Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to take a few minutes to read a statement I have prepared.

Later on our agenda will be a request to annex the proposed 8 acres into the city. This is being brought in front of the council on first reading. There will be no vote on it tonight, however, we will have a hearing on the request. If you want to stick around for it you are more than welcome. Once the hearing is opened to the public everyone will have a chance to be heard. You will have two minutes to share your thoughts. I ask that you please be respectful of one another.

As you all are aware, the Garden Court project that served as a catalyst for this request has been a topic of intense debate and scrutiny. It is no secret that opinions are divided, and emotions run high.

The truth is we are all in this together. We are friends. We are neighbors. We are a community and we all belong here.

I want to thank everyone in this building for being here and everyone online for tuning in. I want to thank everyone who called, texted, emailed, and messaged us. Civil discourse is always welcome as we decide, together, as a team what is best for our City. We are all interdependent of each other, what affects one of us – affects all of us.

I am going to explain my process of bringing projects, especially hot topics, forward to our elected and appointed officials who must make the ultimate decisions. The mayor does not get a vote, but as Mayor, I do have an obligation to put requests on the agenda to be considered.

My process is and will continue to be to get all the necessary information as soon as possible to those who will be voting on it. In this case that was the Council and Plan Commissioners. I know from my time as a councilman, that we didn’t always have much time before the meeting to adequately prepare. This process allows everyone more time to gain knowledge, hear from constituents, and investigate the project more fully.

When Garden Courts was ready to move forward and applied for re-zoning, as a mayor, I had an obligation to allow them to be on the agenda. We immediately shared details of the proposal and request with the Council and Plan Commission members so they could be prepared for their respective meetings. Information was also provided to residents and neighbors.

Unfortunately, some of that information was presented out of context and misinformation circulated rapidly on social media. Ladies and gentlemen, our social media platforms have the power of positive and negative impact. I repeat, I fully support freedom of speech and civil discourse, but it is our duty as elected officials to correct misinformation so that decisions are made based on facts.

Today’s vote against rezoning the property does not surprise me, as I didn’t think it would pass at this location. But I am extremely encouraged that we are having this conversation.

A Housing Impact Study is being conducted, faith- based groups are also meeting to assess and address the housing needs in Plymouth and Marshall County. And I belong to both. Please do not let this vote be the end of your housing concerns.

We do need to address the quality of life issues, not only at the hotels but across the city - we, as a Council, are in a unique position to review our ordinances and establish new ones if necessary. That process has already begun and will continue.

We do need to address the need for 1,300 perhaps more needed units of housing throughout Marshall County, as the preliminary Housing Matters report shows - I do want everyone to know that we are already engaged in discussions with all types of housing developers including the development of full market-rate housing.

For those who can work, we need to explore economic development opportunities to attract employers committed to paying a livable wage so that rentals and home ownership are not beyond financial reach.

We need your help, and we need your feedback. I challenge everyone who was for AND against this proposal to join us in our continued quest to ensure that every man, woman, and child has access to safe, affordable housing in Plymouth and Marshall County.

Please do not feel judged by anyone regarding your opinion for or against this location. There were powerful emotions expressed on both sides. Everyone who has expressed concerns against this project has also emphasized a desire to help resolve the housing issue.

 I want to apologize on behalf of anyone who has made you feel as though you lack empathy – no matter which outcome you wanted.

While there was a myriad of differences expressed during this process – we ALL agreed that every child deserves a happy, healthy home. I believe that Plymouth and Marshall County have what it takes to make that happen.

What is abundantly clear to me is that every one of us cares very much about each other and our community and with that I thank you for showing up and I invite you to join us in our continued efforts to resolve our housing issue on every level here in Plymouth and Marshall County.