



**State of the County  
2022**

Presented by  
Supervisor Eddie Valero  
Chair of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Welcome to the 2022 State of the County! These past few years, together, we've had to build community, commitment, and connection. And, despite the uncertainty, I believe this year brings greater resilience, resolve and respect – because of where we've been and because of where we are going.

Your investment in this county is palpable. And, you clearly showed this during times of great trouble when the public was forced to pause. We united in the struggle, yet we hurt when division struck, too. We owe you a sincere dept of gratitude for your frontline work and for your promise to the nearly 465,000 people of this County. The fruit of your labor is our greatest harvest and our county's collective future. We are definitely stronger together!

Before I start, I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues on the Board of Supervisors. Vice Chair and District 5 Supervisor Dennis Townsend, District 1 Supervisor Larry Micari, District 2 Supervisor Pete Vander Poel, and District 3 Supervisor Amy Shuklian.

Community, Commitment, and Connection are the central features of this year's State of the County address. Our county has become an all-hands-on-deck county because we have worked to put you, our people of Tulare County, front and center in all that we do. We have been fiscally prudent, committed to our employees, and supportive of infrastructure projects that help us pave the way for more resources and opportunities. Today's message is a reflection of this hard work.

Currently, the total County budget is \$1.6 billion and, of this amount, our General Fund is nearing \$1 billion for the first time in our history. Because of our thoughtful management of funds, the

County is in a fiscally strong position -- we can invest in important priorities today while also ensuring that we can confidently face the concerns of the future.

Some significant, notable investments this year include:

**County Fire:** The County appropriated \$30 million toward fire department operations this year, which includes funding for thermal imaging cameras, handheld radios, administrative vehicles, swift water rescue boat and vehicle, and a trailer. We have also recently purchased several new fire trucks.

**County Improvements:** The County regularly reviews the condition of our roads and ensures that we are directing money to the areas of greatest need. This fiscal year's appropriations to County Roads include funding for the County Transportation Improvement Program which identified 47 projects specifically for the improvement and maintenance of County transportation infrastructure.

Thanks to efforts by the Resource Management Agency, we built bridges, we fixed roads to revitalize our small communities, and rehabbed over 20 miles of road to facilitate our farm to market economy.

Our new Transit Operations & Maintenance Facility, which opened in September of 2021 increased County capacity from north to south, east to west. This 26,000 square foot facility includes administration spaces as well as a dispatch and operations center for TCAT vehicles.

We permitted 7 solar projects in 2021. Including a 3,600-acre solar farm near Ducor with enough solar panels to produce

enough clean energy to provide 100% of the power needed for 180,000 homes each year.

And this is definitely a need, given the growth of our housing stock in Tulare County, as we approved or completed several housing developments in 2021. For example, there have been many units built in Goshen with more on the way. Smee Homes is set to break ground on a new development and Quest Equity is approved for an additional 200 lots. Moreover, we have approved conditional use permits that will bring in affordable permanent housing – 52 modular homes in Goshen, 16 units in Pixley with 13 more on the way and 40 units planned for Orosi.

As our communities expand, so does the need for access to basic utility services, and we've been right there to secure these essential services, like with the new housing development in Strathmore which just received approval to connect to existing water and sewer systems.

New houses are nothing without hardworking individuals and families to fill them and make them a home. Which is why I'm proud to report that Tulare County applied for, and received, a grant of up to \$600,000 to provide mortgage and utility assistance to low-income household affected by Covid. The county continues to be committed to fighting homelessness and providing more housing.

**Capital Improvements:** The County continues to invest in our buildings and properties. Funding has been committed to the acquisition of a new substation in Porterville, renovation of several fire stations, and the construction of a new library in Springville. In years to come, we will be constructing a new

programming facility at Sequoia Field Airport for the Sheriff's office.

**American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA):** The County received \$90 million to respond to the COVID 19 pandemic. \$50 million is allocated for public health response, \$15 million for water infrastructure, \$8 million for County Parks, and \$4 million for local industries impacted by the pandemic. In addition to these allocations, in an effort to continue our commitment to addressing homelessness, the Board also ensured that money would be available to support permanent and temporary housing opportunities.

**Emergency Response:** \$2 million was set aside to assist with the SQF Complex Fire recovery and to be available for future emergencies. Recognizing the extreme impacts posed by years of ongoing drought conditions, the County is also setting aside \$2 million for future needs to respond to drought impacts.

Other investments include \$3 million allocated to the Public Agency Retirement services fund to be available for future retirement cost increases and \$2 million to be spent on technology infrastructure projects.

### **COVID ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

If there's any bright side to a multiyear pandemic, it's the opportunity to showcase in year 2 what we learned in year 1, to go on the offensive rather than defensive. The Community Care Coalition was Tulare County's offensive unit in 2021.

The CCC was established in April of 2020 in response to the outbreak of the COVID Pandemic, to combine resources, response and planning efforts throughout the County. Various partners ran

the spectrum of services – all working together to provide outreach and distribution related to rental/mortgage and utility assistance to testing and vaccine efforts to food assistance and distribution and so much more. What an astonishing collaborative effort!

Once vaccines were developed, the County provided the resources for those who requested them. Every community had access to a vaccine clinic, and every individual had the opportunity to get a vaccine and/or vaccines if they so desired. All in all, our Public Health Department administered 538,548 vaccines in Tulare County during 2021.

We owe a nice big round of applause to every healthcare/healthcare adjacent employee and volunteer who made this massive effort to protect and provide for our communities, a reality.

Every mountaintop does come with its valley lows, too. And, unfortunately, the pandemic claimed roughly 1,500 lives of Tulare County residents. No death is just a number. This morning, I ask that you join me in a moment of silence to honor the lives we lost.

Thank you.

Not only is Tulare County committed to meeting the moment, but we are also committed to building momentum for all. Nowhere is that more clearly exemplified than our work done, and the services provided, through our county departments.

**HHSA:** HHSA worked diligently to get our Roomkey projects up and running during the pandemic. And they found temporary

shelter for homeless families who had been blindsided by unemployment, and other COVID induced struggles. We got them off the street and onto the road to recovery; on the road to a permanent home, steady employment, and financial stability. Of their own generosity our communities banded together to provide families with clothing, toys, furniture, toiletries, and in one case, a car complete with a year of free repairs and auto insurance. Talk about life changing momentum! Efforts started at the county are connected and strengthened by our communities. \_

**CarePortal:** This connection is so powerful we decided to partner with a nonprofit whose sole purpose is to connect our faith based organizations with the needs of the community around them. CarePortal launched in 2021 and has served over 200 children, fulfilled over 80 requests for support and provided an \$87,088 economic impact to our community.

**Adult Services:** From families and children to our seniors in need, no one was forgotten. Adult services was able to purchase and distribute 93 ipads to seniors isolated from their families due to the pandemic. These iPads, along with a free data plan and training, allowed seniors to see and hear their loved ones from the safety of their own home. Additionally, our various meals on wheels programs ensured that our seniors were well nourished as they weathered the worst of the pandemic on their own. These services were and are crucial for our senior Tulare county residents mental and physical health.

**Mental Health Diversion Program:** In 2021 Tulare County implemented our Mental Health Diversion Program with the Superior Court, offering individuals struggling with mental health issues and alternative to the traditional jail house. These individuals received expert treatment to mitigate their entry and

re-entry into the criminal justice system. 24 hours a day 7 days a week they receive supervision, medication, treatment, and individualized care to assist them in their recovery process. Our behavioral health treatment teams assist patients with objectives such as enrolling in school, obtaining employment, improving social and familial relationships, and eventually moving into independent living. This all hands on deck effort means even the public defender him/her self makes visits to individual patients to encourage them along the way.

**State of the Art County Public Health Lab:** the Tulare County Public Health Laboratory (TCPHL) performed genomic sequencing to detect emerging variants and address variants circulating the county. Our county was one of the first in the state to utilize this technology.

**Animal Services:** Let us not forget our furry friends during these trying times. While they may have escaped the worst of the pandemic, they found themselves in the middle of another terrifying situation. The KNP and Windy fires resulted in 185 animals needing temporary shelter. Our animal services team evacuated animals large and small and partnered with the International Agri-Center, the Woodlake Rodeo, and local shelters. In October of 2021 Animal Services conducted a soft opening of a brand-new veterinary clinic and welcomed Dr. Alexandra Myhal to our team. This new clinic will increase our capacity to conduct spay and neuter surgeries, several limb amputations, lifesaving wound repairs, various splint placements, and other medical procedures. I'd like to mention our animal save rates because the numbers are nothing short if incredible. We are at a 89% save rate, up from 63% in 2018, and a mere 22% in 2013. On behalf of all animal lovers out there, I extend a great big thank you to our animal services agency.

**GSA:** We completed construction on a co-located emergency dispatch facility for the Sheriff and Fire Departments in October 2021. This modernized facility is located within the Sheriff and Fire headquarters and will serve as the center for emergency dispatch for both departments.

Last year our Sheriff's department continued their stellar youth outreach programs in the County. Over 300 children participated in the Sheriff's flag football league and another 250+ took advantage of the basketball league. And in 2021, it launched the new Mobile Rec Center in order to directly reach communities with limited services and to make face-to-face contact with those communities in the most positive way possible.

While our Sheriff's staff make meaningful connections with the next generation, our Fire department turned their attention to fire resiliency and mitigation efforts. Our Fire crews completed tree removal projects this past year to provide our communities with safe travel corridors and protection of public infrastructure. Similarly, our GSA department also trimmed and removed hazardous trees at our various park sites and cleaned up damage done by the SQF Complex fire at Balch Park in time for its reopening in 2021.

I am thrilled to share once again that our parks will be receiving a funding allocation of \$8 million for improvement projects, including water systems, arbors, benches, and more! Our public parks have served us well over the years and its high time we show them the love they deserve. The parks loved us during the pandemic, too, as they were a place for partnerships and community – hosting COVID-19 resource events up and down the county.

**AG:** For example, it was all hands-on deck when it came to COVID-19 response in 2021. Organizations that you might not expect were on the front lines giving our communities the tools and supplies to weather the storm. Our Tulare County Ag Commissioners department worked right alongside many other county agencies to assist in distributing PPE in the forms of masks, face coverings, hand sanitizer, and other products to farm workers, agricultural businesses, and various other essential workers – both in the fields and at community-wide events.

In 2021, we had the arduous task of completing our redistricting map. We had excellent work done by our CAO and Clerk’s Office, in addition to our I.T department and supporting staff during the once in a decade struggle. 24 meetings totaling a whopping 48 hours, 370 individual participants, 26 unique organizations, 770 hours of preparation by 11 staffers, all to ensure that you, the good people of Tulare County, are accurately and equitably represented by us, your Board of Supervisors. The 12 am quitting times were all worth it in the end, and the good work we did was used as a positive example statewide.

**Probation:** Another department highlight is that of our Probation Department with its newly opened “Connections” facility. It is designed to serve youth, adults, and families by providing mental health, education, vocational training, as well as drug and alcohol recovery services all at one convenient location. 13 community partners have banded together to provide no cost services to clients on probation looking to reestablish a meaningful connection with the community around them. This facility truly embodies community, connection, and commitment. Another innovative commitment by a department is that of Tulare County Registrar of Voters.

**Registrar of Voters:** With an election looming. I want to highlight the work done by our registrar of voters to bolster election integrity. California participated in the Geo-Enabled Election Project whose aim was to strengthen the accuracy and reliability of America's electoral system and to increase voters' confidence that their voices are being heard in each election. We are ensuring that voters are placed in the right voting district, receive the right ballot, and vote in the right electoral contests. Here in Tulare County, we do all that we can to ensure our elections are honest, accessible, and representative.

All in all, we are a county on the move. And, we, as a Board, have been tasked to protect the health and well-being of you, your families, friends, neighbors, and the entire County. Although we did not have a rule book to follow, we worked tirelessly to meet our every-changing goal posts every time.

As I draw to a close, I want to set our eyes on what lies ahead. The work is never done here in Tulare County, because we continually press forward to new horizons.

Just last week our county entered into a Master Stewardship Agreement with the USDA, and the Forest Service, for a 20 year term to document the cooperative efforts between the parties for the care of our national treasure, the Sequoia National Park.

Seeking to leverage technology to better serve the public, the Assessor/Clerk-Recorder is actively involved in a data conversion project that will usher in a modern property tax computer mainframe and convert the department's workflow to a paperless system. The new web-based system will allow the Assessor, the Auditor-Controller, the Tax Collector-Treasurer, the Clerk of the Board and all taxpayers to access county property tax information

accurately, efficiently and securely. The system is scheduled to go live in July. And, yes, an easier way to retrieve your taxes! (Laugh)

At the start of this year, we broke ground on the \$187 million construction project to fix the Friant-Kern Canal and restore its conveyance capacity to help support our local communities and farmers weather California's evermore frequent and harsh droughts.

The County has a strong focus on water issues and improving access to water in rural communities. The County is in the final stages of working with the Water Resources Control Board to serve as the Administrator for the water system in East Orosi. As Administrator, the County will work to improve the water distribution system and regionalize the system for improved operations and system health. The County continues to also partner with other water districts, such as working with the Yettlem-Seville Community Services District to complete an intertie to connect the two community water systems and improve the water supply and access for residents. In addition, the County is partnering with other water agencies on thirteen projects using ARPA funding to increase drought resiliency and water security for communities in all corners of the County.

In conclusion, the State of the County is strong because of the people who are in it. We are all committed, community-driven and connected and, as a result, continue to establish one big county family. When faced with highs and lows, we muster through the storm. From our residents, businesses, libraries, and schools to our frontline workers and first responders, to our healthcare professionals, our teachers and our veterans – we are a community that is resilient, steadfast and renewed. Let's all press forward, together, and let's all lead with love. Thank you for

making Tulare County what it is, and that is a great Community!  
May God bless our County, State and Country. Thank you!