

2026 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS – *Scottsdale Mayor Lisa Borowsky*

Good morning and thank you for being here.

It is with great pride — and a deep sense of responsibility — that I stand before you today to deliver the State of the City address for the City of Scottsdale.

Let me begin with the good news.

Scottsdale is thriving.

We are strong.

We are competitive.

And we continue to set the standard for cities across Arizona and the nation.

Hardly a week goes by without Scottsdale being recognized as best in class—for quality of life, economic vitality, tourism, public safety, or innovation.

If I listed every award our city has received since I was sworn in last January, we would be here through lunch.

So let me simply say this: the results speak for themselves.

And they reflect something important — not luck, not branding, but performance.

Awards are gratifying, but they are not the measure of a city.

The true measure of a city is how well it governs, how responsibly it manages public resources, and how faithfully it serves the people who call it home.

On those measures, Scottsdale has made real progress this year.

From my first day as mayor, I made clear that transparency, accountability, and fiscal discipline would not be optional.

They would be foundational.

Scottsdale residents deserve to know how decisions are made, who is responsible

for them, and whether those decisions serve the public — not institutional habit or political convenience.

That is why one of my earliest actions was to strengthen fiscal oversight at City Hall.

We established the Citizens Budget Review Commission — seven engaged, fiscally focused residents appointed by the mayor and city council — charged with scrutinizing city spending and identifying sustainable savings.

This Commission exists for a simple reason: sunlight improves decision-making.

As the Commission embarks on its first full year of work, its recommendations will help ensure that Scottsdale remains financially strong not just today, but for generations.

At the beginning of the year, I challenged our City Manager to identify ten percent or more in potential savings across the organization.

That was not rhetoric, it was an imperative.

Good times do not excuse complacency but demand discipline.

Efficiency is not about austerity, it requires alignment and ensuring every dollar serves a clear public purpose.

At the same time, fiscal discipline allows us to reprioritize— investing more in public safety, roadway improvements, and critical infrastructure, while easing the tax burden on residents where possible.

Reducing spending reflects a simple belief: government should not collect more than it needs, nor grow simply because it can.

When people hear that Scottsdale has once again been named among the best places to live, work, visit, or raise a family, it is easy to treat those recognitions as abstractions.

But those awards are not abstract.

They are lived...by each and every resident of our city.

The people who we serve with pride.

They show up in everyday moments — when a family feels safe letting their kids walk to school, when a small business owner signs a lease instead of leaving town, when a police officer chooses to stay here instead of taking a job elsewhere.

I hear from longtime residents who admire how Scottsdale has evolved but emphasize the need to preserve our unique and special character.

I hear it from young families who say, “We chose Scottsdale because it feels safe and clean, a place we want to raise our kids.”

And I hear it from business owners who will tell you plainly: other cities compete with us now...and Scottsdale continues to win because we do the basics well and do them consistently.

Cities rarely fail all at once.

They drift.

They drift when small problems are tolerated instead of addressed, when budgets grow on autopilot, and when leadership avoids difficult conversations.

Scottsdale has avoided that fate because residents and leaders alike have refused to let drift become destiny.

A resident once told me, “I don’t need City Hall to be exciting. I need it to be steady.”

That is good government.

Good government focuses on the people who it serves.

Often bureaucrats use statistics when discussing public safety, but people care about it because it is personal.

When I took office, Scottsdale was near the bottom of the Valley in police compensation.

We were losing experienced officers — not because they wanted to leave, but because they could not justify staying.

I spoke with an officer who told me, “I love this city, but I can’t keep explaining to my family why staying here means falling behind.”

That is not a failure of commitment.

It is a failure of leadership.

So we acted.

Today, Scottsdale ranks among the top cities in the region for police compensation --- improving retention, morale, and public safety across our neighborhoods.

Fire safety is no different.

Fire protection is not just about what happens when sirens sound.

It is about preparation, mitigation, and education.

That is why I proposed exploring a citizen-supported volunteer fire mitigation effort — modeled after proven programs in other wildfire-prone communities.

And yet progress stalled — not because the idea lacked merit, but because some chose to turn a public safety issue into a political contest.

Good government is not about landing political punches or an opportunity to score a point.

I treat public safety as an obligation.

This point cannot be made more clearly...Wildfires do not wait for consensus.

Preparedness is not alarmism.

It is leadership.

Protecting tourism begins with the understanding that tourism is more than an industry in Scottsdale.

It is a story we tell the world about who we are.

That story is shaped by roads, sidewalks, public spaces, safety, and experience.

Nowhere is that more visible than Old Town — the front porch of Scottsdale.

Over time, warning signs have emerged: aging infrastructure, safety concerns, parking frustrations, and stakeholder fatigue.

Earlier this year, my office convened a broad summit of Old Town stakeholders — not to perform, but to listen.

They asked for coordination.

They asked for leadership.

And they asked for action.

I requested the creation of a Downtown Task Force.

When that proposal did not advance, I faced a choice: wait or lead.

Cities do not improve by waiting.

So, I am moving forward with a Mayor's Downtown Advisory Group — focused on safety, parking, infrastructure, and experience.

Standing still is not leadership.

Delay is not neutral especially when livelihoods are in the balance.

Old Town matters because it reflects who we are.

Protecting it is not optional — it is stewardship.

Now I want to turn to a subject that is more difficult — but no less important — because it goes to the heart of how this city is governed.

Over the past year, Scottsdale has experienced more internal turmoil and public

controversy than any of us should consider acceptable.

Headlines, accusations, investigations, and internal conflict have become far too frequent.

That is not healthy governance.

And it is not who we are.

Let me be clear at the outset: disagreement is not the problem.

Debate is not the problem.

Oversight is not the problem.

A city council is supposed to question, challenge, and debate.

What we are seeing now is something different.

There is a clear difference between accountability and ambush.

Between raising concerns in good faith and manufacturing controversy for petty advantage.

In the choice between governing and performing – I choose governing.

Over the past year, internal processes intended to protect integrity have too often been repurposed as political tools.

Anonymous complaints.

Selective leaks.

Allegations untethered from facts but amplified through repetition.

The result is not transparency.

The result is erosion.

An erosion of trust, of morale....and unfortunately, of confidence — inside City

Hall and far beyond it.

I hear this concern not just from residents, but from business leaders, investors, and longtime partners of this city who ask the same question in different ways: “What is going on at City Hall?”

That question alone should concern every one of us.

Governance debates are often discussed as concepts.

But their consequences are very real.

One of the most troubling outcomes of this environment has been the departure of experienced city staff — professionals who dedicated years, sometimes decades, to serving Scottsdale.

Institutional knowledge does not replenish itself overnight.

When seasoned staff leave, continuity suffers.

Projects slow.

Decision-making becomes less informed.

And the cost — to taxpayers and to service delivery — is real.

I have spoken with employees who told me they loved this city, loved their work, and believed deeply in public service — but felt caught in a political crossfire they did not create and could not control.

That is not acceptable.

A city cannot function well when its professionals feel expendable or unprotected.

And no city that values excellence should tolerate a climate that drives talent away.

Scottsdale operates under a manager-managed form of government—
a system that has served this city well for decades because it relies on balance.

Professional management provides expertise and continuity.

Elected officials provide policy direction and accountability to voters.

To be sure, that balance is intentional.

It is embedded in our City Charter.

And it depends not just on rules, but on norms — on restraint, respect, and clarity of role.

No system, no matter how well designed, can function if those norms are ignored.

When authority is quietly consolidated rather than openly debated, accountability weakens.

When elected roles are incrementally diminished, transparency erodes.

And when power shifts away from those directly accountable to voters, public trust suffers.

Make no mistake — This is not about personalities.

It is about the institution.

Let me say this plainly: this is not about me.

Whether it is this mayor or any future mayor, efforts that systematically undermine the authority of the office — by design or by neglect — harm the city itself.

It silences the voice of the voters and is antithetical to the very fiber of what we, as Americans, believe in.

The mayor of Scottsdale is not simply a ceremonial position --- it is an elected office with a clear purpose.

The office exists to provide leadership, to represent the city, and to serve as a clear point of accountability to the people who elected us to do the job.

Weakening that role does not create better governance.

It creates confusion.

And confusion is the enemy of accountability.

Residents of Scottsdale elect their leaders with the expectation that authority will be exercised transparently and responsibly.

They do not elect processes.

They do not elect bureaucracies.

They elect people.

When power migrates away from those individuals — without public discussion, without voter consent, and without clear accountability — we drift away from democratic principles.

That drift may be gradual.

But its consequences are profound.

Good government does not fear scrutiny.

But it does require clarity about who is responsible — and who can be held accountable.

That is why I will be calling for the establishment of a Charter Review Committee— independent, citizen-driven, and transparent.

Its purpose will not be to re-litigate personalities or recent disputes.

It will be to ask a more fundamental question: Are our governing structures still doing what they were designed to do — protect accountability, preserve balance, and honor the authority of the voter?

A charter review is not a sign of instability.

It is a sign of seriousness.

Cities that care about their future are willing to examine themselves honestly—

and to strengthen safeguards when needed.

I want to be very clear about something else.

Good government is not defined by those who choose drama and division for the sake of ego or the next social media post.

It is defined by steady decision-making that reflects the real lives of real people.

People trying to raise families.

People running businesses.

People working long hours and trusting City Hall to function.

Leadership is not tested when things are easy.

It is tested when silence would be simpler.

When avoidance would be safer.

And when speaking plainly carries risk.

But leadership requires courage— not theatrics, not outrage, and not ego-driven conflict.

It requires a willingness to protect institutions, not exploit them.

And it requires remembering that the reputation of this city — earned over decades — can be damaged far more quickly than it can be rebuilt.

I will continue to speak clearly when the moment demands it.

I will continue to insist on accountability when lines are blurred.

And I will continue to place the long-term health of this city above short-term politics.

Because Scottsdale deserves governance worthy of its people.

And that is a standard worth defending.

When conversations become difficult, when institutions feel strained, and when the noise of the moment threatens to overwhelm perspective, it is worth remembering something fundamental about Scottsdale.

This city was not built by accident.

It was not shaped by convenience.

And it was never defined by the path of least resistance.

Scottsdale's most enduring achievements came from citizens with vision—people who cared deeply about this place and were willing to stand up, speak out, and persist when the easier choice would have been to settle for less.

Again and again, Scottsdale has been shaped not by complacency, but by courage.

Years ago, when federal planners proposed turning Indian Bend Wash into a massive concrete flood-control channel — stretching through the center of Scottsdale — many cities would have accepted it as inevitable.

Scottsdale did not.

Residents pushed back.

They believed their city deserved more than a concrete scar dividing neighborhoods.

They imagined something different — something that balanced safety with beauty, infrastructure with humanity.

Because of that insistence, Scottsdale gained the Indian Bend Wash Greenbelt — now one of the most admired urban park systems in the country.

That decision did more than manage flood risk.

It shaped the soul of the city.

And it happened because residents refused to accept “good enough.”

Consider the Phoenix Open.

At the time, the idea that a PGA Tour event could anchor itself in Scottsdale was far from guaranteed.

But community leaders believed the tournament could elevate the city’s profile and create lasting economic opportunity.

Today, it is the most attended tournament on the PGA Tour and one of the most recognizable sporting events in the world.

That did not happen because it was easy.

It happened because people believed Scottsdale could do something extraordinary—and were willing to do the work to make it real.

The same is true of WestWorld.

What began as an ambitious vision for a premier equestrian and event facility required navigating complex partnerships, land-use challenges, and long timelines.

It required patience and persistence.

Today, WestWorld stands as one of Scottsdale’s most important economic and cultural assets — because someone was willing to think big and stay the course.

Perhaps no example better illustrates the power of citizen leadership than the McDowell Sonoran Preserve.

Preserving thirty thousand acres of desert land was not the easiest path.

It required voter approval, sustained commitment, and a belief that some things are worth protecting—not for immediate gain, but for future generations.

Because of that vision, Scottsdale is now home to the largest municipal preserve in the nation— a defining feature of our identity and a gift to generations yet to come.

That did not happen because it was convenient.

It happened because residents demanded excellence.

Scottsdale's commitment to culture tells a similar story.

The Museum of the West did not materialize because it was inevitable.

It exists because leaders in our community believed Scottsdale's Western heritage deserved to be preserved, celebrated, and shared.

Through public-private partnership and sheer determination, that vision became a reality — one that honors our past while enriching our present.

These projects remind us that Scottsdale's identity is not accidental.

It is curated.

It is protected.

And it is constantly renewed.

Each of these achievements shares something important in common.

They required patience, resilience, and leadership willing to listen — and then act.

They remind us that Scottsdale's best ideas rarely originate behind closed doors.

They emerge from engaged residents working in partnership with government.

That tradition matters now more than ever.

Today, Scottsdale faces a different set of challenges than it did decades ago—but the lesson remains the same.

Strong cities do not retreat from complexity.

They confront it.

They do not silence voices.

They engage them.

And they do not sacrifice long-term health for short-term peace.

This moment calls for the same civic courage that defined Scottsdale's past—the willingness to look beyond the next vote, the next headline, or the next political calculation.

That is why I remain committed to expanding meaningful opportunities for citizen involvement — not symbolic participation, but real engagement that shapes outcomes.

It is also why I have joined with residents and stakeholders to help form the Greater Scottsdale Economic Development effort — bringing together motivated citizens to promote smart growth, cultural investment, and economic opportunity.

This work is not about bypassing government.

It is about complementing it.

It is about harnessing creativity, energy, and commitment that have always made Scottsdale exceptional.

Scottsdale's greatest legacy is not any single building, event, or policy. It is a culture of involvement.

That is why I have joined the coalition for protecting Arizona's lifeline formed by mayors, cities, tribes, and businesses to protect our fair share of Colorado river allocations.

As we look ahead, it is worth pausing to recognize where we stand in Scottsdale's story.

This year, our city marks its 75th Diamond Anniversary a milestone few communities reach with their character intact, their finances strong, and their reputation respected far beyond their borders.

This anniversary is not simply a celebration.

It is a moment of accountability.

Because every generation inherits Scottsdale from those who came before—and every generation is judged by what it chooses to protect, improve, and pass on.

Looking forward, my priorities as mayor are clear.

First, we will continue to insist on disciplined, transparent government.

Budgets must reflect priorities — not inertia.

Decisions must be explainable, defensible, and rooted in the public interest.

And accountability must remain visible and real.

Second, we will continue to invest in public safety, not only through compensation and staffing, but through preparedness, prevention, and foresight.

That means valuing experience, planning ahead, and refusing to treat safety as a political bargaining chip.

Third, we will protect and strengthen Scottsdale's economic engine—tourism, signature events, and cultural assets — while never losing sight of the fact that economic success must work for residents, not at their expense.

Fourth, we will remain focused on Old Town and our neighborhoods — on safety, mobility, infrastructure, and quality of life — because a city that neglects its core eventually loses its identity.

And finally, we will confront governance challenges directly and honestly— not by escalating conflict, but by strengthening institutions, clarifying authority, and ensuring that the voice of the voter remains central to how this city is run.

It is just as important to be clear about what we will not do.

We will not normalize dysfunction.

We will not accept paralysis disguised as prudence.

And we will not confuse volume with leadership.

As your mayor, that is my guiding premise.

Some treat every issue as an opportunity to land a political punch.

I believe good governance is an obligation — one that demands seriousness and an unwavering focus on outcomes.

This is a moment that calls for civic maturity — from elected officials, from staff, and from the community at large.

That means disagreement without destruction.

It means oversight without sabotage.

And it means remembering that public office is a responsibility, not a weapon.

Scottsdale has never been a city that thrived on chaos.

We thrive on clarity, on quality, and on trust.

Those values did not appear overnight, and they can be lost far more quickly than they were built.

That is why leadership matters most when things are difficult— not when consensus is easy.

Scottsdale endures because it has always demanded more of itself.

More thoughtfulness.

More stewardship.

More respect for the people who live here and invest their lives here.

That is why families choose Scottsdale.

Why businesses invest here.

And why this city continues to lead, even as others struggle to keep pace.

Success is not self-sustaining.

It must be earned— again and again.

As your mayor, I recommit to you today: To listen— not selectively, but sincerely.

To lead— not theatrically, but responsibly.

And to act— not for applause, but for impact.

I will continue to speak plainly when the moment demands it.

I will continue to push for solutions when delay is tempting.

And I will continue to place the long-term health of this city above short-term politics.

Because Scottsdale deserves governance worthy of its people.

As we enjoy Scottsdale's Diamond Anniversary, we have an opportunity— not just to honor our past, but to set the standard for the future.

A standard of integrity.

Of accountability.

Of civic pride.

If we remain grounded in the values that shaped this city since its incorporation in 1951, there is no challenge we cannot meet — and no future we cannot shape.

This is our city.

This is our responsibility.

And together, we will carry Scottsdale forward — stronger, steadier, and worthy of the people who call it home.

Thank you.

