

Intro – Mayor Wheatley

Hi! I'm Mayor Julia Wheatley and I am so excited to kickoff Queen Creek's 2024 State of the Town! As we highlight some of the milestones of the past year, it is incredible to recognize that we are celebrating our 35th year as a Town! Being a relatively young community, we are fortunate to have the continued involvement of our founding fathers! In 1989, five people led the charge to incorporate Queen Creek and we are so thankful for their vision and passion! One of their focuses was involving the community. As a Council, we have worked to continue that focus in a variety of ways, including our Citizen Survey. Every two years the Town gathers feedback from residents on programs and services to help inform future decisions. Results from the 2023 citizen survey indicate that residents are pleased with the community, with 93% reporting QC as a good or excellent place to live, and 90% rating the quality of life as excellent or good. 79% plan to live in Queen Creek in five years and 95% would recommend Queen Creek as a place to live.

Our Citizen Survey is an excellent reminder of how important community engagement is – residents reported their top method for engaging with the Town was social media – in 2023 we saw 11% growth across our social media channels. While digital engagement is certainly growing, part of what makes Queen Creek special is our community connections. We continue to see you, the community, show up to our engagement events like What's Poppin' in QC and Pancake Breakfast, both with record attendance in 2023. We also celebrated the 2023 graduating class of Citizen Leadership Institute – 65% of the 2023 alumni continue to be actively engaged in Town operations through volunteerism!

An area of engagement that is particularly important is with our youth. In 2023 we were excited to recognize 17 Star Students, host our inaugural Constitution Week Contest with some outstanding submissions, have our police department partner with our local schools on the Power of Words campaign, and the Council recently discussed moving forward with a Mayor's Youth Advisory Council. We are looking forward to enhancing our youth connection in 2024 as we move forward with the council.

Speaking of things we are excited about in 2024 – it is an honor to introduce Vice Mayor Leah Martineau – this is her first term as Vice Mayor, and I know she will continue to serve the community well in this role!

Vice Mayor Martineau

Thank you, Mayor! 2023 was another big year for our community and the organization! The Town received a number of awards from local, regional and national organizations.

Our Finance team received a Digital Transformation award;
Our Human Resource Department received the Platinum level "Healthy Worksites Award";
We received the 2023 Recycling Municipality of the Year;
The documentary, "QCPD - the Creation of a Police Department" was a nominee for a Rocky Mountain Emmy and received a SAVVY award;
We also received two awards for the Permanent Base Adjustment Education Plan, an award for last year's State of the Town, the VisitQC and QC Industrial websites received awards, and the Town's industrial brochure received two awards.

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Marissa Garnett, Economic Development Project Manager, was recognized with the Young Economic Development Professional of the Year award. IEDC, the largest global association for professional economic developers, looks specifically for an individual who has demonstrated consistent, exemplary performance in the economic development profession. We are so proud of Marissa - she has been an asset to the organization and the community!

This last one is especially exciting - Mayor Wheatley received the Champion of the Year Award from the Arizona Manufacturers Council. Mayor Wheatley was instrumental in passing of House Bill 2809 – the public infrastructure reimbursement bill. The legislation will help communities attract manufacturers and meet their public infrastructure needs.

Mayor Wheatley is Queen Creek's first new Mayor in 12 years, and as a Council I know we are proud to serve alongside of her. In addition to receiving a statewide award, she helped launch For Our Town, a community initiative spearheaded by the Queen Creek Chamber of Commerce that brings non-profit and faith-based organizations, businesses, and schools together to tackle Queen Creek's most pressing issues. And she continues to be Queen Creek's number one fan, as she likes to say! While we get to know as we make important decisions for our community, it's fun to hear the lighter side as well...

VIDEO: Meet your Mayor

Effective Government – Council member Brown

I too enjoy fall and pasta! I also appreciate efforts to enhance our effectiveness as an organization, particularly those that benefit our residents. In 2023, we officially launched a new Utility Billing System – a massive undertaking that included a new customer portal and field service order management system. The implementation included building interfaces between systems, increasing internal efficiencies, improving customer service and most importantly, enhancements for our utility customers. Through the portal, customers can access water consumption history, payment history, sign up for utility-related alerts and start or transfer service.

And that's just one example of using new technology. Last year, the Town tested accepting credit cards at special events. Each event saw increased credit card sales, with 73% of the transactions processed as credit cards at Trunk or Treat. Not only does technology provide conveniences, it can also enhance safety! In 2023, our GIS team created a map layer of basement homes to be used by Fire Department staff when responding to emergency calls. This data shows responders where basement homes are located so they can take extra safety precautions during an emergency.

An effective government is also financially stable. Thanks to years of strategic decisions and fiscal responsibility, Queen Creek continues to be in a financially stable position. One of the highlights of 2023 was lowering the Town's primary property tax rate for existing residents. Scott McCarty, the Town's Finance Director explains this action, and some of the other financial milestones of 2023, including the savings we've realized through our outstanding volunteers who dedicate their time, talents and knowledge!

Financial Accomplishments – Finance Director Scott McCarty

- The Council unanimously approved ordinance 813-23, lowering the Town's primary property tax rate for existing residents from \$1.83 to \$1.72 per \$100 of assessed value. The action is a result of the

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Resolution 1500-22, approved in 2022, which freezes the amount of taxes paid by property owners in Queen Creek by reducing the property tax rate each year as property values increase.

- In May 2022, the Queen Creek Town Council approved eliminating the Library impact fee when enough funds were collected to pay off the debt associated with the fee – that milestone was reached in July 2023!
- The Council’s Central Arizona Groundwater Replenishment District – or CAGRDR policy provides an annual savings to many of our residents, which reduces the 2024 bills by \$7.5M, or 69%.
- Cost avoidance is another way to be financially stable – in 2023, 1,410 volunteers contributed more than 91,100 hours – a total benefit to taxpayers of \$2.9 million (91,100 hours x \$31.80).

VIDEO: Volunteers

Safe Community – Council member Padilla

Our volunteers certainly are an asset! And we’re growing our volunteer base through the police department’s cadet program that launched in 2023. Additional milestones for QCPD included welcoming our K9s, Obi and Jack – with Obi placing at the statewide trials; fully launching the special assignments unit; and presenting our first Citizen Award to Cole Silva, who heroically jumped into action to help save his sister.

In addition to responding to nearly 30,000 calls for service, our police department has continued their commitment to building community connections. In 2023, QCPD conducted more than 9,000 community contacts, including activities where they read to children at the library, spoke with residents over a cup of coffee, met with our youth in the schools, and participated in drug take-back events.

It was exciting to see QCPD bring home their first trophy from Battle of the Badge! While the Queen Creek Fire & Medical Department brought some stiff competition, I think it came down to those young community helpers who stepped up for their favorite team!

Speaking of Queen Creek Fire & Medical, they were also busy making connections with our community! Not only did we have a great Public Safety Day, nearly 1,500 high school students were trained in “hands only” CPR and more than 100 car seats were installed or checked through our child safety seat events. Our firefighters also had the chance to chat with residents over a cup of coffee – including some of our paramedics. Ryan Gould has more on the expansion of our emergency transportation service...

Emergency Transportation Services – Paramedic Ryan Gould

- In 2023, the full expansion of the Emergency Transportation Services, or ambulance program, was implemented through the Queen Creek Fire & Medical Department.
- This includes placing four ambulances at our fire stations and hiring 26 new staff members.
- As a paramedic who joined the Town as part of the ambulance expansion, it is so exciting to be part of this community.
- Having the emergency transportation service as a function of the fire and medical department helps ensure continuity of care and enhances the Town’s strategic priority of being a safe community.

VIDEO: QCFMD 15 Years Serving the Community

Secure Future – Council member McClure

Having solid public safety departments is so important for today and into the future.

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Queen Creek continues to develop into a thriving community – in 2023, the Town issued more than 1,300 single family home permits, reviewed more than 250 business licenses, and permitted an estimated \$1.1 billion in construction value. These investments fund our Town programs, offer housing options for current and prospective residents, expand dining and shopping options, and bring more local employment opportunities.

As our community expands, it is important that we continue to be environmentally conscious – last year, residents diverted more than 4.6 tons of hazardous materials from households and the landfill and nearly 69 tons of recyclable materials– both increases from the previous year. And to help engage our youth, we hosted a Cardboard Box Car “Drive-in” where residents made box cars out of cardboard boxes and other recyclable materials.

For water conservation we partnered with the Queen Creek Library for their summer reading program, continued education in the schools to create a generational understanding of water conservation and worked with our largest water customers to establish a landscape budget.

Water conservation is one component of the Town’s overall water strategy – before Paul Gardner, our Water Resources Director shares milestones related to the diversification of our water supply, I’d like to note he received the 2023 Distinguished Public Official Award from the American Planning Association, Arizona Chapter. Paul continues to be regarded for his dedication to water and creative solutions...

Water Resources – Water Resources Director Paul Gardner

Reducing reliance on groundwater continues to be one of the Town’s priorities - The transfer of 2,033-acre feet of Colorado River water to the Town of Queen Creek officially began last summer. The transfer added a significant amount of sustainable water to the Town’s water resource portfolio and offsets groundwater pumping demand.

The Town is participating in the Bartlett Dam Improvement feasibility project. The preliminary allocation is the first time the Town will receive an allocation of Salt River Project water - a major effort on diversifying our water portfolio. Queen Creek’s allocation will average up to 15,000-acre feet of water per year.

The Town will be closing on 5,000-acre feet of Harquahala water during the first quarter of 2024, this will equate to 500,000-acre feet added into our water portfolio over the next 100 years.

The Town also participated in efforts to conserve surface water in Lake Mead, providing 3,617 AF of current surface water allocation to be conserved.

Diversifying the Town’s water portfolio continues to be a focus as there is increased interest in the State Trust Land in the northeast area of Town.

VIDEO: New Businesses

Superior Infrastructure – Council member Benning

It is so exciting to see the continued investment in Queen Creek! And ensuring we have the infrastructure to support these new developments is key! In 2023, 8.5 miles of waterlines were

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completed or started construction, with 22 miles in design – nearly five miles of sewer lines were completed or started construction, with two miles in design.

The Harvest Phase 1 water storage tank was completed, with phases 2, 3 and 4 all underway! The well at Frontier Family Park was updated and connected to the park's lake, which will be an exciting community amenity, as are our trails! Design continues for the extension of the Queen Creek Wash Trail from Crismon to Meridian, which will be completed in two phases, and the High Intensity Activated CrossWalk, or HAWK trail crossing was completed making it easier for our equestrians to cross Hawes Road while enjoying the Sonoqui Wash Trail.

Of course, a major focus of superior infrastructure is our roadways! Before our Capital Improvement Program Director shares which roadway projects are underway and in the queue, it is important to note the work that is taking place to maintain our existing roads – 98% of street maintenance work orders were completed within a 24-hour period. And our traffic engineering division implemented traffic system performance measures using real-time data to optimize traffic signals - the first section was the Ellsworth Loop corridor, and they are working to add the signal optimization to the Rittenhouse corridor.

Now let's hear from Dave about our roadway improvement projects...

CIP projects - CIP Director Dave Lipinski

- Last year, we completed Queen Creek Road improvements from Ellsworth Road to Crismon Road.
- Completed Meridian Road improvements from Combs Road to Cherrywood Drive. (In conjunction with Pinal County.)
- Started Ocotillo Road widening project from Sossaman to Hawes
- Started Downtown core connectors – before we jump into those –
- Number of projects in design:
 - Chandler Heights widening from Via del Arroyo to Hawes Road
 - Power Road widening from Chandler Heights Road to Riggs Road
 - Hawes Road improvements from Rittenhouse Road to Jude Drive
 - Crismon Road improvements from Cloud Road to Riggs Road
 - Sossaman and Germann intersection improvements (In conjunction with City of Mesa and Maricopa County)
- Downtown core project includes two new roadways connecting Ellsworth Loop to Ellsworth Road and a new north / south connector between the two... Slated to be completed this quarter, the new roadways include a number of design features to help enhance the downtown core in addition to providing increased connectivity.

VIDEO: Downtown

Quality Lifestyle – Council member Oliphant

Having a walkable downtown will absolutely enhance our quality lifestyle and sense of community!

Outside of our Town Center, our agritainment destinations provide exciting opportunities for our residents and visitors – one of my personal favorites is Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre. In 2023, the facility hosted 209 equestrian days and 35 non-equestrian days including the sold-out monster truck event! Through the various events, more than 150,000 people and 12,000 horses visited the facility!

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Our parks, trails and recreational opportunities are also key components of having a quality lifestyle... we continue to see record numbers through our recreation programs and our youth sports partners. Baseball, softball, soccer, flag and tackle football keep our parks busy on the weekends! And we are so excited to see the progress continue at the expansion of Manel Carter Oasis Park and the new Frontier Family Park! Our parks provide such an important place for the community to come together – as do our special events! We saw record numbers across our signature events, with Trunk or Treat drawing nearly 20,000 attendees and supported by nearly 500 volunteers!

We got a blast from the past when we opened the QC Youth Center Time Capsule from 1998! Mementos of the time included a Motorola cell phone, Mr. Potato Head keychain and bulldog Beanie Baby. The timing of the capsule couldn't have been better as we broke ground on the Town's first Recreation & Aquatic Center. Community Services Director Marnie Schubert has more on what this exciting facility will offer our community...

Rec / Aquatic Center – Community Services Director Marnie Schubert

- QC's new Recreation & Aquatic Center, located off Signal Butte, north of Queen Creek Road broke ground last year and is slated to open by late 2024.
- The state-of-the-art facility will enhance the recreational opportunities in Queen Creek.
- The new facility will include an indoor recreation center with various sport courts (basketball, volleyball, pickleball), a fitness area, teen room, childcare and classrooms. The outdoor aquatic center will include a zero-depth entry play pool, competition / lap pool, lazy river and slides.
- Stay tuned for info on the grand opening later this year!

VIDEO: Trunk or Treat

Closing – Mayor

Each year I think our events can't get any better, and they do! Thanks to all of you, our community, for making them so special!

And wow, there is so much to look forward to in 2024...

- The opening of Frontier Family Park, our new 85-acre park, in just a couple of months
- The opening of the Recreation & Aquatic Center at the end of the year
- Our next signature event, Spring into QC, taking place on March 23
- All of the exciting events at Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Centre
- And more

Details for all of these can be found on our website – which will also have some excitement in 2024 as we launch our website update later this year!

A heartfelt thank you to everyone who makes Queen Creek such an amazing place – and a special thanks to our founding fathers and founding families as we celebrate 35 years!