

Fountain Hills State-of-the-Town Address

Mayor Ginny Dickey

1/31/2024

https://youtu.be/HVgEgyMBHME?si=PeuwNAfXjhpTQ7_t

Good Morning!

Thank you for attending the 2024 State-of-the-Town of Fountain Hills. I'm pleased that so many local and regional leaders were able to join us as we share our Fountain Hills story of 2023 and an outlook for 2024.

We appreciate Patricia DiRoss representing our sponsor, Salt River Project, which provides power and excellent customer service to our residents, organizations and businesses while being a community partner for events like these.

Also, as always, thanks to Phil's Filling Station who prepared this delicious breakfast for our guests; to Bo Larsen, Community Relations Director for putting this program all together and to Community Services and staff for providing such a welcoming environment for this important event!

And talk about a uniquely FH way to start a morning... how about that rendition of Karen Myers' "Our Fountain Hills" by the OK Choral?

Bronco Bruce KOSAVEACH Jinglin' Jud SCHANDEL Tumbleweed Tony PISTILLI

As has been my tradition, now for a sixth time, I will convey a Mayor's perspective of 2023, then we will watch a video of the efforts and accomplishments under the leadership of Manager Rachael Goodwin and our Department Directors, Legal Team, Law Enforcement and Fire Services. Afterwards, I'll complete the morning with a look into 2024.

As I wrap up my 5th year as your Mayor, I remain honored to be a steward of this incredible community. It is a role in public service that I do not take lightly.

I'd always been engaged in civic and municipal issues... locally starting in 1984 when I attended the 1st of several Town Hall/Strategic Planning sessions with my mom and family... and later, statewide, at the Arizona Senate, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, and the US Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona.

After a natural progression of volunteerism and experiences in our Town, I was elected to two terms on the Fountain Hills Unified School District Board, followed by two terms on the Town Council. This journey of involvement, one that many elected leaders embrace, allowed me to continue my commitment to help out in our hometown.

As I started writing this, I looked at the previous descriptors of the State-of-the-Town for some insight of the “how, what, where, when and why” of the last half decade and how it may have helped us guide the community’s wants and needs of today.

Over the years, I’ve described our State of the Town as:

- **TOGETHER** in 2019: A hopeful sentiment for the new Mayor and Council.
- **ENGAGED** in 2020: Recognizing and appreciating the importance of public participation.
- **MOVING FORWARD** in 2021: as we started to emerge from the pandemic.
- **RISING ABOVE** in 2022: by coming out so strong on all fronts plus a respectful nod to history and
- **VIBRANT** in 2023: where development, dynamic activities, events, and beautiful surroundings once again defined our community even as we change.

Now in 2024 I see the State of the Town as

- **AT A CROSSROADS**

Much like the Tom Hanks character Chuck Nolan at the end of “Cast Away” this phrase suggests choices, decisions, direction. We will come back to that...

But for now, some things haven’t changed. As I said a year ago, your Town government remains prepared to ensure that:

- Residents and businesses have a voice.
- Your elected leaders communicate effectively.
- Volunteers remain a crucial part of Town efforts.
- And staff are responsive to requests and concerns, while innovating ways to expand and improve.

Let’s talk about some statistics for a moment:

Fountain Hills is a scenic desert community of approximately 24,000 residents, founded in 1970. Incorporated as a Town in 1989, we cover more than 20 square miles, including voter-approved preserved land and bordered by Scottsdale to the west, annexed State Trust land and McDowell Regional Park to the north, and Tribal communities to the east and south.

Our signature feature is a 560-foot-high Fountain that operates on a daily schedule year-round, with cool new lights we use to commemorate special occasions and recognitions. Surrounded by a 29-acre lake within a 64-acre park, including an 18-hole Championship disc golf course, a remodeled splash park, upgraded playgrounds, and nearly 40 pieces of our remarkable community-wide public art collection... with more improvements in the works... it fittingly illustrates our community’s identity!

More than half of our Town is zoned residential, and nearly one-quarter is designated as open space. Our roadway network is about 162 miles, we have a nationally recognized award-winning park system, highly rated schools plus numerous non-profits, service, and faith-based organizations that continue to engage and thrive.

The Times Independent, the Chamber, our utilities, the schools, Maricopa County Sheriff's Office, and many others are valued partners.

More than 3200 business licenses are registered in the community, 2200 within our boundaries.

Home values remain high.

Overall, Fountain Hills's crime rate is one of the lowest in the nation.*

We are part of the Sun Corridor, one of the eleven "megalopolis" areas in the US and adjacent to great native cultures. Fountain Hills is part of a region surrounding the 5th largest city in the US, yet bright planets, wildlife sightings and breathtaking sunsets are part of our everyday routine.

But if we *do* want to venture out, there is a world class airport, professional sports, arts, and cultural venues (and awesome cities and towns) within easy reach.

Back home again, let's take a look around at the improvements and activities we have seen in 2023:

1. For some of us, coffee rules! So, we are happy to see new places joining our favorite suppliers of morning aromas and afternoon pick-me-ups! Many other businesses have started or re-emerged, from restaurants and boutiques to medical services and several types of retail... as evidenced by numerous weekly ribbon-cuttings!
2. Established, successful businesses enjoyed significant remodels, illustrating commitment to invest and stay in Fountain Hills.
3. We have key partners in new and re-development of spaces, plus on individual lots where we see infill and remodeling, providing needed housing and again, investment. There is potential on the State Trust Land for the future.
4. Millions of additional dollars have been spent on street maintenance and repairs with more to come;
5. Key activities, ventures and events continue to feed the curious, interested and fun sides of our residents and visitors, such as our new trails and the progressing International Dark Sky Discovery Center;
6. The sidewalk infill program has continued to grow and

7. The successful, exciting transition to municipal fire services commenced.

You'll hear even more about the Town's progress in a few minutes from our hardworking, excellent new Manager Rachael Goodwin and her professional staff.

But first, in my view, here are some of the priorities noted last year where strides were made, but with more to come:

1. Complete a Thriving Downtown: This is a work in progress with renewed, unified commitment.
2. Continue guidance using the General and Strategic Plans: We constantly circle back to these documents when decision-making.
3. Ensure financial security: Our consistently conservative budgeting will continue as we face coming capital needs.
4. Emphasize safety: The Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee, Public Works, Building Inspectors, and primarily MCSO and our municipal Fountain Hills Fire Department have made many advances in this, our #1 responsibility to citizens.
5. Strategically address economic development and tourism: The new, unanimously approved Community Economic Development Strategy is leading us in the right direction. Our brand refresh and logo have been successful.

Naturally Beautiful. Naturally Innovative. Naturally Charming. Those were phrases that came up time and again, identified as the Town's attributes during the survey process. I am happy to reveal today that as the state, region and Town enter the highly anticipated event season, Fountain Hills will be launching a digital campaign, "Naturally Fountain Hills" that promotes the community as a destination for residents, businesses and visitors.

When you think about it, the answer to almost any question posed could be "Naturally Fountain Hills!" Where should we hike? Where do you want to get some food? Meet for Happy Hour? Where can we catch the lunar eclipse... see a bobcat... watch the sunset? Retire? Start a business? Start a family? Escape the snow? Naturally, Fountain Hills!

I'm looking forward to the roll-out!

6. Implement important departmental plans: The Town has firm, thoughtful departmental direction, based on the voter-approved General Plan and reinforced through the Strategic Plan. The Town Council is guided by approved plans including Active Transportation, Community Services Parks, Trails, and Recreation Master Plan, Economic Development Strategy, an

Environmental Plan, a McDowell Mountain Preservation Master Plan, a Public Art Master Plan, and a Communications and Citizen Engagement Plan.

7. Invest in the community: Much of our underground infrastructure is 50 years old, and our vertical infrastructure more than 30 years old. The Lake liner is getting up there. Our streets require significant investment.

8. Actively continue strategic representation and partnerships: Council must continue to coordinate with others at all levels.

9. Support the International Dark Sky Discovery Center: Exciting activities to come in March!

These 2023 goals remain as constants. Council and Staff incorporate specific components of our adopted plans when recommending and launching projects. Residents and business-owners can meet us at the *CROSSROADS* to find ways to embrace what voters have approved in order for our Town to thrive... not just survive or worse, slip backwards. After all, how can we display an “Open for Business” sign alongside one that says, “No Vacancy” to potential residents?

We can't let that happen, and what better timing than now to find out straight from Manager Rachael Goodwin and her Staff with their summary of departmental and public safety achievements... and talk more afterwards:

TOWN VIDEO: [State of the Town V9.mp4 - Google Drive](#)

Every year I am impressed and grateful for these accomplishments by our Town! Maybe more so this time as it was a year of change, where Rachael became Town Manager and staff stepped into new roles and gracefully added responsibilities. When we've lost key persons in important positions, others worked together to meet Town needs. Your unity and loyalty are admirable. You are all leaders who inspire us to do our best.

And I want to recognize the contributions from our citizens on Commissions and Committees, who remain motivated to be a part of this special community, following staff's example. Each has an important role in providing input to the Council concerning a wide range of issues. Advisory in nature, their recommendations become part of all the information the Council and staff consider, and we are grateful for it.

As we enter the calendar year 2024, I do indeed believe our Town is at a *CROSSROADS*: we must address significant needs AND at the same time forward important quality of life goals, seeking professional expertise, reasoned debate, public input and a level of balanced, mature decision-making.

So, again, some things have not changed remarkably from 2023. For instance, master-planned basic infrastructure – the Fountain, streets and utilities, pumps, culverts, facilities and washes – still and always will need attention, to be repaired, updated, or replaced. We have made progress, but like your homes, vehicles, and gardens, they require conscientious tending.

You probably noticed in the past when referring to streets I have used the phrase, “tipping point” as the defining term. The analogy one of our road consultants used of a family picnicking on the beach under abundant sunshine, appearing serene until the lens zoomed out and we could see the tidal wave heading for them made a big impression on me. They still had time, but there would come a moment when they would need to MOVE.

That concept... the title subject of a 2000 Malcolm Gladwell book... does not have to be a negative at all. Actually, it is an opportunity. A chance to take action, spread ideas and messages, growing until they reach critical mass – the tipping point.

We are not powerless, but it is a large responsibility to choose the best path when facing those *CROSSROADS*... especially without automatic wise-decision-making GPS!

Where *does* this lead us then?

We have longed for and stressed the importance of working together to achieve shared goals. From planning, ordinances, facilities, and activities to parks, growth, economic vitality, regional issues and leadership, no doubt, the Town's plate was full.

And now? You bet it is, which is encouraging and motivating and yes, challenging. We have seen changes both internally... including our previous seasoned Town Manager Grady Miller moving on to a neighboring community... and from external influences with no history of knowing or caring about us, resulting in outcomes with questionable benefit to our hometown.

We just heard the OK Corral sing, “Neighbors Helping Neighbors”, which pretty much sums up our philosophy over the years.

Does it feel that way now?

We owe all our citizens, businesses, and visitors our best efforts and respect, representing them with equal consideration and seriousness, so that we continue to be the community my family and many of you chose decades ago. One where founding developer MCO advertised in the *Times* the young families arriving in Fountain Hills to start new adventures. There were no life achievement qualification standards or housing requirement tests in order to feel welcome. In fact, we settled into my generous sister and brother-in-law's living room with a 2-year-old and a newborn until we could find a place we could afford. PTA and soccer, Halloween

Carnivals and Community Theater, graduations and weddings and babies followed, creating the kind of memories future generations deserve from their hometown. Everyone wants to belong, right?

I remain committed to working with the Vice Mayor and Council to help achieve shared positive goals and experiences, and look forward to seeing them through.

Allow me to highlight some of what I consider those goals, keeping in mind there is some overlap with those areas from 2023 where work remains:

1. Building on the significant economic development progress we have seen over the past year or so, such as continuing to enhance our downtown area including Park Place and improved connectivity between the Avenue, the Fountain and Parkview Av; keeping up our unique and fun events; and attracting new residents of all ages, adding housing options, jobs and partnering with the schools, to support our businesses and overall vitality.
2. Assisting with the transition of our municipal fire department, along with implementing the new MCSO contract, keeping us one of the safest towns in the Valley.
3. Welcoming the International Dark Sky Discovery Center. Appearing as an “Expert Within” at the Smithsonian representing FH in their “Lights Out” exhibit was nothing I could ever imagine! Somewhere in Chile, two kids are walking around with Fountain pins on their collars. A family from Arkansas, too. People in Indiana, West Virginia, Texas, and more are wearing our State 48 T-shirts and raising interest and curiosity about that Dark Sky Community of Fountain Hills, AZ!

Our reputation in general has been enhanced and growing, with appearances on morning TV, featured articles in magazines, blogs and with real estate professionals in broadcast and print media. Our Earth Cam presence continues worldwide!

4. Finalizing a long-term strategy to reach an acceptable standard for our streets. We will be further homing in on this at our next Council meeting.
5. Preparing for and addressing the infrastructure needs of a 50+ year-old community... home to a Fountain and a large Lake with shall-we-say unique requirements. Also, one with water management issues, plus continuous need for maintaining and improving parks, sidewalks, intersections, buildings, and so on.
6. Maintaining conservative budgeting policies that have consistently shown higher than expected revenue and lower expenditures to help us provide an excellent quality of life

at the same time preparing for capital needs, which as mentioned will include new funding tools to address streets and the Lake liner.

Other items of note include:

- Continuing our valuable relationships with the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation and the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community. With Municipal, State, County and Federal partners, schools, the Sanitary District, Maricopa Association of Governments, the League of AZ Cities and Towns, the FH Chamber, Greater Phoenix Economic Council, East Valley Partnership, and even internationally with the Canada Arizona Business Council, Sister Cities, Honorary Consuls, and Ambassadors.
- Looking at additional tools and/or revising ordinances to consider reevaluating:
 1. Construction areas, vacant lots, buildings, or yards in disrepair for extended periods of time.
 2. Business license criteria in light of the exposure of recent bad actors in the news.
 3. Unprecedented changes we've seen in the broadening home business arena, including STR, especially regarding noise, parking, and number of trips that can interfere with the neighborhood climate.
 4. Working within State and Federal law for future discussions of local issues. This could include zoning, telecommunication, unhoused persons, signage, group homes and personal fireworks.

Recently, we have heard from some criticizing us who nonetheless begin their remarks with comments such as, "FH is the greatest community in the world," or "I have lived in many areas, but FH is the only place for me."

That did not happen by accident, without long-term planning, growth, cooperation and yes, love of this Town and each other. Leaders chose the right direction when approaching their *CROSSROADS* and we are the better for it.

Perhaps since some of the harshest words come from folks with a shorter tenure as residents, they haven't had the chance to volunteer or join groups that give a fuller picture of our traditional dedication to serve others, and the joy that brings.

A friend gave me a book by Simon Sinek that I admit is still unfinished, but coincidentally I received a text from a family member just the other day that included several inspirational quotes, and took it as a sign to share one of them:

"The goal of life is not to have our lives mean something to ourselves... but to have our lives mean something to others." Seems like common sense, maybe a little obvious, but worth thinking about every day.

Furthering that theme, the poems we recognized for MLK Day written by local youths were inspiring and heart-felt. A book King authored in 1967 laid out his “thoughts, plans, and dreams for America's future.” The title, “Character or Chaos?” indicates a now familiar *CROSSROADS* choice, one before its time.

It is important to recognize and resist national interests that can supersede or even undermine common goals for a local community... including civility, unity and lawful, predictable, fair governance.

We can put aside unnecessarily controversial issues and revisiting settled decisions while giving equal voice and respect to all our neighbors and staff.

I want to engage our community in these conversations and in all the exciting plans in store.

We can and will successfully move forward even with a variety of individual priorities, by working together in good faith.

Finally, before we go about the rest of our day, I always like to conclude with selected song lyrics I find meaningful and hope you do, too.

You probably thought I would be going with Clapton’s “Crossroads” but instead this one is from 1989 by Starship:

It starts with, “I see a paradise... this world that I found is too good to be true.”

The chorus proclaims: “We can build this dream together standing strong forever. Nothing's gonna stop us now.”

Then a final promise: “Take it to the good times, see it through the bad times. Whatever it takes is what I'm gonna do.”

Think about those words – we can all do that for one another.

Thanks again for attending and to all who helped make the 2024 State-of-the-Town a success. Have a wonderful day!

*Overall, Fountain Hills’s crime rate is one of the lowest in the nation which makes it a great place to live if safety is an important concern.”

Security Gauge, [Fountain Hills, AZ - 85268 - Real Estate Market Data - NeighborhoodScout](#)