
Text of State of the City address by Carson City Mayor Bob Crowell | Carson City Nevada News

By Carson City Mayor Bob Crowell

Here's the speech made Wednesday by Carson City Mayor Bob Crowell at the 2016 Chamber of Commerce State of the City address held at Gold Dust West:

My fellow Carsonites, thank you once again for affording me the privilege and, indeed, the honor of presenting some remarks on the state of our city, and many thanks to the Carson City Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber is a first rate promoter of our city. I am constantly impressed by the Chamber's ubiquitous and positive presence at nearly every event in our community.

We ended last year and started this year with some really rather historic events.

For the first time since 1944, Carson City once again became the namesake of a United States Navy ship with the christening of the USNS CARSON CITY EPF-7 in Mobile, Alabama. In naming EPF-7, the Secretary of the Navy stated, "Carson City displays American values of community, ingenuity and perseverance at their best."

The CARSON CITY was launched this past week and will be undergoing sea trials under the command of our own Captain Bob Wiley before being formally commissioned. Front and center in the christening ceremony was the local council of the United States Navy League, an organization dedicated to our nation's sea services. In Navy parlance, "Bravo Zulu" to all those who helped make the christening a truly special event, including the ship's sponsor, Susan Crowell, and the ship's matron of honor, Carolyn Southard.

Along with the new came changes to the old. Just this month Carson City saw the razing of the old Citibank building on the corner of Curry and Telegraph Streets to make way for a three story, mixed use, historically themed building being built by the Hop and Mae Adams Foundation. When completed, this building will feature 10 apartments with individual garages together with office and retail spaces. I'll talk more about our downtown redevelopment in a moment, but these types of projects help make Carson City a great place to live, work and play.

In another historic first, through the efforts of the Nevada State Prison Preservation Society, this past year saw the first commercial use of the historic Nevada State Prison when the Chamber held its annual meeting in the prison yard. With that event, a prison museum, as envisioned by the Society, became closer to reality. We should not overlook the tremendous potential of this historic asset.

In 2015 we also broke ground on our new "no-kill" animal shelter that, weather permitting, will open this fall. This new shelter replaces our old, dilapidated facility and was financed in large part by the one-eighth percent sales tax measure. I say in large part because we received two major donations for the construction and furnishing of the shelter. In a credit to the vision and determination of the members of our community, the Carson Animal Services Initiative (CASI) raised and contributed some \$200,000 towards the shelter's construction and the Nevada Humane Society contributed the funds for the facility's furniture, fixtures and equipment—donations that closed the gap in our funding and allowed the shelter's construction to proceed. And of course, there are many of our residents who have volunteered their time by contributing to and working at the shelter for some time now.

On December 30, we opened the new \$8.3 million Multi-Athletic Center, or MAC, next to the Boys & Girls Club. When the Quality of Life initiative was passed in 1996 we promised our citizens that part of the funds raised by that measure would be used to build just such a center. Now, some 20 years later, that vision is a reality. The MAC provides a superb venue for individual and league sports as well as the Boys & Girls Club. With its suspended track, the MAC also offers a terrific, year-round venue for walking and jogging for all ages.

The construction costs of the MAC were financed by a combination of the one-eighth percent sales tax bonding capacity, approximately \$2.2 million, and Quality of Life funds, approximately \$6.1 million.

It bears repeating that the Quality of Life initiative is a perpetual one-quarter percent sales tax levy designed to acquire, promote, maintain and protect our open space and recreation facilities. The citizens of our community who had the foresight to initiate and pass this measure have every reason to be proud. The Quality of Life initiative ranks right up there with the 1969 municipal consolidation of Carson City as a landmark in the development of our community.

And speaking of Quality of Life, this past year we took formal title to 4,551 acres of BLM property, including Silver Saddle Ranch, bringing our total open space to just around seven thousand acres – that's nearly 11 square miles of world-class recreation opportunities.

Pretty fantastic. Not many communities can match that!

In 2015, we also saw the completion of the Ash to Kings Canyon seven mile hiking, biking and jogging trail. Built by the sweat and blisters of many volunteers, including Muscle Powered, this visionary premier trail will someday form a trail link between Douglas County and Carson City. It has put Carson City on the map for having some of the best trails in the nation.

And then there is Epic Rides, one of, if not the premier mountain bike organization in the nation, which will be starting the first of a five-year commitment to bring beginner, amateur and professional mountain bike riders and their families together for a three-day citywide event in our community. We have every reason to be proud that Epic Rides selected Carson City because of our open space trails and our commitment to making a pedestrian and bicycle friendly downtown.

In another month or so, we will break ground on yet another historic project for our city, the downtown core streetscape improvements including Third and Curry Streets. A special thanks to the McFadden family for their generous donation of \$125,000 for the creation of McFadden Plaza on Third Street. The private-public partnership between the McFadden family, the property and business owners on Third Street and the city will provide residents a fantastic dining, shopping and recreation venue.

Our downtown redevelopment will be followed by improvements to all of our city entryways including Williams Street, an area that is in the design stage under the Greening of America's Capitals grant program.

A pat on the back to Ronni Hannaman and the Chamber of Commerce for selling out all 31 downtown street benches at \$1400 a bench and 13 bike racks at \$500 each. I think it only took two weeks or so to sell out, demonstrating our community's commitment to making the downtown of our state capital the envy of all.

In 2015 we also saw the implementation of significant government information and transparency initiatives by our city staff using state of the art technology.

On September 1 of last year, Carson City launched Carson City Connect, a free downloadable application for both the iPhone and Android operating systems. Using this application our residents can not only find in one easy place information regarding a number of government services, but can also communicate directly with city government on a range of matters. The city manager has tasked city employees to respond to issues brought forward under this program within 24 hours.

The initial response looks quite encouraging. From September 1 of last year to the current date, some 258 requests have been received and 150 surveys soliciting customer feedback were sent out. Of those, 68 were returned, with 85 percent of those responding rating employee effectiveness as superior and 89 percent rating the timeliness of response as superior. Perhaps most importantly, 92 percent of the respondents ranked employee courtesy as superior.

Along with Carson Connect, at the beginning of this year the city launched a program on its website that displays all city expenditures in an easy to use, real-time, searchable database.

In January the city implemented the Granicus program that allows for the recording and archiving of city meetings in a searchable format. For example, if one wants to know about a certain subject, a keyword search is available to take the user directly to that portion of the video where the word or topic was discussed.

The city will soon have a newly-redesigned website that will provide a more intuitive and easy to navigate format. We will also seek to expand the menu of options that residents can perform online from the comforts of their own homes.

Not to be outdone, Jump Around Carson, or JAC, launched a new dispatch program as well as a free downloadable application that allows a user to track the status and location of buses and when the next one will reach a designated bus stop. You don't hear much about it, but JAC has seen a 44 percent increase in ridership since 2010, providing some 216,000 rides in 2015.

In the water and wastewater area, with the design and planning phases completed, the much needed improvements to our aging wastewater treatment plant will begin in the next couple of months.

On the water side, the construction of the east-west transmission line continues on schedule. The completion of this line will allow for a fully interconnected water delivery system that will, for the first time, provide enhanced citywide resource delivery capabilities.

Importantly, the water and wastewater projects are overseen by a citizens group.

On the energy and environmental front, the board of supervisors will shortly consider two programs: one to retrofit city facilities to be more energy efficient and another to add 485 kilowatts of solar power to those facilities. The retrofit planning costs were paid for by a grant from the state of Nevada and assuming approval by the board, its \$4 million recommended facility upgrades will be paid through an energy savings performance contract such that there will be no additional out of pocket costs to the city.

It is anticipated that this project will reduce electric energy consumption by about 21 percent and natural gas consumption by about 21 percent, saving approximately \$230,000 per year in utility costs. In environmental terms, this energy reduction equates to annual greenhouse reductions in the neighborhood of 3.3 million pounds, equivalent to removing 342 passenger cars from the road or an annual carbon reduction equivalent to 1,300 acres of forest.

A similar energy savings performance contract concerning solar power will also be considered by the board. This contract would provide for the construction of 1.5 megawatts of solar power. If approved, this project would supply about 30 percent of the city's electrical energy requirements and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by about 1,600 tons or an equivalent 1,200 acres of forest benefit. The two programs combined would decrease our fossil fuel use by 30 percent.

Also on the environmental front, parks and recreation has initiated a pilot program analyzing the use of organic pesticides for weed control. This effort is being undertaken with the free assistance of local and national organic pesticide specialists and was started by a local resident who brought the proposal to our attention. My hope is that we can indeed move to organic pesticide use without detracting from the use and look of our parks and recreation facilities. It is the right thing to do.

In the fire department emergency services area, last year alone, department personnel responded to some 9,600 calls for service. You heard that right, 9,600 calls which include fire response, advanced life support and basic life support 911 rescue calls. To keep up with that volume, our fire department implemented a tiered advanced and basic life support system that more effectively dispatches equipment thereby allowing basic services to be met while keeping advanced life support units available for more emergent calls using part-time employees.

I would also like to recognize our fire department for their heroic actions and community service commitment. On April 23, 2015, the quick actions of our firefighters saved the life of a 12-year old boy trapped in a house fire. Captain Jim Quilici, crew members Travis Boggs, Jon Pedrini and other department personnel were recognized by the board for their heroic actions. I would also like to thank the fire department for their service to the community, particularly the St. Baldrick's cancer fundraiser and Operation Warm, coats for kids.

And in a tribute to multi-tasking, while managing all those calls for service, our fire department was able to secure a \$200,000 grant from homeland security that enabled the purchase of an emergency generator for the MAC.

From the law enforcement perspective of the broader sense of public safety, 2015 was a very good year. This past year firmly established a three-year trend of effective community engagement and outreach that has resulted in crime rate statistics falling to the lowest levels since 1994. We certainly acknowledge and will never forget the heartbreaking loss of Deputy Carl Howell in August, yet this tragedy was not indicative of the rest of the very successful year.

Domestic violence, however, remains a serious problem in our community. A caustic issue that degrades family and community alike. The sheriff asks that we join with him the fight to end the scourge of domestic violence.

One of our most significant accomplishments in 2015 was the positioning of officers in our schools. Seeded by federal community-oriented policing funds, we hope to give our youth and school officials the safest environment to carry out educational opportunities and growth in Carson City.

Another significant accomplishment was the creation and staffing of a Sexual Assault Examination and Forensic room. This facility was made possible through the efforts of our Sexual Assault Response Team made up of a partnership among the Advocates to End Domestic Violence, the District Attorney's Office and Carson Tahoe Hospital. A hearty well done to Lisa Lee, Adrianna Fralick, Supervisor Abowd, Kitty McKay, Nicki Aacker, Dr. Pintar, and all the other members of the SART team. Victims of sexual assault will no longer be required to drive another 45 minutes for an exam. A humiliating experience to say the least.

Thank you to all our police officers and volunteers for their numerous public outreach events such as Holiday with a Hero, National Night Out, DARE and others. Events such as those not only add to our sense of community, but also let our young folks know that the police are not their enemy but rather are there to help. □

I would also like to congratulate Sheriff Furlong for winning the 2015 DEA, DARE Law Enforcement Executive Officer of the Year award, a coveted award given to a senior law enforcement officer who epitomizes an extraordinary commitment to drug prevention and enforcement.

On the development front, the planning commission has been in full swing. This past year saw 42 entitlements being issued under the growth management ordinance, of which 28 were for single family homes, 10 for single family attached, two for mobile home lot developments and two for a duplex. A list of the status of some of those projects can be found on the city website but let me mention a few of those and perhaps some others that are being discussed but have not yet been formalized.

If you haven't been to the Boys & Girls Club lately, I encourage you to take some time to see the developments in that area. In addition to the MAC, which was built

by the city, the Club is in the middle of constructing an adjacent teen center that will complement the existing Club activities by providing a facility for use by teenagers.

FISH is building a new housing facility for economically challenged individuals as well as changing the façade look of its existing building which, as FISH board member and City Supervisor Bagwell correctly states, is a start of façade development in our downtown area. The project has been under construction for some time, but it is important to remember that it is being completed by volunteer labor, labor that is becoming in short supply these days.

Bear with them.

Land clearing and offsite work is proceeding on the first phase of the Schulz Ranch development that will initially encompass 100 homes.

A new 5,000 square foot medical office is being built by Carson Dermatology on Medical Parkway.

A 39-apartment building is about to begin construction on Jeanell Drive.

Seven townhomes were recently approved for construction on East Robinson Street.

We will soon see the completion of United Federal Credit Union building on East Williams Street.

An assisted living facility at 1001 Mountain Street is in the works.

There is talk of a first class age-in-place senior development and serious interest has been shown in parts of the Lompa Ranch off Fifth Street.

With the completion of the freeway scheduled to happen early next year, Carson Street from Fairview south to the Spooner Junction will be transferred from state ownership to Carson City. This includes not only the six traffic lanes but also the adjacent frontage roads and property. Complete street design concepts are being analyzed for this area. As with our downtown streetscape project, before any decisions are made there will be significant public input.

Finally, I have been told that another hotel is being considered on North Carson Street.

Before getting to some concluding thoughts, let me talk a bit about city finances which, I am thankful to say, are improving.

By way of some thumbnail statistics, our community's general obligation debt remains quite good with a Standard and Poor's rating of AA- and A1 from Moody's. Our total debt service represents just 4.7 percent of general fund expenditures.

Over the past five years the number of our general fund employees has decreased by 22 employees. During that same period of time our general fund revenues increased by \$12.7 million, or 24 percent, to \$66.4 million while general fund expenditures have remained flat at around \$61.6 million.

At the height of the financial crisis, the board increased the property tax rate to the maximum permitted under state law to maintain adequate public services. In each of the past three years, the board has reduced that rate and made a commitment to continually look for ways to reduce the property tax rate over time. As we work through the budget process this year, we will have that commitment in mind.

Our consolidated tax receipts for the city are currently coming in at about 10 percent over last year's numbers which, if that holds, will result in approximately \$1.8 million in additional revenue.

In 2011 the board of supervisors adopted a fund balance policy which requires a minimum unrestricted fund balance of not less than five percent with a goal of 8.3 percent. State law requires a four percent fund balance. Industry practices recommend an unrestricted general fund balance sufficient to cover a minimum of two months' operating expenses. My personal opinion is that we should first use any excess revenue to build up our reserves to the board adopted goal of 8.3 percent. But as I said, these determinations will be made through the budget process discussion, always a fun time of year.

Last year when revenues came in over budget, we distributed some \$775,000 to capital and deferred maintenance projects, \$370,000 to streets and \$100,000 to the newly created and restricted extraordinary maintenance fund.

As you can see, we have, thankfully, come a long way since the decline of 2008. And with that, let me offer some concluding thoughts and observations.

A moment ago I mentioned development growth. Suffice it to say that we are once again seeing development take hold in our community, and that is a good thing in many ways, not the least of which is community sustainability.

It is also a good thing that our city had the wisdom some years ago to implement a growth management ordinance. We are fortunate to generally know not only how much and the type of growth our community can reasonably sustain but also have in place a process that promotes a leveling of growth with annual allotments. We are also fortunate to have designed our water and wastewater systems to

accommodate our potential build-out limit.

Not many communities have that luxury.

But growth projections are just that, projections. Although this winter seems like it is one wet day after another most folks now recognize that we are in a drought; the end of which is really rather impossible to predict.

While we have every reason to believe that we have sufficient water for our current and future requirements, we need to be extremely vigilant. Governor Sandoval has created a drought forum through the Division of Emergency Management. Where appropriate, we should take advantage of the information and recommendations developed by the forum in an effort to make reasonable development decisions should the projections of our water resources change as a result of extended drought conditions in western Nevada.

While we remain vigilant, it is also important that we recognize and indeed take advantage of the changing economics happening in northern Nevada. We are not losing our history by any means but we are undergoing a significant economic diversification. As the capital of our state, we are the face of the state that deserves an infrastructure representative of that face.

And we are doing just that.

We should continue to support our manufacturing community by ensuring that we have a work force trained in the business needs of those operating here as well as those looking to locate in northern Nevada. Providing that support means that we should wholeheartedly do what we can to facilitate the efforts of Western Nevada College to provide workforce education and training. Our library is of course doing some of that but we need to look for additional ways to help, including letting our political leaders know the importance of WNC to our region's successful integration into the state's burgeoning diversification efforts.

While we don't run the Carson City School District, the board works closely with the school board and the administration. We hold joint meetings on a quarterly basis to ensure consistency in our respective strategic goals.

I believe that Carson City's K-12 education efforts got tarred with too broad a brush when it was recently publicized that Nevada is ranked 50th in the nation in education. Our school district is not 50th in the nation. Our school district did not receive top in the nation honors through the Race to the Top grant by being 50th in the nation. Indeed, as we learned from our joint board meeting the other night, the education template used in our Race to the Top application is not only showing early signs of success in our own schools, but has been selected for export to school districts in other states. Our high school has received no less than 90 academic state championships and has an 86 percent graduation rate. With respect to work force development, Carson High School is implementing a manufacturing curriculum under its CTE program consistent with the Race to the Top template.

Perhaps even more impressive, however, is the fact that our school district is the only one in Nevada where every student in grades 3 through 12 is provided an individual laptop. That's right—every student. To date more than 5,600 devices have been distributed to our students.

Our private schools are no less impressive.

Those messages need to be heard outside of our community.

I'd like to talk about streets for a few moments. An independent study recently placed Carson City midway when compared to northern Nevada counties. That's not good enough for us and I know it's not good enough for you either.

The primary source of road construction and maintenance is the 9 cent per gallon gas tax in Carson City. The problem with that funding source is that vehicles are far more efficient than they used to be and people are actually driving less. Although we have made significant general fund contributions to streets, that is neither a viable nor long term solution.

As the chairman of our regional transportation commission related at the last board of supervisors meeting, the issue at its heart is a math problem where declining revenues are insufficient to keep up with increasing demand as well as the additional roadways being transferred to the city from the state as a result of the freeway construction and completion.

It is a serious issue and I urge you to carefully consider the enactment of an indexed gas tax similar to that enacted in Washoe County. In the meantime, if you see a situation that needs correcting let the city know either by phone or in person or indeed through Carson Connect. As the city manager often relates to his staff, this is the 21st century where prompt customer service is expected and should be delivered.

Ladies and gentlemen, fellow Carsonites, as I mentioned during the christening ceremonies for the USNS CARSON CITY, what we lack in geographic size we more than make up in our unmatched community pride. Pride that we live in our state's capital. Pride in our mutual shared goal of providing an unmatched quality of life to all of our residents regardless of age or ethnicity. Pride in our heritage and historical underpinnings.

I know that each of my fellow board members share this pride and I thank them for tirelessly working for the benefit of our community.

We are indeed living up to our city motto: "Proud of Its Past, Confident in Its Future." And thanks to each and every one of you, I am pleased to report that while caution remains the watchword, there are many, and I mean many, indicators that the state of our city is not only sound but getting better by the day.

God bless our city and the great state of Nevada.

Thank you for the honor of serving as mayor of the greatest city in Nevada.