



2020 State of the City

To the City Council, the City Attorney, City Clerk and all Fayetteville residents, I offer you the following in the State of the City, 2020.

I would like to open my remarks by saying the state of our City is sound.

I would also like to acknowledge that we have had an extremely challenging year. I deeply appreciate our community for offering the support we need to be steadfast and intentional in our work and for helping all of us through some difficult times.

We are devastated as a City as we grieve the loss of Officer Stephen Carr. But we are also hopeful because in the face of this tragedy, we saw the very best of our community.

Our people came forth to lend an outpouring of support for Stephen's family, as well as the family of his fellow officers and our entire Police Department. The events surrounding this tragedy affirm our faith in each other.

We lost our longtime serving City Clerk, Sondra Smith, this year. Those too were difficult days. I would like to thank City Clerk Kara Paxton who came into office during this tragic time.

Kara and City Clerk office staff pulled together and didn't miss a beat as they performed their excellent work in making our government transparent and accessible to the people.

I would also like to thank our City Attorney Kit Williams and his staff for providing sound legal guidance to my office on behalf of the residents of Fayetteville.

I would like to thank Judge Bill Storey and his staff for their excellent work to ensure a superior district court and provide justice for our city.

I want to thank the City Council for being strong leaders and advocates for our City.

I appreciate you, the City Council of today and the City Council from past years for your hard work and for serving your constituents and the City with your financial stewardship and strategic leadership.

I would like to thank our dedicated City staff, volunteers and all our residents for your hard work and support. We are fortunate to have the most talented and hardest working staff and volunteers and the most engaged residents of any city.

And finally, I want to thank our many partners: the Experience Fayetteville team, Fayetteville Public Library, University of Arkansas and Fayetteville Public Schools, along with many other organizations that serve our residents, promote our economy and provide resources for people in need.

And now, let us take a moment to celebrate some of our 2019 Awards and Accomplishments:

- For the fourth consecutive year we were named one of the top five Best Places to Live by U.S. News and World Report
- The City received three awards in the State's Trendsetter Cities program and was named Arkansas Volunteer Community of the Year at the Arkansas Municipal League
- For the fourth year, we maintained our position as the top "Water Resources Utility of the Future Today"
- We remain on the Best Places for Bikes by People for Bikes
- We received a new recognition for Fayetteville in the "15 Cities Where Business is Booming and Salaries are Rising" by CNBC business blog, "Make It"
- Fayetteville's City Plan 2040 received the "2019 Achievement in Comprehensive Plan Award" by the American Planning Association
- The City's Finance Division received a Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting and Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Governmental Financial Officer's Association
- The Fayetteville Parks and Recreation Department was honored with four awards at the Arkansas Parks Annual Conference
- Citiscapes and NWA Travel Guide awarded our Parks five honors
- Fayetteville was recognized as a Tree City USA Community by the Arbor Day Foundation for the 24th year
- The U.S. Conference of Mayors awarded Fayetteville the Mayors' Climate Protection Awards Program

- Fayetteville received a Gold designation from the national SolSmart program for making it faster, easier and more affordable for homes and businesses to go solar
- We were recognized as a global leader on environmental action and transparency, achieving a place on CDP's Cities A List
- Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) selected Fayetteville to host the 2022 Cyclo-Cross World Championships at the city's new Centennial Park on Millsap Mountain
- Also at Millsap Mountain, FayetteCross has been selected for the 43-nation Pan-American Cyclocross Championships in November of this year

We look forward to welcoming the world to Fayetteville in the months and years to come! Our City always finds opportunities we can share to work together to build, not only a better city, but a better world.

And build we must. We see our region's population expanding every day, and we know we have only one opportunity to build it right for generations to come.

This requires attention to smart growth and the ability to envision growth with equity for all our residents.

And speaking of equity for all, the public library is a place where everyone can go! We launched the \$50 million-dollar Fayetteville Public Library Expansion Project last year and we're going to open the doors in October of this year!

You see my friends, we must be constantly mindful that our actions today include consideration for those who come after us.

We must be thoughtful and generous if we are to put the needs of future generations above those of our own. It's our time to "pay it forward."

Our vision for smart growth is the foundation upon which three very important and fundamental principles depend. I offer to you that if we stay laser focused and strengthen these three main areas, I believe we will build our city right.

These principles are: Economic Vitality, Climate Action and Quality of Life.

But before we get into these principles, I would like to talk about the monumental accomplishment our community achieved that will put our city on course for the next 20 years!

I began this speech by thanking the residents of our community for coming together to help move our city forward and I have to say thank you again, for agreeing with our vision for the future by passing the \$226 million dollar infrastructure improvement bond!

The plan for this bond is our pledge to you that we will address:

- Transportation and Mobility
- Trail Improvements for Pedestrians and Cycling
- Drainage Improvements
- City Park Improvements
- Job Creation and Economic Development
- City Facilities Improvements
- The Cultural Arts Corridor
- New Police Headquarters and 3 new Fire Stations

Phase 1 of the bond program is underway! The City Council approved the issuance of more than \$142 million dollars for Phase 1 last June.

As you see, we are not just talking about the bonds, we are working on the projects we promised!

In fact, the Council has already approved several projects in each area, to include design services for:

- \$9.7 million for the Police Headquarters, Fire Stations 8 and 9, Cultural Arts Corridor and Replacement Parking
- \$3 million for land acquisition and design services for projects at Centennial Park at Millsap Mountain, Kessler Mountain Regional Park, Gulley Community Park and Lewis Park
- \$4.35 million spent or under contract for 10 transportation projects
- \$825,000 on trails projects underway
- \$1.7 million allocated for drainage projects

So as you can see my friends, in just a few short months, this bond is on the move!

Rapid change and regional growth affect us all, but I am confident we have the capacity to manage it well and with purpose!

And now, I would like to get into the three principles I mentioned earlier about economic vitality, climate action and quality of life.

Principle I: Economic Vitality

Let's talk about Economic Vitality. Our economy continues to grow, with new jobs and businesses opening their doors each month. More than 420 new business licenses were issued. New businesses in our targeted industry sectors brought more than 1,400 new jobs to Fayetteville.

We have averaged a business per day for years with these new investments – 1,248 building permits were issued last year, valued at more than \$405 million. Entrepreneurship and the growth of small businesses is a pillar of this City's economic development strategy.

Moving forward, we will strategically place diverse workforce housing options and employment opportunities in our various growth nodes, a strategy in the City's 2040 plan.

While we celebrate the new jobs and higher wages in certain sectors where business is booming and salaries are rising, we know we can do better.

Our highest economic priority is to foster economic inclusion for all – through workforce development.

I am tremendously proud to announce tonight that in 2020, we will deliver the first City of Fayetteville Workforce Development Plan.

This initiative is aimed at promoting the economic mobility of our residents who need our help the most and will change the focus of our economic development efforts moving forward.

The pillars of this Plan are:

- First, the development of talent: with goals aimed at poverty reduction and increased wages for people with barriers to employment through accessible career pathways- such as skilled trades and technical training
- Second, the retention of talent: by raising the number of residents who live and work in the city, addressing pay and employment inequities and increasing access to workforce housing

- And third, the attraction of talent: by increasing the number of technology, professional services and entrepreneurial jobs and expanding our overall employment base with quality jobs that raise wages

Hand in hand with job growth we need to focus on housing and redevelopment. I mentioned earlier that smart growth is the foundation upon which we are building our city.

Staff and City Council accomplished many strategic goals this past year:

- We adopted the revised Comprehensive Plan, City Plan 2040
- We adopted the 71B corridor plan and negotiated the transfer of highway 71B to the jurisdiction of the city
- The Historic District Commission has approved design guidelines for the Washington-Willow Historic District
- We removed the regulatory and administrative barriers to installation of solar energy systems

The City's growth and changes that come with it require that we take the long view. Accordingly, we are refocusing on the Long-Range Planning Process. Some of these projects include:

- Rezoning the section of the 71B corridor with a regulating plan from North Street to Township
- A 71B Corridor Transit Plan to include coordination with transit providers, Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission, our Transportation Committee and staff to determine potential partnerships and next steps

Using strategies laid out in City Plan 2040, we will clearly define "appropriate infill" and ensure that new structures fit in and support the character of Fayetteville's existing neighborhoods.

We will develop protocols for infill construction projects that outline "good neighbor best practices" and ensure that construction companies and neighbors work together to mitigate construction impacts.

To create more compatibility in our built environment, with help from the Council, the Planning Commission and the people, we will review permitted uses, building height, mass, setbacks and architectural design.

We are looking closely at storm water drainage and ecosystem preservation as we evaluate building type. We believe these steps will encourage more missing middle housing and reduce negative impacts from infill.

With an eye toward business-friendly customer service, developers will see a shorter timeline for permitting and certificate of occupancy.

We are actively participating in regional initiatives on affordable housing.

As population grows, so do jobs and housing needs. We must proactively manage the growth on our city's borders.

I will appoint an annexation task force to develop a formal policy to present to Council that plans for smart and environmentally sensitive growth on the City's outer edges and in the Planning Area.

City Council asked staff to pursue a Trailside development plan. This project will evaluate the multi-use trail system, land use, zoning adjacent to trails, development codes and will engage the public.

We will align funding, development and planning of city infrastructure with the goals of City Plan 2040.

Historic preservation progress is ongoing at the Woolsey Farm and Homestead. The Porter Produce building will see masonry repair and roof framing for the stability of that historic structure.

Of utmost importance is our Downtown Master Plan, and we will promote a centralized, unified effort for marketing and physical improvements to the downtown area, one of which will be lighting enhancements at the Downtown Square Garden!

One long-term goal of our downtown development should be to transform all sizable surface lots to new developments that could include structured parking, if necessary.

These locations are opportunities for public/private partnerships for the development of liner buildings for office, commercial and residential use.

One very important redevelopment project that I believe will transform our downtown area is our emerging Cultural Arts Corridor!

Fayetteville's vision for this project is a shared place-based commitment among numerous partners to bring festival and event space, public plazas, streetscape enhancements, trail improvements, natural spaces, outdoor classrooms, green infrastructure and streamside access.

I am confident this new project will provide something for everyone.

In a few short months, we will begin construction of the new streetscape and widening along West Avenue, a new replacement parking structure and paths through the Fay Jones Woods across from the new Fayetteville Public Library expansion.

This newly revived urban forest and its restored streams will truly become a park for everyone to explore and learn about our native species and natural ecosystems. I am thrilled that construction will begin this year and be open to the public in 2021!

Then we can begin development of the Civic Plaza! Its naming and programming are being developed by our partners at Experience Fayetteville.

We look forward to working with the newly established regional arts services organization under the executive leadership of Allyson Esposito and the Northwest Arkansas Council as we set the course for Fayetteville's Cultural Arts Master Plan.

I am excited about these action items for the smart growth of our city. Long term planning and successful and critical partnerships will help us realize our revitalization goals.

Principle II: Climate Action

Now, let's talk about the second principle: Climate Action.

Fayetteville is leading the way regionally and globally by expanding programs to reduce waste, increase recycling, improve alternative forms of transportation, integrate new energy systems, prioritize green infrastructure and promote energy efficiency standards.

Fayetteville is serious about climate action and a transition to a climate-safe future.

In response to President Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, Fayetteville was one of the first 10 cities to join the "We Are Still In" Agreement in 2017 and we are now one of 407 cities who pledge to "adopt, honor, and uphold the commitments to the goals enshrined in the Paris Agreement."

As you know, our adopted Energy Action Plan is a comprehensive plan, focused on renewable energy and emissions reductions. We will convert all municipal facilities to 100 percent clean energy by 2030. We will reduce community-wide emissions 40 percent by 2030 and 80 percent by 2050.

Our Solar Array Project, in partnership with Ozarks Electric Cooperative and Today's Power Inc., installed two solar arrays at our wastewater treatment plants to provide renewable energy. The project increased clean energy consumption by city facilities from 16 percent to 72 percent and will save the city \$6 million over the next 20 years.

Beyond city operations, carbon reduction targets can be met on the streets. Vehicle emissions represent 30 percent of community emissions, so Fayetteville committed to building trails to within one-half mile of all residents, with a larger goal to attain 25 percent multi-modal transportation for residents by 2030.

Partnerships are a key to success for the city. Working with the University of Arkansas, VeoRide and Experience Fayetteville, the City is home to the first stationless bikeshare program in Northwest Arkansas. The program served over 100,000 rides last year! We worked together with Razorback Transit and Ozark Regional Transit to create more efficient routes and began offering free rides on ORT within city limits.

We will further study commuter-oriented transit to cut back on vehicle emissions.

Reducing waste pollution is a high priority for our community. We expanded recycling services to participating multi-family unit dwellings for our curb-side recycling program and launched a commercial composting program.

The City Council also passed an ordinance banning all to-go Styrofoam containers, and tonight you will see an ordinance before you to regulate single-use disposable bags.

We will prioritize density to encourage residents to contribute less emissions per capita and enable them to live around smart growth nodes where jobs and services are within close proximity.

By cutting emissions and making low-carbon alternatives accessible and affordable to residents, Fayetteville demonstrates that urban areas of all shapes and sizes can lead the transition to a climate-safe future.

As a SolSmart designee, more local homes and businesses will be able to obtain affordable, clean and reliable electricity through solar.

These actions help encourage solar companies to do business in the area, driving economic development and creating local jobs.

And that's not all we're doing.

Important ecosystem projects include:

- Stormwater maintenance to reduce flooding and erosion and preserve the quality of streams - our stormwater plan will not only address existing problems, but also close gaps in our storm drainage requirements for new development
- We will improve urban forestry and habitat through native plantings and invasive plant removal with a new plan to increase the healthy tree canopy throughout the City through preservation and maintenance of mature trees, planting of new trees and public education
- We will continue stream restoration to include Tanglewood Branch Creek and urban forest restoration in the Fay Jones Woods Portion of the Cultural Arts Corridor
- We will improve energy efficiency with lighting upgrades
- A new Micromobility Plan will look at the impact of e-scooters and bicycles on vehicle miles traveled
- Electric vehicle charging stations will be installed in various parking facilities

Our sustainable practices require that we set metrics and measure success.

We will use the LEED for Cities and Communities global rating system for evaluating the sustainability of our city.

Principle III: Quality of Life

Quality of life is different for everyone and we must provide that quality with equity and inclusion. Every community's challenges are unique and there is no playbook to ensure success.

The foundation for a healthy quality of life for all begins with certainty – certainty that our people will be safe in our community. We seek the highest quality of policing and fire protection to keep us safe from harm.

The Fayetteville Fire Department recognizes the importance of protecting life, property, and the environment of our residents. In 2019, they had more than 12,000 calls for service, a 2.6 percent increase over 2018.

Despite the increased call volume, our Fire Department was able to maintain just under a five-minute response time and retain its #1 ISO rating.

In our Police Department, we dedicated an officer to patrol our trails system and added School Resource Officers to the Fayetteville Public Schools.

Tonight, I am pleased to report to you some of the highlights of our 2019 crime statistics.

Overall crime was down 9 percent, violent crimes were down 14 percent, misdemeanor marijuana-only arrests were down 43 percent and all custodial arrests taken to the Washington County Jail were down 15 percent. There is nothing more important for our City's future stability and our ability to keep our freedoms than the safety and security our police and fire departments provide for all of us.

And by all of us, I mean every single person who resides in this city. Everyone should not only feel safe but included and welcomed as members of our community.

Two very important initiatives that speak to the heart of this city's inclusion are the "I Count" Census 2020 campaign and the Welcoming Plan.

It is imperative for all our people to stand up and be counted! Both the Census Bureau and our community partners will be reaching out in the weeks and months to come. Census data is used to determine Fayetteville's portion of federal funding across programs in education, housing, health, facilities, transportation, emergency services, food assistance and more!

Millions of dollars per year hang in the balance. Of equal importance is that our count determines how many representatives each state gets in Congress and is used to redraw political district boundaries.

The City's "I Count" campaign partners with over a dozen institutions across our community who are busy with outreach programs encouraging everyone to participate. Our 2020 Census count will affect the funding of programs for 10 years.

The City's Welcoming Plan has focused on translation services, staff training and diversity programs, a virtual Welcoming Hub, and implementation of the amendment to City ordinance allowing residents who are not registered voters to serve on certain city boards and committees.

With the help of Arkansas United, Fayetteville has joined "Cities for Citizenship," a national initiative aimed at increasing citizenship among eligible residents.

We are also working with the UARK Credit Union to set up low-interest loans to pay for the citizenship application and test.

As I mentioned, quality of life when seen through a lens of equity impacts everyone differently.

The city provides services to all residents, including those less fortunate among us. We will always seek to offer new and better resources for those in need:

- The Community Resources Hearth Program housed 45 adults and 36 children
- Our Transportation Program provided taxi services to 126 participants and transit services to 212 participants, including the elderly and disabled
- Our public facilities program housed the Elizabeth Richardson Center, one of three locations in the region providing disability services and support
- Ranger's Pantry provided more than 10,000 pounds of food for 301 pets in 142 households

Our City's Parks are another way we extend valuable quality of life to all our people across our green spaces.

I am extremely excited about the new Centennial Park at Millsap Mountain. Its

state-of -the-art cyclo-cross, mountain biking and hiking trails are unlike any other in the region!

This park sits atop one of Fayetteville's most majestic mountains, with a central upland wetland surrounded by wooded trails. This preserved greenspace will be open to the public very soon!

I am proud of many other accomplishments from the past year in our Parks:

- The Yvonne Richardson Community Center's Kids programs were strengthened with the addition of a new pavilion
- Artificial Turf was installed on the infields at Gary Hampton for our softball and baseball programs, reducing rainouts and daily maintenance and making Fayetteville a more attractive destination for tournaments
- A rowing dock named in honor of Roy Rom was completed at Lake Fayetteville thanks to \$13,000 of contributions from The Rowing Club and Rotary Club
- Urban Forestry gave away 1,000 trees in October as part of the Celebration of Trees

And, looking forward to 2020:

- Construction of a new accessible, inclusive playground and interactive fountain will begin at Gulley Park
- And a new Parks Master Plan will kick off this spring!

As I conclude tonight, I want to tell you about the importance of our community's solidarity and standing up for what we believe in.

And what we believe in is that our diversity is our strength and our source of power. Nobody knows this City better than our people. We are all different, yet we are all one.

We are always forward thinking and willing to take calculated risks. It is our heritage to be proud and fearless. We will face whatever challenges that come our way and say "here we stand."

We will continue to fight for those principles because only our people should determine the best fit for us. We act independently, as a City, freeing ourselves from the conformity of others, making our own choices and making our own way.

My friends, as President Jimmy Carter once told us:

We become not a melting pot but a beautiful mosaic. Different people, different beliefs, different yearnings, different hopes, different dreams.

And it will be through our diversity and our belief in one another that this beautiful mosaic, the City of Fayetteville, grows to meet the demands of our future.

And my friends and Council Members - Fayetteville's future is bright!