

## 2021 State of the County

Good morning.

Welcome to Johnson County's first-ever virtual State of the County presentation.

Thank you, Ms. Baldwin, for that kind introduction. I want to thank the Lenexa Chamber of Commerce for hosting the 2021 State of the County Address and the Johnson County Chambers Public Policy Council for their sponsorship.

I also want to say thanks to the leadership and members of our various chamber organizations for the good work you do every day in supporting the Johnson County business community.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow County Commissioners who are virtually present for the State of the County address:

- Janeé Hanzlick, Vice-Chair representing the Fourth District
- Becky Fast, First District
- Jeff Meyers, Second District
- Charlotte O'Hara, Third District
- Michael Ashcraft, Fifth District
- And Shirley Allenbrand, Sixth District

Commissioners Meyers, O'Hara and Allenbrand are participating in their first State of the County as county commissioners since their election last fall.

I would like to acknowledge Sheriff Calvin Hayden, District Attorney Steve Howe and the District 10 Administrative Judge Kelly Ryan who are able to be with us today. I also want to acknowledge County Manager Penny Postoak Ferguson who is present in this virtual event.

I also want to publicly recognize with a special thank you to Connie Schmidt for managing and leading the 2020 elections as our interim election commissioner this last year. I welcome aboard Fred Sherman as our new election commissioner.

The annual State of the County address traditionally has provided an opportunity for county government to reflect on past achievements and challenges as we look forward to a new year and beyond.

The past year, however, was far from normal. Without a doubt, we will remember 2020 for a long, long time and the many, many challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. 2020 was a year of face masks and social distancing, testing supplies and personal protective equipment. It was a year that tested us and at times divided us. It was a year that had economic pain and personal heartaches since the first case in Kansas, here in Johnson County, was reported a year and 23 days ago.

Many of our residents have experienced job and possible housing loss and have faced food insecurity for the first time.

We will never forget the heavy toll this deadly virus has taken on our county, across our state and throughout our nation from a threat that was virtually unknown as 2020 began. Please join me in a moment of silence in honoring those we have lost, and we pray for comfort and peace to the families and friends left behind.

Thank you very much.

We are still battling the pandemic, but the tide is turning because of our enduring strength and partnerships. The State of Johnson County is: A resilient community.

Our battle plans against the pandemic involved many fronts in 2020.

Our response and recovery efforts have included our local Health Officer and Board of Public Health issuing several life-saving orders and declarations. We activated an Emergency Operations Center to manage this emergency, set up testing clinics, increased our disease investigation resources, and did so much more.

We established the COVID-19 dashboard to track and share necessary data with our community regarding new cases, test positivity rates, hospitalizations, deaths and other demographic information.

We also stayed connected and kept residents informed through virtual meetings and events, including townhall meetings, press conferences and weekly Board of County Commission sessions. These adjustments kept our residents up to date on critical information.

In our first video, we take a look at the county's response to the pandemic....

While all our county departments rose to the task in the pandemic, I especially want to thank all the workers of the Johnson County Department of Health and Environment. Their services and responses to the ever changing, incredibly challenging pandemic have spearheaded our efforts at serving and protecting our residents of all ages.

They were not alone. COVID-19 was a community challenge requiring a community response.

Our ability to slow the spread of the pandemic would not be possible without our doctors, nurses and health care workers; our first responders and essential workers; our teachers and state and local government workers, our business community, and especially our residents. All are important partners in a resilient community.

Many residents and families heeded warnings, diligently practicing physical distancing. They wore face masks, not only to protect themselves, but those all around them. Because of these common efforts, lives were being saved.

Face masks were made by county employees and residents alike and donated to MED-ACT before personal protective equipment supplies were widely available.

More than \$30,000 in donations were received in a virtual food and hygiene drive.

Home-Delivered Meals were still being delivered to homebound residents, serving an average 602 residents each month and delivering almost 187,000 meals last year.

Our older adult population is the fastest growing demographic. To reflect the county's commitment to older residents, the Human Services Department was reorganized to place a higher emphasis on the aging services provided. The name was changed to Aging and Human Services in order to assist residents seeking information about aging issues and to be able to find information easier.

We approved an additional \$250,000 in the 2021 Budget to establish a county funded program to serve more elderly residents with in-home supports and services. Aging Care Services will enable them to continue living in their own homes and divert or delay nursing home placement.

We also took quick action and initiated rapid changes at minimizing the impacts of the pandemic, to keep county government functioning and to make essential public services available. Our next video explains some of those challenges ....

We also provided financial relief to organizations, businesses and schools in Johnson County that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Johnson County was tasked with planning and implementing a strategy to disburse millions of dollars in federal CARES Act to reimburse local taxing jurisdiction COVID-19 expenses and invest in the community.

Funding went directly to our health department to support critical efforts to combat the virus. Funds were distributed to our cities and our community partners.

The fund designated allocations for small business assistance, workforce development and acquisition of more than 52 million personal protective equipment items throughout the county.

CARES Act funding provided housing support of households at risk of eviction or mortgage default along with utility assistance. Funds also were allocated to food pantries, long-term care centers, higher education facilities and school districts, including parochial schools.

We provided utility and food pantry services last year to more than 1,700 households through our Multi-Service Centers. We helped 18% more households with rent assistance last year.

A few weeks following the arrival of the pandemic in Johnson County, our organization began to measure how the pandemic would affect our financial outlook. We acted swiftly and strategically to make necessary changes to the 2020 budget and planned for the impact on the 2021 budget as well. We explain in the next video ....

During the pandemic, the rating agencies, Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch, all affirmed the county's top triple-triple AAA ratings for bonds issued in 2020. Johnson County was one of only 42 counties out of 3,141 to achieve that top bond rating from all three rating agencies.

It shows we are fiscally resilient with sound fiscal management and stewardship during unprecedented times. This highest rating has saved taxpayers millions of dollars in interest payments for more than a decade.

Also last year, the county saved approximately \$13.1 million as a result of refunding current outstanding maturities for future interest savings.

While the county has financially fared better than anticipated, due in part to our cost-saving measures and reserves in the county budget, the profound disruption of COVID-19 has caused the state and local economy to stagger.

According to the County Economic Research Institute (CERI), employment really took an historic hit in the second quarter and has not yet fully recovered.

In April, Kansas had almost 155,000 jobs lost. That included more than 42,500 in Johnson County.

Lost jobs in April caused the unemployment rate to soar into double digit percentages in both our state and our county. Since those peaks, joblessness has been reduced two-thirds by the end of 2020.

One portion of the local economy that remained strong during 2020 was housing. With historically low interest rates, housing demand in Johnson County remained quite strong resulting in a record of almost 12,000 homes sold during the year.

This strong demand coupled with historically low interest rates and short supply of homes for sale, caused sales prices to increase by nearly 10%. Local developers and builders filed 1,800 single family and 1,000 permits for multi-family to meet the continued strong housing demand.

Despite the challenges we faced last year, some great things also happened in 2020. We continued to invest in the County's capital infrastructure, public safety and recreational assets as explained in our next video ....

There's other good news to report as well.

In 2020 our Board and the Johnson County Airport Commission took actions that paved the way for economic development to take off near the New Century AirCenter. A public-private partnership with VanTrust to bring new businesses to this area is expected to create thousands of new jobs over the next 10 years.

Additionally, in 2020 Johnson County's airports, New Century AirCenter near Gardner and Executive Airport in Olathe, had more than 102,000 combined flights which made our county's airport system the busiest in the state beating the second-place airport by more than 20%.

In 2020, our Public Works, Planning and Wastewater departments continued to work together on the infrastructure needed to support our growing population and our business community. We also started a process to examine our transit program to use transit dollars as efficiently as possible while providing an appropriate level of service that benefits our community.

Serving our residents with special needs continued to be a priority in 2020. We spent the year finding innovative ways to support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities during the pandemic.

There were also increased demands to help our at-risk residents in 2020.

Johnson County Mental Health Center received more calls for assistance during the pandemic and modified and expanded services to respond to the community need. This included adding staff to answer the 24/7 crisis line, providing phone and curbside options for medication refills and virtually serving psychosocial groups.

In 2020, the Johnson County Mental Health Center's co-responder program received approval for another co-responder with the Overland Park Police Department. The program also partnered with Olathe Police Department to start a new behavioral health unit, the Advanced Crisis-Intervention Team, or ACT to provide a quicker response to behavioral health calls.

Co-responders are now embedded within 11 city police departments, plus the Sheriff's Office, providing coverage in most cities in Johnson County plus the unincorporated areas.

Also, in 2020, the first ever National Co-Responder Conference was organized and held in Johnson County. The conference was attended by 200 law enforcement, fire, medical and mental health professionals, representing 20 different states. The second one is planned for June 2021 and is expected to be even larger.

Public safety remains our top priority. We thank our Sheriff's Office for the role it plays in protecting our community. For our residents to feel protected, they also must know that there is a support system in place when they need help in a medical emergency.

Last year, MED-ACT responded to just over 50,000 calls for service and transported about 28,500 patients. Six percent of patient transports were attributed to COVID-19. Also, in 2020, MED-ACT assumed responsibility for ambulance service in Johnson County Fire District No. 2.

2020 was a strong year of community engagement. We broke records with our presidential election in the number of registered voters and turnout. Thank you to those who participated in this important process and an extra thank you to the 2,355 poll workers who made our successful election year possible.

You also answered the call to participate in the 2020 Census. Johnson County had the best self-response rate in Kansas with almost 80% completing the census and surpassing state and national rates. An accurate census count is important to our county since it provides critical federal funding and determines congressional districts this decade.

We remembered our county veterans with our first-ever virtual Veterans Day observance. In November, we honored 68 World War II veterans between the ages of 92 and 106 and a local Holocaust survivor. The recognition was in celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of both the ending of the war in Europe and the Holocaust.

Earlier this month, a new Charter Commission began its 10-year review of county government as required by the county's Home Rule Charter. The commission studies and makes recommendations about the structure and operations of County Government.

A final report of its findings and recommendations must be submitted by Feb. 4, 2022. Any proposed amendments to the charter must be approved by Johnson County voters.

And, the 2020 Annual Report, archiving the many challenges, changes and actions by County Government, now is accessible online.

The pandemic is far from over. As we wrapped up 2020 and headed into 2021, vaccinations became available to us and we have been working for several months to get them into arms as quickly as we receive them.

As we enter the final phases of the state's reopening plan, we know what works is wearing a mask, social distancing and vaccinations in protecting ourselves and ensuring the safety of others.

While optimistic that each vaccine brings us closer to the COVID-19 finish line, we know that tough decisions are still ahead, and challenges remain. In looking ahead, we will continue to focus at keeping Johnson County a great place to work, live, raise a family and retire.

Throughout the past 13 months, we have tackled many challenges, and while we're not out of the woods just yet, we know that if we work together – we move forward together to embrace opportunity and to fortify our future.

Thank you for joining us today. We are resilient. We will move forward.  
Stay well, be safe and best wishes for a great 2021.