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**State of the City  
Paragould, Arkansas  
February 22, 2024**

The recently completed year of 2023 stands as a testament to the City of Paragould's ongoing success and resilience. Our thriving community has once again weathered challenges and embraced opportunities, creating a narrative of progress and accomplishment.

The economic landscape of Paragould flourished in 2023, with sustained growth across key sectors. As a city committed to progress, Paragould witnessed significant strides in infrastructure development. Key projects, such as the Community Pavilion, fire/police training facility, workforce development center (THE GIN), and the city's largest public/private partnership ever—The Station, powered by First National Bank—all show the importance of working together to see projects come to fruition. These projects have not only enhanced our communities' landscape and our quality of place but have positioned the city for continued growth. How do we know these efforts are having a positive effect? Our civilian labor force is strong, hovering around 20,000 employees monthly. Our median income is the highest we've seen in our history and according to the census bureau, Paragould is adding a new resident nearly every single day.

I want to take a minute to publicly thank all our department heads and their staff for all they do for our city and its citizens.

**Code Enforcement**

In 2023, the Code Enforcement Division worked 1241 cases; 1153 were property clean-up, 51 were junk vehicles, and 35 were property condemnation cases. Of the condemnation cases, the city remediated 17 at a total cost of \$48,000.00, several others were taken down or rehabbed by the owners, and a handful are still in process. Our Code Enforcement Officers were in court for citations issued over 50 times in 2023.

Next year, code enforcement will show a renewed focus on unlicensed salvage yards across our city and work with the land bank to help with redevelopment. The land bank commission was created by the city council in May and has been meeting monthly since September. They have established three areas of opportunity known as Overlay Districts. The Land Bank will focus on these overlay districts by rehabilitating dilapidated structures and placing a renewed emphasis on redevelopment in those legacy neighborhoods. The Land Bank Commissioners have decided

to put their first efforts into the Northend District and to coincide with the annual clean sweep event this year. A neighborhood meeting is planned to better inform residents living there about the improvements they can expect over the next few years. We are extremely excited about the land bank and feel like this effort has the potential to bring back and completely revive our oldest existing legacy neighborhoods.

### **Planning & Development Office**

The Planning and Development Office is in its second year of using IWORQ. IWORQ is a software that allows construction documents to be submitted online, as well as allowing payments through the portal. In 2023 they issued a total of 1262 permits, which included building, electrical, plumbing, HVAC, roofing, demolition, and fencing, for a total of just over \$67 million in project costs. About \$24.4 million of project costs was for commercial investment. This represents a 3% increase overall and a 79% increase in commercial projects.

2023 boasted an issuance of 57 Single Family Dwelling Permits and 27 Duplex Permits, for a total of 111 new individual dwelling units. The Inspectors Office also logged over 2000 Inspections in 2023.

The City Council adopted the new Land Use Map in May 2023. The moratorium on multi-family dwellings in R2-zoned areas was lifted that same month, as well as the passing of an updated R2-specific ordinance. Our planning and development staff, along with an outside committee of builders and affected partners, are currently reviewing a new zoning code for the city which will update the decades-old zoning code currently in use. Items such as subdivision design, road specification, drainage requirements, and zoning use and design are just a few of the items that will be updated. Over the next 3-5 years our city has between 1200-1500 new residential doors planned. Making sure we have an updated zoning plan will ensure this growth is not only positive but sustainable.

### **Airport**

Aviation needs for the city of Paragould in 2023 were met by focusing on infrastructure upgrades and maintenance that ensures the safety and operational reliability of our airport. The runway, ramp and taxiway were repainted to ensure clear markings and enhance visibility for pilots and ground crew. Because of the economic growth in Paragould and the surrounding area, we saw an increase in private aviation and corporate air travel, as well. We constructed two 80x60 corporate hangers and paved taxiways to those hangers to meet those growing needs. These improvements were completed with both state and federal grants, significantly lowering any cost to the city. We plan to apply for those same grants this summer and will continue to invest in our municipal airport.

### **Street**

The Public Works Department made significant progress in maintaining and improving essential infrastructure throughout 2023. Paragould street employees were able to complete 133 residential work orders. In February, they completed the East Darling Street drainage project, which involved replacing old culverts with concrete box tile to improve drainage efficiency and mitigate flooding risks. They reworked all major drainage ditches on Walcott Road, enhancing

the area's resilience to heavy rainfall and runoff. In March, they finished all concrete ditches on Dana Drive, contributing to improved water flow management and erosion control in the area. They also removed the train trestle on Foreman Drive and reworked the ditch system, enhancing safety and accessibility while also improving drainage. During April, staff completed repairs on the Reynolds Lake spillway, ensuring proper water flow and reducing the risk of flooding in the vicinity.

That brings us to May thru August (or the grass growing season as we call it). The street department undertook one project previously contracted out, the mowing of the 8-mile creek, which resulted in cost savings of over \$80,000. In August, it was back to drainage improvements with staff focusing on reworking the ditches on 72nd Street. Finally, in September, a retention pond behind Fox Hills Country Club was created to reduce flooding issues in the Stafford area. This past fall, our street department staff addressed our dilapidated sidewalks. Thanks to their efforts in cleaning and repairs they have improved walkability throughout the city. This coming year the city council has appropriated 3 million dollars to repaving our city streets which will finalize a multi-year, 25-million-dollar sewer/water upgrade project.

Overall, these efforts demonstrate the Public Works Department's dedication to maintaining and improving essential infrastructure, ensuring the safety, functionality, and quality of life for residents in the city.

## **Fire**

In 2023, the Fire Department made critical advancements and contributions to public safety in the city. The acquisition of a new 107' aerial truck equipped as a quint (quint refers to the five functions that the truck provides - pump, water tank, fire hose, aerial device, and ground ladders) provided the department with enhanced capabilities for Station 1. By utilizing all-time high prices for used fire equipment, we were able to sell two fire engines and add this new ladder, a \$1,400,000 apparatus, for around \$400,000. The addition of a 3,840 sq. ft. fire/police training facility offers a dedicated space for training exercises, drills, and simulation. This facility provides firefighters and law enforcement personnel with realistic training scenarios to hone their skills and improve response capabilities in emergency situations. We are hopeful this addition to our community will bring our city's ISO2 to an ISO1, resulting in lower insurance costs for our industrial partners.

The Paragould Fire Department is also committed to community engagement and education. The department conducted free CPR training sessions, benefiting 216 citizens and equipping them with life-saving skills. Fire safety education efforts reached approximately 2,800 children and adults, helping to raise awareness and prevent fire-related incidents.

Last year our firefighters devoted 13,661 hours to training, ensuring they were well-prepared to handle a wide range of emergencies effectively and safely. The completion of 1,021 business inspections demonstrates the department's commitment to proactive risk management and ensuring compliance with safety regulations. These inspections help identify and mitigate potential hazards in commercial establishments, enhancing public safety and reducing the risk of emergencies.

Last year, the Paragould Fire Department responded to a record-breaking 3,821 emergency calls, highlighting the demand for their services and the department's readiness to handle a high volume of incidents. Through prompt and efficient emergency response efforts, our firefighters worked tirelessly to protect lives, property, and the community's well-being in various critical situations.

Overall, the Fire Department's achievements in 2023 reflect its dedication to excellence in emergency response, community engagement, and continuous improvement in service delivery. Their efforts play a vital role in ensuring the safety and resilience of our city and its residents. Incidentally, our fire department performed all of these tasks while being understaffed by 24 personnel, according to NFPA standards.

## **Police**

In 2023, the Paragould Police Department undertook various initiatives aimed at community engagement, education, and enhancing law enforcement capabilities. Staff successfully conducted two classes of the Citizens Police Academy, with 15 students in each class. Participants gained valuable insight into the daily challenges and responsibilities of police officers, enhancing community understanding and trust in law enforcement. The department actively engaged with the community through events such as Downtown Splash, as well as participating in career days at high schools and job fairs. These efforts help foster a positive relationship between law enforcement and the public.

Last year, the Police Department took 11,122 reports, worked 912 accidents, issued 3,367 tickets and 4,237 warnings, and helped with 643 motorist assists. Patrol made 2,812 arrests, Criminal Investigation Division made 313 arrests, and street crimes unit made 173 arrests. (3300) The department secured grants totaling \$90,294, which were utilized for various equipment and operational needs, including:

- K9 Bullet Proof Vests
- 12 Rifle Plates for Active Shooter Vests
- 10 new body cameras
- 15 New Kenwood Portable radios
- 4 Portable Breath Testers (PBTs)
- Overtime reimbursement totaling over \$45,000

These grants enabled the department to enhance officer safety, improve communication capabilities, and ensure efficient use of resources.

2023 also saw the groundbreaking of the new Paragould municipal complex. This project is the first time in nearly 100 years that our police department and city hall have had a building specifically built to meet their needs. The municipal building will house the police department, CID, the local State Crimes against children office, our street crimes unit, police administration and all civilian police department personnel under the same roof. It will also be home to the City Clerk's office, Planning and Development, council chambers, the mayor's office, the IT department and HR for the city. The new complex is nearly double our current size and is going to allow our city to continue to grow. One of those areas of growth will be an additional HR deputy and a full-time grant writer, a first for the city of Paragould. Our employees at city hall

and our police department are extremely excited about this project. As a reminder, thanks to federal covid funding, this 6-million-dollar project was completed without spending *any city reserves* and with *zero debt*.

Overall, the Paragould Police Department's efforts in 2023 demonstrated a commitment to community policing, proactive enforcement, and continuous improvement in serving and protecting the residents of Paragould. Their willingness to continue serving our citizens, to answer the call and stand ready to help at a moment's notice should not go unnoticed. Incidentally, they perform these tasks while being understaffed by at least 17 officers. Should I mention early voting is happening now???

## 911

This past year, the 911 Center was hard at work, and they achieved several big goals they had set for themselves.

One of their biggest accomplishments for the year was completing the Project P33 training program and becoming nationally accredited through APCO. This was a project that began at the end of the year in 2022 and carried over throughout the first half of 2023. During this project, they completely rebuilt and restructured our training program to give new hires a better chance of success and to help our existing dispatchers receive more advanced training to be able to provide the best service to our community.

At the beginning of 2023, the 911 Center was able to apply and complete training to become partners with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. With this accomplishment, they updated our policy on how to handle calls for missing children and our entire center completed training to be better prepared for several different call types involving children.

Over the summer, Paragould's 911 Center became one of the few 911 centers in the state to implement Emergency Medical Dispatch. With EMD-certified dispatchers we are now able to provide pre-arrival emergency instructions to callers over the phone.

The second half of the year staff focused on training our dispatchers to be better prepared to help callers needing mental health assistance. All supervisor-level dispatchers have completed a mental health aid course to learn about different types of mental health crises. We were also able to send many of our dispatchers to Crisis Intervention Team training. In this course, our dispatchers learned how to better identify a caller who is having a mental health crisis, as well as how to better handle calls for different types of mental health crises.

Overall, 2023 has been a very successful year at Paragould Emergency Services. I look forward to seeing what they can accomplish in 2024.

## Parks

The Parks and Recreation Department had a highly productive year in 2023, with facility upgrades, introducing additional programs, and hosting successful events throughout the parks system.

The Paragould Parks department built three cabanas at the Aquatic Center to rent for birthday parties or day use. There were 221 cabana rentals in three months that generated over half of the construction costs. The outdoor pools received tile work and deck upgrades. The Community Center saw 27 entrance and parking lot lights upgraded to LEDs for better lighting efficiency. Pickleball enthusiasts benefited from the addition of two new courts, with discussions underway for a possible coed pickleball league. Additionally, thanks to City Beautiful, ten trees were planted at Reynolds Park. Some notable events included Greene County Night at the Aquatic Park, the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Trick-or-Treat at the Community Center, the Marshallese Softball Tournament, the 45<sup>th</sup> annual Harvest Craft Show, and the fishing rodeo at Reynolds Park, all of which drew large crowds and showcased community engagement. The first ever Senior Wellness Walk on the 8-Mile Creek Trail was held promoting health and wellness among seniors through leisurely walks and interactions with healthcare professionals. Thanks to donations from private individuals, the 8-Mile Creek Trail also added a total of seven benches. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their skills and time to make these events successful.

We were excited to see the numbers in baseball and softball increase 38% last year, from 567 in 2022 to 743 in the 2023 season. And with the council's approval, the Parks Department was able to decrease the registration fee for this upcoming season's baseball and softball signups to ensure all of our kiddos can play ball no matter their socioeconomic status, so we only expect these numbers to grow. Last year, Rotary Softball Park received 24 tons of crushed brick for a better infield playing surface and drainage was improved for those fields. The co-ed kickball league continued with a growth of 10 teams and 120 participants for the summer league. Men's league basketball, coed volleyball, and women's volleyball all had a great turnout last year with one additional team in all three sports. The Community Center held its second youth spring skills camp for basketball with double the participation compared to last year. This skills camp is a weeklong camp for boys and girls to come and advance their skill set, learn new techniques, and move to the next level of playing. Our Community Center also hosted two AAU basketball tournaments with over 60 teams combined and a Greene County Tech basketball tournament that brought in over 30 teams.

All these upgrades, events, and athletic programs help to provide a better quality of life and physical activity opportunities for our citizens. Good facilities and programs can instill a sense of ownership and encourage community pride in our residents. Your Parks Department is dedicated to continuing to make our local parks the best in Arkansas.

### **Downtown**

Our historic downtown has flourished and grown this past year. While the work will never be complete, we are proud of our recent accomplishments. In 2023, the Community Pavilion opened to the public in January. Since opening, it has hosted numerous corporate events, weddings and nearly 25,000 visitors during the Farmers Market season. Also, an ambient music system was installed on downtown light poles, and the Public Painting Project of the wall on the 200 North block of Pruett Street was completed. As of today, nearly every single store front is either contributing to our local economy and our resident's quality of place or is in the process of being rehabilitated. Our downtown, thanks to Miranda Reynolds, her volunteers and continued

private investment, is enjoying success that was only dreamed of a few short years ago. Thank you to those who collectively volunteered 7,847 hours last year. Without the help of those volunteers, our multiple monthly events and our downtown as a whole would not be as successful.

### **Economic Development**

2023 was full of exciting economic development projects for the city of Paragould. The GIN project was started and completed and will soon be serving our citizens as a one stop shop for job training and workforce development. It will host classes for soft skills such as basic budgeting, building a business plan and how to dress for an interview. The GIN will also serve as an industrial training center to better transition and upscale our workforce to meet tomorrow's needs in an ever-changing workplace. The EDC was recently awarded a DRA grant of nearly \$400,000 to staff the GIN with a full-time director and a part-time tradesman. These two individuals will work with our industrial partners and BRTC to ensure local industrial needs are being met. The GIN will also house a makers space and once completed, will have a small business incubator to not only help foster an entrepreneurial spirit but will also work to lower barriers and help our small businesses better their chances of success in today's marketplace.

Finally, the City of Paragould has once again partnered with Jonesboro for a RAISE Grant application. This year's application focuses on connecting Low to Moderate Income areas of our city to vital services. These services include our local schools, the Mission Outreach, AMMC, the Greene County Library, the Senior BEES Center and our south industrial park. There are also funds in this grant to help address some of the flooding issues in the Allen Engineering and Baldwin School area. If awarded, this grant will bring nearly 8 million dollars of investment with over 5 miles of interconnected trails. I would like to mention that the city did not do this alone. We had help from ten local partners that pledged \$7,500 each, raising a total of \$75,000. These partnerships will play a vital role in ensuring this grant applications success in Washington DC. A huge thank you goes out to those that stepped up and made a difference when it counted the most.

In closing,

As the City of Paragould embraces the start of a new year, the momentum of 2023 has set the stage for continued growth and prosperity. We will continue to meet challenges head on and work diligently to improve our future with a spirit of community and a commitment to progress.

Respectfully Submitted,



Josh Agee  
Mayor of Paragould