



# ***CITY NEWS***

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## **Mayor Brewer's State of the City Address**

Good evening,

Distinguished members of the Wichita City Council, honored guests, and my fellow Wichitans--thank you for attending the 2014 State of the City Address.

I'd like to thank the City Council Members for their commitment and service to the residents of Wichita. I also want to acknowledge a special guest:

- Colonel Joel D. Jackson, Commander of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Air Refueling Wing at McConnell Air Force Base;

Tonight, I'm going to highlight some 2013 accomplishments, share some key initiatives and discuss significant challenges we face together.

### **Call to action 2013**

You may recall during last year's State of the City I asked you to get into the game and help us identify community priorities - for now and the future.

You responded through community surveys, public meetings, online discussions and social media town hall meetings.

Thank you, Wichita, for your time and your feedback.

But 2013 was only a beginning.

We still need to hear from you on the big issues that face our community.

When we work together, our history shows we can do great things.

### **Growing tax base and economy**

Our community partnerships have helped us overcome the challenges of the great recession – which brought layoffs to many sectors of our economy.

We've made significant progress.

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The economy is growing again.

For the past five years - the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition - has helped generate nearly 10,000 jobs and more than 400 million in capital investment.

Another good economic sign is our tax base has held steady and for the 20<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, the City was able to maintain a consistent mill levy rate.

We know that a stable and competitive tax rate attracts and retains Wichita businesses and jobs.

I would like to highlight a few public/private partnerships that are helping us create jobs.

Spirit Aerosystems continues to win new work and add jobs.

Triumph Aerostructures won a new contract with Viking Air, a Canadian aerospace manufacturer. Triumph will build the fuselage for the aircraft at its Wichita plant. This project will provide 100 new jobs.

The general aviation industry is vital to our community. And we're working hard to help it grow. Let me share what we're doing in China.

China is a developing market with many aviation needs. When the Chinese think about aviation – we want them to think about Wichita first.

That's why we are developing new partnerships through the global air capital program. We recently opened an office in Beijing to make sure we're ready to respond when they need planes and to explore trade opportunities. We are also working to develop a relationship with a second Chinese city.

The competition is stiff and, Wichita, we are getting into the game.

We must continue to diversify our economy.

Earlier this year the city teamed with the County and the State to bring the Starwood Hotels and Resorts call center to Wichita. The 900-person call center is the company's largest in North America. Wichita competed against Texas and Washington State to win this project.

Another exciting development is the construction of the K-96 interchange at Greenwich Road, which will start very soon as part of a \$90-million dollar commercial and tourism district. The City is working with developers and the State to build a multi-purpose athletic complex, where youth sports teams will compete in regional and national tournaments.

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This project will attract shoppers, visitors, young athletes and their families to Wichita. It is expected to inject millions of out-of-state dollars into our local economy.

Wichita is also creating jobs in other industries.

For example, Wesley Medical Center will invest approximately \$36 million over the next four years to remodel its Women and Children's Hospital, which will create jobs. Leading technologies composites is expanding and adding jobs. These are just a few of the major projects that occurred here last year.

I also want to remind you that the competition for our local businesses is fierce - on a regional and global level. So it's critical we continue to work with our county, state and business leaders. We will continue to use public dollars to create private jobs, preserve our local economy and support our workers and their families.

We will also continue to support our successful affordable airfares program. It has made flying out of Wichita attractive. In 2013, our airfares continued to drop – falling 3.6 percent according to the most recent figures. As a result, average fares in Wichita are lower than in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. The gap is also closing with Kansas City.

We celebrated a significant milestone at the airport in June as we welcomed Southwest Airlines to Wichita! We worked hard to bring Southwest to town and we need to keep them here in order to keep fares low. So when you make your corporate travel plans, please remember our community's commitment to supporting low-cost carriers.

Related to the airport, there's growing anticipation surrounding our new terminal. It's expected to open on schedule in March of 2015. Later this year, we will open the new four-story parking and rental car facility that will be located near the new terminal.

## **Downtown redevelopment**

Our downtown is also gaining momentum. The master plan is creating more destinations, more jobs and more housing.

It's been exciting to watch the development of block one. Downtown leaders are working with developers and the city to renovate an entire city block in the heart of downtown.

The project includes:

- The newly remodeled 117-room Ambassador Hotel,
- A new 270-space public parking garage financed by the City – which also features retail space and a new urban plaza.

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- The Kansas Leadership Center – the first new downtown building on Douglas in 38 years.
- The former Henry’s building, now under renovation

Another exciting development is the transformation of the old KG&E building to residential apartments known as the Lux. It also offers commercial space on the first two floors. Tenants have already started moving into the building, which happened with city-backed financing.

There are other significant downtown residential projects in the works:

- Value place apartments and River Vista will help jumpstart developments around the Arkansas River.
- Corner 365, the Commodore Apartments and the Market and Main Apartments will bring more housing to the core area.
- The Exchange Place Project will transform two downtown buildings that are currently abandoned.
- And the recent purchase of Union Station by a local firm will also support downtown redevelopment efforts.

We are also taking steps to ensure we have integrity and openness when we solicit proposals for development in the core area. I recently appointed an advisory committee to make sure we have clear guidelines and expectations for developers. We want to make this process easy to navigate, so we can get the best proposals for downtown redevelopment.

## **Infrastructure**

In addition to a strong downtown, we need a solid infrastructure. This year we made more progress in that area. We invested more than \$70 million dollars to improve 13th Street, West 29th Street, the East Kellogg Expansion, Meridian, the Broadway Bridge and Amidon.

More work is underway.

The city has also invested in the second phase of the aquifer storage and recovery project known as ASR. New construction was completed in time to help with the drought. More than 100 million gallons were diverted from the little Arkansas River directly to customers. That minimized the amount of water taken from Cheney Reservoir.

We are making progress, but we still have critical decisions ahead to ensure a long-term water supply.

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### **Business process/technology improvements**

Together, we have made great strides in 2013 to improve our community.

But I also want to share some things we have done to improve City operations and better serve the public.

First, I want you to know City government finances remain sound.

The City continues to maintain excellent credit scores on its long-term debt.

We are building stronger, integrated work teams by training staff on project management disciplines.

Our employees are improving the way we do business by identifying clear goals, objectives and performance measures.

Through better project management, we are doing the right things--the right way--at the right time.

We will also continue to keep you safe and secure. We are using the latest technologies, best practices and smart partnerships to protect you. Let me highlight some of the cutting-edge technology:

- WPD has a new forensic laser that makes it easier to find evidence including fingerprints and DNA.
- The department also has a 3D laser which gives investigators a unique look at evidence – capturing details that might be otherwise overlooked.
- Nearly 50 officers will soon be wearing body cameras to capture events during their shifts. The recordings help protect residents, officers and the integrity of police work.

But technology alone can't solve crimes. Police need your help. There were 16 homicides in Wichita last year. That's a record low. But a single homicide is one too many.

There are still four unsolved homicides to date. We need your help. We must work together to keep our community safe.

The Wichita Fire Department is also working hard to protect you.

A recent national survey shows.

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- Wichita firefighters respond much faster than their peers. They arrive on the scene in less than five minutes and put the fire out in the room where it started more than 70% of the time.
- The survey also shows the cost of providing fire service in Wichita is 40% less than peer cities.
- The City also purchased nine new fire engines and one ladder truck to make sure our firefighters are there when you need them.

Wichita, our public safety workers are serving you .....in many ways.....every day.

### **Helping those in need**

I'm proud to be the Mayor of a generous city where so many people perform charitable deeds.

One example is the Wichita Police Department's Homeless Outreach Team known as HOT. It's designed to help the homeless in different ways.

Now when officers respond to 911 homeless calls, they focus on steering them into shelters, homes and ultimately jobs rather than jail.

The results are encouraging. The HOT Team has helped place 23 people into full-time jobs, reunited 36 people with family and friends and provided other support to 400 homeless people.

One of them is Eddie Benjamin. Mr. Benjamin was homeless. A stranger told him about the Hot Program. He met the homeless outreach team and they directed him to the homeless shelter.

Today, Mr. Benjamin lives in an apartment and has a job.

Mr. Benjamin said, and I quote: "since I met the HOT Team everything started working out for me. They stayed by my side through everything. If it wasn't for the program, I don't know where I would be."

HOT Team, please stand. Thank you for your hard work and your commitment to the less fortunate in our community.

Wichita, we must stay committed to finding suitable, affordable housing for residents in need. To that end, the City and its partners have:

- Provided 18 families with down payment and closing costs so, they could purchase their first home.

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- Helped 44 families become self-sufficient.
- and moved more than 180 veterans into Section 8 Housing.

We can do more to help veterans. I'm asking employers to hire veterans.

Give them a closer look. Give them another chance. And please give to local charities and non-profits that support them.

These brave men and women have made sacrifices for us and now it's our turn to help them.

Tonight I want to recognize a Wichita veteran.

His name is Aldee Miller.

He's a member of the historic Tuskegee airmen – the trailblazing African-Americans who fought in World War II. They were the first black pilots in the United States military. President Obama recently recognized these pioneers.

Mr. Miller wasn't able to make the trip to Washington. But he made it here tonight.

Mr. Miller - Sir – please join Colonel Jackson and me at the podium to receive your congressional gold medal.

Again, Sir, thank you - and all veterans - for your service.

We also have other residents who need our help. This past year the City created the H2O Care Fund so that we can help fellow Wichitans pay their water and sewer bills.

That's what we do, Wichita. We work together as a team. We help one another.

## **Quality of life/Community Development**

Now that we've shared our recent accomplishments, I want to tell you about some of the initiatives that are underway.

Right now the community is discussing how to provide adequate public transportation.

Wichita transit staff and the Transit Advisory Board have developed a plan that will be a key part of the discussion this year.

We need to know what you think:

- Should we have more stops to drop off and pick up riders?

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- Should we run later hours during the week and on the weekends, so we can help people get to their jobs, schools and medical appointments?
- Should we find new partners to extend our service area and help with costs?

We also know the transit fleet is old. Over the next five years more than 65% of the fleet must be replaced. The ongoing cost of fleet replacement remains a challenge for years ahead.

We've also been working on some other transportation and quality of life projects.

State grants will provide 36 miles of new connecting bike paths, new signs and bike racks as part of the bicycle master plan. A pedestrian plan will help promote a healthier lifestyle for Wichitans.

I want to thank the advisory boards and the Wichita Health and Wellness Coalition for supporting these community improvements.

We are also working on a master plan for Watson Park and the City's public swimming pools and water features.

Please weigh in on the discussion at the Activate Wichita website.

We hear you when you give us feedback. That's why we are improving and expanding our street, water and sewer maintenance programs.

- We are increasing street maintenance funding by 25%.
- We are using the latest technology to find the most cost-effective way to maintain our roads.
- We are shifting the emphasis from arterials to neighborhood roads based on your feedback.
- We are increasing our investment in water and sewer systems. Funding has gone up at least 250% from previous years, with repair work occurring across the city.

We also have big decisions to make as a community regarding the future of Century II and the proposed downtown library. The decisions will be based on facts and community feedback. We want a good return on our investments. We want attractive facilities that meet our community's needs. We must hear from you to make a decision.

## **Community Engagement/ACT-ICT**

I'm excited about the many ways we continue to connect with you.

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A few weeks ago - the city launched the Office of Community Engagement.

It was formed with the belief that better government decisions are possible with more community input. We will work with residents and neighborhood groups so that everyone is heard on important issues. And we will develop stronger partnerships.

We've also reached out to you in other ways.

Earlier this year we launched a multi-format community engagement process to get your feedback on our priorities for the next 20 years.

Thank you for your participation. So far, more than 1,300 people have been involved in 98 meetings across Wichita, telling us what matters to them regarding:

- Business investment,
- Job creation,
- A new water source,
- Green spaces & parks,
- Street improvements ,
- Homeless assistance,
- Transit and other issues.

We are encouraged by what we've heard. We learned that more than 70% of our residents are willing to rise above their personal interests to do what's best for the community.

Even more of you have a strong commitment to preserving the future and are willing to do your part to leave Wichita a better place for the next generation.

Next month, the results of this engagement process will be summarized in a report to the community.

The report will serve as a foundation for the City Council's new strategic plan.

## **Conclusion**

Tonight, we've celebrated our accomplishments, shared new initiatives and outlined the challenges ahead.

We've said for some time now that we have growing needs and declining revenue.

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It's time to answer some big questions.

- What do you want for our City and the next generation?
- Do you want to be a place that attracts new jobs and keeps current employers?
- Do you want to be a community where people choose to live, work and raise a family?

Our rich history shows us we can do great things together:

- We've built the fighter planes that helped propel America and its allies to victory in World War II.
- We've trained workers and supported plane manufactures that helped brand Wichita the Air Capital of the World.
- We've produced job creators, innovators and entrepreneurs who grew companies that became global names.
- We've come out of recessions before and responded well to threats of the past.
- And, oh, by the way, we've reached the final four.....and followed that up with an undefeated season.....so far.

Tonight I am asking you to get into the game to move our City forward.

We need you to be a player - not a spectator - to win a better and brighter tomorrow.

Thank you and God bless Wichita.

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