

Mayor Jim Darling: *State of the City –
Tuesday, February 6, 2018*

Thank you, Ashton, for that great introduction. (Mom-Melissa Farias) I hope I'm around when you become Mayor. As Justin would say, it would be phenomenal.

Talk about a can-do spirit, Ashton is a school District multiplication champ, marathon runner and a seasoned chess player.

I want to thank all the leaders in attendance, all the elected officials – members of Congress; State Legislators; State Senators, county elected officials, members of the City Commission, McAllen Public Utility Board, the McAllen School board trustees and South Texas College Board Members.

I also want to thank our City of McAllen administrators, UTRGV and STC officials and our international dignitaries.

All of these leaders do a tremendous job for our region and I'd like for them to all stand up to be recognized. (*stand on their chairs*)

Let's thank them for all they do for the City of McAllen. (**pause for applause**)

As your Mayor, it is my privilege to be with you today and to share with you the State of our City. You have already seen many of the great things that are happening in our city during the video tour. Many of these items are continuations of our city's vision that we build upon each year.

2017 was definitely an ‘interesting’ year!

This past year our country has seen its share of interesting politics—from Washington to Austin. Much of what happens up north directly affects our city. (*I was advised not to get involved in a political discussion*). However, through it all, the City of McAllen has remained focused on our goals, met our challenges, and seized opportunities.

We continue to move forward in McAllen and the state of our City is strong (*ask audience*) safe and sound!

Ok everybody take notes! For you delegates here's the proof of why we're safe and sound.

When compared to all major Texas cities, the City of McAllen has the lowest overall crime rate and is one of the safest cities in the U.S. (*100 times safer than Washington, D.C.*)

At the end of 2017, the City of McAllen completed an eighth consecutive year of reduced crime. In fact, in 2017 McAllen had the lowest crime rate this city has posted in the past 33 years.

For the McAllen Police Department, hometown security is homeland security and their efforts have caused a 67% drop in crime in McAllen since 1995.

For example, in 1992, more than 2000 cars were stolen in McAllen (*including one of mine by the way, I loved that car*).

In 2017, there were only 46 car thefts.

In 1993, there were over 2,100 burglaries.

In 2017, only 185. (*including my law office.*)

And in 2017, the McAllen Police Department saw the resolution of the oldest 'cold case' in America. Through the great work of the McAllen PD, after 57 years, justice was finally done for Irene Garza and her family.

Much of the credit for this fantastic record goes to Chief Victor Rodriguez and the great men and women who put on that McAllen Police Department uniform and put their lives on the line to serve and protect our community.

They have made a commitment to keep our city safe and sound—and they are succeeding.

Here is McAllen Chief of Police, Victor Rodriguez to tell you a bit more.

***PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP OF
CHIEF RODRIGUEZ***

THANKS CHIEF

I want to commend the chief for organizing a 3-day international law enforcement training in December with over 100 law enforcement professionals from Mexico and our local FBI, DEA, Border Patrol and Sheriff's Department.

Chief Balderas

Also working day and night to keep us safe and sound are the first responders of the McAllen Fire Department. Most of us run away from danger—but these brave firefighters run towards danger.

In 2017, our McAllen Fire Department battled fires, helped to save car accident victims, responded to medical emergencies and even saved the life of a four-legged, furry McAllen resident who was suffering from smoke inhalation after getting trapped in a house fire.

Our McAllen firefighters serve in one of the best-trained and best-equipped departments in the State.

The Fire Department has a response rate right at 4 minutes.

That is, they arrive on the scene an average of just 4 minutes after receiving a 9-1-1 call. *(it takes me longer to get into my car and put my seatbelt on)*

Because our McAllen Fire Department is so well trained and equipped--- thanks to the support of the City Commission—our city's insurance

“safety” rating was recently improved to its best level ever.

Here to tell us a little bit more about the improved rating is Fire Chief Rafael Balderas.

***PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP OF
CHIEF BALDERAS***

THANKS CHIEF

Our residents and businesses who benefit from reduced property insurance rates, thank you too.

Sheriff GUERRA

We have many 'partners' who work closely with our McAllen Public Safety employees. One of those partners who serves alongside us is the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Office.

Working together---keeps us safe.

Here to tell us a little bit more about that is Hidalgo County Sheriff and my good buddy, Eddie Guerra.

***PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP OF
SHERIFF GUERRA***

***THANKS SHERIFF GUERRA (he's
inspired me so much, I was going to
run for sheriff when he's finished but
I can't grow a mustache)***

Padilla

We've heard why we are safe and sound at the local and regional level---

Safety is also obviously a top priority at the federal level.

Since 2014 border security has been a daily news item and McAllen, because of the Central American exodus, has been a focal point. Much of the news is misleading at best and has been hurtful to our region.

But we know what a valiant job our border patrol does in our area.

Please listen to someone who really understands our border- my friend, RGV Sector Chief for U.S. Border Patrol Manuel Padilla.

PAUSE FOR VIDEO CLIP OF CHIEF

PADILLA

THANKS CHIEF PADILLA- I hope you get what **YOU** really want and need to protect our border.

The focus of City Commission and I has always been the safety and security of our citizens.

In fact, public safety is the City of McAllen's #1 priority, which is why 60% of the general fund dollars, including 100 percent of all property taxes, goes to fund Police and Fire services.

Thanks to these investments, we will continue to fortify our ability to respond to any emergency and keep McAllen safe and sound.

ECONOMY

McAllen continues to be the economic center of the Rio Grande Valley and south Texas.

We continue to post the lowest unemployment rate in all of the Rio Grande Valley.

Our current unemployment rate is 4.5% and generally tracks the federal unemployment rate.

SALES TAX

Sales tax is still king in McAllen.

In 2017, McAllen generated one of the highest sales tax revenue per capita in the state of Texas.

McAllen has had the distinction of being ranked at the top for a number of years.

Our total annual sales tax collection was \$58.6 million last year. (listen up)

A quarter of our sales tax goes to reduce your and my property taxes.

Almost \$15 million last year.

Another reason to shop McAllen.

To put that in perspective that sales tax paid 38 percent of your property tax last year.

Sales tax doesn't just come from our citizens, but Valley and Mexican shoppers also contribute significantly.

There is no question that conditions beyond our control on both sides of the river have negatively affected our border trade.

We share family ties, friendships, cultural and business relationships with our neighbors to the South.

We feel deeply about the problems of violence in Mexico and have confidence that conditions will improve.

I commend Tamaulipas Governor Cabeza De Vaca for his efforts for increased security.

However, there are signs that our Mexican friends and Valley residents,

are still visiting and shopping in McAllen.

Projections for this year's sales tax

indicate improvement as shown by the

3.19 percent increase in October and a

4.83 percent increase in November.

We will always look for creative ways to

ensure McAllen's retail sector continues

to be strong.

An example is the Dave & Buster's

entertainment and dining center, which

anchors a great, new shopping location-

The Shops at 29th, a new multi-million-dollar investment in our city.

This project, along with the La Plaza Mall expansion and renovation, and the DHR South Dove campus, are examples of public-private partnerships. These are funded by the increased taxes from those locations and showcase our efforts to always keep

McAllen as a great place to shop, relax and stay healthy in South Texas.

Speaking of renovation, McAllen Medical Center undertook a \$43 million renovation in 2017 at its flagship hospital on the expressway.

Solid Property Tax Base

Those of us who call McAllen home live in one of the most beautiful and sought-after areas in South Texas.

This, in part, has allowed the City of McAllen to maintain a very low property tax rate of .4763 cents per \$100 valuation.

This rate is the lowest of the major cities in the Rio Grande Valley.

Additionally, when compared to similar sized cities across the state, McAllen has the second lowest property tax rate in Texas.

McAllen boasts property rolls in our city with a total 'taxable value' of over 10 billion dollars.

A sure sign that folks are eager to invest in our city is that in 2017 alone,

more than \$263 *million* dollars' worth of property improvements were added.

This increase, coupled with the record-breaking \$353 million in 2016, resulted in more than a half billion dollars of new construction the last two years.

The 2,500-acre master planned community at Tres Lagos is booming as anticipated.

Substantial multi-family development is occurring as a result of our recent zoning changes.

All of this resulting in the population for McAllen increasing to 142,212 in the 2016 Census estimates.

There is money to be made in our city because McAllen is a great place to visit, live, work and play.

And speaking of a great place to visit, I want to mention our International Museum of Arts and Sciences (IMAS) celebrated their 50th anniversary this year.

Congratulations to the board, this is another great city partnership.

South Texas College growth

Speaking of development, South Texas College continues to contribute to the growth of McAllen and the region. This year, STC welcomes the addition of several new projects at its three McAllen campuses.

At the McAllen Pecan Campus, \$55 million dollars in new construction is at or near completion.

A \$24 million-dollar, building has also been added at the Nursing and Allied Health Campus on land donated by the City of McAllen.

The STC Technology Campus in South McAllen has also undergone a \$15.6 million-dollar expansion.

All for the better education of our citizens. Kudos to the STC board and administration.

In the near future we anticipate exciting announcements with UTRGV and Texas A&M.

ECONOMY: Rising Bridge Revenues

In 2017 with empty southbound commercial trucks now crossing at the Anzalduas Bridge, traffic and revenue have increased with 17,000 trucks southbound to Mexico.

Newly extended hours for commercial traffic should result in continued growth while at the same time facilitating commerce with the *maquila* industry in Reynosa.

ECONOMY: *Strong Fund Balance & Credit Rating*

Currently, the City of McAllen boasts a healthy unrestricted fund balance of over \$43 million dollars, representing 150 days of reserves.

This is significantly higher reserve than the state of Texas.

This strong balance has helped the City of McAllen earn a financial bond rating of AA+, lowering the rate of interest paid on our bonds.

This places us among the highest rated cities in the nation.

The City of McAllen's 2017 budget is over \$363 million dollars.

QUALITY OF LIFE: *Health*

A healthy and active community is a vibrant one.

To that end, our city offers many community-wide initiatives that help promote healthy living, such as our B-Cycle program.

Our 34 miles of walking trails provide walkers, runners and cyclists an opportunity to get in a no-cost workout while enjoying our community.

And it's safe and sound as you will see later. *(BTW 311/Sprinkler heads)*

And for you dog lovers, don't forget your doggy poop bags.

We have 88 parks constituting 1,016 acres of park space and 3 recreation centers.

In 2017 we added 5 new park venues and made improvements to existing

parks such as Bill Schupp and Los Encinos for a cost of over \$2 million.

Just last month, we held the McAllen Marathon Scott Crane Memorial Run, a Boston Marathon qualifier.

Now in its fifth year, the run attracted more than 5,100 athletes from all over the world.

This number included over 3,500 kids who ran the McAllen Kids Marathon.

Kudos to McAllen ISD.

Our city and school district are making sure to keep everyone moving. *(Some*

a little faster than others, as witnessed at the Marathon city/school competition.

The superintendent says I came in second, I felt it was a tie)

Additionally, we proudly hosted the Games of Texas for the second year where more than 10,000 athletes participated.

Traffic

Traffic was the top item mentioned in the citizen's survey. We are in the process of finishing our north/south corridors by the extension of Bicentennial and 29th street to 107 in

addition to expanding Ware Road and Taylor Road northward from their present locations.

We are looking at 2018 to come up with plans to increase traffic movement on our east/west corridors.

All these involve partnerships with the State of Texas and Hidalgo County.

Water and Sewer

I would like to congratulate the MPU board, here in the audience.

The McAllen Public Utility Board, the only elected public utility board in the state, has invested over \$130 million in

the past 10 years in the infrastructure for clear and safe water. (*bottle water cost*)

In 2017 there have been dramatic improvements to the South Waste Water Treatment Plant.

This was a big deal.

This project involved literally replacing the city's major sewage treatment plant with a new plant at a cost of \$56 million.

In November, this also involved a very

tricky and complicated process of turning one plant off while simultaneously turning the other one on. *(if something happens)* I'm told it's a once in a lifetime project for engineers and our staff.

Everyone with the Public Utility Board had their fingers crossed.

Did anybody notice that? I guess it was a success. *(So every time you flush*

your toilets, thank the public utility board, I know I do.)

There have also been improvements in the North Waste Water Treatment Plant project that promotes water conservation.

This second of its kind project in the state provides re-use water for irrigation and lawn and plant watering.

The PUB has done all this, while still maintaining one of THE lowest water rates in the state for a city of our size. And the lowest overall rate in the Valley.

CLOSING

It would be remiss not to mention in this presentation one other heroic effort by our city employees.

We all watched with concern as our neighbors along the Texas Gulf Coast were ravaged by Hurricane Harvey.

The City of McAllen and the PUB were quick to step up and help.

We deployed more than 100 employees, (we had many more who wanted to volunteer) including crews from McAllen Fire, Parks, Police and Public Works, as well as the McAllen Public Utility to assist with water and

sewer system issues, brush collection and emergency support in Aransas Pass, Fulton and Ingleside.

Our crews teamed up with Hidalgo County Precinct 4 and RGV Health & Human Services to get families back on their feet.

Aside from clearing roads and removing approximately 4,000 tons of debris, the crews helped bring these

cities' entire water system back up and running.

That is what we do in Texas; we take care of our neighbors.

This is why McAllen is a terrific city. I truly think this is the best place to live and raise your family and I hope you feel the same way.

But we're not done yet, folks!

Our heroes don't just put out fires and protect people, they're involved in little known programs and activities so take a look.

WAIT FOR LAST VIDEO TO ROLL

Be a good delegate and remind everyone that we are safe and sound in McAllen!

Thanks for being here today. See you next year!!!!

#

