

**State of the City Speech
Mayor Jim Throgmorton
February 16, 2016**

Good evening. It's my great honor to present this year's State of the City address.

Before reporting how our city is doing, I first want to thank you, the people of Iowa City, for expressing your opinions, for participating in the democratic life of our city, and for keeping your elected representatives' feet to the fire.

Out of our 72,000 residents, more than a hundred currently serve on our 17 boards and commissions. They too warrant our thanks. Their work is rarely acknowledged in public, but it is important and greatly appreciated.

I also want to thank my fellow Council members for their dedicated service. To be a good Council member requires committing time away from one's family, frequently attending nighttime meetings, and finding a way to fairly represent the diverse opinions of our engaged residents.

Last, I want to thank the hundreds of City staff members – police officers, firefighters, street cleaning crews, water and sewerage plant operators, clerical staff, engineers, lawyers, and everyone else – who help keep our City running day in and day out. I've accompanied several of them in the field, and I have nothing but the highest respect for the good work they do.

Due largely to all those I have named, our city is very strong and healthy. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country at 2.2% - less than half the national average. Our Aaa Moody's bond rating is the highest a city can have; we're one of only two cities in Iowa that can claim such a high rating.

Healthy as it is, our city keeps changing in ways that demonstrate both the vitality of our local economy and the public's passionate commitment to this place. Prominent examples of recent change include the University's new Hancher Auditorium, Voxman Music Building, Art Building, and Children's Hospital, all of which will be completed later this summer. Alexander Elementary opened last fall. Sabin Townhomes on S. Dubuque is under construction, as are the Hilton Garden Inn on S. Clinton and an innovative apartment project on Riverside Dr. The 1st Avenue grade separation project should have traffic back on schedule by December. The Gateway Project will begin this summer, and construction of The Rise at Linn and Court is likely to begin in the very near future.

As the face of our city continually changes, so too does our cultural core pulse with life. And it does so partly because City government financially supports a wide range of cultural organizations and activities, including The Englert, the City of Literature, the Summer of the Arts, and many more.

For these and related reasons, national rating services routinely recognize our city for being a great place to live, work, and raise a family. In the last year alone, we have been named one of the country's smartest cities, the least-stressed city, the best city for college graduates, and the best place to age successfully, to name a few.

In brief, there is much for us to feel good about. But these accolades do not tell the whole story.

Not everyone shares equitably in our prosperity. Our city does have an incredibly low *unemployment* rate - but over 27% of our residents live below the federal poverty line, and over 33% of the School District's students participate in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program. Sixty-five percent of renting households pay more than 30% of their income on housing. As our city

has become more diverse racially and ethnically, it has also become more segregated. Some of our neighbors do not feel welcome because of their race, ethnicity, or faith, and we've seen worrisome disproportionality in race-related traffic stops and arrests. Some of our neighbors find parts of our city to be physically impossible to access. And there is compelling evidence that our way of life (especially our reliance on carbon-intensive fossil fuels) risks undermining our grandchildren's future prospects.

In short, Iowa City is a great place to live but not such a good place for all its residents. And because our city is so strong and healthy, we have an opportunity to extend this prosperity to all Iowa Citizens and to ensure it lasts well into the future.

This is the message voters sent in last November's election. They want their City Council to lead the way toward making Iowa City a more inclusive, just, and sustainable community.

In our strategic planning meetings over the past six weeks, the Council has discussed a number of policy initiatives that respond to the voters' call. In brief, we intend to focus on the following seven priorities: (1) developing a strong and resilient local economy, (2) building a vibrant and walkable urban core, (3) fostering healthy neighborhoods throughout the city, (4) maintaining a solid financial foundation, (5) enhancing community engagement and intergovernmental relations, (6) promoting environmental sustainability, and (7) advancing social justice and racial equity.

Considered as a whole, these seven priorities constitute a pretty ambitious agenda. But we are not here to simply envision a better future; we are here to get good things done. This starts with setting realistic goals and providing the resources necessary to achieve them.

We intend, for example, to identify goals for (1) reducing race-related disparities in arrests, (2) increasing the supply of housing that people can afford, and (3) reducing our citywide

carbon emissions. We have set a goal of raising our bike-friendly status from silver to gold by 2017 and then to platinum. We intend to enhance our support for the local foods culture. We have already begun to televise Council work sessions in an effort to be more transparent and accountable.

While necessary, adopting ambitious goals is not sufficient. The goals must be reinforced by how the City collects revenue, allocates resources, and invests its capital. Tonight we are scheduling a public hearing on our proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2017 and our 5-year Capital Improvements Program. As initially proposed by the staff and amended by the Council, the budget provides funds to conduct an Emerald Ash Borer Response Plan, to facilitate development of a climate change mitigation plan, and to improve our neighborhood parks. It continues the UniverCity program with 5 new units per year and provides funds to update our bike master plan. It assigns \$50K for a complete streets study and \$250K per year for complete street improvements, and it increases the annual pavement rehabilitation project to \$1.5M. It includes funding for a full-time community outreach position in the Police Department. It doubles capital funding for the ADA curb ramp project, includes \$50K per year for bus shelter improvements and expansion, and establishes a \$50K endowment for a new Iowa City Community Fund.

There is more. When amending the staff's proposed budget, the Council also decided to put \$1M from The Rise at Linn and Court into an Affordable Housing Fund, to provide \$25K for a new racial equity funding program, and to allocate \$50K for business incentives for persons of color and youth employment. We dedicated \$100K for a carbon emission reduction project, \$25K for a local foods project, \$75K for a street tree inventory/planting program, and \$190K for development of Frauenholtz-Miller Park. We set aside \$150K to develop a new Form Based

Code for at least one part of the city and \$70K for a housing market analysis of the University impact zone. And more.

We added these elements while still reducing the City's overall tax levy for the fifth straight year, this time by 10 cents, and ensuring that our Moody's Aaa bond rating would not be endangered.*

Adopting our new Strategic Plan and revised budget constitute important steps, but not everything can be done at once. More steps are likely to come. As we engage in this great work of building a more just and sustainable place, we will pragmatically build on our city's great strengths and let additional changes unfold step by step.

In fact, several additional actions are already built into our Strategic Plan. Here are but two examples: we intend to review and consider amending the City's Tax Increment Financing policy; and we intend to develop and implement a toolkit for reviewing racial/socioeconomic equity.

Transforming our city into a more inclusive, just, and sustainable place is challenging work. Part of the challenge stems from the basic truth that we are blessed with living in a lively democracy.

Though challenging, this is also good work. And we Iowa Citians are up to doing it well. Our city is full of creative and energetic people. It's full of businessmen and women who are deeply invested in our community. It's full of people whose life experiences provide deep insight into the lived reality of the challenges we face. And it's full of creative designers, builders, realtors, and developers who are eager to engage in the great work of incrementally transforming the city we and they love into a place that residents will cherish for generations to come.

*Subsequent to the drafting of the speech, Council determined the levy rate would be reduced by 7 cents.

So, as we reflect back on all the ways Iowa City is praised – it is the best place to be young, the best place to retire, the best place to find a job and start a family – remember that we Iowa Citians built all of it. If we built a city that is so already so strong and healthy, so too can we – if we commit our minds and hearts to it -- build a city that is more inclusive, more just, and more sustainable.

And by leading the way for Iowa City, we can lead the way for the region and the state.

Thank you.