



City Of Wichita Web Document

Mayor's 2009 State of the City

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Members of the City Council, honored guests, family, friends and residents of Wichita, thank you for attending the State of the City Address and thank you for allowing me to serve as your Mayor.

I'm here to report that amid a global economic crisis, a deepening national recession and threats to our local economy, Wichita is forging ahead, fortified and inspired by the successes of the past year.

I want to cite some of our shared successes of 2008:

- We sent a strong message to bidders looking to lure Wichita's aviation jobs. Other states and regions are still seeking our companies and our workers. We're working hard to keep those jobs here. The City, County and State have made substantial investments including \$33 million for Cessna's Columbus jet program. Those investments in aviation manufacturing must continue.
- We broke ground on the National Center for Aviation Training at Jabara Airport. The City, County and our partners secured 5 million in State dollars to build a cutting-edge facility. It will produce a steady stream of qualified aviation workers for years to come.
- We secured another \$5 million for the National Institute for Aviation Training at Wichita State University.
- We set another passenger record with an increase of nearly 23 thousand fliers at Wichita Mid-Continent Airport thanks to the Kansas Affordable Airfares Program. This happened during a year when passenger numbers nation-wide were down nearly three percent.
- We continue to grow jobs as a member of the Greater Wichita Economic Development Coalition. This past year, GWEDC helped create 2,200 jobs. The City, County and State helped make it happen.
- We made our city safer by partnering with other law enforcement agencies. Together we used the federal RICO Act to crack down on street gangs.
- We took steps to improve our quality of life, with the adoption of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan. The PROS plan will create more recreational trails and add amenities such as dog parks.
- We continued to make progress on Downtown, adding new housing, retail and restaurants. WaterWalk opened for business. Old Town claimed an honor as A Great Neighborhood in America. And the City and County hammered out a compromise to build streets, provide parking and encourage private development around Intrust Bank Arena.
- Finally, we maintained our status as a community of choice. We offer affordable living, quality jobs, safe streets and strong schools. It's no wonder that MSN.Com listed Wichita as the No.1 Most Livable City.

Yes, 2008 was a good year. Yes, 2009 may be a tough year, but we can overcome the challenges by working together. I want to talk about the five Core Priorities that I announced during my first State of the City Address last year.

Those priorities are:

- Government Accountability;
- Community and Regional Partnerships;

- Economic Development;
- Strong Neighborhoods; and
- A Healthy and Compassionate Community.

Government Accountability

First, I want to speak on Government Accountability. This City Council wants to keep building public trust in government. We've worked to achieve Council harmony, greater transparency and a more efficient government.

We haven't always agreed on how to get there, but we've been committed to working together and reaching common ground.

Thank you Vice Mayor, thank you Jeff, Lavonta, Jim, Paul and Sharon. Thank you for your civility, your support and your hard work. We've had many successes.

- We broke ground on new fire stations in East, West and South Wichita.
- We passed a law to significantly limit smoking in public places.
- We fought blight and showed faith in aging neighborhoods through home repair programs, neighborhood cleanups and facade improvements.
- We helped raise awareness about fighting crime. In fact, Wichita had the fifth largest turnout in the nation for National Night Out.
- We were, more than ever, accessible and open to the citizens of Wichita.
- We welcomed their input on big, small and difficult choices.
- We installed a transparent voting system which shows votes in real time.
- We held more public planning sessions and agenda reviews.
- We've improved the City's process for conducting background checks to ensure we are being wise stewards of taxpayers' resources.
- For the 15th straight year, we kept property taxes among the lowest in the state by not raising the mill levy.
- And we hired an excellent new City Manager in Bob Layton.

Moving into 2009, we promise our best efforts to build on the successes of 2008. We are prepared to review our budget, tighten our spending and face the upcoming challenges with citizens who may be affected by additional cutbacks, layoffs and financial uncertainty.

Here's what we know about the City budget. In 2008 we experienced a \$600,000 deficit due to the declining economy. How will we address this shortfall? I'm directing the City Manager:

- To postpone hiring new employees;
- To reduce the use of contract labor;
- To limit overtime costs;
- To work closely with departments to look for additional ways to cut costs;
- To dip into our healthy cash reserves of \$23 million to erase any remaining deficit if necessary.

We all need to share in this pain. As Mayor I will not accept any salary increases or cost of living adjustments during these difficult times.

City government will not jeopardize essential services. But please be patient as we work through these tough budget adjustments. Also the State's deficit may require significant revisions to the City's budget, which was approved last August.

Community and Regional Partnerships

Now I want to talk about Community and Regional Partnerships. During these tough economic times citizens

expect us and need us to work smarter and harder together. City government must continue to cultivate partnerships with private, county and state organizations.

I am pleased that United Way has accepted my request to again take the leadership role in coordinating a one stop center to assist laid-off workers. The Center will provide food, shelter, clothing, budget counseling and other social services.

United Way President Pat Hanrahan and I have met to begin the planning process. Next month, we will host a meeting of agency executives to firm up the plan for this one stop center. This City is dedicated to serving our citizens in times of need. Wichita has the world's best workers and we will support them.

Regarding other partnerships:

- We're asking the State to let us establish Traffic Safety Corridors which will save lives on roadways.
- We have also asked the State to allow us to create Entertainment Districts which will enhance our local events and help us compete with peer cities.
- We're seeking our share of the federal economic stimulus program. The money will fund infrastructure improvements and put displaced workers back to work as soon as possible.
- And the City will continue to help reduce unemployment by supporting job training programs such as the Preparation for Aviation Career Education System (PACES). The PACES program is supported by the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas, Spirit AeroSystems, the Knight Foundation and United Way of the Plains.

Wichita must also set the example of strong partnerships by responding when surrounding cities request assistance. Our response during the 2007 Greensburg tornado is a model example. So was our response during the 2008 record flood in which the Wichita Fire Department made a heroic rescue near Argonia.

We must also seek more government partnerships. And we'll start by inviting Sedgwick County to discuss ways to jointly provide Fire Services.

Economic Development

Now, I want to talk about Economic Development. Economic Development is the engine of a community's growth and prosperity. We must continue with proven efforts to create and retain jobs for workers. We must further diversify our economy.

As we move forward:

- We will continue work on a community vision for revitalizing downtown.
- We'll support business growth by fixing streets and bridges, including the Central Rail Corridor. That project will improve traffic flow downtown after it's completed in July.
- We will encourage private development in aging areas such as the 21st and Broadway intersection. Plans include an international market which will provide a boost to new and existing retail in that area.
- We will continue to maintain low airfares and attract discount carriers by building a new airport terminal. Design is underway and construction is expected to start later this summer. The new terminal will replace a 60-year-old facility that is functionally obsolete. It's expected to open in three years.
- We will continue work on the state-of-the art water supply system, known as the ASR project. It will provide the Wichita area with sufficient water for the next 50 years. Economic Development is not possible without an adequate water supply.

Strong Neighborhoods

Next, I want to talk about strong neighborhoods. Strong neighborhoods help us recruit and retain families,

young people and jobs. Strong neighborhoods are also good for business.

But now we need to focus on creating a strong neighborhood downtown. Downtown is often called Everybody's Neighborhood. It provides visitors with a first and lasting impression of our city. Wichita's downtown has come a long way in the past 20 years, but there's still a lot to do.

Wichita cannot be content. Other Midwestern cities are moving forward aggressively with their downtown development plans. We can't fall behind. We can't believe the naysayers who expect private investment largely to drive downtown's revitalization. City Hall must be a partner with private developers.

Recent successes are encouraging. Despite the economic uncertainty, activity in downtown Wichita is on the rise.

- Cargill Meat Solutions, downtown's largest employer, recently bought a second office building to expand its headquarters. The City helped out by donating a nearby public parking lot.
- More than 25 businesses have located or relocated to the downtown area, adding about 250 jobs.
- Real Development continues to lead the way with major facelifts that are changing the look and feel of high-rise office buildings.
- The Broadview Hotel has gained a new owner in Drury Southwest and will undergo a major renovation in 2009. More than one developer is talking about adding new hotels in downtown Wichita in the near future.
- We're moving forward with plans to build a new downtown public library. Libraries are now seen as destinations where people can read, relax and rejuvenate. The new downtown library will be a first-class facility.

I have exciting news tonight... The City is seeking a partnership with the YMCA. The YMCA plans to build a downtown branch on the Arkansas River at First and Waco. This multi-level, multi-purpose facility will be a flagship YMCA that serves Wichitans and visitors throughout the core area. It will support riverfront and residential development downtown.

The new downtown YMCA will give us additional momentum. Some of you may ask how much it will cost to further revitalize downtown. I don't know what it will cost, but if we don't invest in downtown now, it may cost more later and we'll lose jobs, families and young people to other cities that offer an appealing urban lifestyle.

As a steward of public dollars I will look for financial assistance from grant programs along with our private and public partners. The City will also continue to work closely with the Wichita Downtown Development Corporation. Be assured that as taxpayers, you will weigh in on important downtown development decisions. Decisions that will impact the health and future of our community. As some of you know, I've been making downtown presentations to groups across our community. If you would like me to make a presentation to your group, please call my office at 268-4331.

In addition to downtown, we need to support aging neighborhoods, especially those that are suffering from crime and neglect. We must continue law enforcement and community-engagement efforts to make our oldest neighborhoods safe. We did that in 2008:

- Thanks to our RICO partnership, we cracked down on gang members; 53 suspects have been indicted on federal charges.
- We arrested 791 gang members and seized 141 guns.
- We continued work on stronger laws related to nightclub violence.
- We approved a pilot project that put cameras in police cars.
- We remained committed to a program that puts officers in schools, which helps mentor and protect students.

In 2009 we will continue to build trust between citizens and law enforcement. We will continue to promote community policing which stresses partnerships, problem solving and crime prevention.

We've seen community policing in action when citizens and police work together to solve crimes and neighborhood issues. Unfortunately, we have also seen a few times when neighbors failed to help neighbors. Consider one example:

On Nov. 2, Tyrone Squires was fatally shot while attending a house party. The investigation revealed that the murder followed several assaults and drive-by shootings. Not a single incident was reported to police. There were more than 100 people at that house party. Not one witness has stepped forward to help police with the investigation. The homicide remains unsolved.

That's unacceptable. We should not allow citizens to be gunned down or murdered without consequence. Too many young people are dying on our streets. That's why the Wichita Police Department and my office are hosting a Youth Issues Summit on February 21st at City Hall. We will have follow-up meetings throughout 2009. We must stay in touch with young people. We must keep young people safe and on the right track. To help do that:

- The City will continue to host the Real Men, Real Heroes program at the Atwater Neighborhood Center, providing mentoring, tutoring and other support; and
- The City will continue to support Planeview Activity Camp for Kids. It provides children with positive summertime activities and has shown great success in reducing youth crime in South Wichita.

I want to stress here, that while social programs for youth are important, nothing is more important in the nurturing of our youth than mothers and fathers. Good programs and good policies are helpful but good parenting is also essential for our children. Parents need to parent. Spend time together as a family. Turn off the TV. Put away the video games. Ignore the cell phone. Dine together. Get to know your kids. And meet their friends. In these tough economic times, when the family's budget is tight, you may not have the money to spend on your kids, but you can always spend more time with them.

It is also important that young people reach out to other young people.

That's why I'm proud of the Mayor's Youth Council. During its first year, Youth Council members served their community by mentoring younger students, collecting shoes for those in need and holding a book drive for two local elementary schools. The Youth Council members are also getting involved in state politics. They're headed to Topeka on Feb. 17 to advocate for continued driver's education funding and to observe the legislative process. The Youth Council is one example of our young people doing great civic work.

Another example is the eighth grade Aztecs Football team, which receives support from the Evergreen Recreation Center. The Aztecs became national champions in November. In addition to being outstanding athletes, these exceptional young men mentor younger students and maintain an average 3.5 Grade Point Average.

A Healthy and Compassionate Community

Finally, as we move into 2009, we need to think about our personal health. Wichita must strive to be a healthy and compassionate community.

We need to seek ways to connect people to public health services in times of need. The City Council must support policies and measures that make our community a healthier place. One example is the smoking ordinance, which protects our children and encourages good health.

But personal responsibility is as important as sound policy. We can all do a better job of making better choices regarding diet and exercise. Tonight I'm proud to announce a new run/walk event. The City is teaming up with Run Wichita to hold the first Mayor's 5K challenge. It'll be held Oct. 18 during the annual Wichita Marathon. More details are coming soon. But I promise you, I'll be running. I've already started training and eating better. Just ask my wife... she's closely monitoring my new lifestyle.

So, please join me in making your personal health a top priority. Start by asking your doctor to put you on a plan for good health.

There are more actions government can take to create a healthier environment. My downtown vision speaks to creating a pedestrian-friendly environment. A place where people can walk from Old Town to Intrust Bank Arena to Waterwalk, stopping at retail, restaurant or entertainment venues along the way. The PROS Plan speaks to creating more parks and open space, and more bike and walking paths.

As a City, we can support more community gardens and farmers' markets. These steps are all part of making Wichita a community where people of all ages can find recreational opportunities that fit their interests. I am confident as we move forward with the PROS Plan, we will find more options for creating a healthy community. Additionally, we hope to gain ideas from an upcoming workshop on ways to create a bike- and pedestrian-friendly city.

We can also become a more compassionate community. I asked people last year to become more involved in making Wichita a kinder place. The Task Force on Chronic Homelessness has done its part by providing important research and assistance to the City and the County. I'm pleased to report that our efforts have helped reduce the homeless population in Sedgwick County from 526 in 2007 to 473 in 2008. We're headed in the right direction and we will continue our efforts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I recognize this time of uncertainty has led to stress and worry. While we may not know what the future has in store for our federal, state, local or individual budgets, we know this much:

Throughout our history, Wichitans have demonstrated time and again that our community is both generous and resilient during tough times. From the sod house of the 19th century to the Dust Bowl of the past century, we know how to survive the worst of times by bannng together and helping each other. Today, we are again challenged to step forward and help our fellow citizens during this new round of layoffs.

Even when we are losing jobs, Wichita is blessed with a community of doers and givers. We will work together through these difficult times. We'll do it with that can-do Kansas spirit. It's the same can-do spirit that saved our downtown nearly two decades ago when it was threatened by groundwater contamination and businesses fleeing elsewhere. It's the same can-do spirit that recruited discount carriers and saved jobs when Wichita airfares were too costly for businesses and families. And it's the same can-do spirit that united us after the September 11th terrorist attacks devastated our local economy. So as we forge ahead, we know that tough times unite us, inspire us and create new opportunities. Now is our opportunity:

- To revitalize downtown;
- To be creative about job growth;
- To rebuild our infrastructure;
- To support cultural arts and entertainment venues;
- To provide public services based on best practices; and
- To make our community more safe and secure.

I am optimistic that we can overcome our economic challenges. I am optimistic that we will make wise choices for the growth and health of our community. I am optimistic that we will make Wichita the best midsized city in America. We can do this. We can do this together. And we can do this together in 2009.

Thank you and God bless, Wichita.

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