

STATE OF THE CITY
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2015; 12:00 PM
EMBASSY SUITES, 11767 HARBOR BLVD.

"COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT"
THE FUTURE OF GARDEN GROVE

Thank you and good afternoon. I'd like to thank the chamber for inviting me to speak with you this afternoon. It's encouraging to see so many business owners and community leaders support the chamber and their endeavors to enhance the business climate of the community. As you can imagine, today is an exciting day for me to speak to you as your mayor, and I believe many of you here share in that excitement as well.

We are at the beginning of a new era, and to me that means commencing a broad range of interactions between people. Inviting the community to engage in the way that we communicate...the way that we deliver information to our residents and businesses...the way that we involve and collaborate with the community in our decision-making processes...and, the way that we empower groups to become involved in their community, whether they be informal neighborhood groups or formal partnerships.

This city council believes that community engagement is at the heart of what needs to happen to move this city forward. Community engagement can take on many forms. In my campaign, I talked about creating more government transparency and accountability. I believe that we have taken the first steps in accomplishing this goal with the hiring of an interim-city manager, Mr. Allan Roeder. Before retiring in 2011, Allan served as the city manager for the City of Costa Mesa for 25 years, and in speaking with him, it was clear to us that Allan brings integrity and leadership to our organization. Inviting the community to become involved in a participative democracy is at the forefront of what this city council wants to achieve for this community. Informing and educating the community of the policy direction of the city council and consulting the community as part of a process to develop government policy, are just a couple of ways to build community awareness and understanding. Giving priority to our neighborhoods and local businesses by collectively working toward identifying their needs and available resources, will ensure that we're doing everything possible to assist in the success of our businesses and our community.

As many of you may know, I hold a Master's Degree in Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies, so it should come as no surprise that I am a big believer in "karma." According to Buddhist teachings, our lives, and all that occurs in our lives, is a result of karma. Improving the moral and spiritual quality of life improves its quality for us all. Together, we will act for the good of our city, and for the good of our community, our families, our neighborhoods, and our local businesses. We can't assume success, until we know it's a success for everyone.

When the early settlers and land owners named this town Garden Grove, they said they would “plant flowers and make it beautiful.” We, as modern settlers and business owners, are responsible for continuing that philosophy of building a beautiful place that we’re all proud to be part of. As you’ll hear today, much of this is already underway.

As I said before, informing and educating the community is the first step toward community engagement. So I think it’s important that you understand where we are as a city economically, to understand what resources we have at our disposal. In reviewing the state of the region’s economy last year, Orange County continued an encouraging fifth-year recovery, particularly in job formation, economic activity, and the housing sector. 2014 recorded the lowest unemployment rate for Orange County since 2008, at just under 5 percent. Residential and commercial construction continued a robust trend in 2014 for the county, as well as for Garden Grove. Last year, the City issued building permits with a construction value of \$126.4 million, which is an incredible, 127% increase over 2013! However, despite a spike in building and home values, affordable housing remained out of reach for many Orange County buyers, as the median single-family home price was \$642,000 last August, an increase of more than 34% since the recession in 2008. In this respect, Garden Grove has a clear advantage for young, first-time buyers with current home prices averaging \$458,000, offering larger yards and more square footage than many South County cities.

2014 saw the continuation of development throughout the city. One long-awaited development came with the groundbreaking of the Great Wolf Lodge Southern California, a hotel that promises to bring substantial resources to the City. As we heard from Kim Schaefer earlier, they are making significant progress on the hotel. If you haven’t had an opportunity to see the project, I encourage you to drive by the site. I personally had an opportunity to tour the site this morning and it is very impressive.

On a more personal note, education and the investment in our youth are two things that are very near and dear to my heart. As a previous board member for the Garden Grove Unified School District and an advocate for the development of our local talent, I’ve had the enormous satisfaction of seeing important strides taking place in our schools. One of my most respected colleagues and dearest friends, for many years, has been Board President, Dr. George West. I’m thrilled to have George speak to you today about how the enhancement of our local schools, plays a key role in ensuring our present and our future standing in Orange County. Please join me now in welcoming Garden Grove Unified School District President, Dr. George West.

Thank you, George. This year, the City and the school district will roll out a new marketing campaign promoting Garden Grove as the place for young families to invest, work and bring up their children. Raising awareness of our housing advantages and community amenities, along with our academic excellence will be a big step forward this year. As a city council, we will also explore business

opportunities that attract today's young professionals, as well as social amenities that attract young families. Collaborating with the community to develop partnerships to formulate options and provide recommendations capitalizes on our resources. Empowering the community to make decisions and to implement and manage change was the impetus behind the Re:Imagine Garden Grove campaign. Community comments were received on-line, asking residents and business owners to give their suggestions on ways to re-imagine downtown. The comments received, spurred the creation of "Re:Imagine Garden Grove, a Downtown Open Streets Event." The celebration brought the downtown of the future into the present by creating a pop-up version of the newly-imagined heart of the city. Let's take a look at a short video from our own GG-TV3 to show you what the event was all about...

2015 will see this city council expand upon gathering public comment and will ensure that issues and concerns are understood and considered as part of our decision making process. Looking at 2015, we will make use of our resources to engage further with our existing businesses, in addition to attracting new ones. We'll be working smarter and more efficiently by way of better technology and communication, including an optimum computer system for the police department; a revised and enhanced city website; and expanded use of social media tools and our city's mobile app. Our city staff will focus on pursuing new grant opportunities addressing health, safety, and quality of life issues, along with infrastructure and park improvements.

As I said before, we are at the beginning of a new era. We have the ability, the spirit, and the commitment to make it all happen. And we'll do it...together! Thank you again for attending, and for joining me on this new journey. I wish you all great success in 2015!