



City Of Wichita Web Document


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Contact: Carl Brewer, Mayor

 : CBrewer@wichita.gov

 : (316) 268-4331

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Members of the City Council, honored guests, family, friends and citizens of Wichita, good evening.

I'm here to report that the State of our City is sound, the Air Capital of the World is soaring once again.

We're enjoying prosperous times, thanks to a confluence of factors that include a healthy economy, strong partnerships and great potential.

This is a time of unique opportunity.

An opportunity for us to come together better than ever - so that we can embrace challenges, pursue shared goals and help shape the future of our great City and the South Central Kansas region.

An opportunity for us to strengthen regional partnerships so that we can enrich our standing as the world leader in aviation-manufacturing and enhance our reputation as a great place to raise a family.

And an opportunity for us to seize and sustain this season of prosperity.

Our City is making news ... and it is good news! Wichita's story is getting out.

It's a story about a City that used to be one of the nation's best-kept secrets.

It's a story about a City that boasts productive partnerships, good-paying jobs, affordable housing, strong schools, vibrant neighborhoods, and a revitalized downtown among other attractive qualities.

It's a story that is receiving national recognition.

For example:

- Forbes Magazine has ranked Wichita the #1 place in the country to live a good life inexpensively. It also ranked us #9 in job opportunities.
- American City Business Journals ranked Wichita #2 among most affordable markets to own a home.
- Money Magazine ranked Wichita #9 on the list of best big cities.

And if you need further proof that our City is becoming a Community of Choice - a global relocation organization has ranked Wichita as the best place to relocate a family.

There are many more points of community pride that are overlooked by the media...and by ourselves. I'm

talking about the Visioneering Wichita survey that revealed a self-image problem. We need to start appreciating ourselves as much as others appreciate us. We are reluctant to sing our praises, even though visitors seem so eager to do so.

Despite the national praise, Wichitans know there is much work to do if we are going to fulfill our promise.

I want you to know that the City Council and I stand ready to help you do the hard work that will be necessary if we are going to seize the unique opportunities ahead.

A Mayor has a fundamental responsibility to embrace the City that he or she inherits, strengthen its foundation, and build for its future.

During my first State of the City address, I'm going to focus on five core priorities that I believe reflect our current challenges, our vision and our values.

Those core priorities are:

- Government Accountability;
- Economic Development;
- Community and Regional Partnerships;
- Strong Neighborhoods; and
- A Healthy and Compassionate Community.

The first core priority I want to address is **Government Accountability**. I'm talking about public trust in government. We need to do what we said we were going to do.

When I was sworn in as Mayor in April of 2007, I committed to serve you as a Mayor who could unify this seven-member City Council so that we could together, move our community forward.

For returning Council members, working together was a top priority. We recognized that we wouldn't always agree on issues, projects and goals.

But we could always commit to working together, resolving differences and finding resolutions.

I want you to know that this City Council and I have honored that commitment to work together.

We haven't always agreed with each other, but we have always agreed to work together. That teamwork has produced these results:

- We approved a \$500 million budget that, for the 14th consecutive year, did not require a mill-levy or tax-rate increase. This City Council is firmly committed to providing quality local services without additional mill levy and tax increases. And, despite the pressures of inflation and increased demand for services, we still maintain an adequate reserve fund balance of \$23 million.
- We improved community safety across our expanding city by adding 31 new firefighters and three new fire stations.
- We have initiated the design process for a new terminal at Mid Continent Airport. Thanks to a community partnership that produced Affordable Airfares, our airport set a record with nearly 1.6 million passengers in 2007. We need a new airport terminal to accommodate that growth and address an outdated facility.
- We have secured a three-year, public safety contract with the police and fire unions as well as a contract with the service employee unions.
- We have strengthened collaborations with our partners in government, the business community and neighborhood groups including the launching of New Communities Initiative.
- We've focused on the next phases of Downtown Development, including advancing a \$30 million Master plan for a new Central Library and approving a redevelopment district for additional downtown

housing.

- We've taken steps to create a more attractive environment downtown. That's why this council approved a \$9 million project to change the face of seven downtown buildings. That investment will improve the appearance of downtown and attract more private businesses as well as more residents and retailers.
- We've worked with Sedgwick County to develop a parking plan for the downtown arena, newly named the Intrust Bank Arena.
- We've enhanced our riverfront and increased visitors to the area by completing the Keeper of the Plains-Ring of Fire project.
- We've recruited an exciting new brand of minor-league baseball to Lawrence-Dumont Stadium.
- We've attracted a marquee act to Old Cowtown. The award-winning Diamond 'W' Wranglers are proving to be a major hit, and Old Cowtown may have to expand to meet demand.
- And, great strides are being made at Wichita Waterwalk. The topping out ceremony for Waterwalk Place is scheduled for this Thursday and I invite everyone to this event. I am pleased to announce two more national tenants that will be a part of the WaterWalk restaurant and entertainment development... I am pleased to announce two more national tenants that will be a part of the WaterWalk restaurant and entertainment development. Joining Saddle Ranch Chop House will be Funny Bone Comedy Club and Wet Willies restaurant and daiquiri bar. These are just a couple of the fun and exciting tenants that will help make WaterWalk - Wichita's Next Great Gathering Place.

This Council's determination to work together should guide us through some challenging decisions and goals, which include:

- Hiring a new City Manager. We've brought Dr. Ed Flentje on board as an interim manager to help us find the best choice to meet the unique opportunities ahead.
- Creating a more efficient City Government through a partnership with Wichita State, which is conducting an environmental assessment of City Government. This assessment will give us a clear view of how well we are doing and which areas will need improvement. From the results we will be able to benchmark our processes for greater accountability.
- And providing more transparency about City Government through an expanded program schedule on City Government Cable Channel 7, including: studio shows, news reports, public service announcements and unfiltered news conference coverage.

I'm determined to honor my pledge to be a consensus builder in order to help this city move forward through hard work, better communication and enhanced collaboration.

My second core priority and perhaps the most important is sustaining our recent job growth through enhanced economic development collaboration.

The City of Wichita should strive to be a city where every citizen who wants a job can find a job, where businesses can prosper and where employees can pursue the American Dream that includes home ownership, strong schools and safe neighborhoods.

This City Council stands ready to address opportunities and challenges related to **Economic Development**. We know we can't do it alone, and that's why we must continue to be enthusiastic partners in:

- The Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition, which aims to retain and create jobs;
- The Regional Economic Area Partnership of South Central Kansas, known as REAP;
- Visioneering Wichita, the regional improvement process;
- Wichita Downtown Development Corporation; and
- Other collaborations that include: Sedgwick County, the Wichita Public School District, area universities and the many charitable and non-profit organizations that meet the diverse needs and reveal the great generosity of our community.

The days when cities believed they could create and retain jobs in a silo manner are gone. Partnerships are

critical as we continue efforts to diversify our economy and increase opportunities for employers and workers.

While we work to grow our economy, we must reaffirm that Wichita's bedrock industry is aviation manufacturing.

Wichita's aviation manufacturing industry is the envy of the world. Communities across the globe want what we have.

They covet the work ethic, the skilled labor, the attractive salaries and other benefits of our City's long relationship with aviation manufacturing.

Why is aviation manufacturing so important to our local economy and our future?

Well, I'll provide you with a few reasons:

- Area aviation companies produce 36,500 jobs;
- Aviation payroll in the Wichita area is expected to increase 8.9% annually;
- Each aviation job generates nearly 3 additional jobs;
- Aviation companies – such as Spirit AeroSystems, Cessna, Boeing, Hawker Beechcraft and Bombardier – rank among the top providers in sales and property taxes, pumping \$37.1 million into Sedgwick County alone; and
- \$1.3 billion, or 22%, of the State's \$5.9 billion budget can be connected to the aviation industry.

I want take this moment to recognize past and present Sedgwick County Commissioners. When they supported the aviation-manufacturing training center – which will open in 2009 on land the City provided near Jabara Airport - they demonstrated vision and courage.

They recognized that aviation manufacturing is a growth industry with changing technology and increasing global competition. That global competition represents a real threat to the foundation of our local and state economy, and to our prosperity.

Competition in this industry is emerging in places like the European Union, Canada, Brazil and China, which aims to become the world's No. 2 aviation market.

Meanwhile, the community faces a shortage of skilled workers - a shortfall that will only get worse when aging baby boomers retire, beginning within the next decade.

Retaining this industry and training workers to meet demand is a pressing issue, one that demands immediate attention, community awareness and enhanced regional partnerships.

To meet 2008 demands, we need to find and train 4,500 workers.

Additionally, we need to use our existing industrial park properties to address location needs for new and expanding aviation and composite industries.

Among our leadership responsibilities:

- We must inspire our South Central Kansas legislative delegation to respond to the urgency of this aviation manufacturing opportunity.
- We must support the Visioneering Wichita agenda that calls for more state support for aviation research and business-driven technical education.
- We must pursue a regional approach to recruitment and retention of the growing composite industry.
- We must urge additional state support for an expanded nurse training program, as well as the Wichita Center for Graduate Medical Education.
- And, we must acknowledge the continued importance of energy and agriculture, as oil prices near

\$100 a barrel and the price of wheat flirts near \$10 a bushel.

As your Mayor, I want to be clear that this Council stands ready to help retain aviation manufacturing and build our diverse economy.

It is increasingly important that our city, county, state and Congressional leaders continue to work together on these issues.

My third core priority is **Enhancing Community and Regional Partnerships**. This Council is poised to expand our City's rich history of partnerships.

Partnerships make sense on a lot of levels. They build relationships, establish longstanding collaborations, fast-track public projects, leverage private investments and produce a solid return-on-investment for taxpayers.

This City's strong history of community and regional partnerships is reflected in many model collaborations and projects.

They include:

- Downtown Revitalization
- Affordable Airfares
- Strong Neighborhood Organizations
- Visioneering Wichita
- Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition
- The Downtown Arena
- Passage of the Wichita Public School Bond Issue in 2000.
- The Elevated Central Railroad Corridor Project
- The Keeper of the Plains riverfront enhancements
- And most recently the Murfin Animal Care Campus, which enjoyed its groundbreaking on Dec.20.

Those are all examples of community and regional partnerships that have served our citizens, supported our businesses and strengthened our community and region.

As the largest city in the State of Kansas, we have a responsibility to help strengthen and support the region, especially when needed.

I am delighted to share with you a comment from Kansas House Minority Leader, Dennis McKinney. He praised our City for our prompt response following the Greensburg Tornado.

McKinney said and I quote:

"Wichita has been instrumental in helping our community get back on its feet. As the cleanup process moved into full swing last May, I noticed a number of Wichita trucks entering Greensburg. After I turned down Main Street I counted over 20 vehicles, trucks and loader, and a bevy of workers from Sedgwick County gathering to engage in the recovery effort. It truly reinforced the idea that in Kansas we overcome our differences and take care of each other."

Now, Wichita can take the lead in helping to expand and strengthen partnerships beyond our city's boundaries, across Sedgwick County and throughout the South Central Kansas region.

Cities can no longer act independently to solve issues. We need to act in concert with the public sector, private sector, non-profits and other civic groups.

For example, Wichita is perfectly positioned to become a leading partner in the growing composite sector,

which could create jobs that support aviation manufacturing and other key industries.

The composite sector represents a unique opportunity. We need to seize it.

Community and Regional Partnerships will also serve our community in the future as we seek to initiate and complete other projects, including:

- Workforce training;
- East Bank and West Bank Riverfront Development;
- The Arena Neighborhood Plan;
- Century II Improvements;
- Downtown Development;
- 21st Street Redevelopment; and
- Ushering our community into a new era of wireless opportunities.

My fourth core priority places a citywide emphasis on **Neighborhood Improvement**.

Though our prosperity is attracting attention from national magazines, some of our neighborhoods are struggling. Some of our neighbors feel left behind.

Their story isn't featured in Money Magazine, Forbes or Business Journals.

That's because theirs is a story of discouragement, despair...and even desperation.

They live in neighborhoods that are fighting blight.

They feel abandoned.

They feel unwelcome to our current prosperity.

These neighborhoods can be found throughout the city but they are concentrated in a few districts.

As a community, we can do more to help residents rebuild these neighborhoods.

We can use the same collective approach that we've applied to revitalize downtown and other restored aging neighborhoods.

As Mayor and a lifelong Wichitan, who was raised in one of these distressed neighborhoods, I'm going to make certain that they are not forgotten.

I want their rebuilding to become another successful chapter in the story of our City.

That's why I'm encouraging this Council to show its support for New Communities Initiative.

What is New Communities Initiative?

It's a collaborative and comprehensive approach to rebuilding distressed neighborhoods. It's an approach that has worked in other cities across the country and it can be applied to neighborhoods across our City.

New Communities Initiative brings together existing public, private and community resources.

It targets zip codes with a concentration on distressed neighborhoods. It focuses on quality of life, property

conditions, economic development, education and health care.

It aims to:

- Improve graduation rates;
- Increase recreational activities for youth;
- Restore neglected buildings to positive residential use;
- Support business development; and
- Bring tax delinquent properties into compliance

The goal is simple:

New Communities will create a community where people want to live, where conditions lead to successful families and where people have a reason to hope for a better life.

Strong families, neighborhoods and cities deserve the healthiest possible community in which to live.

That's why my final core priority is sustaining a **Healthy and Compassionate Community**.

More and more Communities across the globe are seeking healthier environments. City Government can assume a leadership role by raising awareness, encouraging community dialogue and taking appropriate action.

My recommendations include:

- First, adopt a smoking ban ordinance in 2008. We've listened to passionate arguments on either side of this issue, and we will continue to listen. This Council unanimously agrees that smoking is a health concern. We have instructed two Council members to reach out to people on both sides of the issue with the mission to help us craft a plan that creates a healthier place to live, work and play. Our goals are the same with only our methods of achieving them being different. A statewide smoking ban is being discussed. From Salina to Johnson County, communities across the state of Kansas have already taken action. Smoking bans are now in place across the globe in countries such as Ireland, England, Italy, and, most recently, even France.
- Second, put more dollars and more effort into our StopBlight program to promote healthier neighborhood environments.
- Third, create more green space and recreational opportunities through a greater awareness of Parks Recreation Open Space, what we call the PROS Plan.
- Fourth, use our City7 cable channel along with local media partnerships to promote wellness and individual responsibility to combat diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure and other health issues.
- Fifth, address homelessness. According to some reports, there are 526 homeless people in our community. The Homeless Task Force has reviewed much local data on the homeless population. They have reviewed available services and gaps in services as well as best practices throughout the country.

I'm requesting that the Homeless Task Force complete its report within the next 60 days.

Lastly, I want to talk about our streetgang problem. The recent tragic death of 19-year-old Robert Ridge illustrates the urgency of the problem.

Robert had a great smile and an even greater future. He was the son of a local pastor and high school basketball coach and a caring mother. Robert was shot to death because a gang member didn't like the way Robert looked at him.

Robert's death reminds us of the seriousness of this community issue.

I want to acknowledge his father and mother, the Rev. and Mrs. Harris, who are in attendance tonight. The community collectively recognizes your loss and will continue to fight for safe harbor for all our youth.

That's one reason why I am forming the Mayor's Youth Council. The Youth Council will help us address the street gang problem, raise awareness about other issues affecting young people and identify new ways to stop the exodus of young talent from our Community.

I have a stern message for streetgangs: You've preyed on our most vulnerable kids for far too long. Your reign of terror over youth, their parents and our neighborhoods is coming to an end. Leave our kids alone. Leave our neighborhoods. You're not welcome in our City.

Here in City Hall, we intend to continue to combat streetgangs with effective intervention and aggressive prosecution.

Last year, we announced a major crackdown on streetgangs, a first step towards a community solution to this problem.

We will continue to do this through enhanced Community Policing; a sustained officers in-schools program; and additional law enforcement collaboration.

But we need your help. Community programs that encourage mentoring, nurturing and positive role models are a vital tool to prevent our youth from following this path to self-destruction.

Programs such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters, The Boys and Girls Clubs, Real Men/Real Heroes and faith-based groups across the city need your help.

Our police can only do so much. It is up to you, my fellow Wichitans, to step up and transform our community and the lives of our vulnerable youth.

As I conclude, I want to say that I'm proud of this City and the progress we have made together.

Indeed, we are a prosperous and promising city, but we need to seize this time of unique opportunity. We need to come together – more than ever – as we encounter our challenges, embrace our future and fulfill our great potential.

I'm asking Wichitans to think hard about our city.

I want them to evaluate its progress, treasure its success and engage in a civic manner so that we can continue to grow, improve and prosper.

Wichitans can come together in the best of times, because we've come together in what seemed like the worst of times. We've shown that we're a city of great resiliency. We've overcome great adversity.

You may recall that soon after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, a different story was being told about our City.

It was a troubling story. It was a story about a grounded aviation manufacturing industry.

It was a story about lost jobs, displaced workers and frightened families.

This story, too, attracted national attention; Media outlets reported that our local economy ranked among those most damaged by the terrorist attacks. Our future seemed in doubt.

Today, our unemployment rate is 3.6%.

Our aviation industry is soaring once again.

And our City's future seems headed to new heights.

I sense that we're living in a special time in a special place.

We need to seize this moment, this unique opportunity.

Here's what I want you to do:

- Volunteer your time.
- Join a civic group.
- Support a charitable organization.
- Champion a non-profit.
- And pay attention to what your elected officials are doing.

I want you to strengthen communication between citizens and government so that you are part of the protection, preservation and promise of our community.

Together, we can create and retain more jobs.

Together, we can identify more opportunities for community and regional partnerships.

Together, we can strengthen neighborhoods across our city so that we don't have to suffer through the tragic loss of another young life.

Together we can sustain a healthy and compassionate City ... A City with a story that only gets better.

I am humbled to serve as Mayor for the people of Wichita, whose faith, generosity and values make this a wonderful place to live, to work and to play.

Thank you, members of the Council, for working with me for the good of our City.

And thank you all for attending ... and for sharing this moment as part of our television audience.

May God bless each of you and our home – Wichita. Good night.

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