

STATE OF THE CITY REPORT
CITY OF NEWTON
APRIL 18, 2002
MAYOR GRANT SCOTT

I would like to take this opportunity to make a brief summary report on the State of the City as my term as Mayor reaches a conclusion. There have been many accomplishments this past year, some of which will provide the framework for the future of the City. I would like to cover some of these highlights.

Citizen Outreach

In order to gain more input and make City government more open and accessible to citizens, a series of Community Forums were conducted this winter. Several hundred citizens provided direction and identified priorities for the coming years. Downtown and economic development was one key component identified as an urgent need. Doing something to meet recreation needs was another, although there appears to be little consensus exactly what constitutes those needs. A strong theme throughout the input process was the priority of maintaining existing infrastructure.

In addition to the Forums, the Commission has initiated a quarterly neighborhood meeting. The Commission will go out into different neighborhoods in the community to hold meetings. At our initial meeting, about 35 citizens came out to interact with Commissioners. This kind of input has been very helpful.

Growth and Development

Newton continues to grow. In part, this was because of the annexation of Royer West, Lazy Creek, Hidden Meadows, and Moorlands. However, the City processed 10 new plats and 13 zoning cases, enabling new development of commercial and residential areas. During 2001, 115 dwelling units were added in Newton, a substantial increase over previous years.

The Community Forums identified downtown and economic development as an urgent priority. To that end, the City worked with the 1965 Development Group to create a private sector plan for rehabilitation of the Fox Theater. In addition, 21 property owners took advantage of the Neighborhood Revitalization Program of tax rebates for new improvements.

Recycling

Newton residents completed their second full year of recycling, which diverted 26.8% of residential solid waste from the landfill to recycling center. This is even more important now that Harvey County's landfill has been closed and waste is trucked to Hutchinson. At the beginning of 2002, the collection system was changed to enable catalogs, phone books, and magazines to be collected as recyclables instead of trash. I want to thank those thousands of households in Newton which are doing a great job making recycling a success story.

State Legislative Impacts

The City is very concerned about the State of Kansas fiscal dilemma. Cuts in aid to local governments have been proposed that could strike deep into basic community services. One concern is the loss of city and county road funds. A fraction of the State gasoline tax comes back to the City to fix streets in Newton.

There has been discussion of balancing the State budget on the backs of local citizens by eliminating this State aid to cities and counties. Newton receives over \$500,000 per year from this source alone, and Harvey County receives even more for their roads. If this source is eliminated, then the only place to seek replacement funds for street repair is from property taxes. Other State revenue flows to cities combine to account for about \$900,000 per year. Since nearly two of every three city tax dollars are spent on streets, law enforcement, fire and emergency medical services, loss of these funds would have tremendous impact on our most essential services. Loss of the entire amount of state aid would be equivalent to 20% of the City property tax levy.

While the Legislature has not yet adjourned, it appears that efforts on a bill to help protect the Equus Beds may be defeated. An alternate bill was substituted that would create a situation where water users in Newton and other cities would pay inflated user fees with only minimal urban representation on the board which sets the fees.

Operation of Wholesale Water District No. 17

WWD No. 17 completed its first full year of operation. Under the District format, Newton, Halstead, North Newton and Sedgwick combined forces to procure a long term, high quality water supply for the future. Construction of pipelines and completion of a state-of-the-art water treatment facility have now been completed. In 2001, the District successfully completed its first year of operation. Each community now receives water treated at the Newton plant.

The District was recognized for two statewide awards for this cooperative venture. Kansas Consulting Engineers recognized the project as the best in Kansas in its size class. In addition, the Kansas Rural Water Association honored the District with an award for Most Improved Water System in Kansas.

Intergovernmental Cooperation

There are many other examples of intergovernmental cooperation in Newton. Newton provides professional building inspection services to five other cities under a contractual arrangement. Newton is partnering with Harvey County to extend sewer and water to subdivisions recently annexed into the City.

The City partners with the County and six other cities to fund the Economic Development Council. Newton contracts with the Newton Chamber of Commerce to meet goals associated with tourism and historic preservation. On a broader front, the City is a charter member of REAP, the Regional Economic Area Partnership of 33 city and county governments in south central Kansas. Newton City Commissioner Carl Harris was elected Chairman of REAP.

Newton is also a charter member of the South Central Municipal Energy Agency, which intervened in the electric rate study before the Kansas Corporation Commission last fall. The electric utility had requested a rate increase, but in the end the Corporation Commission actually ordered a rate decrease for south central Kansas.

Airport

The Newton City-County Airport continues to be a hotbed of activity. In 2001, aircraft movements numbered 59,998. Record fuel sales and full occupancy of industrial buildings meant an outstanding year of operation. Construction plans and funding were developed for rehabilitation of the major runway, which is under construction right now. T-hangars are also under construction to meet demands of a long waiting list of customers, and the new plane wash is now open. Aside from Newton, the nearest plane wash is in Stillwater, Oklahoma, so we anticipate drawing in additional customers with this facility.

Parks and Recreation

Recreation needs persist as citizens rejected a proposal for new soccer and softball fields in 2001. The City Commission and Recreation Commission have gone back to the drawing boards to see what can be accomplished with support of the citizens. The Recreation Commission has hired a new Recreation Director, Brian Bascue.

Meanwhile, the City remains on the list for funding of Sand Creek bank restoration. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will not allow the City to proceed until completion of a feasibility study (2002) and then development of engineering plans (2003). If the project can be kept on the Congressional funding list, construction will begin in 2004. Rep. Todd Tiahrt has been extremely helpful in keeping this project on track. If successful, the City could receive up to \$5 million in federal funding for Sand Creek.

Streets

Long overdue improvements to Spencer Avenue were completed with assistance from KDOT and Harvey County. The City received a statewide award for Spencer improvements. In addition, the City added over 3200 feet of other new streets. The requirement of enabling sidewalks at intersections to be handicap accessible across the city is nearing completion. City crews installed 252 handicap accessible curbcuts during 2001. Hopefully, the complete reconstruction of I-135 will be completed by the end of this year.

Emergency Services

As we grow, the City Commission wants to insure that the quality of our emergency services is maintained at a high level. To that end, Newton was able to raise its fire insurance rating to a Class 3. New 12-lead heart monitors have been placed

on ambulances in order to provide state-of-the-art protection to victims of heart problems. Newton was recipient of both statewide awards for emergency service personnel. The Kansas Association of Emergency Medical Technicians named Scott Metzler as Kansas Emergency Medical Technician of the Year and Mark Willis as Kansas EMS Administrator of the Year.

A new Police Chief, Jim Daily, was selected to head the Newton Police Department in 2001. The Department continues to reach out to the community with programs such as the Citizen's Police Academy, Newton Night Out, school resource officers, and the DARE drug education program in the schools. Total crimes are down, but there have been some very serious cases in the Newton area. Drug dogs helped in the seizure of \$287,240 worth of narcotics in 2001.

Certificate of Excellence

One final note is that the City also was recognized with the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Finance Reporting. This award is presented by the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada to recognize conformance with the highest standards of preparation of state and local government financial reports. This marks the eleventh consecutive year in which Newton has received this prestigious national award.

This is an extensive list of achievements for one year, and citizens should be proud of these highlights. However, my real appreciation for City government is the array of tasks that are performed seven days a week, 24 hours per day. For example, Newtonians can count on safe drinking water coming through the tap. Despite getting over 30,000 calls to 911, citizens know that police, fire and ambulance personnel will quickly respond to their calls. While these may not be listed as highlights, they are certainly vital to our community.

Finally, I want to express my most sincere appreciation for the opportunity to serve as your Mayor for the past twelve months. It has been one of the most gratifying experiences of my lifetime. I shall never forget this year.