

Intro – Mayor

Hi! I'm Mayor Julia Wheatley and it is my honor to welcome you to Queen Creek's 2023 State of the Town!

2022 was another big year for our growing community and we are so excited to share the many milestones – but it also brought some difficult changes for our community.

In June, we lost our beloved Mayor Gail Barney. Mayor Barney was nearly a life-long resident of Queen Creek and served on the Council for 20 years, including 12 years as Mayor. Mayor Barney dedicated his life to service – he and his family have been staples of our community and we are so thankful for impact he made and will continue to make on the hometown he loved so much!

In late 2022, John Kross, our Town Manager of 15 years, announced his retirement. He served the Queen Creek community for 26 years!

Both Mayor Barney and John Kross were instrumental in so many of the strategic decisions that helped shape this community – they both leave a tremendous legacy here in Queen Creek and I know we will continue the positive momentum they both worked so hard to create! And we are fortunate to have Bruce Gardner spearheading that effort as he officially became Queen Creek's new Town Manager just two weeks ago! Bruce has been in a leadership role within the organization since 2007, serving as a director and then the Assistant Town Manager. The Council and I are very excited to continue to work with Bruce as we serve our community!

I take great pride in being QC's biggest fan, so I'm thrilled to share some of the local and national awards that were received in 2022...

- The Town's economic development website received a Golden Prospector Award of Merit by the Arizona Association for Economic Development;
- The Town's tourism postcard, an economic development and marketing tool, received an Award of Excellence from 3CMA;
- Our Downtown Development Manager, Jennifer Lindley was honored as one of the Phoenix Business Journal's 40 under 40;
- The Town's employee wellness program received the Platinum level "Healthy Worksites Award" for the third consecutive year;

And, we received a number of awards related to the Queen Creek Police Department...

The outreach plan for the launch of QCPD received a Silver Circle from 3CMA and an award of merit from PRSA Phoenix; the "intro to our pd vehicles" and "women in law enforcement" videos both received awards of merit from PRSA Phoenix; and QCPD having met the 30x30 initiative at launch received the "2022 Agency of Excellence Award" from the Western Region International Public Management Association for Human Resources, as well as an honorable mention from Ragan Communications and the Diversity Award from PRSA Phoenix. QCPD has been committed to hiring the most qualified applicants – and applicants that are diverse and reflect our community.

VIDEO: Clip of QCPD Documentary

Safe Community – Council member Oliphant

That truly was a special night – it is hard to believe it has already been a year, and quite a busy year at that! So much hard work went into launching the police department and that hard work continues!

One of our primary policy goals is to use data and technology to maintain low crime rates and improve traffic safety. QCPD has taken a proactive approach in this area with the development of a traffic unit and specialized training – nearly 20% of officer contacts were for traffic stops, and much of QCPD's outreach efforts have focused on safety on the road through "drive to arrive" messaging.

The second highest call for service is crime prevention, which includes our community-based policing efforts – another key policy goal of QCPD – creating meaningful collaboration, engagement and partnerships. Our officers are visiting schools, reading at the library, attending community events and visiting neighborhoods and businesses. QCPD is also hosting numerous community events like coffee with a cop and Chillin' with a Cop to encourage community conversations.

QCPD also created a police support specialist program, allowing sworn personnel to focus on priority calls for service. And our sworn personnel continue to expand their training to ensure they are providing quality service to all our residents – notable items include autism certification through IBCCES and certification through the Arizona Commission for Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

The Criminal Investigations Division handled more than 650 cases last year, averaging 50+ cases per month. During the first year, the division established a special victim's unit, forensic examination unit and launched the K-9 program, welcoming Obi and Jack, both trained for search and detection operations, to the QCPD family!

To help offset the various costs of launching and expanding a police department, QCPD has received a number of grants including a 100 Club grant for ballistic equipment, a Blue Courage training for resiliency related to both mental and physical health, and grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety for a vehicle and supplies.

QCPD is committed to serving with respect, compassion and trust – and to help fulfill that commitment, 25% of the sworn personnel are part of the crisis intervention team.

In an effort to highlight the great work of our officers, the QCPD Cares program was initiated. An opportunity to showcase the acts of service by our police officers – we appreciate the community taking the time to share their positive experiences!

Speaking of positive experiences with QCPD, Founders' Day was extra special this year as the Battle of Badge featured the Queen Creek Fire Department and the Queen Creek Police Department! We love coming together as a community to celebrate Queen Creek's history and public safety!

VIDEO: Founders' Day 2022

Safe Community – Vice Mayor Brown

It may have been the launch of QCPD, but that didn't stop Queen Creek Fire & Medical from bringing home the Battle of the Badge trophy!

2022 was a milestone year for Queen Creek related to public safety! Not only did the police department launch, the Town opened two permanent fire stations. Permanent fire station two opened in the

southwest area of town and fire station five opened in the southeast area of town. These stations include state-of-the-art technology, enhancing service to residents and the health of our firefighters! To further our service to the community, the Queen Creek Fire & Medical Department renewed their autism certification and re-established a number of community-based safety programs, including free CPR classes, Stop the Bleed training and child seat installations. To help ensure a healthy blood supply, the Town partnered with Vitalant to host monthly blood drives, with all drives meeting or exceeding the goal – in fact, the 2022 drives resulted in a 30% increase from 2021 – thank you to everyone who so generously donated at one or more of the blood drives!

Four of our firefighters graduated from the regional paramedic program and, seven of our Queen Creek fire personnel were promoted in 2022, including one to a newly created third deputy chief position. We also welcomed 10 new volunteers to the Community Emergency Response Team, or CERT. CERT assisted with various events and activities throughout the year and are trained to assist in a large-scale emergency.

As we continue to evaluate opportunities for improvement, the Council approved establishing an emergency transportation services program. This will allow for consistent ambulance coverage, reduced response times and opportunities to partner with our neighboring jurisdictions to enhance efficiencies and coverage.

And, in 2022 there were also some significant savings for our public safety personnel who are in tier 2 of the Public Safety Personnel Retirement System, or PSPRS. The PSPRS corrected an error that lowered the tier 2 contribution rate for the Town and firefighters from 11.65% to 7.65% - 23 firefighters benefited from the reduced rate, which is directly related to the Town's policy to have a fully funded pension! With the launch of the Police Department, the Town is transitioning from an internal police pension reserve to fully funding the PSPRS police plan. The transition includes a payment of \$7 million to PSPRS from the Town's internal police pension reserve. By fully funding the police PSPRS, the contribution rate for the Town and police officers in tier 2 was also reduced from 11.65% to 7.65%. Not only do these efforts save the town money, they serve as important recruitment and retention tools with respect to our public safety personnel!

We love seeing our police and fire personnel working together to benefit our community!

VIDEO: QCPD/QCFMD video regarding calling 9-1-1

Secure Future – Council member Benning

Glad to see they're working together to keep us safe!

Beyond public safety policies, the Council took a number of actions reducing the cost of government while maintaining our levels of service. Examples include...

- Freezing the amount residents pay in property taxes – as home values go up, the tax rate will go down, saving the median home in QC \$353 over the next five years;
- Absorbing the costs of streetlights that were previously paid by property owners through a street light assessment, saving \$93,000 across more than 16,000 parcels;
- An additional Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District reduction of \$600,000 for about 20,000 properties, with an average annual savings of \$30 per account; and
- Refinancing a loan from 4% to 2.85%, saving \$2.1 million in cash flow over the next 16 years.

These actions, combined with financial policies in previous years, led to our bond rating upgrade from Fitch and S&P to AA+, one step away from the highest rating. This rating upgrade results in lower borrowing costs and affirms our strategic policy decisions.

Residents approved a permanent base adjustment, which means beginning next year, the Town's annual budgetary expenditure limit will be based on the updated formula, eliminating the need for a Home Rule election every four years.

A secure future also includes planning for an economically stable build-out and economic development initiatives. In 2022, the Town issued just over 1,300 single family home permits, reviewed more than 200 business licenses, and permitted an estimated \$808 million in construction value.

The Town's first large-scale industrial development was approved, located near Germann and Meridian roads. The project includes more than one million total square feet and will break ground in early 2023, furthering the Town's competitive position. The Town saw increased interest for employment uses in the northeast area of Town, including LG Energy Solution as the successful bidder on the first piece of State Land that was auctioned. The sustainable, clean energy facility implements one of the Town's target industries of advanced manufacturing, creating the corridor for high tech companies along State Route 24.

The Olive Mill rezoned 32 acres to agritainment. The expansion will include both residential and nonresidential uses and further implements the Town's Agritainment District.

To help enhance our service delivery, the Town created a centralized fee collection for new permits providing convenience for the customer. And, in an effort to further our business goal of achieving the greatest cost recovery possible, we developed a credit card service fee program that offers flexibility and options to minimize the impact to customers.

With the various development comes more roadway improvements. Our departments are working together to coordinate this complicated infrastructure...

VIDEO: Impact to QC Roadways

Superior Infrastructure – Council member Martineau

Coordination is certainly key as we continue to invest in our community and roadways!

Last year, a number of important roadway projects were completed – with the most exciting being the extension of the State Route 24! The Arizona Department of Transportation completed the interim roadway from Ellsworth to Ironwood, providing additional connectivity for Queen Creek and the region!

And, to make the most out of the new roadway, the Town and our neighbors in Mesa, and partners in Maricopa and Pinal counties worked together to provide more north-south connections, including...

- Two new portions of Meridian Road from Queen Creek Road to the State Route 24; and
- A new portion of Signal Butte Road from Germann past the State Route 24.

2022 also saw a number of additional roadway projects completed including...

- The Chandler Heights improvements from Power to Recker;
- The Power Road improvements from Brooks Farm to Chandler Heights;

- The Ocotillo Road improvements from Signal Butte to Ironwood;
- And the extension of Queen Creek Road west of Ellsworth.

There are more roadway projects currently underway including....

- The Queen Creek Road improvements from Ellsworth to Crismon;
- The Meridian Road improvements from Combs to Cherrywood, in conjunction with Pinal County; and
- Two new east-west connectors in the downtown core to help further the vision of the adopted Town Center Plan, creating a vibrant and walkable downtown.

And we'll have a number of additional roadway improvement projects break ground this year!

Not only are we working to build new roads, we are also working to optimize the flow of traffic. As part of a Smart City Initiative, 72 of the Town's traffic signals were incorporated in the Advanced Traffic Management System which allows staff to manage signal performance and operations from a central traffic center.

In partnership with Pinal County and our state delegation, we secured a \$15 million Legislative Budget appropriation to be used by Pinal County to purchase the necessary right-of-way for the State Route 24 extension east of Ironwood Road.

And our partnership with Pinal County doesn't stop there! We secured \$35 million for utility projects in Queen Creek's service area within Pinal County, providing more efficient water distribution and less reliance on groundwater.

Of course, superior infrastructure is so important as we continue our overall water strategy to diversify our water supply with renewable sources. We completed a comprehensive utility master plan to enhance our ability to manage our precious resource of water while maintaining the lowest possible costs for our customers. And while we invest in additional water and wastewater infrastructure, our current resources continue to undergo routine testing that meets or exceeds regulations.

And, we are continuing our water conservation efforts! Last year, we launched a handy water usage calculator...

VIDEO: Tidbit Tuesday water calculator

Effective Government – Council member Padilla

Water conservation continues to be an important topic. Queen Creek is working with our HOAs and schools on the WaterFluence program to optimize landscaping and early detection of leaks. We're continuing our water conservation workshops, and to get our little ones excited about water conservation, we have an interactive floor graphic at the QC Library that helps make learning fun!

In addition to conserving water, the Town is continuing to seek opportunities to reduce its reliance on groundwater. Following an agreement with the Central Arizona Project, 20% of the Town's water supply is from a sustainable source. Two additional efforts are underway, including securing water rights from Harquahala and from a farm in western Arizona.

Our residents are finding opportunities to be environmentally conscious – last year, there was a 2% increase in materials diverted from the landfill through the Town’s Recycle Center and a 27% increase from recycling events.

To help increase efficiencies, and as part of the SMART city initiatives, scanner technology was integrated into town recycling events and the Town’s trash and recycling cart inventory process, improving the flow and saving time.

Increasing efficiencies is a key element of being an effective government – and technology helps us in that area! Last year, the Town transitioned to a new recreation software, simplifying the online registration process for special interest classes and ramada rentals. The Town also implemented a five-year IT strategic plan to help identify key trends, organizational needs and strengthen resiliency.

An effective government also leverages partnerships to save resources. The Town is very excited to partner with residents and businesses through our new volunteer program. While the Town has been fortunate to receive tremendous support from the community through volunteerism, with nearly 84,000 volunteer hours in 2022 through events, the Community Emergency Response Team, the senior program, and youth sports, we recently launched a streamlined program to help optimize the unique talents, skills and knowledge we have here in Queen Creek.

Volunteerism is just one way for the community to get involved. We know an effective government keeps the community they serve informed and engaged. To help build those connections, the Town hosted a new outreach event, What’s Poppin’ in QC, and expanded the annual Pancake Breakfast. We appreciate the partnerships that make these outreach events possible and the time the community takes to attend these events. Not only does it provide an opportunity to learn more about what’s happening in Town, it provides an opportunity for residents to share their feedback with staff and council.

And of course it also provides an opportunity to get to know other people living here in Queen Creek. In honor of QC Neighborly week, we asked what being neighborly means to you...

VIDEO: QC Neighborly

Quality Lifestyle – Council member McClure

Mayor Barney always said it was the people that make Queen Creek so special – and I think we can all agree!

We also have some incredible parks and trails that enhance the quality of life here in Queen Creek by helping provide connections for us.

The Town broke ground on a new 85-acre community park – located on Signal Butte north of Queen Creek Road, Frontier Family Park will be Queen Creek’s largest park and will be the home to the Town’s first recreation and aquatic center! The Town also broke ground on phase two of Mansel Carter Oasis Park, both park projects are anticipated to be complete later this year with the recreation and aquatic center slated to open in mid-2024!

The Town celebrated the extension of the Sonoqui Wash Trail to Crismon, with a number of safety enhancements for the equestrian community, and design is underway for the extension of the Queen Creek Wash Trail to Meridian Road, which will be completed in two phases.

Our special events also create exciting community connections! While the Arizona weather prevented the Town's largest event, Trunk or Treat, from taking place, we saw record numbers at both Founders' Day and Spring into QC!

Horseshoe Park and Equestrian Centre also experienced records numbers, with a 43% increase in revenues. The facility continues to serve as an economic driver for the community by increasing the number of events and diversify offerings. This year Horseshoe Park hosted more than 125,000 people and 12,000 horses!

Not only are people coming to events – they are engaging with us on social media. We saw an increase across accounts, including a 16% increase on the Town's Instagram. Resident engagement didn't stop there – we saw a 37% increase in requests through the Town's online reporting system, SeeClickFix.

Providing a quality lifestyle also means attracting and retaining businesses. Our Economic Development team, who spearheads this effort, received their reaccreditation as an Accredited Economic Development Organization (AEDO) through the International Council for Economic Development. This is a notable distinction that places Queen Creek in a favorable position, particularly for business development.

And we saw quite a bit of business development in Queen Creek last year! From the Town's first Fry's Marketplace and Mici Handcrafted Italian to Ike's Love and Sandwiches and Torchy's Tacos, we are fortunate to have many great businesses– and a number of unique tourism destinations! To help showcase all that Queen Creek has to offer and enhance tourism, the Town launched a new tourism website, www.visitqueencreekaz.com.

Our Economic Development team works closely with the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce on business retention and recruitment! Let's hear from Economic Development Director Doreen Cott before we get an update from Chamber President Chris Clark.

VIDEO: Econ Dev

Chamber Update – Chris Clark

2022 brought challenges to the business community, but also opportunities. From worker shortages, supply chain issues, and surging inflation, to rapid interest rate increases, businesses faced it all. Despite those challenges, businesses were still overwhelmingly optimistic when considering future conditions here in Queen Creek. That's a testament to the planning the Town has done and all of the efforts to create a business friendly environment.

We appreciate the stability the council has shown when considering changes to the general plan. Sticking to a well-designed plan, fiscally conservative budgets, and quality building standards have made Queen Creek a highly desired community to live in. We are now at the edge of the next phase of growth where we believe we'll see office buildings and large employers come to town. We are very excited to see these projects go from conceptual plans to fruition in the near future.

We have enjoyed our partnership with the Town from major projects such as tourism and business retention to quality of life projects like promoting the Lights on Ellsworth.

We look forward to another successful year under the leadership of our new Town Manager, Bruce Gardner, and our new Mayor, Julia Wheatley.

VIDEO: Lights on Ellsworth

Closing – Mayor

Partnerships are so very important to the success of our community. Thank you to all of our partners working hard to make Queen Creek such an amazing place!

There is so much to look forward to in 2023...

- Construction of the Town's second hotel, Homewood Suites in Town Center;
- An update to our Town Center Plan;
- The opening of a number of new businesses including Dave and Busters;
- The launch of our emergency transportation service, or ambulance services;
- An update to our Utility Billing System;
- Continued road improvements; and
- One that I am particularly excited about, the opening of Frontier Family Park!

Thank you for joining us and to everyone who is making Queen Creek such a special community.

I hope you can join us next month for Spring Into QC on March 25 – let's close our 2023 State of the Town with a look at last year's event!

VIDEO: Spring Into QC