

Charleston, SC - Official Website

2017 State of the City Address

The following State of the City Address was prepared for delivery by Mayor John J. Tecklenburg on January 24, 2017, at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Mayor Pro Tem, members of City Council, honored guests and fellow Charlestonians:

It is a great honor to be speaking with you this evening from Founder's Hall at Charles Towne Landing in West Ashley -- the birthplace of our city almost 350 years ago, and a critical part of our future. As a West Ashley resident, and as the first mayor ever to have the distinction of delivering this address from the West Ashley area, I know how passionately committed our West Ashley citizens are to this part of our city -- and how proud we are to welcome you tonight for this report on the state of our city.

But before I begin, I would like to take a moment to introduce our distinguished Charleston City Council members. And I would ask each member to stand as I call out their name, and to remain standing until all have been recognized.

Councilmember Gary White-- Councilmember Rodney Williams -- Councilmember James Lewis -- Councilmember Robert Mitchell -- Councilmember Marvin Wagner -- -- Councilmember Keith Waring -- Councilmember Mike Seekings -- Councilmember Peter Shahid, Jr. -- Councilmember Dean Riegel -- Councilmember Bill Moody, Jr. -- And Councilmember Kathleen Wilson.

Fellow citizens, these are my colleagues in city leadership, and I'd like to ask you to join me now in recognizing their efforts and thanking them for their service.

Thank you all, and please be seated.

I'd like to thank everyone for the opportunity to serve as mayor of this great city. It's really a great honor, and a remarkable experience -- one in which I am blessed to be able to share your concerns and challenges, and work together with so many talented folks to address them, but also blessed to share the goals, hopes and aspirations of our citizens, and to collaborate with you to achieve them. I would so like to thank my wife, Sandy, and my family for their incredible support.

So I'm pleased to report that the state of our City is one of optimism and unity. We're optimistic and united because we are working together, positively, on a shared vision to improve our citizens' quality of life. And we're committed to making Charleston more livable, fair and just -- a city of opportunity for all, particularly for our children.

Last January, in my first State of the City address, I laid out a specific plan to realize this vision for our city by taking action in five major areas -- citywide livability, transportation and public transit, the economy, jobs and housing, more responsive city services, and specific initiatives to improve each and every area of our city -- from West Ashley to the Peninsula, and from Daniel Island to James and Johns Islands.

It is my duty tonight to report to you on the progress we have made in addressing those goals over the past twelve months, and on the progress we will continue to make in the coming year.

And, as always, with regard to citywide livability, we begin with the first job of government -- public safety.

Over the past twelve months, our outstanding police chief, Greg Mullen, has led a series of initiatives that are already making our citizens safer and more secure, and our community stronger and more united. First, working with more than 1200 community leaders, citizens and police officers, we have now completed Phase One of the Illumination Project, developing eighty-six specific strategies to help strengthen citizen and police relations and trust. I believe the Illumination Project, overall, will become a national model for building trust between police and citizens. In addition, we have deployed body cameras, added a full-time Victims' Advocate to the department's Family Violence Unit, and made significant investments in our officers with new and even better training and equipment.

This year, the police department's goals include the deployment of new, state-of-the-art public safety technologies, continued implementation of the Illumination Project's strategies, and winning re-accreditation from CALEA, the gold standard in modern police practices and procedures.

Along with Chief Mullen, our excellent fire Chief, Karen Brack, has also been making great strides in improving public safety in our city. In the last year alone,

our fire department has broken ground on a new fire station in Carolina Bay, begun design on a new station on Savannah Highway, expanded the Fire Marshall Division's education and inspection programs, completed a thorough review of its comprehensive plan, and worked tirelessly to establish a temporary fire station in the Cainhoy area, which is expected to be open later this year.

Also in 2017, the fire department will continue to implement safety, training and fire-response best practices, and to further increase its collaboration with neighboring fire departments to ensure that our citizens receive the fastest, most effective response from the nearest available first-responders for any emergency situations.

Now, before I continue, I'd like to take just a moment to recognize all of the men and women of our police, fire and public service departments for their extraordinary service over the past year, particularly their work during Hurricane Matthew. Due in no small part to their amazing efforts, we were able to come through Matthew and other challenges with our citizens safe and our city secure – and on behalf of all our residents, I thank them for their hard work, and we honor them for their service.

After public safety, our second major priority in the area of city-wide livability improvements continues to be flooding and drainage relief.

In 2016, our efforts were focused on a number of drainage projects, such as the Market Street drainage tunnel and pump station, which cleared almost 400 million gallons of water from the area at the height of Hurricane Matthew; the commencement of Phase 3 of the Spring/Fishburne Drainage Improvement Project, which will bring similar improvements to the west side of the peninsula; and the Forest Acres Drainage Improvement Project, which will bring much-needed relief to West Ashley. In addition, we have worked directly with residents in the Rebellion Road, Greenleaf Street and the White Chapel area, among others, to make neighborhood-specific drainage improvements.

But despite all of these efforts and more, we know that sea level rise and extreme weather events are creating challenges that our city simply cannot solve with its existing practices and procedures. That's why I've asked our Emergency Management Director, retired Coast Guard Captain Mark Wilbert, to expand his duties. Beginning tomorrow, as our city's first-ever Director of Emergency Management and Resilience, Mark will coordinate with a group of key city leaders, department heads and citizens to begin the process of building a strategy to make our city more resilient to the effects of increased disasters, sea level rise and our changing weather. Using the City of Charleston Sea level Rise strategy as a starting point, this group will prioritize projects and actions that can and should be taken immediately, as well as identifying future actions. Looking at efforts such as the Church Creek Drainage Basin engineering study, battery wall construction and future drainage projects throughout the city, this group will formulate a comprehensive strategy to truly make Charleston a more resilient and livable city for the future.

AND, with regard to improving general livability, we have worked to ensure that the cultural arts are even more accessible to citizens throughout our city, with a West Ashley screening of Spoleto's Porgy and Bess, an expanded Piccolo Spoleto footprint, a plan to bring a new community arts center to Cannon Street, and the naming of Charleston's first poet laureate, Marcus Amaker, who is helping to bring an appreciation of poetry to every school and public space in our city. This year, we will do even more in this area, for we understand that the arts have a unique ability to uplift the human spirit, and to bring our citizens together.

Our second major area of focus as we work to protect and improve our citizens' quality of life is transportation and public transit, areas where we have set the stage for significant investments in the past year, but where much, much more remains to be done to implement these investments.

First, the extension of the Mark Clark Expressway. When I spoke with you last year, many sincerely believed that that this critical project was dead – and they were almost right. But thanks to the hard work of state and local leaders and grassroots citizens throughout the Lowcountry, the Mark Clark Extension is once again a going concern, and early this year, we hope to have a recommitment with the State Infrastructure Bank that will finally get this essential transportation project moving forward.

In addition, working in partnership with county and state officials, we have been able to move forward with several road projects in the last twelve months, including the widening of Harborview and Clements Ferry roads, improvements to the corner of Folly and Camp roads and the intersection of Highway 61 and Sam Rittenberg, the addition of a much-needed left turn lane at Bee Street, and signal retiming for West Ashley traffic lights.

And this year, thanks to our citizens' decision last November to complete the local penny for transportation, we have provided funding for any number of critical road projects, including the flyover at Main Road and Savannah Highway, the widening of the Glenn McConnell Parkway, and major improvements to Folly Road and Savannah Highway. What's more, these new funds will also allow us to make major investments in public transit, such as the launch of a regional bus rapid transit system that will eventually run from Summerville to the city, and major upgrades

to CARTA – which has already delivered brand new DASH buses that the public can ride for free downtown.

In addition to our work on roads and public transit, we have also emphasized infrastructure improvements for bicycles and pedestrians, with the adoption of a new city bike share program in conjunction with Gotcha Bike and its major sponsor, the Medical University of South Carolina, new connections to the West Ashley Greenway, and pedestrian safety improvements to seven major streets in the Charleston area. These and other bike-ped initiatives will continue in 2017, as we begin work on the Huger Street streetscape improvements and complete construction on new Greenway improvements in Carolina Bay and along Highway 17.

Finally, we have begun work on several new parking projects—including a new parking garage along with our WestEdge development, increased residential parking zones, the introduction of new, more convenient parking meters, and a pilot program aimed at making parking more affordable for evening and late-night hospitality workers in the downtown area. This year, we will begin a top-to-bottom citywide review of parking policies, practices and procedures.

Our next major action area in 2016 was on the economy and housing, because without meaningful opportunities to succeed and affordable places to live, real quality of life will continue to be out of reach for too many of our fellow citizens.

In terms of our economy, we focused on the areas most in need of immediate attention – strategic economic development in West Ashley, and expanding opportunities for women and minority-owned small businesses. And the results to date have been very encouraging, with certain retail areas of West Ashley already beginning to see the benefits of our revitalization efforts, and increased outreach to ensure that women and minority-owned businesses are participating fully in city infrastructure initiatives large and small, from the Spring/Fishburne drainage project, to the Louis Waring Senior Center (which we just broke ground for yesterday), to the International African American Museum. This year, we will also be hiring a full-time business specialist, whose mission will be to assist and expand opportunities for small business, with a focus on minority and women owned businesses throughout our city.

On housing, it's clear that housing affordability is a regional issue, at a crisis level, and we must use every tool at our disposal and work with all partners to provide more affordable housing products in the Charleston region. We began with Tent City, a sprawling homeless encampment that had developed in our North Central neighborhood and grown to more than a hundred tents by early last year. Working closely with public safety, nonprofit service providers like One80 Place and the Homeless Coalition, our local faith community and caring individuals, we were able to close Tent City in a matter of months, while housing former residents of the encampment who chose to participate in the program. But as successful as that important effort was, we understand that the closing of Tent City did not end the problem of homelessness in our community, and our work does not end there.

In addition, we also rehabilitated several home and rental properties in exchange for long-term affordability agreements, acquired new lots for the building of future affordable homes and, along with Mayors Summey, Page, and Johnson, formed the Mayors' Council on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, which is tasked with helping us develop a long-term regional approach to this long-term regional problem.

This year, we have already introduced a new affordable housing ordinance with expanded requirements for future developments, and are in the process of forming a Community Land Trust in partnership with the Historic Charleston Foundation, which will allow us not only to create new affordable housing, but to ensure that it stays affordable over time. Additionally, we are making several existing city properties available for the development of new affordable housing units.

Our fourth action area for quality of life improvements has been making city government itself better and more responsive to our citizens.

Here, we began with the creation of an internal city performance enhancement team, which received training at the Peak Performance Academy in Denver, Colorado, and will lead our performance innovation program. In conjunction with this internal initiative, we are currently in the process of hiring the external firm that will help conduct our city's first performance review -- a wide-ranging examination of city processes and procedures that will help us understand what's working, what needs improvement, and what we're going to have to do to get there. Over time, this performance review will include literally every department, division, and office in city government and will examine issues ranging from the scope of our arts initiatives, to the timeliness of our business services, to the fairness of our policing, and will recommend improvements and reforms wherever they are needed.

Along with these performance improvement efforts, we've also focused on improving transparency and accountability for our citizens. For the first time, we are now livestreaming both our Ways and Means and our City Council meetings, so residents can follow the work of their city government in real time. In addition, we have introduced a number of new technology tools and services, including a

website that allows all our citizens to apply directly for board and commission appointments, a road-closure mapping application, new online licensing and payment options for both businesses and residents, and expanded access to computer labs at our city recreation facilities. And our police department is currently at work on a new data dashboard application that will place law enforcement statistics right at our citizens' fingertips. This year, we will be adding the ability to submit building plans online, to expedite our approval process.

The fifth and final focus of our efforts has been squarely aimed at the place where quality of life issues are experienced most directly -- in the areas and neighborhoods our residents call home.

First, the area we're speaking from tonight -- West Ashley, which has become the center of the single largest and most comprehensive renewal and revitalization effort in our city's history.

Over the past twelve months, we have established a West Ashley Revitalization Commission, modeled on the successful Downtown Revitalization Commission of the 1970s and 80s. We've hired one of the leading firms in the world to work directly with the Commission and our West Ashley citizens to develop a comprehensive master plan that will guide the area's development for years to come. We've partnered with County and school officials to create a 69 million dollar TIF district redevelopment fund. We've dedicated 37 million dollars to West Ashley parks and capital projects, not counting drainage, through the next two years. And we've worked closely with County officials to create the Du-Wap Community Plan.

But our West Ashley revitalization effort didn't stop there. It also includes important livability and quality of life initiatives, like the popular West Ashley Farmers Market, expanded fire and police presence, and better public-realm landscaping.

And this year, West Ashley revitalization will kick into an even higher gear, as our City's new Resilience office works with one of the world's leading engineering firms to reassess flooding and drainage issues in the Church Creek Drainage Basin, and to create a thoughtful, effective strategy to tackle the problem.

Next up is the peninsula, where our efforts have been aimed at easing the livability issues. In the past year, we've worked with our neighborhoods and citizens to develop a pilot program to better distribute carriage tours in residential areas. We've entered a new set of official comments on cruise ships with the Army Corps of Engineers. We've expanded the reach of code enforcement officers, created a short term rental task, worked with CARTA to improve city bus service, and recommended new, lower temperature limits for carriage horses.

And finally, but perhaps most important, I'm pleased to report that we were able to protect our Board of Architectural Review from the most significant legal challenge in its history -- thereby preserving our ability to control inappropriate design and development in the historic district as our city grows in the years ahead.

Currently, we are preparing two new initiatives for Council's consideration -- first, a new set of BAR revisions and height standards to further strengthen our preservation and design protections. And, second, a series of changes to our hotel zoning regulations aimed at bringing hotel overdevelopment under control, while strategically enhancing the public benefit of any future hotels.

On James Island, we made renovations to existing recreation facilities, improvements to the municipal golf course, and, in partnership with Mayor Bill Woolsey, kicked off a new era of friendship and cooperation between the City of Charleston and the Town of James Island. On Johns Island, we worked with the county to design a third lane for Maybank Highway with minimum tree removal--construction to begin soon--and are planning for a new community pool. On Daniel Island, we moved forward with new park and boat landing plans, including a community recreation center, as well as reaching a final settlement on long standing issues related to the Daniel Island Development Agreement.

My fellow Charlestonians, what I've described to you tonight is just a fraction of the work that we've been able to do in partnership with you, our citizens, to improve livability and opportunity in our city -- and only a glimpse at all the work that still lies ahead. But after serving as your mayor for the last year, I have had the honor of seeing our city at its very best. I've seen our citizens pull together in a hurricane. I've seen people from all walks of life volunteer their time and energy to make our neighborhoods stronger and better. I've seen the magnificent families of the Emanuel Nine inspire us all once again with their dignity and grace. And that is why, tonight, I report to you a City of optimism and unity. Together, we can and will build the better, brighter future we all want for our city and our children--the future that is now so clearly within our reach.

Thank you. God bless you, and God bless the great city of Charleston.

[View Archived Speech](#)

