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Nicolas A. Farley
Mayor

It's an honor to stand before you today to discuss the state of our city, Salem. As we gather here, I'm reminded of the collective vision and commitment that unites us in our shared goal of building a brighter future for our community. And I thank all of you who have helped our great city in the past year, and the work you will do in the future.

Our staff has undergone some changes. Annette Sola is now our interim city manager. She is working hard and has the full backing of our city. While she is in this role, we have brought on Mr. Travis Sanders as the public works director.

At the heart of our city going forward is our strategic plan—a roadmap that charts the course for our city's future. Rooted in our mission to provide the foundation needed to support the opportunity to thrive, our strategic plan outlines key priorities and initiatives aimed at realizing our collective vision for Salem and where we are headed.

We started the strategic plan with an outside consultant to help us. He had listening sessions for the community to provide feedback, and we held planning sessions with members of our business community, city council, city staff, and council. A summary was provided and a framework for the document you can find on our website was developed.

We took that information and established 5-year goals for the city, and initiatives we wanted to accomplish, and we are having quarterly meetings to see the status updates on those initiatives.

Collectively we decided our organizational values are professionalism, act with integrity, accountability, transparency, positive leadership, proactive, active communication, creativity, and vision. Our mission statement was "to provide the foundation needed to support the opportunity to thrive."

I won't go into every objection but here were the 5-year high level goals:

- Actively pursue and support downtown, commercial, and industrial development within the city.
- Pursue and incentivize residential housing development.
- Plan, design, fund and complete city infrastructure improvements.
- Support and promote quality of life initiatives and activities.
- Improve city-owned facilities and services.
- Improve City-wide aesthetics.

Our Public Works Department has been instrumental in enhancing the infrastructure and livability of Salem. In 2023, they embarked on several crucial initiatives that have left a lasting impact on our community:

Through diligent efforts, our Public Works team repaired curb and gutter areas on Woodland Dr. and Hawthorn Estates Dr., improving safety and aesthetics for residents in these neighborhoods. Additionally, they replaced sidewalks on key stretches of S. Broadway and Little Egypt Lane, enhancing pedestrian accessibility and safety.

Significant investments were made in upgrading essential utilities, including the replacement of a water main on S. Broadway and gas line replacements on Edgewood Rd., Oak Tree, and Shady Lane. These upgrades ensure the reliability and efficiency of our water and gas distribution systems, contributing to the overall resilience of our infrastructure.

We also commend the Salem Police Department for their role in ensuring public safety and security during and after the tornado. The Police Department coordinated road closures, traffic control, and emergency communications, as well as preventing looting and vandalism in affected areas. They also helped with search and rescue operations and provided support to displaced residents.

The Emergency Management Department was instrumental in preparing for and managing the aftermath of the tornado. The Emergency Management Department activated the Emergency Operations Center, issued public alerts and warnings, and facilitated the deployment of local and state resources. They also established shelters, coordinated donations, and assisted with recovery planning.

We also must give a huge thank you to the Public Works Department who helped clean the city up in the aftermath of the tornado. The Public Works Department cleared roads, and repaired infrastructure damaged by the storm. They also collected and disposed of debris and helped residents with curbside pickup of storm-related waste.

These four departments exemplify the dedication and excellence of our city employees, who work hard every day to serve and protect our community. We appreciate their efforts and commend them for their outstanding performance in 2023. Even though we had a huge challenge, it showed what our town is made of!

Our Parks and Recreation Department has been working hard to keep our public spaces beautiful and enjoyable for all. Some of their notable achievements in 2023 include:

- Logged 1027.6 hours on two front deck mowers, ensuring the proper maintenance and appearance of our grassy areas.
- Removed old and installed new fence at dog park, creating a more secure and attractive space for our canine friends and their owners.
- Installed new picnic tables in the park, enhancing the amenities and convenience for our park users.
- Installed new sand volleyball courts, including a new parking lot and lighting, expanding the variety and accessibility of our recreational offerings.

Ensuring the safety and security of our residents is paramount, and our Police Department has taken significant steps to enhance their capabilities and effectiveness:

In a proactive move towards accountability and transparency, our Police Department implemented body cameras for all officers and upgraded in-car camera systems six months before the mandate

was to take effect. These measures not only enhance public trust but also provide valuable evidence and documentation for law enforcement activities.

Recognizing the critical role of technology in emergency response, we've implemented state-of-the-art 911 software. This upgraded software improves dispatch efficiency, enhances communication with first responders, and ensures a rapid and coordinated response to emergencies.

These upgrades underscore our commitment to leveraging technology and best practices to provide the highest level of service and protection to our community. I will continue to put our Police Department among the best in Illinois! We are often complimented for the hard work our diligent officers do every day. We truly have a community police department to be proud of.

We have some exciting projects scheduled for 2024.

As part of our ongoing efforts to maintain and improve our infrastructure, we will install new asphalt on several roads in town, including Jefferson St, College St, Kell St, and Boone St. The total cost of this project is estimated at \$1,308,000 and will be funded by the Capital Improvement Program (CIP).

To ensure the reliability and safety of our natural gas supply, we will replace 2950 feet of 2-inch polyethylene gas main, along with four tie-ins and 26 new services and service lines. This project will improve the efficiency and performance of our gas distribution system, as well as reduce the risk of leaks and damage. The total cost of this project is estimated at \$2,749,150 and will be funded by the Gas Utility Fund.

To promote pedestrian safety and accessibility, we will replace the sidewalk on W. Boone Street from Rt. 37 to College St. This project will address the deteriorated and uneven sections of the sidewalk, as well as comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. The total cost of this project is estimated at \$80,000 and will be funded by the CIP.

We will install a new sewer line on Spruce St and Hamilton St. This project will increase the capacity and functionality of our sewer system, as well as prevent backups and overflows. The total cost of this project is estimated at \$250,000.

To support the development of a new apartment complex on Airport Rd, we will work with the developer to coordinate the installation of new utilities, and an incentive package. This project will help create new residential units, as well as contribute to the economic growth, vitality of our city and is a part of our new strategic plan.

Another major accomplishment that we are proud to share is that we have secured a new grant to demolish at least 26 dilapidated and/or vacant homes in our city. This grant will help us remove blight, improve public safety, and create opportunities for redevelopment. We have identified the properties that are eligible for demolition and will work to complete this project by over the next two years. This is a significant step towards enhancing the quality of life and the attractiveness of our city.

In addition to these infrastructure projects, we are also excited to announce a special event that will showcase our city to the world. As the celestial event of a lifetime approaches join us in witnessing the awe-inspiring Total Solar Eclipse on April 8, 2024. Salem offers a prime viewing location for this spectacular phenomenon. The April 8 eclipse is the last total eclipse over North America until 2044, and it will last twice as long as the 2017 eclipse, with a path nearly twice as wide.

We have planned a variety of activities and events leading up to and during the eclipse. For more information, please visit our website at www.salemeclipse.com. That preceding weekend provides a great opportunity to showcase our town, and your businesses. We've done a lot of planning, and will have people from Illinois Law Enforcement, The National Weather Service, Illinois Department of Emergency Management all in town that weekend. Let's show them what a great town we have.

As we look ahead to 2024, we will continue to build upon these achievements, working collaboratively with our Public Works Department, Police Department, and community partners to ensure a prosperous and resilient future for Salem.

In closing, let us remember that our strategic plan isn't just a document—it's a promise. A promise to ourselves, to our community, and to future generations. It's a promise that we will continue to work tirelessly to provide the foundation needed for every individual in Salem to thrive. Together, let us turn our vision into reality and build a brighter future for our city. Thank you.