



**2023 State of the City
Feb. 2, 2023
Mayor Lioneld Jordan**

To the City Council, City Attorney, City Clerk and all Fayetteville residents, I offer the following State of the City, 2023.

I would like to open my remarks by saying the state of our City is sound.

There is no other city in this state like Fayetteville. For many years, we have been named a Trendsetter City, a Volunteer Community of the Year and one of the top ten places to live in the United States.

So many things set us apart and make Fayetteville a place where people want to live, work and raise a family. Our quality of life in this city comes from a unique blend of nature, commerce, opportunity, progress, conservation and the arts. But most of all, I believe it is the compassionate and hard-working people of Fayetteville who make this a great place to live.

Tonight, I will highlight some of the ways my administration and I are working to preserve and improve quality of life for everyone in Fayetteville.

But first, I want to express my gratitude to the residents of Fayetteville for their ongoing support and engagement.

I would also like to thank City Attorney Kit Williams and his staff for providing sound legal guidance to the city on behalf of Fayetteville residents.

I would like to thank City Clerk Treasurer Kara Paxton and her staff for their work.

I want to thank City Council for their service and financial stewardship for the people of Fayetteville.

I would like to thank City staff for their diligence and hard work over the past year.

Their efforts make it possible for this City to deliver on the daily needs of our residents, while anticipating and planning for the future.

Thank you to our police officers and firefighters, who show unwavering dedication to protecting our residents and keeping Fayetteville safe.

And finally, I want to thank our partners: Experience Fayetteville, Fayetteville Public Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville Public Schools, Startup Junkie and so many other organizations that serve our residents and businesses.

Every day, my administration and I are working to meet current needs while planning for the future of this growing community. Water service, public safety, streets and sidewalks, permits and licensing, drainage, parks and trail maintenance, recycling and trash removal – these essential services play an important role in your life, each and every day. And we've added 45 new positions to make sure we continue to deliver those services without interruption.

But it is not enough to simply meet today's needs. We must anticipate and plan for tomorrow.

In 2019, our community voted to invest in Fayetteville's future through an infrastructure improvements bond program. Each bond project helps us address current and future needs for a strong, vibrant Fayetteville. We are making excellent progress across all nine areas of the bond, with project work adding up to nearly \$135 million since the program launched.

Infrastructure and public works projects are underway throughout the city. We're working on roads, intersections, traffic signals and drainage to help move traffic more safely. Upgraded parking technology makes it easier to find and pay for parking in our downtown entertainment district. Trail expansions, new sidewalks, better lighting and street crossings make it safer and easier for people to get around town without cars.

Keeping cars moving while creating more opportunities for alternative transportation is an important part of planning for a growing city. This year, you'll see work continue downtown, on Clinton and Harmon, Zion and the Midtown Corridor, with new projects beginning on College, Mission and Fifteenth and Razorback.

We're also moving forward on a new stormwater utility. This much-needed program will proactively address flood management, drainage and water quality across Fayetteville.

Every day, we deliver safe, reliable water and sewer services to the residents of Fayetteville and neighboring communities. As our water and sewer infrastructure ages, more investments will be needed to keep up with growing demands. This is something

we have to keep in mind as we develop new rate structures and service agreements with neighboring towns.

As our community grows, so do demands on our police and fire services.

In 2022, the Fayetteville Fire Department saved nearly \$155 million worth of property. We opened two new fire stations, and we are adding 12 new positions. This year, we will begin work on an additional fire station. These new facilities and personnel help us respond with better speed and skill during emergencies. That means more lives and property saved.

Last year, our police department provided security for some of the largest events ever hosted in this city. Officers saved the lives of 21 people experiencing opioid overdoses, and they collected 180 pounds of unused or expired prescription medications for proper disposal.

This year's budget includes additional police officers along with more dispatch and police support staff.

Our new Police Department Headquarters facility will open in a few months. This incredible new building is part of the 2019 bond program, and I am grateful to the voters for making it possible.

I want to thank the Council for supporting these investments in our police and firefighting facilities, staffing and resources. Throughout 2023, hiring the most qualified candidates and retaining existing personnel in our fire and police departments remains a priority.

Another priority is our commitment to taking meaningful, strategic steps to protect the environment and preserve natural resources. Last year, Fayetteville was named a 2022 Program of the Year by Resource Recycling for our recycling, food-waste diversion and education programs.

We diverted just over 14,000 tons of waste from area landfills through our recycling and composting programs. Through our residential food waste composting program alone, we've given away 800 collection buckets, opened a total of seven drop-off locations and collected 39 tons of food waste.

City government operations reached a 73 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Our community-wide reduction was 18 percent. Solar projects prevented 45,000 metric tons of CO2 from entering the atmosphere and cut our energy costs by \$1 million.

Work begins this year to improve energy efficiency across 47 city-owned buildings. This project is expected to reduce City energy consumption by 27 percent and produce almost \$4 million in savings over 20 years.

In 2022, Fayetteville was named a Tree City USA for the twenty-seventh year in a row by the Arbor Day Foundation. We planted more than 500 trees last year, and in 2023, we intend to increase this to 1,000 plantings. We gave away almost 1,400 trees to residents through the Celebration of Trees and Invasive Species Bounty programs. And, we amended seven City code requirements to help protect our urban tree canopy.

Through our 2019 bond program, a Parks System master plan is nearly complete. We have launched planning processes for Underwood and Walker Parks. Public input on these plans is critical for safe, inclusive and accessible outdoor experiences throughout Fayetteville.

Nearly 94,000 people attended park events or joined park programs last year. Volunteers put in almost 25,000 hours of service. These incredible numbers show just how important parks and recreation programs are to this community. Whether you prefer a structured, managed green space or something more natural and off the beaten path, I encourage you to explore our parks and find your favorite.

Arts and culture are equally important to Fayetteville's identity. Last fall, the City created 88 artist opportunities that resulted in free events attended by more than 3,000 people. Public murals were added to Gregory Park, Archibald Yell and Lafayette Bridge.

Exposure to the arts can be life changing – I know that first-hand. This year you will see even more opportunities to celebrate art, music, performance and history throughout Fayetteville.

Since it opened last year, the Lower Ramble has been a hub for arts and culture events. This space is one part of a larger 2019 bond project that is bringing new life and energy to our downtown core.

Construction on the Upper Ramble and Civic Plaza will begin after the new parking structure is complete later this summer. A police substation will open in the parking structure to provide focused service for our downtown and entertainment districts.

We have a signed letter of intent for a building on the south end of the Upper Ramble. A public-private partnership like this one will bring positive impacts for businesses throughout the downtown core. And, it is expected to contribute nearly \$1 million a year in additional sales tax to the City.

With help from Congressman Womack and the Chamber of Commerce, we secured a \$3 million federal grant that will go toward the infrastructure work needed for SLS Community and South Cato Springs LLC to move its project forward. It will bring together vocational, residential and clinical resources to help improve the lives of neurodiverse residents and their families. In addition to our federal grant, the City is contributing about \$3.5 million for this project.

The Civic Plaza and south building at the Ramble and SLS Community are projects with long-term, positive impacts for our economy and our community as a whole. I'm excited to see these projects move forward and meet needs that have previously gone unmet in our community.

Fayetteville's economic health depends on a vibrant, diverse ecosystem of business and tourism. Despite ongoing pandemic uncertainty, we continue to see positive trends in Fayetteville's economic vitality:

- \$500 million increase in taxable sales compared to 2021
- 4,000 new jobs added by area businesses
- Increases in permits and inspections for housing and commercial space
- 17,500 visitors from 21 countries during Cyclocross 2022 World Championships
- Record-breaking fuel sales in 2021 and 2022 at Drake Field

Moving forward, I hope to see more encouraging results like these by exploring partnerships, pursuing grants and creating an environment of equitable support for diverse local businesses.

Most of us are able to enjoy or benefit from all of these things that make Fayetteville a great place to live and work. But that is not always true for everyone in this city.

It's hard to appreciate street improvements, new trails or free concerts in the park when you are worried about feeding your family, finding childcare that doesn't take your entire paycheck, or sleeping in a tent because you lost your home.

There are members of this community who are struggling in ways that some of us may not see or understand. But we cannot – we MUST not – overlook them.

I believe we have a responsibility to lift up those who need the most help. That means investing more resources to help at-risk community members.

The Crisis Intervention Response Team within our police department pairs social workers and police officers to safely and compassionately help people who are

experiencing a mental health crisis. In 2022, this team referred 546 people for assistance.

We help at-risk residents find new housing or stay in their homes, make needed repairs and take care of beloved animal companions through our Hearth, Housing Rehabilitation, Ranger's Pantry and AniMeals programs.

We're expanding the Yvonne Richardson Community Center to better serve the children and adults who rely on its free or low-cost recreation, social and learning opportunities. The expansion is funded by our 2019 bond program and a matching grant from the Walton Family Foundation.

CASA, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Peace at Home Family Shelter and the Salvation Army are just a few of our partner organizations who offer focused care for people in need. These organizations receive Community Development Block Grant funding awards through the City.

Partnerships and collaboration are important tools as we work to help our unsheltered community members. For many years, we have provided funding to Seven Hills Homeless Shelter and other groups who work directly with this population.

Through the Pick Me Up Program, people in our unsheltered community are employed to clean up litter in South Fayetteville. Last year, participants cleaned 66,000 pounds of litter. In partnership with Genesis Church and Seven Hills, we'll expand this program in 2023.

I am committed to bringing together people and organizations to collaborate on strategic, long-term actions that will help address the needs of our unsheltered community members.

Fayetteville is home to people who have been marginalized for generations. They feel under-represented and pushed aside. We have an opportunity to help them feel welcomed, valued and appreciated through our words AND our actions.

The City has increased its investment in historic preservation – and specifically, preserving Fayetteville's African American history. Last year, in partnership with our newly-created Black Heritage Preservation Commission, we renamed a street and approved a historic marker honoring Nelson Hackett. The Black History Commission of Arkansas awarded Fayetteville a grant to fund this marker.

A city-wide heritage and historic presentation master plan is underway to help identify, protect and celebrate more of Fayetteville's history - especially those people and places who have long been overlooked.

Fayetteville received around \$17.9 million dollars through American Rescue Plan Act. This funding is intended to help communities recover from the pandemic.

So far, we've distributed funding to quite a few non-profits who saw financial losses while continuing to serve our community during this time of crisis.

The cost of childcare and access to better paying jobs are very real barriers to going back to work and staying engaged in the workforce. This is especially true for women and single parents.

Our new Childcare Assistance program covers the cost of licensed childcare in Fayetteville for up to 12 months. A workforce training program through the Fayetteville Public Library will open up new occupations and job options for our residents. Both of these programs are funded through ARPA.

We are also working to connect residents to affordable broadband service. Many our residents rely on free public Wi-Fi to complete their schoolwork, look for jobs or stay connected to loved ones. Having access to affordable broadband at home will be a game-changer.

This year, I hope to explore ways that we can bring more attainable housing options to Fayetteville. Workforce housing is a very big gap that concerns me. As our population continues to grow, we need more options that fit a spectrum of incomes in Fayetteville.

And, as we work to invest the remaining ARPA funding in 2023, my hope is that we continue balancing our investments across programs that benefit everyone and programs that specifically support the people who need the most help.

The pandemic has brought new challenges and shed light on existing challenges that we may not have seen before.

This time of crisis has helped us learn from each other and broaden our perspectives.

It has also helped us learn that while everyone has a voice, not everyone feels empowered to make their voice heard.

Tonight, I conclude my remarks with this quote from Maya Angelou:

“Each one of us has lived through some devastation, some loneliness, some weather superstorm or spiritual superstorm, when we look at each other we must say, I understand. I understand how you feel because I have been there myself.

We must support each other and empathize with each other because each of us is more alike than we are unlike.”

Friends and Council Members, let us always remember to listen, learn and advocate for those who feel underserved and may need more help to succeed.

And on behalf of all the residents of Fayetteville, let us remain steadfast in our commitment to working together for a better tomorrow, where EVERYONE can prosper and thrive.