

An Interview with City of Henderson Mayor Debra March and Ryan Turner
Perspectives from the COVID-19 Pandemic: Leadership and Learning in Nevada

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Each interviewee had the opportunity to review their transcript. All measures have been taken to preserve the style and language of the interviewee. This interview features Mayor Debra March and Ryan Turner, Former Mayor of Henderson and Director of Emergency Management for City of Henderson, and was conducted on 8/8/22 by Kelliann Beavers. This interview covers topics including reflections on leadership, organizational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration.

Interview with Ryan Turner and Debra March

Date: 8-8-2022

SPEAKERS: Kelliann Beavers, Ryan Turner, Debra March

Kelliann Beavers [00:03]

Okay. So thank you so much again for your time, and to confirm that you're comfortable with the consent form for us to record the interview and provide you with a transcript afterward.

Ryan Turner [00:13]

Nods (affirmative).

Debra March [00:14]

Absolutely.

Kelliann Beavers [00:15]

Okay, great. Well, I didn't take much time to introduce myself. I am Kelliann Beavers, and I'm a Research Associate at the Lincy Institute. And I just finished my doctorate in December, and this project has become most of what I'm working on now in my role there, and it has been really powerful. And I do agree with what you said, Mayor March. There is so much that Henderson has done that is exceptional. So, I'm really looking forward to learning from both of you about what your experience was like.

Alrighty. So the first question is pretty general. And because there are two of you on this call, I will leave it up to you as to whether you want to answer conversationally or on your own. Whatever's comfortable. The question is, as an elected official or department head, how did you see your role during the pandemic?

Debra March [01:11]

I'll start. As mayor, I know legislatively, I have a responsibility to make the declaration. And I know that we regularly, Ryan and I, and some of our other team members, attended meetings at the county up to before the declaration was made. And we were probably meeting weekly, would you say, Ryan? Just about weekly?

Ryan Turner [01:32]

Nods (affirmative).

Debra March [01:33]

We were kind of talking about where things were at, and at what point we were reaching – where the numbers were growing, and we knew we had to take some action to protect the public's interest. And it became clear that the governor was going to make a declaration, I think, on that particular day, and I think it was the 14th – to begin on the 15th of March two years ago.

Ryan Turner [01:57]
Nods (affirmative).

Debra March [01:58]

And I so, I know I looked at Ryan and said, "Well, go for it, Ryan. You got it." (laughs) And I know, you went right back and opened up our emergency operations center. And I have to tell you, if you haven't seen our center, it truly is a state-of-the-art model for how you bring folks together. We really modeled it after the FEMA training center, I think in Virginia. And we did what was expected. The people knew their roles and responsibilities. They stepped into their roles, and other people stepped out of the way to allow implementation. And believe me, in this organization, we put egos out of the way, and it was all about working together, we can get this done, and we can do what's best for the good of our community and collaborate with the partners.

And sometimes, when you didn't get clear direction from other agencies or departments, we got clear about what we needed to do, and we implemented it; whether it was putting childcare into place, or whether it was getting PPE – personal protective equipment – or whatever it was we needed to do. We truly leaned in and got it done. Making sure that the hospitals had the equipment they needed, or the assisted living facilities had what they needed, and those who were a little more fragile.

And then, working with partners like, for example, the hotels, when they shut down, had vast amounts of food that were available. We set up distribution centers in one of our parks, Heritage Park, and we packaged food and then made it available to seniors. And we increased the number of "Meals on Wheels" services because there were so many people that could never get out of their houses.

So, Ryan, maybe you could offer some perspective as well.

Ryan Turner [03:54]

Yeah. I just want to echo what the Mayor said. As far as my role during the pandemic, my role is underneath the Nevada Revised Statutes, as well as underneath our city ordinances. The Director of Emergency Management, underneath the state, and then underneath the city ordinances; the emergency management coordinator, and that means the same thing. Basically, in these times of crisis is when my particular position becomes more important and helps coordinate all of the response and activities on behalf of the mayor and council.

So my role is pretty defined. We have an emergency operations plan that goes through, specifically, how we execute that plan, and how we were able to really get the results that we did – was because of a lot of the pre-planning and the preparedness that was already in place. And so, it was definitely a trying time, but it's a time where we feel like we were very nimble, agile, and were able to respond to the community's needs.

Debra March [05:14]

I'll tell you – that training, if other municipalities haven't had it, they really should explore, so that you're all speaking the same language, and you know when you need to lean in and when

you need to lean back and let someone else lean in. And people are specifically trained for certain things, whether it's the financial role or whether it's the planning role. And one of the things early on – and Ryan, you can emphasize this too is, we began with the end in mind.

Kelliann Beavers [05:39]

Mm-hmm.

Debra March [05:41]

So we started, but we started knowing that we're going to have to exit this, and how are we going to get to the point of exit? And what do we have to do today to make sure that when we're on our way out that we're prepared to do that? And maybe you want to emphasize that a little bit, Ryan.

Ryan Turner [05:58]

Yeah, that was definitely the vision that the mayor gave us, which was great. Because as we started to plan, that was what we were really trying to focus on was, we're not going to be in this crisis mode forever, and that we're going to have to learn to live with COVID at some point, right? Because the economy can't be shut down forever, and all of the impacts that come along with that. So when we started to do our planning, we looked at that, and we looked at it with the end in mind, as the mayor indicated. And we knew that were going to have to basically, where we're at right now, you know, live with COVID still within the community, but people are still able to live their lives. So that's what we were really trying to get to.

Debra March [06:51]

Yeah. And then we also, as a city, continued to function and operate. During that time, we actually built our dollar loan center, which came in, and we saved about 40 million dollars by building it during that time. And we actually built a state-of-the-art facility; kept people working in the construction industry, and it was our keep people employed. The least amount of people that were unemployed, the better for everybody.

So we continued to make investments in public works projects, and we implemented our electronic system for people to make applications for business licenses. Even in our IT department, we – how many units – how many stations did we set up, Ryan?

Ryan Turner [07:34]

900.

Debra March [07:36]

How many?

Ryan Turner [07:37]

900.

Debra March [07:38]

Yeah, so we had people working from home, and they were so quick about making that happen, and it was within the first couple of weeks of the pandemic that we had people working from home. So we kept them employed as well. And then – and maybe, Ryan, you could speak to – we

set up some pretty unique systems where we made some sick leave available. We called it a unique name in terms of- [overtalking 08:01]

Ryan Turner [08:04]

Yes, underneath the Coronavirus Relief Act, there were particular provisions that you could create for people who were sick or exposed – particularly, our first responders and our police and fire. Because they were the ones who were really on those initial front lines of the community. And we wanted to make sure that we protected our employees as they were delivering the service. And we gave them time, so that they could, if they were exposed or if they were sick, they could take that time and still get paid, and we could still have continuity of government within the city. And I'm happy to tell you that through the entire pandemic, because of the actions that we took, we did not lose one employee to COVID. And that was very intentional, and maybe with some luck, but we will take it.

Debra March [09:09]

Yeah.

Ryan Turner [09:10]

But it was very intentional. We put a lot in place to make that happen.

Debra March [09:16]

Yeah. I think that we are very collaborative in the city, and very committed to engaging with our employees. In fact, we're on a path to premier – I'm sure Richard kind of talked about some of the leadership things that we've been doing as an organization. And so, we're very engaged with our employees, and I think it was really demonstrated through this pandemic.

Kelliann Beavers [09:44]

That's wonderful. He did talk a bit about the collaborative aspects like you're emphasizing. But I don't know if there are specific leadership efforts that you want to point to. I'd be more than happy to hear about them- [overtalking 09:58]

Debra March [10:00]

I think we received the Lunenburg Silver Award for our organizational leadership. And we're actually pursuing the Malcolm Baldrige Award. We received the gold for the Southwest Alliance for Excellence. So we're doing a lot of work with our organization, and within our organization, to do team-building, to have collaboration, and to have measurable outcomes.

We are looking, very significantly, at how we measure things, to make sure that we're doing the right things. In fact, I have a crystal on my desk, and it says, "Without facts and data, you're just another person with an opinion." And how critical it is that we understand – don't just do something to do it but do it because it's getting us to a better place. It's building a brighter future. And our commitment to our residents has been that Henderson would be America's premier community. And I think what drives the direction that we go, and then the five principles that we are organizationally following, and I think that really takes to that direction.

Ryan Turner [11:04]

And if I could, to just go off that point about the collaboration. A very specific example is, when we go through our – so there's operational metrics that we look at, and then there are strategic metrics that we look at. And monthly, we go through our operational metrics, and then a department head has to go through, with their peers and analysts, and basically go after their metrics, and go over that in front of them every month. And then strategic planning incorporates a lot of aspects: it incorporates the community; the community surveys; the employee surveys; the direction from the mayor and council on how they see the city moving forward. And then it all comes together, and then we report out on those quarterly.

So, what was unique about this was, and this was something that was fantastic, and I think a best practice is – in emergency management, normally, you have your mercy operations plan, and that's how you respond, okay? And then you have a recovery plan, which we utilized, and that put together the "We Can" document that won the national award. But then what we did was, from that plan, we took everything, and we put it into that strategic planning process, or into that operational planning process, which is an existing structure of collaboration in the city. And that really allowed us to have that end in mind, as the mayor indicated. Where now, we're making it a part of the normal business of the city instead of it being a one-off. Which had to be for a period of time because it grabbed all of our attention. But that really drove the city to where we are today.

Debra March [13:08]

And then we also do, every other year, a pretty extensive community and internal/external survey. We have like 97% citizen satisfaction in our community. And I know in emergency management, there was a high level of satisfaction, in both internal and external police services, planning, and community development. There's really a high level of citizen satisfaction, and I think partly, too, because we spent a lot of effort doing community education and outreach as well. We tried to make sure that we were letting our citizens know what was going on, that people weren't in the dark, right?

So, we did a lot of outreach. And whether it was like in Sun City Anthem – we would do these on Mondays with the mayor, where we would message about specific things that were on COVID and things they should know, and I think it was very helpful to our community.

Ryan Turner [14:07]

I agree.

Kelliann Beavers [14:08]

Absolutely. I've heard from multiple interviewees that a lot of the challenge, and in retrospect, reflection on things that unfolded had a lot to do with the capacity to get the message out to folks as fast as things were changing. And it sounds like you had a lot of really neat systems in place to make that so that people could actually absorb the information.

Debra March [14:33]

Yeah. And then we also had a call center, right, Ryan (nods yes), in our facility. So that if anybody had any questions, there was somebody sitting at a desk, ready to answer their question.

Ryan Turner [14:44]

Yep, absolutely. That was another way that we were able to get that message out there. And there was a one-stop shop for our residents, where they could contact us at any time. And if we didn't have the answer, we'd get them into the right resource.

Kelliann Beavers [15:00]

Mm-hmm, that's incredible. And I imagine, was also its own thing to get that stood up to happen. It's pretty big.

Debra March [15:08]

We have to have you over to our emergency operations center. It's pretty remarkable. You'll have to see it.

Kelliann Beavers [15:14]

I would love to see it. And when Richard first described it, before he started describing the physical space, I thought it was – obviously, not imaginary – but I thought it was a name for the effort, right? I didn't understand that it was a physical space until he started describing it in more detail, and I thought, wow, how incredible. And then he went into some detail, and if you'd like to speak about this, that's fine. If not, we can go on to the next question. But about how certain aspects of the plan for how to respond to the emergency were in place. But then, of course, there are things that you couldn't foresee, like the need to socially distance in the space, and around the physical space, and realizing that "Oh, gosh, this is going to have to be a part of this response."

Debra March [16:03]

Yeah. We all learned along the way. But I think that our folks really stepped up. And whenever we needed someone to be there, we had them there. I was there every day. I felt like I had a responsibility to our citizens to be there, to get the reports, and to know where we were at in case anyone asked me. But Ryan did a great job of chairing that, I'll tell you.

Ryan Turner [16:27]

Followed your lead, Mayor.

Debra March [16:28]

Oh, you're sweet. (laughs)

Kelliann Beavers [16:30]

The next question you've spoken a bit about, but if you'd like to talk more about which groups you believe were hardest hit by the economic downturn in the pandemic as a whole.

Debra March [16:44]

Yeah. I think there were different groups, probably for different reasons. I hear that the business community obviously was impacted because some of them had to shut down, especially those that maybe had only been open a short time. So they were probably more impacted from an economic standpoint, restaurants or new businesses that I said had just opened – smaller businesses, mom-and-pop shops, commercial real estate. Obviously, folks like construction, those businesses continued to operate, so that wasn't impacted.

But I think, in terms of vulnerable populations, probably senior citizens, they were impacted. We were able to secure some grants and expand the "Meals on Wheels" program. We also probably had some issues with homelessness; medically fragile, like working with the assisted living facilities to make sure that they had the protective equipment that they needed. And Ryan, I know, can probably even speak to some of how we got equipment manufactured here locally when we were struggling to get it.

But then also, folks working in the service and healthcare industry, and one of the first things that we were asked was "Can you set up childcare for our first responders, the doctors, the nurses, and the police officers?" who have to continue to go work because schools were closed. And within 12 hours, our team had childcare set up in our facilities, like the multi-gen and some of the other facilities here in Henderson, to make sure that we were addressing those needs. And we actually did accommodate police officers from Clark County who lived in Henderson. So, our reach was beyond Henderson because they were working in other places, but they were Henderson residents because we initially tried to target those folks.

And obviously, our children and our students were certainly impacted because of the loss of the year, so they lost in terms of education. Some of the schools that were – maybe some of the private schools continued to do more. But then we saw an increase in suicides with youth as well, which was, to me, problematic, to have young people thinking about suicide. And I think that engaging in school is not only an education and learning opportunity for students, but I think there's a mental health piece that we shouldn't overlook and underrate. So, maybe, Ryan, you want to lean on some of that?

Ryan Turner [19:18]

Yeah, I just want to echo that. And definitely, thinking of the seniors – so we spent a considerable amount of time within the senior communities we have in Henderson. These large masterplan communities are specifically for 55 and older. And so we definitely had that. I can remember a year into the pandemic when we started to get the vaccinations out, and the seniors that were coming to get vaccinated, some of them had only left their house legitimately twice in an entire year. And so it was kind of a reunion for them when they were coming out.

Those, of course, that were experiencing homelessness were impacted. The Mayor mentioned a high degree of the economic impacts on the businesses and those that were being employed. Naturally, the children and the students because the education system went fully remote. And just as well, our overall – in Henderson, Las Vegas we're a service industry. And when the service industry is not able to deliver their service in person, the mayor and council worked with many of them so that they could deliver service so they could keep their doors open. And the many modifications for drive-up, drive-through, to all different types of services.

And we really were focusing on all of these particular groups along the way, and what we did was, we basically took this huge problem that we were experiencing during – first, the response was to make sure that we're protecting people and keeping them safe. And then secondly, it was to try to stabilize the overall incident, and this is where this effort came in. We took each problem, and then we made it into smaller problems, and then we assigned those smaller problems to a particular department.

So, our economic development and tourism focused on the economic part of it. Our community development services department focused on homelessness. Our parks and recreation focused on the education and the children aspect of it. So we tried to do the best that we could underneath very difficult circumstances, but we were very intentional with making sure that we were focusing on all these groups.

The other effort that I would just like to add, if I could is the vaccination rollout. We made sure that we really targeted those hardest hit areas, even as it relates to equity discussions. And we made sure that we had vaccination sites in lower-income areas so that people had access to those centers. We had FEMA teams deployed into those particular zip codes, where they basically went door-to-door. And it was an education campaign and made sure that people were aware of that in their communities.

Kelliann Beavers [22:50]

Wow.

Ryan Turner [22:52]

Yeah. So we did everything we possibly could to make sure that we focused on all those areas that were being hardest hit.

Debra March [23:00]

And then maybe speak to the role out at Sun City Anthem, which was remarkable, really.

Ryan Turner [23:06]

Yes, it was remarkable. So we partnered – Sun City Anthem is a huge community.

Debra March [23:15]

Thirteen thousand residents.

Ryan Turner [23:18]

How many, Mayor? I'm sorry.

Debra March [23:19]

Thirteen thousand residents.

Kelliann Beavers [23:20]

Wow. I wouldn't have known that. I live very near there, roughly, at St. Rose in Seven Hills, so it's not far, but I had no idea. That's a lot of people.

Debra March [23:28]

Yeah, a big community.

Ryan Turner [23:31]

Yeah. And they're very organized, and they have a Sun City Emergency Preparedness Committee. And part of this whole collaboration and preparing ahead of time – our particular office, emergency management, we've been working with them for many years. Well, when this

all went down, they were very organized and said, "Hey, we wanted to partner with you and deliver a vaccination site within Sun City Anthem, and it can be open to the community." Meaning the community at large. That traditionally had not been the case. They naturally, right, they were very focused on their particular community and their HOA. But in working with them and the health district, we were able to deliver, just out of that site alone, almost 30,000 vaccinations. And volunteer-based effort – we had some of our parks and recreation staff there, and then some of my staff there. And then we worked with Community Ambulance, who were the ones that administered the actual shots.

That effort was remarkable, and what was great was that we were hitting the hardest hit, meaning that the elderly population, where when you look at the statistics – and that data was driving how we were making decisions – that when an elderly person, over the age of 70, or I would say, 'mature,' – I think they like that term better – over the age of 70, when they were getting COVID, and they were experiencing higher rates of death and hospitalization compared to other demographics.

So we wanted to make sure that we were getting out to that community as fast as we possibly could. And with partnerships and planning ahead of time, we were able to deliver that service and have great results.

Debra March [25:34]

And I think an 81% vaccination – at least 81% folks have received at least one vaccination – 81% of our community in Henderson.

Ryan Turner [25:42]

Yes.

Kelliann Beavers [25:42]

Wow, that's reassuring.

Debra March [25:44]

Yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [25:47]

You said something, Ryan, that I wanted to ask about, which was when you described working with Sun City Anthem – before that, you said that – and your department has worked closely with them prior to this. Is what you mean, "worked with them closely" in terms of developing preparedness for emergencies, or response to other events? I'm really fascinated by your role at all, and what you have done pre-pandemic to create the relationships and network that's necessary to cause a successful response.

Ryan Turner [26:28]

Well, thank you for that. We're very fortunate that we have great leaders like our mayor, our council, and our city manager, who supported us and participated in these trainings ahead of time like the mayor said. We went to Emmetsburg, and she came, and I think that produced really good buy-in and support for us, to really have a catalyst to have the program that we have now.

We are one of the few programs that meet the Emergency Management Accreditation Program, so it's a standard. We're the only city in the State of Nevada, and we just got consecutively accredited here recently. And part of that is you have to have a full program. And many of the larger HOAs, hospitals, schools, or many different groups, they all have this emergency preparedness, right? And what we try to be is the connector, the coordinator, of all those efforts. So we have a whole department, and we work – this is our daily job – to prepare not only for pandemics, earthquakes, terrorism, severe weather, or whatever those things are, to prepare the city and the community.

So we work with all of the different types of groups, and Sun City Anthem was just an example. But every industry has an effort underway, and what we try to do in our office is to coordinate those efforts, to have a really prepared community. As our mayor and council have said, their vision is to be America's premier community, and one of ours is community safety is a priority and not – it falls underneath that priority.

Debra March [28:29]

And we practiced – as Ryan said, we practiced having an earthquake, and the school collapsing, and prioritizing which do you respond to first. Do you go to the hospital first? Do you go to the high school first? And so that when an emergency does come, these people have been practicing, and they have a strategic mindset about "Well, I need to think this through, and what are the steps that I need to incorporate here, and what do I need to make sure that I'm protecting the public's interest through this process." And I have to say, they did remarkable work in emergency management.

And I've watched other departments around the state and the city, in southern Nevada, and many of them don't have the experience. And I can see where sometimes, there was political, maybe, stepping on toes that probably, they shouldn't have been stepping on emergency management. Because this is a function that they know their business better than I know their business, right? Ryan knows this better than I do. So I have to trust that he's going to do what he does best, and support him and bring the resources in, and not get political around it. I think it's really important not to make it a political issue, but to make it in the best interest of the public and to protect the public.

One of the things too that we were very fortunate in Sun City Anthem, one of the gentlemen that's up there actually – hadn't he been with Red Cross?

Ryan Turner [30:03]

Red Cross.

Debra March [30:04]

So he really had a mindset to want to be a partner, and we were fortunate to have someone who could help his organization walk the steps on his side as well. And so, I can see where you would provide more training in organizations in the community, whether it's in a large corporation, the community, or in an HOA, where you go in and train them as well so that they're ready and prepared for an emergency, should it arrive.

Kelliann Beavers [30:38]

There are so many parts to this that I learn from every conversation that I have. And the only other person that I've spoken to, who has even a similar role to you, Ryan, is the woman in Las Vegas, Carolyn Levering.

Ryan Turner [30:52]

Carolyn, yep.

Kelliann Beavers [30:53]

And I've learned a lot from her, but I hear you to be saying that there is a distinction in the way your department works and her role. And I'm not sure what her department's like, in the sense of the certification that the city of Henderson has. Is that correct?

Ryan Turner [31:09]

Yeah. So I worked with Carolyn for a very long time. We worked together. She has a great program. Hers is emergency management. We decided – and a lot of our departments are accredited.

Kelliann Beavers [31:28]

Mm-hmm.

Ryan Turner [31:29]

So like our fire department has three. Our public works planning- [over talking 31:32]

Kelliann Beavers [31:33]

Oh, it isn't just that your department, that where you work is accredited, it's that you are working to accredit departments and organizations throughout the community.

Ryan Turner [31:44]

Yeah. So, in emergency management, we just fell in line with the city's goal, right – the culture – and to be America's premier community. And now the city is trying to have, as the mayor indicated, the Baldrige Award, which would be a city-wide accreditation. So that is what makes – that is the distinction between, I would say, us and the city of Las Vegas is that we have outside people who come in and evaluate our program based on national standards.

Kelliann Beavers [32:20]

Wow. The next question, I think, we will somewhat skip because it's because you articulating the timeline of how everything unfolded. And one of the documents has almost a daily timeline articulated in it in terms of dates. But I do want to give you the opportunity, if there is anything you want to add, about how the timeline unfolded, or aspects of that; you're welcome to. Otherwise, we can move on from that question.

Debra March [32:45]

I'm comfortable with what we've shared. Do you have any more, Ryan?

Ryan Turner [32:48]

I don't. You're referring to the lessons in the pandemic response? That one? We spent a lot of time in that document going-

Kelliann Beavers [32:57]

It's like a spreadsheet, and literally dated. I'm not sure which document it was in, but I looked at it before this and I was like "Oh, my gosh. This is incredible."

Ryan Turner [33:04]

Yes.

Kelliann Beavers [33:06]

And how worthwhile, and I'm sure it was time-consuming to look back that way. But it's great that you did that.

Ryan Turner [33:11]

It was. And I'd like to give a shout-out to our Office of Performance and Innovation, who worked with us in emergency management. And basically, what you do is, you have these – they're called ICS forms. They're incident command structure forms. And then you fill out those, and they went through all of those throughout the entire incident and then put that timeline together with our staff.

Kelliann Beavers [33:39]

Wow.

Debra March [33:40]

Mm-hmm.

Ryan Turner [33:42]

So that would really cover, I think, everything that you would need on that timeline.

Kelliann Beavers [33:48]

That's great. Well, I'm glad that that exists, and I commend you for it. The next question is – it doesn't necessarily have to be about the government of the city, but it could be any level of government. What do you wish that different levels of government would have done differently, or could do differently now in response to the pandemic and/or the economic downturn?

Debra March [34:12]

I think for me, it was probably having stronger communication and collaboration, and getting the resources to the ground level, whether it's financial resources getting the grants to us. There were times when – well, I'll tell you – and this is – they'll probably be pissed at me – but the governor's office called once, and that was the extent, and that was at the beginning when he said, "Set up childcare." And we'd be calling, and we just didn't have that level of dialog with them. We're the front end. We're the point of the sword. We're the point where the public – we're dealing with the public. We're solving the problems. We're in their daily lives, whether it's at the

hospital, whether it's assisted living, or whether it's at the schools. Just engage us through the process.

And when there were funds that were being stuck, either at the federal government, at the state, or at the county, trying to get those broken loose for the good of the people. We represent 350,000 residents here in our community, but we didn't hit that federal threshold of 500, I believe, that would have allowed us to get a direct allocation.

Kelliann Beavers [35:36]

Oh...

Debra March [35:38]

So that allocation went to either the state or the county, and we had to struggle with both of them to get them to break loose. And the state said the county owed it to us. The county said the state owed it to us. So we probably spent at least 30 days with that struggle of trying to get those dollars loose for our residents for the needs of our community.

Kelliann Beavers [36:00]

Mm-hmm.

Debra March [36:01]

And there were so many things that we needed to deal with, and certainly, shortfalls in our own budgets that we weren't – because we didn't have the revenue coming in because of loss of tax revenues. So we were trying to figure this out and really needed some of those resources to be coming into our community, but we knew we couldn't stop doing what we needed to do. We had to serve our residents, and we had to go into some of our reserves to be able to solve those challenges. And Ryan, maybe you could speak to some of the things that you saw.

Ryan Turner [36:33]

You know, I think for me was, when you look at just the history of crisis, and you look at hurricanes, right, is a big example, or earthquakes. And it's confined to a particular area of the country, and the other areas of the country can come and support it; either extra people, supplies, equipment, or whatever that is.

So there's always "the Cavalry's coming," right? It could take five days. It could take seven days. It could take 14 days. In the early onsets of this, there was an expectation that the federal government said that they were going to come and support you.

Debra March [37:17]

They couldn't.

Ryan Turner [37:19]

But every community in the entire country declared, at the same time, and it was basically, you were on your own, and you had to figure it out for several months on your own. And I think now, on the other side of this is just preparing for that adequately, and not thinking that the Cavalry's coming, and they're going to come to help save you, and augment you with people, and PPE –

because we didn't have PPE, and as the mayor indicated, we had to be very creative. And we worked with a company called Polar Shades, which makes shades. And we bought raw material in the Midwest, and the raw material was delivered here, and then we started to make gowns and masks early on for healthcare workers, as well as for our first responders. Because that was part of the universal precautions, was to wear gowns, and there were no gowns that you could acquire, and we were able to do that.

So that's really – now, every time the mayor says, "Hey, we're going to bring this new business into the community," I'm always like, "How can they benefit us from an emergency management standpoint?" (laughter) Because when you're on your own, you kind of look locally and say, "Okay, you could do this," or "You could do that." So we had a really big company come in here, which is Hoss, and I think they're going to be tremendous partners.

Debra March [38:56]

Mm-hmm.

Ryan Turner [38:58]

So, looking at it differently, and embracing the private sector in the overall response is something that really, I've had to change my focus.

Debra March [39:11]

I agree, and I think that's a good perspective, Ryan, in terms of looking at these businesses as maybe they could have a secondary role during a crisis. I think that's good.

We also, as a community, felt strongly that schools should have remained open. And so, things that we did as a community, we provided students in our community that didn't have technology with a Chromebook, so at least they had technology at home. And then we worked with Cox and others to get Wi-Fi into neighborhoods where maybe they didn't have it available to them. And we adapted our rec centers for distance learning; so we tried to help students to be successful, so that they could do things with their teachers from a remote setting. But I think we felt that they would have benefited by having schools remain open.

Again, the collaboration could have been better for the allocation of resources. The federal government wanted to do a good job, but maybe sometimes didn't know how to get the resources to the places that it needed to get. And fortunately, we were able to work through some of those challenges, like when the managers would get together and the elected leaders would get together to look at how we could pass over some of these hurdles that were getting in the way of serving our community.

Our model – our plan became a model for the region, right? So I think other communities started to look at our plan. And Ryan didn't the state even use our plan because it was pretty involved and extensive.

Ryan Turner [40:48]

Yeah.

Debra March [40:49]

And again, our community survey work reflected that we came out of this, I think, with a high level of citizen satisfaction, so that was good.

Kelliann Beavers [41:00]

When you say, "your plan," do you mean your emergency response plan versus – my background is urban planning.

Debra March [41:06]

Oh, okay.

Kelliann Beavers [41:07]

At first, I thought you meant your "plan" plan. [over talking 41:07]

Debra March [41:12]

Yeah, this specific plan. And I'm a planner, too, you know. I actually was on the National Board of APA.

Kelliann Beavers [41:18]

Oh, wow.

Debra March [41:19]

I helped to recruit Rob to UNLV.

Kelliann Beavers [41:21]

Oh, I didn't know that. You and I met once before – we went together to Salt Lake with Dr. [Lang??41:27]

Debra March [41:29]

Oh, yes.

Kelliann Beavers [41:30]

It's been years ago.

Debra March [41:31]

Yeah. And didn't Karen go with us too, I think?

Kelliann Beavers [41:35]

That may have been a different trip.

Debra March [41:36]

Oh.

Kelliann Beavers [41:37]

On this one, Karen wasn't, but Tina Quigley was there.

Debra March [41:38]

Oh, yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [41:39]

It was a [over talking 41:40] organized event. I think it was Salt Lake.

Debra March [41:43]

Yeah, it was Salt Lake, to look at transportation.

Kelliann Beavers [41:46]

Yeah.

Debra March [41:47]

And I ran the Lead Institute for Real Estate College in the College of Business for 15 years.

Kelliann Beavers [41:52]

Oh, wow. I had no idea.

Debra March [41:55]

So I was at UNLV before, yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [41:56]

That's fascinating. Thanks for sharing that with me.

Debra March [41:59]

I miss Rob, by the way.

Kelliann Beavers [42:00]

Oh, I do too, every day.

Debra March [42:02]

A good man. So, did you work with Helen Neill?

Kelliann Beavers [42:05]

Yes. I also was her GA during my degree. Yeah.

Debra March [42:10]

Oh, okay. Her son is my godchild.

Kelliann Beavers [42:12]

Oh, my gosh! Really?

Debra March [42:18]

I think he's graduating. Yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [42:19]

Yeah, he may be by now. Yeah.

Debra March [42:20]

I think he's going on for a master's.

Kelliann Beavers [42:21]

That's great. Oh, that's so neat. Yeah, she was actually – I did an assistantship for Robin, and the other person that I worked with was Dr. Neill. I learned so much from her.

Debra March [42:32]

Good. She's wonderful.

Kelliann Beavers [42:33]

Yeah, she really is. You've spoken to the next question in many instances by the nature of the things you shared. But if there is anything else you would like to say about what we can learn from the COVID crisis that could be lessons for future crises, I'll give you a moment to do that. Otherwise, we can-

Debra March [42:51]

I think probably, better collaboration. Knock down the political barriers between different entities, whether your cities or counties. In a crisis, your residents don't know the barriers. They don't see the county line, and they don't see the city line. They see that their children are hungry, their children need to be in school, and you need to solve challenges. So we need to probably get egos out of the way, get political hurdles out of the way, and do the good work for the greater good of our community. I think that's critical. But sometimes that's easier said than done when you start getting silos built, and so I think it's important to work on that.

Financial stewardship: you know, I think being a prudent fiscal manager, as a city, we had some reserves, which I think helped us as we went into this. But we've always been very good about monitoring our resources, knowing that we have this – we actually have an AA-plus bond rating as a city. So, even during this crisis, we were able to continue to get money out on the streets in terms of jobs, whether it was the arena or public works projects, so we were able to keep people working in our community.

We had to learn to be more self-reliant. I think Ryan could probably lean in on that. We had to be self-reliant, that we couldn't wait for somebody who couldn't/wasn't going to come on the – that FEMA wasn't going to show up with a crew that they do at a hurricane because they were dealing with this everywhere.

And so probably, looking too at socioeconomic disparity, and making sure that we're reaching all groups of people.

Kelliann Beavers [44:36]

Mm-hmm.

Debra March [44:37]

And that we're not just reaching the business people, but we're also working through the nonprofits to reach the homeless, or those who could be – but for one circumstance could be displaced and homeless, right? So working with different partners. And I think that we probably have established some good relationships and connections because of this that is going to make us a better community going forward; whether it's through the HOAs, whether it's through HopeLink or the food pantries, where we were able to get resources to people.

I think that folks were really good about responding to a challenge. I don't know that anything wasn't insurmountable, right, Ryan? We solved a lot of challenges.

Ryan Turner [45:28]

You're correct. Absolutely. And just maybe to add onto that, I just want to add that it's really important that you prioritize your emergency management system and that you have a good plan in place. That you practice that plan, and you train on the plan. You exercise, and then you determine if there are any deficiencies, or you put those in an after-action report and then you try to improve on those. And it's just that constant cycle of just overall preparedness and really focusing on the whole community, which includes not just the government, but also the private sector, the nonprofits, the volunteer groups, and the citizens into the overall effort so that you can produce as best of a result as you can in a crisis.

Debra March [46:19]

So, Ryan, a question. Did all of the other municipalities have a robust emergency operations program like we do?

Ryan Turner [46:29]

Well, [they're] my peers, Mayor, I'd say, yes, of course.

Debra March [46:33]

Yeah – no. You do. But do they have an EOC? Do they have a training? Do they lean in operationally and practice it, and you know?

Ryan Turner [46:47]

I would say – last week they were here; so we had the county emergency manager. We had Carolyn here, City of Las Vegas and North Las Vegas.

Debra March [46:53]

Carolyn was here?

Ryan Turner [46:55]

Yeah, she was here.

Debra March [46:56]

Oh, that's great.

Ryan Turner [46:58]

And they were just complimenting our program and saying that we have a really world-renown program that you know, two of them, to give you perspective out of three, live in Henderson, so-

Debra March [47:11]

(laughs)

Ryan Turner [47:13]

So they want our program to succeed. Their kids live here, and their family lives here. But they just said that we have a great program, and we're accredited, and it just shows, you know, in everything that we do.

Debra March [47:32]

That's good. Wonderful.

Kelliann Beavers [47:36]

I was floored to learn how much there is to your job when there's not an emergency. Because that's the first thing I thought of before I interviewed Carolyn was, what does she do when there's not an emergency? And I just, of course, had no idea, other than sit around and worry, and like have expertise [in] what you all would do. And there's just so much to it that it's been incredible to learn about.

Debra March [47:58]

And you've got people across your organization who need to be put through training and need to be refreshed in their training. And there are all sorts of applications and certifications – I mean, it's a non-stop effort, really.

Ryan Turner [48:13]

It is.

Kelliann Beavers [48:17]

That was exactly what I learned in speaking to her. And there was one thing you mentioned too, Mayor March, that I think was also a learning for me that the city manager shared. And he described a specific funds name – I can't remember now – but I have his interview transcript. That was a budget choice that the City of Henderson made to have a specific fund, that essentially was like [a] backup fund that would fund basically the city's operations for the course of a year or something like that.

Debra March [48:43]

A reserve fund. We have a reserve fund.

Kelliann Beavers [48:46]

You said a part of your budget was essentially planning for that. I thought that sounds like a really good idea that everyone should do.

Debra March [48:51]

Yeah.

Kelliann Beavers [48:53]

And it's easier said than done, I'm sure.

Debra March [48:55]

I think the legislature requires a certain amount that has to – I think it's like two months or three months of reserve. But I think that we're pretty prudent here, and we're pretty careful with how we manage and use our resources so that we do have reserves for "rainy days."

Kelliann Beavers [49:12]

Right. Well, much of what's in the next couple of questions I think you've already spoken to, so I'm just going to skip to the last question. I also want to be respectful of your time, and I'm very grateful that you took the time to chat with me. The last question is, are you hopeful, and if yes, what are you hopeful for?

Debra March [49:33]

Well, I'm very hopeful for the future. And certainly, I'm proud of this city, and I'm hopeful for good things to continue here. That I think we've put some systems in play around even measuring, looking at our outcomes, and looking at the Baldrige, looking at the Bloomberg reports and how they have rated us. We work hard to achieve good things. We work hard to collaborate with other agencies. We work hard with our employees to engage them and have them be a part of the team so that everyone feels like they are part of a better outcome. And we continue to grow thoughtfully. We have strategic planning that's an important core – a part of who we are.

Looking at the diversification of our economy, you know, we've been through other crises before. I know when we went through the Great Recession, we made a conscious decision, at that point, that we needed to diversify our economy so that we wouldn't be dependent upon one industry. So we've looked at technology, advanced manufacturing, and better planning as a community. Looking at some urban densities and things like that.

So, even as we're looking at, for example, the water crisis that's going to be ahead of us. I know that's maybe not necessarily the center of Ryan's wheelhouse, but it could be, you know.

Kelliann Beavers [50:56]

Mm-hmm.

Debra March [50:58]

And so it's important that we look at how we are partnering to make sure that we avoid a crisis in the future around a water issue. So I'm very hopeful for the future. I think that good planning, preparation, and social equity are very important. I'm a planner, and I know Michelle has a strong background in planning. So, our incoming mayor will hopefully carry forward with a lot of the same principles that are in place today. I think we've laid a strong foundation, so I'm very hopeful for that future that she'll do great things. I've enjoyed being a public service, and it's been in my

blood, and I hope to be able to continue to mentor, advocate, and give back to the community in the future. But I won't be Mayor after this year, so (laughs) I look forward to watching great things happening here. And if they want to pick up the phone and call me, I'll come over. (laughter) So, Ryan did you-

Ryan Turner [52:00]

Yeah. Just – I'm an optimist by nature, so I'm very hopeful for the future. As long as you don't watch the news, I think you remain hopeful – I'm just kidding. (laughs)

Debra March [52:11]

Well, I think the news sometimes gets-

Ryan Turner [52:15]

But I'm hopeful, and I think that you did the best that you could have done underneath very difficult circumstances. And I think the results are there and we can point to them. And I think that the community is in a really great place compared to others. And you just kept on moving forward through COVID, and we had a strong response and recovery effort during that. And we also just didn't stop, as the Mayor indicated, these other major efforts like the Dollar Loan Center and some of these other areas in our community where, I think, other municipalities, they stopped doing some of those things. And we never did – we just kept on moving forward. And I think where we're at right now, we're at a really good point, and I think the community is at a really good point. And you could just see it with the things that we're doing with the new police station out in West Henderson, and all of our [over talking 53:16]

Debra March [53:18]

The workforce training.

Ryan Turner [53:19]

Yep, the workforce training center, the new crime lab, and all those things. The city's in a good spot.

Debra March [53:25]

Yeah, and we have a great team. I think that our human resources is second to none. We have wonderful team members, and very committed, dedicated, loyal, and hardworking – and they had no problem leaning in when it was necessary to lean in and go the extra mile.

Kelliann Beavers [53:47]

Well, thank you both so much for your leadership, your service, and your time. It's been wonderful to learn from you, and I hope you both enjoy the rest of your day. Thanks again.

Debra March [53:58]

Thank you.

Ryan Turner [53:59]

Thank you.

Debra March [54:00]

And if you see either Karen or Helen, tell them I said hello.

Kelliann Beavers [54:02]

I sure will.

Debra March [54:03]

Okay. Thank you. Take care. Bye.

Kelliann Beavers [54:08]

You too.

End of audio: 54:11