

## **State of the City: Springfield MO--2016**

Good morning and thank you for that introduction, Matt. I am delighted to be here for my final State of the City address and to discuss the past year and try to put this year in perspective.

First of all, this has been a year of many, many successes and just enough challenges to make one truly appreciate the people and the resources that this community can bring to bear on any issue that crops up. But please be assured that the City is in an extremely strong position right now.

For this State of the City address, I have selected a variety of topics and will expand briefly on each one.

The first is Economic Development and Growth. It is imperative that a city continues to grow and develop in order to create jobs and opportunities for those born here and those who move here for whatever reason.

In last year's address, I mentioned several buildings in our downtown are that were being re-purposed and re-developed. I am

delighted to tell you today that every one of those buildings is now open and on line. After 22 years, the Heer's Building has its lights on again—as does the Vandivort, the Sky 11 Building, the U, and the Hotel Sterling. And there is more than \$150 million in the pipeline for upcoming public and private projects in our downtown area.

Just listen to this list of recognitions: Springfield has been named to the Top 5 in the nation for Economic Strength, and named the 15<sup>th</sup> Best City for job growth.

In addition, WalletHub named our community the 3<sup>rd</sup> Best City in which to start a business; Springfield has been named 1<sup>st</sup> for business start-up resources; and a Top 10 City with the lowest cost of living. Not a bad list of accolades and a list we can be proud of.

Hotels are having a banner year in the area of Tourism and room sales in 2015 topped \$100 million for the first time ever.

In the area of Transportation and Infrastructure, this year we completed our 4<sup>th</sup> Diverging Diamond intersection and a number of

roundabouts, continuing to result in reductions of both injury and non-injury accidents.

Since 2009, we have more than tripled the number of bicycle lanes in the City, and Council policy continues to be that we wish to support all methods of movement throughout our City.

And in 2015, our Springfield-Branson National Airport set a record for passenger arrivals and departures. Ticketed passengers moving through our airport was up 9% from 2014 and broke the record set in 2005. In addition, our greatly expanded General Aviation facilities led to Springfield's being named the 2<sup>nd</sup> Fastest Growing Mid-size Airport in the US. Every year, the FAA conducts an evaluation of all airports that looks at operational safety, facility standards, training, and emergency response. For the 12<sup>th</sup> year in a row, our airport has been evaluated with no noted discrepancies. This is one of the best records of any airport in the central United States.

We have made enhancements to the Ozarks “Intelligent Traffic” Transportation System, which includes the variable message signs that you see along our major trafficways. Those signs are interesting because, if we put a message up about using seatbelts or other safety meme, people ask why we’re wasting time with that—it’s supposed to be for emergencies. And if we don’t have a message up, people call to see if the signs are out of order.

And in the last couple of years, we have opened the Birthplace of Route 66 Roadside Park and are continuing revitalization efforts along the western Route 66 corridor. Our annual festival is just a couple of months away, and—last year—more than 23000 attended the 3-day festival.

Public Safety has been an important topic of discussion this year, as it should always be. The year has been complicated by the County’s closing the City-County Jail to our municipal prisoners. However, it is the Mayor’s job along with City Council to solve problems and, along with our great staff, we have solved this one.

Beginning this week, our municipal prisoners could be housed in either Miller County or in Taney County. We had tried for a year to get this problem solved and the issue of transportation of prisoners was always the sticking point. However, just in the last two or three months, this transportation issue was resolved and our police officers and our Municipal Court judges now have options that have not been available for the past year.

While the issue with the jail and police has garnered most of the attention, that is not—in any way, shape, or form—the only piece of the Public Safety picture. Jefferson City also plays a role and, since 2009, when I came on Council, the City’s Legislative Priorities have called for adequate state funding of local jails all over the state. This has not yet occurred and, when the Legislature did appropriate additional funding, the Governor withheld it.

Today, we have 321 sworn police officers with an additional 11 in the pipeline, thanks to a COPS grant that the City Council approved last year. While it is not totally where we want to be in

terms of headcount, this 12% increase in headcount is the largest increase of any City department and certainly a noteworthy improvement over the 286 officers we had on staff in 2010 during the worst of the recession.

Our police department also has been reaccredited by the Commission for Accreditation of Law Enforcement. We are only the 7<sup>th</sup> city in the 21 years of the agency to achieve this distinction.

If you recall, during the recession, we were also rotating the closures of various fire stations, all the while keeping our fingers crossed that there wouldn't be a fire in that particular area.

Thankfully, that practice is in the past and we hope we don't have to repeat it . . . ever.

Our fire department had one of its busiest years ever, responding to many flooding emergencies in addition to fighting fires and teaching about fire prevention.

The Community LifeSave Initiative, which began in 2014, is going strong. This program, run by our award-winning Fire

Department, is for companies and organizations of at least 50 employees and 50% participation. It provides certification for people completing the CPR/AED training. This certification is for two years and our Fire Department is gearing up for the re-certification training. And new companies and organizations are always welcome to get involved. This program is saving lives all over our community.

We come now to the topic of Environmental Stewardship, which—in an early morning meeting—is probably not a really spellbinding topic. But I'll do my best with it.

The spectre of environmental mandates from the EPA looms over communities all over the country, but Springfield has taken the point for the entire country and developed a model that is not only being accepted by the DNR and the EPA, but is being promoted and recognized as a possible model for other cities and towns. Our Integrated Plan for the Environment has been presented to conferences and meetings all over the state and even before the

House Water Resources and Environmental subcommittee in Washington, DC. The concept is simple, but the approval and implementation are anything but. The idea is that each local community is best positioned to define its own environmental priorities and utilize most of its environmental resources on those highest priorities. The EPA has always mandated a cookie-cutter approach, so this acceptance is a major departure since it has become fairly obvious that the upcoming mandates could bankrupt most municipalities in the country. More to come on this issue.

For at least the last eight years, Springfield has prided itself on its conservative fiscal practices. For multiple consecutive years, we were able to pass a balanced budget without borrowing money, without using one-time funds, and without raiding the reserves for operations. Considering we have just emerged from one of the worst recessions since the Great Depression of the 1930's, this is an enviable record.



The City also created and supports the Citizens Sales Tax Oversight Committee. This committee meets quarterly, examines how Springfield is using its tax money, and issues a report to all citizens of any findings. The CSTOC continues to give “clean” ratings to the City, indicating we are handling, investing, and utilizing your various sales taxes properly.

For 39 years in a row, our Finance Department has received a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers’ Association. This is an record to be proud of because it denotes openness and transparency.

In the midst of the recession, in 2009, citizens passed a special sales tax for the Police-Fire Pension Fund. This has enabled the City to move that fund from a level that was seriously underfunded at 29% and was threatening to tip the City into bankruptcy to a current mark of 71%. At a time when most cities were not aware that they had a pension issue, Springfield took the initiative to take care of

business, putting our community at a strong competitive advantage as we emerge from the recession.

At the same time, Moody's raised the City's bond rating—an action almost unheard of in the midst of the recession. The City has been able to easily maintain that rating—enabling us to refinance bonds at a lower rate, thus saving citizens hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest. This is prudent fiscal management at its best.

One thing that we have learned as we went through the recession is that we had to find new and innovative solutions to our problems. The old solutions, many times, did not fit the current, high-tech and ever-changing problems we were presented with. And many times, the problems we encountered had never been seen before.

I have to mention at this time all the people that we have working on behalf of the City of Springfield: our City employees. They are absolutely top-notch; they are knowledgeable; they want to be of service to our citizens; and they take pride in what they are

doing. The 2000+ employees of the City—led by City Manager Greg Burris and City Clerk Anita Cotter—comprise a workforce that I would happily compare to any other city in the country and be extremely confident that we would come out on top. And they all do their work in the glare of media scrutiny and constant public criticism.

From the folks who work with families at Hazelwood Cemetery to the zookeeper who feeds the lions and owls to the firefighter who responds to a medical emergency to the restaurant inspectors who work to keep our food supply safe to the planners who work on helping people fulfill their dreams to the employees who respond to almost 400 Sunshine requests a year to the folks who help coordinate the annual Birthplace of Route 66 festival, to the police officers who keep over 175 special events going with minimal disruption to our traffic flow, all of these employees work for us—those of us in this room—and they do it well. However you can, let them know they are appreciated.

Also, this past year, we developed a focus on Neighborhood Revitalization. Recognizing that government cannot do it all, we reached out to the neighborhoods and to potential partners for a series of Community Listens and for the Zone Blitz. Concentrating on Zone 1, our poorest and most needful area, we learned that that the three largest issues in those neighborhoods were 1) nuisance properties, 2) sidewalks, and 3) public safety.

Along with about 180 partners, including major partner Convoy of Hope, we have rolled up our sleeves and gone to work. At a community event last month, over 2600 volunteers helped provide 8800 citizens with groceries, new shoes, family photographs, medical care, dental care, access to job applications, access to an array of social services, and more.

For those of us who volunteered, it was a humbling experience to realize that there is a part of Springfield that most of us in this room never encounter. Yet, the folks who live in those neighborhoods want exactly the same things we do. They want a

safe neighborhood; they want a clean neighborhood; and they want access.

In addition, I am happy to announce that we are finally out for bids for a Community Greenhouse to be built at the landfill. We have made two trips to Washington to try to obtain funding, to no avail. However, we are now in a place where we can fund it ourselves. As you know, the landfill, through the decomposition process, produces methane gas. This is captured and burned by City Utilities to generate electricity. The by-product of that burning is heat, which currently is just dissipated into the air. Our engineering studies show that we can capture enough of these “free” BTUs to heat up to 4 acres under glass. That’s a lot of fresh vegetables. There is still more to come on this topic.

When I was first elected in 2009, the levels of the public’s trust in elected officials was, quite frankly, in the toilet. There was almost zero trust showing in multiple surveys. One of the accomplishments that I am most proud of is that, at the local level, our Council and

staff has been able to move that needle to a higher level of trust. Folks have repeatedly taken surveys that show an increasing level of trust at the local level, although not necessarily so at the state or federal levels. This speaks strongly to the City's commitment to openness and transparency. We tell voters and citizens what we are going to do, we provide periodic progress reports, and then we let them know when the project is finished.

For City Council, what is our major report card? Our grade is determined by whether voters trust us with their money. As I have mentioned before, while in the midst of a recession, voters trusted us enough to pass the Police-Fire Pension Sales Tax. And then we built on that trust and the tax was renewed for an additional five years. During the time I've been on Council, all tax issues have passed with large margins.

And in April of this year—right now that seems so far back, but it's only been two months—voters approved the renewals of our Capital Improvements Tax and our Transportation Tax by votes of

85% and 86%. I defy any city or county in this country to match that level of approval—not only on a tax issue—but on TWO tax renewals placed on the same ballot.

The City of Springfield is doing the right things for the right reasons at the right time. And our citizens respond to that. To begin to wrap up, I'd like to introduce a short photo mosaic and then I'll be back to conclude.

## VIDEO

The past seven years have been full. I have had the opportunity to do things that I had never imagined, much less as part of day-to-day life. I have met people all over the world as well as within this community that I would not have met any other way. Some have become very special friends. As I finish out my term, it has been a pleasure to serve you.

The State of the City is strong. Our reserves are intact. Our plans are in place. We tackle our issues head-on with positive

results. Our economic development forecasts are all headed in a good direction. We are growing jobs. The State of the City is strong and getting stronger. **May Springfield Live Long and Prosper!**

Thank you.

Matt ?