JANUARY 5, 2018

     Good afternoon. Thank you, Jackson Downtown Development Corporation for hosting the First Friday Forum.

     I also want to thank the Jackson City Council and City Judge Blake Anderson for their service to the city. Let’s also thank our 700 city employees who work for Jackson’s 68,000 residents and the members of our police and fire departments who risk their own lives to protect our lives and property. Please stand if you are a city employee or a member of our police and fire departments.

     I welcome this opportunity to thank our public and private partners, the many volunteers who serve on more than 40 boards and advisory committees within the city, the nonprofits and churches who collaborate so well to serve the needs of our city.

     Finally, I thank my wife, Liz, for standing by my side and in support of the city of Jackson.

     One of my highlights each year as mayor is giving this State of the City speech – because each year this city continues to grow and prosper.

     Once again we see the good things – like sales tax revenue, our economy and jobs – continue to grow. And, we see the bad things – like major crimes – continue to decline.

     As we begin this New Year together, the State of the City is a good opportunity to talk about what we’ve accomplished and the work before us.

     The key issues our city faces each year include public safety, economic growth, improvements to our infrastructure and revitalization. Let’s look at our progress in these areas.

**Transportation**

An important part of improving the city’s infrastructure is improving Jackson’s streets and highways. On major transportation projects, the city’s engineering department collaborates for best practice and planning with TDOT.

I am very appreciative to Governor Haslam, the State of Tennessee and TDOT for helping to fund several major road projects that have a combined federal, state and local investment in excess of $100 million.

* As nearly all of us have experienced, road improvements have already started at the U.S. 45 Bypass, Casey Jones Lane and Carriage House Drive. The project is improving the intersection and traffic lights and will completely remove the U-turn people had to make to go north after leaving Casey Jones Village. The project should be completed in May, 2019.
* TDOT also started to widen Interstate 40 through Jackson from four to six lanes. The first phase of work will extend from west of U.S. Hwy 412 at exit 79 to exit 85. It will eventually widen the interstate to east of U.S. Hwy 70 at exit 87. Widening the interstate includes revisions to the interchanges at the bypass and North Highland. The current completion goal is October 2021.
* The roundabout at Highland Avenue and Deaderick Street. Construction started in October and should take about a year to finish. The roundabout will make the intersection more efficient, slow traffic down as it comes into downtown and provide an entry feature for downtown enhancement.
* Improvements to Dr. F.E. Wright Drive is the fourth major road project. Plans are to widen Dr. F.E. Wright drive from two to four lanes, resurface the existing five lanes from Ridgecrest Road to North Parkway and add bike lanes. Construction should finish by October 2019. We plan to improve the segment south of Parkway when additional funding is available.

**Financial Growth**

* The city continues to have a positive bond rating of AA because of diverse economy improvements and Jackson’s role as a regional economic center.
* The city is operating on a $70.4 million budget this year. We continued to live within our budget without having layoffs or reducing our services.
* Sales tax revenues increased 4.1% – $2.9 million for the last fiscal year. We spent that extra money giving $2.1 million to our local schools, $150,000 to the county fire department and the remaining to increase city services.

**Public Safety – Police Department**

Our Fire, Police and Justice Systems continue to build relationships within the community to make this a safer place in which we live.

* We are a safer city today. Over the last three years, we have seen our crime rate decrease 11 percent.
* For example, homicides are in a steady decline. We had 13 in 2012, nine in 2015, and 7 homicides in 2016 and in 2017. We had 226 robberies in 2012, 85 in 2016, and 79 in 2017.
* We attribute this decline to our more than 200 vigilant police officers, 35 high-profile surveillance cameras located across the city, and citizens who cooperate with the police to solve crimes.
* Police officers continue to address and reduce crime through the philosophy of community-oriented policing.
* The patrol division implemented a body-worn camera program for officers.
* The Police Department received a $188,000 grant from the Tennessee Office of Criminal Justice Programs to implement new investigative techniques to address violent gun crimes.
* In June, Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Tennessee Health Care Foundation awarded the department 252 units of a drug called Narcan that can save the life of someone who has overdosed on an opioid. Officers were trained in how to use Narcan and have already used the drug as a life-saving measure.
* The Safe Hope Center on Roland Avenue opened two and half years ago to help victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. The center’s success is due to the partnership between the police department and several nonprofits, including West Tennessee Legal Services and WRAP.
* A new Lethality Assessment Program gives Jackson police officers on-the-scene ability to screen and immediately seek help for domestic violence victims who are at risk of injury.

**Fire Department**

* The Jackson Fire Department responded to 4,330 fire, hazard, medical, and rescue calls in 2017.
* The City of Jackson’s insurance Classification fell from three to two because of the hard work and partnership of the Jackson Fire Department, City of Jackson Central Dispatch and Jackson Energy Authority. In a fire emergency, the critical steps of communication and water supply can definitely be met here in Jackson. The highest rating you can get on a scale of one to 10 is one.
* The Survive Alive house, which opened on July 1, 2016, has already welcomed more than 2,000 students to receive lifesaving fire education information.

**City Court**

* Our City Court continues to be a model for the Southeast, if not the nation. Judge Anderson conducts criminal and general sessions court, along with six other model courts – Mental Health, Drug Recovery, Domestic Violence, Collection, Environmental, and Traffic Courts. More than 4,000 people have contributed to community service through our City Court this year. Alternative court programs like these help avert sending people to an over-crowded jail and offer them a chance at getting their lives back on track.
* We’ve already started planning a new City Court building. Construction should be completed in Fiscal year 2020.

**Economic Development**

We know from experience that investments in our infrastructure, transportation, education and quality of life are critical to our economic development growth. We continue to see success.

* In 2017, local industry added nearly 1,000 jobs and announced it was investing about $202 million in our community.
* Companies announcing expansions included Stanley Black and Decker, Toyota Boshoku Tennessee, Metal Technologies and Toyota Bodine. Several other expansions are in the works and just haven’t been announced yet.
* The city purchased 115 acres near McKellar-Sipes Regional Airport as part of our efforts to attract a larger industry. We have an option to acquire another 199 acres.
* Our unemployment rate was 7.8% at this time three years ago. It is now 3.5%.
* Our local colleges and technical schools continue to be critical in developing a competent and qualified workforce. Some 13,000 students also contribute to our local economy as they attend Lane College, Union University, University of Memphis Lambuth, Jackson State Community College, Tennessee College of Applied Technology and West Tennessee Business College.
* Twenty industries opened their doors on October 6 and October 20 for Manufacturing Day. Two hundred sixty high school students and faculty toured these industries and learned about lucrative career opportunities in the manufacturing fields of management, accounting, human resources, robotics and engineering.
* Chattanooga may claim it, but Jackson is Tennessee’s first Gig City. JEA’s Telecom Division gives our industry, businesses and residents the ability to link to the rest of the world in the fastest way possible. This year, JEA worked with Jackson-Madison County Schools to connect half of the schools with 10-gig per second networking to allow for school-wide usage and connectivity.
* The Jackson Chamber received a grant from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission to serve as the Tennessee Reconnect Partner for the southwest region. The goal of Tennessee Reconnect is to increase the percentage of working adults with a postsecondary degree or credentialing from our current 39 percent to 55 percent by the year 2025.
* Finally, the chamber continues to lead the effort to launch a new, state-of-the art workforce development center on the campus of Jackson State.

**Revitalization and more economic growth**

In 2017, we continued to make progress in revitalizing the city. Here’s a look at a few statistics …

* We issued 59 commercial building permits, valued at over $32 million.
* We issued 175 residential permits, valued at $36.8 million.
* We demolished 76 structures that were neighborhood eyesores and have another 57 in the abatement process.
* JEA invested $38 million to replace and upgrade aging infrastructure to ensure safe, reliable utility services. These improvements are a driving force for our economic growth.
* JEA’s Water Division provided water main replacement in the central city areas of Park, Prospect, Arlington, Deaderick, and Hale streets.
* JEA’s Wastewater Division put its focus on rehabilitating the infrastructure in the Crescent, Campbell and Park street areas.
* West Tennessee Health Care and Healthsouth opened the state-of-the-art Spire Rehabilitation Hospital on West Forest at the site of the former Jackson Clinic.
* Jackson Walk downtown continues to grow. Over the last four years, developers finished 30 new homes, and construction will start on another four homes this spring.
* The Jackson Walk retailers continue to see sustainable sales growth, and The Lift Wellness Center has grown to about 5,100 members.
* Jackson Walk Phase II on the former Zion Church property at West Deaderick and Campbell Streets is well underway to add 120 apartments and more than 40 lots for single family homes.
* Jackson Walk developers are also making progress in their neighborhood revitalization efforts between Jackson Walk and the University of Memphis Lambuth. They’ve be able to acquire a number of blighted properties to make way for new construction.
* District 2 – Redevlopment:

          There are two redevelopment projects in District 2.  Whitehall Residential Project and Whitehall Commercial Project.  The residential project currently has  two new homes for purchase.  One is soon to be under contract and the other is being actively shown  
          and buyers are seeking to qualify.  The commercial project is close to completion.  Huddle House is open and doing well.  Within the retail building, Loving Arms, a home health agency, is bringing its corporate headquarters to Jackson and will open in February,  
          a new dental office will open in March, Bennigan’s is set to open May 1, and a Metro PCS Cellular Store will finish out the space.

* To improve the drive-ability, walkability and bike-ability around the city, the Engineering Department resurfaced streets, improved sidewalks for ADA compliance and created striped street shoulders on routes like Russell and Wallace roads for added safety of bicyclists and runners.
* The dilapidated Bemis Mill buildings were demolished. The City is awaiting a decision from the mill’s owners to give the city ownership of the 2.5 acres needed to build the Bemis Memorial Park.

**Quality of Life**

From free music concerts at the AMP to theater and art at the NED to community festivals and fundraisers, you can find plenty to do in Jackson.

* Jackson continues to see unprecedented growth in tourism. Fiscal year 2017 saw a four percent increase over 2016, which saw a 7.59 percent increase over fiscal year 2015.
* Two new hotels will be under construction shortly in the Sportsplex area; Best Western Plus and Spring Hill Suites.
* For the fourth year, the city’s Season of Unity brought us a series of family-friendly and free community events. These included the International Food and Art Festival, Trunk or Treat, Praise in the Park and Christmas in the City.
* The arts continue to bring us many more events. Thank you to the Jackson Symphony, the NED, the Jackson Theatre Guild, Ballet Arts and our many other arts groups for their contribution to Jackson’s quality of life.
* The West Tennessee Healthcare Sportsplex hosted 23 travel ball tournaments and local league play for all of Madison County in 2017. Since it opened nearly 10 years ago, the Sportsplex has welcomed 1.7 million visitors.
* Our Recreation and Parks Department completed the Tennis Complex-Pavilion. It also received a $100,000 Recreation and Trails Grant for Liberty Park. This year, the recreation and parks department plans to develop permanent pickle ball courts at Conger Park, begin work on Bemis Memorial Park and install a splash pad.
* For the eighth consecutive year, the West Tennessee Farmer’s Market was named the Best Farmer’s Market in West Tennessee by the Tennessee Magazine.
* Along with the growth of vendor farmers, the Farmer’s Market and AMP were the site of more than 150 events in 2017, including our first wedding at the market.
* The Jackson Generals just completed its 20th season in Jackson with a fourth season of attendance of 120,000 fans. The $9.5 million the city borrowed to build the stadium was paid off in 2017.
* How we treat our animals is another quality of life issue. In partnership with animal rescue groups, we opened the Jackson Animal Care Center October 1. We also started construction of a new center on Conalco Drive. The first phase will be a quarantine center. Rescued animals will spend 14 days in quarantine and receive the health care they need before being eligible for adoption.

     It’s exciting to look forward into 2018 and beyond. Jackson has a great foundation on which we can continue to build.

     It’s a blessing to live in Jackson, to be a part of a community that works together to solve its problems and to celebrate its successes. Thank you to everyone in this room – and residents across the city – who contribute to this community’s well-being. Because of you, I have every confidence that my State of the City speech next January 2019 will be filled with the positive accomplishments of this upcoming year.