



State of the City

January 17, 2012

Mayor Lioneld Jordan

Ladies and gentlemen of the City Council and my fellow citizens of Fayetteville,

One of my favorite authors, Ralph Waldo Emerson, wrote, "This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it." We have known what to do with it. We have worked together to take care of public business, to wisely manage our resources, to provide essential services, to assure a vibrant community, and to build a brighter future for all of the People of Fayetteville.

I am pleased to report tonight that the State of our City is sound.

Three years ago this week, when I reported on the State of the City, I knew then that we were facing tough economic times and reduced revenues. I did not know that in less than a week we would have a record ice storm, with millions of dollars in damage and cleanup costs. Together, we weathered that storm and revealed the heart of a caring community that helped and looked out for each other.

As a result of that experience, we also developed and adopted the City's first practical Emergency Management and Operations Plan to be better prepared for any future events, and we have implemented an automated City alert system for timely warnings to our residents.

Although we were spared the devastation of the tornados that directly affected neighboring communities, unexpected weather events last year presented significant challenges for our operations and service to our citizens.

In February, we experienced a record 22-inch snowfall and record minus 18 degrees temperatures. Our crews worked 24/7 to make transportation safe and to repair broken water mains, and we provided generators and emergency shelters for those at risk.

In April, we had record rainfall and flooding. This resulted in an additional 178 service requests and several major projects that included replacing culverts and drainage structure.

The City Council acted quickly to transfer funds from various projects to address the long-term drainage needs of the city. These months of infrastructure repairs were not anticipated in the 2011 budget, but we weathered these unexpected tribulations practically, logically, and financially with flying colors—and for that I thank the fine work of our excellent City of Fayetteville staff. To them we owe much of our city's civic successes.

In May, Joplin was hit by a catastrophic tornado. Our residents generously responded with donations of food, clothing, and water. Our fire fighters and police officers volunteered to participate in the rescue and recovery operations.

In July and August came the heat wave, and we saw not one, but 12, high-temperature records broken, each over 100

degrees. We provided cooling stations in various parts of the city for public health safety and repaired the many water and sewer pipes damaged by shifting soils. Our response again was timely, and it included additional infrastructure improvements that also were not anticipated in our 2011 budget.

But, we know that the true test of a community does not occur when all is going well. Our true character is revealed by the values we display and the leadership we provide when we are faced with unexpected challenges. Together, we met that test and passed with honors.

Sound Financial Management

I understand the need for fiscal responsibility in these economic times, and we have had to make some tough choices. We forecasted the 2011 General Fund operating expense budget in 2011 to be \$33.8 million—down from \$35.8 million in 2009. Because of local, state and national declines in the economy, the City was forced to address declining sales tax revenues and increases in unavoidable expense categories such as LOPFI retirement, and insurance cost, fuel, and other items.

We provided leadership during this time, and we cut over \$2 million dollars in City operating expenses.

Exercising due diligence and using common sense during the past three years, we have avoided wholesale layoffs and maintained public services, without raising taxes. We have reduced the number of contracts with out-of-state consultants.

We have initiated a Lean Government program that helps us serve as good stewards of taxpayer dollars by increasing efficiency and reducing the future need for additional personnel.

The number of budgeted employee positions in 2011 was reduced by more than 20 compared with 2008, and we actually filled 32 fewer positions than were budgeted.

I am mindful of the additional burden these cost-cutting measures placed on our employees to provide the services our citizens expect and deserve. Accordingly, I will soon bring to the Council a salary plan to reward and retain our dedicated city employees who have shouldered the major burden of our balanced budget for three years without a raise. Addressing that issue is my primary goal for this year, because they have earned it and because it is the right thing to do.

I am pleased to report that, while we had budgeted for the use of Reserve Funds this year, we met a balanced General Fund budget for 2011 and did not require the use of any reserve funds!

This makes two years in a row in which the City of Fayetteville, through sound fiscal responsibility, has not had to draw upon our reserve funds to operate our city. Consequently, at the end of the 2011 budget year, the City's General Fund Reserves will be at or above the amount they were when I took office three years ago. And, in these tough economic times of recession in our nation, that gives us all much of which to be proud.

As a result of the outstanding work by our finance and budget staff, the City was again awarded a Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for its 2011 Budget and a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Governmental Financial Officers Association.

These budgetary successes have been the result of an excellent working relationship between my Administration and the City Council. We have not been burdened by the divisive

party politics that lead to gridlock or by anyone seeking personal, political or financial advantage.

We have embraced civility and fostered cooperation, because we all share the commitment to good government for our community and to excellent services for our citizens.

On October 10th, the People of Fayetteville expressed their confidence by overwhelmingly approving renewal of the existing one-cent sales tax used for continuing City operations and capital improvements.

Essential Services

No government function is more important than assuring the public safety of our citizens, and I commend the courage and commitment of our dedicated police officers, fire fighters, and emergency medical technicians.

Fire Chief David Dayringer led the efforts to establish our city's first comprehensive Emergency Management Plan. Under his leadership, we have had enhanced firefighter training for all personnel and improved communication and morale through the collaborative labor management process he has implemented. Completion of the Canterbury water tank significantly improved water pressure and fire protection to over 2,000 homes and businesses and preserved the City's fire insurance rating.

In addition, the City has achieved an improved insurance rating for building safety.

Through savings and grants, the City of Fayetteville invested in a \$7.1 million Simulcast Radio System to replace the outdated and failing radio system used by our public works, police, and fire personnel to help in keeping the people and structures of Fayetteville safe. For the first time, it provides us with the widest and most comprehensive citywide coverage to better coordinate emergencies and assist the public in every part of our city.

The radio project will better protect the lives and property of the residents by expanding coverage to new areas of development, improving existing coverage areas, resulting in quicker response times, improving the safety of our first responders, and linking the city directly with the State Emergency Management System.

Our agreement with the Washington County Regional Ambulance Authority has been renewed for five more years at no additional cost. The Fayetteville Police Department has met 95% of the applicable standards for certification by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies and anticipates full certification this year. This will help assure that our police force is a Best-in-Class operation and strengthens agency accountability.

The City Council revised and adopted the Master Street Plan. Traffic safety has improved with completion of the Mount Comfort Road project. Progress continues on the planned improvements to Crossover Road, Huntsville Road, Garland Avenue, and Cato Springs Road that will enhance transportation options and safety. Sadly, despite our attention to worker safety, we were reminded this year how fragile life can be when our friend and fellow city employee, Jackie Luper, was killed on the job when hit by a motorist.

Economic Development and Good Jobs

In my first State of the City address three years ago, I promised, “We will have, within 90 days, an economic and community development strategy that considers support for existing small businesses as well as nurturing new opportunities, and together we will work to make it a reality. A slow national economy is no excuse for inaction but an opportunity for us to move quickly and prepare now for our shared future.” That year we instituted the Fayetteville Forward process in which every resident had an opportunity to

contribute ideas for both goals and strategies for future community and economic development, and those ideas have driven our policies. Action groups and the Fayetteville Forward Economic Accountability Council have continued to meet and make the vision a reality. It has paid off for our community.

In the last three years, Fayetteville led the way for Arkansas at No. 15 in *Forbes'* annual list of the top 100 metropolitan areas in the nation for businesses and careers. *Forbes* also ranked Fayetteville as No. 2 among Best Cities for Recession Recovery and No. 4 among Best Places for Business and Careers in the nation. *Business Week* included us among the Best Small Cities for Startups, and *CNN Money* ranked Fayetteville No. 13 on its list of Best Places to launch a Small Business Startup.

Builder magazine ranked us No. 9 for Healthiest Housing Markets, and *Area Development Magazine* listed us in the Top 100 Leading Locations for 2011. The *Milken Institute Review* lists the Fayetteville metropolitan area as the 23rd best performing in the nation on job creation. We have also been honored with the Innovative Community Development Program Award from the Arkansas Community Development Society and the Southern Growth Policies Board 2010 Innovator Award for leading Fayetteville Forward.

In 2009, I said, “My first and immediate goal will be to do everything possible to secure and support the establishment of a Satellite Campus of the University of Arkansas Medical School and a Regional Trauma Center in Fayetteville.” The UAMS Northwest campus is now a reality and an overwhelming success. In November, Washington Regional Medical Center submitted a request for designation as a Level 2 Trauma Center to provide the highest level of emergency care for patients in Northwest Arkansas, and state approval is expected by this summer.

In 2010, I pledged that my top priority for that year was to secure funding for establishing a Green Jobs Training

Center of Excellence in Fayetteville to put people back to work in the jobs of tomorrow that pay a living wage. An active partnership among the City administration, the City Council, the University of Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas Community College, the Northwest Arkansas Labor Council, and the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, working with Governor Beebe and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, made that a reality. We successfully secured state and federal funding, and our partnership with Northwest Arkansas Community College resulted in a Green Jobs Training Center of Excellence that proved successful and, now that the initial grant funding has ended, will be expanded with mobile training and education throughout the region.

Working with the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce Development Team and the Arkansas Economic Development Commission, we have supported the development of good-paying manufacturing jobs for our residents. Hard economic times left Superior Industries forced to significantly reduce jobs, yet through Superior's determination and hard work, they have not only been able to regain the jobs lost, but also regain additional jobs for Fayetteville. Arkansas Power Electronics International now has more than 31 research and production employees at its new facility at the Arkansas Technology Research Park. Delta Group Electronics opened in Fayetteville a new manufacturing facility with a projected 125 high-paying jobs at its 36,000-square foot facility over the next 2 years.

Pinnacle Foods is scheduled to expand its operations in Fayetteville, and Tyson Foods is close to finishing a \$7 million line expansion in Fayetteville that will add 60 jobs. Fayetteville has not only *retained* all of our existing manufacturing jobs, we added significant new manufacturing jobs to our local economy. And, the Arkansas Economic Development Commission awarded 1.5 million dollars to Fayetteville companies to assist us in retaining, expanding, and generating new jobs in Fayetteville.

We have continued the successful *Find it in Fayetteville* campaign to support local businesses; we have created a *How to do Business in Fayetteville* handbook for new and existing businesses; the Creative Economy Group and the Convention and Visitors Bureau made First Thursdays and Last Night successful arts events; new festivals such as the Block Party, Bicycle Fayetteville Days, and the Art-tini Art Festival highlighted the year; Bikes Blues and Barbeque was another smashing success, bringing residents and visitors from all over the country to our community—spending money and raising funds for non-profits; and we began Fayetteville’s Business Registry and Licensing Program. During 2011, over 900 new jobs were added to the local economy. The private investment of \$7 million remodeling of 200 rooms and downtown meeting space at the former Cosmopolitan Hotel should increase the number of conference and convention visitors to our city.

Economic prophecy is an uncertain art, but I predict even better times ahead for Fayetteville’s successful economy and increased opportunities for all of our residents.

Building Community

Fewer places in the world will you find a stronger community than in Fayetteville. I love this city, and I know you do too. That has become our city’s rally call. But, it isn’t a well-kept secret. Fayetteville is consistently on top national lists for our community. *Forbes* named Fayetteville number 7 in the nation as a Top College Sports Town, *Kiplinger* also ranked Fayetteville 7th in the nation in a ranking of Best Places to Live, Work and Play; *Relocate America* this year listed us in the Top 100 Places to Live in the United States; *CNN Money* named Fayetteville as 15th in the nation as a Best Place to Retire; and *Retirement Lifestyles Magazine* named Fayetteville as one of 11 Southern Retirement Hotspots.

Arkansas Business awarded Fayetteville Honorable Mention in the Quality of Life Category, the People of Fayetteville again made us an Arkansas Volunteer Community

of the Year, and *Keep Arkansas Beautiful* had to come up with a whole new award for environmental and beautification excellence due to Fayetteville winning the Shine Award three years in a row. *America in Bloom* awarded Fayetteville the Environmental Awareness Award and the Four Blooms Award, and that organization will be holding its 2012 annual meeting in our city to share our story with communities throughout the nation.

The nationally-recognized Fayetteville Public Library was also named the Best Library in Northwest Arkansas by reader polls in both *Citiscapes Metro Monthly* magazine and the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. In April, *USAToday* ranked our library among the “10 Great Places to Take a Library Tour,” which included the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and others in Boston, Seattle, Denver, and Chicago. There are now more than 64,000 registered users, and circulation has surpassed 1.1 million items this year. To meet the tremendous growth of teen use of library resources, the new Otwell Teen Library was dedicated and opened in June. We are fortunate to have this fine facility in our community, a knowledge resource open to every resident without charge.

Fayetteville Public Schools are the best in the state and were named in the Top 10 in the United States in technology by the National School Boards Association. Fayetteville High School has been named to Newsweek's Best US High School List. Ramay Jr. High School was designated one of 10 Breakthrough Schools in the nation by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Twenty-three students were named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists, more than any other school in Arkansas, and the *Connotations* literary magazine won national awards from Columbia Scholastic Press and the National Council of Teachers of English. The debate team and the choir won state awards, and the band performed at Carnegie Hall in New York. State championships were won in football, basketball, golf, cheerleading, and track. Students

planted community gardens, Green Teams improved the environment, and the Student Council raised awareness and funds for the homeless. Progress continued on construction of the new high school campus, and both Butterfield Trail and Happy Hollow are L.E.E.D. certified by the U.S. Green Building Council.

The University of Arkansas, an essential part of our community, continues to grow with a record 23,199 students and to be ranked nationally for quality of academic programs, receiving the Highest Classification awarded to colleges across the US by the Carnegie Foundation for The Advancement of Teaching. In addition, it is one of the best educational bargains in the nation, a fact recognized this month when it was again named one of the “100 Best Values in Public Colleges” by *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance*.

The relationship between Town and Gown has never been stronger, as we work to share the benefits of cooperation on projects ranging from expansion of the Walton Arts Center to expansion of the trails system to the exciting developments at the Arkansas Research and Technology Park.

We developed and launched the Community Link—an innovative, online resource for community-wide engagement, collaboration, innovation and volunteer management that will increase the ability for everyone in Fayetteville to get further connected with the community and its diverse opportunities for civic engagement. The Community Link is a national model of an effective interactive resource for a whole community and all of its residents. This Community Link has been a further success in connecting our city and building community by providing the link to information about what is going on in Fayetteville and how you can help and get involved. In fact, I expect that the counter on the Community Link will register 200,000 visits before February.

Our traditional sense of community is enhanced by the continued growth of the Fayetteville Farmers Market, now

operating four days a week and in three locations. It was ranked Number 5 nationally this year in the Large Market category in America's Favorite Farmers Markets contest, hosted by American Farmland Trust.

Our trail system expanded in 2011 with completion of Frisco Trail and Oak Ridge Trail and a garden at the Mud Creek Trail Head. Work is continuing on the Clear Creek Trail, Lake Fayetteville Trail, the Town Branch Trail, and the Meadow Valley Trail, a 2.3 mile extension west from Scull Creek Trail, through the UA Farm and past I-540 to connect with the new bike lanes on Mount Comfort Road. Also, the addition of sidewalks and sidewalk improvements continue to be a top priority of my administration, and that commitment will continue in 2012. The Fayetteville Trails Coordinator is also the chairman of the Northwest Arkansas Active Transportation Committee, providing instrumental leadership in coordinating the design, funding, and now implementing the 36-mile Razorback Regional Greenway.

Expanded mass transit will be a part of our future transportation system. We have continued our partnership with Razorback Transit with free transportation for city residents, and ridership has increased on the Ozark Regional Transit routes, resulting in the 2011 Award of Achievement from the Federal Transit Administration for the Highest Percentage Growth in Transit Passenger Ridership in Arkansas. With the addition of 1.25 miles of bicycle lanes on Mt. Comfort Road, for a total of 8.84 miles of bike lanes, we enhanced our position as the second Arkansas city to be named a Bicycle Friendly Community by the League of American Bicyclists. Six miles are planned for this year.

We have also honored our roots. In 2011, we completed a history project of scanning the historic pictures owned by the City so that they, along with the Government Channel History Minutes, can be placed on AccessFayetteville.org in a new Fayetteville History section of the City website. The Fayetteville Government Channel was awarded three statewide

honors for historic digital excellence by the Arkansas Old Statehouse Museum in Little Rock.

The Planning Department also donated hundreds of local photographs to “Project Fayetteville,” the digital history project at the Fayetteville Public Library. A Fayetteville Hall of History was created on the third floor of City Hall, and I invite you to view the exhibit after tonight’s meeting.

During the coming year, I will support the efforts of the Fayetteville Advertising and Promotion Commission to acquire the historic 1911 Post Office in the center of the Downtown Square and explore the possibility of a Fayetteville Museum and studio spaces for local artists.

There are several ways Fayetteville is further getting socially connected and partnerships are flourishing. The City worked with COX Communications to implement free wi-fi on the Historic Downtown Square, which has benefitted Farmers’ Market events, technical demonstrations, and overall community connections. The town Square has long been an essential public forum and gathering place, and it is now linked to the world.

Over 9,000 people attended the six Gulley Park Summer Concerts last year, and the Dive-In Movie Series sponsored by the Fayetteville Firefighters Association and organized by our Parks and Recreation Department was a great success with over 1,600 people attending the four movies at Wilson Park Pool.

Community is also built on a communal sense of caring about the community, its environment, and all who live in it. Last year the Fayetteville Animal Shelter placement record was again broken by adoption of 2,183 pets in new homes, and the Community Service Division’s work with Ranger’s Pantry and the contributions from the public allowed for the distribution of 6.6 tons of pet food last year, allowing people the financial ability to keep their beloved pets in their home. The Housing

Rehabilitation program completed 18 projects, and FEST of ALL brought hundreds of people to the Historic Downtown Square to recognize and celebrate inclusion and was organized by multiple partners in an inclusive manner to highlight the diverse art and culture of our region. The City has provided financial support for the Senior Center, Big Brothers and Big Sisters mentoring program, the Fayetteville Boys and Girls Club, LifeSource International Day Camp, LifeStyles, Fayetteville Free Clinic, Peace at Home Family Shelter, Seven Hills Homeless Shelter, the Illinois River Watershed Project, Arts Live Theater, the Walton Arts Center, and other organizations that contribute to building our community with an inclusive and lasting impact.

To answer the decades-long call for a municipal parking deck in Fayetteville's Entertainment District, we addressed the needs head-on, made several changes requested by patrons, and, after the initiation of the funding source for the deck from revenues gained from existing parking in city-owned lots, we have moved forward on that commitment to build the municipal parking deck to meet the future needs for convenient access to all businesses in the Dickson Street area. And, the success of the residential parking program in the entertainment district has alleviated many of the problems voiced by residents who required better access to their homes.

We now have three dog parks in Fayetteville, most recently the IAMS Dog Park at Bryce Davis Community Park; we have pedicabs, swings sets renovated to gain ADA compliance, enhanced sidewalk and outdoor mobile vendor opportunities, and we even have back-in parking. The Block Avenue improvements support local businesses and provide residents with a safer, more pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically-pleasing link between Dickson Street and the Downtown Square. The Block Party in May and the Holiday Bizarre in December brought thousands of people to share in the alluring festivities.

2011 saw great participation in our recreation programs, such as 1,466 participants in spring youth soccer, 410 participants in spring youth softball, over 250 softball teams in our spring, summer, and fall leagues, Wilson Pool had 21,500 visitors in the summer, 521 people enrolled in the 2011 swimming lesson program, and eight summer BeActive Camps had 450 youth participants. In its third year, the Adult Coed Kickball program grew to 48 teams, and the Yvonne Richardson Community Center had almost 22,000 visits in 2011, an unbelievable 130% increase from 2010. Fayetteville was also one of the first cities in the United States to join the Let's Move national program with the Let's Move Trail Tour that I lead quarterly to help reduce childhood obesity while educating children and their families about Fayetteville parks and trails.

Fayetteville continues to help lessen the impact of hunger and malnutrition in our community with local foods initiatives such as Feed Fayetteville, With a Can We Can, Fayetteville Community Garden Coalition, M & N Augustine Foundation Easter Feed, St. Pauls Episcopal Church and United Methodist Church weekly free meals, the Northwest Arkansas Food Bank, and so many community organizations do much to assure the quality of lives.

Environmental Sustainability

No other city in Arkansas has demonstrated a commitment to environmental sustainability equal to ours. We were placed No. 6 in the nation in the 2009 Natural Resources Defense Council Smarter Cities Project, formerly part of National Geographic's Green Guide. Our leadership serves as an example to educate and encourage our neighbors to adopt policies that treat ecosystems as assets that generate benefits to our communities.

After extensive public participation and comment, City Plan 2030 was adopted unanimously by the Fayetteville City

Council in July 2011 and serves as Fayetteville's comprehensive land use plan. Our vision is that Fayetteville will be a resource-efficient community, in which residents can live, work, learn, and grow. It will guide our policies to achieve sustainability, to provide economic growth, to preserve and protect our natural and cultural resources, and to enhance the quality of life for all residents. The completion of the state's first L.E.E.D. Platinum certified apartment complex in 2011 and the proposal for two additional infill L.E.E.D. apartment projects, suggests that private developers are taking it seriously.

Our new Streamside Protection Ordinance, adopted by the City Council in March, will protect the integrity of the City's waterways and ultimately the region's drinking water. It is the first ordinance of its kind in the state of Arkansas. In partnership with the Watershed Conservation Resource Center, we developed an urban stream restoration project at Niokaska Creek in Sweetbriar Park, using a natural channel design approach that included the development of wetlands. Additionally, we are producing a new Drainage Criteria Manual to include Low Impact Development criteria and best management practices that will also improve water quality.

We have made major strides in our recycling efforts this year. We secured a commercial market for recycling #3 thru #7 plastic and offered drop off collection for those items until curbside collection is feasible in the future. We began an apartment recycling program at two large apartment complexes. We have expanded our commercial cardboard recycling program by 11% and the commercial curbside recycling program by 26%. In addition, we provide a commercial paper recycling program at every public school and two private schools in the city. Design has been completed for the new Recycling Drop Off and Education Facility on Broyles Road using low impact design features, and the facility will be open later this year. This year, City Councilwoman Rhonda Adams and I will be proposing that it be named the Marion Orton Recycling and Education Center

in honor of former Mayor Marion Orton, who led the way for the first public recycling center in the city in 1971.

This year, we implemented the new Community Revolving Loan Fund to install \$220,000 in energy saving retrofits for buildings of three non-profit organizations: the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks, the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce, and Mt. Sequoyah Conference Center. The loans will be repaid with energy savings and reinvested in buildings owned by other non-profit organizations. We have completed the Solar Biosolids Dryer project, which has eliminated biosolids hauling to the landfill, and we began selling dried Class A biosolids for improving soil quality, increasing crop yields, and reducing the application of commercial fertilizers.

We held the annual Tree Give-Away on October 15th at the Fayetteville Town Center, providing 1,100 trees and 160 shrubs to citizens to plant on their property to help re-establish our City's urban forest. The City planted trees in 12 residential developments in 2011, planting 312 trees in street rights-of-way as part of the Tree Preservation and Protection ordinance. These trees over time will reduce storm water peak flows and air pollution, increase oxygen supply and property values, provide wildlife habitat and beautify neighborhoods. The Arbor Day Foundation awarded the City its 16th consecutive Tree City USA Award for Fayetteville's continuing efforts to preserve trees and promote the benefits of trees.

The Native Grass Program began in 2009. Park Staff has continued to work with the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association and the Environmental Study Center in a joint project to restore a native grass prairie at Lake Fayetteville along the historic Butterfield Trail. Invasive species are being removed and good stands of Big Bluestem, Little Bluestem, and Indian grass have been established. Wildflowers will be seeded this year. In addition to the area at Lake Fayetteville, Park Staff installed Indian Grass, Little Bluestem, and Switch Grass on the hillside at Mt. Sequoyah Gardens. Involving neighborhood residents, the staff has continued to

work with volunteers to establish native plants and trees at Clabber Creek Trail and the Wilson Park Volunteer Native Riparian Planting Demonstration Project.

By protecting, preserving, and assuring the wise use and development of our environmental resources, we are creating a healthy community to be enjoyed by all and a legacy for our children. We are doing our part to achieve a more sustainable future in which our actions and community fit with the natural systems that sustain life.

Open Government

Nothing makes me more proud than the informed engagement and active participation of Fayetteville residents who care about our community and demand a voice in how it is governed. That is our strength. I have a deep faith in the collective wisdom of our diverse community, and I trust them to get it right and make the right decisions when they have all the information. That is why I have made open government a keystone of my administration and have devoted significant resources to facilitate both public access to information and informed public participation.

I thank the public for their advice on how the city's website could be improved. We listened to your recommendations, and the city's website is now a far more functional, informational, and interactive website than ever before. We have received the Juggle Award two years in a row as a Top Local Government Website in the nation, and the city was honored as a Digital City of the Year. We continue to make improvements to AccessFayetteville.org. and appreciate your recommendations about how we can best serve your online needs and requests for services.

Five times a year, I hold Town Hall Meetings in which department heads and I go out into the community and have open mic opportunities to update the public on public projects

and to hear from the people about their ideas and address their questions. The Fayetteville Government Channel provides full coverage of these Town Hall meetings and schedules them on the Fayetteville Government Channel, in the same professional manner that all City Council and City Board, Commission, and Committee meetings are scheduled on cable and provided as an on-demand 24/7 service on the city's website.

Improvements to online subscription services, additional uses of social media to connect with and to the community, the addition of YouTube service, informational message boards in certain public areas in city buildings, additional online resources for immediate 24-7 public document access, and a greater ease at finding information on AccessFayetteville. We implemented a new contract for the Education Channel as 24-7 run by the Fayetteville School District. The revised contract for management of the Public Access Channel now provides for free training and more convenient classes that have expanded opportunities for citizens to make their own television programs or to express their opinions in the 5-minute "Short Takes."

These are a few of the things your city government is doing to increase openness, inclusion, and accessibility for all residents of our city.

A Bright Future

The State of our City is Sound, and I believe we have an even brighter future. You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. It is not empty optimism that gives me strong hope for our continued success in the coming year.

We can, if we will, make this time a genuine period of progress for our community, because I know that we share a common sense of purpose to serve all the people, to carefully

manage our resources, to make a better life a reality for everyone in this city.

I thank the City Council for its sound judgment and always keeping the people first. I thank our City Clerk, Sondra Smith, and her staff for all of their work keeping the public informed and the records in excellent order. I thank the City Attorney, Kit Williams, and his staff for a fine job and solid legal advice. And, most of all, I thank the people of Fayetteville for making Fayetteville the best city in the nation.

I look forward to another year working together to honor the responsibility that the people of Fayetteville have placed in our hands. Let us serve them well and without fail.