

STATE OF THE CITY

Hello fellow Height's residents, I am Mayor Michael Blomquist. It is my privilege and honor to give this "State of the City" address for Harker Heights. I hope you enjoy this year in review and a peek forward at what's to come in 2024!

Looking back, 2023 was a very productive year for the City. The City Council passed a balanced budget using a tax rate of \$0.5250 per \$100 valuation. This rate is 5 ½ cents lower than the previous year and represents the second year in a row that the Council has reduced the City taxes for residential homesteads. We take great pride that our City has the lowest tax rate of like cities in Central Texas.

Our City has a strong history of collaboration with regional partners in Central Texas and 2023 was no exception.

Two significant 2023 accomplishments

- First, a big win for rate payers in the City was the collaboration with WCID #1, the

City of Killeen and Fort Cavazos for our City to acquire 2M gallons per day of wastewater capacity in WCID #1's South Plant. Harker Heights will spend \$15 M over the next 5 years to secure our City's capacity for wastewater. Prior to this collaboration, the City was looking at having to spend \$35 M to expand the City's existing wastewater treatment plant. The additional 2M gallons per day capacity will meet the needs of all our City's future wastewater needs through buildout, where City population peaks around 50 thousand. This is a huge win for current and future Harker Heights utility users as millions of dollars will be saved!

- Secondly, our continued support for Fort Cavazos was on display with the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant, better known as DEAGG. This program is an infrastructure grant designed to assist defense communities. The City of Harker Heights agreed to be the lead sponsor for the application that will convert a diesel

locomotive on Fort Cavazos to electric power. This grant project was the highest scoring project among all grant applications across the State. Our City's share will be in-kind services rendered in the form of grant administration. Support for this project was provided by 6 cities, 3 counties, Fort Cavazos, Heart of Tx Defense Alliance truly a regional effort.

Harker Heights was proud to take the initiative to be the lead sponsor for this grant project.

Turning to growth in Harker Heights for 2023.

- The I-14 expansion to 6 lanes and the west to east turn around bridge on the east side of FM 2410 at I-14 was completed and opened.
- Our residential building permits totaled 293 in 2023.
- Whereas commercial development permits totaled 19 and included businesses such as:
 - Chuy's Restaurant

- Black Bear Diner
 - Planet Fitness
 - And ClearSky Rehabilitation Center
 - Just those four projects alone totaled \$18M invested in Harker Heights.
- Additional, as the population continues to grow (now estimated at 35,538), the Council made a financial commitment to pedestrian travel and our City constructed over 2 miles of new sidewalks.

In modernization and emergency preparations for 2023, Harker Heights continued to seek out technologies that allowed us to better serve our citizens.

Four big accomplishments in 2023:

- First, we successfully launched a real time notification system for our community – GovDelivery system. Currently, we have over 6,100 signed up for the email or text message service. This system allows us to efficiently

share news, action alerts, event notices, and updates in a timely fashion.

- Second, the Planning Department launched a new portal on MyGovernment Online. Instead of paper applications, citizens and contractors can now submit those online. This portal streamlines the process and increases the transparency of allowing the permit to be tracked by the citizen and contractor.
- Third, we were able to deploy a new disaster recovery server – taking a proactive approach to Harker Heights’ needs. This server allows us the ability to backup information and protects the City infrastructure data which supports the operations of the City.
- Fourth and finally in 2023, we implanted another tool to assist with efficient and effective inspections. We started providing the option of video inspection services for commercial permit holders resulting in saving time,

effort, and safety for both the staff and the contractor.

Four major accomplishments and awards for Harker Heights City and Staff in 2023:

- First, the We Hire Vets program – Harker Heights was recognized on the State & Federal level. These recognitions highlighted the City’s commitment to hiring veterans. In the Federal recognition, Harker Heights was one of two medium cities recognized in the State of Texas.
- Second, the Texas Municipal League recognized the Harker Heights Concierge Program at City Hall. This program utilizes volunteers to provide friendly faces at City Hall to help guide citizens to the departments or assistance they need.
- Third, our award-winning Finance Department received the Distinguished Budget Award and Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial

Reporting. That makes 26 years in a row that the City has received this award!

- Fourth, the TX Municipal Clerk's Office awarded our City Secretary's Department the Award of Excellence. This recognizes excellence in the effective and efficient management of resources in the Municipal Clerks office. Harker Heights was 1 of 24 communities recognized in the State of Texas.

Turning the page into 2024, where is Harker Heights headed?

First, Infrastructure and Capital Improvements for 2024, the City funded over \$16 M in Capital Improvement Projects in this current budget. Some of those projects include:

- The Water Pump Emergency Standby Generators for the

Emergency Preparedness Plan at a cost of \$1M

- The replacement of the Blowers & Generators @ City Wastewater Treatment Plant for \$1.5M
- Street Improvements were budgeted at \$1.1M
- And improvements to Warrior's Path (Phase 2) – from Pontotoc Trace to FM 2410 \$3.5M
 - The Killeen Temple Metropolitan Planning Organization (KTMPO) provides funds that will assist with this project. This intersection realignment will greatly improve traffic flow and safety for Harker Heights citizens. The project will expand this intersection and install traffic lights.
 - The City plans to begin Pre-engineering for the realignment of Comanche

Gap road to the Warrior's Path intersection.

In addition to funding Capital Improvements, the Council was able to Fund over \$1.6 M in Fixed Asset purchases to keep the City's equipment and fleet maintained. A well-maintained fleet helps our City work to better serve our residents.

In looking to improve and refine our City Charter in 2024, the Council is currently reviewing the City's Charter Revision Process.

- The City's original charter was established in Dec 1971
- There has only been one revision of the charter which took place in May 1991
- Our initial revision will focus on changes to bring our Charter into compliance with current Texas laws.

Another big challenge in 2024, the City faces is panhandling and homelessness. The City

understands that we have daily visitors that are panhandling in specific areas of Harker Heights. City staff are busy working on the implementation of a Panhandling Program.

- The intent of the program is to promote giving to organizations that assist the homeless and not directly to panhandlers.
- Our staff continues to offer help by providing resources to those in need.
- The program's intent is to also address the safety hazards of panhandling on busy roadways and the litter associated with panhandling and homelessness.
- We are working with our local stores, as well as our major shopping areas, for assistance in spreading the information on this program.
- Again, our goal is to get panhandling under control and

direct individuals in need to the proper agencies that can help them.

- In continuing City Budget Improvements, the Finance Department has launched a new Digital Budget Book for 2024.
 - Our new digital budget book is a citizen-friendly way to review our adopted budget.

Eclipse of 2024:

We hope that you are aware of the upcoming Eclipse happening on Monday, April 8th.

- Based on planning and conversations from past eclipse events from other US communities, we are estimating that our City will double its current population for that weekend leading up to the eclipse event.
- Harker Heights Library and Parks Department are providing numerous programs and events for our citizens.

- We encourage you to visit our Eclipse webpage for a ton of information on the eclipse events and activities leading up to the event. Just simply visit our City webpage and click on the Eclipse Icon.

What can you do to help your City become even better for all in 2024?

- I encourage all citizens to get involved and stay informed. We are making it easier for you to do so.
 - Visit our City webpage and click on the Stay Informed icon. Sign up for our text or email messaging blast service.
 - You can also like us and follow us on our Facebook and “X” (Twitter) accounts.
 - Another way to get involved is to Volunteer for Boards and Commissions within the City Departments. Our City Portal icon has information and applications if you should be interested.

- Lastly, be a part of your City Council meetings and workshops. Every first and third Tuesdays of the month your council and staff meet for workshops that begin at 3pm. On the 2nd and 4th Tuesdays of the month, your Council meets at the same location for Council meetings that begin at 5pm.
- Meeting agendas for both events are posted online at our City website.

In closing, I am truly honored and appreciative of being your Mayor. From myself, City Council members, our City Manager – David Mitchell, City Department Heads, and staff; we all come together under the mission of our vision, which is “Providing public services that empower people to focus on what matters most – Their goals, hopes and dreams”.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my first State of the City address and I look forward to seeing you as I am out and about at our City

events. Once again, thank you and you can count on seeing me at our Harker Heights Farmer's Market!