

Mayor Carl Gerlach

2017 State of the City Speech

February 22, 2017

Overland Park Convention Center

**“Back of a napkin”**

**Mayor:** He's driven miles of city streets.

This young professional has walked the sidewalks, spent hours looking at various community amenities and entertainment options.

He's viewed his future with many choices.

Is Overland Park being considered?

Welcome and thank you, Brett.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Chamber's Board of Directors for this opportunity to share with you the outstanding qualities of Overland Park.

To Tracey Osborne and her staff members, thank you for your continuous commitment to the city and for arranging today's event.

I would like to extend a personal thank you to Saint Luke's Health System, today's sponsor.

I appreciate your support of Overland Park, your commitment to the community and Chamber of Commerce, and your participation in making us one of the best communities in the nation.

Also, I want to thank Brett Mitchell, general manager of the Convention Center, Lori Kennedy, food and beverage director, and their dedicated staff for today's terrific service.

I'd like to take a moment to recognize my City Council colleagues.

It is with their support, hard work and dedication to serve that this community continues to grow and prosper, and is nationally recognized.

Please hold your applause until the end.

Councilmembers, please stand as I call your name.

Ward 1 Councilmembers

- Dave Janson and Terry Happer Scheier

Ward 2 Councilmembers

- Paul Lyons and Curt Skoog

Ward 3 Councilmembers

- Jim Kite and Dave White

Ward 4 Councilmembers

- Terry Goodman and Fred Spears

Ward 5 Councilmembers

- John Skubal and Council President John Thompson

Ward 6 Councilmembers

- Dan Stock and Rick Collins

I would like to acknowledge my family in attendance today. They are

- My wife Jill Gerlach
- My son Chris Gerlach
- My daughter Jennifer Gerlach, and
- My son in-law Ryan Brewer.

Finally, I want to thank City Manager Bill Ebel and city staff members who spent time with me in preparing for today's event. They are an incredible and talented team.

All right...before we go any further I need to address the elephant in the room...this is our new virtual mayor. We call him Virtual Carl.

**Virtual Carl:** Hello chamber. While I don't appreciate being referred to as an elephant...it's great to be with you today for our big address.

**Mayor:** Thanks to Virtual Carl, I'll be able to be in two places at once.

**Virtual Carl:** That's right. Juggling our busy calendar just got easier. Plus, I'm slightly taller and a little younger looking.

**Mayor:** That's fake news...you're not taller.

**Virtual Carl:** Also, because I don't sleep, I'm available to launch a Twitter storm at 5 a.m.

**Mayor:** But that's not my style. I would never use social media to...

**Virtual Carl:** Not to mention I'm fluent in several languages...buenos dias! Pre-vee-et...that's Russian.

**Mayor:** OK Virtual Carl, it's not a competition.

**Virtual Carl:** Clearly... Why don't you just hang back a little bit and...let me help with today's speech.

In 2016, Overland Park lost two people who left a legacy that helped create what our city is today.

They were Overland Park banker Ben Craig and former Mayor Marvin Rainey.

Ben used to say that back in the early 1960s, he and others would draw up plans for Overland Park's future on the "back of a napkin" at the old John Francis Restaurant in Downtown Overland Park.

He was being facetious yet insightful, using the analogy that early city supporters were reaching for whatever they could to create a unique and successful community.

Mayor Rainey was equally interested in Overland Park's future growth and development.

During his four years, he helped lead the council to annex land that includes where Oak Park Mall and Corporate Woods are today.

I don't need to tell you the importance of those two iconic sites of commerce to our community.

Both of these men served as Chair of the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and spent a lifetime offering valuable ideas, encouragement and sage advice.

Ben and Marvin were driven to move a young, hopeful and underestimated community forward.

**Mayor:** What great men and what great legacies. Thanks Virtual Carl.

You know...we're here today because of their knowledge, desire, leadership, courage, and the tremendous impact each had on Overland Park.

Using Ben and Marvin as guiding influences, four years ago your City Council took time to evaluate where Overland Park is today and think about what the "sketches on the back of a napkin" should be for the next period of growth in our city.

We identified our top priorities:

- Neighborhood Stabilization
- Strong Public Safety
- Quality of Place, and
- Public-Private Partnerships

We want to boost the strength, stability and appeal of your neighborhood.

This means ensuring that you have pride in where you live, and owners take care their property.

The majority of property managers and landlords invest in their property and are responsible.

For that, we are truly thankful.

We are going to implement a rental registration and inspection program in July to ensure exterior maintenance and upkeep of all properties.

Our goal is to register and begin inspecting the exterior of all residential rental property within a two year period of time.

It's our belief that the addition of four new code compliance officers will help balance the need for maintaining property in our neighborhoods with the rights of property owners.

We want that prospective young professional looking for a home to be inspired by what he sees and invest in Overland Park.

Our other investments include public safety, parks infrastructure and, in some cases, public-private partnerships.

Your safety and that of others is a top priority for us.

This year we will add 10 new positions to the Police Department.

Further, we re-established a 24-hour police presence at the Myron Scafe Justice Center at 85th and Antioch with regular patrol units.

And we're not talking about some virtual presence...we're talking about real officers.

**Virtual Carl:** You know I can hear you right?

**Mayor:** Sorry, Virtual Carl...but for some interactions there's no substitute for real people.

Our greater presence means higher visibility and improved community safety.

Police officers and city neighborhood planners last year organized the first ever "All Nets, No Drugs" basketball tournament for students in middle and high school.

It was a successful first year event.

We are again inviting youth to participate in this year's All Nets, No Drugs basketball tournament on April 22 at City Hall.

**Virtual Carl:** You know...if you'd let me play, I'd be "virtually" unstoppable. See what I did there? Virtual Carl? Virtually unstoppable? I crack us up.

**Mayor:** As I was saying, reaching out to create healthy community relationships has proven to impact these children and opened a path of friendship and trust.

Our public safety commitment also includes high-quality emergency response.

We are expanding our fire service in every part of our city.

Overland Park's first combined Public Safety Center, where both fire and police operate out of the same building, opened last summer.

It's located at 162nd and Antioch, east of Blue Valley West High School.

This joint operation is in an area that is seeing significant growth of homes and businesses.

We are also looking to build a new fire station farther south in about five years to continue to provide the best service to our community.

As we look to the future, we are discussing adding a life support medical squad at the Westgate station on 119th Street, south of Johnson County Community College.

This two-person squad would add coverage to the western side of the city to handle medical calls from our two busiest central stations in a more efficient manner.

We rightly point to our excellent public safety professionals and programs.

However, Overland Park knows that to build a successful city requires balance: A quality of place with amenities for all to enjoy.

Leisure time is important, and appealing park and community amenities help to meet those important needs.

Whether it's spending time at

- our more than 80 parks,
- the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens,
- the Deanna Rose Children's Farmstead,
- community centers and pools, or
- miles of combined bike/hike pathways or golf courses, Overland Park has something for you to enjoy.

We opened the city's first spray park at the site of the outdated Roe Pool in August. In place of the pool we invested more than \$2.5 million into the park.

It includes a new large shelter, trails, children's playground equipment and more.

It is a tremendous community success, and a great investment in those surrounding neighborhoods.

It's an example of creating a quality of place.

In fact, a common question from spray park visitors is - When will Overland Park expand the concept to other parts of the city?

We are looking to replicate that popularity at Strang Park, a 10-acre site located behind the Johnson County Central Library.

In 2020, we are planning a \$2 million renovation and investment where the focus will be making the playground inclusive and accessible to those physically disabled so everyone can enjoy it.

In the coming years there are plans to develop a new neighborhood park at 159<sup>th</sup> and Quivira.

It will include a picnic shelter, playground, a walking path with connections to the current trail and neighborhood, as well as a small plaza for a gathering spot.

Construction should begin in 2019.

One of our greatest attractions that enriches the lives of residents and visitors is the Overland Park Arboretum and Botanical Gardens.

Last year more than 147,000 people came to the Arboretum.

**Virtual Carl:** Excuse me....but if we're going to talk about the planned concept for the Arboretum...why don't you let Virtual Carl lead the Chamber on a virtual tour?

Preliminary plans for a new Visitors Center and Sculpture Garden at the Arboretum were presented last month to a City Council committee.

Members of the Arts and Recreation Foundation of Overland Park are asking the city to participate and contribute to the new visitors center and sculpture garden.

This new center would provide greater amenities, house additional programs, event space and other activities.

Features include entry gardens, reflecting pools, a pond promenade, event terraces, a great lawn, and connecting pathways and gardens.

The Arts and Recreation Foundation is involved in a major fund-raiser with a goal of \$10 million. Efforts to date have brought in over \$4 million.

The foundation has been successful in seeking contributions from corporations, individuals and others.

**Mayor:** That's right, Virtual Carl, and it's because of this public-private partnership that visitors will be able to enjoy many of the Arboretum's features for years to come.

Similar partnerships provide benefits for the City.

We are working with the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce and development community.

We want to redevelop areas of Overland Park and create more opportunities for Class A office space and job growth.

This partnership began 50 years ago with the launch of the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce.

This year the Chamber is celebrating its 50th Anniversary.

I would like to recognize the Chamber's importance to the community, its impeccable performance and years of highly talented leadership.

Thank you Tracey Osborne, former Chamber President Mary Birch, and the late Executive Director Dick Molamphy, who started it all in 1967.

Redevelopment is taking place following the demolition of buildings, such as last month's implosion of the former CenturyLink at I-435 and Nall.

VanTrust Real Estate is planning a major office development, Overland One, at this site.

Three new office buildings from four to five stories tall will be built.

Creative Planning expects to move into Building One. The company currently employs over 200 employees, at an average salary of over \$100,000.

It expects to triple its workforce in the next 10 years.

We are currently working with Creative Planning on its capital investment and workforce.

Just like your business, as part of our investment partnership with Creative Planning, we will establish benchmarks and an ROI.

An economy that attracts and creates jobs, and lures potential workers and residents, benefits the entire community.

Another partnership with the city provides balance and insight into the world of tourism.

The Overland Park Convention and Visitors Bureau has officially changed its name to Visit Overland Park to better define its purpose, which is to bring visitors to our community.

Let me share a little insight into efforts by Dana Markel, the Visit Overland Park team and its Board of Directors.

It is their task to encourage others to visit us and experience what Overland Park has to offer.

Visit Overland Park is responsible for developing and leading a strategy that will drive new revenue streams to our city through tourism.

The success of this tourism strategy depends on the collaboration between the Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Council and the city.

When all efforts are aligned, we achieve a better community by “Building The Good Life Together.”

As Visit OP begins to promote to business travelers and others, we want all to know that Overland Park is an active, vibrant, healthy, safe and prosperous community that enjoys a quality of life.

We are a flourishing city in metropolitan Kansas City.

It's a campaign to capture the essence of Overland Park.

A campaign to show the region and country who we are, and why it is important to start talking about our community.

We want others to talk about us.

The young professional looking for a place to live wants Overland Park to be a city with:

- Exciting development activity,





- increasing job opportunities and competitive pay,
- and a quality of place with a host of leisure time entertainment and activities.

We know that Overland Park does a good job in providing exceptional government services including stable neighborhoods, roads, parks, police, fire services and public management.

This is confirmed by our community.

Last year, more than 1,700 randomly selected residents responded to a citywide survey, a record number.

Residents were either very satisfied or satisfied with various aspects of Overland Park.

The preliminary findings include:

- As a place to retire - 77 percent very satisfied or satisfied
- Image of the City - 91 percent
- Quality of life - 95 percent
- As a place to live - 98 percent, and
- To raise children - 98 percent.

Obviously, Overland Park residents are overwhelming in their belief and support of our city.

These responses validate the energy coming from Downtown Overland Park.

**Virtual Carl:** You're right, Carl. I can tell you the future of Downtown Overland Park looks bright.

While you've been at your numerous meetings, I've been boots on the ground.

Downtown Overland Park is beginning to forge a new identity by building a good life with a cool urban feel in a suburban setting. It's changing how people perceive the district and it is really coming to life.

There are several mixed use projects that combined will bring over 500 new apartments within Downtown Overland Park this year and next.

Those new residents will become customers of stores whose owners are excited to see a potential to increase their revenues.

We want to welcome and provide a place for those tech savvy millennials and baby-boomers who want a different choice and are looking for a new adventure and way of life.

One new way of living in Overland Park includes the addition of nearly 30 miles of bike lanes on existing streets around Downtown Overland Park.

That effort will begin this summer! Which means, it's...wait for it...virtually a reality! (pause) I'm sorry...there's no off switch for my comedic genius.

**Mayor:** Am I really that corny?

There is no doubt that Overland Park provides high-level services in the most fiscally responsible manner.

We do so in a way and at a level that only a handful of cities in the nation can match.

Overland Park was ranked:

- fourth in the nation for Cities with the Best Quality of Life,
- Best Cities to Live in America,
- Safest Cities,
- Best Suburbs for Millennials,
- Best City for Families,
- Best Cities for First-Time Home Buyers, and
- 10 Happiest Cities in America.

We cannot stop; we must look ahead.

What is it that will make Overland Park a “city of the future?”

When a young professional looks at Overland Park, does he or she see that it has opportunities? Does either see a quality of place and what we can do?

I say Overland Park does have opportunities, but we have to create even more.

Former President Teddy Roosevelt once said: “Of course a man has to take advantage of his opportunities, but the opportunities have to come.”

What will it take to get Overland Park to be even better, to be that desirable, have-to-live-there, visit-and-work there community, the place of the future?

Do we want more

- Class A office to bring jobs?
- Entertainment venues for residents and visitors?
- Innovative development that breaks from that traditional design of the past and provides a choice for future generations?

We want answers to those questions and firmly intend to find them through a comprehensive, in-depth and valuable community visioning effort.

Today, I look out among you and know that, whether you are a millennial, Gen Xer or baby-boomer, you have ideas to propel our community to more success, to keep us the great city we are and move us to be a city of the future.

Look at what Vision Metcalf is doing for us today.

Overland Park is reaping the benefits of that effort with development in Downtown Overland Park and along Metcalf.

**Virtual Carl:** That's right...We want people's social media posts to make their friends and family think of Overland Park as not only as a place to live and work, but a destination, a quality of place.

B-T-W, I just "liked" our live feed of this speech on the City's Facebook.

We need and want to create a buzz about Overland Park...a sensation.

**Mayor:** It is our challenge to "take out a napkin and sketch on it" what we can do; look ahead, envision, partner and develop Overland Park so that we continue to be an exciting city with a momentum of looking to the future.

And...

**Virtual Carl/Mayor:** We want you to be part of it.

**Virtual Carl:** Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you.

**Virtual Carl:** Thank you. Man that felt good...I nailed it...pretty sure I stole the show.

**Mayor:** Looks like we still have some bugs to work out. Thank you for coming.