

2022 State of the City - Presented by Mayor Angela Birney on March 31, 2022

Thank you, Kristina and Mary, and Jared for the kind introduction and for being here today. Thank you OneRedmond for sponsoring this event. OneRedmond has been an excellent private/public partner for the last 10 years starting with the three entities of OneRedmond, Microsoft, and the City coming together to create efficiencies and innovations and to spearhead economic development and the Chamber of Commerce resources in Redmond. It has really proved its worth during these challenging years the pandemic has caused; by our listening and supporting our businesses and community of Redmond.

I want to give a big welcome to everyone who has joined us either in person or virtually this morning. It is wonderful to have this opportunity to see many of your whole faces in person!

It is truly my privilege to serve as your Mayor, and I'm so excited to present my third State of the City today. When I took office in January of 2020, we had no idea where these last few years would take us, however, I am proud of the adaptability and resiliency of our community, the community we all love. Today I will share with you our story of the last year and how we are looking excitedly into the future.

When I began the role as Mayor, I wanted to focus on personal stories of our community and the people that make those stories and Redmond the welcome and thriving city it has become. Cities exist to support our community and what better way to show the great work that our city does, than through these voices.

I would like to thank and recognize the many people who have demonstrated their continued commitment to our community, including the Redmond City Council, 14 different boards and commissions, countless city volunteers, invaluable community partnerships, and everyone who gets involved, provides their input on projects, attends meetings, and contributes to decision-making that impacts our community, and of course, our city staff.

I want to thank our Communications staff and OneRedmond for making this hybrid event possible. Last year when I asked my staff to create hybrid Council meetings, I had no idea the intricacies involved. A simple request of "let's have hybrid meetings," turned out to be extremely complicated. But our staff stepped up and made it happen. Let's have a round of applause for them.

We have this time today to share what, by working together, we have accomplished over the last year, as well as taking some time to look into the future. However, I need to at least mention the 800-pound gorilla of the last two years and some thoughts about it.

I'm going to go a little retro here or maybe a bit obscure. Does anyone remember "A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy?" In the TV show, "Don't Panic" in big glowing letters would pop up as the main character made his way through the uncertain and unpredictable universe. That flashing image came to mind many times over the last two years as the pandemic and other unusual events took place. How have we gotten through these last two years? The mantra of "don't panic" is how we were able to keep serving our community with little or no disruption.

Keeping our community safe and healthy through the pandemic has been a top priority. The adaptability and flexibility of our staff and community is inspiring.

While not panicking, we were able to accomplish a lot!

Let's celebrate a few highlights:

- Our Redmond Police Department adopted the Police Lexipol policy and procedures manual, which manages our police to the highest standards.
- All of the light rail permitting is complete!

- We saved \$3.2 million taxpayer dollars by refinancing our bonds.
- Federal CARES Act funding was used for rental and small business assistance.
- We continued to keep water, wastewater, and storm water flowing in all of the right directions!
- We facilitated vaccine clinics throughout our community, helping to achieve one of the highest vaccination rates in the County.

As I begin my third year in office, while continuing to keep everyone safe and healthy, I remain focused on my vision of Redmond as a connected community that enhances livability, sustains the environment, and that places Redmond as a leader locally, regionally, and nationally.

Something we have all learned in the last few years is the importance of being connected. Be it through the virtual universe or in person, we are much better as a society when we can collaborate, meet up, or share a meal. Redmond has been making investments in our community so that all of you can have these kinds of opportunities through parks, trails, facilities, and events.

This past year we celebrated the reopening of two facilities.

First, by investing \$9 million dollars in the Redmond Pool, we have ensured its lifespan for another 40 to 50 years. All three of my daughters learned to swim at Hartman Pool and I recall not so fondly sitting on the bleachers inhaling the chlorinated air waiting for their lessons to be over. When I had the opportunity to tour the just completed pool, I texted my daughter and said, "Remember how yucky the pool was?" Well, it's not anymore! Now our pool is a beautiful and clean place where children can take swim lessons and celebrate birthdays, all ages can exercise and have fun during open and lap swimming, and the Lake Washington School District's swim teams can practice and compete in a place we can all be proud of.

Some years ago, when I was a Councilmember, a group of neighbors asked during a budget hearing for us to start making improvements to Westside Park sooner than later. We listened and, by working with our staff, moved up available funding to an earlier timeframe. Those neighbors stayed involved in the upgrade process. They took time out of their own busy schedules to give input and suggestions to make the park what the neighborhood needed. This past fall, we reopened Westside Park, which now offers our first playground to open since our extensive Americans with Disabilities Act transition plan was adopted in 2019. This updated park provides an inclusive place where ALL kids, of all ages, can play and experience the benefits that parks bring to each of us. I happened to see some of those neighbors recently and they shared that the park - rain or shine - is used daily by many happy families.

Our Parks Department continues to make our parks and trails some of the most used in the region. From the heavily used Downtown and Grasslawn parks to keeping our trails and forests maintained, our crews make sure they stay at the standard we have all come to expect.

There are two more projects that we will be able to enjoy soon - the final piece of the Redmond Central Connector and the new Redmond Senior & Community Center.

The final portion of the Redmond Central Connector is the last 1.6 miles of trail that will connect Redmond to Kirkland and Woodinville and the rest of the Eastrail. Within Redmond, the completion of the Redmond Central Connector gives car-free opportunities for commuting and exercise, as well as easy access for eating and/or drinking at some of the wonderful restaurants and breweries Redmond has to offer. We would like to thank the Washington State Legislature for funding a portion of this important regional connector and our partner Puget Sound Energy.

We're also eager for the opening of the new state-of-the-art Redmond Senior & Community Center, which will be completed on the City Hall campus in late 2023. This project has enjoyed widespread community support for many years and has been thoughtfully designed based on vast outreach and community

input. The Redmond Senior & Community Center will be a place where all ages can gather and recreate. It will have dedicated senior spaces, including a lounge and library, as well as a multipurpose community room, active recreation areas including gym space, which includes a group exercise studio, an elevated walk/jog track, weightlifting and cardio areas, and classroom spaces for art, music, and games. We want to thank the community for their continued patience and crucial involvement in making this major project a reality.

An honored tradition that our community loves and will be coming back this year is Derby Days! I spent many of my years in Redmond helping my kids decorate their tricycles, wagons, big wheels, and bikes for the kid's parade. As they got older their attention was redirected towards the carnival and other activities and my husband and I were finally able to enjoy the beer and wine garden! Those activities and more will be back again this year. Many Redmond families have made Derby Days a tradition in their lives. I am excited to be able to say Derby Days returns this year on July 8 and 9! Most events will be here on the City Hall campus and our bike races will be held with our partners at the Marymoor Velodrome. I hope to see each of you there!

The parks, events, and recreational activities that Redmond loves all started as community ideas that came about through what we call the PARCC Plan - that's Parks, Arts, Recreation, Culture, and Conservation Plan. We are beginning the next update to the PARCC plan and we need to hear from you. Please give your input on the future of parks and recreation.

An important aspect of a livable and well-connected community is found in the strength and vibrancy of all our local businesses. These businesses are the lifeblood of any vibrant city and are made possible through the hard work and dedication of our neighbors, friends, and families. OneRedmond, in partnership with the City, hosted four ribbon-cutting ceremonies last year and over the last two years visited more than 150 small businesses through the Small Business Walk program.

We have been working hard to learn how we can better assist our local businesses and adapt and recover from the ever-changing pandemic environment. A significant portion of our federal CARES Act money went directly to the support of our hardest-hit businesses. Those funds and others were used to set up the OneEastside Spark to make sure businesses are getting the help they need. Without those dollars, many would not have survived.

We are also looking forward to relaunching the "Geek Out Gold" tourism promotion in April. Through the initial promotion last year, we were able to generate over 1,550 hotel night stays, which returned a total economic impact of over \$268,000. The program made national headlines with coverage in more than 45 media stories! I am thrilled we could share what makes Redmond such a wonderful place for so many new visitors.

While tourism remained low last year, we expect many more Redmond events and visitors will return based on the record number of tourism grant applications we received. These beloved and diverse events will bring hundreds of thousands of people together to celebrate here in Redmond while supporting Redmond businesses.

Currently, Redmond is a very livable city. But how do we enhance our livability in the future so that Redmond is a place where anyone can live and flourish?

The kinds of housing choices in Redmond are increasing. From townhouses or single-family homes in more residential areas, to a condominium or apartment in our urban cores, you can find something that fits your lifestyle in Redmond.

As the demand to live in Redmond continues to rise, we are working to do our part to help increase housing options. We are offering all of the available tools while removing barriers to increase the variety of affordable housing. We are doing this through policies, zoning updates, direct funding, inclusionary zoning, and multi-family tax exemptions. Homeowners can build Accessory Dwelling Units on their property if they would like to be part of the solution to the housing crisis. We are proud to be regional leaders in the creation of affordable units and look to continue to build upon that legacy.

This past year, with extensive community input, we finalized the City's first Housing Action Plan, which provides the direction for future housing policy, planning, and regulatory amendments moving us toward improved housing diversity, quantity, and affordability.

The City is creating the structure to improve housing in Redmond, but we need partners to help solve the housing crisis. We support vital projects like the Together Center redevelopment, which is creating urgently needed affordable homes in our community. The new campus will feature a full suite of health and social services, paired with affordable housing, together in one safe, transit-oriented development.

We also support King County's Health Through Housing program, a regional approach to providing housing and services for people experiencing chronic homelessness. By the end of 2022, King County will partner with local jurisdictions to create up to 1,600 permanent supportive housing units, including around 100 units at the former Silver Cloud Inn in the Overlake neighborhood. I know this has been a controversial program in many circles, but I believe as Mayor and a resident of the City that I love, everyone deserves a chance to live here and make Redmond their home. This is one step to realizing that dream.

We will continue to work with development partners, nonprofits, and other elected leaders to create more housing opportunities throughout our region.

One major reason Redmond is such a livable place is people know that we are a safe city. You can walk through our Downtown or any neighborhood and feel confident that you will be safe. However, the last two years have made us acutely aware of the challenges people have been facing and the resources needed to assist. We have invested in creating a community safety program, where traditional public safety and alternative approaches work hand in hand.

The Thrive program, which provides innovative approaches to creating safety and stability, is making a real difference in Redmond.

Last year, the Mobile Integrated Health, or MIH, program worked with 312 community members to reduce risks in their homes, resulting in lessening the need to call 911, ultimately freeing up first responders for other emergency needs.

Our licensed mental health professionals team up with police officers and co-respond to 911 calls. This has been an invaluable tool in de-escalating interactions and helping people in crisis. Last year, our mental health professional, Susie, co-responded to 376 calls and had over 1,100 interactions with people in our community who needed assistance. Susie's efforts truly make a difference in keeping our community safer.

These two programs in combination with the other components of our Thrive program show the impacts these alternative approaches have in helping our community.

While we have enjoyed great success at keeping our residents safe and responding to emergencies and crisis, we know that both our alternative and traditional emergency services are feeling the strain of a

growing population and evolving city. In 2021, our Redmond Police and Fire Departments responded to nearly 38,000 emergency calls for assistance.

At this time, revenues are not keeping pace with expenses. To quickly begin addressing this issue, earlier this year I recruited 10 community members to volunteer on a Sounding Board to explore options for increased funding for our community safety programs both immediately and into the future. I hope you will visit the project webpage to take the questionnaire about funding safety, and I invite you to participate in a community meeting next week to learn more and join the discussion on this critical topic. We must fund a responsive and transparent public safety system that keeps pace with our growth and enhances our emergency services.

Our ideas about what makes a livable place has changed over time as our community has evolved. Currently, our population is just over 73,000 people, and 40% of those who call Redmond home were born outside of the United States. We celebrate our diversity of race, sexual orientation, age, and abilities. Establishing practices that increase our city's ability to provide excellent services to everyone, encourage cross-cultural interactions, and strengthen the fabric of our community is part of our commitment to creating a safe, welcoming, and inclusive community where everyone feels a sense of belonging.

That is why we are preparing a community assessment to determine how we are doing in this work, and to learn how the City can most equitably serve and create opportunities for all. Soon, we will be asking you to share your thoughts through questionnaires and listening sessions. I hope you'll share your voice.

The way a city plans for its future is influenced by the policies and people at that time. New information, demographics, regulations, and other influences help guide us for changes we need to make as we look to the future of Redmond. As an example, starting in the 1950's, cities were planned around a car-centric society. Now we are looking towards the transportation of the future with lower carbon emissions, increased use of public transit, teleworking, and a host of other factors in planning the future of Redmond.

If you have walked, biked, or driven around Redmond lately you might notice a few changes to the landscape. The structures for the light rail line can be seen going up throughout Redmond. This direction for Redmond wasn't something that could have been predicted from the earliest times as the story of Redmond's past is varied. Early on, Redmond was a resting spot for indigenous people to get from one place to another. As the land was settled and a rail line was added, Redmond was known over time for logging and chickens. As our regional economy changed, so has Redmond. Where we were once a suburb for Boeing employees, the addition of a soon-to-be global corporation completely changed the trajectory of Redmond. We were no longer just a pass-through, but a significant place on the map.

These visual changes to Redmond over our recent history stem from innovative and intentional planning from our predecessors. We are the recipients of many years of thoughtful consideration of what Redmond could be. A city with urban centers, where the intentional placement of light rail stations, storm water infrastructure, and dense housing would create the opportunities to attract and retain global corporations with a highly skilled workforce. The intentionality is brilliant. Not only does it make Redmond a place people choose to live for the high quality of life; it allows us to preserve or rehabilitate our natural spaces and improve our environmental footprint by reducing the reliance on single-occupancy vehicles and creating other opportunities that reduce climate impacts.

We have more work to do. As our urban centers develop, we need to be even more intentional and create what has been called "10-minute communities." A community where someone can access all their regular daily needs within 10 minutes of their home. Ideas like this can be our future reality of Redmond.

Planning for our future includes updating our Transportation Master Plan with input from our community. This updated version will include emphasis on connecting people to our urban centers and creating more mobility options within our community.

We have been working closely with Sound Transit to bring light rail to Redmond. Currently, the project is progressing on schedule. The elevated structures to Downtown are under construction and you will begin to see Sound Transit testing trains for the two stations that will open in Overlake next year.

How do you imagine using light rail in your future? The first two stations will be opening in 2023 with the final two in 2024. I am already imagining getting on at the Downtown Station to catch a flight to Sea-Tac. No parking at the airport. No traffic. It sounds like a wonderful low stress way to start a trip, right?

Light rail is just one part of the transportation story. The City has been partnering and constructing a number of multi-modal city facilities and creating efficiencies and access to the four stations in Redmond. Improving pedestrian and bicycle access by building ped/bike bridges and a tunnel, improving sidewalks, integrating and connecting trails, and we are working on improving vehicle access to all four stations.

A transportation package was passed in the most recent legislative session, and with the signing by the Governor last Friday, I am happy to share that Redmond will receive \$8 million to begin design and acquire the right of way to build a bicycle and pedestrian bridge adjacent to 148th over SR 520. We invested a lot of time in demonstrating to our legislative delegation, as well as other state leaders the importance of this project in improving safety for people in this part of our city. I want to once again thank our legislators for ensuring we invest in alternative transportation options for our community.

Doing our part and protecting the long-term health of our planet is integral to my decision-making for the City. In 2020, I led the City's creation of our first Environmental Sustainability Action Plan. This is our roadmap for achieving Redmond's vision of a climate-friendly and environmentally sustainable community. The action plan implementation is well underway, just one year after adoption.

We are very fortunate to live in a natural resource rich city. This past year, the City completed two stream restoration projects - one under Willows Road and the other on Monticello Creek. The projects removed three fish barriers, opening hundreds of feet of healthy upstream habitat for salmon and other wildlife. We also continued working on restoring Bear Creek and the Keller Farm project.

We looked to modernize our recycling program, focusing on making services accessible to all residents. In January, we partnered with Ridwell to offer a free doorstep pick-up recycling program with the goal of creating more equitable and convenient opportunities for hard-to-recycle items. We are seeing increased participation and recycling rates as a result. In January alone, 1,275 Redmond households participated in the pick-ups and recycled enough Styrofoam to fill five 26-foot moving trucks! We have another doorstep pick-up recycling event in May, so be sure to watch for sign up opportunities.

At the City of Redmond, we're also taking a close look at our own operations. This past year we adopted a strategy to improve energy and fuel efficiencies so we can minimize our environmental impact. This includes the transition to an electric vehicle fleet and sourcing 100% renewable energy for city operations. We are also implementing data dashboards, a new tool to transparently share and monitor our sustainability goals and progress.

In addition to our stewardship efforts, we completed the City's first Climate Vulnerability Assessment earlier this month. The Vulnerability Assessment helps us understand and prepare for future impacts from climate change. We're integrating the findings into our planning efforts, including Redmond 2050, to support a climate resilient community far into the future.

I invite you to help reduce your impacts on the planet too. In addition to participating in recycling opportunities, be sure to sign up for one of our free sustainable living classes, where attendees receive tools and information to live more sustainably. You can also join Redmond's new Climate Action Challenge. Here you can learn ways to reduce your carbon footprint, access resources that will help you in your journey, log your accomplishments, and make a real impact.

We will continue to work towards a future of increased sustainability, such as green infrastructure and changing over our fleet to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We need to make sure Redmond is setting the standard for cities on how to be good stewards of our planet while using tax dollars wisely.

Recently, I was in a conversation of why a city exists. As I mentioned earlier, the simple answer is cities exist to serve our community. The complex answer is everything I shared about what our city is doing and more. Every day our staff work to make Redmond a place that will be desirable now and into the future. We keep our focus on the community priorities and customer service while balancing available funding sources, including Federal ARPA dollars and state and county allocations and grants among other revenue sources.

There is so much we can do within the City to be forward-looking and be that city of the future. To do so we also need to work with our partners including our neighboring cities, King County, legislators, the state and our federal congressional delegation. I am honored to serve as the Sound Cities Association president this year where I have a leadership role in making sure our city and the region are working for everyone in our county and state. Being a collaborative partner goes beyond working with other elected officials. It also demands that we work with business and nonprofit partners to bring all voices to the table to make the best decisions for the future possible to improve the lives of all our residents, as well as those around us.

Our most important partner is you. We need each of you in our community to be involved and participate when there are opportunities. We have developed many virtual options during the pandemic, and those will not go away. They can now be combined with in-person events and build an even more impactful and collaborative process.

We have opportunities available now to share your thoughts. Please visit LetsConnectRedmond.com and provide your feedback. Currently, we are asking for community input on topics such as the Redmond Safety Funding Plan, the PARCC Plan, and Redmond 2050, and I hope you'll participate in Redmond's Climate Challenge.

The vision of Redmond as a connected community that enhances livability and sustains the environment, and that places Redmond as a leader locally, regionally, and nationally is an achievable goal if we all work together.

Redmond is a very special place to us all. We have opportunities before us that don't come around often. We have a thriving tech industry, support for small businesses, the beauty of our parks and trails and natural environment, and smart planning with a world-class transportation system on its way. But the most important part of Redmond are the remarkable individuals that have chosen to make this amazing city their home to live, work, and play.

Thank you for being here today. Thank you for listening and placing your trust in me to lead this great city as your Mayor.