

Thank you and good afternoon. Benjamin Franklin once said, “Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning.”

Everywhere you look in Portland right now, you see growth, and you see the improvements, the achievements and the successes that accompany it.

You may have heard about our steady and healthy two-and-one half percent annual population growth, the eight percent annual growth in sales tax revenues, the new developments and investments coming to Portland or about the programs and projects the City is currently launching. Ladies and gentlemen, this is the progress that growth brings. And, that’s what Benjamin Franklin meant.

As for me, I believe this growth and progress has allowed our City to move into this next decade with strength and with clarity of vision. Today, you’re going to learn more about *why* and *how* this has happened. I’m also going to use this opportunity to shed some light on what makes Portland...Portland.

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What is it that makes this community unique? What is Portland's vision moving forward into 2020 and beyond? And, most importantly, how is the City going to execute that vision?

I'd argue that the answers to those questions center around "people." After all, we are a "City of People."

Our residents and business community, our city employees, and our City Council . . . are made up of people who are passionate and dedicated. Portland's people are the fibers that make up the fabric of our community. And our community fabric is woven and sewn with others to create the "quilt" that blankets our region and the Coastal Bend. The City of Portland embraces our business community, we value our citizens and our employees, and we engage with all our partners. We know that without each fiber, without each piece of the fabric, we wouldn't be whole.

So, considering that statement, I'd like to take a moment to say thank you to ALL of you for being part of that fabric.

Thank you specifically to Senator Judith Zaffirini and Chairman J M Lozano.

Chairman Lozano joins us today. Senator Zaffirini sends her regards and would have been here today if it were not for a previously scheduled event.

Thank you Chair Lozano and Senator Zaffirini for all the work that you did this past legislative session on Portland's behalf. We're looking forward to working with you during the next legislative session on items that will benefit Portland and all the Coastal Bend.

I also want to specifically thank all elected and appointed officials who have joined us. I see that we have quite a few representatives from the City of Corpus Christi with us, today. Also, I see that some of our area mayors are in attendance. Would each of the mayors in the audience, please stand and be recognized. Thank you all for your support and partnership with Portland. I also see in the audience: Representative Todd Hunter, County Judge David Krebs, and numerous other elected officials who have joined us. Thank you each for being here.

Last, but not least, thank you to my colleagues on the Portland City Council for your vision and your passion for this community. Would my colleagues from the Portland City Council please stand and be recognized?

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I'd also like to take a moment to recognize our City employees, many of whom are here this afternoon. If you're a City employee, please stand. You keep our city running and touch our lives in so many ways that many of us don't recognize.

From filling potholes on the streets that we drive to work each morning, maintaining the parks our children play in, and protecting our neighborhoods, you work hard every day to serve us. Thank you.

I know that everyone here today chose to be here because you value this community. You're invested in making Portland, and our entire region, a place of prosperity, safety, and sustainable growth.

So let's talk about growth...Approximately 35 billion dollars have been invested by industrial companies expanding or relocating in this area. All within one and a half miles of Portland.

Between 2017 and 2019, Portland added over 123 million dollars in new taxable value to our tax base. That's primarily from the construction of new homes, the completion of apartment projects and several hotels. Hotel Occupancy Tax revenues are increasing every single year due to the many people traveling to or through our city.

Our Planning and Zoning Commission has approved preliminary plats for around 1,000 new homes and we are aware of another developer working on preliminary plats for around 500 more. And, in 2019, we issued nine new commercial permits.

So, what does this growth mean for our community? Well, along with the challenges of the additional impact on infrastructure and a growing number of citizens requiring services.... Those increases in the tax base, sales tax, and Hotel Occupancy Tax mean that the City can begin improvements and expanded services that our citizens have been requesting and that will improve their quality of life.

We spend a lot of time planning and thinking about the future – mostly about how we meet the challenges of growth. But, it’s also important to think about what we want to keep the same. What are the things that we love about Portland? The things we want to nurture.

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We all know that there is no community that exists without challenges. I've heard the concerns that growth could cause Portland to experience higher crime, that we won't be able to keep up with the influx of people and traffic, that our community will lose our identity.

This past budget year, the Portland City Council authorized five new full-time employee positions in the general fund budget. Four of those positions are for public safety – Fire, Police, and Code Enforcement. The other was a streets maintenance technician.

Our City Council knows that safety is a priority in our community. In fact, the number of both violent crimes and non-violent crimes have gone DOWN in Portland in 2019, despite the increase in our population and in the traffic through our city. And I'd like to highlight the resolve of our police by telling you this story.

Just recently, our community experienced three bank robberies - which is very unusual. With very little forensic evidence and only a side view of the suspect's vehicle, there wasn't much data to go on. But, with only that side view of the car, our detectives and a team from the city were able to search criminal databases and find a possible match for a suspect.

Within twenty-two hours of the third bank robbery, the suspect was arrested in Victoria. He was also charged with four additional bank robberies committed in Austin. Lieutenant Joe Tamez and Sergeant Terrell Elliott helped to lead the investigation, and, they're both here with us this afternoon. Thank you, both, for your leadership and meticulous work ethic. THAT, ladies and gentleman, is why Portland will remain one of the best and SAFEST places to live.

One of my goals, as Mayor, is to build and embrace our **community identity** so that as we grow, we keep sight of who we are...and the things that make Portland unique.

This year, we completed the renovations to the Community Center that we are sitting in, right now. I hope that you take a few moments, before you leave today, to explore the space. A lot of thought has gone into the creation of this design – from the vaulted hallways, to the natural light and exposed beams, and, the original photography throughout the building of our amazing Portland landscapes. We wanted to create a truly beautiful and inspiring space for our community to meet, exercise, and celebrate together. This was a \$15 million dollar expansion and renovation.

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And...just a small sales pitch...we will begin accepting reservations on Saturday!

You're seeing the finished product, today. Some of you probably saw this building before we underwent renovations, as well. The Community Center was closed the day after "Christmas in Portland 2018", and, opened for "Christmas in Portland 2019." What most of you didn't see, was what went on between those dates – the behind-the-scenes during construction.

Every week, our City Council heard updates from the City Manager's office that the project was on-time and on-budget. And, every so often, we walked the construction site to see the updates. One of the things that I noticed was how positive and upbeat the staff who work in this building were. Now, if you've ever walked through – or worked on – a construction site, you KNOW what I'm talking about when I say that it is NOT the easiest working environment. It is loud, busy, and there are always little surprises and unexpected changes that disrupt your schedule.

Throughout the construction process, business went on as usual in the Community Center and for the staff who operate out of this building. In the audience, I see that we have Sheri Gagliano. Sheri's title is Aquatics Specialist, but, I know her as someone who pitches in throughout the year and throughout the department. Throughout this past year, Sheri and all the employees officed in the Community Center literally worked in the middle of a construction zone.

They tolerated not only the noise, but also the hot, humid and cold environments while the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system was replaced. These dedicated city employees helped customers and went above and beyond to keep business running as usual with the same energy and professionalism as always.

When we talk about the things that we want to maintain, the things that make our city special...one of the things that I think of is that type of attitude that I just described. It is a love for our community, a desire to make this a good place to live and to raise a family, that's what drives our employees. Thank you, Sheri and all the Community Center employees who endured the construction and did so with a positive attitude.

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I am constantly impressed by how many positive stories I hear from our citizens about their interactions with our employees. I've seen a social media post about a city employee pausing their weed-eating and stepping back so that he wouldn't startle someone's dogs as they walked past. And, another about an employee sharing bottles of water with a lady playing with her daughter at Municipal Park. Employees organize an annual food drive and have donated over one thousand pounds of food to the Salvation Army each of the past four years.

These small acts of kindness may not seem all that significant. BUT, these are the types of interactions that remind us that the "City of Portland" is not a faceless entity. The City of Portland is an organization made up of people. People who care about one another and who care about our citizens and our community.

In 2019, our City Council took the first steps toward revitalizing an area of our city that has incredible potential with the redevelopment of Portland's original town center. This is the section South of 181 from Broadway to 2nd Avenue, more or less, and from Moore Avenue to Wildcat. Right now, so much of the land and buildings in that area are underutilized. Our vision is to develop a vibrant, active, mixed-use, walkable district.

It's yet another way that Portland is looking creatively at our city, and, planning ways to connect our citizens and to support our business community.

We've engaged design consultants Ash and Lime to develop plans, goals, and objectives for this revitalization. We're looking at quantifiable data and mapping the fiscal performance of the district. That data-driven approach will help to guide strategic investments and give us creative ideas on how to make the most impact.

As part of this process, there was an initial series of citizen input sessions as well. Residents and business owners came to City Hall and shared their own visions for the redevelopment project through a series of presentations and branding sessions.

One of the powerful moments I remember from that meeting came from the youngest participant. This young man, a teenager, emphasized that Portland residents need space to connect. He shared his view that we need to provide areas where people can gather, not only for programmed events, but simply to be together in a safe, comfortable, interesting space.

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He mentioned wanting to ride a skateboard or a bicycle to a location where he can meet friends, listen to music and enjoy the outdoors. To simply connect. This is the voice of Portland...the voice of our future...urging us to develop connections and to engage with one another.

From that input session, the group developed three working “values” for the efforts in this area. The first is to bring the community together. The second is to celebrate our environment by embracing the natural features already available to us – our famous steady winds, the integrated trails, and our community parks.

The third is to promote adventure and discovery. We want to create destinations that actively engage people and encourage them to enjoy new experiences. This will be a place to create memories.

Speaking of memories...There’s no better time to bring the community together, and to create memories, than during the holidays. This year, Portland really took things up a notch with a month-long calendar of events that we titled under the umbrella, “Christmas on the Coast.” Hopefully, you had a chance to try out our synthetic ice-skating rink. I did and it was so much fun.

But what I enjoyed the most was just sitting and watching the joy and amusement on the faces of those on the ice-skating rink all while sipping on hot chocolate and listening to carols.

Our vision is to grow and develop “Christmas on the Coast” so that Portland becomes THE place for holiday events and getaways. Each year, you can expect new, fun, additions to the holiday line-up. With “Christmas on the Coast,” and other events and initiatives, we are working to drive overnight stays to our hotels, to bring shoppers to our local businesses and restaurants, AND to provide special, unique activities that build family traditions in our community.

You know, strong, thriving, communities do NOT happen by chance. Communities require planning. They require vision. I believe that the core function of government and local leaders is to provide that vision and the professional planning to ensure that our community reaches its utmost potential.

Portland has a strong tradition of planning. Our city is looking to the future to plan for growth not only in the next few years but over the next few decades.

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We have annexed land to ensure that space is available for future population growth and to protect the City from industrial encroachment. We're currently engaged in a Comprehensive Planning process which addresses thoroughfares, parks and open spaces, housing, public facilities, and land use through the year 2040.

Portland has also worked VERY closely with the County to lead the effort in establishing a Regional Industrial Master Plan. The goal of the plan is to identify those locations where industry is best suited and create incentives and controls to steer industry to those locations. When you have that type of planning and buy-in, it helps guide so many things.

It gives direction to where public infrastructure should be located, where cities and the county may want to focus residential developments, and it helps to inform commercial developers of where growth is predicted. The more knowledge we all have, and share, the better we can all prepare and plan for our futures. I'm proud to say that, as of today, nearly all the cities in our region have approved resolutions to participate in the development of the Industrial Master Plan.

Now, if there is one thing that I've learned in public office, it is to TRY to be brief but interesting. Well, when you're the keynote speaker, you can not exactly be brief. So, in the SPIRIT of keeping things interesting, I would like to share a short video highlighting some of Portland's most recent accomplishments.

PAUSE FOR VIDEO #1

Right now, we're in an inspirational moment. It's January 2020. The first month of a new decade. It's one of those moments in time when you can't help but stop to consider the past and think about the future.

Portland has so many good things in store for our future. We are growing, and we are capitalizing on that growth to translate it into things that will make our citizens' lives better.

When you think about the projects that we've just discussed, you'll notice a common thread. They're focused on developing places, events and ideas that bring people together. Portland has really invested in giving our community that sense of place. And we're going to continue that focus this coming year.

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The goal of our City Council, and our city leadership, is to make Portland a premier place to build homes and raise families. And I'm SO excited to give you a sneak peek into what's coming this way.

With growth comes development. You may have heard the phrase, "money follows the rooftops." Well, with nearly 1,500 new residential homes planned to be built in Portland soon...we are seeing the investment follow.

Very soon, you're going to see ground broken for several new restaurants and commercial retail establishments.

You've probably seen a little press release that came out this week. We can now *finally* confirm that ...Chick-Fil-A will soon come to Portland! The developers leading this effort will demolish the old K-Mart building and will erect several new buildings to house new retail and additional restaurants. We're honored to have in our audience Michael McCleod of McCleod-Sears developers, who is leading this project.

This is a huge win for the City of Portland. In every city, re-development is imperative. When we have older commercial buildings that don't have tenants and aren't bringing in business, they also aren't bringing in tax revenues and they're more likely to become eyesores. Redeveloping the old Kmart site and other sites like it brings new life, and new commercial tax revenues, into that retail space. We're very excited to see what comes!

I can also confirm that Portland will be the site of a new, flagship, Olive Garden restaurant. Darden Restaurants, owners of the Olive Garden brand, has recently rolled out a new look, and only a few cities across the country have been lucky enough to land one. Portland will be one of the first to see the new open layout, with up-scale finishes, and new menu offerings.

In addition to these exciting announcements, Portland is happy to welcome other new businesses like: Randolph Brooks Federal Credit Union, Poseidon Sushi, Avid Hotels, Candlewood Suites, Staybridge Inn and Suites, Bill Miller BBQ, and Texas Submarine Chicken and Burger.

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That is a lot of new business coming to Portland! In addition to the outside development, I think it's important to recognize the internal investment that is taking place. The City is constantly investing in our roads, our facilities, and looking for ways to improve the quality of living in our city. In the Capital Improvement Plan, the City Council has approved several major projects for the next five years. These projects do two things: they provide quality of life for our citizens, and they create a sense of identity for our community.

Although maintenance of roads and utilities infrastructure may not be the most exciting subject, it's one of the ways that Portland distinguishes ourselves. This community puts a priority on maintaining our streets and our infrastructure. The Comprehensive Street, Parking Lot, Sidewalk and Trail Master Plan was approved by the City Council in 2014. Every year, we allocate millions of dollars to keep our streets, and our water and sewer infrastructure, in good condition. In addition to regular street maintenance, in the near future, we will see the widening of Stark Road, sidewalk improvements throughout the entire city, soccer complex lighting improvements, an expansion of the Aquatic Center, a new Library, a new Senior Center, and a new Fire Station.

A highly anticipated development for 2020 is the Indian Point Pavilion project. This project will update the current Indian Point Pier to add an artistic shade structure, landscaping, and lighting that creates a landmark visible from the highway. Our city is truly blessed to have a unique environment along Sunset Lake. This structure will be inspired by that environment and will celebrate the coast and nature.

Another project that we're looking forward to is the Chris Andrews Boating Center. This project will take an existing area that is currently used as a boat launch and improve it with a boat ramp, kayak launch, and parking area along the 181 frontage road. With a generous donation from the Andrews family, Portland is now able to provide our citizens and visitors with an easily accessible location to launch boats and kayaks into the Nueces Bay.

We're also working towards an expansion of the Public Works Facility. In 2020, we'll begin the Phase I of these improvements. Phase I includes a completely reimagined and expanded Animal Services facility. This facility will house more than double the number of animals currently held in our facilities.

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It will provide space for the animals' medical needs. And, it will feature a special place to meet and greet animals and to process adoptions.

The same facility expansion will also add a space for our citizens to drop-off large, bulky, trash items. This citizen drop-off location is a new benefit that we have developed in response to citizen input. It will allow our citizens the flexibility to dispose of large trash items quickly and on their own schedules.

I'd like to share another short video with you that gives additional insight into these major upcoming projects.

-----PAUSE FOR VIDEO #2-----

We take great pride in our community, here in Portland. You see it in the way that local families and volunteers engage and help to build amenities that benefit the rest of the community. You see it when you drive down the highway and our youth groups are picking up trash and keeping our parks clean. It's there in the partnership and engagement of our local businesses, and in the way that organizations like the Portland Chamber of Commerce, the Gregory-Portland Independent School District, our Economic Development Corporations, and other regional partners who come together to plan, and problem solve.

When I was elected, I based my campaign on the tagline, “**Together, we’ll build our future.**” I’ve focused on initiatives and projects that bring our community together and that build connections and experiences. Portland is a city of people. Our fates are intertwined. We ALL must be partners in finding solutions to our challenges and in planning our future.

Right now, I’m calling on each one of you. In this new decade, be engaged. Be visionary. *Now* is the time to embrace and guide this growth into a decade of prosperity for our entire region. Let’s continue, together, to build our future. Thank you. God bless you. And God bless Portland, Texas...the land of opportunity.
