



City Of Wichita Web Document

Mayor's 2010 State of the City Address

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Members of the Wichita City Council, distinguished guests, family, friends and residents - thank you for attending the 2010 State of the City Address. It is my honor to speak to you this evening and to serve as your Mayor.

Tonight, I represent a team of dedicated elected officials who are responsible for moving this city forward. I'd like to recognize Vice Mayor Jim Skelton and City Council members Sue Schlapp, Lavonta Williams, Jeff Longwell, Paul Gray and Janet Miller who joined us this April. Janet replaced Sharon Fearey and, on behalf of the Council, I want to thank Sharon for the eight years she dedicated to serving our community. Even though each council member serves a district, we all work together to improve the lives of Wichita residents.

In 2009, we also worked hand in hand with the community to make Wichita better.

- We used our best economic development tools to help create and retain jobs;
- We helped feed hungry children;
- We reached out to shelter the homeless and stabilize those out of work;
- We made downtown revitalization a top priority;
- And, with the help of City Manager Robert Layton, we made City government more responsive and efficient.

Those accomplishments were essential this past year when many Wichitans faced difficulties. Our residents have encountered a global economic crisis, a historic national recession and thousands of local layoffs. But we see opportunities for growth and prosperity in those obstacles.

Our future success depends on our willingness and ability to work together, guided by a belief that we can accomplish more united than divided. That belief has served us well. During a time of great challenges, we have come together in inspirational ways.

One example was last April when a team of local churches boasting 3,000 people, known as Love Wichita, came together to work on nearly 200 volunteer projects across the city. They cut overgrown weeds and bushes, picked up trash, painted houses, repaired roofs and cleaned gutters. They helped an 84-year-old widower who lived alone. He had been robbed four times the previous year. But the volunteers made his home safer by providing their labor and supplies. The volunteers are coming back bigger and better this April - 36 churches have committed so far. I know that through the will, work ethic and generosity of Wichitans, we will stay strong, stand together and overcome today's challenges.

(GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY)

First, I want to talk to you about what this Council is doing to make government more accountable. We've increased community input of our budget process by engaging the public earlier and more often.

We began a review process last year with the assistance of the Wichita State Hugo Wall School, which helped us refine our vision for Wichita's financial future. It helped us identify the core and essential services, knowing that we had to make very difficult decisions to balance the budget.

This Council believes public safety; a strong infrastructure; and responsible economic development must remain top priorities.

In 2009, the City of Wichita, just like many governments and many businesses, had to cut its expenditures to match its revenues. By the end of the year, the City had cut its budget 6.5 million dollars and had to prepare for the challenges of the 2010 budget.

To help make hard decisions, the City invited the public to comment on the proposed budget. We used that feedback to make budget cuts that included:

- Moving various services, like printing and park mowing, into the private sector;
- Merging departments to allow for cross-utilization of employees and;
- Eliminating some positions that did not affect the delivery of essential services.

These tough steps will help as we manage expected declining revenues for the next few years. Despite the budget shortfalls last year, we were still able to keep our property taxes among the lowest in the state.

Another way we plan to become more accountable is through better customer service. For example, I have asked for a new on-line system that will allow residents to report and track problems like potholes and graffiti. We want to hear from you.

(ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/JOB CREATION)

Next, I want to talk about our work on the economic development front. We must enhance our business efforts while protecting return-on-investment for taxpayers. To that end, we made major policy changes. Those changes will allow us to better balance accountability and job-creation with private investment while considering current economic conditions.

We have changed other economic development policies, such as the façade program, again with a focus on return-on-investment. We now require greater private investment and demonstration of a significant funding gap in order to qualify for the program's special assessments.

Additionally, through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we extended the façade improvement concept to smaller, neighborhood businesses.

I want to thank our economic development partners. The city worked closely with Sedgwick County, the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition and the State of Kansas to create incentive packages that make Wichita an attractive place to either grow or relocate a business.

While the GWEDC partners retained 341 jobs and created 315 new ones this past year, we know we need to do more. We need to update our recruitment data and reassess the region's competitiveness. This council supports GWEDC's hiring of a consultant:

- to review the community's current workforce, business and economic conditions;
- to develop a strategy for leveraging and attracting resources;
- to update the list of target industries;
- and to report on the success of other communities.

Throughout this last year, I have also participated in regular conference calls with Vice President Biden and others in the Obama administration.

We talked about the need for federal dollars for job training and job creation. I will continue those discussions.

I am being heard on these issues and will continue to press our case. We must put our workers back to work.

I've also invited the President to Wichita to see firsthand the skill of our aviation workers and the quality of the planes they produce. Our plea to the president caught the attention of media from around the world. We are now on Washington's radar.

Our job creation and economic development efforts are also focused downtown. This year we're moving forward with a new downtown master plan. The City Council joined the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation and local businesses to hire an expert consultant team. That team will produce a plan that will capitalize on the promise of downtown.

Studies have shown that cities with vibrant downtowns enjoy a 10 to 15 dollar return on every public dollar spent. The private money leads to a "critical mass," where development downtown becomes unstoppable – the private sector investment brings more housing and more people, which brings more businesses to support that population.

The payoff is:

- an expanded tax base,
- new jobs,
- additional tourism revenue
- and greater pride in an area that helps shape the image of our city.

I want to thank those who contributed to the development of a new downtown master plan. We know that a revitalized downtown can attract more companies. Airbus is expanding here now, pledging 80 well-paying engineering jobs. Thank you, Airbus, for supporting downtown and our community. Your local operations are a prized part of our world-class aviation companies.

The City has also renewed its partnership with WaterWalk. The downtown waterfront development is re-focusing its efforts to attract retail, office and entertainment tenants. We moved forward with plans to create a new central library. It will be a dynamic downtown destination - a central gathering place that will offer the latest in technologies, first-class amenities and great service. It will be a place for kids, students, families and lifelong learners.

Just today, the City Council approved 22 million dollars in improvements for Century II. The upgrades will benefit our residents and the performing arts community. They will also attract more conventions to the core area.

We know we can create great destinations downtown. The latest example is the recent opening of Intrust Bank Arena.

Due to our partnerships, we addressed infrastructure improvements and concerns about downtown parking. Parking is available through 4 thousand city-owned and managed parking spaces close to the arena.

Even in difficult economic times, residents recognize we must rebuild and re-energize our downtown if we are going to be a premier community.

(COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS)

As we move into 2010, I want to emphasize the importance of community and regional partnerships. This Council is committed to working harder and smarter with other governments and community organizations to overcome challenges and fulfill common goals. Partnerships are critical in a time of limited resources, so we are working hard with State legislators in this dire budget year.

In our legislative agenda:

- We're seeking reauthorization of Affordable Airfares to help our travelers and businesses.
- We're seeking continued state money to support the National Institute for Aviation Research at Wichita State University and for technical training at the National Center for Aviation Training at Jabara. There is an upturn ahead in aviation manufacturing and we need a trained and ready workforce.
- We're seeking funds for the city's aquifer recharge project. It will provide our children, grandchildren and companies with clean drinking water for years to come.

I'm also pleased that our community partnerships have led to a big success. We secured the National Junior Olympics Track and Field Championships. The event is coming to Wichita in June of 2011. It will pump an estimated 17 million dollars into our local economy over six days.

Our partnerships also led to thoughtful compromise, when we worked together to find a location for the Vietnam Memorial in Veterans Park. The talks were difficult, but we learned lessons about how to come together.

(STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS/QUALITY OF LIFE)

As we commit to creating jobs and caring for one another, I am especially proud of our work this past year to build strong neighborhoods and improve our quality of life. That means among other things - a commitment to a sound infrastructure.

Here is a brief video which highlights the City's infrastructure improvements.

(VOICEOVER/VIDEO)

The City is working to improve drainage and prevent flooding.

I want to thank the Congressional delegation for securing more than a half million dollars in federal grant money for the Wichita area drainage master plan. It will help us better protect neighborhoods throughout the area.

We also created new drainage that will significantly lower flood risks in west Wichita through the Cowskin Creek project. The project is made possible through a public-private partnership involving our Congressional delegation and federal officials.

In addition, our growth to the north demands we reassess drainage and runoff patterns to better prevent flooding in that area of town.

Those infrastructure improvements are just a few examples of how the City Council's teamwork has benefitted the community.

Now let's take a look at a highlight in each Council district.

- In District I, we initiated the widening of 13th Street and a streetscape project along South Broadway, which includes two gateways featuring landscaping and benches among other improvements.
- In District II, we finished the expansion of the Kellogg and Rock Road intersection, which reduces traffic congestion at one of the city's busiest intersections.
- District III will benefit from the work that is now underway at I-135 & 47th Street South. It will rebuild this key interchange and the busy intersection at 47th and Broadway.
- In District IV, we began long-awaited traffic and drainage improvements with the reconstruction of West Street from Maple to Central. Soon cars will no longer flood and stall on West Street during a heavy rain.
- District V is moving forward with an innovative idea that constructs a flyover at interstate I-235 near 13th Street. This will reduce congestion in West Wichita and provide a much-needed alternative for

crossing the floodway.

- And in District VI, we broke ground on the Nomar International Marketplace. The outdoor market will feature a multi-use plaza, office space and a covered patio. It will bring multicultural goods to a richly diverse and deserving area.

(VIDEO ENDS)

As you can see, we have some exciting projects that we can be proud of.

When it comes to strong neighborhoods we are also focusing on reducing violence and protecting property. We've taken action in several ways.

- We opened three new fire stations last year, which helped reduce response times.
- We held 85 neighborhood cleanups, resolved 51 building condemnation cases and responded to 78 emergency requests to secure open buildings.
- The Wichita Police Department started a new series of street-level, neighborhood meetings to connect with residents. They're called IMPACT meetings. They allow police officers to share information about major crimes and hear directly from residents. In 2009, there were 66 meetings involving more than 1,200 people.
- WPD helped coordinate Mayor's Town Hall meetings with the Asian and Hispanic communities. The City Council, City staff and other organizations helped answer questions and address concerns about government operations. We will continue the town hall meetings in 2010.
- WPD also partnered with other law enforcement agencies to combat gang-related crimes through RICO, the anti-racketeering law. Due to this ongoing effort, another 13 defendants were convicted in 2009.
- The City's commitment to public safety was further strengthened by opening two Community Police offices: one on East 13th Street, the other on West Central.
- WPD added 35 new Neighborhood Watch programs.
- And WPD - along with other City departments - worked with residents and business owners to revise a city law to make the areas around nightclubs safer.

(HEALTHY COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY)

I also want to talk tonight about our goals to be a healthy and compassionate community. To promote personal health, we held the first Mayor's 5K walk/run in October. This year I hope more of you will join us for the second Mayor's 5K walk/run. It will be part of the brand new Prairie Fire Marathon starting at Intrust Bank Arena.

I'll soon be announcing more community health events with the help of the Park and Recreation department and City partners.

When it comes to our goals of becoming a more compassionate community, it's important that we support the most vulnerable in our community.

That's why I've supported the No More Hungry Kids campaign. The campaign provides backpacks of food for Wichita public school students – kids who would otherwise go to bed hungry.

So far we've found sponsors for 27 of the 63 schools. Together we've raised 46 thousand dollars. That includes donations from students and staff at Southeast High School. They raised 19 hundred dollars to feed kids at their neighboring Caldwell Elementary School.

I am asking each of you tonight to donate to the campaign. Information on how you can help is on the back of your program.

This Council, community and church leaders support the work of the Lord's Diner. We have been publicly

discussing the best ways to feed more people. We must continue our work to help feed the hungry.

We're also working to help the homeless. In January of 2009, volunteers counted 384 homeless people in Sedgwick County. This past year HUD gave us more than 2 million dollars. The money will be used to help them get into temporary housing and to help pay their bills. No one should have to sleep on streets, under bridges or in abandoned areas. The City is still working in partnership with Sedgwick County and United Way to manage Housing First.

The program places chronically homeless people in permanent housing. At the end of 2009, 55 homeless people found homes.

We also have an obligation to care for and assist those who are out of work as our economic downturn continues and our unemployment rises.

We have been collaborating with United Way and various partners to support the Laid-off Workers Center. To date, the center has provided nearly a half million dollars in assistance to cover housing costs, utilities and other bills.

The young people on the Mayor's Youth Council are helping make a difference. Over the past two years, they have collected shoes to benefit the needy. They're hosting a leadership summit in April to help other young people in our city make a contribution to the community. I'm proud they're giving back and serving others.

(CONCLUSION)

In closing, yes, 2009 was a year of challenges, but tonight I'm looking forward to the opportunities ahead. Together:

- We will look for better ways to diversify our economy and create jobs, especially in the areas of information technology, composites and health care;
- We will work to revitalize downtown through further community engagement and the downtown master plan;
- We will keep improving the ways that government engages residents, delivers services and measures success;
- We will help those who are out of work or less fortunate;
- We will build on improvements to prevent flooding, reduce traffic and keep neighborhoods safe.

I'm calling on you tonight. There are people in our community –your family, your friends, your neighbors who are out of work. They're worried about providing for their families, losing their homes and finding another job. We can all find ways to help.

Over the holidays, I learned of a Kansas family that does not exchange gifts. Instead the parents give money to their children who must donate the cash to a favorite charity. One of the kids delivered a thousand dollar check to the No More Hungry Kids campaign.

Please reach out to others:

- Take a meal to a struggling family;
- Donate food or clothing to a distribution center;
- Run errands for someone in need;
- Give money to a friend – money you don't expect back;
- Do something for those who need help.

Thank you for what you have already done to make this city a caring community and a 2009 All-America City. Thank you also for the support you've shown me and the City Council. Together, we will overcome our current

challenges and share in the prosperity of tomorrow.

Good night and God bless Wichita.

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