

State of the City Address
Mayor Lily Mei
City of Fremont
October 5, 2020

2020 has been a year unlike any the City of Fremont has seen before.

A year full of challenges that have compelled local governments, community members, and business owners alike

to take actions to promote restoration, re-imagining, recovery, and, most of all, resiliency.

The obstacles we are facing require many different types of skillsets, policies, and approaches.

A global pandemic,
national civil unrest,
wildfires that have engulfed the West Coast,
and the economic effects of these events will continue to require new solutions.

As I look back on all the actions the City of Fremont has already taken this year to address frontline issues,
I am proud of the strong leadership I've seen displayed by
City staff, Fremont Police and Fire Departments, the community that calls Fremont home, and the City Council.

Today, I'd like to reflect on and share steps the City has taken as well as new services we've offered to address the COVID-19 global pandemic,
Fremont's dialogue on policing and race,
and this summer's wildfires that prompted an evacuation warning in Fremont.

I am genuinely hopeful for the City's future
as we plan our next steps to stimulate recovery and growth.

First, I'd like to recognize my fellow colleagues on the Fremont City Council.

I've welcomed our Council's collaborative efforts to serve our city.

And this is in partnership with our City Manager Mark Danaj and our City staff.

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To get started,

I'd like to first highlight the actions Fremont took to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

On March 3, the City activated an Emergency Operations Center at an Activation Level 2 and brought together leadership from all City departments.

This step was closely followed by a declaration of the local state of emergency on March 13

that closed all non-essential City facilities before the County-wide Shelter-in-Place Order took effect the following week.

Our City demonstrated strong leadership by quickly opening one of the Bay Area's first drive-through COVID-19 testing centers, and issuing the first Face Covering Executive Order in the Bay Area.

I am impressed by the amount of flexibility, innovation, and thoughtfulness that Fremont staff has put into their work over the last six months to continue to provide safe high-quality services to our community members and businesses through

remote protocols, essential workers on the ground to keep our City safe and operational, and the implementation of new programs to support the most vulnerable in our community.

Let's start with the aid we provided to our business community.

We got to work quickly

by waiving penalties and interest on late payments for business tax certificate renewals, staffing a business assistance hotline via our Economic Development staff,

and creating a Business COVID-19 resource page for vital information on financial assistance programs and safety protocols.

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Additionally, the City fast-tracked the zoning permit approval process for Fremont-based life sciences companies

transitioning operations to fight COVID-19 through the manufacturing of test kits, face masks, and ventilators. Companies included

Evolve Manufacturing

Biolytics

PrinterPrezz

Steri-Tek

ThermoFisher

and Biogenex

The work our companies are doing is making a difference,

like Evolve Manufacturing

and also Biogenex, a Fremont company that pivoted from making diabetes test kits to producing 1.5 million COVID-19 test kits to date.

Not only is this work important in our national fight against COVID, but it also provides jobs in an economic recession.

Back in April,

our Economic Development team and Ohlone College Career Center hosted a virtual career fair

that featured more than 300 job openings at Enovix and Evolve Manufacturing,

And just last Friday Fremont celebrated the 9th annual Manufacturing Day, virtually!

We thank our local employers and educators for their continued partnership to build the modern manufacturing workforce of tomorrow.

We also continue to make it easier for residents

to identify which local businesses are open for take-out and delivery with the

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interactive, online Fremont “open for business” map and store-front signage.

Programs such as the Fremont Small Business Grants, where we dedicated specific Community Development Block Grant funds from the federal CARES Act, to bring much-needed relief to our small businesses.

And our Pop Up Patio program, which includes adapting our permitting services to facilitate outdoor spaces for restaurants and personal services.

Just last month we expanded the program by rolling out another business support initiative allowing fitness classes in City parks.

Another program is Gift Fremont, allowing businesses to conduct retail operations and dining in outdoor areas and provided an avenue for additional immediate revenue from customers with an online gift card incentive.

We also reimagined delivering construction and development services, now supplementing services at our Permit Center to include online permitting and adding a video option for straightforward building inspections.

During the pandemic, code enforcement staff has worked cooperatively with local businesses to allow their safe operation and ensure compliance with the County Health Order.

Graffiti and weed abatement efforts have continued, along with securing neglected properties.

I appreciate the hard work of our inspectors resolving quality of life issues for our community.

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And I'm proud to report that several projects either were completed or are nearing completion in 2020,

including new affordable housing units, Central Commons, Innovia, Geo Apartments, Reilly Station (Metro Crossing), and Pauline Weaver.

Our new Downtown Event Center, which will hopefully open in the spring, with new public programming designed for the post COVID-19 era.

And the BART Warm Springs West Access Bridge & Plaza, along with the opening of the 680 Freeway Widening Project, with a planned ribbon cutting later this month.

Finally, our new Age Well Center at South Fremont will be completed by December, which our Human Services Department will operate.

We'll postpone opening it until next year when it's safe due to the pandemic precautions.

We also provided much needed assistance to our community,

through a temporary moratorium on residential and small business evictions that was approved by the Council and is still in effect today.

Also, free COVID-19 testing sites were made available in partnership with the Fremont Fire Department and Bay Area Community Health.

Recently, we added Asian Health Services as a partner, to ensure additional testing sites are available for the community.

And initiatives such as our traffic speed management program were put into place to protect the increased number of pedestrians and bicyclists during Shelter-in-Place.

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To assist Fremont's vulnerable populations who have been affected particularly hard by the pandemic,

we rolled out the Fremont Cares Rental Relief Program, using CDBG funds for renters unable to pay their rent due to a COVID 19-related loss of income,

installed hygiene infrastructure throughout Fremont for unhoused populations,

and provided a number of meal services to help meet the needs of various groups.

Last, but certainly not least,

we celebrated the virtual grand opening of our new Housing Navigation Center on August 31

and began operations last month to house a reduced number of 25 participants to comply with COVID-19 safety measures.

Fremont recognizes the growing need to help our unhoused residents find sustainable, permanent housing and jobs,

which is exactly the aim of the HNC.

As COVID restrictions lift, the Center will be able to accommodate 45 participants at a time.

While there is much more work to be done, I am proud of this tangible step that was taken in opening the HNC, and am hopeful of additional programs to come in the future.

Continuing on the theme of caring for our residents,

I'd like to now move on and talk about public safety.

We deeply value the sanctity of life, and strive to earn the trust of our community.

We share the grief and community's anger over the unjust killing of George Floyd in May and many others.

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This event had ripple effects all over the country, including peaceful protests in Fremont.

Early on, we all witnessed looting and vandalism taking place across the nation and in some of our neighboring cities.

Our Police Department and Maintenance crews worked together to protect Fremont's retail centers, keeping both residents and businesses safe.

The Fremont Police Department proactively addressed national events by releasing a letter from Chief Petersen denouncing the killing of George Floyd, participating in the 8 Can't Wait campaign that promotes more restrictive use of force policies,

and initiating a Town Hall virtual discussion in June to open up a community dialogue to discuss policing, race, and safety for all.

This Town Hall paved the way for the larger Engage Fremont initiative,

including a community survey and new policing budget infographic, along with small dialogue groups for further conversation and exploration of potential solutions.

To increase transparency and access, a Transparency Portal and new accountability webpage are available on the Police Department's website.

This work doesn't stop here.

We're advocating several legislative bills at the State and Federal levels.

Personally, I participated in the US Conference of Mayor's Working Group on Police Reform and Racial Justice.

Additionally, the Police Department is working with Alameda County on policy adoption, and we're participating in their new racial justice and police accountability working group.

Training is also in place to eliminate bias.

And we've implemented the Mobile Evaluation Team, commonly known as MET, a partnership between the Police Department, Fremont Human Services, and Washington Hospital Healthcare System to provide mental health services to the community,

including responding to homeless calls and a crisis intervention specialist that trains police officers.

Our Police Department is working with Human Services to explore expansion of the program.

And I'm proud to report we've transitioned 78 unhoused residents off the streets into hotels since the pandemic.

Other programs that support the community's needs include a long-established community advisory group to the Police Chief, representing a diverse cross-section of community perspectives, events such as Coffee with a Cop and National Night Out, as well as a variety of youth programs.

We know that this reform effort is not a 'one and done' kind of activity.

We've heard from the community,

understand its urgency, and are committed to continuing to evaluate and make changes to our policies to better serve the Fremont community.

The results stemming from the Engage Fremont Policing and Race Dialogue and next steps we're taking,

will be presented at next week's City Council meeting.

Next I'd like to talk about wildfires.

In August, Northern California was hit by a weather system that caused multiple dry lightning strikes igniting fires throughout the Bay Area.

Despite periods of extreme heat and erratic weather patterns, our Fire Department, City Staff, and Police Department worked around the clock to ensure our residents and members of the public remained out of harm's way.

During what is now being referred to as the third largest fire in California history, the SCU Lightning Complex,

CAL FIRE issued an Evacuation Warning for the eastern foothills of south Fremont.

I'd like to thank everyone who worked on the frontlines and behind the scenes to prepare for these warnings, ensuring our community's safety.

Fremont Fire and Police also deployed resources to fires throughout the Bay Area.

We ask our community to remain ready for wildfires throughout the year, as there is no such thing as a fire season.

Wildfires can happen at any time throughout the year.

I'd like to honor these true heroes, who have put their lives at risk for the public,

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and thank their families for supporting their loved ones and allowing them to selflessly protect and serve.

Moving now to our budget.

Fremont has a long-standing recognition of being fiscally responsible, relying on various revenue streams to balance our annual operating budget.

For the fiscal year that ended on June 30, we estimate that COVID-19 cost the City General Fund \$10 million in revenue, primarily in sales tax and hotel tax.

Factoring in a post-recovery economic slowdown, our General Fund revenues for the current fiscal year are estimated to fall \$12 million below the level projected prior to the pandemic.

Thanks to the Council's decision to increase reserves last year, Fremont will be able to absorb the initial impact of the revenue loss

without laying off staff or severely curtailing services as some other cities have been forced to do.

We took actions to restrict overspending and our budget remained balanced.

Some budget impacted examples are highlighted on this slide.

Our largest revenue source, property taxes, constitutes about half of General Fund revenues and is based on assessed value as of January 1, 2020, so it's relatively unaffected this year by the pandemic.

Sales tax, on the other hand, about a quarter of General Fund revenues, is highly sensitive to economic activity and has been greatly impacted by shelter orders and subsequent health department restrictions on retail activity.

Similarly, hotel tax revenues fell in March as travel essentially stopped, and have only very slowly begun to recover.

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Because business tax is paid on prior year activity,
we won't see the impact from the pandemic on those revenues until next fiscal year.

To ensure the community's best interests are being heard,
our Council continues to take action at the local policy and financial level.

Yet advocacy at a broader level better enables state and federal priorities to occur.

I continue actively championing
the supportive Housing Coalition,
which ensures adequate funding for Homeless services in the California State budget.

Another example of making our voice heard at a regional level
is the initiative I co-chaired for the Silicon Valley Leadership Group's Mayors Circle.

Regional businesses and cities worked in partnership
with the Silicon Valley Recovery Roundtable to develop
better practices for economic recovery due to
the coronavirus and business shutdowns.

And I also spoke out in support of an extended 2020 Census deadline.

I'm pleased the extension now goes through October 31st,
and that our participation rate is 79.3% so far for people being counted.

Something that is more important than ever for funding and elected representation at
the federal level.

Moving Fremont forward,
we're investing in the quality of life for our community.

Whether it's focusing on green initiatives,
implementing a new Trails Strategy,
or updating our new Parks and Recreation Master Plan,

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We're including the feedback from our community members through virtual meetings, surveys, and our Happi Feet app to enhance these plans moving forward.

I want to thank Fremont's incredible participation as we work together to create the future for our parks and recreation programs for the next 15 to 20 years!

For a brighter and greener future,

the update to our Climate Action Plan is also underway to initiate a sustainable and thriving community that supports the environment.

Last month we held a successful community workshop with over 250 attendees.

As part of community planning,

the State is requiring the Bay region to plan for large amounts of new housing as a strategy for making housing more available and affordable.

While this process,

known as the Regional Housing Needs Assessment,

is not yet complete,

we already know that Fremont will be required to accommodate a sizable number of new housing units between 2023-2031.

Fremont has also been planning for several infrastructure projects that are now funded and either under construction or in development.

Speaking of building for your future,
we want you to be prepared.

How many of you have signed up to be notified in the event of an emergency in Fremont?

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Other ways to stay informed
about City programs and projects
and staying involved,
are now more convenient than ever.

And also download our new Fremont App to report City infrastructure concerns.

While this year we may not be in person together,
we remain united in our hopes for a brighter future.

We will continue working on more policing accountability and transparency,
and greater equality for all.

Together, we are stronger.

I want to thank the Fremont Chamber of Commerce and today's sponsors for hosting
this event,

and I'm appreciative of the warm welcome by presenting sponsor, Facebook.