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News Release

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Progress in Melissa advances in the face of obstacles *The year's bumps fail to derail City's progress*

MELISSA (December 21, 2020) While starting out as a year filled with the promise of significant residential and commercial growth and development for the Melissa community, 2020 instead stumbled along, presenting unexpected requirements and obstacles as the COVID-19 pandemic asserted itself.

Even so, the City of Melissa pressed forward, almost without pause, on a variety of fronts. For example, during 2020, the City set a new record in the number of single family home permits issued, forged ahead with the construction of a new water tower, hired key personnel, finalized the shift to a new solid waste contractor, debuted a new website, provided popular online library programming, and bolstered public safety considerably, among many other accomplishments.

Construction was evident in virtually every part of Melissa during the year, as contractors working for the Texas Department of Transportation completed reconstruction work on the portion of SH 121 that runs through Melissa, including the key intersection with Hwy 5. The interchange will set the stage for the reconstruction of Hwy 5 northward in the coming years. In addition, contractor crews completed laying utility lines and turned the initial spades of dirt on the completion of the Melissa Road segment between Hwy 5 and Hwy 121.

Similarly, residential construction did not appear to be significantly stymied by the pandemic as a variety of builders and developers moved forward on either breaking ground on new subdivisions or pressed ahead with the planned expansion phases of existing developments.

The year saw a record number of single family permits issued. The 745 permits issued in Fiscal Year 2020 breaks the old record by nearly 50 percent, and signals that the surge in the number of rooftops in the City will closely match pre-pandemic expectations.

Commercial activity was particularly evident as several businesses opened along the Hwy 121 corridor. Several fast food locations sprung up along with the shells for additional retail in the Melissa Village and Cardinal Village commercial centers. Most notably, officials with Kroger Grocery indicated a strong interest in the construction of a Kroger Marketplace location in that commercial space.

The NEST, north elevated storage tower, saw the concrete stem completed along with the hydrologic preparations necessary for its role of storing up to two million gallons of water for residents and businesses. The NEST is scheduled to be completed in the fall of 2021 and will help provide sufficient water storage for the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, most residents were required to become accustomed to a new solid waste collection day as Melissa moved to a trash and recycling collection schedule that utilized all five days of the week. The contract with Community Waste Disposal includes monthly curbside bulk waste collection, and an annual hazardous household waste collection process.

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Utility Billing completed the transition to a new third party billing partner, replacing the previous provider which unexpectedly closed operations in late 2019. Staff was compelled to take on the monumental task of taking the process in-house for several months and did so with the goal of minimizing disruptions.

The Melissa Fire Department entered the year having fully staffed three shifts, covering the City uninterrupted with professionally trained, full-time staff along with the appropriate leadership personnel. Upgrades to the Fire Station included security fencing, a new kitchen, appliances, and improvements to the dormitory facilities. A new 77-foot ladder truck was purchased in October, with delivery expected in early 2021.

Melissa's Police Department also reached a new record in the Drug Take Back program. The collection of unwanted and expired medications increased by over 100 percent from the previous year, setting a new record at 168 lb. The program removes dangerous medications from circulation and prevents them from being introduced into the water system. During the pandemic, officers amassed over 1,400 hours of advanced training, preparing them for enhanced public safety service delivery to residents.

Municipal Court staff continued with their award-winning Traffic Safety Initiative efforts. The pandemic's restrictions impinged on the staff's usual outreach efforts, but the display remained available in the Court's lobby and was prominent on social media. The annual food drive during November's Municipal Court Week was augmented with staple donations replacing community service for defendants as in-person community service opportunities were diminished or eliminated.

Public Works continued its critical leak detection program, upgrading equipment from analog to more reliable digital detection machinery. Each of Melissa's original five subdivisions, which are affected by defective copper approach lines, was monitored for leaks four times this year, occurring over 46 weeks. Notably, "unaccounted for water," a reporting category that each of the state's water distribution facilities must maintain, was reduced to 8.17% in 2019 and is on schedule to attain a 5.5% rate for 2020, far below the national standard of 12%.

Expanding the Public Works staff from four to seven has elevated customer service, increased work efficiency, assisted in the completion of scheduled projects, allowed for timely leak repairs, and has kept up with the demands of both new residential and commercial construction as well as with the City's internal construction projects.

Perhaps the City department most affected by the pandemic's reach is the Melissa Public Library. Obviously, limiting the number of patrons in the building negatively affected the number of people using the computers as well as the amount of material checkouts. In response, the staff instituted a curbside service program that allowed patrons to checkout materials which they chose online. After their choices were conveyed to the staff, librarians packaged the material for no-contact pickup. The impressive success of the program provided both the staff and patrons the ability to maintain a modicum of normalcy.

Teachers and staff of Melissa ISD schools borrowed the library's mobile hotspots to help students switch quickly to virtual learning. And the use of the OverDrive/Libby application has afforded participating patrons the ability to continue reading on their devices at home.

Library programming also pivoted to a virtual setting. Among the more popular programs were those that included craft bags created by the staff for families to pick up and follow along on Facebook either live or through the recorded version. Storytimes are now being held on Google through a BitMoji classroom to allow participating children to explore different videos, links, books, etc.

Parks personnel continued their efforts at implementing quality of life improvements. Among these was the coordination of the completion of the hike and bike trail along Liberty Way that closes a gap in the overall trails

system. Liberty is now connected to Creek Crossing and North Creek via a wide concrete trail, part of a planned 90-acre park which includes the development of a town lake and accompanying amenities.

Parks staff also managed the contractor-installed overhead netting around the concession stand area at the Z-PLEX. This netting system is a safety feature designed to protect fans from injury resulting from errant foul balls. Staff was instrumental in completing irrigation improvements at the Z-PLEX where an additional 24 sprinkler zones were added. Parks crews also assisted in the installation of the new City Hall diesel backup generator.

While communicating with residents face-to-face was curtailed during the height of the pandemic, and remains so to some extent, the City rolled out an improved website to ensure there was sufficient opportunity to convey matters of wide interest and importance. The new site, occupying the same URL address, has facilitated filling Open Records Requests, and sharing agendas for the City Council and boards and commissions. The City Secretary's office has been a key contributor to this effort.

The new website makes obtaining forms and documents easier and allows for constant communication with City departments where necessary. CARES funding supported the effort to keep the lines of communication open, as well as allowing employees working remotely to access documents via a secure internet connection. Streaming Council meetings, which became necessary in order to comply with social distancing, was initiated.

In addition, the City instituted a new podcast called Heart of Melissa. The third-party podcast host interviews residents and business owners to share their stories with the public, giving current and new residents their various perspectives on settling and starting a business in Melissa.

Ensuring that employees remain engaged and connected even while working remotely has been challenging, providing Human Resources personnel opportunities to innovate various ways to help keep remote workers productive.

While most employees continue to work from their City Hall offices, individual circumstances occasionally change with parental and caregiver responsibilities or isolation due to potential exposure. Remarkably, the irregularity of the workforce's attendance patterns has not affected the periodically-measured employee satisfaction levels negatively. In fact, the opposite is true. The year's levels in engagement and satisfaction have been at their highest levels ever.

Recruitment and hiring have not suffered, and in fact have been enhanced with a new process that makes the selection process both easier and more effective. And, while other cities have gone through furloughs and layoffs, Melissa has been able to avoid these actions, principally because of inventive employee utilization protocols.

Financial Services has been active on a number of fronts, pitching in where needed, learning new processes, and developing skills in diverse areas of the City's internal practices. For example, during the period in which Utility Billing was processing payments in-house, the accounting department posted payments, learned new systems throughout the transition to the new vendor, verified bill accuracy, and assisted with the download into the Incode system.

With some key staffing changes this year, the Finance and Accounting areas we have been training and implementing efficiencies and new processes. The department facilitated the bond rating review from Moody's Investors Service that resulted in a credit rating upgrade that will make a substantial difference in interest rates for future capital reinvestment projects.

The City of Melissa has weathered the vagaries of 2020 with a renewed sense of teamwork and esprit de corps that will undoubtedly carry it through to the next year and beyond, pandemic or not.

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ABOUT THE CITY OF MELISSA – The City of Melissa is a fast-growing progressive suburb with a small-town feel, located 35 miles north of downtown Dallas in the dynamic growth area of northeast Collin County. Melissa sits on 21 square miles, is home to over 16,000 people, and is easily accessible by way of three intersecting highways. Melissa has ample inventory of the highly-sought-after undeveloped frontage available on US 75 and SH 121, primed to serve the commercial needs of a booming Collin County. Melissa is a home-rule municipality, governed by a council-manager form of government.