



CITY OF ELY

501 Mill Street Ely, Nevada 89301
City Hall (775) 289-2430
Cityofelynv.gov

State of the City Address by Mayor Nathan Robertson given during the March 14, 2024, City Council Meeting

Citizens of Ely, City Council Members, City Staff and Guests, it is my honor to provide you all this year's State of City address.

To illustrate how far the City has come in the past five years I'd like to provide some figures. I would certainly like to thank City staff who helped me research and compile these figures.

As anyone who owns a business or manages personnel knows, an organization succeeds or fails by the people who work there.

In the past five years the City of Ely has had four City Attorneys, four Building Officials, two Fire Chiefs, and reestablished the position of the City Public Works Director. Among staff ranks we have seen a number of employees come and go. I appreciate each one that has chosen the path of public employment and service. Each of them contributed to the City as an organization and to our community for the time they were with us. I also appreciate those long serving City employees who have provided our community with the benefit of their institutional knowledge and unfailing dedication. We have several employees who have been with us for decades.

After years of no raises or token raises, the City has been able to increase employee wages by more than 11.5% over the past five years. In order to provide the citizens and community with the services required of a City it is critical that we strive to be a fair and competitive employer in our community.

In the past five years the City of Ely has distributed nearly one million dollars to businesses and non-profits in our community. This has been done in the form of grant programs, low interest loans, and, in the case of local non-profits, direct donations. This has been rather unprecedented in the City's history, and I applaud the City Council for their proactive initiatives in offering this kind of assistance. These kinds of programs also require additional attention and work from City staff, and I thank them for their diligence in carrying out the administration of these programs.

The City successfully weathered it's second global pandemic, the first being the Flu Pandemic of 1918 when the City of Ely was only 11 years old.

Regarding our City's infrastructure, quite a bit has happened in the last five years. The City has completed approximately 3,700 feet of waterline upgrades and 3,200 feet of sewer line upgrades.

The City of Ely is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The City has managed to pave or resurface approximately 230 blocks worth of City streets. That figure is in addition to the 250 tons of patch material our City crews use on average annually to address potholes throughout the community. In the past five years the City has bought or completely rebuilt a total of 10 vehicles and pieces of major equipment (including a new ambulance) and begun construction of two buildings that will be used to house some of this equipment.

In support of maintaining and upgrading the City's infrastructure the City of Ely has continued lobbying for assistance from the State and federal governments. This has included various grant programs as well as direct assistance from Congress. I'm pleased to report that these various efforts have garnered the City of Ely over \$13,000,000 in outside funding. This money has funded projects such as the utility and pavement work on Murry Street, park improvements, and continuing work on City Hall. The bulk of those awards are committed for further upgrades to water and sewer lines, needed upgrades to our sewer treatment plant, improvement for pedestrian safety on Campton St, and tools to assist the Sheriff's Office with public safety. In a city our size it is imperative that we leverage what funds we have to bring in other funding opportunities. We will never raise enough local tax dollars to address all of our community's needs. These grants and other outside funding mean that the citizens tax dollars go further than they would otherwise. The City Council and staff have been very forward thinking in pursuing these external funding sources.

In the past five years the City has successfully negotiated seven intergovernmental agreements. It wasn't many years ago that these kinds of negotiations routinely would drag on for months and would frequently end in some kind of legal proceeding. I am pleased to report that the City of Ely enjoys a cooperative and productive relationship with many of our local entities. This ends up producing better services and benefits the citizens we serve.

Financially speaking, the City of Ely is looking better than it has in a long time. I don't believe a city should hoard money, nor do I think it should spend every dime it gets. Our Capital Expenditures account has remained steady as the City has only spent in the neighborhood of what it brings in. This has kept an annual balance in that account in the \$800,000 - \$1,000,000 range; our ending fund balance has remained strong and steady. We should end this fiscal year again with over \$1,000,000 in the general fund. The City has been thoughtful and precise in how it has expended federal assistance funds that were initially distributed during the COVID pandemic, frequently taking public input and reallocating committed funds as needed. An advisory board has been formed to take public input and advise the City of Ely on ways and methods to distribute redevelopment funds which have, for the most part, been sitting unused in our community for many years. Due to White Pine County recently opting out of the guaranteed CTX tax agreement the City's portion of this tax is going to increase this next year by nearly an additional \$1,000,000. As this source of revenue now has the potential to vary quite a bit it will be critically important to make sure a healthy amount of these additional funds be put into rainy day accounts such as budget stabilization and capital expenditures. This recent development offers our community new and exciting opportunities and also new incentives to ensure that our local economy remains healthy and growing.

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In speaking of growth, growth and development can be (and has proven to be) a divisive issue. While many people long for the return of our economic hay-days, there is justifiable concern about how new developments will certainly alter and shape our City. One thing we can be certain of, new growth and development will come. We do not always have a choice over what kinds of new businesses knock on our door; that is the very nature of capitalism. Investors open businesses they feel will make money in sectors they feel they can be competitive in. Will this affect established businesses in our community? Certainly. Is there a possibility that new businesses could have unintended consequences in our community? Without a doubt. Our challenge is to do our best to allow and encourage growth and new business in a way that will preserve the character of our City. We need to decide what aspects we love best about our community and do what we can to adopt policies and safeguards that will maintain the kind of community that we want to live in. Development and growth will come, one way or the other. If we are not proactive and ready it will happen in ways we may regret in the future.

To that end, the City needs to continue to correct and adjust our City codes. There are processes and programs in the City that have not been revised in decades that will need to be brought up to modern standards. Adopting new technologies that make our employees more efficient and effective are investments that the City must make. For example, our business license system needs an overhaul to make the application process more transparent, easier to understand, and easier to administer. Asset management systems and software are needed to help the City make data-based decisions on how to expend funds, systems like a comprehensive GIS system.

I have been honored to serve this past five-year term as the 25th Mayor of Nevada's 6th oldest City. There are exciting opportunities and a lot of work on the horizon.

I'll close with a quote from Cornelius Vanderbilt who once said, "I have always served the public to the best of my ability. Why? Because, like every other man, it is to my interest to do so."

I am grateful for the unfailing service of those in our community who volunteer their time and energy in so many ways. I'd also like to thank the members of the City Council and other public officials we work with. Investing in the various things that benefit our City is an endeavor that pays dividends for ourselves, our families and our neighbors.