

Rosemount State of the City address**Mayor Bill Droste**

Text as prepared for delivery on March 25, 2008

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge and thank the Dakota County Regional Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event. We know this organization has a new name – but the same commitment to serving the business community on which we depend. I also want to thank two members of the Chamber who are contributing to this event: SKB Environmental and Starbucks Coffee. We value their contributions everyday in Rosemount.

I stand before you on a day that makes us look to the future – a day when we know that winter will soon give way to spring – that the slowdown so many of us see in the economy will not last forever – and a day when the promise of bright days for our community shines more strongly than ever. But before I share with you my vision of that future, I would like to reflect on our past.

It is the perfect time for a look back. This year is the 150th anniversary – or that tongue-twisting word we’re all getting to know – the “sesquicentennial” not just of the state of Minnesota, but also of Rosemount. What was then Rosemount Township became a legal entity on the same day that Minnesota joined the Union. The early European settlers here, first among them William Strathern in 1853, found this land to be hospitable and prosperous.

The relatively flat land and rich soil that would nourish many crops drew many of the early settlers with their optimism of a new life. But nothing about living in Minnesota was easy. Early settlers were subsistence farmers, producing just enough food to feed themselves and trade with neighbors. Amid all these hardships, less than three years after Minnesota joined the Union, the nation was thrown into a civil war that lasted four years.

The war was barely over when those settlers got a lesson in economics. The railroad came to Rosemount, a mile east of the first downtown. And Rosemount adapted. Downtown was moved, to where it is today. The community prospered into the 1940s. But in Rosemount’s case, freeways did not follow the railroads. Growth here stagnated as early suburbs boomed. That history gave us benefits: the “hometown feel” that we seek to preserve today. But it also left challenges that we in City government are trying to address.

We must also reflect on the sacrifices in Rosemount’s history. This spring it will again be my sad but cherished duty to join the observance in Central Park, outside City Hall, to honor the residents whose names are engraved at the base of a flagpole. They are the names of our residents who gave their lives in defense of our country far from home. Last week, the names of Minnesota’s Iraq War dead were called out at the state capitol. The list includes Specialist Sean McDonald, who gave Rosemount as his hometown. The names in that ceremony – and the ones engraved in Central Park -- are a silent reminder of the burden to protect the freedoms we enjoy – and of our duty to remember their sacrifice, shared by their families.

The history of Rosemount contains other stories about sacrifice: about the farmers in the early '40s who had to sell their land for a greater good: the ordnance works to support the nation's battles in World War II. Today we seek to build on that sacrifice – figuratively and literally – as we work with the land's current owner, the University of Minnesota, to envision a community of the future.

That is but one of the ways our City has benefited from progress in education. From the lessons taught at home by the early settlers, to the one-room schoolhouses, to our present public schools in Independent School District 196, and the private ones run by the Church of St. Joseph and First Baptist Church – and beyond to the great college that is our host today, and the UMore research facility nearby – Rosemount continues to benefit from 150 years of commitment to education.

So many of those strands of our history came together in the 12 months just passed. As I stood before you back then, the City was celebrating the generosity of Flint Hills Resources in providing land for an outdoor recreational complex. Our staff spent the year speaking with interested members of the public, including those who volunteer to bring athletic opportunities to our young people. They told us they saw a need for new facilities to handle the demand – to give the youth of Rosemount a healthy alternative to other, sedentary pursuits. Next month we will ask the voters of Rosemount to make a choice on financing a project to complete the work that the Flint Hills donation began.

In the same vote, our residents can take the first step toward another amenity for the community. We acquired the property of the Church of St. Joseph on South Robert Trail – partly to give to Dakota County, for a library site. But we also see other uses in preserving another – and physically, the biggest – chapter of our history. We seek to preserve the church building, whose steeple has stood as a symbol of the community through the decades, a familiar landmark of home for our citizens of whatever faith. A citizens task force studied the question all year, and decided the best use for that building is to create an arts and culture center. The old church requires upgrades to meet accessibility requirements and to meet current building codes, making it more functional for public use.

Both the building renovation and the recreation facility will require support from private sources. I and my colleagues on the City Council wanted to assure ourselves that we could minimize the increase for taxpayers as much as possible. And in my time on the Council, we have worked and succeeded in lowering the property tax rate when we could, and preventing it from going up otherwise. We wanted to give the citizens some breathing room to decide whether they want new amenities for the community. That is the choice for the voters on April 22.

I mentioned a few moments ago the library, whose construction crews managed just a few months after groundbreaking to defy this harsh winter and to take form. We look forward to its opening less than a year from now. We can already see that it will be a welcome addition to our Downtown. It is the first of several improvements to the heart of our community.

After long years of planning and debate, groundbreaking for the first phase of redevelopment is only weeks away. The City negotiated sales with all of the property owners

at Core Block East, now envisioned as Town Centre. It will bring new life to our Downtown, and new features to benefit us all. Town Centre's developer has committed to meeting the state's Green Standards for sustainable development. Among other things, apartments will use Energy Star appliances and efficient lighting and heating. Those energy saving techniques are a trend the City wants to encourage.

Some of the groundwork is already there: Rosemount had one of the 15 "green homes" in this winter's Parade of Homes. And we are making progress at yet another site Downtown, the property formerly owned by Genz Ryan, to provide a home for new businesses in our community.

That brings to mind some of the numbers I see each month about the pace of development in our community. No one would argue that the real estate industry in the country as a whole has suffered a slowdown. But the fact is, in Rosemount, we issued permits for 143 new homes last year, valued at almost \$39 million. Add in the other types of building, including expansions at the refinery – and we added \$63 million in total value to the community. The Realtors' trade group tells us that home sales were down nearly 7 per cent in Rosemount last year – but that compares with a 16-point-4 percent decline metro-wide. What it all adds up to is that Rosemount remains one of the most vital parts of the Twin Cities.

Our housing options continue to expand as a workforce housing project is nearing completion at the corner of Highway 3 and Connemara. It will provide 32 rental units and will be owned and managed by the Dakota County Community Development Agency. The CDA has also contributed to interior and exterior improvements at the Rosemount Greens apartment complex – a project of several million dollars – recognizing the importance of maintaining the quality of our existing housing stock.

We strive to maintain City services and to achieve greater efficiencies in their delivery. We have enhanced the public's safety with targeted law enforcement and the first year of operations at our second fire station. Although the Dakota County Attorney announced recently that prosecutions out of Rosemount by his office are up, the number of reported crimes was down last year. When our citizens call for aid, we are ensuring that they will continue to get a prompt response by helping supervise the new Dakota Communications Center that opened early this winter just south of the City.

But most of the work in public safety is performed even closer to home. This month the American Legion helped us honor Rosemount's public safety employees of the year: Police Officer Mikael Dahlstrom and Firefighter Leigh Anderson. And at City Hall, we observed the anniversary of the appointment of our Chief of Police, Gary Kalstabakken, who has provided ten years of dedicated service to Rosemount.

We honor all our employees for the difference they make for our community. And at the end of each year, our managers select a City Employee of the Year. This time it was Joe Werden, who serves in our Public Works Department. Among his many duties in the past year has been to take on projects to save energy expenses.

The man who handed over that commendation to Joe is our City Administrator, Jamie Verbrugge. Jamie is leaving us next month to take up the reins at a larger city, as I suspected he someday would. We have been fortunate to have his leadership the past five years in managing the growth of Rosemount. He has endured the twists and turns – and some of the abuse – on the way to succeeding with the Council’s directives on Downtown. Jamie worked closely to bring the library to the verge of completion, and to negotiate the donation of the land for an outdoor recreation complex. Under his watch, our staff has maintained City services, and worked to give the community a professional but friendly image.

I hope you can join us Friday of next week, April 4th, from 4 to 6 p.m. at City Hall as we hold a farewell reception. We will thank Jamie, and wish him the best.

We can expect the best for Rosemount, because we spent much of 2007 planning for the future – trying to imagine the Rosemount in the year 2030. Like elsewhere in the metro, we are required to update the City’s Comprehensive Plan. And we are most of the way through a process of community meetings to get the views of our businesses and residents on Rosemount’s key planning need: to guide future growth in an intelligent way. The Plan, dealing with community issues such as transportation, housing, economic development, and land use will guide decisions by future Councils as the City continues to grow. The 2030 Comprehensive Plan will become the blueprint for what the City can become, building on current successes by providing local jobs and services to residents.

And, as I mentioned before, we are also heavily involved in the visioning process administered by the University of Minnesota for its land at UMore.

We progressed on several transportation issues during the year, including projects that will improve traffic flow and safety: on the old County Road 38 and at Shannon Parkway and County Road 42. They call that “infrastructure.” And most people could consider that just a funny bureaucratic term – until last August. The 35-W bridge collapse focused world attention on Minnesota. And it focused Minnesotans’ attention on the state of our roads. We lost 13 people in the accident – one of them, our own resident Peter Hausmann. We share in the grief of those who loved him, and we share a renewed determination to work with state and county officials to improve problem areas.

In our jobs on the City Council, we see the problems. But we also see the successes. We honor the community’s young people. The Council has recently commended young residents who have achieved success in the arts, athletics, and Scouting. Next month we will again fill the Council chambers with volunteers who improve the quality of life in our community. Many of them contribute to our great community celebrations, Leprechaun Days and the Haunted Woods Trail before Halloween. The City supports these efforts, and looks forward to celebrating Rosemount’s sesquicentennial during this July’s Leprechaun Days.

There was one further bit of recognition in 2007 that any businessperson can understand – and that every Rosemount taxpayer should appreciate. Our City’s careful financial management and reporting was recognized with an increase in Rosemount’s credit rating. It had an immediate benefit in saving the City thousands of dollars on borrowing. And it gives taxpayers additional assurance that the City has avoided overextending itself – that we only

borrow when we have to, and when we know we can afford it. That strong rating was reaffirmed last week. We can work toward further improvements as we expand our tax base, and encourage additional commercial development.

That development proceeds in dozens of ways. Work is in the early stages in the eastern end of the community on the MinnCann pipeline, providing more oil for the refinery. The Metropolitan Council completed work on the new outfall pipe to accommodate the expanded capacity of its Empire facility that treats wastewater. In conjunction with that project, a new lift station along County Road 42 will be operational this year. All that work will permit expanded sewer service – allowing continued growth in Rosemount and nearby areas.

So these are the milestones of the past year. And they point us toward the challenges ahead. This month, the Council reaffirmed its goals for what Rosemount City government should accomplish this year and next. We strongly value the importance of continuity and commitment to maintain a clear and consistent vision of where our City is headed.

We will continue to seek growth in the community while preserving our hometown feel. We work to attract retail and commercial centers that will attract new businesses and give our existing ones an environment in which to thrive. We must partner with our business community to grow our economic base. We must take advantage of the effects of revitalization in our Downtown.

We continue to work with the county and state on the major transportation issues that affect Rosemount, including the development of the 42/52 interchange, north-south improvements on 52 and Cedar Avenue, and new mass transit options. We will complete the Comprehensive Plan for 2030 to begin work immediately on the needed housing – especially for an aging population – and additional transportation options and civic amenities.

We will strive to maintain the services our citizens have asked for without increasing the tax rate dedicated to pay for them – looking for improvements in productivity, and ways that a reasonable investment in technology will lead to long-term efficiencies and savings for the taxpayers.

Whenever possible, we will look for ways to partner with our colleagues in the schools, county, neighboring city governments, and other levels to save money and do the public's work where it can be done the best.

And we will advance on the initiatives the City has begun so that we follow the lead of the private sector that I mentioned earlier by focusing on sustainable practices. Some people think “sustainability” sounds vague. But really, it's a concept that can and must be extended to all facets of the way we work and live. We need new approaches to minimize water consumption. We need new practices for building the housing of the future. In Rosemount, our growth will be sustained by building new job opportunities.

We look for a way to build communications networks across the City that will draw high-tech employers and will give alternatives to the long commute for their workers. This

month, we have learned of substantial progress by some of the companies that serve Rosemount. FTTH has informed the City that it will begin expanding its fiber network this spring, to the residential area generally east of the railroad tracks. The system's new owner says it hopes to wire the rest of the community ahead its three-year schedule. The high-capacity fiber network should make Rosemount more attractive to businesses and residents, able to move data and high-definition video at costs lower than before.

Frontier Communications has notified us that it, too, will be busy this spring installing the first nodes of its wireless network in the City. Early service will come to the commercial corridors along County Road 42 and South Robert Trail. And the City will encourage expansion of wireless Internet into residential areas.

We have much to accomplish as we follow the tradition of our predecessors through the past 150 years: to grow and prosper in a place where dreams can be realized – a place where we cherish our piece of the world – a place that we will pass on to those who will live here for the next 150 years.

I want to thank you for coming today. I leave you with the message that the state of our City is good. We have much to be thankful for about our past. We look to the future with the tremendous optimism that the early settlers had when they began farming the prairies of Minnesota. Like them, we will keep alive Rosemount's spirit of pride and progress.

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