



Mayor Mike Thoms

Annual State of the City Address – January 11th, 2021

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the Rock Island Kiwanis and Rotary clubs for hosting the annual State of the City address. It is my honor to serve the citizens of Rock Island as Mayor. I would like to thank all the City employees, our elected officials and 140 plus citizens representing more than 25 various boards and commissions that help set and implement the direction of the City.

This last year was a challenging year to say the least. Covid-19 has changed our world, as we had known it. Many have lost their loved ones, people lost their jobs, some business owners lost their income and some have lost their dreams, building owners lost their rent, many Rock Islanders began remote working from their homes, our children added "remote learning" to their vocabulary and the City lost a lot of revenue.

We were looking at a 6 plus percent property tax rate increase, but we heard you, and we cut our expenses even further to get us to NO property tax rate increase. We will be operating with less employees than we had in 2019, and management and labor have worked together to keep personnel cost increases to a minimum. We will continue to work on getting back to normal, or at least our new normal, but it will take time to make up for what we have lost.

But I do know that Rock Island Residents are Resilient.

Now let me tell you about the positive things that have happened in our City in 2020. Let me start by giving you a look at what has happen within the different departments.

Our Park and Recreation Department was faced with the tough choice of either shutting down facilities such as the Rock Island Fitness and Activity Center or adapting to the new Covid-19 rules regarding attendance and social distancing and staying open. With 62% of the department's budget coming from user fees, so you could imagine how hard hit their budget would have been during last year's pandemic. So they were able to make significant changes and ran over 80 programs with over 5,500 participants. They created 40 new outdoor fitness classes and added 25 new, virtual fitness classes, and held 15 new sports clinics and camps, all the while keeping the participants and themselves Covid safe. Our two golf courses were open and were financially self sustaining. We continued the renovations to Douglas Park with almost \$1 million invested, and \$300,000 invested at Hauberg Center and climbing all in grants and private dollars.

White Water Junction was able to adapt its procedures for the summer and was the only local outdoor municipal pool to open this past summer.

The Martin Luther King Center made some adjustments due to Covid-19 also. When the school district implemented remote learning, the Center fulfilled the need for kids to have a place to be and able to log-in and learn with our staff educators being on hand to assist so parents could go to work and not have to be burdened with the extra cost of daycare options. We all should feel a sense of pride for the staff and board of the King Center for providing the support, nourishment, encouragement and engagement that kids really needed during the many phases of Covid.

Another big change they made was their annual Thanksgiving dinner. MLK served a record number of meals this past year, with over 3,000 meals distributed by either curbside or delivery service. This was no easy task. It required over 100 volunteers and help from a number of other organizations, both with financial and in kind donations from Hill & Valley, Unity Point and many others. A month later, the King Center, with help from Royal Neighbors of America, Unity Point and many other individuals, provided a record number of 500 kids and 200 families with Christmas gifts. The Center was able to gain many lasting friends and supporters this year because of these changes.

There is no doubt that the Martin Luther King Center creates community leaders. Their Board Chair, Tia Edwards, was a "King Center Kid" growing up and is now the Dean at Edison Jr. High in Rock Island and is a leader in the community. The community support from the King Center lets the kids and their families know that they are cared for and respected and that they have an incredible future ahead and that we are here for them.

The Police Department faced a number of really unique challenges in the past year, including dealing with and enforcing of the new 2020 Covid mandates. Being on the front line when dealing with the public during a pandemic has caused a shortage of staff and overtime due to the need to quarantine personnel who were exposed. Through all this, along with their normal every day duties, the men and woman of the Police Department never wavered in their commitment to the City. Even though their annual ceremony had to be postponed to 2021, the Knights of Columbus awarded Patrol Officer Zack Costas as their 2020 Police Officer of the Year for his service to the residents of Rock Island.

Like the Police Department, the Fire Department also faced unprecedented Covid related challenges this past year. Along with a high level of calls for service this past year partially due to the pandemic, the members completed a new Resiliency for First Responders course, continued the child car seat education and installation program, continued to partner with the Red Cross for the "Sound the Alarm" campaign and installed free smoke alarms in many Rock Island homes. Community outreach to train citizens in CPR (prior to Covid) was given and all department Paramedics recertified their Cardiac Life Support training. They also received a Federal grant for Personal Protective Equipment, received the 2020 EMS Silver Award from the American Heart Association for the Lifeline program for care of patients, and placed a new pumper truck into service. Lieutenant Jason Leemans was selected as the Knights of Columbus Firefighter of the Year.

Our Human Resource Department kept busy implementing the constantly changing Covid policies and overseeing our Wellness Clinic. They were able to keep health insurance premiums to a 1.6% increase, even with medical and drug inflation increasing about 7%.

HR negotiated a new cable/internet franchise agreement with MetroNet High Speed Internet that will start up services in Rock Island in 2021. This will offer another option for Rock Island residents who want to have high-speed, internet, and TV service.

Public Works department has been busy. I am sure everyone remembers the Derecho windstorm in August. Our City workers picked up 20,000 cubic yards of debris from that storm alone. It was a giant task that took several weeks to complete, but they were able to keep overtime costs to a minimum while still providing our regular City services to our residents and businesses.

Rock Island continues to be true to its commitment of being a sustainable and green community. One of the major projects in 2020 was a \$13.8 million dollar performance contract with Johnson Controls. In the water and sewer divisions this will include replacing old, unreliable water meters and rehabbing the waste water aeration tanks. Outdated and inefficient heating and cooling systems will be replaced or rehabbed in City Hall, RIFAC, the Central Fire Station, the Library, and the Martin Luther King Center. City owned streetlights, as well as the lighting in City facilities will be upgraded to LED lighting. The energy savings and reduced maintenance costs of the new equipment will offset much of the replacement costs, resulting in no impact to Rock Island taxpayers. More importantly the City's efforts will result in over 1 million pounds in saved CO2 emissions in the first two years. This part of the City's effort to ensure that we are taking steps now by reducing our carbon foot print so that the future generations of children in Rock Island will have clean waters, fresh air, and lush parks to play and explore.

A major revenue producing venture was to expand beyond our garbage collection contract with the Rock Island Arsenal and enter into a 10 year agreement to manage and maintain the Arsenal's water filtration plant, traffic signals and street lights. This partnership between the City and the Arsenal will save the Arsenal money and provide additional revenue for the City. It is a win for the City, the Arsenal, and the taxpayers. It's just another example of providing more cost efficient services through partnerships.

Just recently the City also received \$1.4 million grant from FEMA to make repairs at Sunset Marina from the 2019 flood. This work will include replacing the 400 dock and upgrading the electrical infrastructure for the entire marina.

The Library had a ribbon cutting for its new mobile library in January, the "Library 2Go". Timing was good because the mobile library was very useful in creating Wi-Fi hot spots for students and adults needing internet access to help with E-learning during the Pandemic. We also used it to help us promote the 2020 Census this past year.

In facing the unexpected challenges of 2020, the Library launched three new programs last year; "Homebound" delivery service, a new library mobile app, and an electronic library "E-card" to allow for touch less registration. These new innovative changes helped with remote usage during the pandemic. Instead of shutting down due to Covid, they created curbside pick-up and drop off.

IT was kept especially busy due to Covid-19. Along with their usual tasks, they installed and maintained several new cameras throughout the City. It has been an unprecedented time in our history. Many of our employees worked from home for awhile this past year when we closed some of our buildings to the public, all in an effort to social distance properly and keep our residents and our staff safe. Our IT Department was able to help many of our staff members obtain the needed set ups to accomplish this.

The Finance Department worked diligently to find ways to save money this past year and was able to refinance and consolidate some bonds to reduce interest cost. Even with the loss of expected revenue, they were able to not only stay within an ever changing budget for 2020 due in part to a \$1.6M CURE reimbursement, but also to present a balanced budget for CY 2021. A goal of the City Council was to

maintain between 60 to 90 days of cash in reserves and we are proud to say that goal was and is being met. The City is still in good financial health, even with the loss of revenue, because of our hiring freeze, reducing or delaying some of our capital improvement projects and other budget cuts. Through this all, we were able to increase our credit rating from an A- to an A+ stable with S&P.

In 2020, the City succeeded in getting downtown Rock Island listed on the national Register of Historic Places. This is especially significant because it makes State and Federal historic property tax credits available for commercial rehabilitation projects. We expect this incentive to drive additional investment in the downtown.

During this difficult time, the City was able to assist residents in need. Through our housing programs, we were able to assist 48 residents with housing rehab projects. This is significantly more than our annual goal of assisting 35 residents and the highest number we have served in more than a decade.

Lastly, the CED staff completed a long overdue update of the City's Zoning Code. This update has been in the works for the past several years and will simplify the code, which will ensure that future developments can proceed smoothly.

With our Community Economic Department, one of the biggest changes was implementing a three-year contract with DARI (Development Association of Rock Island) to assist the City with economic development throughout the City. This is another example of private and public partnerships that can leverage private dollars with public dollars and create more economic investment in the City. With this new partnership, DARI has hired two new employees to specifically work in tandem with our City staff to enhance economic development throughout Rock Island.

When the Federal and State Governments started coming out with different grants and loan programs due to Covid, we were looking for a way to help businesses. The City of Moline gave us a lead on a software platform we named "Rock Island Forward". This program allows a business to log in, enter some data specific to their business and it shows them what City, State and Federal programs they are eligible for, along with the appropriate forms needed for submission. Using this system, the City and DARI awarded over \$330,000 in grants in two phases to 87 Rock Island businesses.

The State has awarded almost \$1.4 million in Business Interruption Grant (BIG) dollars to directly to 30 Rock Island businesses in two rounds, along with over \$578,000 to 22 childcare providers in Rock Island. 7 businesses collectively received a \$86,000 grant from the "Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act" rapid response services to assist the businesses to prevent unemployment, not to mention Payroll Protection Program and Personal Protection Equipment funds.

2020 was a challenging year, but we saw many of our restaurants, bars and businesses rethink their business plans and adapt to the circumstances. Carry out became customary and outdoor dining areas were added or expanded at many facilities. Daiquiris, Martinis and Margaritas were being packaged "to go".

Business growth did not stop during the pandemic, and our future is about growth!! 10 new businesses opened in Rock Island and 15 businesses have either started or are planning expansions totaling 70 million which includes projects like the \$17 million dollar expansion at GTI, and several other potential new projects are in the pipeline. We are looking at a \$9.7 million investment in our downtown in 2021 and will be investing \$3.9 million of TIF funds towards these projects, of which \$1.5 million will be

invested in downtown infrastructure like streetscaping, lighting, sidewalks, streets and more. We also have formed a Downtown Task Force to help us continue to implement the 2015 Downtown Revitalization Plan and to pursue options to hire a downtown manager to work closely with the Task Force and downtown businesses and property owners.

In summary it has been a challenging year for everyone in many different ways.

Achievements: Our services to the citizens of Rock Island have not changed, City staff and community partners took the leadership that organized a coalition of the QC's for the Census, to do their part and make sure Rock Island receives its fair share of federal dollars that will be locked in for 10 years with the 2020 Census, we balanced the 2020 and 2021 budget, we passed a zero percent property tax rate increase, we improved our credit rating, we gave out grants - not loans, to those businesses that needed help and we gave out tax incentives to help businesses grow or new ones to open in Rock Island, and executed and created \$70 million of opportunity in 2020 into 2021.

I want to thank the citizens for the trust you have given me and the City Council. I would like to thank the City employees for making the impossible, possible. I really believe that the residents of Rock Island and the whole Quad Cities are RESILANT and as we continue to work together, we will continue to grow.

This Town Rocks Resilience.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Thoms". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Thoms".

Mike Thoms
Mayor
City of Rock Island