

STATE OF THE CITY

MAYOR BRAD CAVANAGH

FALL 2022



Thank you so much for joining me here today for Dubuque's 2022 State of the City address. It is truly an honor to be here with you.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to take a few moments to thank some important people.

First, I want to thank our entire City of Dubuque staff for the essential services they provide every single day. I have been continually impressed with the professionalism, expertise, and dedication of these incredible public servants. The same goes for all those who serve on the many boards and commissions in our City.

I especially want to thank some key City of Dubuque staff members who have helped me gather the information I will share with you today, and with whom I work particularly closely as Mayor. Specifically, thank you to our Public Information Officer Randy Gehl, Assistant City Manager Cori Burbach, City Manager Mike Van Milligen, City Clerk Adrienne Breitfelder, City Attorney Crenna Brumwell, and Director of Strategic Partnerships Teri Goodmann.

Our city is represented by elected representatives at all levels of government, and I want to be sure to offer thanks to them, as well.

First and foremost, I want to thank my City Council colleagues, Ric Jones, David Resnick, Susan Farber, Laura Roussell, Danny Sprank, and Katy Wethal for their dedicated public service, as well

as my esteemed predecessor, Mayor Roy Buol for his many years of service.

At a time in our history when political cooperation is rare and civil discourse and decency sometimes seem like forgotten arts, I am abundantly thankful for these true public servants who demonstrate respect, civility, and thoughtfulness. Please join me in thanking them for their service.

I am also thankful for the partnerships we share with our elected officials in Dubuque County Government, our local State Legislators, and our elected officials serving us in our nation's capital. Each of these partnerships are key to all progress we have made over the years and will make in the future here in Dubuque.

Of course, anyone who dedicates time to their community always has those who are there through it all, the good times and the tough times, to serve as the foundation upon which we stand. To my wife Jennifer, my boys Sam and Andrew, my extended family and those I am lucky to call friends, thank you for being a part of my life as I continue on this fantastic journey of service.

Finally, I want to thank you and all residents of Dubuque for the opportunity of serving as your mayor, and for making this such a wonderful place to call home.

Given the situation of the past few years, it has been a while since we have held a State of the City event in-person here in Dubuque. Since we may be a bit out of

practice, I thought I would set the stage to let everyone know what this speech is, and what it isn't.

Let's start with what it isn't. I think it may be natural when we hear "State of the City" to immediately conjure up visions of our country's annual State of the Union address, but I want to be sure to end those illusions right from the start!

I have worked hard in preparing these remarks to avoid making this a political event.

This also isn't a recounting of all the accomplishments of "my administration". I hope we all understand here in Dubuque that what we accomplish, we accomplish together. We do it through partnerships and beyond political affiliations.

I happen to be one member, with one vote, of an elected body of seven public servants, and we all work with everyone in the community to make Dubuque the best place it can be.

I intend to share several items with you today. I would like to recount what we have accomplished this past year. We have had many successes that need to be celebrated and lifted up for all to see. I would also like us to look ahead. There are many challenges and opportunities on the horizon, and we are making plans to address each of these head-on.

I hope these remarks can leave everyone with a sense of accomplishment and pride in our successes, a sense of purpose and resolve to tackle the issues ahead of us, and a sense of inspiration to continue to dream of the Dubuque we all want to create for generations to come.

I want to begin with a look back at where we have been.

President Harry Truman once commented that, "The next generation never learns anything from the previous one, until it's brought home with a hammer. I've wondered why the next generation can't profit from the generation before, but they never do until they get knocked in the head by experience."

I worry sometimes that this is all too true. We can point to many examples of history repeating itself in all the ways we would rather not see. We saw a pandemic unfold in surprisingly familiar ways after failing to heed lessons from 100 years ago. We see wars flare up with surprisingly familiar foes. And we see frightening political trends that feel like steps backward rather than forward.

I'm comforted, though, by the fact that President Truman's statement isn't an absolute truth. I do think it can be more difficult to remember the history we have only read in books or watched on screens. But when it comes to the history of our city, we have a better opportunity to learn and remember given that our local historians are right here with us. We don't have to "stand on the shoulders of giants" as the saying goes. Here at home, we have the chance to walk right beside those giants every day.

"Will the last one leaving Dubuque please turn out the lights?" We all know this line, don't we? It's genuine Dubuque folklore at this point. I did some quick digging and confirmed this was on a t-shirt back in 1981. Not sure it made it on a billboard, though, as I've heard a few times.

The saying may be legendary, and some of us, I know, are growing tired of hearing it. Yet, the pain in Dubuque in the 1980s was very real. With a population loss of nearly 10,000 residents in just over a decade, Dubuque truly was teetering on the verge of collapse.

The solution in these dark times did not

come from a savior riding in on a magic horse. The solution was found from within.

When times got tough in Dubuque, a generation of leaders was born. Dubuquers banded together, created a collective vision, and got to work.

In the decades that followed, they built the Dubuque we all know and love today. They started with the DRA and the Dubuque Greyhound Park, expanded our economic capability with new industrial parks and 6,000 new jobs, reconnected us to our Mississippi River roots through the America's River Project and a new Port of Dubuque, revitalized our Main Street, gave a second life to our Historic Millwork District, and created a Bee Branch Creek Watershed Flood Mitigation Project that has received international acclaim.

The list of Dubuquers and organizations involved in this decades-long effort is enormous. Elected officials, City of Dubuque staff, County, State, and Federal partners, the Dubuque Community School District, The Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce, Greater Dubuque Development Corporation, the DRA, Dubuque Initiatives, local property developers, local businesses, national and international corporations, local non-profits and so many more.

These are the giants, and these leaders still walk beside us today. They have given us an incredible foundation from which to build our own future. We must remember the history they created, because it is this history that points our way forward.

We can also recognize that the efforts of these giants have granted us national attention. I can't even begin to tell you how many people have stopped me in my first nine months as Mayor just to tell me how much they love Dubuque.

There were the filmmakers from New Orleans, New York City, and Toronto who physically pulled me out of crowds at the Julien Dubuque International Film Festival just to tell me how much they love our City.

There were the countless elected officials and city employees from across Iowa at a recent Iowa League of Cities Conference who said things like, "We LOVE Dubuque!", "We take a trip to

Dubuque every year!", and "When can we have this conference in Dubuque, again?"

I've heard the same from other mayors and elected officials from across the country at national conferences, staffers of lawmakers in Washington, DC, and (my favorite so far) a Secret Service officer who stopped me at the US Conference of Mayors meeting right before the Vice President's speech just to say, "Hey, you're from Dubuque? I love that city."

We have something special here...truly special. Make no mistake. We live in a city that people love. We can be truly proud of where we live.

Throughout this past year, we have continued to add to our list of our successes.

Some of the most important successes are those that impact our daily lives as Dubuque residents, such as those that focus on community safety, our roads and infrastructure, and our quality of life.

This year, my City Council Colleagues and I approved a budget, created and recommended by our City staff, that will add seven new firefighters to the ranks of the Dubuque Fire Department and just added a third ambulance to the fleet to improve response times in emergencies.

This budget increased staffing at our 911 Emergency Communications Center, approved a measure to arm all police officers with tasers as another option to minimize harm and injury to both officers and suspects, and continued investment in our security camera network that has helped us earn one of the highest crime clearance rates in the nation.

All these efforts and more will keep our nationally accredited fire and police departments performing at the highest possible level for the people of Dubuque.

We have focused heavily on improving the roads and essential infrastructure that we all use every day.

I'm certain we have all noticed the extensive work on our roadways this summer. The NW Arterial has undergone a massive reconstruction and overlay, and that follows on the heels of the long-awaited opening of the SW Arterial,

a reconstruction of Chavenelle Road, North Cascade road, and other projects along major thoroughfares.

This year, we approved the resurfacing of over 10 miles of streets for the second year in a row, doubling the miles we have been able to complete in years past.

In addition, with the help of our Federal partners in President Biden's administration and in Congress, the City of Dubuque secured a \$2.28 million dollar Raise Grant made possible through the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

With these funds, we can begin designing a 14th Street Overpass that will be essential to travel as train traffic increases in the years ahead, and Chaplain Schmitt Island becomes a destination for our entire community.

Another service that is essential for every modern community is widespread, accessible, and reliable Internet service. Thanks to innovative public-private partnerships, we have continued a community broadband expansion initiative that puts us on pace to connect every home in Dubuque to fiber connections within the next three years.

With the industrial growth we have seen in the last decade and expected growth in the years to come, we have also made critical investments in our aging infrastructure under ground.

Along the Catfish Creek Sanitary Sewer Shed, we are investing in repairs, replacements, and upgrades that will position us for future growth to the South and West, and further eliminate sewer overflows that pollute our environment.

At the same time, we are looking ahead and planning for future growth along the SW Arterial corridor for increased water service and reliability for residential and industrial customers.

Exciting stuff, right? I know everyone loves hearing about roads, water mains and sewers. In all seriousness, though, we all know how important all of this is in our daily lives. Still, let's move on to something a bit more fun.

One of Dubuque's greatest assets is our natural beauty. Our parks, trails, and natural spaces give us places to relax,

rejuvenate, and connect with each other and the outdoors.

This year, after extensive community input and careful planning, we have moved forward with the redevelopment of our beloved Comiskey Park. This historic North End landmark will undergo a long-awaited upgrade, with the installation of a splash pad, new playground equipment, basketball courts, walkway additions and other amenities. We look forward to enjoying all of these in the year ahead.

Another exciting addition was the opening of the pedestrian railroad underpass along the Bee Branch Greenway. With this key trail connection, bikers, walkers, runners, and hikers can now begin their trek along the Mississippi River trails, continue to the Bee Branch Greenway onto the Heritage Trail, and take that trail all the way to our neighbors in Dyersville, or veer onto the NW Arterial Trail all the way to Bergfeld Pond along our new Chavenelle Road Trail.

We know the benefits of investing in parks and trails and natural amenities like this. That is why the City of Dubuque has also prioritized further development of a Comprehensive Parks Master Plan, and further implementation of our Imagine Dubuque Comprehensive Plan and the Chaplain Schmitt Island Master Plan.

We have also experienced success this past year thanks to extensive investments in economic development.

If you're paying attention, you can feel the buzz around Dubuque. There is an excitement in the air, and for the past two summers, early in the month of August, that excitement has a name. The Field of Dreams.

Thanks to decades-long commitment by our partners at Travel Dubuque, the City of Dyersville, Dubuque County Government and many others, an idea that was once a far-off dream has become a reality. The Field of Dreams game has been the most-watched regular season game two years in a row, and the game and its lasting effects have drawn thousands of visitors to our region.

Everywhere I go, people want to talk about the Field of Dreams. This year the City of Dubuque, in partnership

with Dubuque County and the City of Dyersville, made a strategic investment in a permanent stadium at the site. In conjunction with an extensive buildout of a full Field of Dreams complex by Go the Distance Baseball, this investment will generate tens of millions of dollars into our region in the years ahead.

And this isn't the only thing that has people so excited in Dubuque! I have to say, growing up in Dubuque one thing I never expected to see in my wildest dreams was an unending line of modern riverboats docking on our shore every week.

Thanks to our partners at Viking, American Cruise Lines, American Queen, and the Riverboat Twilight, that wild dream is now a reality. On one day this summer there were four boats docked at the same time in the Port of Dubuque, with over 20 busses waiting to take excited passengers on excursions all throughout Dubuque.

This summer was just the beginning. The companies I mentioned are in the process of building more boats and making plans for even more stops in Dubuque in the years ahead. It is truly a new and exciting day on America's River.

At the same time as all these new developments in tourism, we have seen exciting growth in business and industry over the past two years.

On the heels of welcoming Simmons Foods to Dubuque and the nearly 400 jobs they added to our community, we have seen expansion plans announced by Giese Manufacturing, Grand River Medical Group, Betty Jane Candies, Link Hydraulic, McCullough Creative, Klauer Manufacturing, Progressive Processing, Dubuque Screw Products, Tri-State Quality Metals, Green Industrial Supply and more.

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, I'm not sure we expected any growth quite like this, and yet, here we are.

These local businesses and others getting ready to expand and improve deserve our immense gratitude. They keep our local economy strong and position us for future growth.

At the same time, we must recognize and thank our Federal partners for passing two significant pieces of legislation in the American Rescue Plan

Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

It was this legislation, particularly the funds generated by ARPA, that supported 375 small businesses with direct funding through COVID, expanded community broadband connectivity in underserved neighborhoods, that provided funding for hundreds of residents who were unable to afford their utility bills during the pandemic, and kept our arts and cultural venues open.

The arts and culture funding was of particular importance to our community's economic development. Every year we see and experience the benefits the arts bring to Dubuque. Thanks to this assistance in our time of need, we can continue funding and growing arts and cultural programming for years to come.

Our State of Iowa partners also made significant investments in childcare services this past year.

Childcare services, in particular, took a serious hit in recent years. This is why the City of Dubuque has partnered with organizations like Dubuque Initiatives, the Dream Center, and others to expand childcare services in Dubuque.

By exploring funding opportunities through the State of Iowa, also made possible with ARPA funds, our community is working to build a strong childcare foundation to support our workforce needs.

In all the successes and efforts I have mentioned so far, the City of Dubuque has renewed its commitment to ensure progress in our city is equitable. A city that fails to build itself around equity and inclusion is a city guaranteeing its own failure.

This is why the City of Dubuque has adopted an Equitable Poverty Prevention and Reduction Plan, created the Office of Shared Prosperity and Neighborhood Support, and restructured our Office of Equity and Human Rights.

We must not only ensure that we are a welcoming community for ALL Dubuquers. We must actively and measurably create a community where all people are equitably set up to succeed economically, socially, and personally.

As I've outlined here, we have accomplished so much in the past 12-18 months here in Dubuque. Remarkably, we have done this in a city that has the lowest municipal property tax rate in the State of Iowa.

Thanks to fiscal discipline and responsibility, strategic and careful management of our city's debt, our partnership with the DRA, and, of course, people, planning and partnerships, we have been fortunate in our City's ability to ease the tax burden on our residents while still making investments in our future.

So, with all these successes, we must be done, right? It must be time to sit back, relax and enjoy the fruits of our labor. Not even close.

Despite all we have accomplished together, we face significant challenges ahead. We feel the effects of these challenges every day. Workforce shortages, historic inflation, lingering supply chain backups, a nation-wide housing crisis, and lasting political upheaval here and abroad.

These problems may be very real, but we do not need to let them define our destiny as a city. I truly believe we have everything we need right here at home to find solutions.

In order to do that, we need to foster growth. If we want to build a city that draws people in for generations to come, we must focus on increasing our population in the decade ahead. At the very same time, we must continue to improve the quality of life for all who choose to call Dubuque home.

When my City Council colleagues and I met this past August to set our annual goals and priorities, we did so fully aware of the difficult road ahead, and fully committed to success. We established twelve goals and priorities for the year ahead.

We will work toward returning commercial air service, taking the next steps on Chaplain Schmitt Island, retaining and attracting a vital City of Dubuque workforce, implementing the next phases of our Climate Action Plan, modernizing our city's Fire Station location plan, and improving the streets we all use every day.

We will also move ahead with the

Catfish Creek Sanitary Sewer upgrades and our Central Avenue Revitalization Plan. We will work to create a housing incentive policy to solve our housing crisis, continue our fight against poverty, take real steps forward on Five Flags, and review the operational and staffing needs at Sutton Pool so we can ensure this important community amenity is available to everyone.

All these goals and priorities are important, but I will take a moment to highlight a few that warrant particular attention right now. The first is returning commercial air service to the Dubuque Regional Airport.

The Air Service Task Force is led by Molly Grover of the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce and Airport Director Todd Dalsing, and includes City of Dubuque staff, elected officials and many other concerned citizens. This task force has worked tirelessly to return and expand commercial air service options at our airport.

This effort involves continuing negotiations with legacy carriers like American Airlines, United and Delta; pursuing other carriers like low-cost and regional carriers; and advocating for changes in Federal laws that will keep air service in cities like Dubuque in the future.

I've said it before and I'll say it over and over again: The people of Dubuque deserve full connection to the United States by air, road and rail, and we will not rest until that is exactly what we have.

Another top priority for the coming year is implementation of the Chaplain Schmitt Island Master Plan. As you may have seen in the news recently, the City of Dubuque and the DRA, through community input and collaboration, have created a vision for this island that will finally transform it into the Gateway to Iowa it was always meant to be. I am excited to watch this island become the next great transformation along Dubuque's riverfront.

The City Council has also prioritized implementation of our city's Climate Action Plan. We must continue our city's legacy of sustainability at this critical time in the history of our planet. We will progress forward with electrification of city vehicles, advance our efforts in community energy efficiency, and

keep Dubuque on the forefront of sustainability efforts.

One final item of note is housing. As is the case in much of the United States, Dubuque is in the midst of a housing crisis. This crisis leaves far too many Dubuquers struggling to find and afford a safe and secure place to call home.

We simply do not have enough affordable, quality housing. We have already begun to aggressively address this issue through developer incentives and community partnerships. As we look toward our Central Avenue Revitalization, workforce attraction, and other priorities, housing is a key component. We will actively work to address this need as quickly as possible.

We must achieve each of these goals and priorities, and do so always keeping equity in mind for the benefit of all. Achieving these goals will require significant and smart investment.

We will continue to be responsible stewards with our city's tax dollars, and we will carefully consider how any investment will bring our city the return we need.

With that said, there comes a time when investment is critical to the very future of a community. We have arrived at one of those moments, and it's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work... together.

As I bring these remarks to a close, I want to take a moment to ask each of you to consider your role in the years ahead.

One thing I have noticed in all the time I get to spend out in our community is the creeping effects of what I might call the mood of our nation.

It's easy in a national political environment like we see today to become disenchanted with our nation, or our state, and even each other.

Since I made the choice in my life to enter public service, I have come to realize a hard truth. Our democracy in the United States today is in trouble. Whether this sounds obvious to you, or perhaps overblown, what I have seen has convinced me it is true.

This affects us locally. It seeps into our

thinking and muddies our debates about local issues. Throughout the country today we seem to be looking over our shoulder, scanning for enemies to our ideals. Too often, it seems like the only choices available are to attack the ideals or personal character of the other side, or simply avoid that side altogether.

You may be wondering what we can do about that, sitting here in our little corner of the world in Dubuque, Iowa.

I have good news to share with you. I believe the way forward for all of us begins right here at home.

I recently read a book by the celebrated historian, Jon Meacham, entitled "The Soul of America: The Battle for Our Better Angels." Meacham closes this book with several suggestions on how we, as fellow residents of this country, can enlist the "better angels of our nature" to heal our democracy and build true community where we live.

His first suggestion is to enter the arena. Get involved. In your own way, be a part of making your community the best place it can be.

Second, resist tribalism. Community decision-making is not a zero-sum game of total warfare. It involves active listening, compromise, and cooperation. It involves moving beyond our political and social affiliations, and truly getting to know who our neighbors are and how we can build community together.

I have always believed that one of the best ways to do this is to find ways to serve together. When two people from different political parties, different religions, different cultures...name your difference...when two people get together in a united purpose to serve, it helps you recognize you are on the same team.

Find these opportunities. Serve a meal, help with a neighborhood clean-up or tree planting, volunteer at an event, do something for children in need. Serve your own way and as you do recognize a fundamental truth.

We are all Dubuquers. We are on the same team. This city is ours and we carry it forward together.

Another suggestion from Meacham is to respect facts, deploy reason, and find a critical balance. Here is a simple way

to look at this one: Don't get all your information from one place. This city is filled with good ideas from all parts of the political spectrum.

Listen. Discuss. Respectfully debate and strive for real understanding of ideas different than yours. Together, we can find the answers to our toughest questions and solve our biggest problems.

Finally, Meacham reminds us to always keep history in mind. We don't have to get "knocked in the head by experience" as Truman so eloquently put it. We have the history of Dubuque as a guide. Never forget where we have been and what that can teach us.

One final word before we part today. Recently, the City of Dubuque's very own Teri Goodmann earned the Woman of the Year Award from the Telegraph Herald. Such a worthy honor for a truly amazing woman.

At one point in the video showcasing Teri's contributions to our community, Teri said something that had an immediate impact on me. She said, "Don't dream little dreams. They don't inspire people."

Let's keep dreaming, Dubuque, and while we're at it, let's dream big. Then, let's join as one community and make those dreams a reality.

Thank you for joining me here today. May God bless you and may God bless the great City of Dubuque.

Thank you.