What does it mean to be a great city? Good roads, nice sidewalks, great parks, safe neighborhoods – an amazing mayor? I submit to you a great city is all of these! Cities are not just the pipes or its power lines, nor is a city built solely upon the structures of its government. The foundation of a city is the people. It’s the people who enable these systems to exist and flourish.   
  
Today, we gather to celebrate the boldness that makes our community great. How did we get here? What challenges have we faced? Who has led the charge and what does the future hold?  
  
It all began with Lakewood’s founding fathers and mothers – citizens who created a vision for what this city could be. They set out to create a vibrant and safe community, a city that would provide a superior quality of life for all its residents. I’m happy to say this vision is alive and well today. After all, what is a city but for its people?  
  
I recently read a story about a group of residents who came together because they were concerned about zoning issues affecting their neighborhoods. You can probably guess the topics: building setbacks, off-street parking, traffic impacts, and even mixed-use development.  
  
These meetings could’ve easily been last year, last month, or even last week. When do you think these meetings happened? It may come as a surprise, but these were hot topics in March of 1968 – a whole year before Lakewood was even a city.  
  
Other interesting stories in the Jefferson Sentinel that year ranged from dog issues to problems with public school funding, and believe it or not, state lawmakers were working on a bid for the Winters Olympics. Déjà vu indeed!  
  
Understanding the past is important and meaningful in order to see the future. It also allows us to see the challenges we face today are challenges we’ve faced in the past. As far back as 1968, residents were concerned about the quality of life and safety of their community; however, these folks gathered together and used their resourcefulness to transform challenges into the building blocks of what Lakewood is today.  
  
In the 1940s, Jefferson County’s population had grown by nearly 80 percent and then doubled again in the ’50s. By the late ’60s, the population was set to increase by a whopping 83 percent, making Jeffco one of the fastest growing counties in the nation.  
  
This rapid growth created issues far beyond zoning. By the late ’70s residents were worried about losing too much open space to development. In order to preserve land, residents settled on a plan to tax themselves by half a cent, thus creating a fund to purchase land for parks and open space.  
  
By coming together, the people of Lakewood crafted a solution that worked for everyone. This led to the largest expansion of park acreage in Lakewood’s history. Purchases included parcels for [Hayden Park on Green Mountain](http://www.lakewood.org/HaydenPark/) and the land that is now [Addenbrooke](http://www.lakewood.org/AddenbrookePark/).  
  
The 1980s had its own set of challenges. Having purchased so much parkland, Lakewood faced a serious dilemma. We had a lot of land, but it wasn’t accessible or usable for parks. Once again, the people of Lakewood debated the issue and voted to allow the half-cent tax to do more than just buy land. With this vote, Lakewood was able to build additional playgrounds, trails and other amenities.   
  
By the 1990s, Lakewood faced another surge of growth. In fact, the ’90s saw the biggest boom in housing in Lakewood in the last 30 years! As the decade came to a close, Lakewood faced two challenges – a rapidly growing population and the dying Villa Italia Mall. Much as they did in 1968, Lakewood’s residents came together and accomplished something remarkable. They charted a vision that set the course for what would eventually become Belmar, a bold, but risky solution. Judging from its success, it was worth the risk. Now look at it. Belmar provides a wide array of shopping, restaurants, offices, and housing, and it continues to evolve in new and exciting ways. Today, it is a national model that many cities from across America are looking to for their own futures.  
  
Moving into the 21st century, bringing [West Colfax](http://www.lakewood.org/City_Managers_Office/Economic_Development/Real_Estate_and_Development_Activity/Commercial_Corridors/West_Colfax_Avenue.aspx) back to life remained front and center. Again, we came together to create a solution that would shape this historic corridor while still celebrating its one-of-kind character. Through extensive community dialogue, an idea took root: revitalize Colfax through art.   
  
Now, big things are happening on Colfax! We have investment that has secured the future of historic businesses like Casa Bonita. The [40 West Arts District](http://www.40westarts.org/#!/) is teeming with creative businesses, galleries, coffee shops, and breweries, all bringing economic vitality back to this part of Lakewood. You can even get your health on at Planet Fitness! Reed Art and Imaging has returned to Lakewood and is now housed in the historic Lakewood Theatre, which featured “Cheaper by the Dozen” as its first film in the ’50s. What a wonderful way to preserve our history!

By 2007, it became clear that Lakewood needed a regional healthcare facility. Converting a brownfield site on the Federal Center was a risk, but that risk has become an incredible community asset. Now the St. Anthony Hospital and Medical Campus provides top-notch services to our community, and it has created more than 2,000 jobs and adds millions to the local economy each year. This year, we are thrilled to help them celebrate their 125th anniversary. Congratulations.  
  
This look back on how we got here enables us to see that each of these endeavors are but another chapter in the story of our city. It is a story where residents joined together to meet the challenges of the day with a vision for a bold tomorrow. Out of these challenges have come great things for our community to celebrate. Those that have gone before us have made Lakewood the great place it is to live, work and play.  
  
And look where we are today. I want to share a few highlights from the past year.  
  
The Community Resources Department completed a master plan update called [Imagine Lakewood!](http://www.lakewood.org/soc/https://www.lakewoodtogether.org/imagine) Residents helped chart the future of arts, parks and recreation. The plan is already expanding our community garden program and enhancing the Possibilities Fund, ensuring that everybody has the opportunity to participate in our recreation and cultural programs.  
  
Our Planning Department spent the past year readying [the ArtLine](http://www.lakewood.org/soc/https://www.40westartline.org/) for launch. This inspired walking and biking route takes you through dinosaur-styled sculptures, intriguing ground murals and will connect three of our existing parks. The Artline provides free access to the arts for those who don’t often get to experience it.  
  
The Lakewood Planning Commission launched the [Development Dialogue](http://www.lakewood.org/soc/https://www.lakewoodtogether.org/developmentdialogue). This community conversation is about finding the best solutions to address challenges such as building setbacks, parking, and traffic – just to name a few. Sound familiar?   
  
Good conversations take time, and that’s what the Development Dialogue is all about. Starting this month, you’ll have the opportunity to provide direct feedback about the commission’s proposals that address growth and how it’s affecting our city.  
  
City Council has committed to bringing City Hall to you. We have launched [Lakewood Together](http://www.lakewood.org/soc/https://www.lakewoodtogether.org/), a pioneering digital tool that broadens and deepens the public’s ability to participate in city issues. Our goal is to make council’s discussions accessible to everyone.  
  
To the delight of the whole community City Council has funded the Big Boom Bash, a new Fourth of July celebration that will culminate with a fantastic firework show at Jeffco Stadium. Mark your calendars and come out for this spectacular event.  
  
2017 was also about preserving land for open space and parks. We paid off the lease-purchase of 256 acres in Hayden Park, safeguarding the future of this regional gem. We purchased nearly [60 acres of the Taylor property at Wadsworth and Morrison Road](http://www.lakewood.org/Newsroom/Community_Resources/2147521079/), closing on it just last week. This is the first major addition to our parks since 2000.   
  
I want to thank City Manager Kathy Hodgson and her staff, who were dedicated to bringing this piece of wide-open rolling Colorado landscape into our park system. I also want to thank the Taylor Family for their vision and commitment to Lakewood.  
  
Our great employees are often leading the way. There’s no better example of this than three Lakewood Police agents who helped a family after a devastating car accident last year.  
  
Police agents Chuck Vogel, Jeromy Rohling and Montey Brunk responded to a horrific automobile accident in a way that speaks volumes about our employees’ commitment to Lakewood.  
  
Their efforts began with a heroic attempt to save lives at the scene. Going above and beyond, they stepped up to aid a family devastated by the loss of their mother and 3-year-old son. These agents not only attended the funeral, but on his first day back to school, they treated the family’s 10-year-old son to a pizza party with friends and classmates, showing that they were all there for him.   
  
I want to take a moment to thank all of the men and woman of our [Police Department](http://www.lakewood.org/police/) for their dedication. It is even more meaningful in these difficult times when we are reminded all too often of the dangers you face.  
  
The great hailstorm of 2017 inflicted havoc on Lakewood in a matter of minutes, causing billions of dollars in damage to pretty much everything in its path. The permit team in our Public Works Department knew that [roofing permits would turn from a trickle to a flood](http://www.lakewood.org/BuildingPermitsInspectionsContractorRegistration/). And boy did it!  
  
More than 200 applications were coming in daily! Had it not been for the forward thinking of permit leader Anne Heine and her team, who had earlier invested in an online roofing permit system, this could have been an even bigger disaster. Because of this system, no one has to step foot in City Hall to apply for, make a payment, or receive a roofing permit.   
  
Technology is never the whole story. This dedicated team of public servants processed more than 13,000 permits in eight months. Anne trained additional staff to process the permits, and they worked evenings and weekends to keep up. Anne Heine and Charlene Gonzales from our permit team are here with us today. Let’s all thank them for their hard work.  
  
What is a city but for its people, and let me tell you, we have amazing people doing amazing things in Lakewood!   
  
The founder of Lakewood’s Bicycle Advisory Team, Gary Hardy, tops the list. As you can imagine, he is passionate about cycling. Together with his wife, Judy, they launched the Cycling Without Age program, which uses a unique bicycle that allows older adults to sit comfortably on the front while a pilot pedals behind. This program lets older adults feel like a kid again while the pilot has the privilege of listening to a lifetime of stories. Now I call that a bold idea. Thank you, Gary and Judy.  
  
Sonya Estes is part of the Soles 4 Souls program, which has donated millions of shoes to people in African countries. She supports the city’s recreation programs, and year after year, has provided gifts for dozens of families at Alameda International High School so they can celebrate Christmas. Sonya operates Runners Roost in Lakewood, and she is a bold example for any small business to follow.  
  
Can you imagine going to work or trying to find a job without having the ability to take a hot shower? When you’re homeless something this simple can be out reach. Pastor Drew Ross and his congregation at Bethlehem Lutheran Church saw a need, acted and now operate the Living Well Showers, a trailer outfitted with several private shower stalls. This is just another example of how the power of one can be magnified to address a human necessity and give dignity to those most in need. Thank you, Pastor Ross.  
  
Educating our children is the foundation of everything we do. Ester Valdez, principal at Rose Stein Elementary is leading the way at this newly reopened school. She launched the International Baccalaureate program and prior to the grand reopening, she secured donations and worked with the Lakewood service club coalition to obtain musical instruments, ensuring that all 200 students would have the opportunity to play music. Ester has engaged mentors and volunteers, created an on-site medical clinic and community garden. Her boldness to bring this school back to life has reconnected Rose Stein to the neighborhood. Thank you, Ester for a job well done.  
  
It gets no more bold than winning gold! Let’s celebrate Nicole Hensley who set her sights on becoming an Olympic hockey goalie. This Green Mountain graduate has brought home the gold with the U.S. women’s team from the 2018 Winter Olympics. We are so proud of her, her family and her teammates. I want to welcome her parents, Linda and Darren, who are with us today. Congratulations! This kind of achievement comes from hard work, dedication and boldness.  
  
All of these leaders saw a future that was worth working for. Instead of sitting on the sidelines, they responded with creativity and resourcefulness. This is the kind of Lakewood we should all be thankful for, and folks like these are key to our amazing future.  
  
I spent the past year talking with kids across our community about how they see Lakewood, and I’ve heard a lot of fantastic ideas.   
  
Eduardo, who is 9, wrote to me that we need to keep the sidewalks and streets clean so kids can ride their bikes.   
  
Emmett, a fourth-grader, wants healthy food to be free along with beanie babies and Power Rangers.   
  
Pamela, also in fourth grade, said I should put more interesting books and activities in the school so it’s not so boring.  
  
Zareyah, an 8 year old, said the city should allow kids to have candy every day for free.   
  
Lots of kids told me we should help the homeless and make sure we have more water fountains, a clean city and more parks and schools.  
  
Maybe Payton Douglass, who is 17, said it best: “There aren't many problems I can think of. We have a lot of good things in Colorado that many don't have. A beautiful town and fun places to go. If I were mayor, I would make sure that everyone would have fair opportunities, but not in a way where it would cause chaos.”  
  
These are all great ideas, but the most important message I heard from our children is what they didn’t say. I didn’t hear fear. They spoke about compassion, sharing and making things better, but they are not afraid. That’s a lesson we should all take to heart.  
  
Our nation’s children are providing us another lesson after yet one more school shooting. I wake some mornings wondering if there will be a day when our flags will never fly at full mast again because of the relentless string of school tragedies. Every child deserves to go to school and feel safe. Teens across the country have already become the next generation of leaders, and they are telling the nation they are tired of classmates dying while the adults do nothing. We need to listen and take bold steps to address these pressing issues of safety in our schools.   
  
Now let’s talk about our very bright future. 2019 will be Lakewood’s 50th anniversary. Let’s use this anniversary to focus our thoughts on what this city will look like over the course of the next 50 years. Let’s think about what we can, and must do to make sure that 50 years from now our children are still filled with hope, compassion, and a spirit of collaboration.

It takes only one person, one idea, one dream to make a difference. We don’t have to look far to set the course for change. Within each of us lies the ability to be a leader. I encourage you to follow your passion, dig deep, and take on one thing that needs to be addressed in our city and set it into motion. Find yours and make it happen. It’s with this spirit that we will continue to realize our dreams.  
  
I have given this a lot of thought, and I want to tell you my “one thing” for this year. I want to address childhood hunger in our city. There is no excuse for children to go hungry in Lakewood, yet it happens every day. I believe our kids are our greatest asset. Together, we can change lives by ensuring that their most basic needs are met, and I will consult with the [Lakewood Linked](http://www.lakewood.org/neighbors/) coalitions to make sure we have no – let me repeat – no hungry children in our community.   
This is my bold commitment. What’s yours?  
  
I would also like to make a difference in all the metro area by collaborating with other mayors to work toward a solution for one of the most pressing issues facing residents today – the affordable housing crisis. While it’s true that our cities may have their own boundaries, the reality is that we are all connected and have the same kinds of concerns. I believe it’s the responsibility of the mayors across the metro area to jump in and tackle this issue as a unified force. I look forward to getting to work on this soon.  
  
Growth and change in Lakewood, and across the state, is certainly causing anxiety, and we’re all feeling the effects, whether it’s traffic, lack of housing options or long lines at the grocery store. When looking for solutions it is important that we don’t react in haste. We must not make fear-based decisions or capitulate to the loudest voices. Remember, we have been here before, we have experienced this in years past, and we worked through it. Without building invisible walls, we have been able to transform our challenges into assets with great success. We can and must do this again.  
  
I’d like to thank our dedicated [City Council](http://www.lakewood.org/CityCouncil/) for all they do to stay in touch with our residents and for working together for our future. City Council has established important priorities for the coming year, including expanding open space, increasing our sidewalk replacement program and addressing our growing infrastructure needs – to name a few. We also have a long list of other improvements that must be addressed. Our stormwater needs are preventing new investment in many areas especially on West Colfax, which desperately needs it. The biggest challenge? How do we fund it?  
  
City Council and staff have worked diligently to make sure [Lakewood’s financial position](http://www.lakewood.org/budgets/) is strong, and this has paid off. Had we not been in this position, last year’s hailstorm and the damage to Colorado Mills may not have allowed us to provide the high level of services you expect without interruption. However, the growing list of open space, sidewalk, and safety needs is extensive. With our current funding, it would take decades to address these. Maybe it’s time to talk about using the financial tools that fund large projects, like municipal bonds or de-Brucing from the impact of TABOR. After all, this isn’t new. Lakewood residents have done this four other times in our history. We can do it again.  
  
Over the past five years, Lakewood has refunded more than $17 million dollars under TABOR. For the 2017 budget, the refund is expected to grow to $8.8 million. To put that in perspective, that’s $4 million dollars more than Lakewood receives a year from the state of Colorado and the federal government for transportation. These are big numbers for Lakewood’s budget, and it’s becoming more and more difficult to solve the problems that residents want fixed like traffic congestion, walkability and preserving more open space.   
  
Let’s have these difficult conversations now so we can create a future with more parks, open space, sidewalks, and the infrastructure necessary for a 21st century city. Past generations were not fearful, and we owe it to them to continue their legacy of imaging today an amazing future.   
  
Also at the forefront of many conversations is the land at the Federal Center. We understand that there are needs and gaps to address homelessness in our community; however,[the size and scope of what is currently being proposed](http://www.lakewood.org/CCHFedCenter/) does not follow the multiple plans our residents have previously envisioned for this site. I have great hope that we can involve all the stakeholders to find thoughtful and courageous solutions to address this need that also honors the city’s plans.  
  
As we continue to discuss growth this year, we need to understand the long-term impacts of new policies on affordability, attainability and ownership for living in our city. Let’s not make it harder for those who most need housing options to call Lakewood home! Let’s find solutions that balance the needs of those already here and allow future generations to thrive.   
  
As far back as 1968, residents have been thinking about what our city would look like. We have the framework for success. By bringing together people from all walks of life, we can tackle any challenge that comes our way.   
  
It’s all about you, the people.  
  
Lakewood’s shared vision is an inspiration to many and has long been the source of our city’s quality of life. We rely on people coming together as they did in 1968 to study the issues, to think about them broadly and with an eye to the future. We are in a boom and have the opportunity to make generational changes – changes that will protect our city for decades to come. This boom won't last forever. Let's not let this moment slip away or be fearful of what’s to come. I have faith in our community’s ability to come together. When we have an opportunity to control our own destiny, we must act and move forward or face the consequences of not making a choice. Let’s create the legacy that says we acted, we acted boldly and we created today an amazing tomorrow for our great city.   
  
I want to close by expressing my sincere gratitude. Our presenting sponsor for today’s event, FirstBank, represents boldness in all they do, and I appreciate their community giving so much. Thank you to FirstBank for setting such high standards and for their support of this event.   
  
I also want to thank Bill and Tom for doing a tremendous job hosting this event and for setting bold examples with their commitment to art, culture and innovation.  
  
I want to thank all of you for your dedication to Lakewood and for supporting the important organizations benefiting from this event. Thank you for taking the time to come, and please know that I am deeply touched by your support.  
  
Thank you for being here today!