



City of Arts & Innovation

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Contact:

Phil Pitchford

Public Information Officer

951-826-5975

ppitchford@riversideca.gov

Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson Emphasizes Hope in First State of the City Address

Mayor encourages residents and business owners to take COVID-19 seriously but also look to future

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Riverside is poised for a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic because it remains the business and cultural center of Inland Southern California and is fueled by a strong sense of common purpose shared by all Riversiders, Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson said in her first State of the City address aired today (1/28).

Lock Dawson acknowledged the damage done by COVID-19 during the past year, in both business and personal losses. But, building around a theme of “Together Toward Tomorrow,” she encouraged Riverside residents and business owners to fight against fatigue and frustration and embrace hope and optimism.

“Today I share with you a call to action, a call for all of us to work Together Toward Tomorrow,” Lock Dawson said. “Because, as many of you have heard me say, Riverside’s best days are ahead of us. This is a core belief I have in our city and its future.”

The annual State of the City event, produced by the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce in partnership with the City of Riverside, was conducted virtually because public gatherings are barred by state restrictions designed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Lock Dawson recorded her remarks at the Fox Performing Arts Center for broadcast today, and they are available at WatchRiverside.com.

“We must never forget there is hope – hope for tomorrow and hope for our collective future,” she said. “We will get through this difficult moment in our history. We will prevail.”

The event also included the announcement of Janice Rooths as the latest recipient of the Dr. Carlos E. Cortés Award for Championing Diversity and Inclusivity, named for the UCR professor emeritus of history who is recognized as the single most influential force in shaping the City of Riverside’s Inclusivity Statement.

As a City Commissioner on the Human Relations Commission and a board member for the Center Against Racism and Trauma, Rooths has worked in key advisory roles with UCR’s Concerned Citizen’s

Advisory Committee, various RUSD boards and the NAACP Riverside Branch for the past eight years. She has been one of the leading forces in establishing Trauma Informed Sensitivity Training for the City of Riverside, a recommendation that goes before the City Council in the coming months. Two of her most recent accomplishments have been co-founding The Charles A. Bibbs African American Museum & Cultural Center and the group “Antiracist Riverside.”

“Janice's heart for inclusivity in Riverside is evident in the countless hours she pours into these groups and initiatives,” Lock Dawson said. “Janice has the ability to see the needs of a community and jump into action. She is tireless, passionate and committed and, above all, worthy to be honored for her hand in making Riverside a fairer, more inclusive community.”

Lock Dawson emphasized that Riverside retains all of the community strengths that powered a century of success -- a strong economy, safe streets, inviting parks and other public spaces, welcoming neighborhoods and a shared sense of purpose. The city benefits immensely from having three universities and a community college, two award-winning K-12 school districts, an economy not based on tourism, a historic downtown core, and a robust housing market.

“We continue to fight the pandemic in the here and now, but we must also begin preparing for life after the pandemic,” she said. “For us, a post-COVID Riverside will be shaped by, not defined by, the pandemic, a Riverside where we do what we have done so well before -- create opportunity from adversity.”

Riverside must continue to wrestle with the same pension obligations that face nearly every city in California, Lock Dawson warned, and the City also faces a \$14.4 million structural deficit. She pledged transparency, noting that a tightened spending plan saved \$7.6 million, scheduled raises were suspended and recruitment was stopped for 137 empty positions, which resulted in a \$13.6 million savings for the year.

“As your mayor, I will always be honest with you, sharing the real challenges we face,” she said. “I believe you deserve nothing less.”

Moving forward, Lock Dawson called for the City to continue to explore savings that could be generated by refinancing existing debt; explore a budget stabilization effort to work with stakeholders to stabilize city finances while minimizing service disruptions; and generate new revenue.

“We cannot cut our way out of this crisis,” she said. “We will have to grow our way out, not through taxes, but by attracting investment and fostering business growth.”

Lock Dawson noted that one of Riverside’s biggest strengths always has been its robust social capital that can be seen across its neighborhoods and the entire community. This is especially important now, when Riverside needs to come together to prosper in the face of a crisis.

“Our shared identity as Riversiders has profound implications for our success as a city,” she said. “When we unify and identify as Riversiders, we can work towards shared goals, trusting each other, supporting each other, compelling us to press on with collective action. For we are incredibly powerful when we come together to address problems.”

Lock Dawson pledged to conduct a “big tent tour” of each of Riverside’s 28 neighborhoods; continue to fight for the creation of a more inclusive community; and address racism head-on.

“The racial reckoning of this past summer highlighted the inequities in our society, inequities that allow some of us to succeed while holding others back,” she said. “And, while Riverside values diversity, that does not mean we are immune to racism.”

She proposed measuring equity in the city by completing a diversity audit of departments, boards and commissions to ensure that all residents have a place at the table. And she said the City must ramp up outreach to under-represented communities, where necessary.

Another initiative is making the Santa Ana River even more of a destination for recreation and a community gathering place, while reducing fire danger by finding shelter for homeless people living there. Lock Dawson noted that she helped secure \$3 million in funding for the Santa Ana River Gateway project for 10 projects along the river, including the acquisition of four acres next to Ryan Bonaminio Park.

“I want to continue my work to ‘Put the River Back in Riverside,’” she said. “For too long, we have turned our back on our namesake -- the river that runs along the entire western side of our city -- but we now have an opportunity to celebrate it for the treasure that it is and what it can be: a destination for recreation, a place for our community to connect with each other, across town and across generations.”

Riversiders can look forward to seeing many projects come to fruition in the coming year, including the opening of the new Main Library, which has been a generation in the making; the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture of the Riverside Art Museum; the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California; and the California Air Resources Board’s Southern California headquarters.

“We are on the cusp of a new jobs sector launching in Riverside,” she said. “Riverside will be an international center for green and clean tech.”

Lock Dawson closed by mirroring her call to action with a message of hope. These may be the most dire of times for many, she said, but there is hope for the future.

“In the midst of the divisiveness we see all around us, Riverside continues to band together and find mutual purpose, even across ideological boundaries,” Lock Dawson said. “We are resilient, we’re innovative, we’re creative, we’re strong, and we’re in this together.”

For the latest information and resources regarding COVID-19 -- www.RiversideCA.gov/COVID-19