



## **STATE OF THE CITY**

**Mayor David Dimmitt**

**City of Brentwood, Missouri**

**Delivered January 28, 2021**

**Brentwood Chamber of Commerce Virtual Meeting**

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you to the Brentwood Chamber of Commerce for the opportunity to share with you the State of the City of Brentwood.

Thank you to Chamber President Mike O'Shea, Chamber Executive Director Amy Dwyer, the Chamber's Board of Directors, Chamber members and guests.

I'd like to recognize my fellow elected officials in attendance

Our City Administrator Bola Akande is joining us today, along with members of the City staff.

Thank you all for being here – virtually, of course.

I am pleased to report the state of the City of Brentwood remains strong, despite the many challenges of the past year.

It seems like an eternity since the last time I presented the State of the City to this Chamber. At that time, we had just finished a year of celebrating the City's centennial, poised to enter our second century making progress toward ambitious plans, obviously, including Brentwood Bound. Little did we know that in just a few short weeks after the 2020 State of the City presentation we would be faced with major challenges, the biggest being COVID-19.

In a challenging year like 2020, good things tend to get overshadowed. I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about a few of the positive highlights we experienced in Brentwood in 2020.

The renovation project in City Hall – designed to be more user friendly, to enhance the customer service experience, with additional security features and improved accessibility – was completed in March. City Hall staff who had been working at other city facilities for six months, beginning in the fall of 2019, began moving back in, and we were set to host an open house for the public in late March 2020– when something called COVID-19 quickly derailed these plans.

In late February a term was being floated: “flatten the curve.” In an effort to help, I made the difficult decision to close the Brentwood Recreation Complex. It was a difficult decision because it predated steps ultimately made by St. Louis County. However, I could see that because of the high contact taking place in the Recreation Complex, we couldn't wait for St. Louis County to act.

In the third week of March, County Executive Sam Page issued his Order shutting down non-essential businesses, effective March 23, 2020. At that time, the City of Brentwood implemented safety protocols for all personnel and City operations, based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Saint Louis County Department of Public Health.

While the actions mandated by the County and the steps implemented by the City resulted in difficulties in providing government services, what didn't change was our commitment to serving Brentwood residents and businesses. The shift in work locations of our staff – during the renovation project and, then, during the spring – did not diminish our level of service to the public. Staff members showed resilience and dedication as they adjusted operations while focusing on continued commitment to those we serve.

We look forward to the day when we soon can reschedule that City Hall open house and safely welcome back more visitors to our improved City Hall.

As we closed city facilities and minimized access to our facilities, we shifted all our Board of Aldermen and committee meetings to a virtual format, while continuing

to offer ways for members of the public to participate and have a voice in these meetings.

We have all learned how to use Zoom – with various levels of comfort and using new phrases such as “you’re muted.”

In March, following the Sam Page’s Order to shut down nonessential businesses for 60 days due to the coronavirus, our City Administrator and I began discussing the impact this Order would have on our local businesses and, by extension, the City. As some here know, 72% of the City’s revenue comes from sales tax. Because of this, I tasked City staff with projecting the decrease in sales tax revenue. Based upon a prediction of a 45% decrease over a number of months, staff then presented to the Board of Aldermen recommendations for cost containments to be put in place for the various funds that could be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The cost containment included a temporary layoff of 68 part-time employees and the City encouraged these employees to apply for the enhanced unemployment benefits.

City staff identified other cost-containment measures including a short-time hiring freeze for non-critical positions, suspension of all travel, deferring some capital improvement projects and purchases that had no critical public safety or public health function. Once we realized that the decrease in sales taxes would not be as dire as projected, the Board of Alderman began easing some of the cost-containment measures.

Early on during the pandemic, St. Louis County received \$174,000,000 in Federal Cares Act funding. Sam Page set aside \$47,000,000 for municipalities. Unfortunately, Brentwood and other municipalities stood to receive none of this \$47,000,000. Because of this, I worked with the mayors of Clayton, Webster Groves, Richmond Heights, Olivette and Crestwood, to convince Sam Page and our County councilperson Lisa Clancy to distribute the allocated \$47 million from the Federal CARES Act Fund on a proportionate basis. Thankfully, we were

successful, and the City of Brentwood will now receive nearly \$554,000 to assist with public safety-related expenditures.

Another component of the CARES Act was the Small Business Relief Program, for which \$17,000,000 of the \$174,000,000 was originally allocated. However, because of the number of applicants filed by businesses in District 5 – our district – greatly exceeded those of any other district, the District 5 mayors reached out to our councilperson and Sam Page’s office and implored them to increase the \$17M. County Executive Page decided to increase the number to \$19M. Then came the rollout—the County now acknowledges that they failed the small businesses when it came to that.

As you may know, it was left to the mayors of each municipality to advocate for the businesses in their Cities. Needless to say, I was on the phone a lot with Councilwoman Clancy. Even after the awards had been made, it took entirely too long to get the money into the hands of the businesses. Again, I spoke with Lisa Clancy and demanded that the County do a better a job in mailing out the checks. It saddens me to think about those businesses that were approved but didn’t get their money in time, thereby resulting in the closing of their businesses. For those businesses, the government failed them.

The shutdown caused additional problems aside from the immediate decrease in sales tax. Consumers were forced with making purchases online. My concern was that even after things returned to normal, consumers might not come back to the brick and mortar stores. I decided that we needed to take steps to protect those businesses that have invested in physical locations in Brentwood—essentially, we needed to level the playing field between local businesses and online retailers. I presented to the Board of Aldermen a use tax or internet sales tax proposal. The Board unanimously voted to place this as Proposition 1 on the November 3 ballot.

Brentwood voters passed this proposition with 52 percent approval. It is estimated that the use tax will generate between \$300,000 and \$400,000

annually for the City of Brentwood. This new revenue will help ensure we can continue to provide quality services Brentwood residents and businesses value.

We are fortunate to benefit from our strong and diversified local economy. Brentwood's businesses generate over \$600,000,000 in taxable sales annually. That figure represents 4% of St. Louis County. Because of the vision of prior leaders of this City, Brentwood has fared much better economically during 2020 than most other municipalities.

While the effects of COVID-19 slowed down some projects in the area, Brentwood still saw strength and growth in construction in 2020. For example:

- The Planning department conducted almost 1200 inspections on the completion of residential and commercial projects including a new hotel project;
- Provided plan review services and issued over 720 building permits;
- Saw slight increase in residential construction and slight decrease in commercial construction:
  - residential projects totaled almost \$7M in 2020 as compared to \$6.68M in 2019
  - commercial projects totaled just under \$11M as compared to \$13M in 2019.

Given the difficulties of 2020, all of these numbers are positives and speak to the strength of the Brentwood community, its businesses and residents.

As COVID-19 was requiring us to make adjustments in our daily life – be it home schooling, working from home and adjusting our shopping patterns – early in the summer of 2020, our country faced another challenge. We witnessed this firsthand during the week of June 1, 2020. We experienced vandalism in business communities. We witnessed a rally hosted by “Expect Us” at the Brentwood Promenade. However, whether dealing with the crime from the vandalism or the

challenges of handling the largest rally in St. Louis County, our first responders — police and fire — acted as true professionals by going after the criminals and working with the hosts of the rally to ensure everyone’s safety.

As groups came together to draw attention to inequality and to demand change in June, I received messages inquiring about the Brentwood Police Department. Some of these inquiries referenced “8 Can’t Wait,” a project by Campaign Zero that outlines eight recommendations with a goal to improve police use-of-force outcomes and community safety. This gave me the opportunity to assure our community members that the Brentwood Police Department incorporates all eight of the recommendations in its general orders, procedures, and training.

In fact, the Brentwood Police Department is committed to continuous improvement and to ensuring its use-of-force policies and practices reflect national best practices in law enforcement. The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement (CALEA) awarded the Brentwood Police Department international accreditation in May 2019.

In July 2020, after nearly two years of research and testing, the department launched its body-worn camera program. These body-worn cameras are meant to aid our officers in their mission to perform law enforcement duties fairly and impartially and to enhance transparency within the community they serve.

In 2020, the Board of Aldermen launched a sustainability initiative to ensure a sustainable and vibrant future for the City of Brentwood. Multiple departments identified goals and objectives related to sustainability, and these efforts will continue in 2021 and beyond.

The St. Louis Green Business Challenge is a Missouri Botanical Garden program that works to advance sustainability as a business solution. In 2020, 50 businesses, nonprofits and governmental entities were recognized for their work to integrate sustainable policies and practices into daily business operations.

The City of Brentwood, participating for the first time in 2020, was one of nine municipalities recognized in the Green Cities Challenge component of this program. Green Cities Challenge participants address sustainability within the range of operational requirements unique to local governments.

Among Brentwood's many 2020 sustainability accomplishments, the City...

- Planted 118 trees to help rebuild the urban forest
- Worked with McGrath Elementary PTO group to plant 130 small trees and shrubs as part of a community conservation grant
- Hosted four paper shredding events and four electronics recycling drives
- Collected hundreds of campaign yard signs and metal stands for recycling
- Adopted the 2018 International Code Council codes
- Completed sports courts project with remote-controlled LED lights
- Continued a woodland restoration project, eradicating invasive exotic plant species
- Installed three solar-powered streetlights and two solar-powered, radar-enabled speed limit signs
- Installed two Electric Vehicle Charging Stations at Recreation Complex
- Agreed to a partnership with Great Rivers Habitat Alliance to construct a wetland demonstration site in Brentwood Bound.

- Brentwood Bound, the City's major flood mitigation project, will remove structures in the floodway that have been subject to repetitive flood damage; 12 flood-prone structures have been demolished and floodplain restoration is underway

In 2020, we continued making good progress on our Brentwood Bound projects.

Brentwood Bound is our comprehensive solution to overcome longtime flooding and public safety challenges presented by the Deer Creek watershed channel.

Another component of Brentwood Bound focuses on improving the Manchester Road corridor within the City of Brentwood.

Additionally, the City is partnering with Great Rivers Greenway to connect area residents to surrounding communities with an enhanced greenway – connecting Brentwood's Rogers Parkway with the Deer Creek Greenway. This effort will link multiple parks and offer the potential to connect more than 28 miles of greenways in the metro area.

These three Brentwood Bound initiatives – Deer Creek Flood Mitigation, Manchester Road Improvements, and the Deer Creek Greenway Connector – are bound together in building a bright future for our City.

An initial groundbreaking in December 2019 marked the beginning of the construction phase of the Brentwood Bound plan. Demolition and construction continued throughout 2020, and a request for bids for is open now for the next phase of demolition for the flood mitigation project.

I encourage you to visit the Brentwood Bound website, **[www.brentwoodbound.org](http://www.brentwoodbound.org)**, for project details, videos, presentations, construction updates, project timelines and other information on this exciting plan that will transform part of our City. You can even check out views from four site cameras that are monitoring the daily progress.

While the pandemic led to cancelation of favorite in-person events like our Brentwood Days festival, the City's commitment to our community did not waver. We participated in a "Mayors for Meals Food Drive" event in May, where 23 communities raised over 30,000 pounds of food—with Brentwood collecting 2,562 pounds.

In December, our police and fire departments engaged in a friendly competition: a month-long "pillow fight." The departments collected 222 bed pillows for Home Sweet Home, a nonprofit organization in Brentwood with a mission "to give under-served families a sense of pride and to improve the quality of their lives by providing basic household furnishings." What a happy ending to a tough year.

As we transition to a new year, we will build on our past successes. As far as Brentwood Bound is concerned, this year we will complete all full property acquisitions, as we only have one parcel remaining. Construction has already begun with the demolition of most of the structures on the acquired properties. Over 200 truckloads of dirt are leaving the area daily. I recently toured the demolition area and couldn't believe the transformation.

Our Public Works Committee is currently reviewing the plans for an event lawn and building that will be part of our destination park in the Brentwood Bound area, as well as a new playground. We recently received a \$1M grant to aid in funding the installation of a walkway and streetlights on the northside of Russell on the westside of Brentwood. Additionally, I worked with Councilwoman Clancy to get the County's approval for installation of a traffic light at the intersection of Russell and Brentwood. With this light and the new sidewalk, park users will easily navigate Brentwood Boulevard to go between Brentwood Park and the new Brentwood Bound park.

While we don't know when we'll be out of the woods as far as COVID-19 is concerned, or if and when we'll have to face another such challenge, I **do know** we as a city are well positioned to address these types of challenges **head on** because of our experience in 2020. I **do know** I am forever grateful to those businesses that have chosen Brentwood as their home.

I look forward to gathering 12 months from now, in person, to present next year's State of the City. Thank you all for attending.