includes a water tower as is required in the next few years and expansion of the water service area, which protects our system from encroachment. Impact fees will be used to assist future development to make Cave Springs stronger.

The five-year plan continues the unprecedented resurfacing of multiple streets each year. We will continue working with ARDOT to ensure negotiated agreements on the new highway 112 alignment and on improvements they will perform prior to Main Street's dedication to the city. It includes continued work with ARDOT for approval of sidewalk and trail connections from the expanded highway to Main Street, to relocate utilities out of the expanded highway right-of-way and to see that a new traffic light is installed at Highways 112 North and 264 West.

Although Cave Springs is a city with dynamic growth and robust financial position, it is imperative that we use our tools to prevent the negative influence of Heisenberg Uncertainty Principal type variables. We must have long-term and short-term plans, not dictates, that are used for guidance, and they must be periodically updated to stay current. We must continue residential, commercial, territorial and infrastructural growth to offset negative variables. It is crucial to utilize alternative funding methods so taxpayers' money can be stretched and more can be done for less.

To adequately use the operational tools, and successfully care for a city, it is very important that city leaders have the necessary personal tools. Over the past few years in municipal government, I've discovered personal tools needed for taking care of the variables that impact a city. First and foremost, you must care; for the people who live here, for the community you live in, for providing better services and for healthy growth that helps offset any negative economic impact on residents, regardless of the economy, now and into the future.

Next, public service requires service for others, through efficient spending to reduce property taxes and water rates. It requires vision to create a downtown focal point through planning, to ensure Main Street improvements before accepting dedication from ARDOT and to ensure negotiated Cave Springs Parkway alignment is followed to keep downtown viable.

Also, protection of city authority protects its ability to serve. As statutes change, it is crucial to a city's ability to effectively provide services, for legislation to be reviewed and analyzed to determine its long-term impact. Actively voicing formal support or opposition to state legislators, is how city leaders protect against state intrusion that diminishes a city's authority and its ability to provide effective services for its residents.

Effective care and service for a city starts with leaders that care enough to acquire personal tools through continued education. Knowledge is the tool needed to effectively implement policies and plans to overcome the Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principal type variables that threatens a city's positive momentum. The successful use of these tools will overcome the quantum mechanics form of negative influences. They ensure that we can maintain a robust state of the city and continue the positive momentum needed to take care of Cave Springs, long into the future.

Taking care of a city, is as simple as four little words, "You have to Care"...it's not Nuclear Science.