

Mayor Teddy Gray King's State of the City Address

April 18, 2022

As Prepared

Good evening, everyone. Friends, colleagues, staff and my fellow Piedmonsters.

How beautiful you all look tonight.

After two long years of pandemic shutdown, after countless mind-numbing zoom meetings, I am thrilled that we are finally able to join together in Piedmont's own city hall. Healthy, vaccinated, a little weary – but thoroughly optimistic about what the future holds for the city of Piedmont.

Right off the bat, I'd like to acknowledge the unsung heroes of my 8-year tenure on City Council. This job takes a lot. A lot of time, thought, energy, passion. My children Nicholas, Allison, and Danny are always – well generally – supportive and loving as I pursue my passion for public service. Thanks for your understanding and I love you so much. These kids were in second grade and pre-school when I was first elected to city council, so they have been on this journey with me for a long time.

And, I want to recognize my partner John Whitehurst and my dad Kenneth Gray – always supportive of everything I do.

Before we get started, I also want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our first responders – our Fire Department, the EMTs, DPW, and the Police Department for keeping us safe during the worst of the recent crises. When the rest of us have been able to work from home, our first responders were on the job day in and day out.

Assisting in emergencies, not knowing if helping our community would put them in harm's way. So, my gratitude extends not only to our rock-star leadership: Police Chief Jeremy Bowers and Fire Chief Dave Brannigan, (stand up gentlemen) but also to the rank and file members, the firefighters, the dispatchers, the animal care and control and of course, our **cops on the beat** – who put themselves on the line for us. Every single day. So, thank you.

And thanks to our amazing Executive staff: Lisa Argue and John Tulloch for putting this evening on. Great job organizing, getting invitations out and managing the world of zoom access and online, video communications. You've keep this ship afloat.

(I'd like to extend a big Piedmont welcome to our very own Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson)

I want to say what a pleasure it is working with this council. Vice Mayor Jen Cavanaugh, Councilmember Betsy Smegal Anderson, Councilmember Conna McCarthy, and our newest colleague -- Councilmember Jennifer Long. Your wisdom and professional experience bring so much to our small but mighty government.

It's really an honor to serve with each and every one of you. And I'm grateful that you have supported my work as the Mayor of Piedmont.

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You know, back when I was first elected in 2014 (yes, 2014. 8 years ago. That's a loooooong time), former Mayor Margaret Fujioka started a tradition of a state of the city address. Over time, that tradition has come and gone, but following the historic challenges of the last two years – and with all the great things that the city is doing, I wanted to take this opportunity to let you all know about the amazing transformation that Piedmont is undergoing. With historic infrastructure improvements, investment in our city facilities, re-imagining our policing, taking on our fair share of regional housing challenges, making our streets more walkable and bikeable, tackling greenhouse gas emissions and the climate crisis that we must confront -- and so much more.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

As I was saying a minute ago, one of the core responsibilities of any city – big or small -is to keep its residents safe. And in Piedmont, we've extended this mandate – to include safety of many kinds and in many locations. Under the leadership of Chief Jeremy Bowers, who is the newly elected president of the Alameda County Police Chiefs Association, we are leaning into community policing.

Recently, the Piedmont Police Department completed a three-year strategic plan which provides a roadmap for all department initiatives. Because of our investments in force multipliers like the public safety camera program and the hugely successful Automated License Plate Readers – Piedmont is able to stop crimes before they are committed, effectively investigate crimes that do occur, and just as importantly, share real time information with our partner agencies throughout the region.

Our license plate readers routinely lead to solving and preventing criminal activity. From property crime such as catalytic converter thefts to confiscating illegal firearms – including untraceable ghost guns -- I'm proud of the investment that Piedmont makes for this technology as it not only keeps our town safer, but makes a dent in the number of illegal guns in Northern California. That's a smart investment and that's being a good neighbor.

And just as importantly, the city of Piedmont has hired top-notch researchers with the University of Texas to review the Police Department's calls for service – including all calls to dispatch, traffic stops, and any interaction with a member of the public. The Piedmont City Council hired these experts to one) ensure that we have the right levels of police staffing and two) help us weed out any patterns of racism or bias on our force or in our community.

And, we continue to partner with the Piedmont Unified School District to provide on and off campus support through our Juvenile officer. By working with the schools to identify ways to

assist kids before trouble strikes is another way that the Piedmont PD is re-imagining what a local police force can mean to a community.

And to be sure, the city of Berkeley's loss was our gain when we lured Chief Dave Brannigan to head up the Piedmont Fire Department. In the middle of a pandemic, and from a jurisdiction with multiple fire houses. With his deep experience in running a much larger, more complex fire department, Chief Brannigan was instrumental in helping Piedmont get in-city, on demand covid testing multiple days per week. While it may seem like a long time ago – I recall when covid testing lines stretched around the block. Chief Brannigan's connection with regional testing partners ensured that there were enough tests, enough medical staff, and enough capacity to get our kids back to school and our residents back to work. That's a great accomplishment.

And, just last year, Piedmont firefighters responded to over 800 incidents – in Piedmont and around the state. Thanks to the city of Piedmont's commitment to our Police and Fire Depts, our residents are kept safe by an average 4 minute response time in the city of Piedmont. And, on top of that, we routinely provide mutual aid to surrounding jurisdictions close and far.

In 2021, our brave firefighters supported crews at the enormous Dixie Fire in Butte, Plumas, Lassen, and Shasta Counties. Our personnel were on constant rotation, assisting crews from around the state of California to fight this inferno.

And of course, nothing works without top-notch dispatchers who work in a cramped and outdated space. All I can say is thanks – and we're working to bring our dispatch up to modern standards to support today's and tomorrow's technology.

## RECREATION

And while our first responders were working to keep us safe and healthy during covid – the other unsung heroes are our Recreation Department employees. When most avenues for live human interaction was cut out or severely limited, Recreation Director Chelle Putzer took on the challenge to keep kids' programming open, safe, accessible, and most importantly dependable.

For many, many kids and their families the Recreation Department programs were the only structured outdoor interaction available – and that lasted for a full year. In my own family, during lockdown, during that hot, smokey Covid summer and Fall, my son Nicholas played fully masked tennis under Coach Jim Landes, my other son Danny practiced masked Martial Arts under Master Arnoldo Bolanes. And my daughter Allison learned how to play volleyball, fully masked, surrounded by young girls who are provided the same opportunities to excel at sports because here in the city of Piedmont, we value the spirit of Title IX – of equality and opportunity – to ensure our girls and boys, young women and men can play, compete and be their best selves on the field and beyond.

And you know who we have to thank for this? Chelle Putzer, a Title IX softball star during her own collegiate career at the University of Oklahoma. Go Sooners!

When the world was shutting down, Chelle Putzer doubled down.

Through her leadership in the Piedmont Rec Department, our city opened up more programming, more classes, more field space, more and diverse activities for all types of learners, and do-ers, from toddlers all the way up to Octogenarians like my dad playing pickle-ball. With book clubs, meditation, Walking on Wednesdays, I am proud to share that the Piedmont Recreation Department has never been more robust nor better run. And of course, it bears mentioning that the Rec serves kids and adults from around the region – with lots and lots of Oakland residents joining Piedmonters for the physical and mental health benefits of our programs.

So thank you, Chelle. I can attest – your vision and dogged commitment to children, youth, families, and senior citizens is the very best in local government. Your work touches the lives of hundreds of people. Your work touches the lives of my family. My kids and my dad. And I'm proud to say that I'm a steady user of our new, and GLORIOUS, Corey Reich tennis center. It's a joy to play on the Piedmont courts. I'm proud to show it off to my out-of-town tennis partners. And thank you thank you thank you Cora Wood for always being the friendly and helpful voice on the other side of the phone line when folks call for help with the rec department.

I also want to highlight our generous partners with the Piedmont Recreational Facilities Organization who do an amazing job of raising the funds to keep our playfields and courts awesome. We couldn't do it without you.

## PUBLIC WORKS

And when they say local government is all about fixing pot holes and cracked sidewalks – there is something to that. Nothing is a more bread-and-butter constituent service than Public Works.

But before we go any further, I want to acknowledge our former head of the Department of Public Works, Chester Nakahara. Chester is in the hospital right now, and he's fighting hard to get better and come home. If anyone in the Nakahara family is watching – we love you, Chester. So much of what is great about our streets, sidewalks, beautiful traffic enhancements – we can thank Chester for that. He was – and is – a cherished member of the city family and we pray for a speedy recovery.

Of course, in fine Piedmont fashion, we were able to lure Chester's replacement, Daniel Gonzalez over from the great city of Hillsborough to come and lead our Public Works department. Since Daniel arrived, along with Parks and Programs Manager Nancy Kent, the Department of Public Works has had to adjust our vision and care of open space to accommodate the historic drought and effects of climate change. We're planting more native species and bay-friendly varieties, which use less water but keep our parks – like Dracena or the Main Park, and traffic calming spaces like the Ramona-Ronada corner or the Linda-Kingston Triangle, beautiful, functional and water smart.

And speaking of traffic calming – right now, the city of Piedmont is investing in traffic calming throughout the city.

When we say we are committed to making our city more walkable and bikeable – we mean it. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of former Vice Mayor Tim Rood, our Planning staff and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee, we recently adopted our **Piedmont Safer Streets Plan** which will guide us for the coming years. We are currently constructing bulb outs on Oakland Avenue to slow traffic and reduce the distance pedestrians need to cross at key intersections. Also, we are using creative, low-cost solutions like speed cushions on Greenbank and temporary bollards on Nova and Grand Avenues to reduce speeds, clarify traffic lanes and enhance safety.

Clean streets, safer streets, bikeable and walkable streets -- these are the hallmarks of a healthy city.

And, I'd be remiss if, when talking about our safe and beautiful public spaces, I didn't mention PBF, the Piedmont Beautification Foundation. Everywhere you look, when you see a beautiful, well lighted area. When you walk by the Japanese Tea House with the Zen rock garden, or the soon to be installed safer Guilford Steps, or the annual Holiday Tree outside the Community Hall – we can thank the vision and generosity this outstanding civic organization. So, thank you PBF – Piedmont wouldn't look like Piedmont without you.

## ENVIRONMENT

So, going back for a minute to Environmental Stewardship, I'm so proud of the work the city of Piedmont is doing to protect the Environment and address the looming threat of climate change.

You know, one of my first posts as a volunteer in Piedmont was Chair of the Environmental Task Force, seated by former Mayor Abe Friedman. This was back in 2009-2010. We recommended to Council back then to hire a Sustainability Coordinator, so that one person could coordinate all the climate-saving initiatives that are spread among the various city and state agencies. I'm thrilled to report that a decade after this recommendation was made, Alyssa Dykman joined our fair city over a year ago, and is working very hard to make sure that Piedmont is second to none in our dedication to the planet.

This City Council is showing over and over again that we have a strong commitment to protecting our planet through an aggressive composting program – soon, we will have a program in place that yields so much FREE MULCH – LIKE, MORE FREE MULCH THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE – that every Piedmonter with a garden can access.

By separating organic, compostable materials in our green bins, we are keeping this biodegradable waste out of our landfills, thus eliminating it's methane release – a significant greenhouse gas.

With assistance from our regional partners at StopWaste and the State's organics and recycling laws, we are bringing organic materials back as compost for all of us to use. Thus, making our gardens grow while protecting the planet.

Also, among our environmentally progressive policies, in 2021, Piedmont adopted reach codes that will ensure our homes are improved with enhancements like solar panels, or induction cook-tops, or electric heat pumps, or electric hot water heaters, or any number of improvements at the time of new construction or sale.

We adopted a city policy that 100 percent of our electricity is procured through East Bay Community Energy – so that every time you turn on a lightbulb or use your microwave, we’re using an energy mix that is cleaner and greener than most consumers in the state of California. We will be installing Fast, low-cost EV charging stations shortly, right here in the center of town, which will be a great amenity and will help serve the charging needs of teachers, city employees and residents.

## PLANNING AND HOUSING

And of course, when we talk about the environment, there is no way to discuss environmental stewardship without talking about housing. Because sound housing policy is sound environmental policy. And fair housing policy is racial justice. And sound housing policy makes for equitable education. Here at the Piedmont City Council, **we’re tackling all of it.**

As my mayoral initiative, I was pleased to be able seat the Housing Advisory Committee, Chaired by Rani Batra, that, along with the Planning Commission, that is taking a deep dive into what our regional housing mandates mean.

See, the state of California looked at every region around the state. And looked at projected growth in in every city and county – big and small.

And of course, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Area is projected to keep growing. With economic growth, more jobs, more cultural amenities. The good news is that the Bay Area is projected to be the place for business, innovation, culture, ethnic and racial diversity for years and years to come.

Of course, the challenging part is that we, the residents of Piedmont will have to take a long, hard look at every available buildable parcel, so that we too can meet our fair share of the housing obligations put forth by the state through the Association of Bay Area Governments.

You’ve probably seen the Piedmont is Home banners hung up throughout our city. Good work Pierce McDonald and Kevin Jackson with the Planning Department. The banners look beautiful.

And thanks to Mark Enea at the Front Desk. That’s a hard job, but a vitally important one.

Through the many workshops, committee meetings, online interactive strategy sessions – the city staff and councilmembers – are working with some of our amazing partners in answering this question where to build housing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Piedmont Racial Equity Campaign and the Piedmont Anti-Racism and Diversity Committee are supportive partners in helping us envision how to grow sustainably

Piedmont has been charged with allowing for over 500 new housing units in the coming years. And by engaging the community early, at every step of this planning process, I know that we will find a way to grow in a responsible manner that allows us to maintain the beauty and distinctiveness of Piedmont's built environment.

I'm excited to be Mayor at this critical juncture of our history. I want to do everything in my power to ensure that the drive to grow is fair, is equitable, and brings as many voices to the table as possible.

## LABOR NEGOTIATIONS AND BUDGET

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the outstanding work by Finance Director Mike Szczech, City Attorney Michelle Kenyan, HR Administrator Stacy Jennings, and our city manager PAR EXCELLANCE Sara Lillevand.

It's because of their keen eye on the bottom line, with regards to our spending and revenue projections that we just completed a thorough top to bottom review of all our labor relations and successfully negotiated 4 year agreements with all city employees. Piedmont has long benefited from outstanding staff – this year we seized the opportunity to get ahead of our labor agreements to ensure that our workforce remains outstanding, committed to constituent service, and compensated fairly.

I believe that city council has done a solid job of responding to the tight labor market while ensuring the fiscal health of our city long into the future. These negotiations took months and months and months. A lot on zoom. Some in person. But I'm proud to say we got this job done and that our employees know they work in an environment that values their contributions.

## SCHOOLS

I'm proud to say that the city of Piedmont's working relationship with the Piedmont Unified School District has never been stronger. While there is very little good to say about the year in lockdown – I will say that the schools and the city of Piedmont worked together like never before. From school construction, road closures, covid testing, and offering free childcare to the kids of our Amazing teachers and administrative staff – that time was truly an all hands on deck moment. Now that we're deep into the Spring semester, I can say that the goodwill and partnership developed during the worst of the crisis continues to bear fruit. On behalf of our entire city and school communities.

## THE POOL

And speaking of our future – we have to talk about the most exciting infrastructure project that Piedmont has seen for decades, and that is the future of the Piedmont Community pool. What a glorious project this is to work on.

Now, they say the political is personal. For me, it certainly is.

Before we start talking about bonds and interest rates and the price of building materials – I want to share with you a story of how access to public pools can change a person's life.

My mom, Teddy Vasquez, was the 5<sup>th</sup> of 8 children, born in San Francisco's Mission District to a Spanish-Speaking, Mexican immigrant family. In the depths of the Great Depression.

To be sure, my mom's family never went on vacations. Didn't head to the beach or Tahoe or anything like that.

But not far from their flat on Folsom Street was the a public swimming pool at Garfield Park, affectionately known as Nickel Pool, because it cost the kids a nickel to gain admittance. And swim for the day.

And that's what she did as a kid all summer long. No formal swim lessons, just a nickel in her pocket and the will to get in the water.

Fast forward 80 years, and my mom suffered terribly from osteoporosis. When she could barely stand upright, or walk without pain, she could go to a warm pool at Mills-Peninsula Hospital where a water aerobics class catered to the injured, the afflicted, and people with disabilities.

Those were the best moments for her. She would say, when I'm in the water I'm free.

Sadly, like many other things, this pool closed during the covid shutdown and honestly, this started my mom's decline.

But the reason I'm sharing this story is to illustrate the power of a community pool. You see, the Piedmont pool isn't just for lap swimming or water polo practice. Or even just a place to take lessons. Our community pool was – and will be again -- the place where lives are transformed for kids, seniors and everyone in between.

In 2020, while the state was still on lockdown, Piedmont voters resoundingly passed Measure UU, the pool bond initiative that will provide \$19.5 Million to create a new, beautiful, functional, practical aquatics facility. And, like the old pool we are replacing, families and individuals from around the area can buy a day pass, a seasonal pass or yearly pass to use this awesome facility.

I firmly believe that we would not here, talking about a new pool for the 21<sup>st</sup> century without the vision and stubborn tenacity of Councilmember Betsy Smegal Anderson and former Mayor Bob McBain.

I remember in the depths of 2020 the Measure UU campaign called and knocked on doors (fully masked,) to persuade neighbors and friends of the urgency of a pool bond. And in November, Measure UU, **the first General Obligation Bond put on the ballot by the city won and won big.**

So, lets applaud that amazing vision and tenacity.



Now, almost two years on – we’re so fortunate that former Rec Commission Chair Steve Roland has taken on the herculean task of holding the hearings, workshops and community meetings to bring this vision to reality.

Under the guidance of our aquatics architect, Piedmont’s own Clarence Mamuyac, we are knee deep in the design phase of the upcoming facility. Unfortunately, today’s inflationary environment is forcing us to cut back on some ‘nice to haves” while we protect the “need to haves” for the upcoming construction.

Of course, a need to have versus a nice to have is pretty subjective.

And when we started this process we budgeted for a need to have natural gas heating system, assuming the cost of clean, green electric heat would be just too expensive.

But this council said – **not so fast.**

I’m proud to say that at our last meeting, we declared once and for all that the city of Piedmont’s biggest infrastructure investment in a generation will harness solar, wind, and other renewable sources to heat the pool through electric heat pumps.

And, by doing so we’re stepping forward, willing to be one of the first large, competitive level pools to be heated with renewable electricity.

And I am beyond thrilled that we have taken this giant step in the right direction. I can also say, that we’re working with our state leaders at the California Energy Commission, and Councilmember McCarthy and I are meeting with State Representatives this week to urge state support for this historic project.

This is one of our most consequential efforts. Possibly the most important project I’ve worked on in my 8 plus years on the city council. And, while I won’t be mayor in 2024 when this historic facility opens for its first splash, I’ll be there with a big, proud smile, and a swimsuit in my backpack.

Finally, as I wrap up the State of the City Address 2022, it’s appropriate to look back at the state of this city in 1924. That was the year another Piedmonter by the name of Sidney Dearing was run out of town, along with his wife and children, from their family home. All because Mr. Dearing and his family were black, and Piedmont maintained strict and despicable racial covenants. At this heartbreaking time, the Dearing family wasn’t protected by the Piedmont Police. They were sent packing by the Piedmont Police.

So, tonight I join with the community and fellow councilmembers in calling for Piedmont City Government to find a way to tell the Dearing story in a meaningful way. City Administrator Sara Lillevand has suggested and I agree that the Piedmont Park Commission to take up the issue and solicit input our neighbors and residents on how best to memorialize the Dearing Family.

This important action will help tell the story of the Dearing Family to a new generation – one hundred years after this sad chapter.

So, Colleagues, Family and Friends, I came to this meeting tonight hoping to share with you the amazing things that your city is doing right now.

Often, we get so wrapped up In getting a job done, we don't take the time to pause. Reflect. And share our progress with our fellow Piedmonters.

Thanks for sharing this evening with me – I regret we had to miss the Warriors Game.

In conclusion, things are looking up in our town. We're a thoughtful city government. A responsive city government – one that listens to the community and learns the hard lessons from the past. Together, we're building a great future and I'm so grateful that we're on this journey together.

What a thrill it is to be your mayor. It truly is the honor of a lifetime.

Thank you and Good night.