



State of the City Solana Beach, California

June 21, 2006

Presented by David Powell, Mayor

Welcome and good evening.

Deputy Mayor Heebner, Councilmembers, honored guest, my fellow citizens of Solana Beach.

I am here before you today to speak to you about the State of our city - a place we all hold dear. Fellow citizens, I ask you, when does a house become a home? How does the idea of a city become the place where we dwell, gather, love, and live?

It has been twenty years since the town Council and citizens of Solana Beach united to break away from the County of San Diego and take control of its destiny. We incorporated in July 1986 and on July 1st of this year; we will celebrate at Fletcher Cove the wisdom of our town elders and honor them as we do tonight with our grateful thanks for their vision and courage.

Birthing a city is no easy business as people in this chamber can attest. What drove us to take that first action that led to our city hood is remembered by many of you in this chamber, but for most, it's a distant memory of a valiant struggle.

As in any city of modest age, families come and ago and a town's present becomes its history, its birth relegated long since to stories told with heroes and villains, triumph and tragedy. As we look back through our past we may find that as we turn our attention to the future, what continues to drive us, motivate us, and sustain us over the length and breath of the life of our fair and great city is a love for this place, this 1.7 miles of earth that lives at the edge of the Pacific Ocean. Change is on the wind my friends, where it continually dwells and we must embrace it, as the tide embraces the shore, inevitable, constant ... constantly changing.

President John Kennedy said in his last State of the Union Address: "We are not lulled by the momentary calm of the sea or the somewhat clearer skies above. We know the turbulence that lies below, and the storms that are beyond the horizon..."

My fellow citizens, I too admonish us from being lulled by the joy of our past achievements, celebrate them we shall, honor the vision of our founders we will; but this city lives for its citizens today, we dwell in the present, and we shall meet the challenges of the future with the same courage, vision, and leadership of those who first manned this ship of state, this sunny and beautiful place, this home of ours we call Solana Beach.

It is fitting, after twenty years to ask ourselves a few defining questions. Who are we as a city? What have we become? Is who we are today what we intended? What image comes to your mind when you say, "I live in Solana Beach?" When people ask me where I live, there is always this wan look of longing and desire when I say Solana Beach. Inevitably they always respond, "Oh, that is such a lovely place, I wish I could afford to live there."

I wonder what they are responding to. Is it the beach? Our size, we are the second smallest city in the county! Is it the Cedros District, the Sunday Farmer's Market, the Belly Up? Is it the Coastal Rail Trail, now replete with Betsy Shultz's exquisite arches? Is it the North Coast Repertory Theater? Is it our distinguished schools? Is it the active involvement of our citizens? Is it the transparent and excellent management of our city by the staff at City Hall? Is it the intimate 20th century style of our neighborhoods? Does all of this make up our character?

Are we a "beach town" like Pismo Beach, Ocean Beach, Seal Beach, and others?

Are we an "artist's town", like Laguna Beach?

Are we a city known for its commerce and development?

What is our character? What do we as Solana Beach residents, want to be known for, what do we want people to think of when they think of Solana Beach?

We often talk about "community character," and we toss that phrase around so often but what do we mean when we say that?

Do we know who we are as a collective group of residents, business owners, and activists?

Do we know and agree upon where the city is headed?

We are at the perfect moment in time to consider these questions. Lets us reflect upon twenty years of our own creation, lets us look to where we've been to understand where we are going...

Imagine if you will, twenty years ago, a group of interested future citizens coming together to form this city. Imagine what an enormous undertaking that was, the amount of work and the challenges they faced along the way. Not everyone in the community wanted to become a city – for many the status quo is preferred to change. For many the land-use issues of the day were not their issues. Our city is quite interesting, it has two distinct sections. The community east of the freeway, a planned subdivision, was built in 1975, while the beach bungalows of the west side harken from 1924 -1950s. Regardless of these differences, the founding fathers and mothers of Solana Beach succeeded, and we now are able to call this place, "Our city, the city of Solana Beach." We even have a city song!

Building a city is much like raising a child.

As an infant city, we needed a strong foundation for the future. We needed to decide, and we did, what types of rules we were going to use to govern ourselves – think of the multitude number of ordinances, resolutions, policies and programs we needed to develop – and, with the courage, tenacity and determination of our local residents, we collectively developed a comprehensive General Plan and the city’s Municipal Codes. Growing through our first years of life, there was a lot to do, and we should be proud of ourselves for doing a great job. Our foundation is good.

We were like that toddler that learned to walk early, or I should say run, and run we did, building a City Hall, a fire station second to none, we developed unique approaches for solving land-use issues such as the comprehensive view assessment toolkit and creating a view assessment process that allowed citizens a forum to adjudicate their view concerns. As we grew, so did our ambition. Along with the County of San Diego and the San Dieguito School District we built the joint-use library at Earl Warren Middle School. We helped encourage commerce in the Cedros Design District and thanks to active community members in the area; it’s a beautiful and vibrant place to shop and visit.

To extend the metaphor, as we hit our teenage years, we struggled to define ourselves and how we could solve the most significant issues of the day, such as development standards which include view issues, beaches, and bluffs, and we continue to struggle with these issues today. We made decisions as to what type of community we wanted to be...We turned down Costco’s offer to build a store in Solana Beach and passed Proposition T to manage growth in Solana Beach. We rescued the Amtrak station from Del Mar and built the grade separation at Lomas Santa Fe and Highway 101.

While we may have differing views on the aforementioned issues, we have continued to define and refine our direction over the past twenty years and we should be very proud of the level of public debate that these evolving standards represent.

As we transition from our youth, we face the question as many do when facing adulthood, “What do we want to be when we grow up?” Some of the answers have already come. We recently completed the Coastal Rail Trail, a 1.7 mile beautification project of the rail easement between the train tracks and Highway 101. Our segment was the first segment in a 44 mile project that will traverse the county. We completed the Rosa Street Pedestrian Bridge linking South Cedros with the old highway and are on the verge of going out to bid on the Cliff Street Pedestrian Bridge that will link North Cedros with Highway 101. We have received Coastal Commission approval of a redesign of Fletcher Cove and will be building this new and exciting park this year beginning after Labor Day. And with full funding in place, we are looking to rebuild the Lomas Santa Fe Interchange, removing the left turn lanes, and freeing up traffic on Lomas Santa Fe.

Like all children, we will grow up, like it or not, we will change and mature...there will be struggles, but growth will come, not always as planned nor as intended, but just as the coastal redwood has its roots in the earth and its crown in the sky, growing ever upwards, so to shall Solana Beach grow.

The question before for us today as in days past, is ... Are we, this current collective group of interested residents, going to take up the challenge before us, and rise to the occasion, as they did here in this very city twenty years ago? Are we going to take up the mantle of change, envision the next twenty years for our city and just as our forebears did so for us, and lead our city to its future?

Or will we fight and argue, and stomp our feet exclaiming, “No, I don’t want to grow up!” just as some young folks often do, in the hopes of avoiding difficult decisions and not disappointing their neighbors? Whatever we do, we must think not of “our views”, “of our wishes”, “of ourselves” – but of our city, Solana Beach, the place we dwell, gather and create.

The courageous people, who helped to form our city, did not think just of themselves and what was best for their position or their point of view. Instead, they thought of what would be the right thing for the collective good of the whole community. For example, when deciding on the city’s potential boundaries, some of the early discussions included making Solana Beach’s boundary at the I-5 freeway. While that might have been a great idea for the west I-5 residents, to keep their “small town” community just for themselves - somehow they knew including east I-5 residents would be “good for the city” and, thankfully, they made the right decision. Solana Beach would be in a very precarious financial position had the city residents been more selfish and bifurcated themselves in 1986, rather than expanded their horizons.

We are now faced with a similar opportunity – we are a collective group of residents at a similar place and time in history. We are poised to make decisions that will affect the city’s future and will help to sustain the city - Our future is literally here.

In 2026, another Mayor will, hopefully, be giving the city’s State of the city address to a crowd of interested, active, and concerned residents. If the city today makes the right decisions, those residents, families, children and elderly will have a viable city to discuss.

However, if we don’t take the opportunity presented to us right now, I am concerned we may not leave them a city at all. I say this because small cities such as Solana Beach are considered today on the “endangered list.” There is a real and rational concern throughout the county, among city management and civic leaders, as to whether or not small cities will be able to survive the competition for finances, resources, and the lure of the “large pockets” found among large cities and counties. We don’t even have to look far for an example.

Our neighbors in Del Mar are struggling to find ways to manage their city financially. Their boundary line, ending near the I-5 freeway, leaves their tiny city without many resources to balance the ebb and flow of their real estate tax base. They will need to make some tough choices over the course of the next few years to turn around, or they could end up extinct. They are not alone, in San Diego County, Imperial Beach, National City, and Lemon Grove, are all examples of cities that struggle to stay afloat.

Solana Beach, on the other hand, is a shining star among these small cities. A few years ago, we made the right decision to self-insure our workers comp program as well as to try our hand, again, at a Redevelopment Agency. Just a few days ago, I signed our first bond issuance, which will generate about 3.1 million dollars for projects over the next 4 years. In starting the RDA, in spite of the city's previous unsuccessful attempt at an RDA, this Council considered the city's current financial state and made a policy and business decision that would serve the best interest for the city's future. We didn't put a lot of emotion into the decision; we objectively considered what was in the best interest for the greatest good.

Here we are now, at a time of great change and big decisions; a time of moving from our youth into adulthood.

Yet, we seem to be struggling with the decisions we face today. Its not that we shouldn't struggle, important decisions are meant to be wrestled with. Important decisions are meant to be debated. It seems to that we struggle with our vision. It seems that we know more of what we don't want rather than what we do. It seems to me, that we are managing our city, not leading it. We need to consider now what the impact of our choices will be in twenty years; we need to create a collective vision for our city that will take us through the next twenty years just as our founding leaders did for the first twenty.

Twenty years ago, the first leaders of Solana Beach needed a center of governance for this community. We've got it. I am speaking to you from City Hall. We set building standards and modified them as needed. We determined the type of public safety we needed and wanted, and created it. We determined for ourselves, and are still determining, what type of beaches we want and how we will handle the bluff issues. We've built consensus and resolved conflict. We developed a View Assessment Committee, recognizing and appreciating the value of the views in our city. So, change, we see, is good.

Without change, we'd be down at the County Board of Supervisors, trying to get their attention, when they have such a large region with so many concerns. As it is, we've taken charge of our own city; we've determined our aging sewer system needs rebuilding and we've set the course to get it done over the next few years; we wanted the Rosa Street Bridge and we built it; we wanted to be part of the Coastal Rail Trail on Highway 101 and was the first city to completed its segment; we wanted Fletcher Cove to be rebuilt and construction will begin in the fall of this year.

We've built our roads and bridges and fought to get the train station in town so we have opportunity for people to come and go. However, at the time it was being considered, some people loved the idea and some didn't. The train station, which we wrestled away from Del Mar, has been very good for the city. Some people were resistant because they loved the "walkways" and dirt paths in the area and they were very upset when the walkways that meant so much to them were displaced to make way for the grade separation project, which placed the train tracks below grade.

Today, we have finally replaced those dirt paths with the beautiful Coastal Rail Trail, which has the most amazing public art sculpture, a set of arches gracing the entrance beautifully designed and constructed by Betsy Schultz and local community members.

The Rail Trail itself wouldn't be what it is today, if it wasn't for a group of concerned and interested residents who took it upon themselves to come up with an alternative and more "Solana Beach" design than the one which had been approved by the then City Council. We are impressed by the beauty of the trail and grateful to Mike Nichols, and Lesa Heebner, who spearheaded this project before she was elected to City Council, and others who gave of their time and talents to the city to help us find "our path" for the project.

Although some people wanted the train station and some didn't, look at it now, with the Coastal Rail Trail, the newly constructed Rosa Street Pedestrian Bridge, and the soon to be built Cliff Street Pedestrian Bridge. I'm routinely told of how much people love it all; so, in spite of the resistance first encountered, in the end, the Council made the right decision to go forward with the train station and to construct the Rail Trail and bridge.

Residents and visitors crossing over the bridge from Highway 101, will find themselves on what is arguably one of the most unique shopping streets in San Diego, Cedros Avenue – with everything from Muttropolis for pets, to the varied artists who display their creations at this eclectic mix of retail stores. Cedros is unlike most other shopping areas in San Diego - the "feel" of the street is a combination of art and commerce cohabitating beautifully.

In 2006, we are about to embark on the largest remodel of a park on the beach in the County's recent history – Fletcher Cove. We recently received the final plans from Mike Peltz & Associates, who provided a design that is beautiful, useful, and of the quality we want to be properly reflective of our Crown Jewel – Fletcher Cove.

The plans include a large open lawn with room for kids, and families can play basketball and play in the tot lot. Most importantly, the designers have highlighted our precious view corridor and were able to maximize viewing opportunities at three potential "view plazas"

- 1) the "sun plaza" which creates a dramatic entry into the park;
- 2) the "view plaza" shown by the shell features picnic tables and terraced seating;
- 3) and lastly, the existing scenic overlook and lawn area at the edge of the bluff will be enhanced with decomposed granite paving and picnic tables.

As Fletcher Cove construction gets underway later this year, we should be looking around the city and asking ourselves, "Where do we go from here?" "What's missing, what's next?"

Our responsibility is to ensure we have a viable city. To sustain ourselves, and to be a viable, lively city with a future, we must have a solid foundation (which, we have). We also need a sufficient amount of commerce, but commerce alone does not make a city. It must be coupled with art and recreation. Solana Beach is not just our house, it's our home. It's the place we dwell, gathering to eat and laugh with friends and family, debate the issues of the day, be transformed and transfixed by public art, and to be moved and inspired by plays at the North Coast Rep from Sophocles to Hughes, Shakespeare to Brecht, Beckett to Albee. But, where is the public gathering space? Where is the center of our town? It is not this hall; the soul of this city does not reside in this chamber.

When I was elected, Barry Johnson, our recently retired City Manager, asked me what my vision was for the city. I told him I saw a city with a viable and rich downtown life, a thriving center where people gathered, laughed, lived, engaged in discourse and debate, ate, shopped, and shared their lives. I saw a thriving, walkable downtown. A revitalized and beautified Highway 101 corridor connected to Cedros Design district in the south by the Rosa Street Bridge and connected to the North Cedros Train Station project, home to commercial shops and the North Coast Repertory Theatre by the Cliff Street Bridge. All pointed through the newly re-designed plaza to the jewel of our city, the redesigned Fletcher Cove Park. "How do you propose to pay for it?" he asked. I told him that money flows to the vision. As I stand here before you tonight, the Coastal Rail Trail and Rosa Street Bridge are paid for and completed. The Fletcher Cove and the Cliff Street Bridge are designed, have the financing in place, and construction is poised to start in the fall of this year. The train station project has full funding for the underground parking structure (approximately 13 million) and the Council and community will begin the debate of this project this summer. The Highway 101 beautification design has been completed and it is time to pursue funding. As I told Barry, 3 and a-half years ago, the money flows to the vision.

We are poised to "have it all." Our commission, should we choose to accept it, is to bring each of these areas together and create this beautiful vibrant walkable center of Solana Beach, marrying the beach with the land, art and commerce. This is our character, this is our identity, this is our gathering place, this is our community.

Solana Beach shall be seen as a brilliant jewel of a beach city, known for the seamless marriage of Art, Recreation, and Commerce.

As for commerce, we've considered the type of commerce we desire over the years and have encouraged the right amount and type of growth in this arena, as highlighted by the growth in the Cedros Designed District, the Highway 101 beautification project and the proposed Train Station project.

As for recreation, we have of course, the jewel of our city - Fletcher Cove, which is being remodeled this year. We also must plan for the updating of La Colonia Park.

And as for Art, we are a city with a focus on public art. In fact, we are one of a few cities in the County with an employee dedicated to the arts and we are the only city in the county with an art gallery inside City Hall! We should be very proud of ourselves. But, “art” is more than artwork. It’s music and paintings; it’s photography and culture; it’s literature, and where literature comes alive, it is the theatre. Art and culture bring people together; in bringing people together, we form community and it is this community that defines the character of Solana Beach.

Right now, we have separate areas in our city, and it is in those separate areas we are developing factions, not community. “Community” is a place where the different opinions, voices, and thoughts come together, can be appreciated, and respected. Where the collective vision is forged for the benefit of all.

Those who love the beach may not have developed an appreciation for the commerce district on Cedros and therefore, may resist changes to make Cedros a better shopping experience. And those who enjoy the variety of eating establishments without an appreciation for our bluffs and beaches may not appreciate the city’s efforts to support and retain that precious resource.

The good news is that we are on the threshold of bringing us all together, of finding a way to develop, form, and nurture our sense of community where we can share opinions, thoughts, and ideas. Fighting it out in the Center of Governance, City Hall is not the answer. Sharing ideas over dinner, engaging in lively debate before we take in an evening play, and later sip coffee and desserts on Cedros and discuss what is most important about life, this is the way “community” is formed and it’s the way it has been done for centuries.

If you go to Europe, you will find nearly every town or city throughout the region, has a “town square,” a “city center.” Have you been there? If so, you’ll know what I mean. Literally, no matter how small the town, they are built around the town square or center.

It’s in the center where the “farmer’s markets” meet one afternoon or morning every week – to this day. It’s in the center, where the pastiere is adjacent to the church, the café, and the dentist. It’s in the town’s center, where community members gather to share their lives, watch the world go by, watch a community theater production, or debate the news of the day.

It’s in the town’s center, in Greece, where a democratic government was first discussed, established, and practiced. For thousands of years, the “town center” was how communities were formed and their foundations constructed. Today it is rare to find a place to live with such a sense of community; people are so busy, and life is so hectic. But we have a great opportunity today to create this in Solana Beach. Let us do so.

Looking back, in just twenty short years, we’ve taken care of center of governance, we’ve got our foundation, and we’ve developed the cornerstones of culture and community.

Let’s take another look at where we are and travel around the city.

Commerce on Cedros Design District, which is connected to Highway 101 by the Rosa Street Bridges; from there, we cross over to the Coastal Rail Trail, view some art nodes and features, and walk on over to the 101, where we've got plenty of restaurants with indoor AND outdoor seating..

We can make our way over to Fletcher Cove for some recreation and when the redesign is complete, play a game of basketball.

Making our way up the plaza, we could continue down the 101 and once the redesign is complete, we'd find a lot of redeveloped shops and places to visit.

Our missing piece, and the way we can bring all these things together, has been already proposed – is the Cliff Street Bridge and the new train station project.

The proposed train station project will beautifully host the North Coast Repertory Theatre and with that, we could connect the dots between all these ideas and develop the character and center of our city, complete with a walk-able, enjoyable, and balanced community.

Imagine going to the Rep for an evening production followed by a night of music and coffee with friends chatting about what a great place it is to live in Solana Beach and enjoy robust conversation - sharing ideas, debating the issues of the day. All the while we're eating, shopping, and relaxing; we'd be supporting the financial health of the city.

Yes, the Train Station Project is vital to the city's financial health.

As most twenty-year-olds, we've yet to find ways to financially sustain ourselves indefinitely; furthermore, many of us say we don't want the "easy way out," such as with a Home Depot, Wal-Mart or Lowes. So, we need other methods to support our modest area of commerce on Cedros, which can be achieved by the Train Station project and the Highway 101 project.

Both projects are in the RDA defined area, which will provide the city with significant tax increment allotments and will be the single most important fiscal engine that will drive development in our downtown for the next twenty years. In addition, both projects will encourage surrounding buildings and houses to remodel or redevelop their properties. Overall, both projects are fiscally vital to our city, and I hope you will offer your steady, if not resounding, support as they come before the City Council.

You may not like every aspect of the projects, just as when the city was first formed, every person did not like every aspect of forming the city – or when the train station first came to the city – every person did not like every aspect – but, they compromised; they looked for the long-term benefit and did not expect to have everything "their way." As always, compromise was needed then, and it's needed now. But, keep the end in sight – keep your eyes to the city's future; these are important projects that are vital not only to the quality of our lives, but to the long-term fiscal sustainability of our city.

So, what do you want Solana Beach to be when it grows up over the next few years?

I think it can be a place where music, food, art, culture, recreation, and commerce thrive together as sustenance not only for the city to remain fully functional and financially viable, but also as sustenance for us as human beings. Where our lives are enriched because of the choices we are willing to make today. So that where we live, and how we live, enhances being alive.

Our choices about what is best for the city should be more about creating a vibrant, viable city, than about protecting our own personal interests.

Our choices about what is best for the city should be just as much about what is good for all of us twenty years from now, as it is about what is good for me today.

Let's make choices so that when we say "Solana Beach," we think of a walk-able, sustainable and vibrant community - our home!

The choices a group of concerned and interested residents made twenty years ago, in which they took responsibility for this city, have provided us this wonderful place to live. I know you and I are grateful to them. And to them, I publicly and proudly say, thank you! Thank you for the foundation for our city.

I believe some of the decisions facing our city today with respect to projects, finances, art, and culture; will set us on a course of action that determines our fate.

And twenty years from now, I hope it will be said that we understood what was needed, we took responsibility to make decisions that would allow the city to grow and mature into adulthood, and we made sure to cultivate a continuing and deepening sense of community.

In the year 2026, when our city is in its 40s, looking back at this time, I hope those civic leaders will be grateful and proud of what we accomplished. I am confident we will succeed. To quote John Kennedy one last time, "We steer our ship with hope, as Thomas Jefferson said, 'leaving Fear astern... Today we still welcome those winds of change - and we have every reason to believe that our tide is running strong.'" I believe we can accomplish our goals, by keeping an eye on the future, ready to embrace, manage, and direct the inevitable winds of change.

Thank you

I am pleased to have served you these past few years.... Goodnight.