

State of the City Mayor Paul Natale

Good morning and welcome to the Commerce City Civic Center. On behalf of the City Council, thank you for being here as we discuss the achievements of the past year and what we are set to accomplish in 2008.



I am here this morning to tell you that the State of Commerce City is strong and getting stronger. We are moving into the future based upon our past successes and we will continue to strive at delivering great customer service to our citizens, businesses and the public that we deal with daily.

Today you will hear about successes in 2007 that illustrate how we have “raised the bar” for public service and quality of life. Building our new Civic Center and improving parks and roads are just a few examples of the projects that will benefit the public safety, health and welfare.

You will hear what we are planning for 2008 by connecting northern and southern areas, integrating and embracing our community diversity, and focusing on our economic vitality by implementing thoughtful and sustainable growth.

A strong City is built on the foundation of a dedicated City Council and staff. We have made great strides to bring both together and focus our limited resources with efficiency. The Council has established better communication with staff by committing to a vision for our future that includes staff input and expertise.

We have agreed as the elected body of this city to put aside whatever differences of opinion we may have and move forward in a united front to bring in new business and residential development. The economic impact of the downturn in housing is the single biggest challenge facing our budget this year, yet we are positive that the momentum has only slowed and will resurge toward the last quarter of this year.

Of course, the City Council and staff cannot do our jobs without a strong community and citizen base. We have the most dedicated group of citizens that I have ever seen; they care about Commerce City and want us to succeed. They have actively participated in our Neighbors to Neighbors meetings, Graffiti Task Force, Immigration Integration Committee, Arts Council and numerous boards and commissions.

In 2007, the City experienced tremendous opportunities and challenges. In the past year, we moved into this building, this



council hired a new city manager, and we welcomed the world to our beautiful city to experience soccer in the state-of-the-art facility next door. Commerce City has earned its place on the international stage and we have a lot more to say.

Our accomplishments as a city have spanned every department. This is not an exhaustive list, but it should give you a sense of what's happening and instill pride in our community.

Completing and moving into the Civic Center

The city has now spent a full year in this beautiful Civic Center. In one of our many firsts, this is the first Civic Center in Colorado to be LEED certified at "Silver." Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) is the standard for green building design, and the Civic Center shows our commitment to the environment and our future.

While it was a large undertaking requiring efforts from all the staff, the move to this building did not disrupt services to our residents and we were successful in keeping the community informed at each stage.

In April 2007, the Colorado Rapids hosted its first home game. The compliments about Commerce City and the stadium began coming and haven't stopped. Our police department, engineering staff and others worked tirelessly with Kroenke Sports and the Rapids to make the experience here a great one.

The world came to town for the MLS All Star Game in July and Commerce City received coverage in at least 133 international publications from Malaysia to Germany.

Commerce City will continue to receive attention regionally, nationally and internationally as our partnership with the Rapids and other organizations grows.

Quiet zones



All's quiet on the railroad front, as Commerce City is the first city in Colorado to implement quiet zones along tracks that run through the community. A quiet zone is a rail crossing at which trains do not have to routinely sound their horns. Two intersections, 72nd Avenue and Highway 2 and Highway 2 and Quebec Street, have already been upgraded to quiet zones at no cost to the city. We are now working with the railroads to implement quiet zones at 10 other intersections.

Keeping things quiet at the crossings enhances our quality of life; however we want to make a lot of noise when it comes to communicating with our citizens and our businesses.

We continue to look for ways to serve our residents and give you the information you need on city services, events and activities; we aim to help you become a part of everything happening here. We have a quarterly publication schedule for City Lights, and publish the Parks and Recreation Activities Guide three times a year. Both magazines are delivered right to residents' mailboxes.

In 2007, our Web site (c3gov.com) added a new section called "In the works" to provide information for ongoing and long-term projects and activities. This section includes project overviews, schedules and funding information.

Last year also saw the initiation of online packets for City Council meetings, allowing you to see the agenda and packet contents before council meetings and study sessions. Effective communication is integral to our continued success in learning what our community needs and wants are.

Software/Systems upgrades

Upgrades in software and systems have improved efficiencies, accountability, and communication. In 2007, the city embarked on a number of efforts to improve record keeping, including enterprise content management. Having electronic records allows staff to easily access information, helping us to work more efficiently and provide better customer service in a timely manner. This project continues into 2008, but progress thus far is notable.

We have also implemented new permitting software, allowing staff to better track and respond to requests.

Fiscal responsibility

All of these efforts contribute to our commitment to fiscal responsibility. As a public entity we need to be aware of expenses and ensure that we are operating at high levels of efficiency and effectiveness. The software upgrades are a part of that. But a lesser known piece is our on-going efforts to cut costs for necessary items, such as insurance without decreasing benefits.

By certifying work procedures with the Colorado Department of Labor, we saved five percent on insurance premiums. With creation of a safety team and adoption of safe practices, we have realized an additional 10 percent in savings on those same premiums. These measures will save the city an estimated \$200,000 or more in 2008.

Parks and Recreation

Programming and services offered by Parks and Recreation help us create a quality community. In 2007, the Recreation Strategic Plan was completed, as well as the master plan for Fairfax Park improvements. We also have finalized a wildlife management plan and completed phase II of Pioneer Park development.

The community will enjoy all that Pioneer Park has to offer with its expanded facilities, which include a fourth baseball field, batting cages, a skate park, basketball courts and a perimeter trail. A spray ground for children is in the works as the final piece to this community showpiece. The skate park just won Westword's "best of" and people are coming from throughout the region to experience the unique park.

Another recreational resource, the Sand Creek Regional Greenway Wetland is now complete, as is the final section of off-street trail within Commerce City.

To help fund these improvements, the city applied for and received Adams County Open Space grants of more than \$800,000 that were used for development of Pioneer Park, a multi-use ball field in Belle Creek and property purchases.

This is a very short list of city accomplishments in 2007. I have not gone into the efforts of economic development to establish a business retention program to further engage our current businesses. There is not time to fully address the hundreds of other programs, services, and activities that the Council and staff are planning.

We are moving and growing and we are committed to doing both responsibly and with the needs of our residents guiding our goals and decisions.

2008 priorities

As you can see, we have accomplished many things in 2007, and as we look to 2008, we are undertaking several initiatives aimed at producing a healthy, safe community that is financially secure, economically diverse and customer-focused on serving you.

The City Council has set several strategic priorities for 2008 and is well on its way to fulfilling its goals. We are and have been working with staff to ensure our priorities and goals are responsive to the community and that our plans and goals align. Here are some of the exciting projects before us now.

Improving city image and community identity

We are committed to improving the city image and enhancing community identity. The Neighborhood Empowerment Team is one that you will be hearing, seeing, and hopefully participating in throughout the year and beyond. This team is dedicated to community-oriented governance – getting you engaged and active in your neighborhood and in your city.

Another effort to improve our image internally and externally is graffiti cleanup; in 2007, we spent \$84,000 on this cleanup. There are multiple layers to the problem and limited solutions, but we are committed to addressing the issue throughout the city. A group of community leaders and staff members are now working to

take back the city from taggers, and we will need your help in this effort.

You may have noticed that many of our council members are actively involved in regional organizations and activities. We are dedicated to giving Commerce City a place and a voice at decision-making tables throughout the metro area. Our council members and staff are ensuring our community's needs are at the forefront of local, regional and state discussions on economics, planning and business.

Promote efficient and enduring transportation

Many of our efforts to promote efficient and enduring transportation systems support, and at times drive, our regional participation and cooperation. The 104th Avenue improvement project is a multi-year project with General Improvement District funding. Thank you, voters in the GID, for approving the bond issue. This project widens 104th to four lanes, enhances our ability to move through the city and also provides an important east/west corridor and direct route to Denver International Airport.

Our proximity to DIA plays a key role in attracting sustainable and unique economic development and we have tremendous opportunity for planned, responsible growth in the E-470 corridor.

Other infrastructure improvements include the intersections of Highway 2 and 88th Avenue and Highway 2 and 96th Avenue. Both projects are designed to ease congestion and improve the safety of those intersections.



TOD or transit-oriented development is a phrase you may have heard. With the northern expansion of FasTracks and plans for a station in Commerce City, we have the opportunity to establish retail and commercial space around the station. This type of development encourages a healthy lifestyle by locating recreational, shopping and living spaces along a mass-transit line, which also provides quick access to medical and dental offices.

Transportation does not simply entail motorized traffic. Efforts to expand the trail system in and

throughout the city continue. One of our commitments is to complete a north/south trail connection within the city and enable you, no matter where you live, to easily reach the Civic Center by riding your bike, jogging, or walking. As you can already see, we are moving the fence back along Highway 2, and in the next few days, we will begin work on the trail itself.

Improve quality of life

The trail system is only one example of our vision to continually improve the quality of life in our city. Council and staff have been working with community leaders and partners to obtain funding for construction of a Boys and Girls Club within the city. There is a definite need for this program, and so far, the Club has received \$170,000 in funding. Club programs are already in place thanks to the cooperation of Adams County School District 14, and the next big step will be construction of a building that will serve as the home of a full-functioning club here.

In 2005, the city conducted a communitywide needs assessment to establish baseline knowledge of residents' needs and desires. We made a commitment to check back with the community, track our progress and see what new areas exist for improvement and topics of interest. We will be doing an update soon. Please participate if you are randomly chosen to receive the survey. This is one means for us to hear from the community, track trends and analyze our progress.

Improving health and safety

The 2005 needs assessment showed that improving health and safety was a priority and it continues to be one. This need includes improving the health of our residents through the trails system and activities, establishing and expanding medical services, and implementing plans to respond to emergencies.

Ensuring financial stability

Ensuring financial stability will continue to be a priority for this City Council. As I mentioned earlier, enterprise content management is a system which enhances our efficiencies, but also helps ensure our financial stability. The effective implementation of technology solutions is imperative in reaching our financial goals. By creating and analyzing reports to target community needs, complaints and concerns, we can use that information to target resources more efficiently and effectively, saving taxpayers money.

As we strive to provide more services through Web-based systems, one service stands out as a tool for helping us meet community needs and track our responsiveness to those needs. The Citizen/Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system will be live and ready to use in June of this year. This system is a tremendous tool which allows you to access government 24/7. It also provides feedback and tracking similar to a UPS package.

Maintain and enhance service delivery

This leads into our next priority, to maintain and enhance service delivery. To meet the needs of the community, we need to know what those needs are so we can provide those services and track our response in meeting those needs.

This council has tasked the city manager with expanding staff training and development to ensure a responsive workforce. We are initiating a customer service training program that all employees will complete, and we are seeking means to ensure internal accountability for Council and staff. We want you to know what we are doing, why, and how.

Annexation of the northern enclave became official on January 1 of this year. We plan to improve infrastructure in and around the annexed area, and will be looking at improving city services there. We embrace our new residents and look forward to their input and participation in city matters.

Last year, Commerce City was named the second fastest-growing suburb in Colorado and the 16th fastest-growing in the United States by Forbes magazine.

To help guide this growth and provide a vision for the future, Commerce City will begin the process of updating the City's Comprehensive Plan this year. This plan will set major policy goals for the next 20-30 years. The Comprehensive Plan will attempt to address many challenges that the city faces, including land use, housing, transportation, economic development, city image, environmental protection and citizen participation. This new plan will serve as the framework for making responsible decisions that reflect the desires of the community.



Commerce City is now rewriting the entire zoning ordinance. The current ordinance was adopted in 1987 and has been amended many times. The new code will create a set of regulations for all aspects of land development, which includes zoning, subdivision regulations, planned developments and all other ordinances that regulate site design and development.

The city is also in the process of rewriting the municipal code. The code was created in the early 1970s and an updated code is needed for today's community. The municipal code provides a framework for enforcing the regulations that make Commerce City a pleasant and enjoyable, "Quality Community for a Lifetime."

Promote economic vitality

All of these priorities tie into our ability to promote economic vitality. I, and the council, would like you to know that we are committed to sustainable growth to ensure our economic viability far into the future.

The Derby project is a fine example of revitalization of the “core city.” It is a critical commercial and residential area that we need to embrace and re-invigorate. Zoning design standards for Derby were approved last year; in 2008 we will focus on several elements of continuing redevelopment, including façade renovation of the Derby Resource Center and street improvements. It is important that we do not neglect this historic part of our city.

This is a good time to thank SunCor Energy, who has been a great neighbor and partner in visualizing the future of Derby.

Another part of the Derby project is revitalizing retail businesses along the 72nd Avenue corridor west to Colorado Boulevard. Staff is working with a consultant on this project, which ties in to the FasTrack station being considered for Commerce City.

The Prairie Gateway will once again be the center of national attention this summer. Commerce City will host the Mile High Music Festival, the largest music festival in Colorado, at Dick’s Sporting Goods Park. And soon you will see groundbreaking as we bring new businesses onto the Prairie Gateway site. While I cannot promise these businesses in 2008, the wheels are turning.

We are also looking into the feasibility of building a 5,000-seat baseball stadium; the city has been approached by a developer to construct a complex that would include a recreation center and additional community ball fields. One of the proposed sites is north of 104th Avenue and west of Highway 2. We will seek public input on this project as it progresses.

I could spend a great deal more time talking about what we are doing and what we are planning, but this gives you an idea of where Commerce City is headed. We are a crown jewel in the Denver Metro Area. It is an amazing time to be in Commerce City and to be a part of the vibrancy which defines us as a community.