

READ Carson state of the city address

CARSON CITY, Nev. (KOLO) - Here is the full text of the state of the city speech, delivered by Carson City Mayor Bob Crowell January 30, 2017:

I am honored to stand in front of you once again to deliver the State of the City address and to highlight the successes and challenges of Nevada's finest city. To start, I want to acknowledge and thank the Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event.

Let me also thank my fellow board members, Supervisors Abowd, Bonkowski, Bagwell and our newest member, John Barrette, for joining me.

Both organizations, one private and the other public, are representative of what I wish to convey tonight, one community working together to improve the quality of life for all of us.

You have heard me say that the people of Carson City are its greatest asset. Our community is comprised of people and businesses who are selflessly devoted to making Carson City a better place to live. In tonight's address I will talk about what that means as well as discuss the affairs of your local government.

Carson City is not merely a collection of neighborhoods; we are one community, indeed one community working together. If I could leave you with one message tonight, it would be just that. The state of our city is strong, the state of our community is even stronger.

At the risk of leaving someone out, I would like to mention just some, and I repeat, just some, of the examples of what makes us a great community.

Most recently our community experienced one of the worst storms we have seen in recent years. Heavy snows in the mountains followed by rain created the perfect storm for flooding. You won't find a better example of our community and our state coming together to minimize injury to people and damage to property.

We have every reason to be proud of the city's proactive response to this extreme weather event. Our storm water division identified problem areas and the public works department worked overtime to prevent significant flooding. During the storm, our Emergency Operations Center addressed problem areas quickly and kept the public informed. The Public works department deployed over 35,000 sandbags and numerous flood barriers. Their preparation and response are major reasons why the flooding damage wasn't as severe as in our neighboring counties.

Unfortunately, we still did have major damage, especially to our park and recreation facilities with many trails severely eroded or washed out entirely.

But as bad as the storm was, before and during the event one would see our residents filling sandbags with many taking the time to help others.

And before and during the event you could see our residents cleaning gutters and drains in front of not only their own property but that of their neighbors as well, in other words doing what they could to help everyone.

Our state partners were also heavily engaged--from Governor Sandoval to the Department of Emergency Management to the Nevada Division of Forestry to name a few.

I can't say enough about our own public works department and all of our other emergency personnel including those who staffed the Emergency Operations Center. Simply put--they were everywhere all the time symbolic of the adage, "when the going gets tough, the tough get going."

Let me express our community's heartfelt thanks to each of you who, along with our city employees, were the epitome of another adage, "boots on the ground get it done."

As we say in the Navy, Bravo Zulu to each and every one of you.

Our Carson City Visitors' Bureau has also been hard at work. This past year, we were proud to host the first race in the Carson City Off-Road Epic Rides series. I'd like to thank the Visitors' Bureau, our city staff and all the volunteers for their hard work in planning and executing a superb event. Kudos to Kurt Meyer for taking the lead local role on the Epic Rides private side.

From firsthand experience, I can tell you that participants and visitors alike loved the race, but they loved our city even more. As most of you know, the Carson City Off-Road Race was named the nation's top mountain bike race--that's right, tops in the entire nation. Residents of other cities may think that it would be hard to improve on that ranking, but they don't know the people of Carson City. The 2017 Carson City Off-Road will raise the bar even higher. I have every reason to believe that our namesake, Kit Carson, would be proud of the race.

In previous addresses, I have thanked Muscle Powered for their dedication and hard work in leading the development of the Ash to Kings Canyon Trail that was such an important part of the Off-Road Race and which has earned national recognition in its own right. I would like to do that once again. I am sure that we will see the Muscle Powered volunteers and others stepping up to repair the recent storm damage to our trail system.

A big part of the draw for the Off-Road Race is the street fair that took place in our downtown. This past year, we opened the newly redesigned and reconstructed Carson Street in our historic downtown. Many cities in America have seen their downtowns decline as tastes in transportation, retail and lifestyles change. Many have taken proactive measures to restore the draw of their downtowns and Carson City now joins that list.

I am particularly proud of the work that everyone put into this important project. I want to thank my fellow board members for the leadership they have shown in this ten-year effort as well as the Downtown Business Association, the Downtown 20/20 group, the Chamber of Commerce and our Redevelopment Authority Citizens' Advisory Committee.

Our own public works department led by Darren Schulz and our city engineer, Danny Rotter, deserve much credit for completing this project on time and on budget. As an aside I am told that many folks affectionately refer to Carson Street as "Rotter's Road." I am one of those people.

A key part of our downtown renewal were public-private partnerships. Muscle Powered contributed over \$16,000 for functional and artistic bike racks. As you know, our community holds the distinction of being a bicycle friendly community and the redesign of our downtown makes bike travel safe and attractive in that area.

Not to be outdone, the Chamber led the effort to sell benches and raise money for public art. The Chamber director and I recently had the privilege of dedicating those benches to those who purchased them in honor of family members and businesses.

I look forward to working with our new arts and culture director and the arts community in the design and procurement of public art for our city. McFadden Plaza is a wonderful addition to our city, a true gathering spot with something for all ages with free Wi-Fi provided by SkyFiber, no less. On behalf of our community, let me thank the McFadden family for their generous donation that made the Bob McFadden Plaza a reality. Mark and Jenny Lopiccolo were similarly instrumental in granting the city a right of way to build our new stage on the plaza. The McFaddens and Lopiccolos are demonstrative of the value of one community working together.

Let me also thank the Chamber, the State of Nevada and our own city staff for making the Silver and Snowflakes festival this past Christmas truly stunning. Many have mentioned to me that they have never seen such a beautiful Christmas display in front of the capitol and up and down Carson Street. I couldn't agree more with them.

And along with the beauty of Christmas lights in the winter, this summer our city will once again be adorned with the beautiful flower baskets in our downtown area. Those baskets were started by our own Supervisor Abowd and continued by the Greenhouse Project of which she is a founding member. Speaking of which, let me say, there is no project of greater significance that defines the meaning of "sense of community" than the Greenhouse Project.

The downtown project was only one of three major capital projects that we completed in 2016.

Early in 2016, we proudly cut the ribbon on our new Multipurpose Athletic Center, or MAC. The MAC was an important part of the projects the voters approved when they passed Question 18, the quality of life initiative in 1996.

I am very pleased to report that the MAC is indeed a first class facility. Residents use the courts and indoor track at drop-in times and we have hosted several tournaments. Additionally, the Boys & Girls Club uses it as part of our co-use agreement with them. Earlier this month we even set the MAC up as an emergency shelter. By way of use statistics, to date the MAC has issued 406 passes and served some 11,547 drop-in patrons as well as 17 different leagues with 1,661 participants.

We also cut the ribbon on our new Animal Shelter in October. Along with the MAC, this shelter is a world class, no-kill facility that facilitates the care of vulnerable animals. The shelter includes a surgical suite and other clinical assets. This shelter epitomizes the meaning of "Carson Proud". If you have not seen it, please take some time to view the new shelter, and maybe take home your new best friend!

This facility would not have been possible without the caring support of one community working together. The Nevada Humane Society and Carson City's very own CASI contributed significant funds and volunteer hours to make this shelter a reality.

In another example of our citizens working together with their city government for the betterment of our community, this past year we created a new citizens'

committee, TRAFFC for short, to provide guidance on how to address the declining state of our roads.

Similarly, our Utility Financial Oversight Citizens' Committee also performs a valuable function with respect to the use and application of more than \$30,000,000 relating to the renovation and upgrading of our water resource recovery facility.

Indeed, all of our city boards and commissions are made up of hardworking individuals who devote substantial personal time, without pay I might add, ensuring citizen participation in the many functions of government. They are critical to the quality of life we enjoy in our community and are most deserving of our collective gratitude.

Additionally our community is blessed with a growing list charitable organizations that provide needed assistance to our residents, organizations such as:

Friends In Service Helping or FISH, which in addition to its normal functions will soon open a 39 unit living facility for veterans known as Richards Crossing. I would note that Supervisor Bagwell is a member of the FISH board and was instrumental in raising the funds necessary to acquire the furnishings for Richards Crossing. And of course, Richards Crossing would not be a reality without the private donation of land by the Garth Richards family.

Advocates to End Domestic Violence which, along with Carson Tahoe Hospital and our health officer, Doctor Pintar, Deputy District Attorney Fralick, Shannon Hess and Supervisor Abowd, among others, recently worked with the city to stand up a fully staffed Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), thereby eliminating the really rather inhumane requirement that sexual assault victims somehow get themselves to Reno for care and understanding because such assistance was not available in our community.

Ron Wood, which continues its many missions of taking care of families in need with much of the food it distributes being donated by the Greenhouse Project.

Partnership Carson City that oversees many community outreach programs targeted at among other matters, drug abuse, in our youth community.

Circles, led by former Supervisor Shelly Aldean, provides a hand up to families living in poverty. Shelly recently received the Governor's Points of Light award.

The Boys & Girls Club that daily strives to enable all young people to realize their full potential as productive, responsible and caring individuals.

Our Senior Center that provides a gathering place and tasty food for our senior community. Indeed, its Meals On Wheels program continues to grow each year, reminding us of the necessity of keeping the needs of our seniors in the forefront of our community thought.

Pets of the Homeless, a non-profit entity of national prominence that provides food and assistance to what may be called underprivileged animals. And many others.

In addition to charitable organizations we have a growing list of arts and culture entities that add to the sense of community so important for successful cities. To name but a few: The Brewery Arts Center for bringing us free summer concerts, TedX, and many other performances and art displays. The Capital City Arts Initiative that provides art in various locations in our community including the Sierra Room, BRIC and the Court House to name a few.

McDonalds, Cal Ranch, Rutledge Law, Champagne Beauty Bar, Charlie B's and others for bringing us tremendous wall murals at McDonalds North, Telegraph Street and other locations around our city. The Nevada State Prison Preservation Society that continues to work to create a museum at the site of the old maximum security prison. Where possible, we should do everything we can to help accomplish that important project.

The Friends of the Library that operates Browsers Corner and raises funds for our library that now includes a digitorium and online eBooks to check out.

The Hop and Mae Adams Foundation created to advance our community on a variety of fronts including the Adams Hub for entrepreneurs of all ages and the soon to be open 308 North Curry Street mixed use development.

We would not be one community without our numerous civic organizations such as Kiwanis, Rotary, Elks, United Latino Community, Lions, Soroptomists, Masons and others, organizations that look for and routinely tackle needed community services.

Speaking of which, the Carson Nugget deserves a big pat on the back for providing its annual free Thanksgiving dinner for our entire community, and another pat on the back to Walmart for sponsoring Holiday with a Hero, organized by our police and public safety professionals. Nor would we be one community without our veteran service organizations such as Honor Flight Nevada, Veterans Resource Center, the Veterans Center at WNC, Vietnam Veterans Chapter 388, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Marine Corps League and many others that tend to the care of our military and veteran community.

As a retired naval officer and Vietnam veteran, I am particularly proud of the city website that lists all the organizations in our community that are available to assist

our veterans. Much of the information for that list was provided by local Green Zone coordinator, Marine Gunnery Sergeant and Vietnam veteran, Frank Reynolds, who is a recipient of the governor's Veteran of the Month recognition as well as an Honor Flight participant.

As Governor Sandoval rightly states, Nevada is a veteran friendly state, perhaps the most veteran friendly in the nation. Likewise, our community lives up to that designation at the local level.

Speaking of our city website, thanks to the hard work of our IT folks, this site is now the epitome of transparent government and will only get better.

Let me also mention the importance of our faith-based organizations in making our city truly one community. These organizations provide not only moral and spiritual guidance, but assistance to those with physical needs such as food and shelter. Indeed, the Church of Latter Day Saints recently opened its doors as an emergency shelter for those in need during disasters. In addition to its other duties, the Salvation Army routinely staffs city-provided shelter services when needed. And I am sure there are many others whose services include providing assistance to the needy.

Examples of community service don't just include adults, but our school age kids as well. For example, Carson High School's NJROTC cadets raised and donated \$2,500 to five needy families so that they too could enjoy Christmas this past year. Hats off to you young folks. Keep it up!

Education is also a critical component of a successful and sustainable community. We are fortunate to have not only good K-12 public and private schools, but Western Nevada College as well. Additionally, the Adams Hub sponsors the new program for budding entrepreneurs. These learning facilities are critical to both the short term and long term health of our community.

I apologize if I did not mention a particular organization or service—it is not meant as a slight. As I mentioned, Carson City's greatest assets are its citizens and our businesses including our manufacturing community, all of whom contribute to an economy that supports our quality of life.

I could go on all night talking about the good works that abound in our community but let me just say on behalf of our board and our community, we appreciate all that you do and want all of you to know how important you are to making us truly one community with a quality of life that's the envy of others. It is what makes Carson proud and we are proud of all of you.

Your city government is also devoted to ensuring that Carson City is a community that we can all be proud of. I've mentioned some of Carson City's completed capital projects. We have several others that are in progress which I'll touch on in a moment, but what about the city as a whole? As to that question I can report to you that the city is moving in a strong direction.

When I became mayor, our ending fund balance, or rainy day fund as it might be called, was almost depleted, it stood right around the statutory minimum of 5 percent. I am pleased to report that at the end of last fiscal year, that fund was at 10.75 percent, or \$8.1 million. Our finance folks expect that we may well end this fiscal year with a similar amount. That gives us some options as we look at recapitalizing city assets from buildings and grounds to the sheriff's office and fire department.

Your city has managed its finances with a steady hand and continues to maintain its investment grade rating from the major rating agencies. Moody's rates the city at A1 and Standard and Poor rates us as AA-. That rating is important as it affects the rate the city is charged when we issue bonds. It is also a good indicator of how outside independent agencies view the financial health of our community.

A good snapshot of the health of our local economy is the growth, or decline, in taxable sales on everything from automobiles to building materials. As many of you know, sales and property taxes make up the bulk of the revenue that finances government services including public safety, parks and recreation and the courts. This current fiscal year, we based our budget on a growth rate of 4 percent in sales tax revenue. That number looks to be about 8 percent for this year, or about a surplus of \$900,000. Again, that represents a degree of flexibility for the city to meet, in a thoughtful way, its maintenance requirements. Those increases in taxable sales also indicate a continuing improvement in our employment picture. The city's current unemployment rate of 5.3 percent is approaching its pre-recession level. That said, we still have too many wage earners without jobs or working part-time, and for some, working multiple part-time jobs. Oddly enough, at the same time we are experiencing a shortage of skilled labor in our region.

We are working hard to improve that employment picture. The city has partnered with our development partner, the Northern Nevada Development Authority, to attract employers and good-paying jobs to our city.

Last year we created the first certified site in the state, a designation that cuts the time it will take for a developer or builder to entitle and construct a new facility. We have worked closely with NNDA to retain and expand our current manufacturing base and attract new manufacturers as well. I can report to you

that many of the infrastructure improvements recommended in our manufacturers' survey have already been completed, including road and drainage enhancements.

Programs such as Jump Start, high school CTE classes, our library's M1 certification program and the enhanced CTE courses and degrees offered by WNC will also improve the employment picture in our city and region.

Home values are also up in Carson City. I don't need to tell any homeowner how deep the recession was, our median home values declined from just over \$300,000 to \$145,000. That number is \$275,000 today and several real estate professionals predict a 7 to 9 percent increase for 2017.

There has also been a significant increase in both residential and commercial development. We are seeing new construction in both those categories matching pre-recession numbers. The increase in commercial construction - everything from a manufacturing facility to an office building - is particularly important as these generally represent new jobs for our community. Rates of commercial construction are an important leading indicator of the health of our economy, and it's pointing towards a strong 2017.

We have already permitted over \$20,000,000 of new commercial development through the first six months of the fiscal year and we are on pace to meet or exceed pre-recession numbers in that category. Residential construction is similarly strong with over \$25,000,000 of permitted value through the same period.

Typically, NAI Alliance does a bi-annual vacancy study for retail, office and industrial properties in Carson City. Supervisor Bonkowski reports that they have seen vacancy rates in all sectors decline, with the rates for industrial, downtown retail and residential rentals at levels that are below what are considered a balanced market. As he states, there is a need for new industrial buildings immediately and a repositioning of the infill and vacant retail properties that remain to bring new retailers into the downtown core.

Housing is another area where we need additional supply as the vacancy rate for residential rentals is below 2 percent, a rate that low makes it more difficult to attract business if employees cannot find a place to live.

A few words about growth.

As we talk about growth it is important to remember that our community has a growth management ordinance that limits the rate of growth on an annual basis. This ordinance has been in existence since 1979 and is one of the only such ordinances I know of in Nevada. Its purpose is to ensure that city services are sufficient to meet anticipated growth and that new development is carefully planned and managed. It is also important to keep in mind that a housing project that is approved for 1,000 units today may have a 10-year buildout which equates to 100 units per year.

Based on projected growth rates from the state demographer, we expect the city's population to reach 75-80,000 people between 2055 and 2065. The city currently owns over 18,000 acre-feet of water rights and of that we use about 12,000 acre-feet on an annual basis such that even in dry years, we have sufficient reserves to meet our current and future requirements.

That said, prudence dictates that even in wet years such as this one is shaping up to be, we need to keep a watchful eye on our water supply and the effect of growth on that supply.

We have worked hard over the past year on our water and wastewater infrastructure. The new water resource recovery facility is on budget and well ahead of schedule. We could well be cutting the ribbon on that new facility literally one year from now. It will significantly improve efficiency and reliability as well as significantly decrease odor.

We have also improved the city's capability to deliver water through the construction of the East- West Transmission line. Currently, the city has what are essentially two water systems, one for the east side of our community and one for the west side. This new line will connect both systems and improve the city's ability to meet our residents' requirements.

We have also worked hard to be a leader in reducing our energy usage. Carson City owns three solar photovoltaic systems totaling 500 kW dc. Those systems are all located at the Public Works' campus. Combined, they produce about 813 mwh of electricity annually. It should also be noted that the Carson City School District has 2,125 kW of solar PV installed at various school sites in Carson City.

Further, we are implementing an Energy Savings Performance Contract (ESPC). This project involves upgrading lighting to LEDs, installation of high efficiency condensing boilers, building control system upgrades, building retro-commissioning, building envelope repairs and an HVAC retrofit at City Hall. This \$4.2 million project is entirely self-funded through guaranteed energy savings.

Once completed, it will reduce the city's electricity consumption by over 2 million kilowatt hours each year. Natural gas savings will exceed 65,000 therms annually. Energy cost savings are projected to exceed \$200,000 per year. Annual greenhouse

gas reductions resulting from this project are equivalent to 188 typical American homes or removing 376 passenger cars from the road.

So, what can we expect in 2017? To start, the freeway bypass will finally be completed to Spooner Junction. The completion of that project is both a challenge and an opportunity. As the volume of traffic on South Carson Street is reduced, it will definitely be a challenge to existing businesses. But, as the city manager reminds me, that freeway runs in both directions. With the increase in Washoe County sales tax to 8.265 percent, Carson City retailers have almost a full percentage point advantage in sales tax and a \$0.27 per gallon advantage in fuel taxes. We should maximize those advantages.

We will also begin the design work on two important capital projects, Curry Street and South Carson Street. Both are funded in part from the 1/8 percent sales tax revenue plan. The city also received more than \$5 million from the state for the South Carson Complete Streets project. Both projects are important, in different ways, to the economic well-being of the city. South Carson in particular is the center of gravity for retail in Carson City. It is imperative that we do everything we can to help our retailers.

In an effort to ensure that in the future we avoid the deferred maintenance issues we are currently experiencing, city staff has been preparing an asset management plan to address deferred maintenance and the recapitalization of existing assets. Our board looks forward to the details of that plan and has made addressing those requirements a priority. During the lean years, we continued to kick the can down the road. That road has come to an end and we need to plan for the future.

I also want to address roads. While I am disappointed that the voters did not approve the fuel tax indexing, our board is committed to maintaining the condition of our streets to the best of our ability. As the primary source of road revenue is the gas tax, we have a structural funding problem. We have implemented a UNR-developed index and model to evaluate our streets and allocate resources. And, as I mentioned, we have also staffed a Citizens' Advisory panel to help us make funding decisions.

I should note that the problem facing Carson City is shared by every city, state and even the federal government. Gas taxes do not generate anywhere near the amount needed to maintain the current street and road systems. That said, we remain committed to managing this problem and maintaining the condition of our streets.

I have gone on for some time, but let me conclude by talking a bit about how my remarks as a whole are intended to relate to the theme of this year's address, "Carson City - one community working together." I chose that theme because it goes to the heart of what I believe makes not only a great community, but a great community that is sustainable over time.

I recently ran across a particularly apt description of what makes a community sustainable and why it is important. That description from the sustainability.org website reads:

"The sustainability of a community depends on creating and maintaining its economic and environmental health, promoting social equity, and fostering broad-based citizen participation in planning and implementation. Communities that engage citizens and institutions to develop sustainability principles and a collective vision for the future and that apply an integrative approach to environmental, economic, and social goals are generally likely to be more successful."

Because of your efforts our community enjoys a unique quality of life. It is because of your efforts that I am proud to report that the health of our city is strong and perhaps even more importantly, well on its way to becoming a sustainable community that embodies not only the spirit of Nevada in the 21st century, but one which we can be proud to pass on to future generations.

Thank you again for the privilege of serving as your mayor.