

## Durango Doings

### Chapter 23: A brief chronology of the development of the City of Durango

#### **A brief and incomplete chronology related to the history of Durango, Colorado, and its environs, since 1776**

Compiled by Todd Ellison, last updated 1/31/2022

1776 Aug. 9: Spanish explorers Dominguez and Escalante passed through the area. The Animas River had already been named (El Río de las Ánimas; “the river of lost souls”).

1860: Hundreds of gold miners were camped out in the area.

1880 Sept.: The Denver and Rio Grande Railroad Company formed Durango along the banks of the Animas River to serve the San Juan mining district. Lots of silver (and later, even more of gold) was being discovered in the mountains ever since gold fever struck in 1872 and resulted in the settlement of mining towns like Silverton, 50 miles north. Durango had a more tolerable climate and a good supply of water and coal for operating the smelters to pull precious metals out of the ore. The railroad company chose a site south of the town of Animas City for its depot. It bought up the land in the eventual downtown Durango area using various different names to conceal what it was doing. The land was purchased for less money this way. When the train steamed through Animas City on its way north in 1881, it didn't even stop there!

1881 March 11: Election by which the citizens of the Town of Durango agreed to incorporate. (The process was evidently underway at the State level since at least November 19, 1880, which is the date the State Archives has on its books.)

1881 April 27: The Town of Durango was incorporated within the State of Colorado, following the Town's 4/12/1881 Incorporation Election Certification of the results of the 3/11/1881 elections.

1881 May 16: The first meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Town of Durango

1881: Durango had a population of 2,400 and began to grow. People arrived from many countries to work in the smelters and mines and on the railroad.

- 1886 July: Durango switched from being a Town to being a City; via Ordinances 1 through 7 in July of 1886 it adopted a City seal and procedures for appointing and paying City officers, and other matters.
- 1887 Feb. 15: City Council adopted Ordinance 38 establishing Green Mound [later renamed Greenmount] Cemetery.
- 1899 Oct.: Free mail delivery began in Durango in 1899 (or soon after). On October 17, 1899, Durango's City Council instructed the City Clerk to publicize in the public press a request that the owners of houses in Durango begin to number them, using information by calling upon the Clerk.
- 1907: Durango's Carnegie Library building was dedicated. A note in the minutes of a special meeting of the Library's Board of Directors on March 9, 1907 mentioned the cornerstone laying ceremony. The total cost of the small two-story building (still in use; it is the northwest portion of the expanded building at East Second Avenue and 12th Street) was \$17,500—including philanthropist Andrew Carnegie's donation of \$15,000. Railroad tycoon General William J. Palmer donated the land. The architectural style of the building is Beaux-Arts Mediterranean Revival. The library room in the original Carnegie building is the City's longest continuously-occupied space—since 1907. For 110 years, users appreciated the light, airy space, which was naturally illuminated and cooled by six large windows with transoms (some of which still open). In 2017, City Operations split up the space, walling off the northern portion to house the Public Information Office in a secured, renovated room. (See chapter 7 of this book, pages 121-136, for a visual history of the development of the Carnegie Building.)
- 1909 June: The City began prohibiting fishing in the City's reservoirs. (See chapter 21, starting at page 403, for a history of the Durango Reservoir Grant deep in the Weminuche mountains.)
- 1910: The population of the city of Durango was 4,686.
- 1910 Spring: The City started placing trash cans on Main Avenue. The City allowed the vendor to place Sanitary Rubbish Cans at no charge to the City, in exchange for his being allowed to sell advertising on 3 sides.
- 1910 May: Durango's City Council established speed limits of 10 MPH in the business district and 18 MPH elsewhere.
- 1910 June: Council approved the first Durango automobile licenses, issued to Dara C. White and The Pioneer Consolidated Company.
- 1910 June: U.S. Senator Simon Guggenheim informed City Council of federal appropriations for the start-up of Mesa Verde National Park. Mesa Verde National Park was founded in 1906—the first national park in Colorado.
- 1911 Jan.: Durango Health Officer Hurd reported 5 smallpox patients in the County Pest House, 4 under quarantine within City limits, and 2 lodging houses under a 14-day quarantine.

- 1911 March: Council instructed the City Marshal to rid the city of vagrants. Those who did not care to leave were to be arrested and put to work on a rock pile.
- 1911 Oct.: Animas River peaked at 25,000 cubic feet per second, washing out bridges and turning the Animas Valley into a lake.
- 1912 June: Due to many alleged speeding violations by “autoists”, the Durango City Marshal was authorized to rent a stop watch for 30 days or for as long as he needed, to enable him to enforce the speed ordinances and arrest the offenders.
- 1912 June: Automatic electric lighting of the dials on the Town Clock (at the County Court House; the City of Durango subsidized the clock’s maintenance) began.
- 1912 Sept. 3: Durango became one of the first municipalities in the U.S. to adopt the Council/ Manager form of government and home rule -- by the charter election on this date. Actual changes in the City’s form of government didn’t happen until 1913 and 1915; the 1912 home rule charter election started the ball rolling. (See chapter 8, pages 137-142, for more on this.)
- According to Wikipedia, “[Sumter, South Carolina](#) has the distinction of being the first city in the United States to implement council–manager government successfully [on June 11, 1912, just 3 months ahead of Durango], although [Staunton, Virginia](#) is credited as the first American city appointing a city manager in 1908.<sup>[7]</sup> Some have traced the first occurrence of the manager position to as early as 1904 in Ukiah, California, however, but it seems clear that all experts in the field credit the Staunton position as the one, which began to focus the light on the fledgling profession and caught the eye of [Richard S. Childs](#), who would become known, somewhat, as the “father” of the council-manager form of government and the *Model City Charter*.<sup>[6][8]</sup> The first large city to adopt the council–manager form was [Dayton, Ohio](#), in 1913.” Staunton has posted a bronze plaque to stake its claim, as shown here: <http://www.staunton.va.us/about-staunton/about-staunton>
- 1913 March: Western Colorado Power Company was created; during the ensuing year it consolidated the operations of eight major electrical power companies on the Western Slope of Colorado.
- 1913 April: City Council dropped from nine men to three when the City adopted the commissioner form of government. There was less discussion; two men could decide a matter, whereas under the previous aldermanic form of government it required four votes (back then, the mayor would only vote if there was a tie).
- 1913 May 1: City Council held its last meeting under the Aldermanic form of government and its first meeting under the Commissioner form of government. Two persons constituted a quorum.
- 1913 Aug.: Durango hired a dog catcher, and allowed him to keep \$1 (paid by the dog’s owner) for each arrest he made for violation of Durango’s dog license ordinance.
- 1913 Dec.: The City established its current practice of having a bulletin board in front of City Hall upon which typewritten copy of statements would be posted.

- 1915 April 6: By general municipal election, voters voted by a large majority to change the City Charter to move to a commissioner-manager form of government.
- 1915 Spring: Council installed a Public Comfort Station for Women, on the south portion of the first floor in the Century Building on Main Avenue.
- 1915 July 6: A. F. Hood became the first City Manager of the City of Durango. He was an undertaker by profession (Hood Mortuary).
- 1915 July: Mr. J. C. Rawlins was allowed \$5 a month as the City Pound Keeper and was instructed to drive all foreign horses out of the City.
- 1915 Aug.: The City began participating in workmen's compensation (now called workers compensation).
- 1915 Oct. 7: Jack Dempsey fought Andy Malloy this day at the Jarvis Suites Hotel. Mr. Dempsey, born in southern Colorado, became the heavyweight boxing champion in 1919. His sister's grave is in Greenmount Cemetery, with a large monument Jack provided.
- 1917: Construction of the highway connecting Durango, Silverton and Ouray ("[the Million Dollar Highway](#)") began.
- 1917 May: The draft for World War I began. City Council agreed to offer any assistance they could offer the County Sheriff, the County Clerk and the Physician whom the Federal Government had appointed as Registrars of the County of La Plata "for the registration of all men between the ages of 21 and 30, in compliance with the Federal Conscript Act."
- 1917 June: Durango's Fire and Police departments were consolidated, to save money.
- 1918 Aug.: Council passed an ordinance prohibiting the speaking of the German language in any public building or on any public street or alley. Another wartime measure Council adopted in 1918 was Ordinance 557, requiring all males ages 18 to 55 to engage in some useful occupation.
- 1918: Fort Lewis School began offering continuous twelve month school sessions.
- 1918-1919: The flu epidemic ("Spanish influenza") hit the region; 5 of every 75 people died. (See chapter 16 in this book, pages 313-346, for a tour of the Greenmount burials, and read chapter 14, pages 263-283, for more history of infectious diseases in Durango.)
- 1920: The population of the city of Durango dropped to 4,116.
- 1921 March: The City notified the Durango Railway and Realty Company that unless it removed the track and Main Avenue streetcar from the streets of Durango, the City would sue to compel their removal.
- 1921 June: Council authorized the Mayor and the City Manager "to arrange for automobiles or City Truck [sic] to help out in the proposed celebration of the Durango-Silverton highway to be held July 3d and 4th."

1921 July: Council removed “the Quarantine against the Navajoe Indian on account of Typhus.”

1924: City of Durango removed the light poles from Main Avenue.

1925 Dec.: Red lights for Main Avenue! One of his first actions of Edward Oviatt, when he was still only the City Manager Elect, was to get Council’s authorization for him to order two 250 candle power red lights to be placed in the center of Main Avenue, at 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets.

1926: A group of businessmen, including Earl Barker, bought the Strater Hotel.

1927 April: “The City Manager ...brought up the matter of perfecting arrangements for a landing for Airplains [sic] and the Council took the matter under advisement.”

1927 May: Durango added its first traffic police. After some discussion, Council empowered and authorized the City Manager “to put on an extra Policeman who would furnish his own Motorcycle, the City furnishing the Gas and Oil and not to pay to exceed \$110.00 per month and try it for one month” to enforce a new ordinance to regulate street traffic and automobile signals. (However, the Traffic Ordinance No, 627 was not introduced until July 5<sup>th</sup>.)

1927 Sept.: Fort Lewis School (out by Hesperus) began offering a two-year college curriculum.

1929 May: Representatives of the Lions Club-American Legion and the Durango Exchange (predecessor of the Durango Chamber of Commerce) appeared before Council, “asking the City’s cooperation in securing an Airport for the City of Durango.” The Commissioners agreed to appropriate \$350 to pay a professional “who would come here and make a complete examination and report.” On June 4<sup>th</sup> Mr. Jeneks of The International Airport Corporation presented his report to Council, recommending Reservoir Hill as the site for the Durango airport. The City selected Reservoir Hill (the later site of Fort Lewis College) for the Durango airport. The City bought 600+ acres of land there from various owners.

1929: The stock market crashed and the Great Depression began.

1929 Dec.: City Council assured the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Company “that the City Council as well as a large majority of the people of the Southwest were in favor of retaining the name for [the Durango-Silverton-Ouray] Highway as the `Million Dollar Highway” rather than changing it to Chief Ouray Highway, which was believed to have been instigated by outsiders,

1930: The population of the city of Durango rose to 5,400.

1931 Feb.: The Depression hit Durango. The Rev. F. R. Shoemaker and others appeared before Council to request immediate relief for the unemployed. “He reported that the situation is more acute now than at anytime heretofore; that there is now on their relief list thirty (30) white families, and sixty five (85) [sic] Mexican families, dependent of [sic] Charity.” The City immediately responded, saying that it “would start at once to

spend about \$1,200.00 on Street work... [paying] forty-five men in all, working each fifteen men three days, rotating the crews, until the work was finished, or as much work as the \$1,200.00 would allow...the pay per day to be \$3.20 for eight (8) hours."

1931: Council agreed that it would be good to sell Brookside Park and use the money at the Airport Park.

1933: Fort Lewis began offering only college-level courses; high school classes were discontinued.

1933-37: Dust Bowl days.

1935: Wiley Post and Will Rogers flew into Durango and stayed at the Strater Hotel. They died in a plane crash in Alaska several weeks later en route to the Orient.

1936 April: City Council agreed to fence the airport grounds on Reservoir Hill as soon as possible, "on account of live stock roaming, and automobiles running at random on the Airport grounds making it unsafe for the taking off or landing of Airplanes."

1937: The Western Colorado Power Company made progress with electrification of the region.

1940: The population of the city of Durango rose a bit to 5,887.

1941-1945: World War II.

1941 Dec.: Seven days after the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, Mayor Fankhauser signed a resolution in support of the war effort.

1942 Nov.: The City started collecting an airplane tax. At the Council meeting on November 17, 1942, "It was suggested by the Council that a reasonable fee would be charged for any planes operating for revenue or otherwise from airport, this could be arranged by City installing gasoline pump at airport selling all planes their gasoline at a reasonable profit per gallon. / Guard or some reasonable person being held responsible for all gasoline delivered to airport."

1944 Feb.: The City Clerk received signatures in support of an application by A. F. Christopherson for a beer, wine and spirituous liquors license for the El Rancho Tavern for the year 1944. Signers included Earl Barker, Nels, Newman, and Durango Mayor John Fankhauser. El Rancho apparently "takes the cake" for having a City of Durango liquor license for the longest time (to the present day).

1945 Dec.: The City wrote a letter of protest to the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Air Force at Peterson Field, Colo. Springs "in regard to the B-17 Bomber flying over the City of Durango at a very low and dangerous altitude."

1946 May: The airport started its move from the Durango municipal airport on Reservoir Hill in Durango to the Southern Ute Reservation off of Colorado Highway 172. City Council adopted a resolution to pay \$12,000 to John Cameron for 420 acres located on Ute Indian lands about 12 miles south of the City of Durango, as the site for the new

Durango airport. The new airport's first terminal building was a former Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) barracks building that was moved to the new site from the Mesa occupied by Fort Lewis College. It served as the terminal building until late 1952 when the core of the terminal building (eventually replaced by the new building in 1985) was built (per narrative history of the Airport for 6/10/1985 joint meeting of City/County Planning Commissions, in the Project Files electronic cabinet). Alfred J. Ryan, the consulting engineer for the new airport, was based out of Denver and was also contracted (by the Colorado Highway Department) as the engineer of the famous "Valley Highway" (now I-25) through Denver in the mid-1940s, and also for the Denver-Boulder Turnpike in the 1950s.<sup>1</sup> (See chapter 18 in this book, pages 359-374, for a brief chronicle of Durango's airports.)

1946 Nov. 27: Monarch Airways made the first commercial flight to Durango, arriving at and departing from the new City-County airport [this is contrary to Neil Davis, Sr.'s brief history in the December 2010 issue of *Travel Host* magazine; the 6/10/85 narrative mentioned above says this flight landed at the present Durango-La Plata County Airport. The 8/13/1946 City Council meeting minutes reported on progress on the City/County airport and a meeting with Monarch Airlines in Durango the next day regarding signing a contract—which was considered and adopted on 10/15/1946. See also the 11/1/1946 *Durango News* article that said Monarch Air Lines was planning on beginning daily operations to the City-County airport on Monday, November 4.]

1947 Oct.: Citizens of the town of Animas City and the City of Durango overwhelmingly voted to unite the two.

1948: Fort Lewis was officially designated a junior college with its own president; autonomous from Fort Collins but under control of the State Board of Agriculture.

1949 June: Charles Dale Rea became the first president of Fort Lewis A & M College after the resignation of Dean E. H. Bader.

1949 July: The City added a Storekeeper (predecessor of today's Purchasing Agent). City Manager Hubbard asked the council for permission to acquire a storekeeper for the city. Council "decided ...that a storekeeper was very necessary and that a salary from \$210 to \$225 per month would be paid."

1949 Sept. 19: After City Council considered the idea since 1946, parking meters became operational in the downtown business district starting at 9 a.m. that Monday. The cost was 12 minutes for a penny, 1 hour for a nickel.

1949 Nov.: World War II surplus Quonset huts in Durango. Council asked the U.S. Public Housing Administration for title to 20 Quonset huts. A week later the City had received the Housing and Home Finance administrator's offer to relinquish to the City its interest in these units. By 1950, the City was selling the Quonset huts.

1949 Dec.: Bus fares were revised: only school children under age 5 rode free. The Navajo Trail Inc., operating what was formerly known as the Durango Bus Line, asked the Council for a change in bus fares. New fares would be 10 cents a ride to any point in

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<sup>1</sup> Source: CDOT *Highways to the Sky* [online history](#) viewed 11/6/2018.

- Durango and 5 cents a ride for school children to any point in Durango within school hours and on school days only. Children under five years of age could ride free.
- 1950: The population of the city of Durango climbed to 7,459. Also, Fort Lewis College began offering extension courses in Durango.
- 1950: The first City Market in Durango opened, at 1316 Main Avenue.
- 1951 Feb.: In response to President Harry Truman's 12/17/1950 declaration of a State of National Emergency, Council adopted a resolution appointing "Roy W. Secord as Director of Civil Defense in and for the City of Durango and the County of La Plata."
- 1951 Dec.: Last trip of old Rio Grande Southern railroad (including the Galloping Goose rail car) through Wildcat Canyon from Hesperus to Mancos, Dolores, Rico and Telluride.
- 1952 April: The City abandoned the municipal airport on Reservoir Hill.
- On April 22, 1952, "Council advised Floyd Gregg and Ralph Burress that municipal airport would be left to the management of individual plane owners under their own management...with privelege [sic] to move to City and County Airport at any time, as Municipal airport will be abandoned." (City Clerk Wm. Horther was not noted for excellent spelling or the use of the word "the".)
- 1954: The City of Durango reinstalled light poles on Main Avenue, and used mercury lights.
- 1954 March: Council agreed to convey to the State Board of Agriculture 193 acres on Reservoir Hill (former site of the former municipal airport) for the use of the branch of the Fort Lewis Agricultural College at Durango, for a token sum of \$8,400. The agreement states that if the lands ever cease to be used for educational purposes, the City has the right and option to purchase the lands, "together with all improvements thereon situate and all rights and privileges thereunto appertaining, for the sum of \$8,400 cash in hand."
- 1956 June: The City completed the construction of its Water Treatment Plant.
- 1956 (summer): Fort Lewis College moved to Durango (classes began there in September). The Fall enrollment was 384 students (238 full-time and 146 part-time). The Old Fort Lewis College campus at Hesperus began to be used as an agricultural experiment station.
- 1957: The Diamond Belle Saloon at the Strater Hotel opened its doors. There is a bullet hole in the far east drawer behind the bar.
- 1957: Jackson Clark, Sr. and his family established Toh-Atin, a business dealing in Indian and Southwest art. The Toh-Atin Gallery opened in 1975. Mr. Clark was originally the principal partner in Jackson David Bottling Company, a Durango-based soft drink dealership.



- 1957 May: Dedication of new Fort Lewis College campus facilities on Reservoir Hill above Durango. Two men's dormitories, one women's dormitory, the president's home (later renamed Kroeger Hall), Student Center (Miller), and twenty married students' apartments were occupied.
- 1958: New Fine Arts Building (later the Theatre) and McPherson Chapel at the Fort Lewis campus.
- 1959: The four-story West Building at 835 East Second Avenue, Durango's first modern building and the only bona fide office building for many years, was built. It was designed and approved for eight floors—contrary to the City's height limits code—but James and Ward West, the two brothers who built it for oil and gas company offices, stopped it at four stories because of a slump in the energy sector. At the point that they capped construction, the first-floor lobby's elevator console (which shows 8 floors) had already been installed.
- 1960: The population of the city of Durango jumped to 10,530.
- 1960 April: Fort Lewis College bought 280 acres on the east side of the Durango campus (later known as Raider Ridge) from La Plata County at \$2 per acre for future expansion.
- 1960 June: The Colorado State Democratic Convention was held in Durango; it was one of the first big events held at Fort Lewis College. U.S. presidential election candidate U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy was the keynote speaker at the Strater Hotel.
- 1960 Fall: The College's Hesperus dairy herd of 85 animals was sold at a special public auction. On Oct. 7, 1961, the State Board of Agriculture approved leasing to the Colorado State University Experiment Station 6,318 acres of land comprising the Fort Lewis Reservation, at \$10,000 per year. The Hesperus farm equipment was transferred from the college to the Colorado State University Experiment Station at Hesperus, at no charge, effective Nov. 1, 1961.
- 1961: Community Hospital was brought into existence as the result of a vote of the people. It had a \$2 million payroll and 165 employees as of 1986, and revenues of \$5.25 million. Thus began a number of decades of what some called the "hospital wars" in Durango, due to its competition with the non-government Mercy Hospital.
- 1961 Dec.: After considering allegations related to the purchase of a 1951 surplus college truck by President Charles Dale Rea at a public sale, the State Board of Agriculture announced the resignation of Charles Dale Rea as president of Fort Lewis A & M College, effective June 30, 1962.
- 1962: The Diamond Circle Melodrama at the Strater Hotel theater did its first production.
- 1962: Fort Lewis College became a baccalaureate degree-granting institution; Dr. John F. Reed was installed as president; 7 majors were authorized. The Fort Lewis A & M College Post Office Contract Station (the only other post office in Durango today) began operation.

- 1963: City Hall at 949 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue was built (dedicated on Saturday, 6/8/1963); the old one was demolished.
- 1963 June 18: The City created a Durango Firemen Retirement System.
- 1963 Sept.: The State Board of Agriculture authorized President Reed to ask the Governor to change the name from Fort Lewis School to Fort Lewis College; the change was approved by March of 1964.
- 1963 Dec. 16: The City created the Parks and Recreation Department.
- 1964 April: First commencement of a Fort Lewis College graduating class as a four-year institution.
- 1965: Dozens of individuals launched the Purgatory ski resort.
- 1966: Durango Industrial Development Foundation was established; the DIDF fostered economic growth by forming and establishing the 250-acre Bodo Business Ranches, better known as Bodo Industrial Park, which at the time of its actual launching in 1973 was two miles south of the Durango city limits. Its original goal was to attract light and clean industry from outside the area, to diversify the economic base of Durango. About 80 local businessmen pledged about \$2,000 apiece over 10 years to start the foundation which oversees the park operation. As of 1985, Bodo Park had 83 tenants.
- 1967: The City of Durango operated a sanitary landfill at Bodo from 1967 until around 1987.
- 1967 March 7: City Council discussed renaming the Truck By-Pass (between Town Plaza and the river). Possible names included Camino Del Rio, Animas Freeway, Holiday Drive, and Riverside Drive. The Councilors let the Durango High School Spanish Club name the highway—and it chose the Spanish name. The name (with a capital D) was adopted by Resolution 167 on 3/21/1967.
- 1967 April: At a special meeting, the State Board of Agriculture approved exchanging 12 acres of the Hillcrest Municipal Golf Course land for equal acreage owned by the City of Durango which was formerly the site of the city reservoir.
- 1967 Spring: The Fort Lewis College library/ classroom building (later named Reed Library) was dedicated and occupied. The new dorms were named Bader and [Philip H.] Sheridan halls.
- 1968: Fort Lewis College opened its new Student Union Building (CUB/College Union Building) and 6 new dormitories.
- 1968: The U.S. government funded the Dolores Project, an archaeological excavation (the largest contract archaeology project in the U.S. at the time) to salvage artifacts prior to the construction of McPhee Dam and the second-largest reservoir in Colorado.
- 1968: Francisco's Restaurante Y Cantina opened in the Central Business District. Until Francis and Claudine Garcia (the founders) sold it in 2013 (it closed the following year,

unexpectedly) it was a popular Mexican food restaurant for tourists and locals alike—for 46 years.

1968 Dec. 17: The City created an Electrical Inspection Department.

1969 June: FLC President John F. Reed resigned and was succeeded by Rexer Berndt.

1970: Groundbreaking for Fairfield Pagosa (12,000 units were planned by Fairfield, one of the largest timeshare companies in the world) on 18,000 acres located a mile west of Pagosa Springs—the largest residential development project in Archuleta County.

1972: The Iron Horse Bicycle Classic began; it is the longest continuously run cycling event in the U.S. Road bikers race the Durango-Silverton Train to Silverton on the Memorial Day weekend.

1973 April: The former Hillcrest golf course and reservoir sites (presently the city softball fields) were annexed into the City of Durango.

1973 April: Groundbreaking for the 400-unit resort hotel, Tamarron Resort, located about 15 miles north of Durango and owned (then) by Florida-based Golf Hosts, Inc. The hotel could handle at least a thousand guests at one time, and sported an 18-hole championship golf course and many other amenities that attracted conventions from all over the United States.

1974 Aug. 3: First Master Plan study of the Durango-La Plata County Airport, calling for staged development of the airport.

1974 Aug. 24: Durango's worst fire in recent memory destroyed buildings on the west side of 800 block of Main Ave. and firefighter Nick Parks III and Durango Police Department Cpl. Gale Emerson (each was 24 and had a wife pregnant with their first child) died in their attempts to save others in their role as first responders at the early morning blaze. The destroyed buildings had housed 8 or 9 businesses, including Chez Louis (a French restaurant), Gardenswartz Sporting Goods, City Taxi, Taylor-Raymond Jewelers and Thompson Saddle Shop. Subsequently, the Main Mall was built on that block (dedicated on 6/18/1976). A Denver Channel 7 news reporter who flew over Durango reported that the smoke was visible 30 miles away and could be smelled at 10,000 feet. In November 1975 Gilbert F. Martinez, age 25, confessed to having started the fire because he was angry about having been evicted. (Source: *Durango Herald* news article 8/22/2014).

1976 June 18: Official dedication of the Main Mall, replacing 6 buildings destroyed in the 800 block of Main Avenue by the arson-set fire 8/24/1974.

1978: The North City Market store opened at 3130 Main Avenue; its location was chosen so as to be near the added traffic crossing the 32<sup>nd</sup> Street Bridge.

1978 November 7: The City's second charter election refined Durango's council-manager form of government; Council members henceforth were called councilmen rather than commissioners; they chose from among themselves the Mayor and Mayor Pro-Tem.

- 1978-1979: Groundbreaking for The Ranch, with 294 total units planned for this upscale residential home development located about 11 miles north of Durango on 560 acres, totally controlled by Durango rancher David James.
- 1979: John Wolgamott and Durango native Jerry Zink (brother of Ed Zink) formed StoneAge, a Durango-based waterjet business that designs and manufactures high-pressure water-assisted drilling and cleaning equipment that is sold worldwide, for drilling through rock, clearing and cleaning pipe lines in the oil and natural gas fields, removing dried cement from the inside of pipe, cleaning 19<sup>th</sup> century train locomotives at the downtown Durango train depot, etc.
- 1980 Aug. 13: President Gerald Ford visited Durango. He was the only U.S. President to do so. He dedicated the Animas Museum in the morning and the Main Avenue Historic District in the afternoon, followed by the dedication of the Hillcrest Municipal Golf Course Expansion ceremony, with USGA President Will Nicholson also participating.
- 1980 Sept.: Northpoint Mall, formerly a dairy headquarters, auto dealership and Montgomery Ward office, was expanded to a total of 56,000sf of office and retail space for 30-40 tenants at about \$9/sf, between Main Avenue and Camino del Rio “across from the Old High School Park” (*Durango Herald*, 6/20/1982). Ted Hermesman was one of the partners of the developer.
- 1981: The Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory (under the leadership and ownership of Frank Crail and others) started making fudge and sold it in one store, in downtown Durango. Four years later it was making 550,000 pounds of chocolate that it was distributing nationwide, including some that was sold as Nieman Marcus Candy in New York City.
- 1981: Charles Bradshaw of Orlando, Florida purchased the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which attracted countless numbers of tourists to Durango in the subsequent years.
- 1981: Ted Hermesman, Sr., opened a home decorating store, which was followed by furniture stores in 1983 and 1985, which eventually occupied the majority of NorthPoint Mall and the Main Mall (owned by him).
- 1981 April 17: Dedication of Pioneer Park (City park near the Durango High School).
- 1982 April: The City took over from the County the management and operation of the outdoor La Plata County swimming pool, next to the high school, due to budgetary constraints of the County.
- 1982 April 20: Grand opening of the Durango Mall, east of town. Durango’s largest single commercial development (178,000sf of leased space), it was owned by a Canadian real estate company in Toronto, and included two anchor stores, JC Penneys and K mart (the 34<sup>th</sup> K mart in Colorado and one of 2,069 in the northern hemisphere) (by the end of 2020, both stores had closed—K mart shut its doors soon after a Walmart superstore opened in Durango in July of 1998). Only 21 of the possible 36 stores were filled at the time of the mall’s opening. The *Durango Herald* article about the grand opening noted that “Durango has about half the population usually considered minimal to support a mall” but the owners hoped to draw shoppers from much of the San Juan Basin.

- 1982 June: Council passed a resolution regarding the Cold War between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., calling for a freeze on the testing, production and deployment of nuclear weapons.
- 1982 Sept. 7: Councilman Plotkin announced the arrival of four used diesel Mercedes buses that the City of Durango purchased from the City of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, for \$15,000 through Urban Mass Transit Administration. This inaugurated the City's public transportation system, which was initially called the Durango Lift Company.
- 1982 Oct. 25: Robert F. Ledger, Jr. started his 25-year tenure as the 15th City Manager of the City of Durango. When he started, the city had something like 7 paved streets. When he retired in August of 2007 all of the city's streets were paved. By 2016, the City had 380 miles of asphalt pavement and 4,253 street signs.
- 1982 Dec.: The City approved the purchase of an x-ray device to screen carry-on baggage at the Durango-La Plata County Airport, as recommended by Frontier Airlines.
- 1982 Dec.: Durango switched to using City-provided trash bins for its commercial customers.
- 1983 Spring: Groundbreaking for the new Purgatory Village Center at base of the Purgatory Ski Area; 1,180 units were planned, as part of a 10-year, \$250-million expansion plan begun by the Durango Ski Corp.
- 1983 March: The City acquired the parcels owned by the Colorado Ute Electric Association between 12th and 14th Streets on the west side of Camino del Rio, which became known as River City Hall (the home for the Department of Planning and Community Development—with a fire station in the back of the building, facing the Animas River).
- 1983 July 19: The City of Durango combined the positions of Director of Public Works and City Engineer.
- 1983 Aug. 16: The City created a Department of Community Development.
- 1983 Sept.: The Rocky Mountain Chocolate Factory moved from cramped quarters in Rio Grande Land near the Durango train depot, into a 13,000 s.f. manufacturing facility and 8,000 s.f. warehouse at the top of Bodo Industrial Park.
- 1983 Oct.: David Turner was appointed Municipal Judge to replace the resigning Robert C. Dawes who was Municipal Judge since August 1980. Turner had been Substitute Municipal Judge since February 1982. Diane Badgley (now Knutson) was appointed to replace Turner as Substitute Municipal Judge.
- 1983 Nov.: The City created and established a Public Transit Enterprise Fund, as the City of Durango was assuming legal and operational control of Opportunity/Lift Bus Program that was operated by Club Esfuerzo Inc. by creating a Public Transit Division with the City's Department of General Services.

1984? (or was it 1983?) Spring: Groundbreaking for Edgemont Ranch (maximum of 2,283 housing units allowed by La Plata County), one of the largest housing developments in the county, located about five miles north of Durango on County Road 240 (Florida Road)

1984 Spring: Office of Business Development established, in City Hall; Bonnie Taylor-Smith was its first head (cf. *Durango Herald* news article 4/29/1984)

1984 June: Dwight and Doug Hunter, brothers, moved Durango's Ford/Toyota/Subaru dealership from the corner of West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Street to US Highway 160 West, 1.5 miles west of Durango, establishing a small hub of car dealerships in that area. Nissan followed.

1984 Oct.: The State Board of Agriculture held a hearing regarding the possibility of removing Fort Lewis College from the Colorado State University System that the Board created on July 26 to include Colorado State University, University of Southern Colorado, and Fort Lewis College, with Philip Austin as Chancellor. A motion to exclude Fort Lewis College was defeated 5-1 at the Board's meeting on Nov. 16, 1984. The FITE (Fighting for Independence, Tradition and Excellence) Committee of Fort Lewis College faculty, et al., responded.

1984 Dec.: FLC President Rexer Berndt retired; the Durango Chamber of Commerce names him Citizen of the Year. He was succeeded by Bernard Adams. Adams went on Administrative Leave two years later and resigned soon after.

1985: Graden's Mill, long a Durango landmark at the intersection of US Highways 160 and 550, was torn down and was replaced by the Red Lion Inn (which later became the Doubletree Hotel).

1986 Spring:<sup>2</sup> The 159-room Red Lion Inn [which later became the DoubleTree] opened at the Animas River, Camino del Rio and the US 160/550 intersection, at a cost of \$13 million. Its restaurant was one of the largest in Durango, seating 85, plus banquet facilities in a 6,000 s.f. ballroom area. Only Tamarron Resort, north of Durango, offered comparably large convention space.

1986 Oct.: Dedication of Dan Noble Hall (formerly called the New Classroom Building) at Fort Lewis College and renaming of library as John F. Reed Library, in a ceremony held in conjunction with Homecoming and the 75th anniversary of the college. Noble was a state legislator from Montrose who persuaded the State to fund the classroom building.

1986 Dec: South City Market moved from 1316 Main Avenue to the building at Camino del Rio (#6 Town Plaza) that formerly housed Montgomery Wards. At the time, this City Market had the largest area (32,000 s.f.) of any store in City Market's 38-store chain.

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the 1986 economic development data is from the 2/1/1987 "Focus on Business" supplement to the *Durango Herald*. Related data for other years is from the 2/10/1985 and 2/9/1986 supplements with the same title.

1986: Air traffic at the Durango-La Plata County airport was up 7.1 percent, setting an all-time high mark (a total of 190,949) of passengers boardings (96,370) and deplanements. The busiest airline was United Express (formerly Aspen Airways) at 41% of the Durango market, followed by America West (34%), then Continental Express (formerly Trans Colorado) at 12%, and Mesa Airlines at 2%.

1986 Dec.: Fort Lewis College's 1986 payroll of \$9.4 million was the largest of any employer in La Plata County. As of December, it had 390 employees (excluding student wages). School District 9-R was the county's second-highest payroll at nearly \$8.2 million for 409 employees (making it the third largest employer in the count, behind Purgatory Ski Center—which employed 675 during the ski season—and Mercy Medical Center, which had annual expenditures of about \$13 million).

1987 Feb. 3: The City created a Library Department. Prior to that, the Library was its own entity with its own Board of Trustees, separate from the governance of the City of Durango, since around the time of its origins in 1904. At its regular meeting on 1/6/1987 City Council had a public hearing to consider incorporating the Durango Public Library into the Durango City government as a department. The first reading of the Ordinance O-1987-1 was on 1/20/87; Council adopted the change on 2/3/1987.

1987-1988? The last remaining chimney at the former VCA (Vanadium Corporation of America) smelter on the Animas River at the base of Smelter Mountain was demolished.

1987/1988 (winter): Measles epidemic among the students at Fort Lewis College.

1988 Jan. 19: In the worst airplane crash in the history of La Plata County, a Continental Express plane crashed near Durango, killing both pilots and 7 passengers who were seated in the front portion of the little plane. The co-pilot had failed to tell the FAA of his prior conviction for drunken driving.

1988 March 19: Dedication of the new 36,329 sf \$2.5M terminal at the Durango-La Plata County Airport, which replaced a 10,000 terminal building just to the south of it on the west of the runway.

1988 March 20: Joel M. Jones (8/11/1937-7/13/2016) was appointed president of Fort Lewis College.

1990: The population of the city of Durango rose to 12,439.

1990 April 2:<sup>3</sup> First day of City of Durango collection of recyclable materials from the curbside (following the City's purchase of 3,300 bins and a trailer in 1989) and from five established drop-off sites throughout the city. 83 volunteers distributed the bins. The City's recycling program began with newspapers, mixed colors of glass, aluminum cans, and yard waste (the latter was abandoned on 10/5/1990 when the Van Dal Landfill closed and there was no suitable location yet selected for municipal composting).

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<sup>3</sup> Durango recycling program accomplishments, 1990-2008, were listed by Sustainability Program coordinator Nancy Andrews (four pages that were found with an email of hers dated 2/18/2009).

- 1990 Oct.: Hicks House Movers moved the "Old Willis House" from the lot south of City Hall, bound for its new location at 1033 Avenida del Sol. The house would become the new Durango community shelter, "a haven for 20 homeless people."
- 1990 Oct.: The City of Durango began collecting Christmas trees and shredding them into mulch.
- 1991 Feb. 17: Opening ceremony for the Durango Homeless Shelter
- 1992 (March 17): Shawn Slater of the Ku Klux Klan appeared at a forum on racial awareness that was sponsored by the Political Science Club. In retrospect, the event was considered to be one of FLC's most significant "non-events" in terms of cost and time.
- 1992 Oct. 28: US Vice President Dan Quayle arrived at Durango-La Plata County Airport in Air Force One (a Boeing 707) with C-141 transport planes for his limousine for the motorcade. He was welcomed by G.O.P. dignitaries for a brief visit on the tarmac before being driven to Farmington, NM for a campaign rally.
- 1992: City of Durango Car Park Phase II public restrooms project was built (the Transit Center opened there in 2009).
- Winter of 1992/93: The landmark Fort Lewis College water tower was dismantled. The architectural drawings for the tower had been drawn by Chicago Bridge & Iron Co. in 1955.
- 1993 Jan. 13: The Teen Center opened its doors at the old Mason School building as a place where teens could go after school, evenings, and weekends instead of walking the streets downtown, being home alone, or getting into trouble.
- 1993 Sept.: The \$4.4 million West Residence Hall opened on Fort Lewis College campus. For the first time, the College required freshmen to live on campus if their homes are not in the area.
- 1993 Oct. 6: Dedication of the front addition to the Carnegie Building to make the Durango Public Library accessible to persons with disabilities.
- 1994: The Town of Bayfield began recycling and delivering recyclables to Durango. Also, this year the City of Durango began asking residents to separate their Spring and Fall Cleanup set-out materials into organics and non-organics so limbs and brush could be shredded into mulch rather than trucked to a landfill.
- 1994 Oct. 4: The City adopted an ordinance regarding crimes of graffiti.
- 1994 Oct.: Glass had to be separated by color, due to market demands.
- 1995 April: The City began actively promoting backyard composting, and sold 825 composting bins by October through an OEC grant that subsidized each bin's cost by at least \$10. In 1996 the City bought 500 more bins and sold them at cost over the next few years.



- 1996 Dec.: The City opened the Durango Recycling Center in the Durango Tech Center. It was designed with the upgrade potential to process 20 tons of recyclables per day. In 2000, 7.2 tons per day was moved through the Center. The Center also began accepting corrugated cardboard and brown grocery bags by drop-off at the Center.
- 1997 March 11: The City adopted a new Comprehensive Plan.
- 1997 April: The City began the renovation of City Hall at 949 East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, expanding the north and south wings of the building toward Second Avenue.
- 1997 July 26: Opening ceremony for the City of Durango Recycling Center at the Durango Tech Center.
- 1997 Sept.: Third new \$4.4 million Art Building opened on the Fort Lewis College campus.
- 1997 Oct.: The \$5 million Fort Lewis College Community Concert Hall was inaugurated. The finale of the month-long series of events was a performance of Beethoven's 9th Symphony.
- 1997 Oct. 21: The City adopted a system of Major Street Impact Fees to be imposed on new development.
- 1998 March: The City began collecting corrugated cardboard from businesses.
- 1999 Feb.: Kendall Blanchard took office as the 6th president of Fort Lewis College.
- 1999 April: City voters approved (by a margin of 208 votes) a half-cent sales tax increase to fund the Durango Community Recreation Center and parks and open space. The City spent more than \$34M on the rec center and the Animas River Trail between 2002 and 2013 (according to a *Durango Herald* article 6/28/2014), after spending \$15.4M (not including interest on the debt) to build the rec center.
- 1999 April 23: Dedication of the City's Riverview Sports Complex.
- 1999 Aug.: Record 7.51 inches of rainfall on Durango during the month.
- 2000 April 14: Groundbreaking ceremony for the new \$15+M City of Durango Community Recreation Center, on a 99-year lease from La Plata County at the north end of the Fairgrounds.
- 2000 June: President Bill Clinton signed a proclamation that created Canyon of the Ancients National Monument, 164,000 acres, west of Cortez, containing the highest known density of archaeological features in the U.S.
- 2000 Oct 17: The City created a new "rural district" zoning designation, pertinent to the City's initiating annexation of areas along US Highway 160 West and the Lightner Creek area.

2001 April 3: The City's last election that was a polling-place election; subsequently, they included a mail-in option.

2001 June: A private business (Phoenix Recycling) began collecting recyclables from La Plata County residents located outside Durango's municipal limits.

2001: Completion and dedication of several new buildings on the Fort Lewis College campus: Business/Education Building, Center of Southwest Studies, Chemistry Hall, Dale Rea Memorial Clock Tower, and the Student Life Center.

2002: The Durango Fire Department was decommissioned and the Durango Fire & Rescue Authority was formed.

2002 July: FLC President Blanchard stepped down. Former Durango mayor Vice President of Business and Finance Robert Dolphin, Jr. (who was planning to retire at that time) agreed to serve as Interim President, and was later appointed President.

2002 June: Colorado Governor Bill Owens signed House Bill 1419, approving the creation of a stand-alone Board of Trustees for Fort Lewis College. The State Board of Agriculture (SBA) had governed Fort Lewis since it first became an agricultural high school in 1911 until the passage of this new legislation.

2002 June: Following one of the driest winters and springs on record, the largest forest fire in the recorded history of southwest Colorado began near Missionary Ridge, north of Durango, and moved toward Lemon Reservoir, burning 70,485 acres and numerous homes. It was controlled on August 7, having cost \$40.8 million to fight.

2002 June: Nearly all of the married student housing units at Fort Lewis College and Hesperus Hall were razed. ("The wreck of the Hesperus.") The Quonset hut (i.e., the last of the buildings that remained of those that were brought to the Durango campus from the Old Fort Lewis campus in the mid-1950s) was demolished at the end of July.

2005 Sept.: The City held its first e-waste (electronics) event, collecting computer components for recycling, thus diverting potentially hazardous wastes from the landfill. 137 vehicles dropped

2003 Sept. 16: The City adopted an ordinance regarding illegal discharges into the municipal sewer system.

2003 Fall: The City gave away over 800 cubic yards of wood and/or glass chips (using the glass crusher it and the San Juan Basin Recycling Association had acquired in June of 2002) to City water customers to encourage mulching as a means of conserving irrigation water.

2005 March 1: The City began recycling plastic bottles.

2005 April 5: City voters approved a half-cent sales tax increase to fund the Durango Public Library and parks and open space.

- 2005 April: Council increased the salary of Council members to \$750 per month, plus full medical, dental and vision benefits and (currently) a cell phone stipend.
- 2005 Oct. 1: The City held its first-ever Household Hazardous Waste collection day, together with La Plata County.
- 2005 Nov.: The City held its third e-waste (electronics) event, which began a pattern of semi-annual collections.
- 2006 June 24: Dedication of Ward Lee Field (ball field at the La Plata County Fairgrounds) as part of the celebration of the City of Durango's 125th Anniversary.
- 2006 Nov. 7: Voters at City of Durango election approved \$15.9 million in sales and use tax revenue bonds to fund site purchase and construction of new Durango Public Library.
- 2007 Jan. 1: The City of Durango began specifying that its janitorial cleaning supplies must be certified as environmentally preferable, by meeting at least one of these two standards: "Green Seal" and "Environmental Choice" – and also began requiring that all City computers meet the EPEAT (Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool) standard and rating system for electronics.
- 2007 July: The City changed its LUDC (Land Use and Development Code) to require all new commercial developments to provide adequate space for recycling containers and servicing of those containers, and also to require that all existing and new multi-family properties of at least eight dwelling units must provide recycling of at least three types of recyclables.
- 2007/2008: Fort Lewis College undertook a \$55 million bond revenue issue -- the College's largest bond issue ever, by far -- to pay for a new College Union Building (projected to cost around \$25-30 million, to be paid primarily through student fees) and new dorms, and to reimburse some old bonds (Student Life Center, etc.) to obtain better terms and lower rates.
- 2008 Jan. 1: The City of Durango began to purchase Green Power electricity, to offset all of the emissions associated with its electric accounts, and was among a select number of municipalities to be recognized by the EPA for this. The La Plata Electric Association described this as "very impressive and frankly, awesome," and (in a 2/18/2009 email to Nancy Andrews, the City's Sustainability Program coordinator at the time) noted that "this was also important in LPEA's marketing/communicating of our Green Power program."
- 2008 Feb. 6: The City dedicated its first new Police Substation, in the Three Springs Metropolitan District, east of the city limits. Though not LEED certified, it was built using a number of sustainable materials and practices.
- 2008 Feb. 22: Fire caused by an improperly installed kitchen stove ventilation hood destroyed the building (built ca. 1895; The Bowman & Lazarus Building) at Main Avenue that housed 3 businesses (Seasons Restaurant, Half Price Tees, and Le Rendezvous restaurant). A brick from the ruins is in the City of Durango Archives.

- 2008: The Colorado Department of Transportation installed wildlife sensors on one mile of U.S. Highway 160 east of Elmore's Corners in Durango to alert motorists to the presence of wildlife presence near the highway. That sensor system on Highway 160 was the first in the nation and cost \$1.2 million. According to a *Durango Herald* report on the project on 11/21/11, "Underground cables running the length of both sides of the highway detect changes in the Earth's electromagnetic field when wildlife cross the wire, which triggers the lighted signs. The cables are buried 1 foot deep, 30 feet from either side of the highway."
- 2008 Nov. 4: Voters at City of Durango election approved \$17.6M indebtedness for the Florida Road Reconstruction Project bond issue.
- 2008 Dec. 1: Opening ceremony for the new City of Durango Public Library at the former site of Mercy Hospital. The cost was more than \$13.3 million; the building was placed in service on August 31, 2008, but the last day of service in the original building at 1188 East Second Avenue was Saturday, October 25, 2008.
- 2009 Jan.: The City created a Department of Sustainable Services, "to help make Durango greener."
- 2009 Aug. 14: The City opened its Transit Center at 250 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street (the groundbreaking was 12 months previous).
- 2009: Difficult economic times began to affect individuals and organizations of the region, as they did elsewhere in the US.
- 2009 Dec. 1: The City adopted an ordinance regulating (and charging a fee and requiring a permit for) the presence of chickens inside city limits, and removing poultry from the City's definition of livestock.
- 2010: The estimated population of the city of Durango was 16,169.
- 2010 Dec. 14: La Plata Electric Association completed the replacement of all 756 of Durango's streetlights, to comply with the "dark-skies" ordinance that City Council passed in 2003 that mandated that streetlights be retrofitted so they don't cause as much light pollution. The newer streetlights in Durango have a full cut-off lens that directs light down without reflecting light upward.
- 2010 Dec. 21: The City of Durango reorganized a number of its departments and divisions, creating the Administrative Services to include City Clerk's Office and Human Resources; new Engineering Department (separate from Public Works); and a new Department of Natural Lands, Trails and Sustainability. The Department of General Services became the Department of City Operations.
- 2011 Jan. 19: The City adopted an ordinance regarding emergency response procedures, including City control or regulation of the use, sale, production or distribution of food, water, clothing etc.

- 2011 June 20: Official re-opening of Florida Road, the largest public works project in the City's history. By the time it was done, the contract sum had increased \$1.2 million from the original \$14.8 million to over \$16 million.
- 2011 Oct. 18: The City named the plaza in front of City Hall after Robert F. "Bob" Ledger, Jr., who was the City Manager for 25 years ending in 2007.
- 2011 Oct.: The Colorado Department of Transportation installed blinking yellow left turn arrow traffic lights on U.S. Highway 160 from Colo. 172 to 32nd Street. The lights are intended to enhance safety. Durango is the first place in Colorado where an entire corridor was equipped with these traffic signals.
- 2011 Nov. 17: The Colorado Department of Transportation opened the ramps to the multi-bridge U.S. Highway 160 interchange in Grandview. The main bridge, known as "the Bridge to Nowhere," turns abruptly when it hits the base of a steep hillside.
- 2012 Feb. 21: City Council added a new name to its in-town Terminal Reservoir: Rogers Reservoir, in recognition of Otha "Jack" Rogers who started work 7/19/1983 and became the director of the Department of Public Works. It has also been known as City Reservoir, or City Reservoir One (although the City's first reservoir is Lemon Reservoir, outside the City up Florida Road in the Weeminuche Wilderness Area).
- 2012 Apr. 17: The City renamed its Department of Public Works the Department of Utilities.
- 2012 July: The Durango Welcome Center opened at 802 Main Avenue.
- 2012 Aug. 20: The City hosted the Overall Start of the 2012 USA Pro Challenge bicycle staged road race to Denver. By the day of the event, it was apparent that the corporation that had organized and promoted the race had given the City false expectations as to the numbers of attendees and the economic benefit of the City's substantial investment of finances, facilities and workforce.
- 2012 Nov. 20: The City adopted an ordinance banning smoking in certain types of outdoor public places including bus stops, City-owned parks, playgrounds and picnic pavilions, recreational facilities and ball fields excluding Hillcrest Golf Course, and on the Animas River Trail and adjacent greenway owned by the City.
- 2012 Dec. 4: The City reorganized several departments, merging Planning and Community Development; Engineering; Natural Lands, Trails and Sustainability; and Code Enforcement into the new Community Planning Department.
- 2013 June 5: The West Fork Complex, three fires in the Wolf Creek Pass region that torched 109,615 acres in the San Juan and Rio Grande national forests, made national news as they closed areas east of the Continental Divide until rains extinguished them by mid-July.
- 2013 Dec. 16: The City replaced 1,010 parking meters downtown with new meters using card reader technology, and increased the rates for parking.

- 2014 Jan. 1: The City's bonded indebtedness was \$33.8 million.
- 2014 Oct. 26: Frontier Airlines, the first airline ever to serve Durango, ceased all service to DRO after reducing its service to three days a week from May through August in 2013 due to a lack of profitability on the route. It ceased daily service effective October 29, 2013. This left United Airlines with a monopoly on flights between Durango and Denver.
- 2014 Sept. 26: The first sales of retail marijuana in Durango began, at Durango Organics in Bodo Industrial Park—which was temporarily shut down by the Colorado Marijuana Enforcement Division due to an issue with potency testing.
- 2015 Feb. 3: The City created the new Department of Transportation and Sustainability.
- 2015 Aug. 5: The Environmental Protection Agency, the federal agency committed to protecting “human health and the environment,” jeopardized both by accidentally releasing three million gallons of toxic wastewater into the Animas River. An EPA-contracted crew was using a backhoe near the entrance to the Gold King Mine above Silverton when they triggered the release of wastewater containing heavy metals including zinc, arsenic, lead, iron, and copper. *The Denver Post* reported that residents of Durango “gathered along the Animas River to watch as the blue waters turned a thick, radiant orange and yellow just after 8 p.m. on August 6<sup>th</sup>--nearly 34 hours after the spill started.” The report of this disaster hit all of the main news outlets in the US and beyond.
- 2017 Jan. 24: Following the (finally!) arrival of fairly typical winter weather for Durango, the City Streets Division removed 110 dump truck loads of snow from downtown streets this evening, working from 11 PM and through the night. This was followed by the hauling of 342 loads the next day from the Central Business District and cul-de-sacs across town. For the first time, snow removed from the Central Business District, Florida Road, 32nd Street and cul-de-sacs is taken to a new 3.35-acre City-owned site near the Durango Tech Center, west of the downtown, that the City bought in September of 2016 for the purpose, rather than dumping it at of Cundiff Park south of downtown off of Camino del Rio, due to residents' concerns about melting snow flushing street grime into the Animas River.
- 2017 Jan. 30: Opening of the City's new \$2.1M gymnastics facility at 144 Bodo Drive in south Durango, paid for by the half cent sales tax on purchases within the City of Durango. In the works since at least April 2010, it replaced the facility in the old Mason Center (formerly Central Elementary School), which itself replaced the gymnastics facility in the old Colorado National Guard Armory Building between the Durango Community Recreation Center and Main Avenue (now housing the Boys and Girls Club) in space the County leased to the private Gold Rush Gymnastics entity.
- 2017/2018 “winter”: Record-setting lack of precipitation. According to a [U.S. Geological Survey gauge station](#) that has 107 years of water level data, the flow rate of the Animas River through Durango was at record lows almost daily. The dismally low flows were tied to drought conditions that plagued Southwest Colorado that winter. Dry winter weather brought less than half of the normal snow pack to the area. The United States Drought Monitor at <http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/> on 4/19/2018 highlighted the Four Corners region and a swath of the portions where Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico adjoin as the highest rating, Exceptional Drought, noting that “Due to deteriorating

agricultural and hydrological conditions, exceptional drought (D4) was expanded in the Four Corners region.”

- 2018 Jan.: City Council began to consider ways to address continuing and growing problems of homelessness in Durango, and also problems with panhandling downtown. Pressure and threats of lawsuits from the ACLU prompted the Council to adopt different approaches than it had used in the past, back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- 2018 Jan. 16: City Council approved a Housing Plan to encourage developers to build more housing in town to help meet the demand.
- 2018 Feb.-on: The City of Durango and the Business Improvement District installed hundreds of new lights downtown and work with LPEA to replace 135 lights with high-efficiency LED bulbs.
- 2018 Feb. 20: City Council approved the annexation of Lake Nighthorse--a step toward opening the area on April 1, 2018. (For an operational history of this reservoir, read chapter 21, pages 403 ff.)
- 2018 Apr. 24: The City revised its sign code to make its regulations content neutral following a Supreme Court ruling upholding the First Amendment pertaining to freedom of speech (approved by Council on 2/19/2019 and modified on 4/2/2019).
- 2018 May 22: City Council heard a presentation of a conceptual plan for Ewing Mesa, which the City renamed as Durango Mesa, for a proposed athletic/sports field complex, music venue, outdoor events center and possible new La Plata County fairgrounds.
- 2018 June 1: The 416 Fire (thus named because it was the 416<sup>th</sup> San Juan National Forest fire dispatch received in 2018) was reported at 9:50 am by railroad buff Al Chione, whose home is near the narrow gauge railroad tracks 10 miles north of Durango in the Animas Valley. As was his custom, he had scanned the tracks and the surrounding mountains after the coal-powered Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge train had passed—and a “wisp of smoke” led him to the fire. Despite his quick action, the fire spread quickly, burning 1,100 acres that first day. Its column of smoke was soon so tall, firefighters were concerned it would collapse and spread the fire across to the east side of US Highway 550. By the fourth day, 416 federal firefighters from around the US were fighting it. By the 12th day, the US Forest Service closed the entire 1.8-million-acre San Juan National Forest for an indefinite time period for the first time since the forest was designated a national forest more than a hundred years before—due to the danger of the risk of human-caused fires. Some people questioned why the use of the steam locomotive had been allowed in such dry conditions, rather than using the railroad’s diesel engine. Providential steady but gentle rains on the 3rd weekend of the fire abetted the multi-million-dollar firefighting effort to quench it. By the time this wildfire was under control, more than a thousand emergency personnel had worked it. The firefighting equipment included one of the largest air tankers in the country. The fire, which burned more than 54,000 acres and cost more than \$30M to fight (with possibly at least that much in economic loss to the region) was contained and reduced to smoldering 40 days after it began. Hundreds of residents were evacuated, but no lives were lost, nor were any homes or structures destroyed by the fire, and the fire was deemed overall to have had long-term benefits for the forest environment.

2018 June 5: City Council repealed a City ordinance prohibiting residents facing a fine for low-level criminal offenses from requesting a jury trial—as a result of ACLU correspondence stating that City law violated the Colorado Constitution. (For more on the rights and responsibilities of citizens and of government, read chapter 4, pages 45-80.) Also, at this meeting Council reduced the amount of time residents may speak during the public comment section of the meetings, from 5 minutes to 3, and required citizens to sign in prior to giving public comment.

2018 July: Mudslides up to 6 feet deep in the North Animas Valley resulted after rainstorms on burned areas. Also, on July 27<sup>th</sup>, collapsing infrastructure at a sewer main above Santa Rita Park caused some sewage discharges, and snared traffic in south Durango for at least a week.

2018 Sept.: Southwest Colorado persisted more and more into exceptional drought. The Animas River registered its lowest flows ever recorded at a water-level gauge, operational for 107 years, where the River passes the Powerhouse Science Center in central Durango.

2019 Jan.: The City adopted a new campaign finance rule: political committees that raise money to support or oppose City ballot issues must report all amounts given and the source of each gift of more than \$20.

2019 Jan.: To date, the City had generated nearly a million dollars for supporting affordable housing, through fees paid by developers.

2019 Feb. 12: Council gave the go-ahead for the Durango-La Plata County Airport to buy a large neighboring property for \$3.9 million to facilitate future expansion of the air terminal.

2019 Feb. 19: Durango police officers began using body worn cameras.

2019 Feb. 22: Record-breaking snowfall welcomed in Durango.

2019 May: In Durango's first 140 years, the city limits expanded by a factor of 20, through annexation.

2019 Aug. 20: City Manager Ron LeBlanc announced his retirement, which took effect on October 1.

2019 Sept.: The City's 6-year-old \$500 apiece parking meters were being replaced by hundreds of upgraded less expensive meters.

2019 Oct. 15: Finance Director Julie Brown resigned. (For newspaper reporting on the end of her work with the City, see the *Durango Herald* articles dated 10/15, 19 and 22/ 2019, 11/19/2019, 4/10/2020, 7/8, 9, 14 and 28/2020, 8/16/2020, and 4/18/2021.)

2019 Dec. 4: Ribbon-cutting and grand opening of the completed new/rebuilt/expanded \$58M sewer treatment plant, named the Santa Rita Water Reclamation Facility.



- 2020 March 16: Several entities in Southwest Colorado joined in on declaring a public health emergency, due to worldwide alarms at the spread of the coronavirus from China. The City issued a stay-at-home advisory. Inexplicably, the public's initial response led to a scarcity of toilet paper. What was initially a 14-day pause to flatten the curve of COVID-19 infections became an enduring shutdown that impacted most aspects of life in the region and across the globe.
- 2020 May 5: City Council approved an Urban Renewal Authority to spur economic development and recovery in "blighted" areas of the city.
- 2021 Jan. 6: Durango reached a figure of \$820,000 in federal pass-through relief grants for businesses, using CARES Act funding released by the US Congress and signed by President Trump.
- 2021 Jan. 31: Due to the rising price of homes in Durango as people from urban areas bought them as an escape, Council began to consider a possible revision of the Fair Share ordinance affordable housing law passed in 2009. Durango had become a "Zoom town" (a reference to the online virtual meetings that virtually replaced face to face meetings since the spring of 2020).
- 2021 Feb. 23: The Animas River through Durango receded to a record low flow, as measured by the U.S. Geological Survey's water gauge behind the Powerhouse Science Center: 79.6 cubic feet per second, which was the lowest number in 110 years of data collection there.
- 2021 March 10: City Manager José Madrigal notified the City staff of his reorganization of the organization, with the stated goal of maintaining flexibility while promoting a team environment. The changes included grouping departments by similar functions, establishing Information Services and Media and Community Engagement as their own departments, doing away with the Assistant City Managers designation, assigning three of the directors to be managing directors of multiple departments newly grouped as Public Safety, Community Development, and Internal and Cultural Services, and re-establishing Public Works as a department that would include the former Utilities and Engineering departments.
- 2021 Nov. 16: City Council adopted Ordinance O-2021-24 approving the most sweeping changes in the City's organization in many decades, as shown on the 10/12/2021 organization chart the Ordinance referenced.
- 2021/2022: Between September of 2020 and March of 2022 the City experienced more changes in its organizational structure and its middle- and upper-level management leadership than it had experienced in the past century. Only one long-term director (Kevin Hall, of Planning and Community Development) remained in position. This, and the City's decision to set a default retention setting of two years for the automatic purging of its emails from Microsoft Outlook/Office 365, had significant impacts on the preservation and transmission of the corporate memory. There was also a notable loss in experience; the average age of those in mid- and top management dropped by 10-20 years, and most of the new hires had no prior association with the City.