



"If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can endure a hardship today."

-Trich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk

Teamwork Matters

A message from
the City Manager

Jason Stilwell



Against the backdrop of the global coronavirus pandemic, the events of 2020 brought new challenges for which no one was prepared. Our intentions to accomplish specific, adopted goals for our community were slowed but, not broken as the pandemic changed the way we work and how we connect with each other.

Our most impressive accomplishment, and of which I am very proud, is how you, our City employees, committed to weather the challenges to get through this grueling year together. None of us has ever experienced a crisis of this scale.

Our primary goal all year long was - and is - the safety of our employees, our community, and our customers during this COVID-19 crisis. Thank you to the leadership of our City Council, Department Directors, Division Supervisors, and dedicated employees.

We never closed service to our customers. We closed buildings, but we stayed open, shifting more to services online, by phone, and drop-bins. We did everything in our power to keep our employees and customers safe. Day in, day out, you continued to ensure our customers have safe, clean water, public safety, safe roads and buildings, robust leisure opportunities, and many more municipal services.

Another impressive accomplishment is your creativity, dedication, and resilience. Departments found innovative ways to continue serving customers. We opened the first inclusive playground in Santa Barbara County, introduced bubble soccer and paddleboard yoga, drive-up bingo, and other drive-through events (among many other creative programs).

We launched the Bookmobile, Library sidewalk service, completed the shooting range at Los Flores Ranch, continued with street and sidewalk improvements, made progress on the Alignment Project, and so much more.

Despite the pandemic, together, we initiated 85 of 100 department goals as of September 30th, the end of the first fiscal quarter. Twelve goals were already completed, and only three were placed on hold. This is remarkable.

We are fortunate the City has not had a COVID-19 spread in the workplace and that is due to the well-thought out safety plans and diligence of our employees. We are acutely aware of the exposure risk, and the recent rise in positivity rates. Santa Maria has been especially hard-hit, with 75 deaths attributed to the virus. There are more than 4,600 confirmed cases here, of which 95 percent have recovered.

2020 is as sobering as it is defining. Remember how fortunate we are. Other cities without one-time reserves underwent layoffs and cut services. We remain grateful to the voters who extended and enhanced the pivotal Measure U local sales tax.

This past year will forever be a reminder of our community's heart and spirit. I know we are all ready to put 2020 behind us. But, please remain vigilant in stopping the pandemic's spread. The next few weeks will be challenging but, with the impending vaccines, we are turning the corner. Take a moment to reflect on our wins, and lessons learned. Like you, I look forward to a fresh start in 2021 and continuing to work together.

Jason