



State of the City

“Bentonville Rising: Collaborating for a Brighter Future”

March 11, 2025

Good evening. It is both an honor and a privilege to serve as your Mayor and I appreciate the opportunity to share the State of the City with you tonight.

As we gather here, we have much to celebrate—our resilience, our progress, and the incredible people who make Bentonville what it is. This past year, our community demonstrated remarkable resilience in the wake of the devastating May '24 tornadoes. Together, we have and will continue to rebuild and support one another in ways that truly reflect the spirit of our city, all while continuing to experience unprecedented growth and prosperity.

Bentonville is a model community that others look to for inspiration. With a robust economy, exceptional quality of life, and a steadfast commitment to connectivity, safety, and sustainability, we are dedicated to strategic growth that diligently addresses the challenges that accompany such prosperity. We're prioritizing infrastructure, transportation, recreation, innovation, and communication, while fostering strong leadership and governance with data backed decisions. Thanks to dedicated leaders like you and a phenomenal community, Bentonville is a place where people want to live, work, play, raise a family and retire. We remain committed to building on that foundation and ensuring it continues for years to come.

Looking to the future, Bentonville is poised for continued success. From the grand opening of the new Walmart Home Office, signaling a new era of innovation and opportunity, to the completion of 8th Street, enhancing connectivity and vibrancy, our city is evolving. The much-anticipated 8th Street Gateway Park is well underway, the A Street Promenade is creating a beautiful, safe pedestrian corridor that links our downtown parks and plazas. New additions like the Adult Wellness Center and upgraded Phillips Baseball Park will offer exciting recreational and health-focused amenities, ensuring Bentonville's success well into 2025 and beyond. And yes, indeed, even more exciting developments lie ahead. Bentonville is truly a special place to be. These examples are a testament to how dedicated elected officials, city staff, and community partners are committed to a high

quality of life in Bentonville. These projects do not happen without that collaboration in both funding and execution.

Major private investments are being made in healthcare, bringing new services and opportunities that will benefit our families for generations to come. Significant announcements in art and culture are continuously enhancing access and enriching our community. Bentonville is on the rise, and it's because of the hard work and vision of all of you—our residents, city employees, businesses, our workforce and many community partners committed to working together to see our city shine! One of the greatest privileges of being your Mayor is the opportunity to recognize individuals and organizations who go above and beyond to make Bentonville a better place for everyone. In 2024, I had the honor of acknowledging several whose efforts have greatly enhanced the quality of life in our city. These inspiring individuals and organizations were presented with a certificate and an engraved Spirit of Bentonville coin and were invited to share their stories with our community.

Please join me in congratulating the 2024 Spirit of Bentonville Community award winners you see on the screen. These honorees were nominated by the public and city departments for their exceptional service to Bentonville. Their selflessness and dedication have left a lasting, positive impact and are recognized as going above and beyond for their community.

There are so many remarkable individuals in our community who consistently go above and beyond in service to others. I encourage everyone to take a moment to nominate someone truly special for the 2025 Spirit of Bentonville Award.

The City also proudly recognized several employees for their exceptional contributions and going above and beyond to serve the public. These individuals embody what makes Bentonville special and play a key role in the positive reputation we've built. In 2024, the nominated employees featured on screen were presented with High Five Awards at the Mayor's monthly staff meeting. It is truly an honor to lead a team that continually elevates Bentonville through their hard work and service.

In 2024, 21 students participated in the Mayor's Youth Council, now in its fourth year. This program is a vital way to engage young people in our community, connecting them with city leadership and fostering civic engagement. Through monthly meetings with department heads and a city volunteer opportunity, these students gained valuable insights into municipal government and contributed fresh perspectives on real-world issues. Representing a diverse range of schools—public, private, charter, homeschool, and those living in Bentonville but attending school elsewhere—these students demonstrated the importance of involving youth in shaping the future of our city.

The sixteen members of the Mayor's Community Council met monthly in 2024, representing all four city wards. This group is vital in strengthening community engagement, bringing together residents to discuss city activities, initiatives, and gather

valuable public feedback. The purpose of the Community Council is to create a more connected Bentonville, where residents actively engage with and learn about local government. Through open dialogue and shared experiences, this council has become a true reflection of Bentonville's spirit of collaboration, respect, and civic pride. It's inspiring to see many alumni of the program go on to serve on city boards and commissions, using their passion for service to make an even greater impact. Ultimately, this initiative aims to spark that same passion in every participant, empowering them to shape Bentonville's future—whether through city involvement or other efforts that contribute to our community's growth and vibrancy.

The 2024 Youth and Community Council participants who completed the program were recognized with certificates of completion at the December 10, 2024, Bentonville City Council meeting.

The City has continued its efforts to strengthen the role of Bentonville-based non-profit and service organizations through our Connecting Community Needs to Community Resources initiative. Held twice in 2024, this networking opportunity highlights the critical impact that non-profits have in a thriving city. By fostering collaboration and building connections, the initiative not only enhances the well-being of those with diverse needs but also strengthens the social fabric of our community. Community organizations are essential partners in addressing local challenges, and their efforts, whether in providing basic services or promoting social good they play a vital role in shaping a compassionate and resilient Bentonville. Many of these community organizations also played a significant role in recovery from the May '24 tornadoes. We are deeply grateful for these organizations and their heart to serve our community.

In addition, this initiative connects community members to a variety of volunteer opportunities, ensuring that more people are engaged in the important work being done across our city. These collaborations are helping to build a more connected, caring community where everyone can contribute to the city's success.

Bentonville is rapidly becoming a must-visit destination for travelers from around the globe, offering a vibrant downtown, renowned trails, historic landmarks, world-class museums, expansive parks, and a diverse food scene.

Known as the "Mountain Biking Capital of the World," our city draws cycling enthusiasts year-round to experience our award-winning trails. With the U.S. National Mountain Biking Team now calling Bentonville home, our reputation as a biking hub continues to soar. A proud highlight for Bentonville in 2024 was seeing team USA cycling member, Haley Batten, who trains in Bentonville, win the Silver Medal at the Summer Olympics in Paris. This remarkable achievement has only further cemented Bentonville's standing as the "Mountain Biking Capital of the World."

In 2024, Bentonville rose to the occasion by hosting the Collegiate Mountain Bike Nationals just months after we faced our devastation from tornadoes. When Hurricane

Helene devastated North Carolina and forced the event's relocation, Bentonville's resilience and community spirit truly stood out. Our hearts continue to be with our friends in North Carolina as they rebuild and we're deeply thankful that our community was able to quickly unite and provide a space for the Nationals to continue as planned.

The Bentonville Convention and Visitors Bureau, or Visit Bentonville, reports another strong increase in travelers participating in outdoor activities, cultural events, and local festivals for 2024. This uptick can be attributed to Bentonville's continued development as a vibrant hub for outdoor adventure, art, and culture. From hiking and biking trails to world-class museums and art installations there is something for everyone to enjoy. The city's growing reputation as a premier destination for mountain biking, paired with its thriving culinary scene and unique events, has drawn an increasing number of visitors seeking new experiences. Additionally, Bentonville's emphasis on sustainable tourism and community engagement has made it an attractive destination for those looking to enjoy both the beauty and the spirit of our area.

The partnership between the city and Visit Bentonville continues to be a valuable asset drawing visitors from around the world through innovative conferences, sporting events, festivals, concerts, and biking tournaments. Visit Bentonville also plays a crucial role in funding a range of city park and facility initiatives. In 2024, their investments supported significant projects such as improvements to Phillips Park, numerous baseball and softball tournaments, the Bentonville Half Marathon, the Holiday Light Display, the 4th of July Celebration, and the expansion of the Library.

The City's partnership with Downtown Bentonville, Inc. continues to produce popular and exciting events like the award-winning Saturday Farmers' Market, First Fridays, the Lighting of the Square, and the Christmas Parade, drawing thousands for affordable, family-friendly experiences. As the Downtown Promenade project progresses, we are excited to know it will enhance Bentonville's ability to connect, host and expand such events. With new public spaces and upgraded infrastructure, the development will create more opportunities for community engagement and larger gatherings, further enriching Bentonville life and promoting community connection.

The Bentonville Together Initiative has sparked valuable community conversations, emphasizing respect, understanding, and a shared commitment to strengthening our city. These discussions led to the creation of the Bentonville Together Multicultural Festival, launched in April 2022 and recognized with a Trendsetter Award from the Arkansas Municipal League. In 2024, the festival made its return to the Downtown Square, celebrating community unity and highlighting the newly renovated Phase II of the Promenade area, which truly reflects the welcoming spirit of our city. We are excited to build on this success and look forward to even greater collaboration with many community organizations and Downtown Bentonville Inc. for the 2025 event.

Bentonville, known for our natural beauty, scenic parks, and welcoming neighborhoods, was once again recognized as one of the safest cities in Arkansas. This distinction highlights not only our commitment to creating a secure and vibrant community, but also the strong bonds that unite residents, local organizations, and law enforcement. With a focus on both public safety and quality of life, Bentonville continues to be a place where people feel both at home and protected, making it an ideal destination for families, visitors, and newcomers alike.

Our thriving economy, job growth, and major commercial projects reflect the city's prosperity. These successes stem from thoughtful planning and a shared commitment to making Bentonville a great place to live, work, play, visit, raise a family and retire! The "can-do" spirit of our community continues to drive our growth, overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities.

Effective city communication keeps residents informed, engaged, and connected to local initiatives. It fosters transparency, builds trust, and ensures the community is aware of updates, services, and opportunities that impact their lives. As Bentonville continues to grow, enhancing clear and reliable communication remains a top priority for our city team.

In September 2019, we launched Bentonville 311, an online platform developed by the Mayor's office to address non-emergency concerns. This single point of contact covers 22 categories, and to date, we've received over 10,000 service requests with resolution to 89% percent with many longer-term solutions currently underway. We appreciate the public helping to be our eyes and ears on every street in Bentonville and taking the time to upload a picture and submit their concern to us. Administration reviews the concerns coming in daily and is committed to addressing each and every one to find the best solution as efficiently as possible.

In 2024, we issued over 130 press releases, hosted 12 virtual Coffee with the Mayor sessions, and grew our social media following to over 32,000.

Our active engagement on social media has proven to be an effective and cost-efficient way to connect with the public, sharing important updates, events, and city achievements. We are dedicated to continuously enhancing our social media presence to ensure we deliver clear, timely, and accurate information. However, we understand that social media is not always the best platform for addressing concerns, and responding to every comment can be challenging. To better connect with the community, starting in 2025, the Mayor will host quarterly open Council Chamber hours where the public can drop by and ask questions in person. We will also be incorporating a Community Feedback Board into this process. At each open hour, we will have a designated board or digital platform where residents can submit their concerns, suggestions, or feedback in writing. A virtual link will also be available for those who prefer to join remotely. By continuing to enhance

communication efforts, our goal is to foster greater trust and accountability, keeping our community informed and engaged in the work of our city government.

The city also maintains several dedicated websites that offer up-to-date information on various topics impacting daily life, from city services to upcoming events. The city's main webpage, bentonvillear.com, received more than 2.3 million visits in 2024. The city also distributes a newsletter to keep the public informed, offering up-to-date information in a variety of formats for easy access.

In 2024, we hosted several public input sessions, ensuring that residents had opportunities to voice their opinions and contribute to important decisions. Bentonville Connections programming again saw record attendance, providing a platform for the public to engage directly with the Mayor, City Council, and Department Heads on key community issues. These initiatives continue to grow and foster a transparent dialogue, allowing residents to stay informed, ask questions, and offer valuable feedback, further strengthening the relationship between our city government and the community.

Key city support departments, including Human Resources (HR), Information Technology (IT), Legal, District Court, Purchasing, Utility Billing and Finance, play a vital role in ensuring the smooth operation of essential public-facing services such as Transportation, Water, Sewer, Electric, Police, Fire, Planning, Parks and Rec, and the Library. These support teams provide essential services that allow frontline departments to effectively serve our community, from managing budgets and handling legal matters to ensuring that technology and staffing needs are met. Their dedication and collaboration are key to maintaining the high standards of service our residents rely on every day.

In 2024, our HR Department focused on enhancing employee satisfaction, improving recruitment efforts, and ensuring the well-being of our 794 employees.

A major priority was offering a competitive benefits package, which included two new medical plans and an employee-paid pet insurance option.

The Department also worked to strengthen connections with the community by attending job fairs hosted by the Rogers/Lowell Chamber of Commerce, Northwest Arkansas Community College, and Bentonville High School. Human Resource staff also served on the Northwest Arkansas Community College Adult Education Advisory Committee and facilitated 26 job orientation sessions, as well as quarterly "Lunch and Learn" events on a variety of topics.

Training remained a key focus, with HR offering monthly development sessions for each shift, covering both hard and soft skills. They also provided specialized training on Workers Compensation, FMLA, and Manager/Supervisor development, in addition to quarterly city-wide safety training and monthly department-specific safety meetings.

In January 2024, HR resumed monthly meetings of the City Personnel Policy Review Committee, resulting in updates recently passed by City Council. HR also partnered with the Bentonville School District's IGNITE program to create an onboarding video for part-time staff.

Employee engagement efforts included events such as an Egg Hunt, a blood drive, Employee Appreciation Night, and a food drive benefiting Helping Hands. The department also facilitated 11 Firefighter Exam sessions throughout the year, ensuring we continue to attract top talent to serve our community.

Through these initiatives, Bentonville's HR department plays a vital role in fostering a skilled, engaged, and satisfied workforce, contributing directly to the city's ongoing success.

The City's Accounting, Finance, and Grant teams play a crucial role in ensuring the financial health and success of Bentonville. In 2024, these teams had another successful year, with the Accounts Payable team issuing payments totaling \$258.5 million, Accounts Receivable invoicing over \$6.2 million, and Payroll servicing a record 1,026 employees. Our on staff grant writer also secured an additional \$6.2 million in grants to support various departments, from Police to Wastewater.

In December, the Accounting Department launched the Capital Asset module in our financial software, allowing for more transparent tracking of the City's capital assets and providing valuable data for future planning. The Finance team also consolidated all City departments' Capital Improvement Plans (CIPs) into a unified, City-wide CIP, improving our ability to manage both short- and long-term capital needs.

For the fourth consecutive year, the City received the Government Finance Officer Association's (GFOA) Triple Crown award. This prestigious recognition honors governments that have earned the GFOA's Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, the Annual Financial Reporting Award, and the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award.

In April 2024, the Utility Billing Department surpassed 30,000 active accounts, achieving a 3% year-over-year growth. The department generated over 354,000 bills in 2024, with 162,000 printed bills, thanks to a record 54% paperless adoption rate—up from 49% at the end of 2023. This is an efficiency that we continue to promote and encourage the public to adopt.

As part of the Electric Department's transition to Eaton's Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI), the Meter Department saw fewer trips to the field for readings. In 2023, 53% of the 8,076 service orders required physical visits. In 2024, service orders increased by 3%, but trips to the field decreased by 32%, due to the new electric AMI system and enhanced Water Department AMI performance. This reduction in field visits has led to lower fuel consumption and faster response times.

The City of Bentonville's IT Department ensures the security and functionality of technological systems, maintaining infrastructure that supports essential services and optimizing technology for efficient city operations.

Supporting over 90 locations, including administration offices, police and fire stations, parks, libraries, and utility facilities, the IT Department's responsibilities include client technical support, cybersecurity, system maintenance, software provisioning, GIS mapping, and more.

In 2024, the IT Services Team handled over 7,100 support tickets, completed over 10,000 tasks, onboarded 78 employees, and managed 107 new hardware requests. They also implemented a new software patching initiative, significantly reducing system vulnerabilities.

The Network Team completed Phase II of the City Fiber Project, enhancing reliability for city services and supporting the new public safety radio system.

The Applications Team migrated the TraKIT Permitting and Planning Application to the cloud and facilitated GIS integration.

The Facilities Team upgraded 120 access doors across city buildings with a new control system, and the GIS Team migrated all services to the cloud, created a comprehensive sidewalk inventory, and generated thousands of vital maps and address points. They also manage the city's 311 portal.

These achievements reflect the department's ongoing commitment to supporting Bentonville's growth and ensuring our technological systems are secure, reliable, and efficient.

The City of Bentonville Legal Department offers legal guidance, contract oversight, and compliance support to the City Council, Mayor, and all City departments. In 2024, the department managed over 2,744 new criminal and traffic cases in Bentonville District Court, covering arraignments, plea negotiations, and trials.

The Bentonville District Court focuses on problem-solving. Our treatment court helps high-risk DWI offenders with mental health, substance abuse, and life skills support. The city also has an innovative post-arrest diversion program for substance abuse and anger management, and a partnership with Harbor House that provides rapid alternative sentencing with support for employment and housing. Building on these successes, this team proactively works with pre-arrest diversion programs to connect individuals with resources before they enter the court system. By collaborating with organizations like the Women's Shelter and Child Advocacy Center, the legal team prioritizes fairness and works to reduce the burden on the court system.

In Addition, the legal department reviewed ordinances, resolutions, grant applications, contracts, and land transactions, while providing legal support for criminal investigations and handling numerous Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests.

The Legal Department also worked closely with other city departments to plan a new building location that allows all legal staff to consolidate, enhancing efficiency and service.

The Purchasing Department is dedicated to ensuring efficient and transparent procurement for the City of Bentonville, overseeing requisitions, purchase orders, contracts, and vendor relationships. In 2024, this team reviewed 7,081 requisitions, processed 1,358 purchase card statements, and managed 96 formal solicitations. They finalized 110 contracts, completed more than 1,240 purchase order change orders, and facilitated 32 vendor introduction meetings to strengthen business partnerships. The department also assessed numerous contracts and cooperative agreements to explore potential participation opportunities.

A key achievement for the department in 2024 was the launch of Beacon Bid, the City's new bidding software. This platform streamlines the bidding and vendor registration process, enhances communication and increases access to a broader pool of qualified vendors.

Support departments play a critical role in the City of Bentonville. Their dedicated services ensure that our more public-facing departments can operate smoothly and efficiently, contributing to a well-organized city government. One of the things that sets Bentonville apart from most other cities in Arkansas is that our water, sewer, and electric utilities are directly managed by the City. These services are funded through a dedicated Utility Fund, offering a unique perspective on the intricacies involved in running a successful city. With this in mind, in the next section of the State of the City we will delve into the accomplishments, challenges, and essential services that our utility departments deliver to the community each day.

The Bentonville Electric Utility Department (BEUD) ensures safe, reliable, and affordable electric power for our residents and responds swiftly to emergencies and outages. BEUD is responsible for the design, installation, and maintenance of the city's electric distribution system.

Through the City's 311 system, BEUD has replaced, updated, or repaired over 2,200 streetlights. In 2024, the department addressed 355 tickets and is currently working on 11 ongoing issues that require more than a simple bulb or photocell replacement.

In 2024, BEUD completed Phase II of the city's fiber installation project, adding 20 miles and bringing the total fiber layout for this project to nearly 40 miles, connecting all city buildings and substations for essential redundancy.

BEUD's contractor replaced over 29,000 outdated meters with advanced AMI meters, offering real-time data and improving outage management. Additionally, over 1,000 new electric meters were installed for new homes, apartments, and commercial properties.

Thanks to the City's Inventory Warehouse, which maintains a rotating stock of about \$14 million worth of materials, BEUD was able to restore power quickly after the May 2024 tornadoes. Despite global supply chain challenges, the warehouse ensures that all city departments are equipped to serve residents efficiently.

Over the past 10 years, BEUD has consistently maintained a 99.99% reliability rate, meaning that nearly every time a resident flips a switch, the light comes on. Even in the aftermath of the May tornadoes, which caused 11,000 meters to lose power, BEUD was able to restore service to all customers who could receive it within a week. As a result, BEUD's 2024 reliability rating remained strong at 99.77%, reflecting the department's steadfast commitment to ensuring that our residents have access to reliable power.

Bentonville's Water Utilities (BWU) consists of three divisions: Water Operations & Maintenance, Wastewater Resource Recovery Facility, and Technical Services. In 2024, the Operations & Maintenance team focused on maintaining efficient infrastructure while addressing water loss and sewer capacity challenges. The team replaced over 700 water service lines, installed 101 new services, and secured two additional contractors to replace an average of 90 lines per month. They also worked with Mueller Industries to replace 12,000 defective meters at the vendor's cost and monitored the AMI system, addressing water loss through District Metering Areas (DMAs).

The Sewer Rehab team hydro-cleaned 190 miles of sewer lines, televised 78,000 feet of sewer main, and repaired nearly 3,000 feet using the Cured-in-Place Pipe (CIPP) method, strengthening the system and preparing for growth. The CIPP system is a fast and versatile way to protect and restore pipelines, reduce infiltration, increase flow, and improve water quality.

The Controller team distributed nearly 7 billion gallons of water and collected over 800 water quality samples, ensuring clean and reliable water for residents.

The Damage Prevention team handled over 14,600 utility-locate requests, safeguarding infrastructure.

In April 2024, a contractor struck the City's 48-inch water transmission main, disrupting service. Water Utilities was able to initiate a backup plan with a neighboring city and residents ultimately experienced very little noticeable interruption in service. Repairs were completed in eight days, prompting additional improvements in emergency response, communication strategies and protocols.

The Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) treated nearly 1.1 billion gallons of wastewater and plans were finalized for an upgrade to support future growth, with construction set to begin in 2025.

The new Compost Facility In-Vessel project, launched in February 2024. This innovative project allows the city to convert biosolid byproducts into Class A compost with better environmental quality control. The team also replaced communication systems at lift stations, improving monitoring and efficiency.

The Wastewater Pre-Treatment Program conducted 207 environmental compliance events, analyzed 502 samples, and diverted 465,258 gallons of fats, oils, and grease from the collection system, ensuring the City's wastewater infrastructure operates smoothly and effectively as Bentonville continues to grow.

In 2024, the Water Utilities-Technical Services team reached significant milestones across various areas. The Cross-Connection Control Program grew to 6,656 backflow devices, highlighting its success. The Land Development team facilitated new development, attending over 2,600 meetings, completing 2,671 plan reviews, and conducting 2,895 inspections of water and sewer infrastructure, showing growth and dedication to maintaining reliable systems.

The team also surveyed over 26,000 service lines to ensure compliance with the EPA's Revised Lead and Copper Rule, prioritizing public health and regulatory standards. Additionally, they set new benchmarks in construction installation, customer service, and review efficiencies.

The Capital Development team, launched in mid-2024, is managing over \$100 million in infrastructure design and installations, proactively addressing current and future water and sewer needs.

The Bentonville Public Works Maintenance Department (BPW), through its dedicated employees, provides responsive, thorough, and efficient roadway mowing, facility maintenance, custodial services, and essential cemetery services to families with compassion and dignity. Their work is crucial in maintaining the city's infrastructure and ensuring that Bentonville residents receive the highest level of service.

In 2024, BPW achieved several significant milestones. In November, they completed the quarterly and annual mowing and edging of over 70 miles of city street curbs and sidewalks, ensuring our roadways remain clean and well-maintained. Additionally, they finished construction on the Bentonville Cemetery's Columbarium/Committal Shelter, which added 320 cremation niches, with plans for another 320 to accommodate future growth. This team was also heavily involved in storm debris cleanup in 2024.

These achievements highlight the department's ongoing dedication to serving our community and ensuring Bentonville remains a beautiful and well-kept place to live.

From utilities to our most public facing departments, the work the City does on a daily basis often starts in the Planning Department. The Bentonville Planning Department oversees a wide range of services, including development, comprehensive planning, code enforcement, neighborhood support, public art, and other community-focused initiatives.

The Development Services division serves as the main point of contact for development projects within the city. The projects submitted provide valuable insights into emerging construction trends and the overall direction of development efforts.

In 2024, Bentonville Planning processed 304 projects, including preliminary and final plats, large-scale developments, property line adjustments, rezonings, conditional uses, variances, and waivers. This represents a 12% decrease from 2023, largely driven by a drop in rezoning requests.

The most significant change was the notable increase in completed subdivisions, reflected in the rise of final plats, as well as the number of planned lots, shown by preliminary plats. The number of final plats surged by 130%, from 9 in 2023 to 21 in 2024. As a result, the number of finalized lots more than doubled, from 291 in 2023 to 623 in 2024. While the number of preliminary plat projects decreased by one, the number of lots planned saw a 45% increase, reaching a total of 487.

Planning staff processed 59 large-scale development requests in 2024, an increase of 6 projects compared to 2023. Among these, 14 residential projects were proposed, totaling 2,305 units –nearly double the number of units planned the previous year. Additionally, 25 new commercial projects were submitted, including recreational facilities, retail services, and restaurants.

For the first time in four years, rezoning requests declined, falling from 89 in 2023 to 61 in 2024. Similarly, variance requests to the Board of Adjustment decreased, from 32 in 2023 to 25 in 2024. Working within the land use plan and planning zones continues to be a focus to bring these requests down and provide more consistency for residents and developers.

In addition to development projects, the Planning staff handles a variety of permits, including those for signs, fences, outdoor vendors, and parklets, while also reviewing building and engineering permits. Sign permits increased by 10%, with 225 reviewed in 2024. The staff also processed 49 outdoor vendor permits and 4 parklet permits. In total, the planning staff reviewed 743 permits, including those from other city departments.

In 2024, the department introduced new cottage-court zoning regulations to promote a wider variety of housing options in the city. And, following the May tornadoes,

the conditional use requirement for using shipping containers for storage was suspended for two months to aid recovery efforts.

The Comprehensive Planning Division oversees long-term planning, ordinance preparation, property maintenance enforcement, and key community programs such as the Great Neighborhoods Partnership, public art, and tree and landscape initiatives.

The Great Neighborhoods Partnership, launched in 2019, expanded in 2024 from 27 to 36 neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Advisory Council hosted 11 meetings with guest speakers from various city departments, including tornado recovery guidance.

The Block Party Trailer, which helps neighborhoods connect, was greatly used and prompted the addition of a second trailer in October. In November, the program introduced its first “Neighborhood of the Year” awards, with Cornerstone Ridge recognized for Best Neighborhood Communication and Grammercy Park for Social Improvement. Neighborhoods participated in the Holiday Decorating Contest, with Stonehenge winning the Most Holiday Spirit Award and Rolling Acres and White Oak Trails tying for the People’s Choice Award. In support of neighborhood cleanups, kits were distributed empowering the public to help maintain clean and safe communities.

The Code Enforcement division played a key role in keeping our city well kept, addressing 437 cases and successfully closing 419 of them. In addition to handling these cases, the team removed 1,115 nonconforming signs and posted 214 public hearing signs, helping to maintain the city’s visual appeal and compliance with local regulations.

Code enforcement also continued its commitment to crime reduction by launching the second year of the Crime Prevention Through Environment Design (CPTED) program. This initiative involves conducting property surveys, identifying opportunities to reduce crime and enhance neighborhood safety through environmental improvements.

The Tree and Landscape Advisory Committee distributed 1,000 trees in 2024, contributing to Bentonville’s 26th consecutive year as a Tree City USA. The tree giveaways were made possible through the support of the Peel Compton Foundation, Steuart Walton and the Walton Family Foundation. This committee also honored Bentonville residential and commercial properties for their landscaping efforts in promoting a clean and beautiful city.

The Public Art Committee accepted or participated in the installation of 19 new artworks and engaged with artists nationally and internationally. This committee also accepted eight loans of world-class art from OZ Art, approved three unsolicited proposals-including the Red Ball project-a regional temporary installation with stellar community engagement. This committee also conducted an assessment of all city-owned artwork and submitted an application for a Public Art Master Plan grant. Between public and privately funded works, there are over 140 public art pieces in Bentonville.

This division saw the introduction of new programs like the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, which helped fund childcare assistance and homeless services. Moving forward, funds will be directed towards sidewalk construction in underserved neighborhoods.

The Bentonville Business Registry was launched in 2024 with more than 80% opting to be featured on an interactive online map. The registry's fees were waived during tornado recovery and permanently eliminated by year's end. In May, "City Link" connected businesses with city services, and more opportunities to support local businesses will follow in 2025.

In 2024, the City partnered with Republic Services to host two Shred-It days, offering residents a free, secure way to dispose of sensitive documents. Participants appreciated the service, and we look forward to expanding these efforts in 2025 with an electronic waste pickup day.

Planning also implemented a new special event permitting process with eProval software to streamline applications. This system will go live in 2025, ensuring a more efficient and secure process for events.

A key initiative for the Planning Department is the update of the Bentonville Community Plan. The launch of Plan Bentonville in the fall of 2023 marked the start of the city's most comprehensive community-wide planning effort. The project is structured in two phases: Phase I, which focuses on updating the Future Land Use Map and was the primary focus in 2024, and Phase II, which will involve rewriting zoning and development codes, set for 2025.

Since its launch, the project website, planbentonville.com, has provided news, updates, and opportunities for community engagement, attracting over 11,000 unique visitors and 35,000 page views.

The Bentonville community has played a vital role in this process, offering insights, evaluating ideas, and providing feedback to refine proposals that address both current and future growth challenges. Participation opportunities were promoted across all city communication channels—including banners, flyers, emails, newsletters, press releases, social media, and giveaways—reaching tens of thousands of residents.

Nearly 4,700 people participated in over 80 hours of feedback opportunities, engaging through surveys, stakeholder interviews, pop-up events, open houses, one-on-one interactions with city staff, online reviews, and public meetings. This diverse involvement reflects Bentonville's engaged community, with contributions from residents, newcomers, elected officials, school administrators, entrepreneurs, builders, developers, social service organizations, and more.

The American Planning Association Arkansas Chapter recognized Plan Bentonville with the Award for Outstanding Public Engagement for the broad variety and significant number of engagement opportunities offered through this initiative.

Two special events further guided the process. The spring developer forum allowed architects, engineers, and contractors to provide feedback on the Place Types for the Future Land Use Map, contributing valuable input to the Plan Bentonville project. Additionally, in November, the City Council and Planning Commission held a joint meeting to discuss the project. Spring and Fall Developer Forums are scheduled for 2025.

City planning is crucial to fostering thoughtful city development and ensuring sustainable growth. As Bentonville attracts more residents and businesses, the success of this planning process will continue to be instrumental in shaping the city's promising future.

The Transportation Department, which includes the Engineering team, the Street Department, oversight of our contract with Ozark Regional Transit, the Municipal Airport and the Traffic Management Center, is integral to Bentonville's infrastructure. This team of professionals works tirelessly to enhance traffic flow, improve road safety, and ensure that our growing city's transportation network meets evolving demands.

The Engineering Department plays a crucial role in ensuring that new projects are designed and built to meet city standards. By prioritizing quality and durability, the department not only promotes longer-lasting infrastructure, but also delivers lasting value to the public by minimizing future maintenance costs and reducing the overall burden on our community. They focus on everything from drainage and sidewalks to streets, ensuring that all construction meets standards through ongoing inspections. In 2024, the team completed five street and drainage capital improvement projects and work continues on an additional 3 bond projects.

Notable completions included the Eighth Street Project, which upgraded 1.5 miles of roadway with dedicated lanes for vehicles, buses, and bikes, along with pedestrian facilities. The SW Gator Boulevard Project added new pedestrian/bicycle facilities, improving connectivity between neighborhoods and schools. The team also completed several drainage improvement projects on Little Osage Creek and Black Apple Creek to ensure proper water flow and reduce flooding.

In addition, several major projects continued in 2024. The SW 28th Street project, expected to finish this Spring, will improve traffic flow and provide pedestrian and bicycle access along a 1.28-mile stretch. The SW 10th and F Drainage Project started in May and will replace outdated storm drains. The SE Walton Boulevard Intersection Improvements, which began in July, will help alleviate congestion and improve safety along this busy corridor.

Engineering staff also reviewed 1,795 projects, performed 2,060 site inspections, and facilitated 28 pre-construction conferences.

In 2024, the Street Department patched nearly 11 miles of streets, sealed over 13 miles of cracks, and cleaned a mile and a half of stormwater infrastructure. In response to winter weather, they applied over 730 tons of salt and 30,000 gallons of brine. The department also upgraded school zone beacons, installed 10 new traffic signals, and added three miles of fiber optics to improve signal functionality.

It's important to note that much of this department's annual work was significantly disrupted by the May 2024 tornadoes. However, like many departments, their swift and decisive actions quickly earned public praise, as they worked tirelessly to clear roads and restore traffic signal functionality after nearly every road was impassable and most signals were affected from the event.

As Bentonville continues to grow, there's no shortage of work ahead for our Transportation Department. From maintaining our roads and infrastructure to preparing for future expansion, the challenges are ever-present. We are fortunate to have a dedicated team in place, focused on ensuring our community's transportation needs are met with efficiency and care. Their commitment to keeping Bentonville moving forward is invaluable, and we're grateful for their hard work and dedication.

In 2024, Bentonville's Thaden Field Municipal Airport continued to thrive as a top-tier general aviation hub and a key economic driver for our city. One of the highlights of the year was the return of the UP Summit, which brought some of the world's most innovative minds to Bentonville to explore the future of transportation and air mobility. The event wrapped up with a spectacular drone show, attended by more than 10,000 people.

In 2024, the airport successfully hosted Women in Aviation Week, an event so well-received that it was just held again for 2025 during International Women's Month. Plans are already underway for 2026.

In terms of infrastructure, over a million dollars in construction projects were completed at the municipal airport, funded through a combination of federal, state, and private grants. These improvements included a new taxiway and the necessary infrastructure to support six new hangars as part of our Hangar Development Project.

The partnership with Bentonville Public Schools, particularly the Ignite Program, has solidified its place at the airport as a permanent and valuable fixture. Additionally, our part-time Wildlife Control Officer, Robin Fields, and Maverick, the goose dog, have been instrumental in managing the geese population at the airport.

Looking ahead, we have exciting projects on the horizon, including the eastside taxiway extension, a new fuel farm parking apron, and the construction of additional hangars on the west side of the airport.

In 2024, Bentonville's Thaden Field Municipal Airport has proven itself as a vital asset to our community, driving innovation, economic growth, and educational opportunities. From hosting major events like the UP Summit to completing significant infrastructure improvements, the airport continues to build on its success. With ongoing projects and valuable partnerships, we're excited for the future and the continued role the airport will play in Bentonville's growth and development.

The Parks and Recreation Department is essential to Bentonville, offering well-maintained, scenic spaces for both residents and visitors, while also organizing more than 140 recreation programs. The City places a strong emphasis on parks and green spaces, recognizing their significant contribution to the community's well-being, recreation, and tourism.

In 2024, Bentonville's parks saw an incredible 7 million visitors, with 4 million of those being trail users. This team operated four recreation facilities, hosted over 140 programs and events, and attracted more than 752,000 attendees, generating over \$5.2 million in revenue. These figures reflect the growing importance of parks as not only a recreational asset but also a key driver of economic development for Bentonville.

Signature events like the Run Bentonville Half Marathon, Square 2 Square Bike Ride, swim meets, and USSSA baseball and softball tournaments generated an impressive \$5.4 million in economic impact for our community, despite the challenges faced by our team in 2024, including the unprecedented natural disaster that significantly impacted our parks and trails.

Volunteers continue to be the backbone of the success in the Parks and Recreation Department, dedicating over 39,000 hours in support of tree plantings, litter cleanups, youth sports coaching, and event coordination.

The Parks and Recreation Department remains focused on both developing new parks and maintaining our existing ones. In 2024, major updates were made to the Bentonville Community Center, Memorial Park, Citizens Park, Wildwood Park, Orchards Park, and Gilmore Park. We also unveiled new amenities at Bella Vista Lake Park and reopened Town Branch Park as part of our Quilt of Parks initiative, offering new gathering spaces and restored stream access.

The Razorback Greenway expanded with two new bridges and trail sections, improving connectivity for cyclists and pedestrians. Significant bond-funded projects also moved forward, including the construction of new ballfields at Phillips Park and the A Street Promenade. Ground was broken for the 8th Street Gateway Park, a 100-acre site set

to become the "Central Park" of Bentonville, and construction began on the new Bentonville Adult Recreation Center, slated to open in 2026.

In response to the growing interest in sustainable transportation, this department launched an E-Bike Rebate Program with the funding assistance of the Walmart and Walton Family Foundations, which has currently distributed over 470 e-bikes and over \$220,000 in rebates to residents from purchases at Bentonville-based bike shops.

Our Parks Maintenance Team worked tirelessly, preparing fields, planting trees, maintaining gardens, and addressing challenges such as the aftermath of the May tornado. They also created a stunning holiday light display with over 420,000 light bulbs, drawing thousands to downtown Bentonville for the Lighting of the Square event, which saw over 250,000 visitors throughout the season,

In 2024, millions of people visited our trails and facilities, showing just how important these spaces are for both our community's well-being and the local economy. It's a great reminder that the best way to support and appreciate our parks and trails is simply by using them. Looking ahead to 2025, this team is excited for another year of success and the continued chance to serve and improve our community through the work they do in Parks and Recreation.

Public safety remains a top priority for Bentonville, and the Bentonville Police Department exemplifies this commitment by providing exceptional service to the community.

In 2024, the Telecommunications Division handled over 113,000 calls, including 50,386 police calls and 7,696 fire/EMS calls. Following severe storm damage in May, the division seamlessly transitioned to a new radio system developed over two years, ensuring continued emergency support.

The department assigned extra personnel to support over 107 special events, including First Fridays, races, church security, and sporting events. Community engagement programs, such as the Citizen's Police Academy and National Night Out, also experienced strong participation.

In June, the department hosted the International Police Mountain Bike Association conference, welcoming 250 attendees from 32 states and countries.

The records unit expanded by 275 square feet, improving the management of more than 6,600 reports and 485 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests for 2024. In addition, the department is working towards earning accreditation from CALEA (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies), with plans to achieve it by Spring 2026.

Crime statistics revealed a reduction in both violent and non-violent crimes, with decreases of 22.18% and 11.35%, respectively, and no alarming trends. The department also investigated 2,061 accidents and conducted 11,534 traffic stops to maintain roadway safety.

In 2024, the department saw several significant promotions, including three officers elevated to Captain, three to Lieutenant, and five to Sergeant, along with advancements in the Emergency Communication Center.

Committed to professional development, the department continues to offer training opportunities, such as the FBI Law Enforcement Executive Development Association leadership program also known as LEEDA.

In 2024, two major police department projects funded by the 2021 bond extension were completed: the upgrade of the public safety radio system and the construction of a new law enforcement training range. The radio upgrade improves communication and coordination during emergencies, while the training range offers a state-of-the-art facility for skill development and realistic scenario-based training. Both projects are valuable investments in improving law enforcement safety, efficiency, and preparedness, and the department is grateful to the public for their support of these projects.

The department collaborates closely with federal partners, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), and US Marshals, to tackle complex issues like drug enforcement and cybercrime. Federal and state grants have funded new initiatives, including a bomb detection K9, a Bomb Response/Command Vehicle, and electric vehicles, boosting both safety and sustainability. These grants, totaling over \$1 million, have been crucial in enhancing the department's capabilities and improving its response to high-risk situations.

Bentonville Animal Services has made remarkable strides in just two years. What began without a dedicated facility is now a fully operational animal services and adoption center, operating under the Bentonville Police Department. The department provides adoption, education, and advocacy services throughout the year.

The facility is staffed by a dedicated team of seven, including a manager, supervisor, and animal services officers. In 2024, the department took in 366 animals, a rise from 308 in 2023, and responded to 2,785 service calls, marking an increase from the previous year. Additionally, 322 animals were microchipped.

For the second year in a row, Bentonville Animal Services has received a generous \$20,000 sponsorship from PetIQ. The department actively promotes pet returns and adoptions through its website and social media platforms. In 2024, 174 pets were reunited with their owners, while 161 found new homes through adoption. Additionally, the

department collaborates with organizations like Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and Big Paws of the Ozarks, Paws & Rec, K9 Luxury Resort and Cool Wag to further its mission.

Staff and volunteers are deeply involved in the community, attending events such as First Fridays, the Bentonville Farmer's Market, and other local gatherings to promote responsible pet ownership and adoption. They also host free microchipping events for Bentonville residents and have introduced a program focused on trapping, neutering, and releasing feral cats.

In 2024, the dedicated volunteer community contributed more than 2,400 service hours to this department. Bentonville Animal Services encourages residents to visit and spend time with the shelter pets. The facility is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday each week.

The Bentonville Fire Department is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life by providing resilient public safety services. Their vision is to be a professional all-risk mitigation and emergency response provider committed to delivering exceptional customer service through diligent preparedness, skillful execution and community involvement.

In 2024, the department handled 13,872 service calls, reflecting an 18% increase from the previous year. This total included 5,331 medical calls, 179 fire responses, 244 hazardous materials incidents, 753 alarm calls and 201 Bike Trail System calls.

In 2024, the Bentonville Fire Department strengthened its operations by adding two key positions: Division Chief of Administration and Training Captain, improving both departmental efficiency and training capabilities. The department logged a total of 55,100 training hours, with 75% of that conducted at the newly completed, bond-funded Training Tower. The expansion and renovation of Fire Station 3 were also completed, providing additional staff housing and support spaces. Additionally, for the first time in 20 years, the department updated its mission and vision statements and core values.

One of the most challenging emergencies in 2024 was the successful extrication of a young child from a vehicle trapped between two dump trucks. This heroic effort was recognized with both the Spirit of Bentonville and High Five awards for outstanding collaboration.

The department also added new vehicles to its fleet, including a fire engine, aerial truck, and a UTV for special responses, along with upgraded Automated External Defibrillators. The completion of the city-wide P25 radio system significantly improved communication capabilities and tornado sirens were upgraded to include remote activation for added safety.

In 2024, Building and Fire Safety issued 1,354 permits valued at more than \$380 million and providing over 7.8 million square feet of space. The group also issued 341 new

residential permits contributing 447 new dwelling units to the city. The department carried out 3,791 life safety inspections and 34 fire investigations. Finally, the team conducted more than 13,000 construction inspections to ensure that building projects meet adopted codes. In a 2024 ISO audit, Bentonville Fire and Safety earned a top 10% ranking in commercial and residential categories. This demonstrates the department's commitment to high safety standards and positions the city among the leaders in building code enforcement.

As we enter 2025, the Bentonville Fire Department remains committed to meeting the needs of all city residents and visitors, ensuring the safety of both newcomers and long-time residents.

After over four years of planning, design, fundraising, and construction, the Bentonville Public Library celebrated the grand opening of its 22,000-square-foot expansion. This new space includes a Youth Library with dedicated areas for children and teens, the Walmart Foundation Community Room (with a 250-person capacity), a Community Hub with study and meeting spaces, a Makerspace and Digital Lab, and upgraded staff areas. The Ribbon Cutting, held on October 30, 2024, marked the 18th anniversary of the original building's dedication. Following the ceremony, over 600 patrons visited the event space to meet 17 community partners who helped make the expansion possible.

Guests were welcomed with book totes featuring the Library's new logo, commemorative coins, bookmarks created in the new Makerspace, and charcuterie boxes from the Bentonville Library Foundation. Attendees had the opportunity to explore the project's timeline and chat with architects, designers, contractors, and representatives from the Illinois River Watershed Partnership, which helped fund the stormwater gardens. Library staff were also on hand to share project details and provide additional context.

The Library's successful expansion was made possible by the support of taxpayers, City leadership, other City departments, the Bentonville Library Foundation, dedicated donors, and many community partners. Even with construction disruptions and temporary closures, the Library continued to provide essential services. Key 2024 statistics include:

- 6,902 new library card sign-ups
- More than 860,000 total checkouts including physical and digital downloads were recorded...BPL's highest circulation ever!
- 495 programs with 31,607 total attendees
- 4,270 Summer Reading Program participants, with 9,937 free summer lunches served by Aramark
- 260 volunteers contributed 6,396 hours, valued at almost \$174,000

Beyond its Main Street location, the Library expanded its reach through book clubs at local assisted living facilities, storytimes at the Community Center, Peel Mansion, and Osage Park, and interactive booths at community events such as Bentonville Connections,

National Night Out, Tinkerfest, Bentonville Together, and the Second Street Pantry holiday giveaway.

In addition to the physical expansion, the Library launched a digital refresh with a new website featuring a modern design and enhanced user interface. This fall, they unveiled new branding, including a logo and color palette that reflect the updated spaces and the Library's central role in the community.

Looking to 2025, the Library is excited for continued engagement, as it remains a vital hub for learning, literacy, discovery, and connection for Bentonville residents.

As I conclude tonight's State of the City presentation, I would be remiss not to take a moment to acknowledge the remarkable resilience and unwavering dedication shown by our City in the wake of the devastating tornadoes that struck Bentonville in May 2024. The challenges posed by the storm were unprecedented, but thanks to the dedication of an incredible city team, volunteers, and the community's unwavering "can do" attitude, the city has shown incredible resolve to recover and continue to thrive.

On the morning of Sunday, May 26th, 2024, our city was hit by the largest natural disaster in over two decades. The tornadoes prompted nearly every city department to immediately cut short their holiday weekend and respond with incredible urgency. The Mayor, along with Department Heads, quickly convened at the Emergency Operations Center to manage the aftermath, demonstrating the coordination and teamwork that would drive our recovery.

Within just 15 hours of the storm, the emergency communications center had handled over 850 9-1-1 calls and nearly 800 non-emergency calls. Despite the storm disrupting the public safety radio system, our team's successful transition to a new radio system, two years in the making, ensured continuous emergency support for Bentonville and surrounding areas. All police and fire emergency personnel available were called in to manage calls and start emergency response protocol.

In the first 48 hours, the Fire Department responded to 150 emergency calls and reported more than 200 locations of damage, including downed power lines and blocked streets. The efforts of both Police and Fire did not stop there, as off-duty personnel continued to assist with volunteer efforts as they could be coordinated outside of regular duties.

Our Bentonville Electric Utility Department (BEUD) faced an unprecedented challenge in restoring power. With over 11,000 meters down, BEUD worked around the clock, restoring 90% of power within five days and 98% within a week. They replaced more than 100 poles, 67 transformers, and thousands of feet of wire, all while coordinating with sister cities and contractors to expedite the restoration process. BEUD had 84 additional personnel from the cities of Conway, Jonesboro, and North Little Rock, Oklahoma Municipal Power Association, and contractors BBC Electric, Hawk Line

Construction, ProTree Service and Arkansas Electric Coop, Inc. The department's quick action and coordination helped bring our city back online in record time. Despite the costs, over \$2.2 million in repairs, their dedication saved the city millions more in avoided damages and service delays.

The Parks and Recreation team displayed unwavering commitment in restoring widespread damage to parks and trails. Park Springs, Town Branch, Austin-Baggett, and Memorial Parks were among the hardest hit, along with the Slaughter Pen Trails. The destruction was profound, affecting both the natural beauty and functionality of these beloved spaces. Thanks to the resilience and dedication of our Parks and Recreation team, the majority of repairs have been completed, though efforts continue to fully restore these areas. While we anticipate much of this work will be finalized in 2025, the reality is that it will take decades for newly planted trees and landscapes to mature and reflect what was lost.

The Water and Sewer crews also played a crucial role, responding to water main and sewer breaks and assisting with debris clearing efforts. Their quick action in setting up a temporary debris collection site and working with contractors saved the city hundreds of thousands of dollars in disposal fees.

Our Compost Facility staff worked relentlessly through 12-hour shifts, 7 days a week, throughout the month of June, helping citizens and contractors with storm debris clean-up. The facility processed over 73,000 cubic yards of green waste, more than three times the usual amount collected in a year. This work continued well into the summer, ensuring that the city remained clean and safe during the long recovery process.

The Street Department in particular played a pivotal role in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Nearly every road in Bentonville was unpassable due to debris, and virtually all traffic signals were rendered inoperable. The dedicated Street Department teams worked tirelessly to clear debris from roads, remove fallen trees, and restore safe passage throughout the city. Their efforts were critical to ensuring that emergency vehicles and recovery teams could access affected areas. In addition to their immediate response, the Street Department continued to work throughout the weeks following the storm, ensuring that all roads were cleared, repaired, and safe for travel. This was a monumental effort that allowed the city to function and begin the recovery process.

Public Works Maintenance crews also joined the effort to clear debris from streets, removing over 40 uprooted trees and assisting with repairs at the cemetery, helping to restore these important public spaces. Human Resources played an essential role by coordinating meals for the workers, feeding 230 people, including city and non-city utility crews, showing the full scope of cooperation across departments.

Legal staff quickly stepped in, ensuring that FEMA compliance contracts were in place and managing insurance claims to facilitate a smooth recovery process. The Utility Billing Department supported resident and business owner insurance claims providing a

verification letter of any outage. The cross-department collaboration, driven by our commitment to the community, made it possible for Bentonville to rebound with strength and resolve.

While recovery continues, the work done by all city departments demonstrates the incredible teamwork and resilience that defines Bentonville. More than 40 projects have been submitted to FEMA for reimbursement, with the city working diligently to secure 75% reimbursement for expenses. Additionally, we are updating our Emergency Response Plan, ensuring that lessons learned from this experience will make us even better prepared for future challenges.

During this event the community's spirit of volunteerism was nothing short of inspiring. Countless individuals stepped up to help their neighbors, offering a helping hand when it was needed most. From organizing food to feed workers and first responders, to providing critical support for organizations working tirelessly to help clear debris, volunteers have been at the heart of Bentonville's recovery. Their selfless dedication and compassion are a beacon of hope for all of us, reminding us that together we are better and can overcome even the toughest challenges.

As we look back on all that's been achieved, let's remember how much our city employees and community members care about Bentonville, and how fortunate we are to be a part of this amazing community.

Their tireless dedication to ensuring the well-being of our community has been the cornerstone of our recovery. Through collaboration, resilience, and a shared commitment to our city, Bentonville continues to not only recover but to grow and thrive.

As I wrap up tonight's State of the City address, I'm filled with both gratitude and excitement for the future of Bentonville. Our city's success is built on meaningful conversations, collaboration, and a shared dedication to enhancing the services and initiatives that improve the lives of our residents. This, truly, is Bentonville's "secret sauce"—the driving force behind our continued growth and progress. I chose the theme "Bentonville Rising: Collaborating for a Brighter Future" for tonight's State of the City address because I firmly believe that within our community lies the knowledge, expertise, and shared determination to move Bentonville forward in extraordinary ways. By coming together, listening to one another, and collaborating, I'm confident we can achieve even greater things and build an even brighter future for our city.

Each person in our community plays a vital role in making Bentonville the vibrant, safe, and thriving place it is today. We are built on the collective determination of those who are dedicated to creating a better city for everyone.

Bentonville is a testament to economic growth and a high quality of life, driven by the dedication of our residents. Looking back on our accomplishments, I'm reminded that progress is never straightforward....if it were easy, it would have already been done. Every

night when I now drive 8th Street to get home, I am reminded of the many amazing accomplishments this City has experienced over the last few years. And, while the path can be challenging, our commitment to overcoming obstacles and moving our City forward remains unwavering. The results from this dedication are easy to see.

As you leave here tonight, know this: The State of our City is strong, our momentum is unwavering, and Bentonville's future has never been brighter. Together, we're creating something truly exceptional.

Thank you all, and may God continue to bless Bentonville, Northwest Arkansas, and the United States of America.

Mayor Stephanie Orman
City of Bentonville