

**STATE OF THE CITY of FRESNO**  
**June 15, 2016**  
**Mayor Ashley Swearingin**

**OPEN – The Learn’d Astronomer**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak once again of the State of our City...to embrace our successes and measure our challenges as Fresno continues to move into its **exciting** and **long-anticipated future**.

I stand here before you today to declare one last time as Mayor that **the state of the City of Fresno is strong and growing stronger every day.**

I wanted to begin my final State of the City with the video we just watched – put to the words of Walt Whitman’s poem, “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” because I believe it perfectly captures the stunning and wonderful moment in which we are living.

In this poem, Whitman is describing a young man who attends a lecture by an astronomer thinking he’s going to actually learn about the stars, but instead he ends up getting overwhelmed by the “proofs, figures...charts and diagrams” until all the facts and details make him tired and sick...so he wanders out into the night sky...and he simply looks up in perfect silence...and ***experiences*** the awe and beauty of the stars.

I believe we have arrived at a similar moment in the development of our city – yes there are facts and figures, spreadsheets and charts...all which fill our heads with detail and provide evidence of the **transformational journey** we are on. But Walt Whitman showed us that there is a level of amazement and wonderment which ***can’t always*** be explained with just facts and figures.

It’s the experience of walking around the growing crowds at the monthly ArtHop, seeing the dramatic changes in the construction along Fulton Street, joining the cheering crowd

of thousands at a Paul McCartney concert or downtown at a Grizzlies “Taco Truck Throwdown” or...I don’t know, maybe just having a glass of your favorite Swearengin Strawberry Blonde Ale at the FresYES festival?

Something **different** is happening in Fresno, and it is **real**. People, both inside and outside our community, are noticing this change. People like Johnny Soto, the creator of that wonderful video. Johnny was born and raised in Fresno and quickly developed a passion for storytelling – he majored in theatre at Fresno State and soon made his way to Los Angeles. But he discovered that Hollywood was not what he had expected. And just as unexpectedly, he discovered a new appreciation for his hometown.

Johnny says, “Every time I came back to Fresno, it felt **different**...It felt **good**...And the writers and actors and artists I knew were composing, creating, and performing in Fresno because they loved it here.” And he also realized that the storyteller who set out for the bright lights of Hollywood could find just as much **opportunity** and **satisfaction** in Fresno.

So he moved back – the reversal of the “brain drain” – a “brain gain” - and is producing videos with such beauty and vision that they capture the heart of the city we love. Johnny Soto, please stand and let us welcome you back home and thank you for your work.

In my final State of the City address, I want to review with you the progress of our efforts over the past seven and a half years, speak of our unfinished work, and set our sights on the years ahead.

Before I do, there are so many to thank.

I’d like to start by recognizing and thanking my family.

- Sobrados
- Newtons

- Paul, Syd, Sam

Thank you again to Council President Caprioglio. I also want to thank my other colleagues on the Fresno City Council. Would you all please stand?

- D1 – Esmeralda Soria
- D2 – Steve Brandau
- D3 – Oliver Baines
- D5 and Supervisor-elect – Sal Quintero
- D6 – Lee Brand
- D7- Clint Olivier

It's been a privilege to serve alongside my council colleagues, both current and past, over the last 7 ½ years. Thank you for your leadership, and your willingness to “discuss” the tough things and work together toward a greater solution. Please join me in giving them a round of applause.

I'd also like to thank the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce and new CEO Nathan Ahle for providing this special forum...and thank you to the organizations that help host this event. You'll find their names listed on the program. The annual “State of the City” address would not be possible without their financial support.

I have been truly blessed to work with an exceptional group of people at City Hall over these past two terms. When you hear me talk about Fulton Street, the General Plan, BRT, Restore Fresno, the water infrastructure project, increased public safety staffing, the Blackstone Corridor, the Food Expo, and so many more initiatives – when you see the results of their herculean efforts, you should thank them, too.

Want to list each person quickly this year - Capably and honorably led by City Manager Bruce Rudd:

- Renena Smith, Assistant City Manager

- Wilma Quan, Deputy City Manager
- Briana Parra
- Econ Dev Team – Larry Westerlund, Claudia Ruiz Alvarez, Kelly Trevino, Crystal Cooper
- Communications Team – Mark Standriff, Miguel Ramirez
- Mayor’s office staff – Danielle Bergstrom, Cheryl Burns, Kelli Furtado, Georgeanne White

These men and women are true warriors who have fought for excellence and integrity each and every day – and I owe them gratitude and pride in the job they have done.

I would also like to acknowledge my team of department directors. It is an honor to serve alongside such strong, capable, and caring people.

The legendary Muhammad Ali, who passed away just a few days ago, once said that “It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out; it's the pebble in your shoe.”

Well, we’ve had to endure more than our share of pebbles in our walk together these past few years, and I will never be able to truly express my appreciation for your commitment to our city and its cause. Please stand and accept our thanks.

Finally, all city employees who are here, please stand so we can thank you for your service to our community.

Today, because of them, Fresno is stronger. We look out now on a city that is gaining traction and growing in unity and self-confidence.

But it wasn't long ago that we looked out on a much different landscape:

- Unstable city finances;
- Unemployment at 18%;
- A homeless population growing by double digits every year;

- No willpower to address our long-term water needs;
- Unsustainable development patterns that all but gutted our city center and no actionable plan in place to deal with the neglect and the concentration of poverty in our city.

We also saw a City Hall that over the decades would often get deadlocked over these complicated issues which would then too often result in gridlock...and...ultimately, inaction.

A near 20-year stalemate over the Bus Rapid Transit plan. 25 years of inaction over water infrastructure upgrades. A 50-year gridlock over the future of the Fulton Mall.

And a 60-year standstill on a development code that was so old and creaky that still had regulations for “Turkish bath houses”... *In 2015.*

**Uprooting “status quo” thinking** and replacing it with a **culture of “action”** based on best practices, solid analysis, and financial sustainability has been our mission at City Hall.

To create an atmosphere of expectation in our community and to prepare people’s hearts and minds for change, I closed my first State of the City address in 2009 by declaring...**that our efforts to transform our community would be “different” this time.**

And, being a good Fresnoan and totally immersed in the local culture, I knew when I said those words...that a very large, steaming portion of cynicism would be served up in response.

“Oh, that’s what every mayor says, but nothing ever changes.” So, I said it again, **“It’s different this time.”**

“But we’ve tried all these things before and nothing ever changes and all we ever do is talk and nothing ever happens...” but I replied a third and a fourth time, ***“It’s different this time.”***

I look back on that first speech and I ask myself, “Why did I make such a bold declaration?” I think it’s because I could sense who we were becoming as a city and that there was **just enough** of a change in our mindset...**enough dissatisfaction with the status quo and hunger for change**...and enough people mobilized in our community...that if we added...the **unwavering focus and undeniable determination from City Hall to the equation**, that things could, in fact, be **“different”** this time...that **talk** would turn to **action**...and **action to results**.

With that in mind, we came together as a community to begin to tackle the biggest challenges in front of us. We borrowed the best practices of ancient explorers charting the unknown, along with the data from learn’d astronomers who had studied the heavens, and began crafting Fresno’s own “Star Chart” for the next eight years.

Here’s what we have accomplished together.

The top priority of my Administration is, and always has been public safety. My #1 task to carry out that commitment was to protect public safety spending as much as possible through the budget cuts of the Great Recession. The first major grant I secured as Mayor of Fresno was a \$12 million Community Oriented Policing Services grant in January 2009 to fund 41 police officers, which was the largest COPS grant awarded in the nation. That was then.

After navigating through the recession and seeing our number of officers drop to a low of 700, we have now turned the corner and are building back the strength of force needed in a major California city like Fresno. Today, we are proposing in the FY2017 budget to add 26 police officers next year on top of the 43 officers we added this year,

which will bring our total number of funded positions up to 801 – just shy of our all-time high police staffing levels in 2008.

We are opening a fifth police district in Manchester Center to better serve Central Fresno and the Tower District. School resource officers are being added to address school and neighborhood related enforcement problems. We brought on three new police officers to focus on addressing scavenging issues near recycling centers. We stepped up security for our FAX busses by assigning four new officers for transit support.

Chief Dyer recently provided me a 10-year analysis of crime rates in Fresno – from 2006 to 2015 – and the results are amazing. Thanks to the work of Chief Dyer and the men and women of the Fresno Police Department, in a season of fewer resources, not more...our community still experienced a 21% reduction in violent crime and a 7% decrease in property crime when comparing 2006 to 2015. In total, we've seen 9.5% drop in all crimes from 2006 to 2015. That's 2,500 fewer incidents of crime...2,500 fewer victims in our city in 2015 than in 2006.

Even still, we can never be satisfied with reductions in crime rates, particularly with statewide changes in laws that are impacting our streets today like they are in every major city in California.

But again, our Chief and his staff have responded to this latest challenge brilliantly, deploying policing resources in the most strategic manner possible, which means this next year we will have over 400 officers working on patrol in our city, one of the highest community staffing levels we've experienced in our city.

And our Fire Chief, Kerri Donis, is a superstar in her own right. The recession proved to be just as challenging for our firefighters, and yet Chief Donis has produced impressive results, just as increases in service calls have consistently set records, year after year.

Our 8 minute response times for assembling an effective response force has improved from meeting the goal 72% of the time in 2014 to 84% in 2015.

In order to continue improving response times and provide greater efficiency for our first responders, we will increase next year's Fire Department budget by 11%, the single largest increase for any general fund department in this year's budget.

With the help of a Federal SAFER grant, we'll increase our minimum daily staffing to 77 firefighters by September 1<sup>st</sup>, which is still short of our all-time high staffing level of 82 but a dramatic improvement over our lowest staffing level, which was 63. Chief Donis and our firefighters deserve our thanks for their service and sacrifice.

While it has been extremely difficult to manage the public safety needs of our city through the Great Recession, we made it through and we are now rebuilding both the police and fire departments aggressively and sustainably.

Without any general fund support, we have also successfully advanced the revitalization of our downtown.

In 2009, I said that a city's calling card is its downtown and without a revitalized urban core, we miss out on the opportunity to attract and retain the best and brightest entrepreneurs and to positively impact the lives of the families who are already living in or near our city's center.

At the center of that vision has been our City's historic main street – Fulton.

Dissent and concern over the future of Fulton started in the early 1960s and seemingly never stopped. In fact, in doing our research on Fulton Mall, we found a full page ad from the Fresno Bee in 1964 that was placed by a group of downtown business owners who warned the City Council at the time...that not only would paving over Fulton Street

destroy their businesses...but that it would take downtown Fresno 40 years to recover. They were pretty close...it's taken 50 years.

Decades of controversy resulted in gridlock and paralysis which only accelerated the decline of Fresno's historic main street. Something had to be done.

Fortunately, it was different this time and we found the will this time to make a change.

After seven years of community meetings, planning, designing, engineering, and scraping together grant dollars for the project...a crowd of close to a thousand gathered on March 3 at the corner of Fulton and Merced. 52 years earlier, in March of 1964, city leaders had gathered at that very location to break ground on the new Fulton Mall, but this time around in March of 2016, the crowd was there to cheer loud and long as we officially broke ground on the Fulton Street reconstruction project.

That was a defining moment in our city's history and a turning point in our revitalization. I don't think I will ever forget that moment. And while I won't be in office when the project is finished and we gather again in less than a year to cut the ribbon on the re-opening of Fulton Street, TRUST ME – I will be right there leading the cheers.

Just as predicted, unclogging our main artery is making downtown's heart beat stronger and stronger. In the 18 months since the City Council gave the go-ahead for the Fulton Street project, over \$100 million in new private investment has been committed to downtown Fresno.

Not since the historic buildings that line Fulton were originally built have we seen so much investment and renovation, with much more in the planning and financing stages, including the South Stadium project – approved by the Fresno City Council in February. We have just one more hurdle to clear on the project, which I suspect we will and then soon there will be 51 apartments overlooking Chukchansi stadium with ground floor retail and a world-class public market across the street in the old Gottschalks building.

- Mehmet Noyan, Terance Frazier, Danielle Bergstrom

A block away is the headquarters for Fresno's tech industry that is gaining state and national attention. Bitwise Industries opened its 2<sup>nd</sup> tech-hub space in their South Stadium location, helping Fresno experience a 20% increase in tech jobs since 2011 and making us the fourth fastest tech job creating city in California.

That's the beginning of the rebirth we envisioned eight short years ago, and while the time has flown, the lessons will linger – giving the next generation of leaders a template for success.

We also had to bring renewed focus to our older neighborhoods and breathe life into aging corridors like Blackstone Avenue. This 8.3 mile corridor is the longest and largest in Fresno and is the spine of the entire city that is either going to be strong and vibrant and help hold up the rest of the body – or it will collapse and we'll be like a jellyfish city with no spine.

Strengthening this massive corridor and the neighborhoods to the east and west of Blackstone and south of Shaw Avenue were the motivation behind the passage of the new General Plan, the new Development Code, the new zoning ordinance, and a citywide rezone – all of which were accomplished over the last seven years.

I never thought I could be so excited about a new zoning ordinance...until I dug deeper and deeper into the reasons why more than 2/3 of our neighborhoods are deeply distressed. And then I realized in large part it's our own city land use policies that were the biggest contributors to the very blighted conditions the our city is trying to reverse.

In addition to these substantial policy and regulatory reforms, the City of Fresno is backing up these important changes with the investment of millions of dollars of public infrastructure investments and public services.

Public services like the “Restore Fresno” initiative. Launched last year, Restore Fresno involves bringing all the pieces of the neighborhood revitalization puzzle together to see **lasting and sustainable change** in our older neighborhoods – pieces like developing **leadership** among residents so ***they*** can identify neighborhood priorities and work with city staff to address them.

And, pieces like proactive code enforcement that literally goes property by property through a neighborhood working with residents and landlords to fix all code violations and bring value back to older neighborhoods.

We’ve been in 5 neighborhoods with this approach – Kirk, Lowell, Yokomi, Jefferson, and El Dorado Park. And, in my last budget we’ve included the resources to expand our Neighborhood Revitalization Team from five to 15 neighborhoods.

But there’s still so much work to be done to turn around our neighborhoods and break the pattern of blight and substandard living conditions that exist in far too many homes and apartments in Fresno.

Just before Thanksgiving last year, we learned of the devastating situation at Summerset Village Apartments after word that the residents had been without heat or hot water for a week when their gas lines had to be shut down.

On November 25, I was forced to declare a local emergency to give the city the powers needed to step in and remedy the situation should the property owner continue to fail to do so.

In announcing the declaration, I told the public that I wished I could say with confidence that Summerset was an anomaly, an isolated incident that was unlikely to happen anywhere else in Fresno. But that wasn’t true.

Unfortunately there are dozens of properties that could just have easily been the subject of that emergency declaration. In addition, there are thousands of rental units in our community that may not be quite as bad today, but with a few more years of neglect, they will be.

We immediately developed an aggressive strategy to handle the most negligent property owners by creating our STOPP team (which stands for Strike Team On Problem Properties.) They report directly to our City Manager, targeting the worst living conditions and doing everything possible to force their repair.

In addition, we put more tools in our code enforcement tool box, with new legislation that gives us more options to deal with blight and nuisance activity, and options like receivership and deputizing City attorneys to make interior inspections and file criminal charges.

Next year's budget proposal calls for even more resources to be added to our fight against blight. We will invest in six additional code enforcement staff and 4 positions for the City Attorney's office so we can pursue every legal angle necessary to bring neglected properties into compliance.

And finally, working with our Community Code Enforcement Task Force, the Administration will soon recommend to the City Council a new interior inspection program that will require regular interior inspections for all rental units in our City. Patience Milrod put it best when in a recent Code Enforcement Task Force meeting. She said, we are aiming for a **“smart, efficient, fair, and reasonably priced” interior inspection policy.**

That sums up perfectly what good policy is. Developing good policy isn't bending to whims or protests or jumping to respond to headlines. Good policy involves creating solutions based on sound analysis and public discussion that can be implemented in both an **effective** and **sustainable manner.**

Effective and sustainable. The same principles we used to finally pass our Bus Rapid Transit program, which took a couple of decades to move past all the roadblocks. It may have taken time, but BRT will eventually provide our customers with better service, increased safety and more amenities.

Most important, BRT helps to answer an important question: how do we revitalize our older neighborhoods if they don't have the same access to amenities and services that newer neighborhoods have?

We'll soon be able to see the results along Blackstone and Ventura/Kings Canyon Blvd – with the adoption of our new transit program, coupled with the new zoning ordinance and citywide rezone, we've already seen a substantial increase in private sector interest in doing mixed use projects along these corridors.

One example - imagine you're one of the 23,000 students at Fresno City College and having the opportunity to live across the street from the campus in a gorgeous, new mixed use development on the southwest corner of Blackstone and McKinley. You can walk or ride your bike to class and avoid the parking crush at Fresno City College and you've got a BRT stop right by your front door providing you transit access to job opportunities all up and down the corridor from River Park to Downtown. That project is not a figment of my mixed-use, TOD-loving mind, that project is being proposed today for the Southwest corner of Blackstone and McKinley. And, the private developer would not be interested in the site if it wasn't for the City's investment in BRT.

Nothing has tested the patience or resolve of city leaders or our citizens than the issue of homelessness. Reducing homelessness in Fresno is one of the reasons I ran for Mayor in the first place, and throughout my tenure in office, it has been a steady focus.

When I took office, my administration committed to continue the City and County's 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. In the first seven years of implementation,

Fresno has seen unprecedented levels of collaboration and dedication among public agencies, non-profits, private donors and volunteers.

We quickly learned that using the best-practice model of housing-first was making a significant impact on Fresno's homeless population, but that federal and local funds were often restrictive and there was a need for private funds to bridge the gaps in services.

In 2010, we established Fresno First Steps Home, and to date have raised \$1.2 million to provide funding to local service providers. By the way, donating to First Steps Home is a much better use of your charity than handing a \$1 to someone standing at a street corner. We need to enable service providers, not the panhandlers.

You've got a chance to do just that coming up on Friday, June 24<sup>th</sup> at Chukchansi Park when it will be "Good Karma" day. All you have to do is walk into Chukchansi Park and buy a ticket...but pay whatever you want! You decide. If you're feeling lucky and like you've got all the good karma you need, then pay a buck at the door. If you want to play it safe and store up some good karma, then maybe you could pay \$20 for your ticket. Whatever you pay – half is going to go to Fresno First Steps Home. I actually don't believe in karma, but I know a **good deal for some great baseball and a great cause when I see one so you can count me in.**

Whether it's our annual point-in-time count of homelessness, the database used by all our service providers to track the homeless population, or the database kept by Fresno PD's homeless task force, **every measure indicates that we are making major progress on resolving homelessness in Fresno – about 440 to 500 chronically homeless.** Between 2009, the first year of our 10 year plan, and 2016, the number of total homeless has decreased by just over 48%, and the number of chronically homeless has decreased by 51%.

Seven years of hard work have resulted in progress...and setbacks...lessons learned... and new strategies for addressing homelessness.

One of those is the MAP Point at the Poverello House. MAP Point at the Pov is the result of the County, hospitals, law enforcement, the City, and service providers all coming together behind the goal of providing a coordinated “front door” so that people needing help get “the right care, the first time.”

In its first year, the team at the MAP Point provided services for almost 1,400 households with multiple social services, including mental health, substance abuse treatment and housing.

One of those families was Ackles family. Single mom Teri Ackles, her elderly mother and her two young sons suddenly found themselves homeless for the first time several months ago. Teri had run out of options: she was the sole provider for her elderly mother, and both her boys were under the age of 5.

Teri had no furniture, no bed, no blankets. She had no place to go - not even a car to sleep in. Teri had no help and no hope.

Fortunately, a member of her church recommended MAP Point at the Pov. There, the staff found Teri and her family temporary shelter at the Fresno Rescue Mission while she looked for a new home for her family.

She used Poverello House’s Emergency Shelter Voucher Program for families, a program funded by a grant through the city of Fresno, and within 10 days Teri was able to find a home, the first time in over 4 years that she and her family had an apartment on her own. Wings, a local volunteer group organized through the Catholic diocese, provided basic furniture and beds for the family.

Teri states that since she found a permanent home, she's had a great weight lifted off her shoulders. She says, "I feel that I can actually focus on creating a brighter future for myself, my mom and my kids."

Teri now plans to enroll in adult school to finish her credits needed for City College so she can study to become a correctional officer. And she is so very grateful that her boys have a safe place to sleep and a chance to thrive. **TERI, PLEASE STAND AND BE RECOGNIZED.**

One of the things we've learned over the last seven years of this effort is that we need dedicated social workers on the streets every day making contact with the homeless population and working with them to access services that are available.

So, in January, the City Council approved \$520,000 of carryover funds to pay for 7 additional outreach team members. They will be responding to calls from the public and frequenting locations around the city that are known to have a regular homeless population congregating.

You will see these 7 amazing, capable, trained professionals around town wearing bright orange shirts that say "HERO Team" on the back – "Homeless Engagement and Resource Outreach Team" In fact, we are joined today by the HERO Team – please stand and be recognized for your work.

With the addition of our new HERO Team, and with all the other efforts that have been put into place during the first 7 years of our 10 year plan, we are very, very close to achieving a "functional zero" homeless population. That doesn't mean we won't still have homeless people in Fresno, but it means that we have the systems and services in place to quickly help those who may become homeless in any given month. The less time someone spends on the street, the more likely it is they will get back on their feet and achieve independence again.

Last week, Fresno County Board Chair Buddy Mendes and I, along with a host of service providers, released a 3 year plan to get to functional zero. We need another 50 units of permanent supportive housing and about \$500,000 a year for rapid rehousing, on top of the other efforts that are already under way.

I want to recognize the tireless efforts of community partners like the members of the Fresno Madera Continuum of Care, the Veterans Administration, the County of Fresno, the Fresno Housing Authority, the Poverello House, the Fresno Rescue Mission, and many other service providers who are making a difference in our community by providing quality care to those in need. **Would you please stand and accept our appreciation for your willingness to help the most vulnerable and often times the hardest to serve among us. TRACEWELL**

Homelessness is one of the most frustrating challenges a city faces. Yet working from the same playbook, we are taking on those challenges and erasing those margins until all of our residents have the shelter and stability of a home of their own.

We're also getting closer to another significant milestone – making Fresno one of the most drought-resilient cities in the nation. Construction is well under way on “Recharge Fresno” and our recycled water program, which represents over \$600 million of water infrastructure. This is a plan that’s been recommended by city staff and water experts for over 25 years – but it’s a plan that was shelved time and again because, well, no one enjoys telling the public they’re going to have to pay more for their monthly water bill.

Raising water rates is the NEXT to the last thing the City Council and I wanted to do...the NEXT to the last thing. The only thing that was worse and the LAST thing we wanted to do was fail to take action on an issue as important as securing our city’s water future. So we approved the plan to reduce our dependence on groundwater and maximize use of our available surface water supply.

In March of this year, work began on the Southeast Surface Water Treatment Facility. Soon, we're opening the downtown water storage tank, launching construction on our raw water and treated water pipelines, and beginning preparations for a 20 mile recycled water transmission system that will convey recycled water throughout the city for irrigation use and groundwater recharge.

When we are finished, our reliable water supply will meet the needs of our residents, encourage economic development, and provide jobs and support for the overall economy. **We can now be confident in knowing our water future is secure.**

Nowhere in the world produces more food than right here in Fresno and the Central Valley, and the eyes of the food world turn toward Fresno every year to witness the grand spectacle of our Food Expo, which has grown to become the nation's largest regional food show. **If stars are the poetry of the heavens, as Lord Byron once wrote, then food is the poetry of the earth.**

Since we launched the Fresno Food Expo in 2011, it has showcased 129 new products to the marketplace, hosted almost 2,000 different buyers from around the world, and introduced 226 local food and beverage companies to new customers.

The result is the Food Expo has established itself as a world-class event that is now completely run by the food industry with David Nalchajian and Amy Fuentes capably leading the charge.

This year's Expo is coming up – July 27 and 28 – this is an event you don't want to miss! It will feature more local wineries and breweries and local restaurant stations that will be preparing dishes with ingredients found on the floor of the show. Our special guest will be the Food Network's Simon Majumdar who will be visiting the stations, tasting, tweeting and interacting with our local restaurateurs and vendors. Tickets are on sale at [fresnofoodexpo.com](http://fresnofoodexpo.com), and there may still be an exhibitor space or two but they

are selling out fast! **Remember – the Food Expo is not just “delicious,” it’s “Expolicious!”**

Over the past two terms, my team and I have carried the baton on behalf of Fresno and making our city a better place for all who live here. Others carried it before we did, and we will hand off soon to the next team, who will hand off to the next and the next...

**What lies in the stars for the next 20 years?**

I believe that Fresno’s next star chart must see through to completion a 20-year master plan for parks, trails and open space for our city. (PAUSE)

By the end of this year, we will have laid a solid foundation for parks and trails, but it is just the beginning. As our budget is recovering, we will have directed almost \$12 million to park improvements between this year’s budget and next. Those dollars are improving playgrounds and ball fields, adding new splash pads and rebuilding structures. We’ve introduced new parks like Inspiration Park and Almy and Roy, and we’ve broken ground on the Cultural Arts District Park.

In addition, we’ve launched our joint use program with Fresno Unified and Central Unified School Districts to provide weekend recreational and green space opportunities on school campuses across our City. **By the end of this month, we will have added almost 400 acres of green space for a fraction of the cost!**

While this is a great partnership and an effective way to immediately provide access to open space in badly needed areas, we know it’s a stop gap, an interim solution while we work on a much bigger plan to dramatically improve our parks and trails throughout the city.

In fact, we are taking on **both** a citywide parks master plan update this year, as well as a citywide trails master plan update. Why not?? It’s called “running through the tape.”

While we will hand off these efforts to the next administration to complete, by the end of this year we should have a pretty good idea of what the community's priorities are, what kind of resources we're going to need to build out the parks and trails master plans, and our options for putting those resources together.

You may have noticed that we're not waiting until these plans are complete to kick off great projects that can serve as cornerstones for these larger, comprehensive planning efforts.

Since 2010, Fresno has dramatically extended its bike lane network by more than a third, to about 155 miles. And, for the last year, the cities of Fresno and Clovis have been meeting every two weeks together and working on the plans for the Mid Town Trail.

That project was formally announced on Monday by Councilmembers Brandau and Caprioligio, and Supervisor Elect Magsig and is a long awaited bankside trail providing 7 miles of bicycle and pedestrian trails from the FAX hub at Manchester Center at Blackstone and Shields, down Millbrook to McKinley, and then past Fresno Yosemite International Airport and out to the Clovis Old Town Trail, which connects to the Sugar Pine trail in north Fresno. When this new 7 mile trail gets built, we will have 17 miles of trails through Central Fresno, Clovis, and North Fresno tying together two cities and dozens of neighborhoods.

We've talked for at least a couple of decades about that project and now the funding is in place to make it a reality. Construction starts in ?? and will be complete in 2018.

Our plans to improve the quality of life in our city should always include two important questions: "Are we spending dollars wisely?" and "Is this plan financially sustainable?"

I'm pleased to report that we have held ourselves to those **strict and necessary standards** and the result is upgrades in bond ratings and outlooks, an annual financial

report that contains no mention of “going concern” for two consecutive years and...best of all...a general fund reserve of \$20 m through my last budget that will eventually reach our goal of 10% by the year 2020.

That will only happen if future City administrations and councils continue our mandate to manage government finances effectively.

Finally, we must all do our part to encourage the continued progress being made by our local school districts. Education is not only a priority for our school leaders, it defines our city and shapes its future.

Some have questioned why I’m so focused on restoring our older neighborhoods. I’ve been accused of obstructing the “free market” by championing a general plan that doesn’t expand the city’s boundaries and requires half of all new investment to happen within the existing city limits.

I will gladly take that criticism. In fact, the scars from those political battles have become badges of honor to me because I know that **when we fight for our older neighborhoods, we are fighting for our schools. And, when we fight for our schools, we are fighting for the future of this city.**

Every day I see the consequences of a sprawling city that grew out too quickly and without regard for the neighborhoods and their schools that were getting left behind.

I was asked recently, “Which came first in Fresno? Failing schools or failing neighborhoods?” And I don’t know that I can answer that question or that it is even important to perfectly analyze the past. But, what I do know is that today our schools are outperforming our older neighborhoods.

This from the Fresno Bee on May 17, 2016 – “Superintendents in central San Joaquin Valley school districts had good news to report on Tuesday with graduation rates up and dropout rates down, according to data released by the state.”

The article goes on to report Clovis Unified’s graduation rates improved another 2.5%. Central Unified – 3.1% gains. Sanger Unified up 3.3% to 95.5% - the highest graduation rate in the metropolitan area. And Fresno Unified posted a 4.5% gain to achieve an 83.8% graduation rate, with Hispanic students seeing a 10.8% jump in 4 years. African American student graduation rates are up 15.2% over the last 4 years.

Folks, this is incredible. To see our schools moving in the right direction knowing the headwinds the students, teachers, school and district leaders face being surrounded by neighborhoods that, in many cases, experience the second highest concentration of poverty anywhere in the U.S.? And, they still post gains like these?

How much easier will it be for our schools to continue to make these and even more impressive gains as the neighborhoods immediately surrounding these schools are improved? As living conditions stabilize, as blight is reversed and economic opportunity returns to older parts of Fresno? **That** is the thought that keeps me up at night. **That** is the thought that has given me the **resolve** and **determination** to fight for Fresno’s older neighborhoods.

It’s for young people like Nancy Meza. Nancy’s family history does not include many diplomas. Her dad stopped at the 9th grade and mom only got a 6th grade education, but Nancy Meza determined at a young age that she would attend college. Her parents have to leave for work early in the morning, so Nancy arranged her school schedule so her first class each morning her senior year was an open period so she could make sure her little brother and sister got to school and day care each day. Nancy made the honor roll every semester in high school, helped take care of her siblings and still found time to volunteer at the Community Food Bank, Habitat for Humanity and Nazareth

House, and she worked as a student banker in the Union Bank Internship Program at her school.

Nancy graduated last week from McLane High School with a 4.0 and dreams of becoming a teacher. Nancy says, “Every time I help my sister with her homework, I feel a great satisfaction in me. Teaching is my passion and I’m going for it.”

Well, guess what, Nancy? Your city is “going for it,” too – aligning every resource, policy, strategy and effort behind improving the neighborhoods that are home to our schools and to our city’s future.

Nancy is here with the principal of McLane High School Scott Lamm. Will you please stand and be recognized?

Our commitment to education is not limited to tickets to college. We have many adults in our community who need skills upgrades and workforce training. And, our economy will never fully thrive without a massive commitment to workforce development and career technical education – for students and for adults.

No one is more passionate about this point or preaches this message better than Mike Betts of the Betts Company.

The Betts Company is a sixth generation, family owned business that began in 1868 and spent most of its history in the Bay Area. But several years ago, Mike and his family were concerned about the lack of a career tech ecosystem there. So they did their due diligence and discovered that Fresno, of all places, had an abundance of career tech programs at both the high school and college level that were virtually unheard of. So they moved their company to its present location on South Maple Avenue.

Through the Fresno Business Council and the San Joaquin Valley Manufacturing Alliance, Mike is now leading the charge and organizing his industry – over 100

manufacturers from throughout the Central San Joaquin Valley – to be a part of building a world class, advanced manufacturing training facility in the Fresno Region.

Mike says, “Fresno is on the edge of a giant breakthrough in career tech education,” And, he has committed countless hours and dollars of his own resources to make sure that breakthrough is achieved. In fact, he’s **betting** the **future** of the **Betts** Company on that promise. Mike, thank you for leading the charge in the business community on career technical education.

This is almost the end of my term as mayor...and my speech.

My team and I started planning in earnest for transition last July so when it comes time to hand off the baton, we will have spent 18 months planning for that moment, ensuring that things are in order, that there are clear road maps in place for our community’s biggest challenges, and to the greatest extent possible that the financial resources are there for the next mayor to keep running on behalf of Fresnans and achieve even greater distances at a faster pace than my team and I have.

I am already thinking about what the next Mayor will say at his first “State of the City” address. I imagine that he will cover many of the same subjects that I have talked about year in and year out.

And, while he’ll certainly add his own initiatives and flavor to the Office of Mayor, the truth is that mature cities aren’t afraid of big, hard, complicated work that take years of effort to ultimately reach a successful conclusion. As a community, we should **want...we should expect...**mayor after mayor after mayor to stand here each year and report on our community’s work on public safety, homelessness, neighborhood revitalization, downtown, code enforcement, fiscal health, water, economic development. **Consistent persistence is the formula for community transformation.**

There are two questions people ask me all the time. First, “What’s it been like to be the mayor of Fresno?” Well, the best word I can use to describe the experience of the last 7 ½ years is the word “struggle.” I know that may bring negative images to mind, but I actually don’t mean to imply anything negative at all. What I mean to communicate is that this particular season of time in our city has been all about a big, internal struggle over whether or not we’re really ready to disrupt the status quo and choose to go in a new direction as a city.

Every big decision we’ve faced in the last 8 years had two very clear choices – what’s comfortable and what we’ve always done versus **charting a new course** for Fresno.

Decisions over our finances, our general plan, Fulton Street, our transit system, the development code, our water plan – you know the list of issues which have represented our biggest community debates over the last 8 years. In every case, there was always a “status quo” choice and then there was a “new direction” choice and we’ve had to struggle with which path to take. The “status quo” choice was always comfortable and maybe even somewhat reasonable – but the only problem was it wouldn’t yield different results for our community.

Abraham Lincoln said, “The **struggle** of today is not altogether **for** today – it is for a **vast future** also.”

The second question I’m asked most often is, “What is the one thing you are most proud of as mayor?” My proudest accomplishment is this: on my watch, every time there was a choice to make - “status quo” versus “new direction” – every struggle to leave the comfort of what we’ve always known and confront the politics of change – **every** time and **every** decision, no matter the issue, that was an easy call for me – the choice was **Fresno** and the choice was for **our future**.

When I first started this job in 2009, I think I was a lot more like the Learn’d Astronomer with plenty of “**head knowledge**” about Fresno – facts and figures, charts and

diagrams...but I am **ending** this job as someone who equally values ***“looking up in perfect silence at the stars.”***

It's one thing to study and analyze. It's another thing to experience. I have been forever changed for the better by my Fresno experience.

On behalf of my family and me, thank you for the honor and privilege of serving as your mayor.

May God bless you and may God richly and abundantly and overwhelmingly bless the people of the City of Fresno.