
City of Bryant

State of the City



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Mayor Larry Mitchell

February, 2009

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As I enter the second half of my term as mayor, I marvel at the changes taking place in Bryant. The continued transformation of downtown, new residential and commercial development to the north, expansion of our parks system, or the completion of major road improvements - all of these changes add value to our community, its livability, diversity, and commercial strength.

Focused on the Future

I want to say to our people in 2009, as we start a new fiscal year for City government, that the State of the City of Bryant is *strong*.

We are strong financially—with a balanced budget and careful fiscal management.

We are strong as a community—with involved citizens who care about the future of our children and our quality of life today and tomorrow and are willing to invest in that future.

We are strong economically—with a commitment to economic growth, exciting new developments coming to Bryant, and educational support that is expanding the skills of our workforce.

In 2009, Bryant celebrates 117 years as a community. We have a proud history, a sense of purpose, and the momentum for great progress.

Committed to Neighborhoods

Bryant is a great place to find excellent neighborhoods and affordable homes to put down roots and raise a family. With a population of approximately 17,000, we are the 2nd largest city in Saline County, and we're still growing.

Our housing supply is split with 80% single family and 20% townhomes, duplexes and apartments. Several mobile home parks and a full array of housing for senior citizens complement the mix. However, there is a demand for more single family homes and trendy apartments to accommodate single and married career professionals who choose to live near urban amenities.

Whether we experience growth through annexation, people moving into Bryant, or because our own children are looking for a place to live, people deserve to feel like a part of their community.

Even in these economic times, 2008 was a very productive year. Our Planning Division prepared and submitted voluntary annexations that added over 1,000 acres to our City. The division processed 72 applications related to new commercial and residential developments, including the LaQuinta Inn & Suites Hotel, Value Place Hotel, IHOP Restaurant, Sunshine Academy, Zaxby's, Summit Bank, O'Reilly Auto Parts, Total Precision Manufacturing, Bristol Place Apartments, and new subdivision plats for Kings Crossing - Phases 2 and 3, Remington Place - Phase 1, and Midtown Bryant - Phases 1 and 2.

The staff participated in meetings between Bryant and Saline County and negotiated an unprecedented interlocal agreement that establishes rules and processes for development approval within the City's territorial jurisdiction.

Effective planning and methodical execution of those plans have become the hallmark of our City's planning division. In fact, Bryant has been held out as a model of planning and results. Our leadership team is currently working on the City's next comprehensive plan with the goal of having it finalized by the end of March, so if you have some good ideas for our City and its planning area, now is a good time to speak out.

Last year, the Permit & Code Enforcement Division processed 37 new commercial building and remodel permits for buildings valued at about 24 million dollars. Over 1,314 additional permits were issued for business licenses, outbuildings, swimming pools, fences, etc. It also permitted more than 145 new residential units valued at over 23 million dollars. We have seen a greater diversity of housing types, particularly in the attached single family, duplex, and townhouse markets. Each year, our density is increasing - another sign of a small town emerging into a city.

None of this could have happened without valuable partnerships, a strong belief in the City we have become, and dedicated City employees who work hard for our community and make things happen.

City's Budgetary House in Order

Bryant plays a significant role in the day-to-day lives of thousands of people, and we all know that the global economy is in a downward trend unprecedented in recent memory. In spite of media reports and the public's growing unease over the recession, you can have confidence that the City's financial house is in order.

While we are closely watching the local economy and will adjust our budget should economic conditions warrant. Our General Fund ended the 2008 year with a positive balance, and we expect, through conservative budgeting practices, to achieve the same result this year.

A Legacy of Parks

Bryant residents of all ages like to play! Rain or shine, our fabulous system of parks offers residents and visitors numerous options for recreation.

Last year, the Kings Crossing Park was added to the parks system, and we saw completion of the Midland Road Soccer Complex near the City's northeast boundary. This very successful endeavor received the Arkansas Recreation and Park Association Facility of the Year Award.

Bryant also received an Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Grant for the building of a tree farm at Plumb Park. The Parks and Recreation Department plans to conduct tree growing and pruning seminars this spring.

This year residents will finally realize the magnitude of the 106-acre Bishop Park. Ball fields will be ready for use in the fall and construction of the Community Center will be underway this spring. The City has received the results of the study from Ballard*King and Associates on organization and future operations of the Community Center, and we are now finalizing plans to begin construction of the Aquatic Facility and will soon begin remodeling the Bishop house and renovating three acres surrounding it.

The number, variety, and quality of parks in our community speak to this City's commitment to providing quality open spaces for residents and visitors. In fact, coaches, players and families from states all over the southwest are planning to visit Bryant to participate in the 2009 Babe Ruth Southwest Regional Baseball Tournament this year.

These are all opportunities to showcase our community, our quality facilities and our pride.

The sport tourism industry can make an even greater contribution to our economy. Besides the immediate economic boost during these events, sport tourism will assist our City with infrastructure development that we can all use recreationally for many years to come.

This is a community that welcomes visitors and creates events that instill pride among our citizens.

Focus on Volunteerism

During the Arkansas Municipal League Winter Conference, Governor Beebe presented the City of Bryant with one of twelve prestigious "2008 Volunteer Community of the Year" Awards. This award honors 1,895 volunteers who provided 64,148 hours of volunteer services to citizens of Bryant. These volunteer services ranged from support of athletic and after-school programs for our children, to parental support from the Bryant School District, to special events programs for businesses through the Chamber of Commerce, to neighbors helping neighbors through Operation Flood Relief.

A city cannot function without volunteers, so a big “Thank You” to all! It’s our volunteers, the people who give countless hours to our City, our Chamber of Commerce, our schools and our places of worship, who provide the passion and the strong sense of community that makes Bryant the successful City it is today.

Keeping Bryant Safe

The Bryant Water Utilities, the Bryant Fire Department, and the Bryant Police Department are all working to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

The City Council and I are committed to promoting a safe and healthy community. Police personnel continue to maintain our patrols, find new ways to fight crime, invest in youth and incorporate safety into community design. Police data shows that Criminal Investigation Division activity was down last year along with traffic accidents and violations. Most importantly, our violent crime is declining even as our population grows.

Through the Fire Department, we’re doing what we can to make sure our residents are prepared for emergencies too. The City purchased a new early warning system called the CodeRED Emergency Notification System, an ultra high-speed telephone communication service. We have already had over 12,500 citizens sign up for the service, which allows us to telephone all or even targeted areas of the City in emergencies which require immediate action, such as “Boil Water” orders, missing child alerts, or evacuation notices. The system is capable of dialing 50,000 phone numbers an hour, making three attempts to connect to any number, to deliver pre-recorded emergency messages from the City.

Through the Fire Department’s Education Outreach Program, we provided fire prevention and education to over 1,800 grade school age children, sponsored a coloring contest, visited with several community organizations, and held our first Fire Prevention Festival at the Central Fire Station which drew over 550 in attendance. We received a Fire Prevention Grant that allowed us to purchase 30 Vent-a-Hood Fire Extinguishers which suppresses stove top grease fires. All of these units were placed in service at the Bryant House, a local residence for senior citizens. In November, the City also received a grant from the Fire Act Grant Program which has allowed us to save \$195,000 in replacing a 1972 model truck with a new Rescue Pumper.

The City responded to 1,491 emergency calls in 2008 with no fire fatalities. Our fire crews continue to meet and exceed all State and Federal requirements and as of the end of last year, logged more than 51,225 hours of training.

In early April, our City was hit hard with a tornado and several days of flash flooding. Employees of our Fire, Police, and Public Works Department rallied together and put the City’s Emergency Operations Plan into action. We were able to meet all of the demands that were placed on our employees and continued to provide Flood Relief Operations by aiding in the evacuation of flood victims and assisting in the preparation efforts for imminent flooding. We also provided citizens with property damage assessments in order to speed the process of recovery and financial aid from FEMA.

Bryant's Water Utilities have been working hard to provide a safe, dependable supply of drinking water and sanitary disposal of wastewater for this community since 1955. In recent months, the system has been evaluated with an eye towards meeting present and future needs. We have developed a 20-year Master Plan involving projects to better serve our community. These improvements required an increase in the cost of services to the users of the City's systems in order to continue to provide for the everyday needs of our citizens and keep pace with the rate of growth. During the next 3 years, we will be working on phase 1 of the Master Plan for Water and Wastewater in our continuing effort to make improvements which are crucial to meeting the high standards we have set for our community residents, businesses and industries.

Bryant, a Destination

We are becoming a hip cultural destination, in part, due to the fact that Bryant is where people come to shop and play.

- The Alcoa Exchange Shopping Center offers a variety of retail establishments to meet every need;
- The innovatively-designed Midtown promises trendy shops, restaurants, and a farmer's market; and
- Bishop Park, a magnificent 106-acre community park and sports complex located on Boone Road, is designed to satisfy a wide range of recreational interests.

These are only a few attractions that will make our City a destination for tourists and Saline County residents for years to come.

Flood Control

"Operation Flood Relief" has been at the center of attention of all City departments after tornadoes and accompanying storms last year left devastating effects in Bryant. Since that time, the City has been in a "State of Emergency," as declared by the City Council. Diversion of staffing and funding has placed emphasis on stormwater drainage improvements, and the Council has authorized expenditures of hundreds of thousands of dollars in its commitment to address this issue in the City.

Downtown Bryant

The section of Reynolds Road south of the Interstate continues to experience commercial revitalization. The newly-remodeled Alcoa Federal Credit Union and the brand new Jordan's Bar-B-Que and Mitchell's Barber Shop proves that redevelopment interests continue to abound in the downtown area.

Building Roads Ahead

Transportation and traffic rank as one of the public's biggest concerns. Last year, the City's Street Department completed overlay projects on North Lake Road to accommodate heavy traffic generated by the Bethel Middle School, and on two miles of Shobe Road, where culverts were also replaced. The Department also replaced drainage culverts in other locations and constructed left and right turn lanes at the intersection of Roya Lane and Reynolds Road. As a part of the Safe Routes to School Program, the sidewalk along Highway 5 to Collegeville School was installed.

Under "Operation Flood Relief," other scheduled projects gave way to disaster relief efforts due to tornadoes. A portion of those projects included replacing washed-out culverts and digging ditches along many of our streets.

The approval of the Street Bond Issue in December has set off an array of project shifts and funding opportunities for road improvements beginning this year. We will be installing a long-awaited traffic signal at the intersection of Roya Lane and Reynolds Road. We will begin letting contracts for overlaying several city streets including Lombard, Laverne, Raintree, Northeast First, Ridgecrest, Henson, parts of Shobe and more.

Serving the Public

Providing helpful services to the public is a top priority. Several initiatives were launched last year to make City services more accessible, customer-friendly and interactive.

This year, residents will begin to see some changes in the way the City accepts payments for water and sewer bills. The Council recently approved Bryant's first credit card payment processing system. It has been up and running since the first of this year and has been deemed a tremendous success.

A new web-based information center now allows the public an interactive means to obtain information about the City online. Residents now will be able to find answers to frequently asked questions and submit comments or questions for staff and Council members.

The Bryant Animal Control and Adoption Center is scheduled to celebrate 10 years of service to our community. We've come a long way from the single truck and one animal control officer to a staff of 4 full-time animal control officers and 2 temporary part-time animal care technicians as well as 20+ volunteers. In late 2008, Tricia Power was asked to speak at Animal Care Expo 2009 in Las Vegas, which is hosted by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and is being held this April. This invitation, which is an honor usually bestowed on the directors of only the largest animal shelters and rescue organizations in the country - cities like Los Angeles and New York City - recognizes Bryant Animal Control and Adoption Center as one of the nation's top animal shelters in terms of care and services provided to the community's pets. As one HSUS representative has said, "Bryant is a small shelter doing a lot of big things."

We strive to spread the word about the animals in need of homes, to educate the public in an effort to prevent surrendered animals, and to assist other agencies and shelters in finding placement for their pets. We plan to continue providing what we have always been known for: our kind and caring staff, an immaculately clean shelter, and innovative adoption programs.

In Conclusion

A lot has been done and a lot remains to be done, however the evidence that our City is poised for more great things to come surrounds us:

- in our strategic location;
- in our very high quality of life;
- and most of all in our can-do people and our never-say-no attitude.

We have a lot of positive momentum in Bryant that contributes to your quality of life. This is your City, and we want you to feel proud when you call Bryant your home. To that end, I am honored to serve you. Working together, we can continue to accomplish great things for our community!

Thank You!