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State of the City

Paragould, Arkansas

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The recently completed year of 2022 proved to be another successful year for the City of Paragould. We are continuing to see growth and with your help in the future expect this growth to continue. Last year revenues exceeded our projections and our overall bank balances ended the year with an approximate 4.6-million-dollar increase. Last year this increase was 4.4 million for a total of nearly 9 million in extra savings we have been able to put into reserves over the past 2 years. As you all remember, 6 million of this was from ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) and the additional 3 million is from both increased revenue and conservative spending measures taken by our department heads. I want to take a minute to publicly thank them for all they do for our city and its citizens.

Code Enforcement

2022 was another extremely busy year for Code Enforcement as they worked a total of 1309 cases. 1190 of those were property clean-up (grass & trash), 47 were junk / inoperative vehicles and 72 were property condemnation cases. Condemnation cases were up 44% over 2021. Only 23 of the 72 condemnation cases had to be remediated by the city, the others were either taken down or rehabbed by the owners. Additionally, the city remediated 247 properties (mowing and junk haul-off) as opposed to 164 properties in 2021, an increase of 51%. Just to give you an idea of how busy our code enforcement officers are, they were in court for citations issued over 60 days in 2022. Looking forward for 2023, our plan is to establish a Land Bank in the first quarter and move from the condemnation stage to the rehabilitation stage. This idea will involve the community and developers alike working together in addressing key areas for redevelopment. Our hope is it will be the first step in repairing and renewing life in our legacy neighborhoods.

Inspector's Office

The Inspector's Office is now in the 21st century as we have launched a new permitting system, (IWORQ) that allows applications and documents to be submitted online for approval as well as paying online. This tool not only saves our contractors time but also reduces our turnaround time making the entire process timelier and more efficient. IWORQ allows contractors to purchase permits and schedule inspections right from their phone or laptop without having to come to city hall. Last year we received over 300 online payments in the new system. In 2022 we issued a total of 1417 permits which includes Building, Electrical, Plumbing, HVAC, Roofing, Demolition and Fencing for a total of just under \$65 million in project costs. This number is up 55% over 2021's total of 42 million. Of these permits over \$13.5 million were commercial investments. There was a total of 86 Single Family Dwelling Permits, 21 Duplex Permits, 7 Triplex Permits and 19 Quadplex Permits for a total of 207 new individual dwelling units, up

approximately 17% from 2021's 177. The Inspector's Office logged over 2200 inspections in 2022. The State of Arkansas adopted a new Plumbing and Gas Code to replace the 2006 version, a new Mechanical code to replace the 2010 version and a new Electrical code to replace the 2017 code. Beginning January 1 of this year we are under a new Building and Fire Code, the 2021 Arkansas Fire Prevention Code which covers Fire, Commercial Building & Residential. In the calendar year 2021 most of you know we partnered with the Orion Group to come up with a comprehensive 20-year strategic growth plan. This plan is finished and has been endorsed by the EDC and the portions which pertain to city government, such as a new Land Use Map, are currently in the public input stage before being adopted by the Paragould City Council. We have worked hard on this plan, with hundreds of hours of input from our citizens and we encourage you to take time to view it at DiscoverParagould2042.com. During the stages of creating the strategic growth plan it became apparent that our zoning and subdivision requirements were antiquated and that a complete rewrite would be necessary. To help ensure the City of Paragould continues to see strategic growth, the Orion Group suggested the Paragould City Council pass a moratorium on multi-family dwellings in R2 zoned areas until the issues with our development code could be addressed. We began the zoning code updating process and hope to have it ready for council approval in fall of this year. Areas of concern such as subdivision design, road specifications, drainage requirements and zoning uses are just a few of the items that we will be updating. Once this zoning code update is finished the moratorium on multi-family in R2 will be lifted. As you can see the City of Paragould is experiencing growth and with that growth, we will see growing pains, but the City is taking a proactive approach to addressing issues that arise and making sure our growth is both positive and sustainable.

Street/Sanitation

Last year the council authorized the purchase of a new front load sanitation truck. We are moving in the direction of front load dumpsters for commercial businesses. Front load trucks can be run by a single operator who is always in the cab, which prevents employees from having to be on the back of the trucks in often harsh weather conditions. Right now, we currently have 48 serviceable front load containers throughout the City, with a goal to have 100 by the end of 2023. 2022 was the year of drainage for our Street Department and that will continue into 2023. In 2022 we spent over \$500,000 in drainage improvements. I would like to name just a few of the larger projects we completed last year. We replaced two major culverts on South Rockingchair Rd, finished concreting the ditches on Dana Drive, replaced a major tile on Pruetts Chapel, and increased the size of the culvert on Bogil Rd. to help with overall drainage in this area. Thanks to the council also for allowing us to purchase the new excavator. With it we were able to replace the concrete box culverts on East Darling Street in house, saving the cost of having to contract this project out. We have been reworking all concrete ditches and will continue to do so throughout 2023. In 2022 we cleared out many ditches throughout the city and made sure they were back on grade. A few examples are, Noble Wilson Ditch which was cleared and reworked, Loggy Creek starting at 72nd Street and ending at the airport and we also cleared and mowed the 8-mile ditch from East to West. In 2022, I can say with confidence that we did more drainage work than in the last five years combined. We also overlaid 2 times as many streets as was previously done in a year's time. I am proud of the work Adam and his team have completed in 2022. We are going to continue to invest in drainage improvements and street overlays in 2023.

Fire

The Fire department took possession of the new rescue truck, Rescue 2, and they have put it to good use. Our department responded to 2707 rescue and medical service calls in 2023. We also ordered a UTV with a spine board, Rescue 3, that will respond to HAZMAT calls for personnel transport, will provide EMS at large public events and will provide access to the 8-mile creek trail for any EMS calls that may arise. We also purchased our very own Fire Safety House this past year. The Fire Administration Officers were able to find this unit used at a price of \$16,000 compared to a new price of \$130,000-150,000. We were able to provide fire and life safety education to approximately 2,000 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade students from all local school districts. Our department continues to provide educational opportunities for our residents including, fire extinguisher training for industrial employees, community CPR classes and we installed over 100 smoke alarms throughout our city. Let me remind you that thanks to grants, all of this training and the smoke detectors are at no cost to our citizens. Training is always on the forefront of the Fire Department having logged over 12,836 hours in areas of firefighting skills, EMS, HAZMAT, vehicle extrication, fire service administration, arson investigation and technical rescue. Finally, 2023 will show a capital investment into a fire training center that will help continue our educational opportunities. This project, along with the new ladder truck that is scheduled to arrive in the fall, should lower our ISO 2 to an ISO 1. This will make Paragould one of only 15 cities in the state with an ISO 1 rating.

Police

The Paragould Police Department had a great year and thanks to you all our pay is at an all-time high and recruitment numbers are up. Last year, the council funded 10 non-lethal shotguns and ammo, 65 new 9mm Glock pistols with red dot sights, 55 new holsters and 25 new 223 rifles with accessories. We always are looking for grants to help offset equipment costs. Last year we secured over \$135,000 in grants that went to a new K-9, 21 new bullet proof vests, 20 in-car camera systems, 2 in-car radars, 4 portable breath testers and over \$45,000 dollars in STEP overtime reimbursement. Thanks to you all, we are one of, if not the very best outfitted departments in the state. We have also broken ground on our new municipal/justice complex. This capital project will transform the way we at city hall and our police department are able to do our jobs. We are all super excited about having a complex that has been custom built for our administration and police department. I believe the last time the city had a municipal building that was built specifically for our needs was in the early 1900's. Later, we occupied the old Dickson Memorial Hospital from 1950 until we moved into our current facility in 1995. Let me mention our current building was built in 1953 for PLWC, so you can see why we are all looking forward to being in a building that can serve our needs. We have been planning this build for the past 18 months or so and have taken the time to get input from all departments that will use this facility, making sure to try to accommodate everyone's needs. We feel like this complex will serve us for at least the next 50 years. Having been in the planning stages for almost 2 years we have been able to put back into reserves the complete cost of the building. All our department heads have taken conservative measures helping us save enough to make sure we can pay for it with cash, without getting into our City's reserves and without having any debt. Finishing up in the Police Department last year our patrol officers wrote 11,277 reports, worked 902 accidents,

issued 2648 tickets, 2139 warnings and assisted 245 motorists in the line of work. Our CID and SCU officers made over 3000 misdemeanor arrests and a total of 649 felony arrests. Lastly, we are in the final planning stages of the Paragould Police Opportunity. This initiative will be a partnership with BRTC to help provide college tuition assistance to anyone who is wanting to join the Police Department. We are excited about this idea, knowing that this investment will pay recruitment dividends for years to come.

911

The 911 Dispatch Center had a very busy year taking over 125,000 phone calls. They are finishing up the EMD (Emergency Medical Dispatching) certification process the council financed last year. In order to obtain this certification over 1600 hours of training are required. This certification will be extremely beneficial especially to our EMS/Fire responders when taking an emergency medical call. We are continuing to invest in Paragould Mobile Sky Patrol cameras. Last year we added cameras to all major intersections and have added LPR's (license plate readers) on major thoroughfares in our city. We also partnered with GCT and PSD to integrate cameras into the local school districts that are monitored by our 911 dispatchers. Also, an additional RTSA or real time surveillance analyst has been added to focus on all our Paragould Mobile Sky Patrol cameras. This additional position can relay real time information and better communicate with our dispatchers and first responders on their way to a scene.

Parks

The Parks and Recreation Department had a very productive year in 2022. Over the past year the Parks Department has progressed in achieving upgrades, additional programs, and events within our parks system. The Parks Department rebuilt 5 pavilions and added 2 additional pavilions for a combined total of 7 pavilions at Reynolds Park. We also replaced a pavilion at Labor Park and added 1 at both the Community Center and Harmon Park for a total of 10 new pavilions. The Parks Department has also broken ground on 3 cabanas for the 2023 aquatic season which will provide additional revenue for the parks. The Community Center has added a total of 10 new pieces of workout equipment, 3 of which were donated, to our upstairs walking track. On October 27th we held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new 8 Mile Creek Trail. The trail connects 3 of our parks within the parks system and features an outdoor workout area located at Harmon Park. Thanks to Leadership Paragould Class 25, a Rainbow Bridge was constructed and added to the entrance of the dog park. The Rainbow Bridge represents a pleasant place where a pet is believed to go after it dies and where the owner hopes to see it again one day. Pet owners may purchase a tag through our Parks Department with their pet's name on it to be placed on the bridge in remembrance of their pet. This past year we also started a trick or treat at the Community Center as a safe place for parents to bring their kids and enjoy our park facilities. This event brought over 20 volunteers and an estimated 2,000 children to the park. In the month of June, we started "Movie in the Park" which consisted of 5 child friendly movies and open concessions. The parks department is excited to have baseball and softball under our umbrella. These 2 programs combined have attracted over 720 children to participate in the baseball and softball programs in the past spring and fall seasons. Our Recreational Baseball Program held 3 2D tournaments at Bland Baseball Park with a combined total of 50 teams for the 3 tournaments. The second year of co-ed kickball league was a success with over 10 teams and 120 participants. The Community Center also hosts Baggo one night a week for those that are interested in

improving their strategy for tailgates and tournament play. The Aquatics Center also hosted 2 GCT swim meets, the first consisting of 6 teams and the second consisting of 9 teams. The Community Center has also started a youth spring skills camp for basketball. This is a week-long camp for boys and girls to come and advance their skill set, learn new techniques and move to the next level of playing. We hosted 2 AAU basketball tournaments with over 60 teams combined and a GCT basketball tournament that brought in over 30 teams to our Community Center. For those disc golf lovers out there, we are in the process of laying out a 9-hole disc golf course at Reynolds Park to hone up your playing skills. Also, at Reynolds Park we are currently in the process of constructing the layout markings on the outdoor court for pickle ball play for those interested. Finally, Labor Day 2022, our Parks staff, along with Anchor Packaging hosted the first annual Marshallese Softball Tournament. This tournament consisted of 4 days, 22 teams and \$10,000 dollars to the winning team. We had teams from across the US, the Marshall Islands and Hawaii. We look forward to the tournament being bigger in 2023 with an anticipated 5 days, hosting 22 men's teams and 10 women's teams. Closing I would like to say that all these upgrades, events, and athletic programs help to provide a better quality of life. They provide opportunities for a wide variety of intellectual, cultural, and physical activities. These facilities and programs instill a sense of ownership and encourage community pride in our residents. The Parks Department is dedicated to continuing to make our local parks the best in Arkansas.

Downtown

Our historic downtown's momentum has continued in 2022. Last year thanks to our council, new trash and recycle cans were purchased along with 8 new light poles, new string lights and new street signs. 2022 saw the completion of the Caboose Renovation Project with help from the Greenbrier Company. Main Street added an art alley with 8 murals, new light pole banners, a downtown "PARAGOULD" mural and held 15 different events bringing tens of thousands of visitors to eat, shop and play downtown. Entrepreneurship is booming with 8 new businesses, 2 business expansions and 36 jobs added to our economy. Also, for 2023 we are finalizing the plans for rehabilitation of the old generator plant. The current plans show this to be a 10,000 sq ft event space with an attached amphitheater to coincide with the new Community Pavilion. For years we have invested into our airport by building hangars to rent. This investment has taken our airport from the red to the black. Our plan for downtown is the same template. We are going to invest in capital projects that Main Street can rent out to offset the amount contributed by the City. Our hope is to one day have Main Street as a standalone entity. This project will be one of the final large projects we expect in what will become downtown's "Power Plant Park". Finally, let's finish with talk of revitalizing downtown, economic development and helping our local industrial partners all at the same time. Last year the Economic Development Corporation purchased the west block of 200 North Pruett Street and renovations have begun. Plans are being finalized on Northeast Arkansas' newest and largest Innovation Center, the "GIN". The GIN stands for Generating Innovative Networks. There will be more information coming soon on what all is planned for this space. Among other things the GIN will be a major factor in helping with workforce training to meet the current demands of our industries, along with other opportunities such as day camps for kids, a makerspace, private office and coworking spaces, 1 on 1 mentoring for small businesses, a small business incubator, and many other ways to help foster an entrepreneurial spirit in all of our citizens. 2022 was a tremendous year and 2023 is

looking like it will be another successful year. We are excited about Miranda Reynolds' leadership, the direction of our historic downtown and its Main Street Program.

In closing, I want to mention a project that has the possibility of transforming the entire Northeast Arkansas region. Bridge NEA is a partnership of Craighead and Greene Counties and the cities of Jonesboro, Brookland and Paragould. Together we will be applying for a 25 million dollar RAISE grant to better help connect our communities. This grant will fund a pedestrian trail that will connect our existing 8-Mile Trail not only to more areas of our city, but will also connect to Crowley's Ridge State Park, Lake Frierson State Park, ASU, Downtown Jonesboro and countless other neighborhoods in both Paragould and Jonesboro. This federal grant is extremely competitive with over a thousand cities across the nation vying for it, however, we feel like partnering with surrounding counties and cities really gives us a great shot at landing this historic opportunity. As you can see last year was a busy year in the City of Paragould and 2023 will be no exception. We are doing this project, all the projects coming up and what you have seen in the past two years, all while continuing to build our reserves for future projects. In order to succeed, a local government must be progressive in its vision for the future but conservative in its current spending. Finally, considering our former Presidents' current state, I thought that today I would close with this. Last year when we were planting trees at Linwood Cemetery, Christen and I took a trip to Atlanta. While we were there, we visited the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library. I saw this quote and immediately took a picture and sent to you all reminding you of why we do what we do. The quote says, "A man has made at least a start on discovering the meaning of human life when he plants shade trees under which he knows full well he will never sit." I feel like this sums up the work we do as city government. We lay groundwork for generations to come to enjoy. We lay that groundwork for my children, your children and your grandchildren. What could be more fulfilling? As always let me finish by saying thank you for allowing me to be your mayor and to help lay that groundwork.

I call it an honor.

Respectfully Submitted,



Josh Agee
Mayor of Paragould