

## THE SOUL OF THE CITY

My friends, for the past 8 years, I have happily reported to you that the state of our city is sound. This year, I want to go a step further and let you know that due to the City of Fayetteville's economic prosperity, smart growth, ability to continue new infrastructure projects, and the increasing diversity of our people and workforce, the state of our city is **strong**, stronger than it has ever been before.

We have had a steady climb over these years to create the economic and social underpinnings that make our city great. We have learned which paths to take to keep our bold dreams alive as we strive for all of us to thrive and prosper together.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson explains in his essay, *The Over-Soul*, "We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are the shining parts, is the soul." The state of the city is about the soul of the city, this unique and eclectic community that has

chosen to live together in one of the most beautiful places on earth.

It is because of our collective efforts that we have built this purposeful city and it will be through this soul of our community that we will keep it moving forward.

My friends, I will remind you again about the unique place that we call home and the soul of our community, a community whose strategies have historically and will always survive uncertainties and gain strength through adversity. In our world, it still seems that we are living in the best of times --- there is so much more opportunity that awaits us.

We will keep that faith, stay strong together and continue to progress with the principles that have defined our culture, despite - or more importantly - **because** of what may happen outside of the perimeters beyond our control. It will be our priority to maintain our local control to keep our momentum moving in a progressive and positive direction.

Tonight, I will spend only a few moments reflecting on the City of Fayetteville's 2016 accomplishments and then I want to elaborate about our objectives for 2017 and beyond.

Our competitive advantage in 2017 stems from the advantage of our current position and our unique talents -- combined with unwavering conviction.

We are fortunate to have the best city staff who make this city function like a well-oiled machine; we are fortunate to have an abundance of input from a very active citizenry, one who is not afraid to vote to spend their tax dollars wisely; and we are very fortunate to have a City Council who are each committed to moving this city forward.

The City Attorney's Office continues to provide sound legal and advisory services to the City Council, the Mayor, and the various operating departments and divisions within the City.

The City Clerk's Office continues to be a great source of information and record keeping for both the general public and city staff.

What did we actually do in this city to achieve our successes? We had a vision for the infrastructure and we built it over years and years with balanced budgets! We built:

- The Van Asche Extension.
- Renovation of the Walton Arts Center.
- Kessler Mountain Regional Park, Phase I.
- Restoration of Historic Bridges at Maple and Lafayette.
- Ruppel Road from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Persimmon Street.

We dream big in this city. We dreamed of preserving Kessler Mountain and building a Regional Park that could compete with the best in the state and within the multi-state region. And we built it!

We dreamed of an arts facility that could help bring the type of programming here that attracts talent to the area, has a positive impact on quality of life, and introduces the arts and creativity to support a well-rounded cultural experience. And we built it!

We dreamed of an expansion to the world-class Blair Library and the citizens of this city decided they wanted to build that too!

Dreams of expanding Fayetteville Public Library became reality this year when the community passed a millage supporting library operations and the construction of an additional 80,000 square feet.

We've been able to build an enormous amount of infrastructure in the past few years due to our strong sales tax revenue and smart money management. 2016 was a strong year for economic activity in Fayetteville.

We have several Master Plans in the works that will guide us as we set our goals to build new infrastructure:

The Fayetteville Mobility Plan, the Recycling and Trash Master Plan, the Economic Development Plan and will have plans to update the City Plan 2030. Also, I plan to have a Strategic Planning session with the City Council during the first quarter of this year.

## 2016 FIRE AND PUBLIC SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

As you will recall in the 2016 budget, due to increases in population, service area, calls for service, and response times, we asked for increases in staffing for the Fayetteville Fire and Police Departments. I want to take this time to report on the impact this strategic decision has made on our city.

With the addition of a Rescue Engine Fire Company on April 11, 2016, the Fayetteville Fire Department now deploys 10 active fire

companies. This action, along with a few other improvements, has resulted in a 3.2% improvement in response times.

Also, the Police Department added 7 new officers. These officers were hired, trained and placed on patrol in the late 3rd quarter of 2016. Year-to-date results indicate priority one response call times have improved and are down 7.6% from 2016.

Recruitment with a focus on diversity and training of personnel will continue to be a top priority for the police and fire departments.

- Fire will pursue a # 1 ISO rating from the Insurance Services Office, which can mean lower insurance premiums for homeowners and businesses.
- The Police Department will continue with proactive steps of reaching out to business, civic, public, and faith based organizations to build relationships.

There is nothing more important for our city's future stability and our abilities to keep our freedoms and enjoy our diverse culture than the work we do to keep our people out of harm's way. I know our citizens appreciate these efforts.

I am deeply proud of the service of the individuals in our Fire and Police Departments and I know our City Council feels the same way.

While we remain very proud of all the accomplishments of 2016, I want to take a moment to close out the old and look to the New Year.

What do we have to look forward to in 2017? My priorities are in these five main areas:

- Implementing the Fayetteville First Economic Development Plan.
- Paying Down the Debt.
- Infrastructure Planning.
- Engaging in a Lean Government Review.



- Improving Operations and Technologies.

## **Implementing the Fayetteville First Economic Development Plan**

The Fayetteville First Plan provides several calls to action and strategic focus areas. The City has contracted with Startup Junkie Consulting and the Chamber of Commerce and is currently in the hiring process for a Director of Economic Vitality, an internal city staff position.

A focus area is to further enhance the arts and cultural environment; pursue grant funding and encourage public art installations; and support the cultural arts district development. Some specific action steps are to:

- Extend support to the Fayetteville Library, Walton Arts Center and Theatre Squared, all within a single Cultural Arts District.
- Pursue grant funding and opportunities.
- Work with the University and community to exhibit public art in more locations.

- Work with artists to increase public art projects around city facilities.
- Boost efforts to ensure high-value artisan food and craft beverage companies flourish in Fayetteville.

Another focus of the economic development plan is to support, retain and attract business; improve the business perception; and meet property needs of targeted business sectors. To meet this goal, the Chamber of Commerce will:

- Maintain and communicate with business sectors when property, equipment or staffing needs are made known.
- Create an inventory and analysis of the area's retail base and gaps, identifying trends and targets for growth opportunity.
- Focus efforts on legacy industry, regional headquarters, and our entrepreneurs and startups.

- Continue its Employee Retention and Expansion program.

Additionally, city staff will:

- Continue regular communication sessions related to development, construction and permitting review, process improvements and development challenges.
- Improve customer service with a new position in Development Services devoted to Customer Service interaction.
- Conduct a Lean Government Process in Development Services focused on process improvement.
- Research and develop incentive opportunities, parameters and funding mechanisms in targeted areas of interest.

There are many parallel activities included in our economic development plan, not the least of which is a focus on workforce development. We must ensure workforce talent is attracted, developed and retained. We have always had strong partnerships with the University of Arkansas and Fayetteville Public Schools and this city depends on those relationships.

The talent pool may be developed within the city or region through career education and counseling in secondary schools, recruited from higher education institutions, or drawn from an existing regional or global workforce. For many professions and employers, our workers may come from that population of new Americans, immigrants who are increasingly becoming a vital part of this state's overall economy. We will:

- Strengthen lines of communication with UAMS in its continued dialogue to grow in Fayetteville.

- Create a Welcoming City Plan focused on inclusion and integration of new Americans in Fayetteville.
- Work with Engage Northwest Arkansas and the Northwest Arkansas Council, on a Welcoming Region Plan.
- Develop the City as a role model in workforce strategies by establishing diversity as a key pillar to our talent management strategy, and development of leaders who reward high performance. A new compensation/classification salary study is forthcoming so that we can implement competitive salaries across all departments when financial conditions allow.

In the coming years, we will be highlighting Fayetteville as the ***Startup City of the South***.

Our focus will be to embrace our entrepreneurial system and support startup companies and the culture to retain them long-term; increase high tech job growth through University partnerships; create innovative

spaces and programs to support entrepreneurs; and expand entrepreneurship education programs. To meet this goal, the City will:

- Create the Fayetteville Innovation Council to establish a collaborative environment that addresses the needs and challenges of entrepreneurs and innovators in Fayetteville.
- Anyone interested in entrepreneurship will be able to find notable successes, best practices, entrepreneurial initiatives, a calendar of meet-ups, events and educational mentoring opportunities, and technology support networks on a new ***Startup City of the South*** web site.
- Our city needs space for entrepreneurial programming and for creative ideas to occur. This year, we will formally launch and sustain CenterSpace as a free co-working and entrepreneurship space open to the public located on the 2nd floor of the East Square Plaza.

- Over the next year, a recently formed Millennial Advisory Panel will meet monthly to recommend policies, education and development practices to create an environment that attracts the new millennial worker and/ or business owners.

Also, we will continue to focus on improving the outstanding lifestyle quality in Fayetteville; support attainable housing development; enhance and support public transportation; energize and support downtown Fayetteville; explore redevelopment opportunities; and seek development of a hotel/conference center. To meet this goal, the City will:

- Continue to explore affordable housing developments.
- Continue to support public transit, using the Mobility Plan and participating in a region-wide Transit Development Plan to



- understand the needs, and improvements that can be made to public transit, as well as what funding needs and sources are sustainable.
- Continue to install wayfinding signage throughout the City to assist visitors.
  - Create a downtown business association that works to support all of the properties and interests in the downtown area.
  - Create a marketing campaign aimed at the startup culture to energize the Fayetteville environment.
  - Invest funds to complete pedestrian improvements along 71b and identify potential redevelopment opportunities.
  - Conduct research to understand the capacity level and need for a hotel/ conference center located in Fayetteville.

We will focus on enhancing Fayetteville's public profile as a dynamic business location; build the Fayetteville First brand; pursue

recognition in key rankings; and increase publicity about key economic development efforts. To meet these goals, the City will:

- Release a new, redesigned website in the first quarter of the year, improving navigation by prioritizing content based on analytics that reflect our citizens' most frequently used online services.
- Our analytics report for 2016 indicates nearly 2 million page views by almost 500,000 users, of whom nearly 60% come from outside Fayetteville. The top 4 of those outside users are in Dallas, Springdale, Oklahoma City, and Bentonville. Nearly half of our viewers use a mobile device or tablet, which makes our efforts for a mobile friendly web site increasingly important.
- A new brand, streamlined graphics and local photography will bring a clean design for enhanced readability and a sense of place to identify Fayetteville First. Also, the new site is designed with accessibility standards, which will

- optimize the web experience for people with disabilities.
- Create a new Fayetteville First marketing video that highlights the strategic focus areas of the Economic Development Plan.
  - Develop placemaking and marketing materials to showcase Fayetteville's quality of life.
  - Research options to create an open data, financial transparency portal which will focus on providing the public access to financial and operational data.

Finally, we will organize and capitalize on Fayetteville's sustainable environment; promote a plan for the future of sustainability; and support the local food economy.

The City of Fayetteville is focused on becoming a community of livable neighborhoods that meets present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

We will focus on economic, environmental, and social policy development and project management and stay involved with local, state and national organizations on environmental protection, transportation, green building and energy issues. The city will:

- Use feedback from the recent Community Survey to guide quality of life initiatives and to lay foundational work for a 2018 STAR Re-certification with a goal of becoming a 4-STAR Community.
- Develop a community energy action plan.
- Designate Fayetteville as a Solar Friendly Community so that residents and businesses can install solar more easily on their property.
- Explore the potential for expanding the city's successful investment in the Ozarks Natural Energy Solar Array, that investment generated 54,000 Kilowatt hours of renewable electricity per year.

- Encourage the City Council to adopt expanded recycling programs for organics, composting, small multifamily units, and construction debris opportunities.
- Work with the University of Arkansas and other stakeholders to develop and implement a community bike share program, and install bike racks at public buildings where needed.
- Explore Employee Sustainability Initiatives.
- Support a Local Food Economy Working Group.
- Support creation of a regional food hub and explore potential for local food production and consumption.

## **Pay Down the Debt**

For those of you who may not remember, in 2006, voters approved a bond issue for road and trail improvements. Those revenues, combined with Federal, State and private contributions, funded the major infrastructure projects I previously mentioned. Completion of all bond projects is expected by the end of 2018.

If sales taxes continue to hold strong, it is my plan to pay down the City's debt so that we can develop a new capital package to take to the citizens to help us sustain the quality of life that has made this community the 3<sup>rd</sup> best place to live in the United States. These new projects will be prioritized through strategic planning with City Council members and citizen engagement

This comprehensive plan would be presented to the voters when the current sales tax bonds are paid off. The current estimate for that payoff is the third quarter of 2019.

Over the years, citizens have mentioned some large capital projects that will be under consideration.

We, of course, will also bring forth recommended transportation projects from the Mobility Plan.

## **Infrastructure Planning**

To sustain our progress in infrastructure development, we will focus on items identified in our Master Plans.

I have been working on building this city's infrastructure from my time on City Council on the Street Committee through my two terms as Mayor and I'm going to continue to add to that infrastructure in my third term.

### PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE FAYETTEVILLE MOBILITY PLAN

As we wrap up the major transportation projects this city outlined through previous master planning efforts, we look forward to the Fayetteville Mobility Plan, a transportation master plan that will outline a blueprint for long-term, multimodal mobility in the City of Fayetteville. The Plan will establish mechanisms for funding local and regional projects, with the latter feeding into the Northwest Arkansas Regional Transportation Plan.



Some specific areas of interest for me in the near term are to:

- Continue the extension of Ruppel Road. Add signals to the intersection of Ruppel at Martin Luther King, Jr. and Persimmon.
- Begin construction for the next phase of the Ruppel Road improvements from Starry Night View to Mount Comfort, including straightening, intersection alignment and a traffic light.
- Add the leg of Ruppel to Howard Nickell Road and complete the arterial loop!
- Bring a new list of projects forward, including ones to enhance our east-west connectivity, impact mobility and alternative transportation, and grow our multimodal network system of roads, trails and sidewalks.

Our goal with the Mobility Plan is to constantly improve driving, walking, biking, public transit, and parking in Fayetteville.

We also realize that to make our city's mobility network more accessible to all citizens, we need to do a better job of addressing public transit amenities. As part of our economic development strategic plan, we depend on the growth of alternative transportation to provide the mobility choices the emerging workforce expects.

Transit provides commutes to distant job sites and workforce training opportunities to fill the increasing number of jobs available. We will continue to work with the University and ORT to improve the city's transit infrastructure.

Our mobility plan also offers an analysis of the city's parking strategies and we anticipate changes to be implemented to:

- Streamline parking rates and time limits to create a unified parking approach in the Entertainment and Downtown Districts and create uniform signage.

- Support strategies that provide greater pedestrian access by improving sidewalks and lighting in specific areas.
- Support the City's Downtown Master Plan by working with area businesses to ensure parking requirements are successful.

For our roads and trails network, staff has provided a list of projects already on the books that are coming within the year. They are:

- The Sain / Vantage Connection will provide an alternative route to the Joyce and College intersection.
- Old Wire from Mission to Ash and from Ash to Stanton will be improved with bike lanes, curb and gutter, sidewalk and trail.
- Design a roundabout to replace the existing 4 -way stop at 15<sup>th</sup> Street and Razorback Road intersection.

- Include overlay and widening, and signalization at Razorback Road and Maple Street.
- Highway 112 Improvements from Poplar to Van Asche.
- College Avenue Rezoning to support form-based walkable re-development and sidewalk enhancements between Maple and North.

Some major trail improvements will be completed in 2017, the first two of which provide major expansions west of I49 and connectivity for alternative transportation routes:

- The leg of Clabber Creek Trail east from Ruppel Road to Holcomb School is being completed. In 2019 the Clabber Creek Trail is planned to extend to the east from Holcomb school to the Razorback Regional Greenway.
- The Cato Springs Trail will extend south to the new Kessler Mountain Regional

Park. The new Niokaska Creek Trail will connect along the east side of Old Wire Road through Gulley Park to Mud Creek Trail at Old Missouri Road.

- We will also develop and implement protected on-street bicycle connections.

This connectivity among our greenspaces will make our parks even more attractive.

As I previously mentioned, if we are able to pay down the debt as I expect, I also plan to move forward aggressively with the next phases of the Kessler Mountain Regional Park.

The opening of this park signifies why building infrastructure and preserving open and green space is a priority in this city.

We are extremely proud of the 400 acres of mountaintop preserved this year on the south side of town at the Kessler Mountain Regional Park. I will work to add to our inventory of preserved open spaces throughout my tenure with the city.

## DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

We will focus on three main things in building the City's digital infrastructure:

- Broadband Connectivity to city-owned facilities and public parks to improve city staff's productivity and establish more wi-fi hot spots around the city.
- Policy Development to pave the way for "smart city" design.
- A Digital Inclusion Plan to close the homework gap and provide affordable internet access to all.

The city will solicit proposals for internet access, and building network connectivity through an RFP process.

## SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

We will continue to support diversity and equal rights for all residents.

Specifically, I have several new goals this year to address these main areas:

The Welcoming Fayetteville Plan will ensure that intentional efforts are made to further the City's support of its diverse community.

We will develop and work on adoption of a plan that improves equitable services and access for Fayetteville citizens.

Housing Assistance: Through the Community Development Block Grant we will invest \$500,000 back into the community to assist low to moderate income residents.

In the Transportation Program, we will assist an estimated 110 elderly and disabled residents with taxi coupons, and will assist an estimated 350 individuals with transit passes and qualified individuals with paratransit passes.

Through the Hearth Program, our goal is to house 100 homeless individuals as we did last year.

Ranger's Pantry will continue to assist citizens experiencing financial hardships with pet food.

Strategies for Affordable Housing: The City will invest up to \$1,000,000 in the Houses at Willow Bend, an attainable housing development in the Walker Park Neighborhood and continue to explore other opportunities for attainable housing.

Digital Inclusion: I believe in the necessity of broadband access for all but I know there is a



balancing act we face. The more tech-focused the city becomes, the more stark the divide is between the tech-savvy, and those left behind.

We must focus on providing access for everyone so that high speed broadband becomes a leveler across our community.

We will explore options to increase the availability of competitive broadband internet to attain one gig of bandwidth across the city at affordable prices.

We will be forming a Task Force to develop the City's Broadband Plan. I am happy to work in partnership with the Fayetteville Public Library on this component.

The City's Digital Inclusion Plan will take a comprehensive approach to community connectivity and will invite community members to take stock of their current broadband assets, access, and applications

and identify opportunities to the next steps for increasing access, adoption and use.

## **Engaging in a Lean Government Review**

I asked all departments involved in planning, development, and building permitting processes to peel back the covers and take a look at their processes and procedures from customers' point of view.

Development Services will focus on process improvement and will assist developers by providing resources such as:

- A manual on small lot single family home design.
- Flowchart detailing the development processes.
- Zoning brochure to enhance understanding of various zoning districts in the city.
- Continued community meetings.

- The use of Tactical Urbanism to implement quick, low-cost intersection or street improvements.

In Planning, we will make available online submittal of mechanical, electrical, plumbing and gas permits and online payment of re-inspection fees.

The Utilities department will streamline the internal plans review process between City Engineering and Water, Sewer, Metering & Backflow processes.

## **Improving Operations and Technologies**

All departments and divisions will streamline workflow and processes, creating better customer service and efficiency in all City interactions.

We will implement additional technology improvements to enhance customer and city interaction. Several Departments are migrating to handheld devices for field work and maintenance work.

Our Parking Management Division will expand payment options.

The Parks and Recreation Department will add software to increase the department efficiency. Planning will install large display touch - screens for customer interaction with zoning, maps, code searches, business and other license registration, and citizen review of project files.

Utilities will implement an integrated system of smart meters, communications networks, and data management systems.

Information Technology will implement the final phase of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software that will significantly upgrade utility bill paying options including real time balance information.



## **Closing**

In closing, my vision for this city is to remain a top tier city across the country, a city that has a vibrant business economy that welcomes millennials, next generation workers, immigrants and new Americans and provides an environment where existing citizens and newcomers can thrive.

We will continue to maintain our quality of life through smart growth and focus our efforts in making Fayetteville a progressive city for economic development and one that is responsive to our citizens' needs.

And, as always, we will make every effort to retain Fayetteville's unique, eclectic identity and culture as we call upon our community to strengthen the connections between our people and the places to create our collective vision for the future.



We will continue to reject policies that treat segments of our community differently.

To quote John F. Kennedy:

“Our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.”

We are all part owners together in this city regardless of the color of our skin, the religion we practice or who we love and understanding these principles will help us all understand what makes us strong. We will find opportunities and security for all of our citizens. We will maintain the soul of our community and make it stronger every day through deliberate and intentional actions.

With the great confidence voters displayed for me and this administration in the last election comes an equal responsibility and humility to uphold the principles of our community, I

believe our commitment to these principles is validated and shared and I will do everything in my power to maintain them.