



STATE OF THE CITY

Mayor Roy D. Buol Spring 2021

Around this time last year, every conceivable thing about life as we knew it changed and became more dangerous and complicated. A year ago, we were alarmed at the first COVID-19 cases and deaths in our county. As of April 1, 2021, nearly 13,000 county residents have been diagnosed with COVID and, tragically, over 200 citizens have died. Significant challenges remain, yet we have the ability to move toward recovery, reopening, and renewal.

The quickest path to the recovery and reopening of our community lies in vaccinations and doing our part to create herd immunity. Please watch for updates on vaccine availability and consider helping others to both make and get to appointments. We ALL want to return to living life with extended family, friends, and colleagues. We ALL want to support our local economy and small businesses. We ALL want to attend events, enjoy activities, and watch our kids and grandkids perform. The reality of life in our “new normal” is that the only way to ensure the treasured outcomes we ALL want is to reach “herd immunity” through vaccinations.

Fortunately, the City entered this pandemic in a strong financial position with healthy general fund reserves to allow for unforeseen expenses. The goal has been to have at least a 20% general fund reserve and, in fiscal year (FY) 2022, the City will have nearly 25%, or nearly \$18 million. The City’s strategic use of debt provides the capacity to withstand a crisis that might require significant investments. In FY2022, Dubuque will be using just 45% of the statutory debt limit, which ranks Dubuque as the fifth lowest of the 11 largest Iowa cities.

Recently, your City Council unanimously adopted the FY2022 budget, which takes effect July 1. It lowers the property tax rate by 2.51%, giving the City of Dubuque the second lowest property tax rate of the 11 largest cities in Iowa. The highest tax rate (Waterloo) is 95% higher, and the average is 51% higher than Dubuque’s. This also gives Dubuque the lowest property taxes per capita compared to those 11 cities. The highest city (West Des Moines) is 157% higher than Dubuque’s taxes per capita, and the average is 82% higher

than Dubuque. Combined with minor increases to utility rates and fees, the budget for the next fiscal year minimizes costs to residents and businesses while ensuring efficient delivery of critical city services.

Additionally, the City of Dubuque is projected to receive \$27.43 million from President Biden’s *American Rescue Plan*, with 50% received by June and the remaining 50% within 12 months. The funds are expected to be limited to the following: assistance to impacted individuals and households, private businesses, tourism, travel, hospitality, and non-profits; reimbursement for lost revenues to the City; and necessary investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.

With this *American Rescue Plan* funding, the City will be able to avoid budget cuts and employee layoffs and remove the freeze on vacant City positions, equipment purchases, maintenance projects, travel and training, and capital projects. Planned infrastructure improvements include resurfacing 10 miles of city streets in the next fiscal year – double the normal average of five miles per year!

Spring is our time for renewal. When we can gather again, and reflect on the unforgettable year behind us, it is incumbent upon us as a nation to remember lessons learned that require resolution such as the inequalities in medical care for our most vulnerable and minority populations, the racism and gun violence showing us the darkest parts of human nature, and more.

We, too, must honor the best in humanity, like our medical, police and fire professionals on the frontlines working tirelessly to save lives and our essential workers helping to keep our economy moving. Clearly, this pandemic showed us deficiencies, but it also showed us how precious our time together truly is.

Our City’s vision, with its budget focus, is on the right path. The personal path to renewal, through vaccinations and herd immunity, is before us. It’s up to you. §