

TOGETHER TOWARDS TOMORROW

STATE OF THE CITY | 2021

WITH MAYOR PATRICIA LOCK DAWSON

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GREATER RIVERSIDE
CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE



January 28, 2021

Good evening and thank you for joining me for my very first State of the City address as the 18th Mayor of the City of Riverside.

A special thank you to the Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce, particularly my friend Cindy Roth, for hosting a State of the City unlike any other. Thank you, Cindy, for your continued leadership. Businesses in the City of Riverside are fortunate to have the very best chamber in California advocating on their behalf. Thank you to the City Council and City Management and staff for your warm welcome. I look forward to the years ahead of working alongside the City of Riverside team in service to our community.

I'd also like to thank you--the residents, business owners, and families of Riverside for trusting me with the great honor and privilege of leading our City. Thank you for your confidence in me. I am committed to serving all of Riverside and I do not take that responsibility lightly.

Today I share with you a call to action, a call for all of us to work:

Together Towards Tomorrow.

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.

But we must first acknowledge where we are. The Covid-19 pandemic has struck a blow to the spirit of Riverside, resulting in painful losses of family, friends and livelihoods. Many Riversiders are struggling to make ends meet. Our healthcare system is at the brink, and our students and teachers are challenged by online learning. As a community, we have had to change our way of life--asking ourselves questions like, "Is it safe to go to the grocery store? Will they have what my household needs? Will I be able to pay my bills each month? When can I spend time with friends and family again?" These are the questions that keep so many of our loved ones and neighbors up at night.

While we remain at this critical stage in the pandemic, we cannot allow fatigue or frustration to set in. A lot of time, effort, and money has gone into helping people get through the shutdowns and, while both business and personal losses have set in for many, we must never forget there is hope. Hope for tomorrow and hope for our collective future. We will get through this dark moment in our history. We will prevail.

The COVID-19 vaccine is being rolled out and we continue to fight the pandemic in the here and now, but we must also begin preparing for life after the pandemic. 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. A Riverside that has a vibrant, diverse economy where small and large businesses thrive, where people live where they work, know their neighbors, feel safe on our streets, where our parks are clean and our public spaces welcoming and accessible. But most of all where people feel included because they are represented and hopeful because they have opportunities, knowing those opportunities are limitless. This is the Riverside that I envision, and it is one that I know we can attain together.

A Riverside where we work Together Towards Tomorrow.

A tomorrow defined by:

STABLE FINANCES

Riverside has always been a beacon of prosperity. But, like every municipality across the state, our city is facing sizable pension obligations that demand our attention. And we also have a structural deficit of \$14.5 million. As your mayor, I will always be honest with you, sharing the real challenges we face--I believe you deserve nothing less.

We know these are uncertain economic times, and we feel it on a daily basis. Just as your household budget may be feeling the strain of the pandemic, the City's budget faces similar obstacles, on a much larger scale. The economic impact of the pandemic is still unfolding as I share this information with you tonight.

Clearly there are still trials ahead. But we've also taken action to stabilize our finances and get us to where we need to be:

A tightened spending plan saved \$7.6 million in non-personnel, special programs and minor capital work. We made the tough choice to institute managed hiring and suspend scheduled raises. Recruitment was suspended for 137 empty positions, which resulted in a \$13.6 million savings for the year.

The City is also implementing priority-based budgeting which will direct funding to City programs and departments deemed most critical by you--the residents and taxpayers. This will be vitally important in a time of limited resources, and we will need your input.

My top priority is to work with our business and labor leaders to balance the City's budget and resolve our pension debt crisis. In addition to priority-based budgeting, I propose a three-pronged approach for fiscal success:

- Continue to explore refinancing existing city debt so what we have borrowed does not cost as much.
- Explore a Budget Stabilization Effort similar to what we accomplished during my tenure on the Riverside Unified School District Board of Education. This will allow us to work with stakeholders to stabilize City finances while minimizing service disruptions.

- And third, generate new revenue, since we cannot cut our way out of this crisis. We will have to grow our way out--not through taxes, but by attracting investment and fostering business growth.

The good news? The pandemic was actually expected to have a more negative financial impact. Sales tax revenue for the fiscal year came in above pandemic expectations, allowing the City to meet adjusted budget targets.

The best news is this--the resources that made Riverside prosperous for decades are still here and will aid our recovery and growth: three universities and a community college, two award-winning K-12 school districts, an economy not based on tourism, a historic Downtown core, desirable neighborhoods, and a robust housing market. These footings will help stabilize our finances and put us in a good place for working Together Towards Tomorrow

A tomorrow defined by:

ROBUST SOCIAL CAPITAL

Riverside's greatest strength is undeniably our caring, committed and connected community. I hear that from people who visit our City and I heard it repeatedly on the campaign trail while talking with residents all across Riverside. When I asked: "What is working in Riverside?" They consistently cited our neighbors and our community. This incredible social capital is what allows us to come together and prosper, even in the midst of crisis.

Our shared identity as Riversiders has profound implications for our success as a City. 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.

We have many amazing groups and organizations working to make Riverside an equitable, prosperous city. A few examples are:

- Love Riverside led by Lynn Heatley whose motto "No Act of Kindness is Ever Wasted" is on full display through their citywide service days;
- Mujeres Activas en la Salud led by Frances Beltran coordinates monthly meetings to engage and empower the Latino community in La Sierra and Arlanza;
- Overflow Farms led by Fred Stover who is working with our school districts to teach the skills of agriculture while collaborating with Feeding America to distribute fresh produce;
- And faith organizations all across our City that are helping those that cannot help themselves.

These are just a few of the groups that you can find all across Riverside's unique 28 neighborhoods. Each neighborhood has its own character, its own heart, its own rhythm.

Once it's safe to gather, I will conduct a "Big Tent Tour" of each neighborhood to get to experience with each of you what makes your neighborhood home. Your connection to, and involvement in, your neighborhood builds this important social capital. Share with us the needs of your neighborhood so we can make better decisions. Because we must ensure when making these important decisions that we include *all* Riversiders.

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. And while Riverside values diversity, that does not mean we are immune to racism.

As Mayor, I took an oath to serve all Riversiders and I will continue to fight for the creation of a more inclusive community with opportunities for all. But it is not enough to just be inclusive, we must also address racism head-on.

I commend the City Council for incorporating anti-racist actions into our strategic plan. I'm looking forward to continuing that work with the Mayor's Multicultural Forum and the Human Relations Commission--both of which work closely with my office. I'm also pleased to see so many groups come together to listen, share, understand and learn from one another.

While generations of Riversiders have benefitted from the work of community champions who have made strides to combat racism and discrimination in our community, there is always more work to do. I propose that we measure 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 where necessary, we must ramp up our outreach to under-represented communities. Establishing a baseline and measuring where we are will help us determine the efficacy of our actions in ensuring a tomorrow that is better for all Riversiders.

A tomorrow defined by:

ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE

Riversiders must be able to *live* where they *work*. We must work towards a City where anyone who needs housing can afford to live here, instead of spending hours on the freeway each day.

As of now, securing housing continues to be a struggle for Riversiders. The State's Regional Housing Needs Allocation, or RHNA, sets housing levels the City must achieve over the next eight years. Riverside's share will be approximately 24,000 new housing units by 2029 and we are currently identifying locations for these homes as we update our Housing Element Plan.

We not only need places to live, we need places to play. That's why I want to continue my work to "Put the River Back in Riverside." 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.

I was pleased to have played a role in securing funding for The Santa Ana River Gateway project which will provide almost \$3 million for ten projects along the River. Including the acquisition of four acres next to Ryan Bonaminio Park.

Working with a regional coalition, we will reduce fire danger and address homelessness in the riverbottom with access to more mental health services, emergency shelter programs and job training. This regional coordination will be critical in the effort to ensure all parties do their part to address homelessness.

Riverside also needs vibrant arts, culture, and entertainment. Work continues on reimagining our Downtown as a lively and exciting destination with an array of entertainment options. Within a few city blocks, Riversiders can access a connected network of exciting cultural and historical sites.

The new Main Library, which has been a generation in the making, includes a state of the art City Archive which will house items from the Library's local history collection and documents from the Museum of Riverside and City Clerk's Office. There's also an innovation center offering a built-in sound recording booth, cutting edge technology, state of the art research opportunities, and community spaces with impressive views of the city. It may be called a library, but it is much more of a learning center for the 21st century.

In the former Main Library location, we will soon welcome the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art and Culture--the first museum of its kind in the United States and a game-changer for the Riverside arts scene.

Just down the street will be the Civil Rights Institute of Inland Southern California, brought in partnership with the Fair Housing Council. This unique center will help us recognize and celebrate Riverside's rich and diverse history while also offering seventy two units of affordable housing. This timely addition to our city is under construction now.

With these projects and many more all across our City, we are well on our way to the Riverside of tomorrow.

A tomorrow defined by:

SHARED PROSPERITY

Riverside is a thriving city, the largest city in the county and the urban center of Inland Southern California.

With the completion of the California Air Resources Board Southern California Headquarters in the spring, Riverside will be an international center for green and clean tech. We expect to attract related businesses that will work with the Air Resources Board to bring in high-quality jobs for Riverside's workforce. We are on the cusp of a new jobs sector launching in Riverside.

One of the greatest attractions for securing the Air Resources Board was the University of California, Riverside, which with our other higher education institutions, provides our City with local, qualified talent. But a stronger bond still needs to be made between the City and the schools of higher education. As a UCR alumnus myself, I know that ensuring our local graduates stay in Riverside is a high priority and I will work to provide opportunities for the thousands of yearly graduates in our City.

We need to begin by creating the local jobs that incentivize people to stay in Riverside. As mayor, I pledge to pursue the types of industries and high-wage employers that propel Riverside's prosperity while ensuring the labor force is adequately trained to meet the demands of the 21st century. This will include:

Helping small businesses and start-ups access capital by working with the Economic Development Department, Workforce Development Board and business sectors that would benefit from these new businesses. Specifically by encouraging investment in the City's Innovation District, marketing the effort nationally and internationally.

Mapping our assets to tell a compelling story that welcomes investment. I will work with our partners at the Chambers of Commerce, universities, museums, nonprofits and creative community leaders to identify what makes our city unique and desirable.

And connecting our community college and employers to provide in-demand technical training, certification, and professional development programs to ensure our methods of retaining local talent are as diverse as the workers themselves.

Our world has become much smaller in many ways, but our challenges have grown much larger. We need to look beyond City Hall and the City for solutions to challenges that are interconnected with surrounding cities, counties and the state. Working on our own is not productive—we must use our network of connections to be intentional and strategic in elevating Riverside locally, statewide and nationally.

We will continue to participate in the Big City Mayors Coalition—a group of the thirteen largest cities in the state. Riverside is the only city in our region included in this coalition and our participation in this group secured \$39 million in grant funds that Riverside benefited from directly. Building on those successes, we will step up our advocacy efforts to secure more funding at the federal and state levels by developing more effective partnerships. So yes, there is still more work to do.

But I leave you tonight not only with a call to action, but with a message of hope.

It is true that for many these are the darkest of times, but what I share with you is that as Americans, as Riversiders, we are uniquely positioned to rise to this challenge and emerge a stronger more prosperous community. We will rebound from this pandemic if we continue to harness Riverside's dynamic assets, leveraging them with new ideas and ingenuity.

In the midst of the divisiveness we see all around us, Riversiders continue to band together and find mutual purpose even across ideological boundaries. We are resilient, we're innovative, we're creative, we're strong, and we're in this together.

So join me, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work: Together Towards Tomorrow.

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