

Good afternoon, everyone!

I'm Mayor Lisa Fitzgibbons, and it is truly my pleasure to join you here today to share an update on what's happening in the City of Casa Grande. It's wonderful to see so many familiar faces and to be surrounded by the people who continue to drive Casa Grande forward—our business community.

I take great pride in the fact that before becoming Mayor, I spent seventeen years working for a small local business. Fitzgibbons Law, which employs 22 people, has long been part of Casa Grande's business fabric. I'm especially proud to say that my daughter Ashley and my husband Denis, who are here with me today, are part of that team. I want to thank them for their ongoing support of me personally and for their dedication to this community we all call home.

Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to recognize members of our City Council who are here with us today, Mayor Pro Temp Matt Herman, Councilmember Sean Dugan, and Councilmember Rebecca Romo, as well as to those who were not able to attend, Councilmember Bob Huddleston, Councilmember Anthony Edwards, and Councilmember Brent BeDillon. I also want to take a moment to recognize our very talented and dedicated city staff. Their hard work and commitment make it possible for us to deliver the services and resources our residents depend on each day.

I also want to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of you—our businesses. You are the lifeblood of local commerce and the foundation of our community's success. The work you do goes far beyond your storefronts, offices, and job sites. You sponsor our Little League teams, support our 4-H groups, and contribute to countless community programs that shape the next generation. You help define our city as welcoming, friendly, and customer service-driven. For that, I am deeply grateful.

This afternoon, I'll be touching on many important topics that impact both our city and our local economy. But I want to begin with something I believe is absolutely essential: public engagement. Without trust, without connection, and without real dialogue, even the best-laid city plans cannot succeed.

## **Community Engagement**

We live in a time when people expect more than updates from their local government. They want transparency. They want involvement. And most importantly, they want a voice. If we don't create that space, someone else will.

That's why we built a Community Engagement Plan — not as a PR tool, but as a philosophy of government. Its purpose is simple: foster real connections between city leadership and our residents. Not just the loudest voices, but the everyday voices — the ones we often miss.

We grounded this plan in four commitments:

1. Communicate clearly.
2. Invite participation.
3. Build trust.
4. And be intentionally inclusive — especially of the underserved and underrepresented.

To put that vision into action, we launched Engage Casa Grande!, a webpage dedicated to public involvement. Residents can explore projects, take surveys, download documents, and most importantly, see how their feedback shaped decisions.

The numbers show it's working. Since January, we've sent over 100 real-time CG Alerts. Our Facebook page now reaches over 300,000 views a month. Website traffic topped 424,000 visits last year and is already on pace to surpass that. And our most visited pages? "Pay a Bill" and our "Parks & Recreation" page, proving everyday needs are where connection begins.

We're also telling our story in new ways. With our new Video Production Specialist position, we'll launch short, engaging videos like "City Projects in Progress", "Council Meeting Wrap-Ups", and "Casa Grande Government 101", showing how local government works based on residents' real questions. Because if people don't understand the process, they can't be part of it.

But we knew engagement couldn't live online alone. That's why we have hosted two Community Open Houses this year, drawing incredible turnout. Residents came with questions, ideas, and passion — talking with Council, with staff, and with one another. And we've been showing up at neighborhood clean-ups, city events, and anywhere people naturally gather. Because participation doesn't happen in a vacuum. It happens in relationships.

And we don't just ask for input. We follow up. We explain the "why." And even if we can't say yes, we say so. Because honesty builds more trust than silence ever will.

Already, survey results and Open House feedback have been built into our FY26 budget, and this fall, they'll help guide our Strategic Planning session. When residents see their

voice reflected in city action, connection turns into trust and trust builds momentum for everything we do together.

## **Communication & Events**

Building on that theme of engagement, I want to touch briefly on how we communicate and some exciting upcoming events.

Our most recent community survey focused on communication types — how the city communicates with residents and, just as importantly, how residents communicate back with us. And the feedback was clear: people want options, they want convenience, and they want two-way dialogue.

That's why we offer tools to make that happen. Residents can still use SeeClickFix to report issues like potholes, graffiti, or code enforcement concerns. You can also report minor crimes through our Police Online Reporting Tool right on the city website. And if you haven't already, I encourage you to sign up for CG Alerts. With CG Alerts, you choose how you want to get information — text, email, or phone call — so you stay informed on what matters most to you. And of course, be sure to follow us on one or all of our Social Media platforms for timely and accurate information.

We also use these tools to promote all the wonderful community events happening across Casa Grande. And as the weather cools, event season is about to ramp up.

Coming up on September 20th is one of our most meaningful gatherings: the 9/11 Day of Service at Carr McNatt Park. This year there are over 35 service projects to choose from, and the day begins with a moving opening ceremony. It's a powerful way for our community to come together, to honor, and to give back.

September also gives us the chance to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. I invite everyone to mark your calendars for September 26th, when *Celebra'* will bring our community together in historic downtown with live music, cultural performances, and plenty of fun for everyone.

Then on October 23, we celebrate one of our biggest traditions — the Halloween Harvest Festival. This free, family-friendly event will feature inflatables, carnival-style games, food vendors, a costume contest and trick-or-treating.

This year, we're excited to introduce something new: the Scare-y Grande Scarecrow Walk. This is a creative partnership with Experience Casa Grande and our Arts & Culture Commission. Picture a festive walkway lined with scarecrows designed by local

businesses, community groups, and residents. You can stroll through the display — or better yet, join the fun by decorating your own scarecrow. So, I hope everyone here is already thinking about what kind of scarecrow you might want to submit!

Finally, mark your calendars for Saturday, December 6! The Electric Light Parade will once again grace Florence Boulevard. I imagine some of you already have your folding chairs ready to go.

You can find all the details on the City of Casa Grande website. And I hope to see many of you not just at these events, but as active participants in building the connections that make Casa Grande such a special place to call home.

### **Capital Improvement Projects-FY26**

Now let's turn to some of the physical improvements that keep us moving forward. Here are some highlights from our \$250 million Capital Improvement Program for FY26.

Roads, sewer systems, and utilities may not be flashy, but they are the backbone of a strong community and a thriving economy. They are what makes it possible for businesses to expand, for families to travel safely, and for new opportunities to take root here.

At the intersection of Ash Avenue and Florence Street, we'll be building a new roundabout. With traffic increasing due to new manufacturing jobs, this project will improve safety and traffic flow and create an attractive entry point into our city. Construction is set to begin in 2026 with federal earmark funding.

We are also moving forward with the improvements on McCartney Road, one of the most important projects in our growth areas. With residential and commercial development rapidly expanding, we'll be reconstructing two key segments of McCartney Road, from Pinal Avenue to Trekell Road and from Trekell Road to I-10. Construction will begin towards the end of November.

The Colorado Street through O'Neil Drive project will reconstruct sections of O'Neil Drive and Colorado Street, adding new lanes, sidewalks, ADA ramps, and lighting. This will make travel safer and easier for students, families, and businesses in some of our busiest corridors.

Meanwhile, the Trekell Road reconstruction from Rodeo Road to McCartney Road is nearing completion. The gas companies have finally completed their work, and our contractor will be back on the road in the coming weeks to finish up the project.

The Kortsen Road and Peart Road intersection improvements, including additional lanes and a new right-turn bay, are in the works to ease congestion and improve access.

In May, City Council voted to reduce the Fund Balance Reserve from 50% to 30% to increase the Capital Improvement Program by another \$15 million. The \$15 million will include several roadway projects.

Roadway Improvements on O'Neil Drive from Pueblo to Peart Road. Estimated cost \$2,250,000.

Roadway Improvements on Colorado Road from Cottonwood Lane to O'Neil Drive. Estimated cost \$3,550,000.

In coordination with ADOT, the traffic signal addition at Hacienda Boulevard and Florence Boulevard. Estimated cost \$1,500,000.

Enhancement to city's Roadway Signage Program – Estimated cost \$500,000.

Improvements at Mission Parkway and Cottonwood Lane – Estimated cost \$1 million.

Kortsen Road Improvements from Colorado Road to Peart Road – Estimated costs \$2.5 million.

It will also include funding towards the replacement of Fire Station 501 and beautification at the Paul Mason Sports Plex.

On the wastewater side, several major projects are underway to keep pace with growth.

The Trekell Road Relief Sewer project will install nearly two miles of new gravity sewer lines to expand capacity, with completion expected by the end of 2026.

We're also constructing the Kortsen West Regional Sewer Lift Station, which will directly support new residential, commercial, and industrial development on the west side. That project is scheduled for completion early in 2027.

At the Wastewater Reclamation Facility, upgrades are moving forward and will be finished by late 2025. While some components have been delayed due to supply chain issues, this work is critical to ensuring our city's long-term reliability.

A few months ago, we completed the Kortsen Relief Sewer Project, adding over three miles of new sewer main and a new pumping facility. This was a major step in expanding our system's capacity.

Altogether, these roadway and wastewater projects represent millions of dollars invested in Casa Grande's future. They're not only improving safety and mobility but also laying the foundation for continued economic growth.

## **Housing and Water**

Now I am going to update you on our current and future state of housing and water. Both are essential to how we live today, and how we grow responsibly for the future.

Let's start with housing.

This year, we are on track to issue about 200 new single-family residential permits. That's lower than the past few years, but it mirrors what we're seeing across Arizona. Rising mortgage rates, higher construction costs, and population shifts all play a role. And when you add in labor shortages and supply chain challenges — with some electrical components and raw materials taking up to a year to arrive — it's no surprise that single-family starts have slowed.

But housing in Casa Grande is not just about single-family homes. Over the past year, we've seen the completion of several new multi-family projects — from traditional apartment complexes to build-to-rent communities. Right now, there are currently five projects still under construction that will be completed within the next year.

Adding these units to our housing stock is critical because of the influx of jobs into our city. It is anticipated that 1,000 new jobs will be added in Casa Grande over the course of the year. Based on the opportunities in economic development, the city could see an additional 3,000 jobs created in the next five years. A balanced inventory prevents single-family home prices from climbing out of reach by offering more diverse options for people at different income levels. That means lower housing cost burdens for low- and middle-income households, and more choices for young professionals, students, and empty-nesters who value convenience, flexibility, and less maintenance.

A diverse housing market isn't just good for residents; it's a key driver of economic development and job creation. Businesses looking to locate here look at housing when they decide whether to invest in a community. As the adage goes, "Retail follows rooftops", and the more options we can provide, the stronger our economy becomes.

Now, let's turn to water.

Two facts are important to remember. First, Arizona Water Company is the private utility that has been, and continues to be, the water provider within Casa Grande's city limits.

Second, the City of Casa Grande does own and operate a small water company outside of city limits, which will serve the Copper Mountain Ranch Development in the coming years.

Over the past year — and especially during this last Legislative Session — some major water policy decisions were made that will have a positive impact on Casa Grande and the Pinal Active Management Area, or AMA.

Let me reassure you: Casa Grande has more than enough water supplies to serve our residents for the next 100 years. Still, living in the desert means that conservation and sound policy will always remain essential. Recently, I joined the Coalition for Protecting Arizona's Lifeline—a group of mayors from across the state taking a united, bipartisan stand to safeguard Arizona's share of the Colorado River and to support the Central Arizona Project, which delivers water to millions of people in central and southern Arizona. Through this coalition, we are working together to educate the public, advocate for smart policy, and collaborate across regions and party lines to protect Arizona's water future.

Beyond conservation, we need to secure new physical water supplies for the future. Two new programs will be especially impactful.

The first is the Alternative Designation of Assured Water Supply, or ADAWS. In Arizona's Active Management Areas, land can't be subdivided into six or more residential lots unless there is a proven 100-year water supply. Traditionally, that required every new subdivision to go through its own lengthy process to prove water availability. Under the new ADAWS program, water providers like Arizona Water Company can apply for a designation showing they already have a 100-year supply for their service area. Developers within that area can then rely on the provider's designation, streamlining growth while ensuring sustainability. Arizona Water Company is currently in the application phase of this process with ADWR and expects a decision in calendar year 2026.

This is a big change from the previous Certificate of Assured Water Supply program. Under that older system, Casa Grande was essentially capped at about 11,000 subdivided lots already on file — which would have limited growth to the next 10–15 years. ADAWS provides a path forward.

The second major development is the “Ag-to-Urban” Groundwater Conservation Program, passed this year in Senate Bill 1611. This bipartisan law allows farmers in the Pinal and Maricopa AMAs to voluntarily retire irrigated farmland in exchange for groundwater savings credits. Developers can then use those credits to meet their 100-year assured water supply requirements.

This program will conserve millions of acre-feet of groundwater while also unlocking housing development in areas where it had previously stalled. The law takes effect on

September 26, with the Department of Water Resources hosting an information session for potential applicants' on September 18. ADWR is required to adopt formal rules by June 30, 2026, and from there, property owners, including farmers and developers in the Pinal AMA, will be able to convert one acre-foot of groundwater per acre for 100 years. Naturally, conservation standards will apply, including restrictions on turf, landscaping, and water features.

Together, these new tools — ADAWS and Ag-to-Urban — give Casa Grande a clear and responsible path forward. They will help us continue growing while preserving the water resources we all depend on.

## **General Obligation Bond**

All the growth in our city places greater demand on our roads and water supply—but it also raises the question: what about the demand for quality of life? We must be just as mindful about investing in amenities and experiences that make Casa Grande a place where people want to live, work, and play. When there's nothing to do close to home, people often take their business elsewhere. That's why I'd like to take a few moments to talk about Proposition 496 that will be on the ballot on November 4.

The Casa Grande City Council has voted to place a \$67 million General Obligation, or GO, Bond question on the ballot. If approved, this bond would fund recreational improvements designed to enhance our quality of life and support our city's growing population.

So, what exactly is a General Obligation Bond?

A GO Bond is a voter-approved financing tool. It allows the city to sell tax-exempt bonds to fund large-scale public projects.

Here are a few important points about a GO Bond:

- It must be voter approved.
- It can only be used for the specific projects outlined.
- It is repaid through secondary property taxes over a set period, which in this case is 20 years.

Now, let's talk about what this bond would fund:

### **Aquatic Complex**

The proposed facility would feature a heated swimming pool suitable for both recreation



and competitive events. Additional amenities may include water slides, ramadas, picnic areas, a family pool with zero-depth entry, a lazy river, and a spray playground.

#### Lighted Baseball and Softball Fields

Planned for Ed Hooper Park, these fields would provide more opportunities for youth and adult leagues, regional and local tournaments, clinics, and practices — helping to expand recreational options citywide.

#### Multipurpose Sports & Event Fields

Also at Ed Hooper Park, these fields would be designed for multiple sports, special events, and community use, with lighting and expanded capacity to serve residents of all ages.

Finally, you may be wondering how this impacts you as a property owner.

The total project cost is \$67 million, and the tax applies to residential, business, and industrial properties. This portion of the property tax is temporary, ending after 20 years. For example, a residential home assessed at \$200,000, the estimated average tax rate is \$0.5539 per \$100 of net assessed value, which works out to roughly \$111 per year, or about \$10 per month.

This bond represents an investment in health and recreation for our community. There are information cards at the booth in the back of the room with members of the Play It Forward PAC here to answer questions and I encourage each of you to visit the City of Casa Grande webpage for more information and to calculate your investment based on your own property value.

One thing to note, this special election will be an all-mail ballot election. Why?

Arizona law sets specific election dates to save money and encourage higher voter turnout. To meet those requirements, the City of Casa Grande has an Intergovernmental Agreement with Pinal County to conduct our elections together. That way, our regular elections in even-numbered years are included on the same ballot.

For special elections in odd-numbered years, the process is a little different—they're usually conducted entirely by mail. Every registered voter automatically gets a ballot at home, which can be mailed back or dropped off at one of the secure ballot boxes around the county. Those drop boxes are monitored and even live streamed by Pinal County to make sure the process is safe, secure, and transparent. Visit the Pinal County website to check designated sites.

#### **Economic Profile Data Points**

And speaking of growth statistics, we've supplied each table with the most recent Economic Profile. This snapshot gives you a clear picture of where Casa Grande stands today and where we're headed. On it, you will find an overview of our population trends, household information, median home values, and the current status of multifamily units across the city. For example, our average household income has increased to \$89,469, our median age has decreased to just under 36 and our median home value has topped \$330,000. On the back, it also highlights some of the businesses generating the most jobs in our community, along with those currently in the pipeline.

This profile is an important tool—not only for business leaders and investors, but for all of us who want to understand the momentum behind Casa Grande's growth. It shows that we are building a strong, diverse economy that continues to create opportunities for residents and businesses alike.

### **Economic Development**

Now I'd like to talk about economic development. Business retention and expansion and workforce development are always top of mind for our community.

I understand the Chamber has held 13 ribbon cutting ceremonies for businesses so far this year. Some of you are in this room and I first want to extend my congratulations to you.

At the Marketplace, which we used to know as the Casa Grande Mall, I'm happy to report that Hobby Lobby has opened and is doing very well. We also expect EOS Fitness to open its doors by the end of the year, adding another great option for our residents. Additional tenants on the way include One Stop Nutrition, Regus Flex Office Space, and L'Mage Salon Suites, with even more announcements expected very soon.

Turning to the Promenade Mall, I recently met with the leasing company, and I'm pleased to report that they anticipate the property will be fully leased by the first quarter of 2026. All of this is terrific news for our community — more retail jobs, more shopping choices, and stronger economic growth. And while I can't make an official announcement about Target just yet, I did notice some work being done at the building. Let's just say that's a very encouraging sign!

When it comes to retail, it's important to remember that the city is not always the final say whether a store chooses to locate here. Those decisions are ultimately made by the private sector. But what we can do — and what we do every day — is actively recruit and put our best foot forward with site locators and developers.

And believe me—we have a wish list too! Just like you, we want more variety, more conveniences, and the same amenities residents ask us about. Right now, there are active

discussions with Get Air Sports Trampoline Park and Sprouts, who are both evaluating market conditions in Casa Grande. There are others who are also evaluating our community anonymously.

I'm also very excited to share that our brand-new Marriott Hotel will be opening before the end of the year and Hilton has given me the go-ahead to officially announce they will be expanding our hotel lineup. Both Home2 Suites and Hampton Inn will be coming to Casa Grande, located east of Mission Parkway and Kohl's!

Together, these developments highlight the momentum we're experiencing, and the growing confidence businesses have in Casa Grande, but we need a strong workforce to succeed, and this is where our efforts in workforce development come in.

### **Workforce Development Update**

The city actively promotes AZ@Work, which offers free resources to employers looking to hire, to individuals searching for jobs, and to those who may need additional education or training to take the next step in their careers.

This past year, we've also expanded opportunities for learning and growth. The City sponsored the Pinal County Apprenticeship Lunch & Learn, and we supported the "Funding Your Business: Getting Ready for the Lending Process" workshop hosted by CAC's Small Business Development Center. On top of that, we were excited to help Union and Vista Grande High School DECA students join the Entrepreneur Experience program, which walks participants through the steps of starting a business — an incredible hands-on opportunity for our future entrepreneurs.

And we're not stopping there. Moving forward, we're working with the Chamber, SBDC, and other partners to identify additional workshops and roundtables designed to strengthen our small business community. Our next session is planned for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, and we're eager to keep building momentum.

Together, these efforts aren't just about filling jobs, they're about creating career pathways.

### **Childcare Taskforce Update**

One of the most critical challenges we continue to hear from both employers and families is access to affordable, reliable childcare. To address this, we created the Childcare Taskforce, which has been meeting over the past several months to better assess both current and future needs in our community. The taskforce brings together major employers

such as Banner Hospital, Abbott, and Kohler, along with childcare stakeholders like First Things First—Arizona’s early childhood agency dedicated to education and health programs for children under five.

We’ve already begun surveying major employers, and Pinal County has distributed surveys as well, so we can build a clear picture of the demand. We’re also working to identify potential childcare center operators who can meet the needs of our 24-hour companies — because we know shift work doesn’t end at 5 o’clock.

Beyond facilities, we’re focused on growing the childcare workforce by partnering with our schools and Central Arizona College. We’re also developing a marketing strategy to connect both formal providers and informal caregivers — like grandparents and family friends — with the free training and resources available to them.

The goal is simple but powerful: to elevate the quality of childcare in Casa Grande, giving every child the opportunity to engage in more learning activities and arrive at school better prepared to succeed.

## **Safety Initiatives**

Another vital aspect of growth and prosperity is ensuring our community is safe, so I am going to talk briefly about safety and two specific initiatives the Casa Grande Police Department is working on.

Many of you may have heard about the burglaries downtown a couple of months ago. What happened next is a perfect example of the power of community partnership. Downtown business owners reached out to our Police Department and organized an informal crime prevention meeting. Over 35 business owners attended, sharing ideas and strategies to keep our community safe.

Thanks to surveillance footage and photographic evidence, police were able to identify and arrest a suspect. This shows how communication, collaboration, and vigilance make a real difference.

Another highlight of our proactive efforts is Operation Safe Streets. In June, our Community Response Team, K9 Unit, Traffic Division, and Criminal Investigations Division, including drone operators, joined forces for a 14-hour targeted enforcement operation. The results were impressive: 96 traffic stops, 13 citations, 23 arrests, three firearms recovered, and a stolen vehicle recovered.

From apprehending a stolen vehicle suspect to detaining a gunshot suspect and seizing drugs, firearms, and suspected explosives, these efforts show the power of teamwork and proactive policing. These efforts will continue through the fall, so drive safely out there.

When we work together — city staff, police, businesses, and residents — we make Casa Grande safer and stronger.

### **Closing Remarks**

As we close today, I want to thank each of you — our business leaders, partners, and community champions — for the role you play in shaping Casa Grande's future. The success of our city is not built by government alone, but through partnership, innovation, and the determination of people like you who invest your time, talent, and resources here.

We are a community on the rise. From new housing and recreational opportunities to strong infrastructure and smart water policy, Casa Grande is laying the groundwork not just for growth, but for long-term prosperity. And at the center of it all are our businesses — large and small — that create jobs, support families, and give our city its unique character.

Together, we are writing the next chapter for our city, and I cannot be more optimistic about what lies ahead. Let's continue to dream big, work hard, and show everyone the pride and promise of Casa Grande.

Thank you everyone. Thank you for having me and thank you again for all you do.