



# State of the City 2018

Jan. 17, 2018 | Kiwanis Club of Memphis

*Mayor Jim Strickland*

*Opening/acknowledgments:*

- *Members of the City Council*
- *Kiwanis Club of Memphis*

So here we are: Halfway through my first term as your mayor. We've had some great days and some long nights. We've had some frustrations, and we've celebrated some successes.

But through it all, we've tuned out the noise and we've focused on a central mission: To improve the services we offer our citizens. To make life better for every Memphian, every single day.

We don't get involved in the partisan politics of the day, or the shouting matches that far too often define politics these days. You probably know by now that's not my style.

**Our team shuts up, rolls up its sleeves and takes action.**

**For example:**

**Police ranks are up.** On Thursday night, I'll welcome another 80 or so officers to the Memphis Police Department. This comes on the heels of our largest class in years that graduated in August, and couples with the reduced attrition we've seen thanks to better pay and benefits. By week's end, we'll have the first net annual gain of officers in seven years.

**Unemployment is down.** Some 12,000 Memphians are employed today who weren't employed on Jan. 1, 2016. And in September of last year, we enjoyed our lowest unemployment rate since the federal government started tracking the statistic for cities in 1990.

**Street paving is up.** The \$18.5 million we're spending on paving this year, coupled with increased funding from the state thanks to the IMPROVE Act, means 265 lane-miles of road are being paved. That's double what the City was doing just four short years ago.

**The time you wait on your most important phone call is down.** When we came into office, it took us, on average, a full minute to answer a 911 call. Last month, the average was around 7 seconds. And last month, for the first time since we started tracking it, we met the national standard of answering 95 percent of your 911 calls in 20 seconds.

For these reasons, and for so much more to come, **the state of our city is strong — and getting stronger every single day.**

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We stand at a critical juncture in this time in our city. More and more attention is being focused on our city — not just by City government, but by the private sector. And as that attention comes, it happens at some pivotal moments in our history.

Soon, we will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination at the Lorraine Motel.

Shortly after I took office, I charged our team with ensuring that our commemoration matched the moment. **Memphis will rise to the occasion and show the world who we are** — and we will continue to reflect on the change that Dr. King brought not just to our city, but to the world.

Next year, we will celebrate the 200th year of Memphis — a city whose originality and soul has changed the world, and continues to change it.

That great milestone has only furthered our focus to cast the City we want for the next hundred years — what Memphis in our third century will look like.

From the earliest years of our city's history, Memphis looked to grow by growing out and extending the city limits. It's easy to think that where we stand today has always been a part of Memphis. But it, too, was annexed — back in 1899.

Those days of growth by annexation are over.

Fortunately, today we have an unprecedented amount of energy looking back to our roots — to our core, and to our neighborhoods. Our administration is leading that view, and we've made our goals all about reinvesting in Memphis.

**Think about the trends for a moment:**

- Population loss remains our No. 1 challenge, but we are losing far fewer every year than we did just a few years back.
- More than \$11 billion in recent, current or future development is happening in Greater Memphis, but here's the kicker: Most of that development is happening *inside* our city limits — not *outside* of them.
- Major moments for Downtown and Midtown — USL soccer, ServiceMaster, St. Jude, the Hickman Building rehab, Tennessee Brewery, Crosstown Concourse, among others.
- Major moments in Whitehaven with Elvis Presley Enterprises, and in Binghampton with the Binghampton Gateway Center.
- My job is to spread more of that throughout the city.

**Here's what guides our administration's vision of our third century:**

- We will **build up**, not build out.
- Our growth will be anchored on the strength of our core and our neighborhoods.

- Our growth will enable opportunity for all Memphians.

These principles dictate every decision we make every day at City Hall.

**Let me describe a few:**

- **Multi-family residential tax incentive.** We've all seen the amazing growth on Downtown's South End. So, I wondered, why can't we do more of this? We got with the development community, and learned that an incentive that enabled this growth Downtown couldn't be used in other areas. So we expanded the zone to Midtown, and already have some projects in the pipeline, like a major development at McLean and Madison. Our next goal is to expand this all across our city.
- We mentioned **paving** earlier, and that's no small matter for me. There is no more visible sign to citizens that the city cares about you and your street than a fresh coat of blacktop. Our long-neglected infrastructure is no longer an afterthought.
- It's not often that **sewers** are in the news, but they were recently, when we decided to no longer allow sewer taps to new developments outside city limits in unincorporated Shelby County. For too long, the City of Memphis helped subsidize its own population loss with this policy. I've put an end to it. We're reinvesting in our current sewer system so that it's equipped to handle our future needs.
- After decades and decades of sprawl, our administration is taking Memphis in a different direction. We're embracing the **right-sizing of our city** through de-annexation. Yes, the process is messy — but I encourage you to think of it from 30,000 feet. Our administration is the first ever in Memphis to actually propose de-annexation, and we may be the only city in the nation to do so.

- Our parks are vital components of a vibrant neighborhood life, and we know that we haven't invested as much as we should in them in the past few decades. So today, I'm proud to announce a program that we're starting this year that will reinvest in our parks. Inspired by the summer outdoor programs of the Parks Commission of old, but with a 21st century twist, we will be launching an initiative this summer to activate neighborhood parks with free programming. This means Parks staff leading games and sports, lending equipment, and making our parks real destinations within our neighborhoods and assets for neighbors.
- We're continuing to get real about our fight against **blight**. Code Enforcement has greatly improved its response time in responding to citizen complaints. And we're working to beef up our efforts to combat neglect with commercial properties.
- And of course, we can't describe reinvesting in our city without talking about the guide for our growth in our third century — **Memphis 3.0**. It's the first comprehensive growth plan for Memphis in almost four decades, and we'll debut it next year. It's 100 percent privately funded. Our planners are currently hard at work inside neighborhoods to develop the framework for a city of opportunity, connectivity and growth.

**Make no mistake about it: Our administration is doubling down on our core and our neighborhoods. Our administration is reinvesting in Memphis.**

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But just as we're reinvesting in the roads, the buildings and the infrastructure of *Memphis*, **it's important to know we are reinvesting in Memphians, too.**

One way we're doing that is by being real and frank about addressing our violent crime challenge — so that every neighborhood is safe, and every child has a chance. For too long, it was the topic that could not be discussed in Memphis — the topic we only discussed when the numbers are good.

**Well, I view my job to be equal parts celebrating our momentum and being clear-eyed about our challenges.** And crime is our greatest challenge. Everywhere I go, in every corner of this city, I hear it.

That's why we're rebuilding the Memphis Police Department. That's why we've partnered with the U.S. Attorney's Office to strengthen the enforcement of laws for violent repeat offenders. That's why we've done so much to intervene in the lives of our young people. And I could go on and on.

We face a crime challenge in this city, and we're working every day on our multi-faceted strategy for long-term crime reduction. Today, I'm proud to announce another step toward that. We know that gangs are a major driver of the violence that affects our city. So today, I'm announcing that later this month, Director Rallings is expanding our gang unit by eight officers.

This will allow our officers to better pursue gang members who commit these acts and who prey on our youth. It'll allow our officers to do what we want them to do: Intervene in activity before it starts and make our neighborhoods safer as a result.

I mentioned earlier all we're doing for our youth. Since we've taken office, we've grown the number of summer youth jobs, we've increased programming in community centers, and we've opened libraries longer hours.

I'm particularly proud that last year, we added literacy training in our summer community center programming for the first time. This is a critical point, and here's a critical stat: If a third-grader can read at the third grade level, they have a 90 percent chance of graduating high school — even if they grow up in poverty.

That's an astounding number — and a clear illustration of the fork in the road that our children face. It is incumbent on all of us — from City government, to the school system, to the community — to ensure that more of our children take the right road.

Universal pre-Kindergarten will be a significant step in that direction. I'm proud to report that, working alongside a unified City Council, we are getting closer to identifying a sustainable funding solution that can achieve this goal. In the coming weeks and months, you'll be hearing more from me on this.

**Because positively affecting our young people is the moral calling of our time in this city.**

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It's a tall task — just like everything we've mentioned in this speech. But as the French proverb says, "To believe a thing impossible is to make it so."

**When it comes to Memphis, I believe nothing is impossible.**

For years and years, Memphis had tried to do right by the 1968 sanitation workers, but came up short. Yet there we were last July, awarding grants to



these surviving men, helping provide the retirement security that had eluded them.

For years and years, Memphis had tried to remove divisive symbols from public spaces, but came up short. Last fall, we went to work building a coalition to support our application to the state. We built a diverse group of Memphians — black and white, Republican and Democrat, conservative and liberal clergy, business leaders, and everyday Memphians — a show of unity I've never seen in Memphis. And there we were four weeks ago watching these monuments placed years ago to support segregation being removed — legally.

***We can accomplish the impossible. We're Memphis!***

We're a city that's changed the world, and we're not through just yet.

Thank you.