



**2021 State of the City
Jan. 26, 2021
Mayor Lioneld Jordan**

To the City Council, the City Attorney, City Clerk and all Fayetteville residents, I offer the following State of the City, 2021.

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

This has been the most challenging year I've faced during my time in office. And I know the people of Fayetteville have felt those challenges deeply as well.

We have watched the COVID-19 pandemic turn our lives upside down. Nearly all our normal daily activities have been affected. We have lost loved ones. We have changed our social behaviors and family traditions to keep each other safe.

Mandatory closures, reduced operations and strict regulations have created great strain on nearly all the businesses in Fayetteville – especially our small and locally owned businesses. Many of our residents are hurting financially because of reduced hours or lost jobs.

We have seen our community members debate sensitive topics with strong feelings and deeply-held convictions. And we have seen an upswell of social unrest here and across the country because of racism and racial injustices. All of us have had to confront uncomfortable truths about the historical mistreatment of African Americans and the inequalities experienced by all people of color across this country.

The events of 2020 would be enough to do serious and lasting damage to a community. But I believe this past year has shown that Fayetteville is stronger and more resilient than ever before.

We have adapted to make sure no City services are interrupted, and we have worked to help people have access to as many support resources as possible.

Our bond projects have injected more than \$40 million dollars into the local economy.

When other cities were erupting in violent protests, our community served as a model for peaceful, safe and cooperative demonstrations of free speech and assembly.

And Fayetteville was one of the first cities in the state to take proactive COVID-19 measures such as masking, reduced capacity and virtual public meetings.

You have heard me say many times, we will get through this together. We ARE getting through this together.

Fayetteville is a community that comes together during difficult times. No matter what challenges come our way, we remain steadfast in working together for a better tomorrow for all our residents.

I am proud of this community that we have built together. We are not perfect, and we never will be. But each day we work to get better, to get stronger.

I want to express my gratitude to the residents of Fayetteville.

Of any city in Arkansas, I believe our residents are the most engaged in local government, the most passionate about social issues and the most dedicated to serving each other and making this community a great place to live.

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

I would like to thank City Clerk Treasurer Kara Paxton and her staff for their work to ensure our city government is transparent and accessible to the people.

I want to thank the City Council for being strong leaders and advocates for the people of Fayetteville. I appreciate your hard work, service and financial stewardship for this City.

I would like to thank our dedicated City staff for keeping so many projects moving forward and for maintaining uninterrupted public access to meetings and information during this challenging year.

Thank you to our dedicated police officers and firefighters for working to protect our residents and keep Fayetteville a safe place to live and work.

And finally, I want to thank our many partners: the Experience Fayetteville team, Fayetteville Public Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville Public Schools, and so many other organizations that serve our residents, promote our economy and provide resources for people in need.

And now, let us take a moment to celebrate some of our 2020 Awards and Accomplishments:

- For the fifth year in a row, Fayetteville was ranked in the top ten Best Places to Live by U.S. News and World Report

- For the 31st year in a row, the City's Finance Division received a Certificate of Achievement in Financial Reporting from the Governmental Financial Officer's Association
- The Arkansas Association of Chiefs of Police gave our Police Department several awards this year:
 - Chief Mike Reynolds was named Chief of the Year
 - Sergeant James Jennings, Corporal Seay Floyd and Officer Natalie Eucce were named Officers of the Year
 - And the late Officer Stephen Carr was recognized for his line of duty sacrifice
- Once again, we ranked in the Top Ten U.S. Cities for Bicycles by People for Bikes
- Our composting and recycling programs earned the National Recycling Coalition 2020 Outstanding Program award
- Our Fleet was nationally ranked in Top 100 Fleets again this year
- We received a mid-America chapter EMMY nomination for editing on the Fayetteville Police Department "Ride Along" recruiting commercial and a Gold Telly Award for the "Tribute to Officer Stephen Carr" video
- Lights of the Ozarks was named in USA Today's Readers' Choice Top 10 Best Holiday Displays
- Our solar array project was a finalist for the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality ENVY Award
- The League of American Bicyclists named Fayetteville a Silver-Level Bike Friendly Community
- Our in-house trails construction program was awarded the 2020 Developer of the Year award by the Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce
- Our Water and Sewer construction groups were recognized as exceptional for their work to avoid damage to gas lines
- 2020 was our 25th year to be named a Tree City USA by the Arbor Day Foundation, and this year we received an additional USA Growth Award for higher level of tree care and community engagement
- Fayetteville Police Detective Nickalus White received the Washington County Ordinary Hero Award for his work with victims of child abuse and neglect
- And for the fifth year in a row, our wastewater treatment service received the Utility of the Future Today award

Our 2020 awards reach across nearly every City department and showcase city staff's excellent work.

And speaking of excellent work, I'm happy to report that the \$50 million Fayetteville Public Library expansion project is complete! Doors opened, with COVID-19 protocols in place, last week.

This incredible facility takes learning and equitable access to a new level. Our library is a true asset to our community. Its cutting-edge design and programming are great examples of building for the future and serving current generations and those who come after us.

My staff and I mostly focused on two areas last year: taking quick and thoughtful action around the pandemic and moving bond projects forward.

That said, we did not forget about our commitment to taking climate action and providing quality of life for the people of Fayetteville.

Our climate actions last year included:

- Implementing a polystyrene ban
- Creating a compost delivery program to support food security efforts through backyard gardening
- Launching a mobile food waste collection program and adding 10 new residential food waste compost drop off locations
- Opening remote drop-off locations for recycling
- Working with SWEPCO to begin installing LED streetlights across the City
- Providing compostable to-go cups at no charge to restaurants and bars in the Outdoor Refreshment Area
- Planting 480 trees in parks, rights of way and along trails
- Giving away more than 1000 trees and shrubs to residents
- Installing more than 3,000 native plants next to a new trail in Gulley Park
- And continuing our work on stormwater ordinance amendments

In 2021, I look forward to renewing our commitment to climate action. We will continue working to take bold, measurable actions to reduce negative impacts on our climate.

Some of our actions last year to ensure quality of life included:

- Opening the Niokaska Creek Trail, accessible to more than 4,000 residents within one-quarter mile of their homes
- Preserving more than 60 acres of green space on Markham Hill
- Providing virtual and bilingual instruction for Public Access Television
- Launching new, socially distanced outdoor programs such as sunset paddling, backpacking and camping
- Helping 90 homes feed nearly 200 pets through 8,300 pounds of pet food donations to Ranger's Pantry
- Installing backflow tracking software to protect drinking water

I am grateful to my staff and administration and to City Council for helping us achieve so much in 2020.

As I think about last year's achievements, I must remark on all the actions this City took to respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

In early March, I declared a public health emergency and began encouraging residents to practice social distancing, well before any statewide directives were issued.

With the temporary expanded powers entrusted to me by City Council, I reduced capacity in bars, restaurants and other business where social gatherings created increased risk of community spread.

I closed City Hall to the public and postponed all City-sponsored events to reduce opportunities for large groups to gather.

We moved very quickly to virtual meetings, and our meetings have taken place as scheduled with public participation throughout the pandemic.

City departments adopted safety protocols to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread among staff at work. This prevented interruptions in the City's ability to provide essential services and conduct necessary business.

We continued water service to all customers, regardless of whether they were current on their bills, and we waived security deposits for those experiencing hardships.

I believe these early and proactive steps helped protect Fayetteville from the high caseloads, community spread and hospitalizations seen in other areas of the country.

City Council passed several ordinances to help protect the health and safety of our residents. This included a mask mandate with measures to help businesses enforce masks for their customers. The Board of Health and City Health Officer position were brought back to make sure we have sound medical advice as we navigate this pandemic.

City Council approved the Outdoor Refreshment Area pilot program, the largest of its kind in the state. ORA has helped nearly 60 bars and restaurants to safely serve more patrons and increase their business traffic.

Creative solutions such as pop-up events, parklets and free on-street parking for to-go orders have helped support businesses as they work to serve patrons while following new health and safety guidelines.

Our Police and Fire Departments have worked hard to help educate and enforce masks across Fayetteville, including in our entertainment district and at high-traffic retail sites. Police officers and firefighters distributed more than 180,000 free masks to businesses and people across Fayetteville last year.

We kept City parks and trails open throughout the pandemic. Our 4,000 acres of parks and 90

miles of trails give people a safe, healthy and free place to take a break from working at home or attending virtual school.

The City helped 160 households avoid utility shut-off or eviction through the Community Development Block Grant rental and utility assistance program. That's 160 households that avoided eviction and possible homelessness.

And for those residents who are experiencing homelessness, we partnered with local organizations on Safe Camp. Safe Camp is a place where people can stay, have basic needs met, apply for housing and get help finding a job – with a sense of safety, dignity and respect.

Like you, I am anxious to see the end of this terrible pandemic. I am ready to see an end to the ever-increasing number of deaths in our community. I am ready to see businesses reopening, people going back to work and families celebrating holidays together.

We must keep working together to make that happen. We must keep following safety guidelines and looking out for each other as the vaccination program reaches more people.

I will continue to monitor potential risks to our community and work with staff, the Board of Health, the City Health Officer and City Council to take thoughtful, meaningful steps to address risks to Fayetteville's health and safety.

My staff and I dedicated a huge amount of time and effort to managing pandemic concerns last year. Despite that, we made significant progress on our 2019 Infrastructure Improvement Bond Projects.

In 2020, we had more than 45 Phase 1 bond projects underway across the City. This would be a major undertaking in a normal year – and I think we can agree that 2020 was anything but a normal year.

Tonight, I will give you an overview of just a few key milestones and progress we achieved over the past year of bond work. I will also share a glimpse of what you can expect from our bond programs in 2021.

Improvements to our streets, sidewalks and trails create better transportation and mobility options for everyone. This is true whether you commute by car, bus, bike, scooter or on foot.

Our Street Improvement Bond includes more than 20 projects. I'd like to call your attention to the progress we've made on just a few of those 20 projects.

Recently we opened the Ruppel Road extension – a significant piece of infrastructure on the west side of town. This was the final link in a project we've been working on for a long time.

We have made progress on all three segments of the 71B Corridor project. Traffic studies are complete, and design work is underway for this major roadway that stretches from far north to

far south Fayetteville. We'll be holding public input sessions soon for the Archibald Yell and Rock Street intersection redesign project. This work is part of our 71B Master Plan.

Construction began on Zion Road improvements in September 2020 and should be done in early 2022. This is an extensive project that will create a much safer connection for all users.

Other new street projects we will begin in 2021 include:

- New railroad crossings on Gregg Street at Futrall Drive and Shiloh Drive that will improve safety and unlock valuable land for new developments worth hundreds of millions of dollars
- Extending Sain Street to Vantage Drive, to relieve congestion at the Joyce and College intersection
- Midtown Corridor improvements on Porter Road and Deane, Sycamore and Poplar Streets
- Signalization of the Razorback Road and 15th Street intersection
- Lighting, sidewalk and access ramp improvements in the downtown area

In our Trail Improvement Bond, design on the Hamestring Creek Trail Bridge began in 2020, and construction starts early this year.

We also began design work on the Midtown Corridor trail. This project creates a much-needed east-west connection between dense residential, employment and commercial areas.

Looking ahead, we will begin construction on the Tsa La Gi trail across Razorback Road this year. This project will close a gap to create a 5-mile trail loop in south Fayetteville.

The Mission Boulevard Corridor Trail and Wilson Park on-street bikeway projects will help connect our historic district to downtown and the Razorback Greenway, helping to close a gap between those areas and our new Niokaska Creek Trail and Old Wire Cycle Track. Public input sessions begin this spring, and we will incorporate feedback from our residents into the design of this very important project.

Projects underway through the Drainage Improvement Bond will help reduce flooding and protect water quality.

In 2020, we completed drainage construction for the Boxwood Addition. Upper Scull Creek Phase 2 construction will be done early this year. Designs for the Missouri Creek/Rolling Hills area are done.

For 2021, construction is underway for North Palmer Avenue. Homespun Drive is scheduled to begin this spring. Design work is underway for Sunbridge Drive and North College as well.

Last year, Fayetteville was awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency to match the City's bond dollars for several stream restoration projects. We will begin work this year on Niokaska Creek and Scull Creek.

Part of what makes Fayetteville special is our parks. They have been more valuable than ever this past year. So many of us have turned to outdoor recreation in City parks to cope with pandemic stress and restrictions. Through our Parks Improvement Bond, we're making investments that residents and visitors can enjoy for generations to come.

Last year, in partnership with Fayetteville Public Schools, we purchased Lewis Fields. This preserved 12 acres of highly-used and much-loved green space right in the middle town.

At Kessler Mountain Regional Park, we completed a new soft-surface trail and installed synthetic turf on four existing infields. When limited youth baseball resumed last summer, it was my honor to throw out the first pitch in celebration of the newly-named Chambers Baseball Complex. In December, we opened bids for the next phase of Kessler, which includes a new baseball complex and additional parking.

We opened four new soft-surface trails at Centennial Park at Millsap Mountain. We also began design work on a pavilion and restrooms to get ready for the 2022 UCI Cyclocross World Championship.

This year, we will complete work on an entry road, hard surface trail connections, parking lot and other infrastructure to help people access and enjoy the park.

Starting next month, our Downtown Square Gardens will see some enhancements. New lighting will brighten up the interior of the Gardens in a way that brings out its beauty and helps pedestrians navigate the square with better safety and comfort. Electrical infrastructure work will deliver power to the Square Gardens and eliminate the need for generators during events.

We are restoring the Fayetteville Town Center Plaza through our City Facilities Improvement Bond. Construction began earlier this month. This project will improve the safety and appearance of a highly visible public facility in the heart of our downtown square. It includes masonry improvements and waterproofing for retaining walls and planters, power and lighting upgrades and a snow melt system built into a completely new walkway.

The Town Center Plaza restoration and Square Gardens lighting projects make our historic downtown square even more inviting for residents and visitors.

Whether you are visiting shops and restaurants near the square, going to the Farmer's Market or admiring the Lights of the Ozarks, you'll be able to enjoy these improvements all year long, day or night.

More work on accessible public outdoor spaces is well underway through our Cultural Arts Corridor Improvement Bond. We broke ground on the first phase of this project in September. This includes improvements to Fay Jones Woods, West Avenue streetscapes and the Razorback Greenway trail. These will be finishing up at the end of this year.

Soon, I hope to bring a contract to City Council on the purchase of land for a replacement parking deck at the Depot Lot on West Avenue and Dickson Street. If the Council approves this contract, construction could begin this spring.

The City hired a local agency to begin the renaming and branding process for the entire Cultural Arts Corridor. Soon, we will invite the public to participate in this process.

Parks and public spaces such as the Cultural Arts Corridor contribute to a strong quality of life in Fayetteville. But let us not forget that public safety is a critical component in making this a great place to live and work.

Fayetteville is a growing city, and with that growth comes increased demand on police and fire services. To meet that demand, we break ground on a new public safety campus very soon.

Through the Police Facilities Construction Bond, we are building a new headquarters for the Fayetteville Police Department. I've been working on this project for a very long time, and I am really pleased that our new facility will address the many deficiencies of the current police station building.

I believe the Fayetteville Police Department is the best in the state, the best in the country. This new facility gives our officers what they need to continue being the best. Of all the incredible features this new headquarters offers, the most important one is safety. Our officers deserve to have a safe and secure facility. And that is exactly what this project will deliver.

In the first phase of our Firefighting Facilities Construction Bond, we are building two new fire stations – one on the public safety campus off Deane and Porter and one on South School, near Cato Springs Road.

Last year, the Fayetteville Fire Department saved more than \$220 million worth of property in our City. Adding fire stations to the center and south of town means faster response times in those areas during emergencies. Faster response times result in more lives and more property saved.

In 2020, we finalized designs on the new fire stations and purchased a new ladder apparatus and fire engine. Looking ahead, we expect to begin construction on Fire Station #8 and #9 later this year.

The work we are doing through the Police and Fire bond projects will ensure that our police officers and firefighters have what they need to continue providing excellent service to the people of Fayetteville.

Our first Economic Development Bond project will be the Industrial Drive Commerce Park extension. Last year we received a \$2 million grant from the Economic Development Administration, and we'll match that with \$500,000 from this bond fund.

We will construct nearly 2,500 feet of road through City-owned property to open more than 40 acres of land for businesses to either start or expand operations. This is a great tool to help us recruit businesses and increase the number of high-wage jobs in Fayetteville.

Tonight, I have shared just a handful of bond program highlights. I invite you to learn more about all these projects by going to the City's website. Hundreds of millions of dollars will be invested into this community over the next few years through our bond program.

This kind of investment plays a critical role right now in keeping Fayetteville's economy financially healthy and strong.

A total of just over \$127 million dollars was approved for Phase 1 bond funding. Of that amount, approximately \$16 million dollars were spent in 2020, with an additional \$25 million dollars placed under contract.

That means building materials, equipment and supplies being purchased. That means existing jobs being preserved and new jobs being created. That means people getting steady paychecks and making good wages to support themselves and their families. That means money being spent in our stores, restaurants, bars, service businesses and more.

The combination of bond investments, revenue collections and good money management from City staff and your elected officials contributes to a strong, healthy and stable economy in Fayetteville.

My friends, the past year has been incredibly challenging for all of us. We're not through this pandemic yet, but I hope – and I believe – that better days are ahead.

Fayetteville is a strong community. A resilient community. A community that believes our differences make us better. We WILL emerge from this difficult time stronger and more resilient than ever before, ready to tackle whatever challenges may come our way.

Tonight, I conclude my remarks with this quote from Franklin D. Roosevelt:

“We have always held to the hope, the belief, the conviction that there is a better life, a better world, beyond the horizon.”

Friends and Council Members, let us continue working together to deliver on our promise to make Fayetteville a place where everyone feels safe. Where everyone feels welcome. Where everyone feels hope for the future.