

Mayor Brewer's 2013 State of the City Address

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Communications Team | (316) 268-4351

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Distinguished members of the Wichita City Council, honored guests, family, friends and Wichitans, thank you for attending the 2013 State of the City address. It is my honor to serve as your Mayor and to address you this evening.

As this great city moves into 2013, we find ourselves at a crossroads. The needs of the community are great and continue to increase. At the same time, four years of flat property tax revenue along with reduced state and federal funding have crippled our ability to meet those needs. What kind of City should Wichita become? What kind of legacy will we leave our children and grandchildren? City government cannot answer these questions, but you can. Wichita has overcome great challenges in the past and will overcome these as well, but we'll need to work together.

Fortunately, a lot of accomplishments were made in 2012 that better prepare us for the time ahead. Through strategic planning and efficient management the City's financial house was kept in order, ending the year with strong balances that assure rating agencies of our financial stability. By being good stewards of your tax dollars, we avoided the financial pitfalls facing many other cities across the nation.

Achieving this, however, required prioritization. Protecting life, protecting property, protecting infrastructure, and creating a growing and sustainable community drove each and every decision the City Council made last year. In 2012, 60 cents of every general fund dollar were spent to protect our families, neighbors, schools and businesses. The Police Department reorganized into a more streamlined and focused department, capable of adapting to new challenges and improving homelessness outreach training. At the same time, the department was successful in reducing both gang related and violent crimes compared to the year before.

The Wichita Fire Department continued their success as well, providing a high level of protection to residents and businesses. The number of fire fatalities dropped in 2012, while additional staff training improved the heart attack survival rate. In an effort to increase the effectiveness of the Department even further, Fire Department management began a significant outreach process to rank and file members seeking input and inclusion in policy making. I believe we would all agree that public safety is one of local government's most important functions, and because of the hard work and sacrifices of Wichita's police and fire personnel,

2012 was a successful year in that regard. Please join me in thanking the brave men and women of the Wichita Police and Fire Departments.

Protecting our infrastructure continues to challenge us as we evaluate the condition of our roads, water and sewer systems, and public facilities. We made progress, however, by reducing energy usage, securing funding from the State for the Kellogg expansion, completing the St. Francis corridor as a downtown centerpiece, and completing additional projects such as 21st and Maize and the Lincoln Street Bridge and dam.

2012 also saw tremendous progress towards creating a growing and sustainable community, an important goal that serves to improve the quality of life for Wichitans. Construction began on the new terminal at Mid-Continent Airport, and beginning in June, travelers from the surrounding area can look forward to expanded flight opportunities and reduced travel costs with the addition of service from Southwest Airlines.

As you know, revitalizing downtown has been a key part of growing our community in recent years, recognizing that a healthy and thriving downtown improves our ability to attract new business, keep our young people here, and expand our tax base. With \$100 million in completed downtown projects in 2012 and another \$115 million starting this year, we've made extraordinary progress toward having the downtown that Wichitans have dreamed of. Since 2009, the private sector has invested \$250 million in downtown redevelopment projects. The new Robert D. Love YMCA, the Zelman Lofts, Block One Urban Plaza, and the Commerce Street Residential Project are just a few of the projects we're all proud of. On the horizon is the new Kansas Leadership Center (the first new construction along the core of Douglas Avenue in 28 years), a new apartment development on the West Bank, and additional residential units downtown at The Lux. As development continues downtown, we are closer to reaching our goals of increased pride, an increased tax base, and bringing more businesses and jobs to Wichita.

Our goal of improving the community's quality of life expands beyond downtown. Significant efforts were focused on Wichita's young people in 2012, including the opening of the Wichita Children's Home drop-in center for homeless youth. The drop-in center, named the Opportunity Zone or "OZ" by a panel of young people, has been open one year and has recorded over 1,300 visits. Additionally, as a direct result of our focus on the problem of homeless youth and weeks of strategic planning with community partners, we will be seeking your participation in funding a 5-bed emergency shelter pilot program. This program will get us one step closer toward the vital goal of eliminating homelessness among Wichita's youth.

2012 also saw the implementation of a new model for the Summer Youth Employment Program that focused on employing nearly 80 children from low-income homes. Additionally, our year-round Youth Employment Training Program targeted youth in the juvenile justice system, or in

foster care, and helped them find jobs while completing high school. These efforts were successful. Every participant in the training program was employed with 100% retention, several completed high school, and involvement in the criminal justice system was reduced. Over 200 youth were given scholarships to attend Park and Recreation summer camps, and the Police Department reported that criminal activity in that age group was down in the areas where camps were held. Ultimately, our comprehensive approach to assisting disadvantaged youth is strengthening the community as a whole.

Aside from the youth, other efforts were made to improve the community's quality of life. Our Housing First Program continued to provide housing to the chronically homeless - serving 140 people since the program began, with over half of those currently participating contributing to their own housing expenses. Our affordable housing programs have provided over 150 veterans with housing vouchers, assisted 225 homeowners with home repairs, and helped 45 families purchase their first homes. In addition, we launched the New Communities: Investing in People and Properties Initiative, a strategy for neighborhood revitalization that focuses on small 2 to 3 block areas and helps those residents improve their own communities. So far, we have seen increased home repairs and property clean-ups, and are looking forward to adding additional resources to engage new neighborhoods in sustainable improvements. If we want to get serious about reducing dependence on government and encouraging personal responsibility, innovative programs like the New Communities Initiative are a great way to start.

Finally, I would like to highlight a few additional quality of life successes. While we've been challenged to come to an agreement on a new Central library, progress was made on a new plan that allows for phased construction. Despite the need for new and renovated facilities, the library's summer reading program broke records with over 12,000 young people reading for over 25,000 hours! Our Park and Recreation Department also enjoyed successes including an additional 40,000 visitors to Botanica and the opening of the new Meridian Dog Park. Wichita Golf saw a 12% increase in rounds played and a 13% increase in revenue, while Recreation increased revenue by more than \$100,000 and cemented new partnerships with Butler Community College and KETCH for use of the Boston and Osage Recreation Facilities. And certainly, we are all pleased that we have merged the City and County code services offices, making it easier for our private business partners to build and grow our region. In addition to improved customer service, this merger will provide standardized code enforcement while eliminating inefficiencies. If successful, this merger could pave the way for additional mergers in the future.

As you can see, we've made progress on many of the issues residents of Wichita and the region find important. But what about the future? At the local level, there are some signs of recovery: property values are projected to increase 2% in 2014, Wichita State University's Current Conditions Index shows signs of stability and modest growth, and a recent Wichita Business Journal report shows that employment is steady or increasing through most of Wichita's top employers. But while the local economy may be stabilizing, the national economy's condition is still of concern. For the first time in decades, Wichita property values have remained flat for four consecutive years. Even with modest growth projections, this current weakness,

coupled with reductions in State and Federal funding, leaves us vulnerable. At the same time, we are facing unprecedented infrastructure and quality of life concerns.

During my last State of the City address, I suggested that we needed to take hold of some very serious issues, saying that our successes in cutting the budget were not enough. At that time, I announced plans to bring people together to prioritize our needs and determine how to fund our most important services in the long-term. Tonight, I echo that call to action and highlight an upcoming community-wide survey by Wichita State University that MUST include your input. Here are some of the issues that we are facing.

Over the next 30 years, the vast majority of Wichita's aging water, sewer, and storm drainage systems will require significant maintenance or replacement. Total replacement of these systems is estimated to cost \$2.1 BILLION. Our water resources are limited and costs associated with ensuring adequate clean water continue to escalate. Where will the money for future water come from?

Nearly half of Wichita streets are ranked below the nationally accepted satisfactory benchmarks, and substantial maintenance costs have been identified. 29% of our bridges are in need of rehabilitation or replacement. Current state funding for transportation infrastructure is 38% less than the previous budget, but clearly our needs are not diminishing. Where will the money for roads and bridges come from?

Reductions in available grant funds and increasing pension, health insurance, and fuel costs have placed significant burdens on our transit system. On top of that, we have an aging fleet that would cost \$21 million to replace in the next six years. With flat revenue and rising costs, Wichita Transit will not break-even in 2014 unless we find new sources of funding or we cut services to those who need them most: hard working Wichitans who rely on bus transportation to get to and from work, the doctor, the grocery store, and more. Where will the money for adequate public transportation come from?

As we struggle to compete for new businesses and new jobs, especially in light of job losses in aviation, we must face the reality that we are competing with other cities that offer economic incentives for business development and expansion. If we want to be IN the game, we need to PLAY the game, but we have no dedicated funding source for economic development. If we're serious about finding new jobs for our people – and I am – we must change this scenario as soon as possible. Where will those incentive dollars come from?

Federal funding provides significant dollars for our community development programs, not the least of which are Community Development Block Grants and our housing programs. In 2012 we changed the lives of hundreds of homeless citizens, youth, veterans, and residents of

impoverished neighborhoods, in many cases giving them the tools they needed to continue improving their lives. With demand for these programs growing and the threat of reduced federal funding, we must decide how to meet the needs of our fellow Wichitans who need these programs not for handouts, but for a shot at a better life. How will we handle reduced funding?

Various quality of life issues demand attention, but limited funding means we must pick and choose between several initiatives. Funds to expand Century II, construct a new Central Library, and expand cultural arts facilities are currently inadequate. At the same time, multiple City plans developed in partnership with community stakeholders call for accelerated levels of spending. The Wichita Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan recommends \$27 million of capital improvements per year to upgrade, expand, and develop our park and recreation resources. The draft Bicycle Master Plan recommends spending \$12.5 million to develop the bicycle priority network, making travel by bicycle easier in Wichita. Where will the money for enhanced quality of life come from?

There has been discussion on all levels of government surrounding the philosophy that the answer to all of these questions is to cut spending. We have done that. From 2009 to 2013, we cut approximately \$28.2 million from the General Fund budget. We will continue, through strategic planning and efficient management, to cut more where we can, doing as little as possible to the critical services government provides to our residents. Jobs, safe streets in our neighborhoods, and enough clean water to last. Affordable housing for our struggling veterans, buses to take us to work when we can't afford a car, and arts and cultural activities that make Wichita vibrant. These are the fundamental services that help each of us live our lives to the fullest ...which do we choose to fund? Do we repair streets and bridges while excluding programs for those in need? Do we fund economic development but ignore youth employment? Do we dedicate funds for water and sewer repair but allocate nothing for parks and recreation? We must choose. And these choices are not and will not be easy.

Wichita is our home. The people that live here are our neighbors. The challenges facing us will impact our families today and into the future. **THE TIME FOR ACTION IS NOW!** We have reached a point where we **MUST** come together as a community, and create a plan that defines our priorities and the City we are to become.

Your input is critical so if you receive Wichita State's survey in the mail be sure to fill it out. Silence benefits no one. Even if you do not receive a survey, someone you know will. Share your voice. Learn about the issues at "wichita.gov". Reach out to your council member and our staff. Speak up at a public meeting, and use social media to tell us what you think. Only by hearing from you can we work together to solve the challenges facing our community.

For all of our differences, I have never doubted this community's ability to come together and protect what matters most. Wichitans work hard, and that work reflects our values. What kind of

City should Wichita become? What kind of legacy will we leave for our children and grandchildren? This City needs you to step up and answer. I, along with the other members of the City Council, will be listening. Thank you, goodnight, and God bless the City of Wichita and its residents.