

Novato Strong, Novato Proud

2017: <title slide>

Good morning my fellow Novatans. Today, I address you with humility. With a little over four months as your City Administrator, I don't have all the answers, nor do I have a grand vision. I am still learning—still exploring—still discovering, our sweet home Novato.

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In my short time here, though, I have marveled at **Novato's incredible assets**—our open space, parks, wetlands, and the breathtaking Mt. Burdell; the history and traditions we honor—
<SLIDE 3> like the tree lighting, the City's birthday, and our citizen and businesses of the year; our strong and mighty non-profit community, our robust businesses—big & small--and our entrepreneurial spirit; our active and engaged community, and our dedicated City Council and top-notch professional City staff. **Novato has a solid foundation.**

I am also learning that **Novato is resilient**. Our community has weathered its share of tough economic times—in fact, as most of you know, Novato is not like any other city in California—in so many ways, but especially when it comes to our tax revenues. <SLIDE 4> Per resident, our tax revenue is lower than nearly all other cities in Marin; we are the only city in the state that does not collect waste hauler franchise fees or utility user taxes. But despite these circumstances, and upcoming challenges ahead with pension and infrastructure costs, we have been fortunate. Our Council has been judicious with City resources and has been working to ensure that our long-term fiscal future is **sustainable**.

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And our economic indicators are currently heading in the right direction:

- Transient occupancy tax, after 5 years of double-digit growth, is projected to continue strong--at 4% growth in 16/17;
- Property assessed valuation continues strong growth at 5.5% in 16/17; and
- Measure C will add \$2.5 million per year to the City's sales tax annual collections, which in 16/17 will reach nearly \$12 million.

I am happy to report that **our reserves are healthy and our pension plans are better-funded than most**. City leadership had the foresight years ago to know that there would be increased costs in the long run if we had adopted the upgraded retirement plans—that many cities were

adopting. Last year, our City's credit rating was upgraded to the second highest rating Standard & Poors assigns. That said, we still need to address skyrocketing pension costs while trying to retain qualified, professional staff.

Novato is making **significant investments in our City infrastructure.**

Let me give you a few examples of what we've accomplished in the past year:

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In addition to hundreds of requests for service a week, and the flood protection work, street repair, park, pool, and building maintenance they manage, our prolific Public Works Department gave our parks a much needed refresh--including new landscaping, amenities, and signage.

<SLIDE 7> They put a new roof on the Gymnastics Center, repaved the interchanges at De Long and Ignacio Avenues that included new pedestrian and bike lane improvements, completed the LED retrofit to make every streetlight-4,500 of them--in Novato, energy-efficient; re-landscaped medians along key corridors in our city including Redwood, Rowland, and De Long, and widened Olive Avenue all the way to Atherton to accommodate new bike lanes on both sides of the street.

The City was also successful in teeing up a countywide Quiet Zone with the City of San Rafael, which will be in place when SMART begins service later this year; and we have also completed the first phase of the Downtown SMART station with hopes of completing the remaining construction once funding is secured.

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Novato is **shaping our future through innovation**, leveraging our existing technology, and developing new approaches to improve how we deliver City services. Our IT team moved our Police Department to a shared dispatch system with the County. This not only will increase officer safety in the field, but will reduce ongoing costs. The City's vehicle fleet has been outfitted with a new fuel management system that boosts efficiency, cuts fuel-related costs, and keeps our fleet on the road longer. We are also on the way to replacing an antiquated mapping system with the latest in GIS technology-which will provide mobile applications for our staff in the field—code enforcement, public works, and police--and an invaluable information resource for our community.

Recently, our Community Development Department launched new resources on our website that make it easier for businesses to navigate the City's permit process, explore locations for a new or expanding business, and understand the costs and requirements unique to their project.

We want it to be easy and convenient to do business in Novato—and are making great strides to put the “yes” back into the way we operate.

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Novato **strives to keep our economic engine primed** and get ahead of the next recession.

This past year, our Hamilton Base Reuse Director, Scott Ward, was successful in completing our Federal Lands-to-Parks exchange, which freed up nearly 19 acres of City-owned properties for redevelopment and created more than 90 acres of preserved open space. Very soon, we will be working with the community and our Council to discuss how best to revitalize those properties in Hamilton.

In addition, we closed escrow on the Hamilton Cottages--16-units of single-family senior housing on Hamilton Parkway—on an underutilized, difficult-to-assemble, site that provided the City \$500,000 in revenue and a creative housing solution to help our seniors age-in-place.

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The backbone of our economy is our small businesses. We continue to look for ways to retain, and accommodate the expansion of, Novato businesses. Partnering with the Chamber of Commerce and the Small Business Development Center we are connecting our businesses to resources that will help improve their bottom line.

Our ShopLocal program continues to help our retailers and services grow their sales locally and connect them to our community. Recently, we added a Spanish-language section to the ShopLocal website which highlights our mono and bilingual businesses and connects them to our Spanish-speaking consumers. <SLIDE 11> This year's online Holiday Shopping Guide was a hit with the locals. Harnessing the power of social media, the guide reached nearly 8,000 local shoppers in a week, providing them with holiday gift ideas from our local merchants.

As Novato looks to our future, we need to sharpen our focus and broaden our reach.

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Our General Plan update, led by our Community Development Department and its Director, Bob Brown, is nearing completion this year. <SLIDE 13> After three years of outreach to hundreds of Novatans in dozens of meetings, venues, and online surveys, we have drafted policies:

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- that help our aging population stay independent longer,
- that encourages more active, healthy lifestyles,
- that focuses new growth on underutilized and under developed parcels,
- that creates a hub for tech and life science companies,
- that envisions an efficient transportation network for all,
- that recognizes our role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating a more sustainable water supply,

- and that provides a plan to help us maintain our infrastructure and city services.

<SLIDE 15> I am proud to say that this General Plan **envisions a Novato that is greener, more prosperous, and sustainable**. One of the City Council's top priorities is Novato's environmental legacy. In March, we will be bringing back our Climate Action Plan to Council to discuss how to build upon that decade-old vision and engage our community in our sustainability efforts—to create a legacy of stewardship, which is everybody's work.

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Finally, this year our goal is to facilitate the development of the North Redwood Corridor. Last year, thanks to the efforts of our Community Development staff and our Design Review Commission, met with developers, ROIC and Black Point, to help them formulate a unified site plan that responds to the feedback we received in the public charrettes. We anticipate receiving applications from both in the very near future.

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In the spirit of our Council's vision of **activating our public spaces and creating great places**, our Parks, Recreation, and Community Services will be offering even more community events this year. The popular City Hall concert series kicked off in February and will continue on our Civic Green this summer. Also returning is our Sundays on Sherman--which transforms Sherman Avenue into outdoor play spaces for the entire family.

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Both Parks and Public Works continue to facilitate public feedback on the proposed Hill Recreation Area Master Plan—which envisions additional parking and more sports fields—including synthetic turf fields—and other park and community center amenities. City Council will consider this spring.

Ultimately, all of what we do, contributes to the high quality of life that we have come to expect in our City. Because of you, Novato, and through the passage of Measure C in 2015, we have been able to continue offering those City services that are important to you—the most important of those is public safety.

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This past year, we continued to struggle with officer retention. With labor negotiations reaching a successful conclusion late last year, we are making some progress to pay our police—and our city staff—a wage that is comparable to other cities in the region. A wage they deserve.

With the leadership of former Novato Police Chief Joe Kreins and our hardworking staff in Professional Standards and Human Resources, we were able to fill many of those vacancies including—most recently--the hiring of a permanent Police Chief, Adam McGill—whose

leadership, in tandem with his dedicated & professional staff, and our vigilant, engaged community—will continue Novato’s reputation among one of the safest in the state.

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In fact, last year:

- Overall Reported Crime Decreased
- Violent Crime Decreased
- And we saw a slight increase (1%) in Property Crime

<SLIDES 21> Our Police Department continues to be a unifier of the community and a leader in outreach. Every day they are present in our community, promoting safety and awareness, enforcing our laws, and building relationships and trust. <SLIDES 22> Now, more than ever, the need for lasting, collaborative relationships between law enforcement and the community is crucial. And we have that in abundance, here in Novato.

Here are just some highlights of the NPD’s partnerships and community engagement activities <SLIDE 23 & 24>

<SLIDE 25> And speaking of public engagement, over this last year we have made great strides in engaging our community and our City Council has made it a top priority for the City. We are addressing the need for more clarity in our noticing and outreach regarding development projects and policy initiatives. We are utilizing technology to meet people where they are—and engage them early in the process and get their feedback to ensure a better product, better decision, better experience for all in the end.

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We have dedicated webpages for both private and public works projects. Residents can sign-up to be notified on any and all of these projects—via e-mail or text. Our public notices are easier to read, provide links for more information, and are sent out more widely and frequently.

In this era of fake news, we recognize our responsibility in ensuring that the information we provide is timely, accurate, and helpful. We want to be the first place our residents go to for City information. We have a multitude of ways to connect with the City. <SLIDE 27>

And once you connect with us, and want to know more, we are committed to providing you with the information you need. Misinformation confuses and it serves no one. The City will continue to strive for transparency and clarity in our information, in our processes, and in our decision-making.

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Putting aside fake news—what about GOOD NEWS? We launched #NovatoProud late last year to feature Novatans doing good and extraordinary works, fun facts, and innovative businesses—

including San Marin High School Teacher Nick Williams, who was awarded the 2015 Milken Educator Award, and Dr. Mary K Sweeney, the Executive Director of Homeward Bound of Marin, who helps homeless families in Marin.

We also feature Novato-based businesses, big and small, like the Republic of Tea, a leading purveyor of premium teas with a commitment to social responsibility, and BioMarin, a highly innovative life sciences company developing innovative treatments for extremely rare medical conditions. And how about the fun fact that Bravo's Vanderpump Rules was filmed on-location at our very own Hilltop? I don't know how many of you know (or care) about that piece of trivia, but it sure received a lot of social media attention.

<SLIDE 29> Please reach out to us and share your #NovatoProud story

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Oftentimes when we discuss City services—how to improve, how to fund, what to provide—the piece that gets glossed over are the people behind those services. These are the people who do your resale inspections, help you pull a building permit, renew your business license, provide childcare and after-school programs for your children. They keep our City facilities maintained, beautify our parks, clean out our storm drains, fix the potholes in our streets; they plan for a more sustainable Novato for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. They do safety checks when you are away on vacation, and they lend a helping hand to Novatans in need. They know you—our residents, our businesses, our community leaders, and our community's unsung heroes. They anticipate your needs and they take pride in their service to you. Recently, we recognized a cumulative 350 years of service to Novato in an employee event, where we celebrated 5 to 35 years of service to our community. Astounding dedication and personalized service. That's how we roll in Novato.

And although our city organization continues to recover from the loss of nearly a third of our workforce over the last decade—which has been frustrating to our underserved residents and overstretched employees—we are working to find ways to better serve you, through the use of technology, <SLIDE 31> through our partnerships with service organizations such as the Chamber, the Hispanic Chamber, Novato Independent Elders, Novato Unified, Novato Youth Center, and partner agencies such as the Fire, Water, and Sanitary Districts, through innovative programs such as Junior Second Units, the Surveillance Camera Registry, and the Crime-Free Multi-Housing Program.

The key to maintaining and improving City services is to continue to retain and attract a talented, professional workforce by offering an environment that provides growth opportunities, the latitude for creativity, and the right tools to do the job—and at a competitive salary in order live in our community.

And with all those accomplishments, **we know we can do better**. Our competition isn't other cities, like San Rafael or Petaluma. It is Google and Amazon—in customer service and

responsiveness. But we can't do it alone. If we want to ensure that in the next 20 years from now the state of the City is even stronger than it is today, it will take strong public-private partnerships that get things done. **Novato's bright future depends on the actions we take today—together.**

<SLIDE 32> In the coming months, we anticipate that **SMART will be running** and we want Novato to take full advantage. Through the leadership of the Chamber and area employers, companies will be able to enjoy frequent-rider discount passes and potential shuttle services.

We will continue our **partnership with the Downtown Streets Team**. Their model of providing hope and a dignified path out of homelessness through meaningful work has brought a shine and a pride to our streets in our neighborhoods and Downtown—while addressing a growing issue for all communities.

In the not-to-distant future, we will be **embarking on some long-anticipated Capital Improvement Projects**, many of which are currently out to bid or in design, including:

- Major improvements to Dogbone Meadow dogpark
- The widening of Novato Boulevard
- Our annual resurfacing of 5 miles of our local roads, including
- Improvements to Vineyard Road, including resurfacing and new bike lanes
- And projects in Hamilton including the repair of perimeter walls throughout the neighborhood, and the levee toe-drain project which will provide additional flood protection to property owners

<SLIDE 33> Over the next fiscal year, **we will have a new General Plan and a Downtown Parking Study** (with solutions!)

We will continue to work on **business retention and attraction**. Our **ShopLocal** program will emphasize local business-to-business transactions and launch a campaign that will **connect prosperity with sustainability**.

<SLIDE 34> As part of our ongoing commitment to public engagement and transparency, **we will be updating our public engagement plan**--with input from the community--to bring it to Council for adoption later this year. And as part of our installation of our new finance software, we will be looking to add an **Open Data portal** to provide our residents the ability to easily access and locate City data and freely share and use that data.

We also will be **bringing City Hall to the neighborhoods**, by holding open houses throughout the City on various city topics—including the City's budget.

<SLIDE 35> With all the uncertainty at national level, we recognize there is PENT UP DEMAND to take action. This spring, we will be **launching "Volunteer Novato,"** a place where Novatans can find volunteer opportunities in Novato via the City's website.

This Earth Day, **sign-up for our annual Clean & Green Day** or volunteer to adopt-an-island and help beautify Novato year-round. We also encourage you to participate on a City commission, committee, or board. We have more than a dozen to choose from and it is a great way to serve the community.

So, I leave you with this thought as I close:

<SLIDE 36> With all the rancor and discourse we see on the national level; in the midst of a divided and troubled nation, we can lift up ourselves and each other. We can “go high” and strengthen our local foundation, by expanding our possibilities of collaboration—by promoting the practice of inclusion—and by embracing new and different ways of thinking to make Novato even better.

I haven’t been here long, but this I know: Novato has a spirit—it is strong, it is resilient, it is proud. Let’s do good work together.

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