**State of the City Helena-West Helena 2018**

**by Mayor Jay Hollowell**

Good evening to my colleagues, committed City Council members and residents of Helena-West Helena. I want to extend a special thank you to our elected officials and city employees for your partnership and passion for our great city.

Code Enforcement: In regards to Code Enforcement, the department has seen an increase in revenue generated by permitting in 2017. Over $66,000 was generated in revenue from permit fees. The Code Enforcement department has worked aggressively to achieve its three main objectives. As a focus on maintenance of real property, Code Enforcement sponsored a spring and fall city clean-up in conjunction with the Keep Arkansas Beautiful campaign; and by citing property owners and issuing affidavits for their failure to maintain their property. They are working tirelessly in the nuisance abatement of substandard housing by removing over ten nuisance properties; two life threatening structures in the Historic Downtown Area and also, at Code Enforcement’s recommendation, the approval by the City Council of the condemnation of ten additional properties as uninhabitable. The Sanitation, Street, Landfill and Water Department employees worked together in conjunction with Code Enforcement in the demolition and removal of blighted properties. There have also been efforts and assistance by numerous organizations and individuals that will further these efforts throughout the balance of 2018.

Street Department: The Street Department has again had a busy year. We are blessed to have great leadership of Oscar Hoskins in this department. The Street Department received approval for seven streets to be paved through the Arkansas State Aid Program totaling $255,000.00, however, this funding will not available until late 2018. Oakland Avenue is in deplorable condition. The Arkansas Highway Department has constantly heard from me on this and I can promise you that we will have this addressed by them in the near future. As soon as we have a proposed schedule, I will announce that news.

**Projects completed in 2017 were:**

\*Repaired drain top covers throughout city. \*Overlaid damaged or bad intersections at Rose Circle at Valley Drive, Leifer at Clairanna, Galloway at Hwy 242, Fairview at Porter Drive, and Alice at Anderson. \*Repaired shoulders and Curbing’s at Roseland at Anderson (drain). \*Repaired catch basins and pipes at N. 10th and Jackson Street, Jefferson at Franklin, 157 S. Baringo, Anderson at 5th, Summit at Liberty (undermining street), Stonebrook, Waverly Woods and Word Avenue. \*Started storm drain repair at York and Market Alley. It is still a major project that hopefully can be addressed once the spring rains are over. \*Two of the Street Department employees attended asbestos inspector training to renew their certification. This is critical to a more aggressive approach to demolition of our blighted areas throughout our community. We continue our to pledge to the citizens of Helena-West Helena to make street repairs an annual priority and our Street Department’s work has been highly visible and much appreciated. **Helena-West Helena Landfill:**

The Helena-West Helena Landfill had the largest year ever in waste received in 2017 and revenue which is under the direction of long term manager, Bob Gaston. The landfill is inspected by the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality every quarter and has passed all inspections in 2017. The landfill operators completed sub-grade work on Phase 2 Cell 4, saving the City approximately $300,000. This waste disposal cell is necessary to provide additional constructed air space for the landfill. The current constructed airspace is nearly depleted and this cell, the last cell to be constructed, will provide the City 20-25 years of waste disposal capacity. They also redesigned Leachate Storage Capacity and upgraded system to include automatic shut-off to prevent over flow. The landfill currently has three employees with Masters Level Certification.

**Sanitation Department:**

In the past, our sanitation vehicles were costing the city many dollars in repairs. Along with the sanitation vehicles purchased in the two previous years, we able to purchase one side MAC and two front loaders for the Sanitation Department. Due to the purchasing of the equipment over the past few years, we have been able to reduce purchasing equipment parts; reduce employee overtime and more efficiently and effectively pick up residential and commercial garbage. Sanitation Director, Bobby Jones and his department have done a great job and we are continuing to achieve our goal of making Helena-West Helena a cleaner community.

**Water Department:**

Many undertakings have been completed in 2017. We hired Jack Ross as the General Manager of the Helena-West Helena Water Department in April of 2017. His expertise has brought to the fore-front serious issues with our water and sewer systems, and his knowledge has provided a plan to repair our antiquated system. In 2017 the department was forced to face a vast number of issues that had long been overlooked. Despite the many problems they encountered, they have done a lot of work to improve our system and I am very proud of the Water Department progress over the past year.

Of the nine lift stations on the east side of the city, only one operated without needing major repair during 2017. Lack of routine maintenance over the past decade resulted in an extremely large volume of deteriorated parts and damage from excessive wear and tear, and mechanisms that had long passed their useful service.

* \*The Filter Plant has had some of the main back wash valves replaced that had been leaking through causing clear well water to leak back into the filters. The valves are now holding and they are now able to prevent re-treatment of potable water. \*Our two plant wells were serviced this year and tested. They are in good condition with minimal degradation that is expected over time \*West Helena Lift Stations are all in good operational condition. Our stations in West Helena are somewhat smaller than the stations in Helena and they had been maintained over the years \*We have 4 wells in West Helena. They have been maintained through the years and have operated trouble free this year. They just lost the motor on Well #8 and replaced the motor and Well #9 went down and they had that motor rebuilt this winter \*The filter plant has some areas that will need attention this year. There is a main backwash line (currently patched) that has a hole in the line. There are valves on this line that need replacing and the department is beginning the specification process \*They have many employees that are going through training for licensure \*They are repairing leaks throughout the city due to the extreme winter weather we have experienced The Water Department has had an unbelievably busy year and is working on a long-range plan for the City in order to address some of the aging infrastructure issues we are experiencing. They are also working with the Arkansas Rural Water Association on a recommended rate study to address the City future needs. **Fire Department:**
* From a public safety perspective, our Fire Department and the great people who serve also play a vital role and great headway is being made by the Helena-West Helena Fire Department. Our Fire Chief, Reginald Wilson has continued to provide great leadership not only in his department but has assisted many other departments in our grant efforts. We have added critical new equipment and department funding, including: \*Receiving $2,500 grant from Center Point Energy Community Partnership for equipment. \*Received $5,000 matching funds for USDA grant from the Isle Of Capri Casino. \*Received USDA Community Facilities Grant $106,810.15 for equipment. \*They received $15,000 from The Phillips County Port Authority for the Fire Chief’s salary. \*They received a total of $129,310.15from grants for the 2017 year. **Police Department:**
* From another public safety perspective, our Police Department and the great people who serve also play a vital role in our safety and great progress is being made by the Helena-West Helena Police Department as well. I hired James Patrick Smith as the new Police Chief in April 2017. With over 20 years’ experience with the Memphis Police Department and being a Helena-West Helena native we have great leadership in the Police Department. He has had a busy several months that includes the following: \*The department certified the uniformed patrol division as latent print techs. A partnership with the Memphis Police Department and its Crime Scene Investigation Unit provided an 8-hour latent print training for all patrolmen and investigators free of charge. The officers were trained in obtaining prints and processing crime scenes. This has allowed our officers to collect prints from crime scenes without calling in a CSI technician. In November of 2017, Wall-Mart donated all the carrying boxes for each marked unit. \*The department implemented the first Cadet training class in the history of the department. The program is a law enforcement entry level program that offers training and varied work assignments to new-hires, who are age 21 years or older. The Cadet program provides qualified men and women with a chance to experience the challenges and rewards of an entry level officer. Cadets are rotated thorough a variety of assignments within the department to provide exposure to many aspects of law enforcement. The Cadets are assigned to a Field Training Officer (FTO) before attending the training academy. Cadets receive training and may work in varying assignments including communications, community policing, latent print training, traffic, arrest procedures, and firearms training. Upon completion of the program, with additional testing, the cadets will attend the Arkansas Law Enforcement Training Academy (ALETA), were upon graduation they will become Patrol Officers First Class.
* \*In August, the department implemented its first Internal Affairs Division. In the past, all internal/external complaints were handle by the Chief of Police or a designee. The division was developed to ensure that the department policy and procedures are followed and that all department employees follow agency standards of professionalism. Since law enforcement is accountable to everyone regardless of public opinion, the Police Department is obliged to insure that our officers operate within the confines of the law and according to procedures. \*The department also implemented its first Training Division. The Training Division is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the activities and maintaining the records relating to Basic, Supervisory, Specialized and In-service training programs. This includes all programs attended, taught, and sponsored by or for members of the Department. The Training Unit will coordinate and record over 30,000 hours of training in 2018. \*The department has become the first in the state of Arkansas to implement Virtual Academy into its training program. Our officers are now receiving more training annually than is mandated by the state of Arkansas. The ability to cover classroom training online without the need for travel and lodging expenses and live scenario training through the department is a combination that will continue to improve upon the level of service we provide our citizens. As I have stated before, law enforcement has always been a very difficult job, but I believe it is more dangerous and a more problematic job today than ever. As a community, we need to stand behind our officers and continue to support their efforts to make our streets safe for its citizens. **Vision:**
* We continue to listen to your input as we work together to improve our community, aligning our resources with community priorities, infrastructure needs and opportunities. Our Advertising & Promotions Commission works toward fulfilling our vision and is busy every year, and 2017 was no exception.
* **The A&P Commission**:
* \*Completed landscaping along Plaza from MLK to 10th Street; \*Added Interpretive Panels along Plaza documenting the Prisoner of War Camp, timber industry and railroad history of former West Helena . \*Added poles and “Plaza District” banners along Plaza. \*Added two more Civil War sites along Biscoe as part of Scenic Byways project. \*The A&P Commission assisted with visits of the American Queen and American Duchess steamboats in 2017 and have been working with those steamboat stops in 2018. \*Scenic Byways walking, biking path along Biscoe was basically completed, connecting Welcome Center to Downtown.
* This project is also instrumental in cleaning up a major corridor into Helena/West Helena. We continue to work regionally in efforts to attract tourist through our efforts, but also with the efforts of outside organizations that are committed to the same goal. Biking and hiking trail development are an important part of our community development projects. I envision a biking trail form the Harahan Bridge in West Memphis that I helped dedicate with the Mayor Jim Strickland of Memphis through Helena-West Helena to Highway Commissioner Robert Moore’s Arkansas Post. With this development bikers and hikers can travel the complete eastern Arkansas border. There is also an effort that I support that will connect our trail with a trail that would go westward and connect central Arkansas and Hot Springs and back eastward connecting our trail via the Clarendon bridge. Let’s hope that the efforts to preserve that historic bridge are successful.
* \*A&P also expanded Christmas decorations to Plaza and added Christmas lighting to the downtown including a 20′ Christmas tree. They continue to highlight our community activities and festivals. They developed and placed ads on several standard billboards and various electronic billboards in the Memphis area. They also developed and placed ads and articles in several publications emphasizing the beauty and rich history of our area. They developed and printed brochures and maps about our community as well. \*I am excited to work with the A&P Commission and others to honor one of the greatest country music artist of all times, Conway Twitty. More information will be forthcoming to announce this exciting upcoming day in Helena-West Helena. \*This August we will be hosting the only Catfish Tournament on the Mississippi River in Arkansas in our River Park and we are hoping this will become an annual event. In consideration of our vision, we are always encouraged regarding industrial and/or commercial prospects looking at our city. The Helena-West Helena leadership team continues its commitment to family, quality, and improvement. We can never thank John Edwards enough for the support, assistance and guidance in our efforts to make ourselves more attractive to business and industrial prospects that will lead to more jobs and opportunities for our community. I am sure good news will follow! **Security Cameras:**
* I sought and received approval from Entergy to have 34 security cameras installed on Cherry Street from the Delta Cultural Center to City Hall on their light poles. Entergy has generously waived the $1,500 set up fee and $500 per pole charge. These cameras will be monitored at the Helena-West Helena Police Department. We want to increase the safety and security of our residents and visitors. Funding the expense of the equipment is still being worked on and hopefully this will be a reality in the near future. We have so many exciting and challenging issues in the near future. I am still committed to a prisoner work release program to best serve our community and at the same time reduce our prisoner housing cost. There seems to never be a day that my Chief of Staff Helen Halbert, City Clerk Sandi Ramsey and City Treasurer Derrick Turner and I do not have a dialog to address the full gamut of city issues. I cannot tell you how great an asset they are to me to address our problems and opportunities. I do not hesitate to bring them into discussion on issues that are so paramount to our community and I thank them! As we have entered 2018, some of the same trials remain for Helena-West Helena. Revenue is still a challenge facing us in 2018 as the economy continues its slow recovery. Your dollars go to support the infrastructure you use, the people and equipment that make you safe, and create the quality of life that we all want to enjoy. Continued economic weaknesses over the past several years have had their effect on services, as well as antiquated water and sewer systems, but I know the city is accomplishing a goal to restore or expand services whenever possible.
* We continue to struggle in dealing with revenue issues and I know that the city can overcome these challenges because we are all working together to achieve the same goals. We have a challenge ahead of us to deal with financial issues that will impact us with the loss of over$500,000 in revenue annually beginning in 2020 when revenue will be diverted to the jail project.

In conclusion, the vision of Helena-West Helena should be an energetic, innovative, inclusive, affordable, sustainable, and growing City. After four years of work together, our municipal finances are healthier, but as I have said, many challenges face us; we are seeing major interests in our Historic Downtown, which could innovatively impact our economy; and we are moving rapidly to dramatically improve our public infrastructure.

The State of the City is robust and ever-progressing toward an even brighter, increasingly vigorous future.

This evening I again thank you for the opportunity to serve you as your Mayor. I could not be more thankful for the opportunity you have given me to lead this great city. I have to say that it is my sincere honor and privilege to serve the citizens of this community. There is still a great deal of work to be done for our community to reach its full potential.

I hope that you appreciated hearing about what we have accomplished in 2017 as a community and as always, I ask for your continued support as we explore future opportunities to improve our City. Thank you so much and God bless Helena-West Helena; God bless the state of Arkansas; and God bless America.