



***State of the City
March 12th, 2024
Mayor Russell Stroud***

Good evening, everyone. I am pleased to announce that the state of the city is STRONG.

I would like to recognize each of our elected and appointed officials of our City Council. Thank you for your service to the City of Goshen and our residents.

Let me also take this opportunity to recognize and thank our members of the Goshen Planning Commission and the Goshen Parks Commission. You each bring experience and talent to these commissions that are invaluable to our city and our progress towards the future growth of our city and our region.

I would like to thank our city staff at City Hall, Ms. KaSeana Williams and Mrs. Lacie Lawson. Without these two amazing and professional young ladies I could never have accomplished what we were able to accomplish over the past year. Ms. Williams has consistently gone above and beyond to serve all our residents in managing City Hall and keeping us in alignment with local, state and federal regulations of municipal government. Mrs. Lawson has quickly become an integral part of our team and has excelled. She has taken on City Zoning and Planning as our Zoning Official, working closely with Mr. J.D. Demott, our City Building inspector. While Mr. Demott does not work at City Hall, he is always available when we need his assistance, and we appreciate the expertise he brings to our city as our building inspector.

We have been able to fully staff our Infrastructure and Facilities Management department and have already seen a significant improvement in our ability to complete projects more efficiently. I would like to thank Mr. Dave Gatlin and our newest employee, Mr. Ivan Ivannikov. They have been working tirelessly to improve our city's infrastructure and our facilities. They work to do anything that is asked of them, from setting up the Community Building for meetings, to building trash cans for our public spaces, to picking up trash along city streets, to changing street signs, to maintaining city equipment, and the list never ends. I give my deepest gratitude to both these men for their dedication and hard work.

Thank you to the Goshen City Police Department for their unwavering dedication to protecting our residents and keeping Goshen safe. You each give so much of your time, attention, enthusiasm, and integrity to your profession. We are truly appreciative of this level of professionalism and character you bring to our city. Chief Travis, you consistently raise the bar and exemplify the ideals of excellence in law enforcement. Your team, Captain Doug Stewart, Sergeant Jessie Sorrell, Corporal Nathan Snipes, and Officer Raul Manzo, are all to be commended for your commitment to upholding the law. As I have gotten to know each of you over this past year, I feel proud that you each continue to give your ALL in protecting our great City. Thank you for your service.

And finally, I would like to thank our partners throughout the City: Goshen Fire District and all the firefighters who volunteer to protect our community, Anderson's Gas and Propane, Phillips 66/FastTrax, Panchos Mexican Restaurant, Dollar General, Goshen Arbor Board, Goshen Riding Club, Goshen Extension Homemakers Cooperative, the Goshen Historical Society, the Goshen Senior Center, Goshen Farmers Market, and all of the other businesses or non-profits that bring life to Goshen. We truly appreciate the impact your services provide for our citizens and communities.

Anyone who lives in Goshen understands what an amazing place this is and how there are very few communities like ours anywhere in the country. We have a deep history with many of our residents having been here for several generations. We also have many who have moved here because of Goshen's beauty and tranquility. Our city holds onto both rural and suburban fervor and is primed to experience tremendous growth over the next decade as our region continues to expand and develop. This rapid growth creates both a desire to preserve what we love about Goshen as well as an excitement to explore new possibilities. Sometimes it is easy to be torn between preserving what feels familiar and embracing new progressive approaches. I understand this well as a Goshen local with four generations of our family still living in Goshen. I believe this is possible if we balance our priorities while working on delivering the best outcomes for our city and our community.

Tonight, I would like to recap some highlights from the work accomplished in 2023 as well as work we have already begun in 2024. In 2023 we were able to dramatically change our approach to budgeting with the addition of a finance committee looking at how to streamline our fund accounting within the software program utilized by the city to better track expenditures. This has allowed for up-to-date transparency with our accounting software mirroring our bank accounts in real time. Along with this additional oversight through a finance committee, we were able to put an additional \$600,000.00 in CD's last year pushing our year-to-date CD funds to over \$998,988.00, nearly 1 million dollars. These CDs allowed us to earn over \$22,000.00 last year. This coupled with our current General Fund Balance of over \$725,000.00 and Street Fund Balance of over \$270,000.00, we are fiscally prepared for the future. I would like to personally thank Mr. Jerry Jackson and his firm at Jackson Wealth Preservation Group for providing services to the City of Goshen free of charge, helping to streamline our accounting practices for the city. You have dedicated significant hours of service and training to city staff that have been nothing short of priceless. Thank you, Mr. Jackson!

After improvements supported by our City Council, we were able to update our contracts with service providers to improve our website, developed a new process for online building permit applications, and online capabilities for on-site real time building inspections. These improvements have saved countless hours and streamlined processes.

We also purchased three computers last year for City Hall, added an onsite firewall, onsite server with cloud backup. We have subsequently purchased two additional computers this year for our Police Department for improved efficiency. Although we had some difficulties with our initial I.T. service provider in 2023 we have successfully transitioned to a company that has been delivering excellent quality and support in 2024.

We were able to renovate much of the interiors of both City Hall as well as the Community Building with more renovations underway this year. These have breathed new life into both buildings and have assisted us in becoming better equipped for the future. We look forward to completing both of these projects in 2024.

Through our Parks Commission and their fortitude in obtaining grants, we are overseeing and administering these grants for the completion of numerous projects for the improvement of Mill Branch Park. The Parks Commission is also looking forward to expanding the existing Community Center Park with the addition of picnic tables and a secondary playground in 2024. They are working on many exciting new ventures with a focus on delivering projects that will bring enjoyment to our community.

From early 2023 to present the city has purchased improved equipment for better maintenance of our Parks and other open spaces throughout the city. We have been able to commit significant resources to our streets and bridges over the past 14 months by trimming trees, applying gravel to roads, grating roads, resurfacing streets, replacing and clearing culverts, repairing and replacing guardrails, and purchasing concrete tiles at deeply discounted prices. We will continue to work on these projects as well as replacing all street signs within the city by the end of the year with easily visible reflective signage.

Looking more towards the remainder of 2024, we have many goals to accomplish. We are looking to annex our most Westerly growth area to help grow our city and increase our revenue with an anticipated \$100,000.00 to \$300,000.00 in potential increased revenue. Our Planning subcommittee is working diligently to look at our future footprint for commercial zoning. We are eager to look for how we get better connected as a city and for additional grant opportunities to help accomplish this goal.

Safety is also of utmost concern for this administration. We are proactively looking at ways to make our infrastructure and public facilities safer. This should include the installation of cameras for surveillance, bullet resistant glass coatings, and better security for building entry. We will also analyze ways to improve the safety of city streets, city intersections, and decrease crime. We have requested assistance from Arkansas

Department of Transportation (ARDOT) to evaluate the intersection of state highway 45, Goshen-Tuttle, and Blue Springs to determine if a stoplight at this intersection would be beneficial for traffic safety. ARDOT will soon begin resurfacing highway 45, starting at Anderson's and working their way east to Hindsville. Once this phase is completed, they will be returning to Anderson's and working during the night to complete the resurfacing of highway 45 going west back to Crossover Blvd. in Fayetteville. I know we are all eager to have this project completed and have been assured it will be completed by November of 2024. Please allow yourselves extra time during this process as there may be some impact on traffic patterns.

As part of a safe environment and safety for our city we will start the enforcement of ordinances that were not consistently enforced previously. These will include things like unkept properties that can pose safety risks to surrounding neighbors, swimming pool fencing, aggressive or threatening animals running loose in our city, and others that impact the safety of our citizens. We have put into use our retired patrol vehicle for code enforcement, allowing us the ability to deliver violation notices in a clearly marked city vehicle. While we do not want to disrupt or cause angst by enforcement, we understand it's need for the safety of all our citizens who these violations may impact.

Things I would like our city to consider for our future; How to get Goshen more connected and accessible for walking and biking. Becoming greener as a city and investing in green energy alternatives such as solar energy, investing in electric vehicles, and continuing to remain a tree city. Let's consider better ways we can bring recycling to Goshen, how to improve our main access corridor on Bowen Blvd., while working to get Goshen connected to the NWA Greenway system of trails. We should plan for improvements to our Fire/Rescue services, while expanding our city limits through annexation of areas vital to our growth and development. Let us strive to improve services for our older adults and those with disabilities. Protect our way of life while moving thoughtfully forward by proactively planning for tomorrow's future.

In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the residents of Goshen for their support, encouragement and engagement over the past year. This administration's number one goal is and will continue to be, to serve our city and each of our citizens with humility and respect.

All these things can be accomplished if we work towards a better tomorrow, respecting our past and leading purposefully for our city's future. We must be better to do better. Let us be a team vigorously working for ALL our citizens. Let's lean into 2024 and beyond, unified in bringing growth and development to Goshen. Let's keep the state of our city STRONG. Thank you and may God Bless our great City.