

2018 State of the City Address  
Jon Costas, Mayor of Valparaiso, IN  
Before the Valparaiso Chamber of Commerce  
January 23, 2018

It is indeed a privilege to deliver my fifteenth state of the city address to this audience. I had no idea what a fabulous adventure awaited me the first day I stepped into the mayor's office at 166 Lincolnway back in 2004. I was long on vision and campaign promises, but short on experience. How was I to deliver on these many lofty goals? I didn't want to let my supporters down, but more importantly I wanted to help our city prosper and succeed. Citizens were counting on me to find a way to solve the problems addressed in the campaign, and to seize the opportunities that lay ahead of us. There was a lot at stake and people were, rightly so, expecting results.

The first order of business was to compile a team of outstanding public servants who shared this mission. It was always first about the team. Now it may seem counterintuitive to focus on the players before you have a game plan, but it makes practical sense in sports, business and even government. In his classic book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins revealed that the most successful CEOs first got the right people on the bus and *then* figured out where to drive the bus. In other words, success begins with the team, and in the absence of a great team, your great vision is irrelevant. Certainly, the driving force behind our success over the last fifteen years is our extraordinary leadership team. These thirteen men and women have taken on the visioning, planning and heavy lifting necessary to transform our city. Please give them another round of applause.

In addition to a stellar leadership team, two other ingredients are required for organizational success: Vision and culture. Vision includes mission and strategy. It is like the hardware of a computer. By vision, mission and strategy we determine our purpose and our goals. But a computer without software is useless. That's why an organization's culture is critical. It's like the software that drives the computer. Culture comprises the values, aspirations and rules of engagement that enable an organization to function in a healthy, productive manner and thereby achieve its goals. A healthy work culture is magic, but requires continual focus on the key values that sustain it. Our leadership team identified five core values from day one, and as we hold ourselves daily accountable to those values our culture has vibrant, healthy and productive. Our five core values are

1. Boldly Proactive.
2. Surprisingly Responsive.
3. Creatively Frugal.
4. Respectfully Compassionate, and,
5. Honestly Accountable.

These aspirations have always remained our True North in the storm, our solid foundation for change.

In addition to a great team and a healthy work culture, every organization needs an inspiring vision, and a clear strategy to achieve that vision. I believe that vision is organic; it flows up from those you serve. Over the years we have constantly engaged our citizens to help us shape the future vision for our city and then we have crafted successive strategic plans to methodically drive us toward that vision. The accomplishments of 2017 and those to come in the current year are not haphazard, but emerge from our current strategic plan that was finalized in 2016. So let's take a look back on some of those accomplishments as we also look forward to 2018 and beyond.

Let's start with safety because it is the foundation for all we do. Students learn best when they feel safe, businesses prosper when crime is low and neighborhoods flourish when they are well protected. First, I can say without any reservation that our safety departments—police, fire and ambulance—are exceptional. The people, training, equipment and facilities that comprise our safety departments are second to none. We are models for other cities. Our nationally accredited police department is a leader in community policing. In 2017 we approved and funded body cams for all of our police officers and began a new program called Safe Exchange that provides a safe environment for individual commerce. Our fire department, working closely with our Utilities Department, lowered its ISO rating to 2, which puts us in the top 1% of all fire departments in the state, and also lowers the cost of your homeowners insurance. Our safety departments are deeply engaged with our citizens in many ways in their quest to find new proactive strategies for keeping our community safe. I must make special mention of the new MAAC Foundation public safety training campus located next to TFT in Valparaiso. This amazing public/private partnership is the brainchild of Stu McMillan whose talents and generosity have impacted our city in countless ways. Thank you Stu and the entire McMillan family.

Our Parks Department has earned a stellar reputation across the Midwest and continues to roll out new programs and facilities that improve our quality of life and sense of place. Last year we began extensive renovations at Tower Park that feature university themed outdoor basketball courts and a new all-weather surface baseball field funded partially with a generous donation from former VHS athletic star and current MLB ace, Jeff Samardzija. These public-private partnerships are part of a program championed by Parks Director John Seibert called "Leaders Giving Back". This year we will construct our new dog park near the high school and complete our expanded horticultural campus on that same site. If you haven't walked the new Vale Park Pathway that was completed last year, you're missing out. It's stunning. And just recently it was named the best pathways project in the state by the Indiana Greenways Foundation.

I believe that growth is an indicator of success. Valparaiso is a community of choice and we are adding new residents everyday. Our growth rate is sustainable and manageable. It's our duty to manage growth so that it enhances rather than detracts from our quality of life. Utilities, storm water solutions, building standards and code enforcement are some of the important tools we use to successfully encourage and manage growth. In 2017, housing starts and overall building permits increased by 40% over 2016 and the total value of private investment in the community surpassed \$124 million. Currently we have

twelve subdivisions under construction and many homes being remodeled throughout the entire city. Our sustainable growth is a trend we expect will continue well into the future.

Valpo residents expect outstanding service from their public works department and we deliver on those expectations. Our roads will see more investment due to a modest annual wheel tax passed last year that leverages new state funding for local roads. So get ready for more red cones come April. We refuse to thrust deferred maintenance for our roads and infrastructure on the next generation. We have modernized our fleets in every respect and obtained a state grant recently which guarantees that 90% of our citizens will be utilizing the large 96 gallon recycle totes. Nate McGinley, was recently appointed our new public works director is off to a great start in leading this crucial department.

One thing I've discovered as a mayor is that while engineers are rarely the life of the party, they sure are important to have around. And we have an exceptional engineering director in Tim Burkman. He is smart, methodical and determined. His efforts have enhanced your life more than you know. He and his staff have solved countless storm drainage issues over the last decade and are now tackling our most pressing storm water conundrum at Beauty Creek. In 2017 Tim's office completed a computer optimization of our 33 traffic signals to reduce rates, improve safety and traffic flow. And our engineers are chomping at the proverbial bit to begin construction of the new roundabout this year at the mega intersection of Silhavy and La Porte. We are officially the roundabout capital of northern Indiana, and this new circle of bliss will increase traffic flow, reduce injuries, save energy and look pretty awesome.

Our vibrant downtown continues to thrive and expand. This year we witnessed the addition of many new specialty shops and restaurants. Private investment is booming in downtown buildings as well as the central neighborhood area. Our first larger housing redevelopment, St. Paul Square is transforming an outdated and vacant school into a bustling 48-unit condominium neighborhood. This type of higher density housing redevelopment has been part of our long-term downtown plan and is now coming to fruition. We hope to see more developments like this one being built by Coolman Communities. 2017 was our busiest year ever for fun events in Central Park Plaza and the Urschel Pavilion. Over 120,000 visitors came to our downtown to attend one of our many festivals, events and celebrations. Our downtown plaza has become a sacred place for citizens from all walks of life to gather and enjoy family fun.

Our downtown renaissance expands with the redevelopment now underway at the old Anco wiper blade manufacturing site on south Campbell. In 2017, the city acquired this property, remediated its environmental concerns and is now seeking private partners in a mixed-use development. Long an eyesore and environmental problem, this area will soon be transformed into cool living and work spaces. Also, we have moved our Chicago Dash transit parking to this site, along with the new Coach bus service to the Chicago airports.

Bill Oeding has been our city administrator since 2009 and it is impossible to overestimate the value of his service in our success. Bill oversees the day-to-day

operations of the city and makes sure our strategic plans stay on budget and on time. He provided me with a list of accomplishments in 2017 that is much too long to include here, but let me mention a few. We are bringing high quality dark fiber to our city with our ValpoNet project. Much of the conduit was installed in 2017 and we will be lighting it up in a few months. This will benefit our schools, universities and business, giving us a competitive advantage when it comes to Internet bandwidth. We upgraded all of city streetlights to LED to increase quality of light and reduce costs. Our city shade brigade planted 269 trees in city rights of way. We completed the financial transparency portal located on the city's website. The new North Calumet avenue pathway and lighting project was completed last year adding to our many miles of safe and accessible pathways. We have plans to build new pathways in 2018 and will also add almost a mile of sidewalks to the Northview school area thanks to our as our fourth safe walks to school federal grant. Also, in 2018 we will begin the expansion of our current city hall. We are sorely out of space and are finding a creatively fugal way to expand our central facility, while maintaining the historic architecture of this beautiful building. Finally, we are in the process of hiring a new leadership team position, Director of Community Engagement. This key position, recommended by our ValpoNext initiative, will help us connect closely with our neighborhoods, expand our hiring efforts to better reflect our growing diverse citizenry and enhance our commitment to be an open and welcoming city.

At the onset of this address I talked about the tripartite recipe for organizational success: great people, an inspiring vision and a healthy work culture. But these ingredients are no surprise to you. Before me are hundreds of talented leaders, some battle tested and some emerging, who understand these key leadership principles. But as C.S. Lewis said, "we have a greater need to be reminded than instructed". What he means is that we are forgetful humans easily distracted from noble pursuits. We are prone to neglect virtue unless reminded often of its beauty and what it requires of us. That's why it is so important to continually remind ourselves of the aspirations we seek, like justice, compassion, hard work, forgiveness, collaboration, sacrifice, understanding, acceptance, duty, kindness, perseverance, family and faith. A community that elevates and pursues timeless values of virtue in its conversations, plans and actions is destined for success. Having observed and led this city for the last fifteen years I can say without reservation that Valparaiso is that kind of city. A city that values unity over autonomy and duty over convenience. And that is why I am optimistic about our future. This city operates like a vibrant organization. First, it has quality people. Second it has a collective vision—a vision that is fueled by extensive citizen engagement. And finally, it embraces a healthy culture formed around timeless and noble values. In our quest for greatness, we must remember the words of De Tocqueville as he studied a young America. He concluded by stating, "America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, it will cease to be great." It is only our quest for goodness that can lead us to true greatness as a city, state and nation.