*I want to thank the Rotary for sponsoring the State of the City.*

*Many of you may think that the State of the City is going to be about the unfortunate announcement last week. It will be touched on throughout but it will not be our focus. In fact, I hope the content of the state of the city will offer optimism and encouragement in overcoming the news from last week.*

*The State of the City in the past has been a time to research, a time to test ideas, a time to give baseline reports, a time to educate, and even times to evoke a rally cry. This state of the city is meant to build directly off last year’s closing.*

*At the close of last year’s State of the City I emphasized “let’s get ourselves to the point where no one can doubt or debate the title that Rushville is “the leader in rural Indiana.” Today I’m going to pick up on that topic that has since been expanded to something some would call a claim, a brand, an aspirational goal, a mission statement, or a tagline. A slight variation of that phrase coined by an admirer to describe Rushville as “Leading the way in rural Indiana” has been embraced by the community.*

*So that leads me to a series of questions related to that phrase.*

***The first and foremost-“What is the definition of rural Indiana?”***

*I’ve read much on this topic and those books have referred to many metrics. Without getting deep into the weeds my definition is simple. It is a community that is outside the metropolitan area and not along an interstate.*

***The next question would be- What does “Leading the way in rural Indiana” mean to me and this administration?***

*To me the phrase represents a mindset, something the Japanese would call “kaizen,” which means constant improvement. It is an attitude that inspires us to be the example to others, of not just how to survive, but how to prosper in rural Indiana.*

***So how do we prove that we are “leading the way in rural Indiana?”***

*This can be evidenced by a number of indicators. One would be outside recognition. OCRA (Office of Community and Rural Affairs) awarded Rushville the Stellar designee even though Rushville is 86th of 89 cities in size, in the large city class. We have been defined in OCRA parameters as a community in absolute decline. Additionally, the state indicators predict that Rushville’s population will continue to decline.*

*Another meter would be our peers. The fact that our playbook is being duplicated and built upon by our neighbors and our competitors. An additional fact in this area would be the number of communities who were competing for stellar recognition in 2017 and how many reached out to Rushville for guidance.*

*Another gauge would be those in the academics field and those considered experts in the field, they have reached out to the city to either present our strategy or to share information about our journey. Those would include Ball State, OCRA, AIM, Indiana University, and IUPUI. Even the lieutenant governor sought out Rushville as the location she wanted to announce the criteria for the new “Next Level Stellar.”*

*Likely the most impactful evidence is those you would find on local level. The City of Rushville presently has scheduled town hall meetings to keep the public updated of the current status of the numerous projects. For the boots on the ground perspective, a conversation that would shed light on the local economy, would be with the local real estate professionals.*

*Maybe the most impactful indication is the fact that Rushville has 64 projects worth over $74M dollars which will complete over three years from 2017 to 2019. These are a variety of public and private investments/reinvestments in Rushville and much of the investment will occur in our historic downtown district.*

*I want to take some time to talk about those projects that have either been completed during the last year or reached a phase of completion that is significant.*

*• The Farmers Market which includes parking, event space, public restrooms, an electric car charging station and our mural recognizing our agricultural heritage.*

*• The wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) Phase III which is a project where the city utilized new technology that removes us from the list as a CSO community. This project was completed (6) six years before it was mandated by IDEM at a cost savings of $1.7 million.*

*• 2017 Community Crossing was a series of road maintenance projects that together comprised the most comprehensive road resurfacing in our history*

*• The (8) eight stellar projects. The Knights of Pythias (Windsor) and the Durbin (Campaign Quarters) have started demolition. The remaining six projects are either in design or client selection.*

*• The Rushville City Center (Theater/IVY Tech)-ADA portion is completed.*

*• The Workforce Training Center is presently under construction while we continue to work towards the programming that will happen in the building as well as the larger local workforce strategy. After this week it should become clear to all how important these type facilities are with an ever-changing economy.*

*• Commerce Park (North Industrial Park) where the redevelopment board completed the installation of the entry sign and boulevard lighting. Some would avoid talking about the commerce Park because it has yet to land a tenant, but knowing that the completed park has attracted (8) eight site visits compared to the empty farm field producing none. It has allowed opportunity to show off our community. Eventually we will find the correct community partner.*

*• We have completed the design for housing on 50 acres south of 16th Street. We currently are in negotiations to sign a developer for the market rate apartments.*

*• We have completed the first phase of our downtown Wi-Fi system. The first phase is the area in front and behind the new farmers market.*

*• We have started assembling the team who will provide input related to our art consultancy grant.*

*So what do all these projects have in common? They all push the comfort level of rural America. I think we can all remember a similar project 12 years ago that we now proudly call Riverside Park.*

*With the volume of work being done in our community it is safe to say that there has never been so much positive movement and change. The only time that is comparable would be the early 1900s. The heyday of our community.*

*We all need to be aware that to be successful we have to provide balance. Balance in the effort to move forward long-term goals, mid and short term goals, and the everyday work. We work on these larger projects, all the while, we are being asked to provide the same (or upgraded) services, programs, efficiencies, employee wages and benefits, without any decline.*

*So now let’s look at improvements made at our department level. I would argue that many of the improvements that are made are in the processes of the departments, but for the sake of time most people recognize significant purchases.*

*Before I discuss the departmental improvements – I want to talk about an example of thinking different (improvements not equipment)-Chuck Jenkins, under this administration he has not bought the biggest shiniest newest truck but the overall impact of his purchases and programs for the department. His less noticeable advancements’ have arguably been the most significant in the history of his department, and for the department’s future viability.*

***Street and Sanitation Department*** *- new trash truck, new chipper*

***Police Department*** *- completed their training facility and purchased new body cameras*

***Fire Department*** *- completed their truck bay remodel*

***Parks Department*** *- we’ve taken a once merged department and have separated it. The Parks Department also spent considerable time and planning in the long-overdue recognition/rededication of community Park to Carol Jenkins-Davis Community Park*

***Animal Control*** *- we’ve completed the land acquisition for the new animal shelter and have recently completed the drainage study.*

***Rushville City Utilities*** *- purchased the new vac truck*

***Back to our questions- how did we come to be “Leading the way in rural Indiana?”***

*In a time when it has been well documented that rural Indiana and rural America face serious challenges related to sustainability and viability, how did Rushville begin to move the needle?*

*Back in 2012 this administration started with four Foundational Focus Areas. It was believed that as we came into office these were the 1st (4) four areas we needed to focus our attention on. They included the following: Community Pride and Confidence, Quality of Life, Communication and Transparency, and Economic Development and Infrastructure.*

*In 2014 we expanded the area of focus to include Governance-Policy and Leadership. In 2016 we added another foundational focus area-Fiscal Responsibility and Fiscal Planning. 2017 as a result of receiving the stellar recognition we added yet another foundational focus area-Community Vitality Indicators (i.e. assessed value, population, school enrollment, per capita income and educational attainment). This year, 2018, I would add a final focus area-Setting the Vision. Setting that vision has to be thinking forward, in a manner that focuses less on this generation and more on future generations.*

*I might add that in preparation for the speech I reviewed all the prior State of the City speeches and I must say I was proud of the vision grown in a grassroots fashion. I was also proud of how we have systematically accomplished one goal after another. We continue to have a laser focus on those transformative goals while avoiding most distractions.*

*We learned as a result of stellar process was a simple concept, that we have called accelerators. Accelerators are simple strategies that when coupled with your Foundational Focus Areas allow an accelerated progress. These accelerators are as follows:*

*• Rowing in the same direction – which is getting everyone to focus on the common goal.*

*• Get the right people on the bus - make sure that those who are passionate, truly interested, and the decision-makers are all on the same team.*

*• Plan the work, work the plan - stay focused on the plan and ultimate goal.*

*• What gets measured gets done - always evaluate your progress to make sure that you’re moving forward.*

*In addition to those items mentioned above we need to adjust some simple beliefs. We need to allow ourselves to be the rural community that others look to as an example. To be that community they have to keep up with to stay relevant. We have to work every day to create our own economy and our own culture. We need to allow ourselves to adopt an “expect to win” attitude. We need to encourage ourselves to proudly espouse our virtues. All the while, assume a clear defined direction focused but flexible. We need to constantly educate our stakeholders. Maybe the most challenging need is to be patient and have faith in the vision.*

***Are we alone in “Leading the way in rural Indiana?”***

*No-there are other communities out there who we compete with and who are fighting hard to turn the tide of rural decline. Examples off the top of my head are-Wabash, Delphi, Madison, Crawfordsville and Huntingburg. Although they are our competition they’re also friends as well as great resources and they fosters exchange of ideas and best practices.*

***So how do we continue to “Lead the way in rural Indiana?”***

*In order to do this we need to fight the urge to take the easy way out and to regress to what we’ve done before. This would eliminate the use of the phrase “that’s the way we’ve always done things.”*

*You might ask, “How do we do that?” We do that through education. That education has to focus on three questions: “what are we doing?”, “Why are we doing it?”, and “What are the desired results?” That educational campaign needs to include the City Council, Board of Works, the various boards and committees in the community, our partner organizations, our employees and our citizens.*

*Along with education we need to emphasize our new mindset. We need to assure the citizenry that we will follow, or even better, we will create the best practices in rural Indiana. That every day we strive for constant improvement. That our leaders stay in our lanes and trust one another. That we avoid egos and not care who gets credit. That we avoid the temptation of micro-managing, we have competent people. That we seek out public opinion. That we stay balanced. That we strive to involve our youth, because they foster innovation. We need to stay focused on our ultimate goals and let minor distractions be minor. That we do the work, don’t talk about the work, just do the work. That we learn to adapt to an ever-changing world. That we continue to seek out common ground. We continue to partner. Even though we feel we can be successful alone, we need to look to accelerate our progress by trying to find alignment with the County. That we continue to think “regional” even though regional can hurt when done by corporations, as evidenced last week.*

*We need to constantly remind ourselves to set a vision, and as important as that vision is, acting on that vision is imperative for the next generation.*

*We need to continue to invest and work on aspirational long-term goals like the Highway 3 upgrade.*

*We need to continue to work on those mid and short term goals which aid in our evolution. The ambulance service to the center district of the county would be an example. Improved housing would be on the list. And as a result of last week new retail would be another.*

*As last week taught us, there are things we will always need to avoid. We need to avoid taking our newfound success for granted or we lose our edge. We need to stay lean and hungry, to remember we have to fight every day. We need to avoid at all costs becoming complacent. We need to never be satisfied. We need to always remember that this success is not a birthright and it did not come by accident.*

***My final question, why is “Leading the way in rural Indiana” so critical and such an accomplishment?***

*Because we always need to remember that the other option, failure, is not an option. As we’ve learned this week the status quo is not enough. Evidenced by the fact the state’s other progressive leaders won’t wait for those not moving. If we are not moving we are being left behind.*

*If we don’t continue to lead we will fill that predicted decline, and thus we are left to manage that decline.*

*We never want to get to the point where every story starts with “remember when.”*

*So as we reflect with pride on the title bestowed on us as “Leading the way in rural, Indiana” and how we merge it with last week’s new reality*

*Now we have to talk about the elephant in the room, and the elephant’s name is Walmart.*

*Walmart obviously didn’t care about our title as a leader. Walmart obviously didn’t care about our momentum. Walmart obviously didn’t care about our local investment and Walmart apparently didn’t care about Steller.*

*What Walmart did care about was Walmart, about its bottom line, and about its shareholders.*

*As a result Thursday morning we were notified that after roughly 30 years the giant brick-and-mortar retailer would be closing their Rushville location.*

*That announcement might seem to fly in the face of the content of this speech, but I would disagree. Everything mentioned in the state of the city is why we do have the potential to overcome and to come through this stronger and better positioned. We have to see this is an opportunity. An opportunity to solve a problem. A problem we can solve before other communities. Finally, and most importantly an opportunity to be more relevant for future generations.*

*All that being said, to overcome our newest challenge and continue our momentum, we have to make demands of our city leadership and our leadership team, and we are a team. We have to demand that our leadership have an “all in” attitude. We have to demand that they stay progressive, pro-active, and have a real implementable plan. And we have to demand that our leaders educate and engage the community in that plan.*

*We have to know that we are not to the point where the titles and positions are enough. Our leadership needs to add value and be impactful not just a placeholder. If our leadership is not trained and prepared we will not overcome this challenge.*

*Leadership has to have self-developed vision. Leadership has to understand entirely that vision. Leadership has to grasp the desired results of that vision. All the while keeping the vision flexible and adaptable in a world we don’t control. Our leadership has to navigate an ever-changing system in an ever-changing world. No one can move Rushville forward but Rushville.*

*I stand here with confidence and conviction today because of all of you on the current leadership team. I am very aware of all of those I need to thank. I want to thank-the City Council, the Board of Works, the Utility Board, and the numerous other boards who keep our city moving forward. I want to thank our businesses and industry, the ECDC, Chamber, Community Foundation, County Government, School Corporation and all our other partner organizations. I want to say a special thank you to my department heads and to the city employees. I would walk into a war with this group and last Thursday proved that.*

*I want to thank the citizens of the city of Rushville it is been an absolute honor and privilege to be able to serve you. I will always believe my time serving you as having been a blessing.*

*As we part company, I ask for your continued prayers for me, the team, and our families and for the entire community. Thank you again for your ongoing belief in me and in this administration and for your unwavering support of our leadership and direction.*

*Thank you.*