

2008 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

“The Essence of Government”

Introduction

Fellow councilors, ladies and gentlemen, good evening and welcome to my seventh annual Prior Lake State of the City Address. Thank you for sharing this moment with me as we reflect on the accomplishments of this past year and look ahead to the challenges of this year and beyond. Whether you are here in the council chambers or watching cable television you should consider yourself among the most knowledgeable and well informed citizens regarding your city government.

In an oligarchy, dictatorship or monarchy it would not matter in the least whether you took the time to consider this message tonight. For in each of these systems there are the governed and those who govern and the roles of each are birthright and not constitutional right.

In the representative democracy of your Prior Lake city government each of us has an equal opportunity to be the governor or the governed. Each of us has the opportunity to make our voices heard on local government issues of significance by phone, in person, on paper, in the newspaper or through the public hearing process.

The election process which is so critical to our system requires as an operating prerequisite that every one of us become informed, have opinions, share opinions, refine our thoughts and develop a paradigm uniquely our own from which we observe, digest and interpret our political world.

Indeed the Greeks recognized this in early civilization when as Aristotle wrote, “If liberty and equality, as is thought by some are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will best be attained when all persons alike share in the government to the utmost.”

The Essence of Government

Over my past six years as your mayor, I have been engaged in this process of refining my views on local government. In the Midwinter 2008 edition of our Wavelength newsletter and later in the “Prior Lake American” and “This Week in Prior Lake” I wrote about those views in a column entitled, “The Essence of Government” Since those columns were published I have been more than just a little surprised by the numerous positive comments and e-mails I have received.

The basic thesis of the article is that it is essential for those of us in government whether at the local, county, state, regional or national level to focus on the big picture and the long term impact of each thing we do today. But that is more easily said than done. The nature of our political lives is to focus on the short term. It is to please the electorate to assure that come election time we will be remembered in a positive vote getting way.

And indeed there are people in our society that believe that their elected officials should be nothing but thermometers taking the temperature of constituents from issue to issue

and then wagging their vote in the direction of the majority. This too contributes to a myopic governmental view.

We are a society of producers. We want the fruits of our labors now! Patience is neither our individual nor our national virtue and so in staying aware of the actions of our government we may focus upon day to day events which have little or no real impact upon the long term future of our city and its residents.

It is so easy to succumb to such daily pressures in the political world. Our terms are short lived—four years at the longest so our focus is too often on the next election. Our performance is too often judged NOT by the degree to which we prepare our community for its future but instead upon the percentage tax increase of an annual budget.

I have concluded that position is misguided. We as government officials must have the courage to provide for the long term good of all of our citizens. To make the investments which in 50 years will be the legacy which we leave to those who succeed us. To make decisions that truly stand the test of time.

2030 Vision and Strategic Plan

I would like to speak to you tonight and reflect on our accomplishments of 2007. I say “our” intentionally. Because I sincerely believe that anything the city council or staff accomplishes is to be credited to the entire community and the many different roles each of us play in their accomplishment.

Our accomplishments would be meaningless if they were simply an isolated byproduct of one person’s imaginings. No, accomplishments must be part of a well refined, coordinated and community shared plan. As author Tyron Edwards said, “Thoughts lead on to purposes; purposes go forth into action; actions form habits; habits decide character; and character fixes our destiny”

That is precisely what the 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan is. Conceived in 2002 by in excess of 60 Prior Lake stakeholders it has now been refined three additional times in 2003, 2005 and 2007 collectively by 400 volunteers. The document itself has remained unchanged in the vision of our community for 2030, in the mission of the city and in the exceedingly high value we place upon partnerships.

Our mission remains,” The mission of the city of Prior Lake is to enhance the quality of life for current and future citizens by providing quality services which result in a safe, secure community, recreation and leisure time opportunities, preservation and effective use of lakes, parks and other natural resources, economic vitality, and the promotion of partnerships, volunteerism, and civic pride for the community’s diverse population.”

As you can hear, the mission is unchanged.

In other ways the document has changed dramatically as one would expect a living document to do. The original eight vision elements have grown to ten. The goals and

objectives within each vision element have been significantly renewed as we have completed one it is replaced with a new one. The evolution has been at the hands of the 400 or so Prior Lake area stakeholders who participated in the update process.

Achievements of 2007

At our annual retreat several weeks ago, city councilmembers reflected upon our 2007 work. One councilmember said he “was amazed at how much we accomplished.” Another added that, "he was surprised by the ease of accomplishments.” You have heard me say before as I say to you now that the singular reason for this amazing progress is our 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan.

I have asked our department heads to share with you some of the highlights and accomplishments from our 2030 Vision from this past year.

DEPARTMENT HEAD PRESENTATIONS

Thank you very much for sharing these highlights and for all you do each day for the citizens of Prior Lake.

Now let's move to the future. Although not a City Council responsibility, the biggest single issue facing you and I as citizens of the Prior Lake area is the status of Independent School District 719. Our greatest challenge as a community is to pass a levy referendum in November 2008 to preserve the quality of our educational system and the vibrancy of our community. It does not matter if you are a student, a parent, a property owner or a business owner. We all have much to gain and we all have much to lose.

To the student, the impact is immediate and obvious. A brand new elementary school will sit vacant and unused this September as class sizes grow and the quality of education falters. To the homeowner and business owner the impact is equally significant as property values will decline and community pride will plummet.

My challenge to all segments of our community and to leaders of Prior Lake organizations representing seniors, business persons, educators, parents, civic organizations, students, athletic organizations, religious groups, clubs, scouts and the rest is to get involved.

I am not smart enough to know what the exact referendum amount should be. That is up to the school board.

What I do know is that there are two current referendum levies expiring and a new referendum levy needs to be passed this November without hesitation. Without it there will be at least a 15% reduction in school district operating revenue which would be devastating to the school district and the entire community (including all of Prior Lake, Spring Lake and Credit River Townships; and a significant portion of Savage). And, let me clarify, we are talking about operating dollars only, this referendum and my comments do not pertain to any building alterations or expansions.

Please get involved, learn the facts, share the facts with others, and be part of the solution for your entire community.

2008 Opportunities

Now let's turn to your City Council priorities for this year.

As we enter into 2008 a quote from author Brian Tracy is instructive. He says," All successful people men and women are big dreamers. They imagine what their future could be, ideal in every respect, and then they work every day toward their distant vision, that goal or purpose." Isn't that really what we are doing at Prior Lake through our 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan? It absolutely is. But, I sometimes hear people ask can we afford the vision? My answer to you is that we cannot afford to be without it.

1. The 2030 Vision and strategic plan will be due for another update late in 2008 or in January 2009. The last six years have taught us that if we agree as a community to what we want done, we can make incredible progress and maximize cost effectiveness because of our strategic plan. Goals and objectives will need to be updated and the public should weigh in once again regarding the mission and vision. I encourage each of you to participate in the update process. Simply stated it is the most important thing you can do for your community. To that end we will make significant efforts to publicize opportunities for you to volunteer.
2. Strong financial management will continue as a key priority. The city has spent considerable time and effort identifying seven gold standards to help the public understand the job we are doing as stewards of your tax dollar. I expect that we will continue as the community with the lowest tax rate in Scott County. To you and I this means that if there are two properties with the same value, be it in Prior Lake, New Market, or Savage the taxes on the Prior Lake property will be less.

As mentioned earlier we are proud of our Aa3 bond rating which places us in the top 3% of Minnesota cities. This saves you thousands of dollars each year on the cost of your city's infrastructure. Our city tax increase on the average home in Prior Lake over the past 6 years has averaged less than the Consumer Price Index- less than 3%; and we want to continue that trend. Few communities can make this statement.

As a result of the long term thinking engendered by the strategic plan, our city council is also asking more long range financial questions. Questions like:

- What are our long range parks, fields and open space needs and how do we pay for them?
- How do we provide for the long term maintenance and replacement of our parks, streets and utilities and other municipal facilities?
- How do we maximize the utilization of our all of our equipment be it a hand lawn mower to the aerial platform fire truck?
- How do we plan for staffing needs, growth and development as we grow as a community?
- What are our land acquisition needs to fulfill our vision and to preserve the beauty which is Prior Lake?
- How do we fulfill these long term objectives while maintaining our fiscal priorities – particularly in times of economic downturn?

- These questions, in my opinion, are the essence of government and the fact that we are even asking these questions differentiates us from most communities.
3. Downtown redevelopment will continue to make significant strides this year. By the end of the year we expect to have at least one new multi-use downtown building project underway. The building will follow the Lakefront Plaza and Rock Creek template as a quality multi story and multi use structure.

A second focus is parking. We have heard customers and business owners express concerns about parking shortages. This is not bad news because it means we have more successful businesses in our downtown environment. We understand that we must create more parking and soon. You can anticipate in 2008 that additional parking will be created on city owned property.

Transportation patterns are key to a successful downtown so we will work with Scott County to identify when improvements will take place to the CSAH 21/ Arcadia intersection and the CSAH 44/Main/ TH 13/Ridgmont Intersection.

4. Infrastructure continues to be important. The completion of Fire Station 2 will occur in June which will pave the way for more effective fire service in the northern portions of the city. The construction of the water treatment facility is well underway and completion is targeted for 2009.

As unglamorous as it is, our street reconstruction program will continue. Brooksville Hills first phase will be built in 2008 while phase two is readied for 2009 construction. And as a final transportation action step, we will eliminate our five year plan and create a ten year transportation plan in 2008 to help us better plan for the long term and better leverage county money for major road improvements.

5. Our vision element, safe and healthy community will become an even greater focal point this year. The community safety task force which Chief O'Rourke talked about earlier will make its first recommendations toward making our community safer and healthier. The council is looking forward to seeing the report from the task by early this summer.
6. Partnerships have been a major focus of this city council, have paid tremendous dividends and will continue to grow in number and in scope. We will work with the YMCA to facilitate the construction of their wonderful new building at Shepherds Path. Once completed we will work with the "Y" to jointly program and market recreational activities for all age groups. By the way this is part of our safe and healthy community initiative in that we are fighting obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure and the like while we are providing wholesome and healthy activities for our youth.

On another key partnership front, I extend the council's congratulations to SMSC Chairman Stanley Crooks, to Vice Chairman Glynn Crooks and to Secretary/Treasurer Keith Anderson in their successful reelections in December. I attended and was honored to address the 500 people assembled at their inauguration last week. The theme of their new administration is, "Looking out for your Future". I believe their reelection signifies that the SMSC community, as a sovereign nation recognizes the importance of partnerships and investing in their tribal community for the benefit of generations to come.

I stood here last year and committed to you that I would make every effort to improve the relationship between the SMSC and Scott County. I am pleased to report tonight that this mission has been accomplished and an ongoing dialogue has been established from which, I am confident; there will be many significant examples of cooperation.

Also a partnership effort, SCALE will make progress in three key areas in 2008. The regional joint training facility will open so police, fire and public works employees will have available modern up to date information and training. The telephone is literally ringing off the wall as agencies in the metropolitan area, state and region learn about this new training resource. As chairperson of the joint training facility executive board, I am committed to assuring that the reputation of this facility will grow to be the best in the nation.

SCALE will finish the countywide fiber optic back bone to increase public safety data transmission speeds between all users. Police officers, Firefighters and ambulance communications will be among the first to see the difference. And from the perspective of the taxpayer the price will go down as response time and the availability of lifesaving information goes up for better more cost effective emergency services.

Jointly, Prior Lake and Scott County will venture into web streaming and video on demand in cooperation with the State of Minnesota Office of Technology. This technology will open all electronic information at the city and county to our residents no matter where they are around the world and they will be able to view what they want when they want it. An example will be for you as a resident to view this presentation at any time and any place on your computer. SCALE will become involved and take advantage of the spade work we have done so the benefits can be spread to all county residents.

Let me conclude.

My comments have centered on the essence of government and the value of long range planning-especially our 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan. In other words, the importance of having a long term vision and being committed to making decisions that support it.

Please don't conclude from my comments that it will be easy to reach our 2030 Vision. It will not be. Our vision will be tweaked and modified over time as conditions and priorities change. Sometimes, accomplishments will be rapid and easy and other times, slow and difficult. The key is to focus our collective eyes on the future as we make decisions for the future.

Let me share an example.

If you were to take your family on a trip to California by car, you would look at a map and define your route and plan your stops. You would know the approximate miles and the amount of time it would take to arrive at your destination. Sometimes, when the roads are dry and the sky is blue, you will drive the speed limit (or faster). When the roads are snow covered or wet, when the winds are blowing, and the traffic thick, you may only drive 20-30 mph. You need to adjust to conditions. You may get there on time-maybe not. The key is that you will get there.

So it is with our 2030 Vision, sometimes we can have rapid progress and other times progress may be very slow. 2002 to mid 2006 were times of rapid progress. Since mid 2006, our pace has slowed as our economy has weakened and our growth has slowed.

There is no question that our world economy is filled with uncertainty. A recession may be on the horizon, new home building is extremely slow, housing values have declined, unemployment is up, and you may not feel as financially secure as you did in recent years.

As a council, we must be sensitive to these conditions. We need to proceed cautiously while still focusing on our 2030 Vision and all it represents. The weather and roads may have changed, we may be driving slower but our target is still the long term future. After all, that is our challenge... It is the essence of government.

May Prior Lake continue to be a wonderful place to call home and may God bless each and every one of you.