

Mayor's State of the City Address
February 23, 2009

As I finish my second year as the Mayor of the City of Atwater, I look back and am astonished by the depth and breadth of the accomplishments. This has truly been a banner year. I would like to congratulate everyone involved in achieving these accomplishments and would like to highlight a few of them.

The City of Atwater has established goals and objectives to guide the city in 2009 and the coming years. Some are short term goals and some are multi year goals. The City Council's priority areas of focus are as follows:

Public Safety
Sound Financial Health
Economic Development
Land Use/ Environmental
City Infrastructure
Parks and Recreation focus with youth
Building Organizational capacity, development and continual improvement

I will review each of these areas of focus, highlighting the accomplishments and areas we need to work and grow.

It has been a team effort between City Council, City Staff, City Commissions and Committees in meeting these goals.

Public Safety

Public Safety is made up of primarily the Police and Fire Departments.

- The police have 33 sworn officers, with coverage 24/7. Their response time of less than three minutes when dispatched to a major emergency is outstanding. Due to long term labor agreements, we have been able to retain our highly trained officers in these hard economic times. The Gang Task Force is very active in arresting and prosecuting gang members and local taggers and graffiti artists.
- The City has purchased portable cameras and located them around the city to help eliminate our graffiti problem. One of the major things the Police Department has done this year was to upgrade the 911 dispatch and improve the Information Technology equipment. The State Office of Peace Officer Standards and Training will be evaluating the department in the next two months to highlight the strengths and develop best practices for the department.

- On October 1, 2008, the City Council entered into a three year contract with Cal Fire for fire suppression, establishing a staffing of 4.0 throughout the city. When the City of Atwater operated the local Fire Department, city funds never allowed having continual 4.0 staffing. Best practices recommend the city have 4.0 staffing 24 hours a day seven days a week. The Atwater Firefighter's Association supported the change, enabling career advancement and more opportunity for professional growth.

Sound Financial Health

- In 2005 the City Council, City Manager Wellman and Assistant City Manager adopted a 3 year financial plan. This recovery plan included spending controls and an aggressive Economic Development Program, Succession Planning and reorganization to better utilize employees. The Department and City Staff adhere to the City adopted financial policies. Mr. Wellman and Mr. Feathers established internal service funds that enabled the City to improve our Informational Technology System and Risk Management Program.
- The City does not foresee the need to lay off employees at this time. I am proud to announce that we have a reserve of 3.7 million dollars remaining in the General Fund Reserve at the end of our 2008 Fiscal Year. This is an outstanding accomplishment. I credit the City Council, Mr. Wellman and City Staff in the outstanding job in fiscal management. Given the economy, we know that we have challenges ahead and we must be very careful in our spending and hiring in the coming year. Our on going expenses must be paid for by on going revenue. With the opening of our Regency Shopping Center and the Atwater Market Place, the reduction of sales tax leakage has improved our financial status. The City Council and City Staff must continue to place emphasis on Economic Development and continue to maintain and utilize our established financial policies.

Economic Development

- Economic Development is where we generate revenue. I want to thank the Community for their support in helping us bring the Regency Shopping Center to the City of Atwater. Economic Development and Special Project Director McBride has done an outstanding job in attracting new business to our City. Mr. McBride has been working with our Grants Manager to obtain funding to establish our new Business Park on Wallace Road and install utilities & infrastructure; this will enable us to be shovel ready when perspective businesses would like to build in our Community. We must continue to work towards shovel ready projects even during this economic crisis and we are on the right track. This is crucial for a continuation of Economic Development in the City of Atwater.

- We must work on our sphere of influence with the development of the land surrounding the Central Avenue interchange. A positive partnership must be developed between the County of Merced and the City of Atwater in order for both agencies to have financial success. We will bring the General Plan and Assembly Bill 1600 fees up to date, so when the development starts again we will have a sustainable fee schedule.
- Waste Water Treatment Plant Project (WWTP) is on schedule. WWTP must meet tertiary standards by 2011. The Atwater, Merced Expressway EIR is near completion for the first phase which will be a new Buhach interchange. This Expressway will go from Highway 99 to Santa Fe Avenue. This should bring at least 3700 new jobs into the area. Exciting new Economic projects are on the horizon that involves the County of Merced and the City of Atwater and we must place emphasis on working together for a positive outcome.

City Infrastructure

- We have been very active with Capital Improvement Projects this year. The City of Atwater had many Capital Projects completed this Fiscal Year 2007-2008. In the years past, projects have been funded but never completed.
- The City is in the process of in the process of buying right-of-way to improve the intersection at Atwater Boulevard and Winton Way. This is an on going project for the next two to three years.
- Completion of repaving Applegate overpass and installation of new traffic lights for Regency Center and surrounding area.
- A Project Study report is in the process with Cal Trans Traffic Advisory Consultant, City Staff and Merced County Association of Governments to develop a plan to bypass the Regency Shopping Center and reduce congestion. This is the first step in many to develop a 99 bypass for the City of Atwater. (2025-2030)
- Bloss House: The first Mayor of the City of Atwater lived in the Bloss House. It is a Historic Landmark and is part of Atwater's history. State Recreation Funds enabled us to repair the porches, second floor ceilings and repaint.
- City Hall Complex: A modular building was installed in front of City Hall to be used as our new Community Development Center. This enabled us to have 5,000 square foot of new working space. This building and the furnishing were fully paid for out of developer fees. The outside landscaping will be completed with the sponsorship of Tree Partners Foundation, Atwater Rotary Club, City Staff and Community Volunteers. Tree Partners Foundation donated a beautiful oak tree in recognition of the past City of Atwater Mayors. Public

Works Streets Manager Sorenson obtained the beautiful lamps that surround City Hall donated by a Community Developer.

- The next capital improvement project was the concrete wall around City Hall to protect the Police Department and its' equipment. This was completed by a local contractor Norm Rolfe.
- Remodeling inside City Hall created a new conference and training center for the Police Department, a new office for the Sergeants and a female Officer locker room. All work was done by local contractor, Vargas Brothers.
- Continual upgrading of the Fireman's Memorial Ball Park. Removal of old concession stand and replaced by a new facility donated by NCI, a great local business who has been so generous to the City of Atwater

Parks and Recreation with focus on youth

- 50th anniversary of the Lions Club Baseball Tournament and dedication of the new concession stand at Fireman's Memorial Ball Park will take place during the Easter Tournament in April.
- Castle Youth Center was completely repainted and new carpet installed. It serves approximately 80 students each day in the Police Activities League "After School Program", giving kids a positive and active way to spend time.
- Parks and Recreation Department has hired a firm to come in and do a complete evaluation and recommend future park sites, future programs and possible funding sources. This information will be included in the Atwater General Plan Update.

Building organizational capacity, development, and continual improvement

- The City has gone through an evaluation process of each Department. This will be a planning tool for future development. The information from each evaluation will be included in the General Plan Update.
- The City of Atwater is very fortunate to have such talented staff, always willing to improve their skills and willing to take on any task assigned to them.
- Economic Development and Special Projects Director McBride is a fine example of an outstanding individual who has been promoted from within. He is one of the key persons bringing Economic Development to the fore front and helping to make Atwater a business friendly place.

In closing, it is my view that the City of Atwater must stay on course with the Cities Financial Policies and we must be ready to understand the risks and challenges that face us in the next 2 to 3 years. We will work together as a team to continue to adhere to Financial Policies with emphasis on Economic Development. We can not depend on outside Agencies or State or Federal Government for support. The City of Atwater must form partnerships with the County of Merced and the surrounding Communities to enable all of us to succeed in these hard financial times facing us.

It will continue to be my privilege to serve you as your Mayor during these challenging times and I pledge to work cooperatively with my colleagues, the City Council, our Appointed Committees and Commissions, other Elected Officials and the Community of Atwater at large. THANK YOU!