



**2024 State of the City Address
Mayor Mike Mendenhall**

February 20, 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, Spanish Fork City, thank you for coming.

In the room this evening are many of our Spanish Fork University alumni and their families. The Spanish Fork University 101 class is a 10-week course for residents to learn all about Spanish Fork City, get to know the City Staff, and see why we are the home of Pride & Progress.

One of the results of this course is creating ambassadors of Spanish Fork City - each of you - who have seen behind the curtain in the City's operations and know where to go to ask questions and get answers.

But, you don't need to take the 10-week class to communicate with the City. You can call or text us anytime! For less effort than posting on one of your favorite social media sites, you can text us and get a quicker and more correct response straight from our personable City staff.

By the way, I would take our City staff any day of the week. We have some incredible professionals that do amazing jobs in each of their respective fields. And we have so many different fields and professions within the City from our police, fire & EMS first responders, to our buildings, parks, and cemetery folks, to those that maintain our roads, sewer, and water systems. Plus, our award-winning library staff, and next-day building inspectors.

Not to mention the fastest and most reliable internet network in the state, SFCN.

Over the last two years, City staff has been working diligently to identify the collective mission of our employees and various departments. They worked to find the balance between what our fairgrounds employees do and what our fleet or finance employees do, and how golf and garden beds, airplanes and administration, events and economic development all mesh together, and they came up with this:

Video of the mission statement.

We strive to build and maintain a vibrant City through personable community interactions and innovative local government services.

The City Council and I could not be prouder of the mission our employees have. Despite the differences in duties, each one of our staff works to a common goal, to build and maintain a vibrant City.

So, what does vibrant mean? Vibrant means full of energy and life. It creates a place where people want to be, living, shopping, working, and recreating.

In 2023, we did a lot to add to the vibrancy of Spanish Fork. Library Hall opened, and quickly set records with the number of accounts created and books that were checked out. It decisively showed us that libraries are not dead, and families are yearning for safe places to take their kids. We also completed Electric Park, and started construction on the recreation, aquatic, and senior center - more places that will be full of energy and life.

With our record snowpack last year, we did amazing work in and around the Spanish Fork River with our state and county partners to prevent flooding. We worked with Union Pacific Railroad to finally open Spanish Fork Parkway, the long-awaited and much-needed connection for the east side of town to Canyon Creek and I-15.

We also dealt with some tough things last year, including telephone terrorism at Spanish Fork High School in March, and the loss of too many to tragedy and suicide. Although I would much rather prefer not having these losses, I have been touched

over and over again by the outpouring of support and love this community offers one another time and time again.

Specific to the active shooter hoax at Spanish Fork High, the police response was overwhelming and decisive. Our Fire & EMS crews and Spanish Fork hospital were at the ready for whatever was going to happen inside those hallowed and storied walls. If this incident was a test of our response, rest assured we passed the test.

Fire & EMS

One of the biggest priorities we have for the upcoming year is ensuring that we can always pass the test and respond to the call - whatever it may be. Our Fire & EMS crews responded to over 3700 calls for service in 2023. After a month and a half into 2024, we are already outpacing those numbers. This call volume and the firefighting standards of today have brought us to a crossroads that involves making major investments into our Fire & EMS service.

In 1908, the 20-man Spanish Fork Volunteer Fire Department was organized and we have been reaping the benefits of that decision for over a century. Because of the dedication of our volunteers, for years we have been able to do a lot of things as a City while keeping property taxes well below the Utah County average. Spanish Fork would not be what it is today without the volunteers we've had for 125 years and still have on our crews today.

To those volunteers and your families - Thank you for your service and sacrifice.

Our City, however, is getting too big to lift by volunteers alone. For example, there were 4 LDS wards in 1908. And now? There are 10 LDS stakes. Most volunteers used to work in the City and be able to respond to the handful of calls for service. And now? Most volunteers work outside the City and there are much more than a handful of calls.

And no, it's not just more calls on US-6. It's calls from our friends and family and calls from Spanish Fork Hospital. Emergency services responding to a call is always personal for a family or individual. No one knows this better than Councilman Marshall, Councilwoman Beck, and myself. In the recent past, emergency services have taken care of our loved ones in their time of need.

So, we are working on ways to fund Fire & EMS from already existing revenues. We are working to prioritize projects in order to meet the challenges of today's service-level expectations. Chief Hales and his very experienced team are working on innovative ways to staff our stations, continue to use our dedicated volunteers, and be able to respond when one of us makes a call in our moment of need.

Growth

Another top priority for 2024 is to update the land use element of our general plan. This plan is our guide to smart growth, and what our growth in Spanish Fork will look like. As we anticipate future I-15 interchanges and the addition of FrontRunner to the community, we need to anticipate the other community uses. Where does it make sense to have high-density housing or commercial or industrial uses?

We've partnered with a very experienced firm to help us with this process of creating our "blueprint for growth."

Growth is going to happen. There are many reasons for this, and they're all important to understand. Here are a few:

1. We have created a vibrant community that people, including our own kids, want to be a part of. I still get the small-town feeling every time state champions ride a fire truck down Main Street!
2. State lawmakers continue to push cities to be part of the solution for the housing shortage in Utah.
3. Property rights matter. As long as development projects meet the zoning requirements for their properties, they are allowed to develop. This includes

the rights a farmer has to sell a farm field, and the rights a new field owner has to build.

If we can understand why growth happens, we can help guide smart growth and where it happens.

Think about this. Every year, about 350 students graduate from Spanish Fork High School. If we factor in the Spanish Fork residents from Maple Mountain, American Leadership Academy, and Landmark High Schools, we're looking at close to 500 members of the community entering the workforce that need jobs. Sure, some will go to colleges or service opportunities, but it would be nice if they at least had the option to stay and work in Spanish Fork - the place they call home.

VERK Industrial Project

One of the innovative ways we are addressing industrial growth and job growth is through the VERK industrial project and partnership with the Utah Inland Port Authority.

There is a lot of misinformation around this project. Let me clear the air. The area around the Spanish Fork Airport and North Main Street has been zoned for industrial uses for over 20 years. Two of the benefits of industrial growth are increased jobs and increased tax revenue.

This project will not create an inland port. The port authority's involvement in the project is strictly as a funding mechanism to help facilitate the multi-million dollar investments that companies will make to call Spanish Fork home, especially in regards to public infrastructure.

The VERK project is a good thing for Spanish Fork. Industrial investment allows us to keep property taxes low and still provide the quality of life that we all enjoy.

Traffic

The one thing that many of us don't enjoy, however, is traffic, and it's a reality that isn't going to change unless we get really innovative. Although we love the connectivity Highway 6 offers, it's a very popular route for people up and down the Wasatch Front! Plus, it's a diagonal road that was placed onto our grid system. It creates some real challenges.

The other very popular road in town is Main Street, especially for non-Spanish Fork residents. That's why, our engineering team has been hard at work to help our traffic flow better north and south, so that we don't have to use these major and busy roads.

Let's take a look at the plan for this north/south corridor project:

Video of north/south corridor project

Now don't go sharing this with all of your friends in Salem, they can stay on the state roads, or better yet, help them find northbound I-15 on the South end of town by using the new Mount Loafer Parkway.

These north and south corridors should provide our residents with some new routes to get around town. And they will be especially helpful as UDOT makes upgrades to Highway 6 this summer, and Main Street gets reconstructed in a couple of years.

Rec Center

Speaking of Main Street, I think the most exciting thing happening right now is on Main Street and Volunteer Drive, the home of our new Indoor Outdoor Recreation Aquatic and Senior Center.

Construction has begun and is on schedule to be completed in the fall of 2025. The building should start going vertical in the next few weeks!

We are grateful to our partners at Nebo School District and Utah County for their roles in helping to create what will be a productive addition to Spanish Fork City.

While we wait the next 19 or so months before the facility opens, we will be working on what the membership and use prices will be for individuals and families. Our goal is to make it affordable for all residents of Spanish Fork.

In addition, we are working on a private endowment that will help fund memberships for our youth that may otherwise not be able to afford a membership. There will be a few factors, like maintaining a base GPA in school, to be eligible, but the hope is that the rec center will be a safe and productive place for our youth to be.

We're excited about this endowment, which will be fully-funded from community and business donations.

Debt & Finances

I'd like to conclude tonight with some final thoughts about the financial status of the City. Some have shared the concern that the City is overburdened with debt. This is not true. City leaders past and present have been very wise with the care and expenditure of tax-payer dollars.

Our savings are well within the limits set by the state of Utah.

There is a major difference between personal finances and City finances, especially when it comes to debt. For a City, the use of debt, when used wisely, is the fiscally conservative thing to do because those who use the service pay for the service.

For instance, we could have saved up 130 million dollars over the course of 20 years for a new wastewater facility. Who knows how much construction costs would increase over that time period? And who knows how many residents would pay into the system and then move before it came online, or move in after it was built and never paid for it.

Issuing a bond for the construction of the wastewater treatment plant allows the users of the plant to be the payers of the plant. Because our wastewater goes into the pipes and has to be treated, it's only fair that we are the ones paying for it - not those before us.

We follow this model for other major projects including buildings, water tanks, and critical infrastructure. Doing so allows us to predict our utility rates, and not have to raise and lower them frequently when projects come around.

Looking at debt from this lens is different, but local governments are different and we are trying to find creative and innovative solutions to new and age-old problems.

Please join me in a collective commitment to be part of the solutions for Spanish Fork. If you think all you need to do to be an activist is to idly comment on the problems, or pile on the issues on social media, then we're certainly falling short.

Please join me in always remembering our agricultural roots. This year is the 100th year of the Utah State Junior Livestock Show, held right here in Spanish Fork for a century. This is the 82nd year of the PRCA Hall of Fame Fiesta Days Rodeo and the Fiesta Days celebrations that come with it each July.

Please get engaged and get involved. Come out to events, and sign up for programs. Reach out for answers to questions, and more importantly reach out to one another. The 45,000 of us that call Spanish Fork home is what makes us who we are.

I'm happy to report that the State of the City is STRONG. As your Mayor, Council, and 250 committed full time employees, we are grateful to those who came before us. Those who created an environment for us to honor the heritage of our ancestors, while leaning into the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Thank you. May God continue to Bless the United States, the State of Utah, and our City of Spanish Fork. The Home of Pride and Progress.