

# State of the City Address

Robert Lee, Mayor of Jenks

September 18, 2019

My wife and I moved to Jenks when we were expecting our daughter, who is now almost four years old. We moved here for the same reason so many others do: we have the best schools in the state, and it's clearly a great place for kids to grow up. It's been a joy to begin our journey as a family here in Jenks—a city that immediately made us feel at home. We're expecting our next child - a boy - any minute now. I can't wait to introduce him to all the wonderful things that our city has to offer.

I'm a relatively new mayor to Jenks. I have the good fortune of having moved into this new role at a time when our city is seeing its best days, and I couldn't be more honored to build on our city's success in this role. It's safe to say that Jenks has never been stronger, and it's never been in a better position as we look to the future.

Earlier this year, our city's resolve and resilience were put to the test, with the historic floods that threatened the region. It was impossible to know how bad it would get, but our first responders and city staff sprang into action, working around the clock with our regional partners to prepare for the worst. The Police and Fire Departments worked night and day, monitoring water levels and coordinating our response with regional emergency officials. Our Aquarium was under serious threat from the flood waters, and Aquarium staff spent days on end sandbagging entrances and other important fixtures around the facility. Our Public Works department was a linchpin in our emergency response, risking their safety to keep our roads passable, and making infrastructure repairs as the waters receded. Our City Hall staff coordinated these efforts and communicated with the public. We also had an army of community volunteers who helped fill sandbags and clear storm debris after tornadoes came through town.

The damage from these events was relatively minimal, but the lessons we learned were priceless. One important lesson was that the City of Jenks has an incredibly dedicated and hard-working group of staff and first responders working for us. We also learned how prepared we are to respond to weather events of this nature, and how effective the measures we've put in place since the flooding of 1986 have been.

As all-consuming as the weather events have seemed to be, the City of Jenks has accomplished an enormous amount this year. We recently completed the widening of Main Street. We're working on expanding major intersections in South Jenks, and making improvements to roads throughout the city, with a focus on walkability. We're also working hard on repairing neighborhood infrastructure. We have a plan for much-needed upgrades to our wastewater treatment system, and we're taking steps to begin implementing this plan very soon.

We've continued to make key investments in our police and fire departments. Our Fire Department has new engines, the first they've had in a decade. Our Police Department has new vehicles, and they are now part of the regional SWAT team. We're taking a hard look at a rebuild of our central fire station that will improve response times, and we have plans to build a new and improved animal shelter, with the goal of making Jenks a no-kill city.

We've made many improvements to our parks this year, and the Jenks Chamber of Commerce has expanded its programming at Downtown Commons and in the downtown area, bringing tens of thousands out each year to enjoy our city.

A recent audit of our city's finances confirmed that we are on very secure financial footing. In nearly every category, we are leaps and bounds ahead of most cities. Commercial activity has never been stronger, and we are enjoying record sales tax revenues. This will only become more true, with the recent commitment from Simon Premium Outlets, who are planning to open their next outlet mall in 2021, right here in Jenks.

Just last month, we rolled out our new recycling program, which will divert tons of waste from local landfills every year. Our new recycling program will allow us to be better stewards of our resources, while saving the people of Jenks from higher refuse rates in the long term.

It's been a big year for the Oklahoma Aquarium. They unveiled their new Polynesian Reef exhibit and playground this year, and they captured our imaginations with their inaugural Sharklahoma programming for the month of July. They have a new octopus exhibit in the works, and they're planning new and improved jellyfish and stingray exhibits. We're excited about the Aquarium's partnership with their new sister organization, the Jerusalem Aquarium. Our staff designed the Jerusalem Aquarium, underscoring the fact that the Oklahoma Aquarium is an internationally-recognized facility with global impact. The Aquarium brought nearly 350,000 visitors to Jenks last year alone, proving once again that they are an indispensable cultural and economic driver for the city.

Jenks Public Schools had a great year. Whether it was athletics, the arts, or academics, Jenks students led the way last year in every category, showing folks across the state and across the nation what it means to be a Trojan. We congratulate Dr. Stacey Butterfield, who was named Superintendent of the Year by the Oklahoma Association of School Administrators.

We've made tremendous progress on a GO bond package, with the goal of bringing it to voters this coming April. This will be the first municipal bond that Jenks voters have considered since 2013. The centerpiece of the package will be a widening of South Elm Street, and we're considering other measures that citizens have been asking for, including important infrastructure needs. We're planning a series of community feedback sessions, and look forward to getting your input on what you'd like to accomplish before the citizens decide in April.

Things have never been better in Jenks, and none of it would be possible without our community partners, city staff, city council, and all of those who served our city in the past. As great as Jenks is doing, we know that our best days are ahead of us. Thank you for joining us as we continue that progress.