

LAKEWOOD STATE OF THE CITY

Feb. 26, 2025 – panel presentation by

***MAYOR TODD ROGERS
CITY MANAGER THADDEUS MCCORMACK &
WATER RESOURCES DIRECTOR DEREK NGUYEN***

MAYOR ROGERS

- Hello everyone. Thank you so much for coming to our annual State of the City event. It's great to see you all...and it means a lot to us to have you join us here today.
- First, I want to say a few things about the video we just saw. CityTV got some great shots in there of so many wonderful and touching things that happened in Lakewood this past year.
- Everything from our community coming out strong to raise a new flag over our Veterans Memorial...to our local kids loving the new park playgrounds we installed...and capping it all off with the 605 All-Star Band parading through Lakewood.
- They really captured some of the special moments that once again made Lakewood a special community this past year. So let's hear it once more for the crew of Lakewood CityTV.
- Those of you who know me, have heard me say something regularly throughout my career on the City Council....and believe it or not, I want to say it again today.
- The number 1 priority of local government is creating and maintaining a safe community.
- Nothing else good can happen in a community if you don't have public safety.
- You need a well-deserved sense of safety for people to feel free to walk around their block at any time of day... to take their dog out...or just to enjoy some fresh air.
- People need that sense of safety to feel good taking their kids to their local park without worrying.
- And people want that sense of safety so they can go out shopping or dining and patronize local businesses and keep the local economy vibrant.
- Living in a safe community is why so many people have moved to Lakewood over the years...and why they have stayed here for generations.
- But we don't live on a fairy tale island in Lakewood. We're part of the busy...crowded...exciting...and sometimes chaotic place that we call Southern California...even if Lakewood does seem like a peaceful, tranquil island most of the time.

- Although we're doing better than most, we do face our share of challenges with public safety here in Lakewood.
- And those challenges got greater over the past few years...just like they did for many communities in California...with a rise in property crimes and a lessening of penalties for those who carried out those crimes.
- Like many of our neighbors, Lakewood saw an increase in crime in 2024.
- But fortunately, we have new tools in 2025 to help us address it.
- At the state level, California voters reinstated tough sentencing rules for those who commit property crimes.
- And at the local level, we now have a District Attorney who has reversed the "soft on crime" approach of his predecessor.
- Our new DA has instituted new prosecution guidelines that have freed up our Sheriff's Department to once again arrest those who commit property crimes...with the expectation that the DA will now actually prosecute those they arrest.
- That's bad news for property criminals...and great news for the rest of us. Who agrees with me on that?
- In Lakewood, we've never just relied on government at higher levels to keep us safe. We do everything we can at the local level.
- And so over this past year...and in the year ahead...we're applying lots of local crime fighting tools here in Lakewood...some traditional and time-tested...some new and innovative.
- We're paying for the maximum amount of Deputy Sheriff patrol time that L.A. County's personnel levels will allow us to have.
- That includes a two-Deputy crime saturation patrol unit that targets areas with an uptick in crime and which made over 450 arrests last year.
- We've also upgraded our growing network of Automated License Plate Reading cameras that spot wanted vehicles with suspects as they are entering Lakewood so our Deputies can pull them over quickly...before they commit any crimes here.
- And we're expanding our rebate program to help residents install video cameras and home security systems. Over 250 residents have used the rebates so far for these systems that deter crime and help law enforcement find criminals.

- Our innovative tools include the use of a Community Prosecutor, who is a Deputy District Attorney with expert prosecutorial experience, who we pay to be assigned to our region to work with our city staff and Lakewood Sheriff's personnel.
- Our Community Prosecutor skillfully uses the legal system to combat gang activity...nuisance properties...and other problems so that we use all the tools we can to protect the quality of life in our community.
- We're actually saying farewell this month to our Community Prosecutor, Kelly Tatman, after 25 years of work with the District Attorney's office, including two very successful years here in Lakewood. Kelly is heading off to practice family law in the private sector, and we wish her well there. Please join me in thanking Kelly for her years of service to Lakewood and to the people of Los Angeles County.
- We look forward to welcoming a new Community Prosecutor in a very short time to replace Kelly, and he or she will have a tough act to follow thanks to Kelly's good work with us. But we will help the new prosecutor fit right in and get started helping to keep Lakewood safe and to maintain our neighborhood quality of life.

=====

- So, how do we develop and choose from these various crime-fighting tools and strategies?
- Well, it starts with having great city staff working on public safety. So I want to thank our Director of Public Safety Josh Yordt and our City Manager Thaddeus McCormack for their devotion to Lakewood's public safety every day they're at work...and often every day of the week...since we end up talking with Josh and Thaddeus a lot on the weekends too. Thank you both for your service to Lakewood.
- That's on the civilian side of things. Where the boots hit the ground of course, I want to thank the men and women of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department who protect us day-in and day-out in Lakewood. Let's show them our appreciation for what they do every day to keep us safe.
- We bring together the leadership of the Lakewood Sheriff's Station and our civilian team once a month to meet with the city council's Public Safety Committee to go over crime trends, discuss new problem areas, and to work through how we can tackle new problems.
- We meet for 2-3 hours at night once a month to hash things out, and it's been very effective for us over the past five or six years that we've been doing it. I'm joined on that Committee by my colleague Council Member Jeff Wood. Thank you Jeff for your work and your dedication.

- All together it's a good team effort here in Lakewood in the service of public safety. Fortunately, we have plenty of successes to talk about in keeping our community as safe as we possibly can, but we will always have our challenges too.
- And one of the biggest right now is homelessness.
- As I have often said, it's not illegal to be homeless, but it is illegal for anyone...including homeless people...to not follow the law and to commit a crime.
- The City of Lakewood is taking a strong, dual approach of carrying out intensive outreach to homeless people in the city...offering services and help in leaving the streets and getting housing...coupled with Sheriff's enforcement to ensure that illegal encampments are removed as quickly as possible AND laws are being followed in order to protect the quality of life for the community as a whole.
- Lakewood's homeless outreach team has succeeded in encouraging dozens of homeless people in Lakewood to accept help and leave the streets over the past two years. But the challenge is great, with many homeless people being resistant to help.
- And the problem has recently gotten worse, with mini-encampments sprouting up behind businesses or in very visible places along sidewalks.
- Here's one recent example...and how our city handled it.
- There was a homeless encampment in the rear alley behind Petco on Lakewood Blvd., which we made the focus of our city team efforts.
- Deputy Sheriffs contacted the homeless people there, found that one had a felony warrant, and started the process to arrest him. He then indicated he was having a medical emergency due to narcotics he had taken the previous day. He was transported to a hospital for treatment...but when he was medically cleared, he went to jail for the warrant.
- The city's Public Safety Officers (or PSOs) offered homeless services to the other individuals, but they refused help. They were then told to quickly gather their items and leave the area.
- PSOs also contacted the manager of Petco regarding the incident to emphasize calling the Sheriff's Station anytime there are homeless congregating in their parking lot.
- They were also successful in having the manager sign a Letter of Agency (which allows the Sheriff's Department to enforce trespassing on behalf of a business during non-business hours).
- Lakewood will continue to carry out actions like that. We're being as active as we can in addressing homelessness in our city. Unfortunately, the solution is not as simple as some people would like, because we of course need to follow the law and the limitations it places on us.

- But we're doing everything we can to maintain the quality of life for our overall community while we also offer help and encourage homeless people to accept it.
- We hope that the message begins to spread that Lakewood is not a place to set up an encampment and hope to comfortably stay for long. We will offer you help, but if you don't accept it...and the owner of the property doesn't want you there...we will enforce the law and get you to move.
- As I said, this is not an easy problem to solve. But we're committed on the City Council to doing everything we can to make progress on this problem as part of our overall work to keep Lakewood a good place to live and work...and a safe place to live and work.

=====

- Another key partner of ours in keeping Lakewood safe is the Los Angeles County Fire Department.
- Lakewood is fortunate to be served by 48 Fire Department personnel staffing our three fire stations 24 hours a day.
- Last year, they responded to an amazing 14,000 calls for emergency service in Lakewood, including medical emergencies...car accidents with injuries...residential and commercial fires...and other incidents.
- From our Award of Valor luncheons over the years, we have seen example after example of our Fire personnel saving lives in Lakewood, and we are extremely appreciative for their skilled training and their service.
- And this past month, that skilled training and dedication to service came into play even more as our Fire personnel had to mobilize county-wide and do all that they could to combat the two most destructive wildfires our county has ever seen, which happened during gale and hurricane force winds.
- Thousands of homes were burned to the ground and 29 people lost their lives...but even more homes and more lives would have been lost without the courageous and sustained efforts of our Los Angeles County firefighters.
- Can I ask our firefighters here today to please stand...and can I ask everyone to join me in giving a well-deserved round of applause to the men and women who protect and serve us with the Los Angeles County Fire Department.

=====

- I'd like to make a transition now from keeping us safe in Lakewood...to having fun in Lakewood.
- And that means talking about our recreation and community services programs.
- In the Annual Report video, you saw some great examples of the good work...and the fun work...happening in our Recreation & Community Services Department.
- Everything from new playgrounds for kids....Special Olympics and Adaptive Recreation which have been a part of our city for nearly 40 years...programs for seniors...and lots of opportunities for residents to come together and enjoy life in Lakewood. That includes community events the city organizes like the Pan Am Fiesta...the Block Party...Concerts in the Park...Fest of All...and the Holiday Tree Lighting...and many more.
- Our recreation staff also organizes and supports hundreds of Lakewood residents in volunteering to help their neighbors in need. That's a key part of what makes Lakewood a strong, caring community.
- Let's hear it for all our city staff...and our community volunteers...for everything they do to keep life in Lakewood fun and meaningful.
- Now, for the next part of our program, I'd like to bring up our esteemed and always entertaining city manager, Thaddeus McCormack.

=====

THADDEUS MCCORMACK

- Thank you Mayor Rogers. I'll be sure to let my wife know that at the office I'm considered esteemed and entertaining. She has a few other adjectives that she prefers to use, but I like those two.
- So being esteemed and entertaining, I'm here to talk about another E word...and that's the economy of Lakewood.
- As many of you know, we have what we call the "6% Challenge" in Lakewood. And that's the fact that only 6% of our land is devoted to commerce...a very small amount for a city...because we're a largely residential city...which of course has its benefits.
- But it also means we're not going to have the number of new business openings you might see every year in other cities.
- But despite that challenge, Lakewood remains an attractive place for many business owners and entrepreneurs to locate in and invest their time, money, hard work and talent. And, at the

city, we work hard to make their new construction or renovation go as smoothly and quickly as possible.

- This past year saw a notable new opening with “Sender One” in the former Office Max across the street from Lakewood Center on Lakewood Blvd. Sender One provides everything from first-time wall climbing experiences for youth and families looking for a fun time...to challenging practice areas for climbing enthusiasts.
- By the way, we’re very pleased that the owner of Sender One has praised Lakewood’s business-friendly approach, highlighting the support she received throughout the process of obtaining permits...and saying that unlike her experience in other cities, Lakewood staff provided hands-on guidance and made the process seamless and efficient. That’s what we like to hear and how we want to foster a welcoming environment for businesses.
- This coming year, we’ll see the opening of “Big Blue Swim School” in the former Hometown Buffet on Candlewood Street. The company has 250 locations nationwide where they teach children to swim, with their secret being water that is always 90 degrees and always shallow, making lessons comfortable and safe.
- While these two businesses are not the traditional kind you would see at or near a shopping mall, they are the new kinds of “experiential attractions” that shopping malls nationwide are now looking for to bring in customers and families who will end up dining and shopping elsewhere on the property. So we’re pleased to see these businesses choosing to locate in Lakewood at or near our large regional mall.
- There’s another notable economic development being built right now in Lakewood and that’s “The Drive”—a large, four-building commercial project on Carson Street at Obispo Avenue, just east of Walmart. This is the biggest commercial development in Lakewood in 25 years. It’s expected to house medical and professional offices along with retail shops and bring about 200 jobs to our city.
- Those are the big projects. But we had plenty of small and medium sized projects too. This past year, we issued a total of 4,700 construction permits for commercial and residential work -- the second highest number in 17 years.
- So, besides our limited commercial real estate space, what other challenges do we face? And what strengths and opportunities do we have?
- Well, on the challenging side, our large retail sector, including our regional shopping mall, faces the same Internet sales challenge that retail does in every city.
- The sales tax from online sales goes to the city that has the warehouse where the goods are shipped from, as opposed to where the transaction is conducted as is with brick and mortar stores. So this transition to online sales has had an impact on our sales tax.

- That's one of the reasons the city sought a local sales tax a few years ago now, because those sales tax dollars now stay in Lakewood, even for online sales.
- And that folds in to one of our corresponding strengths, which is we have a densely populated community of single-family, middle-income households who buy things online, but also who provide a large customer base for potential brick and mortar businesses here in Lakewood.
- And we're a retail destination for the residents of many nearby cities...which is tens of thousands of additional customers. We're also strategically located near a lot of economic and transportation hubs. And we have a well-educated, mobile workforce.
- We're at the tail end right now of wrapping up our first-ever Economic Development Strategic Plan... crafted with the help of a local, economic development consulting firm.
- I've just given you a taste of some of its findings. In the near future, we'll finalize the report and be publicizing it to you...along with the recommendations that we're going to pursue to invigorate our city economy. So stay tuned for that in 2025.
- Any economic development plan of course needs to include a focus on infrastructure as well.
- You can't expect to attract businesses if you don't have smooth streets, reliable utilities, and robust infrastructure.
- Well, fortunately that's one area where Lakewood excels.
- I think we all know that Lakewood is known for its smooth streets. We love that reputation, but we don't rest on our laurels. And so this coming year, we're embarking on a major \$15 million repaving program to make sure we continue our tradition of having some of the best...if not THE BEST...roads in the region.
- And we're in the middle right now of the biggest sidewalk repair program in our city's history...spending \$5 million to repair or replace over a half-million square feet of sidewalks over a three year period.
- We're modernizing our traffic signals as well, with new state-of-the-art signals at 12 of the busiest intersections in town that will make traffic flow more easily and safely.
- There's one other key area of infrastructure that Lakewood is proud of...but it's an area most people never think about...until there's a problem. And our goal is to make sure a problem never happens in that area. And that's with water.
- So here to tell you about one of Lakewood's best kept infrastructure secrets is our Director of Water Resources, Dr. Derek Nguyen.

=====

DR. DEREK NGUYEN

- Thank you, Thaddeus. It has been said that, "Water is life...and it is the driving force of civilization."
- As such, it's not surprising... that water has played an important role in the development and growth of our community of Lakewood too.
- For over 70 years, the Lakewood city water system has relied 100% on groundwater from aquifers deep beneath our feet.
- Having access to this high quality, local groundwater protects us from the uncertainties of imported water from Northern California and the Colorado River, which are both subject to weather-patterns, regulatory cutbacks, and much higher costs.
- Over the years, Lakewood has acquired more groundwater pumping rights than we now typically use in an average year, thanks to our conservation efforts, thus securing our long-term needs.
- Today, our city Water Resources Department operates and maintains over 180 miles of pipelines, 11 wells, 9 reservoirs and 15 booster pumps.
- Our infrastructure serves over 60,000 Lakewood customers, supplying over 6 million gallons per day of high-quality drinking water, 365 days a year.
- We strive to find every possible way to maintain efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- For example, since we are fortunate to have more pumping rights than we need each year, we lease out our surplus water rights to nearby systems, that need the water, such as Cerritos, Compton and Whittier, allowing them to pump more groundwater, which provides revenue to the Lakewood water system.
- Our wells have more capacity than we need, so we pump groundwater to Long Beach, which also provides additional revenue to the Lakewood water system.
- We use that revenue for two key purposes.
- First...to keep our water rates just as low as possible.
- And second...to reinvest in our infrastructure by keeping it in top shape and enhancing its capacity for the future.

- For example, last year, we completed a new water treatment plant, that now produces over a million gallons of water per day...roughly 16% of our average daily usage.
- We also replaced 2 miles of aging pipelines to ensure our distribution system remains robust and reliable.
- This year, we will drill a new high capacity well, capable of producing another 3 million gallons of water per day, further enhancing our overall capacity.
- We are expanding our leak detection system throughout the city, to forewarn us, of potential leaks, so repairs can be made promptly, before they turn, into disruptive main breaks.
- We stay vigilant for emerging contaminants, which we know can threaten any water supply. As regulations become more stringent, new contaminants are being identified statewide and we need to be prepared, to take action should those contaminants, are detected locally.
- Fortunately, we have the support of our City Council to provide the necessary resources, to ensure that our water system remains robust and that our water quality and supply are safe and secured.
- While 75% of the city's territory is served by our own Water Department, the remaining 25% of Lakewood, east of the San Gabriel River, is served by a private water company, since before Lakewood even became a city. That system is owned by the Golden State Water Company.
- Golden State is an investor-owned utility. They do need to make a profit and have other costs that we do not have as a city. Their rates tend to be higher relative to the city system, but they are regulated by the California Public Utilities Commission.
- At the city, we advocate on behalf of our residents with the PUC, to keep their water rates as low as reasonable and we stay in regular touch with Golden State. We also have an interconnection with them, in case of an emergency with our system or theirs.
- We have a Council Member from the eastern portion of Lakewood, that's...Vice Mayor Cassandra Chase, who sits on the City Council's Water Resources Committee and has studied water extensively, so that she can be a strong advocate for our residents who are served by Golden State.
- In Lakewood, we understand that our water system is more than just infrastructure. It's a system that relies, on the dedication of our staff and our council leadership for excellence, tradition and legacy. Our water system isn't just about providing water, it's also about community, continuity and care.
- We are proud to have a Department, that...not only keeps our water system, running well and reliably....but also, maximizes efficiency, forward thinking and sound planning.

- We are proud to be responsible for maintaining, one of the key pieces of our community's infrastructure, which has served us well in the past...and that we intend and are committed to keeping it, in great shape to serve our community of Lakewood for many generations to come.
- We appreciate your listening and thank you for your time.

=====

MAYOR ROGERS

- Thank you Derek...thank you Thaddeus...and thank you to everyone for coming out today to hear about the State of our City as we put a bow on what was a busy year of 2024 and enter into an even busier year of 2025.
- On the City Council, we value the role that each and every one of you here today play in Lakewood...and we look forward to working with you...together...as we do everything we can to keep Lakewood a great place to live, work and visit...now and into the future.
- Thank you all, and have a great afternoon.