

ANNUAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

2011 Year End Report

Mr. President Pro Temp,
Madam Clerk,
Mr. City Attorney,
Members of the Council,
Members of the Media,
Distinguished Guests,
and Citizens of Jonesboro;

As I begin my fourth year as Mayor, it never fails that each and every day I am reminded of just how blessed I am to be able to help lead a city with so many who are willing to give so generously of their time, energy and resources into making this such an incredible community. Our citizens, our businesses, our institutions, and our family of city employees; all working together in a

seamless effort to help us realize our goals of continued growth and prosperity.

It is to each of you that I say THANK YOU for this wonderful responsibility, and to whom I dedicate this annual State of the City.

On behalf of my administration and those aforementioned dedicated employees of the City of Jonesboro, it gives me great pleasure to report to you, yet again, that the state of the City of Jonesboro is strong and viable, and that we continue to have an optimistic outlook for our future in 2012 and beyond.

2011 was unique for my administration. After having two full years under our belt, we approached last year with a new sense of confidence. As we began the year, we had recent history of trends and projections, and

knew that our method of fiscal management and budgetary responsibility was working.

We began and ended the year with a balanced budget. We did so due to the diligence and commitment of our employees, our department heads, and our budget staff. We continued to be conservative in our revenue projections, and steadfast in our commitment to transparency and the kind of responsible day-to-day management of individual budgets that leads to a prudent use of the tax dollars we have been entrusted with for the operations of the city.

The efforts of our staff and employees once again paid huge dividends in our financial management, as we ended the year with revenues exceeding expenses.

As I have stated in previous addresses, those accomplishments came after sacrifice, ingenuity, and a tenacious commitment to cut cost and increase productivity on behalf of those who manage these budgets on a daily basis. The credit belongs to those on the front line for making it happen; and I am so proud of each and every one of them.

We continue to be blessed as a city of interest and investment. We continue to enjoy being a destination for investment capital, new industry, retail expansion, healthcare and educational advances as well as residential growth.

Last year the official results of the 2010 Decennial Census, where it was confirmed that Jonesboro has continued to enjoy its past success of steady and consistent growth; boasting a population of 67,263. We

remain the fifth most populous city in the State of Arkansas, and the second largest in terms of acreage inside the city limits. This growth and expanse of area continues to present unique challenges and opportunities.

Many of these challenges continued to be addressed not only in the short term, but in the long term; as 2011 saw critical movement in our advancement of the Jonesboro Vision 2030 plan. While the final document is being wrapped up for release in the next 60 to 90 days, so much of the data gathering, initial visioning, and key components were developed over countless hours by staff and volunteers throughout 2011.

As we move ahead, we are striving to balance our priorities and make sure that we are looking at every facet of life in and throughout the city in an effort to

address every concern, every opportunity and every element in building the highest level of quality of life for our citizens.

As with any growing community, public safety remains a top priority. I would not be doing service to our citizens or our public safety personnel if I did not take the time to once again thank the people for their confidence and support in helping us to bridge this gap and make sure we had the funding necessary to continue providing the best protection possible. It is a testament to the job done by our police, fire and dispatch services as well as the resolve of our citizens.

Progress is being made on the Harrisburg Road fire station and it will be completed and occupied in 2012. This is the next to last station on our strategic ISO relocation plan to ensure that every household within

the city has the optimum protection and shortest response time possible.

The last location has been identified and it is our desire that the land will be purchased this year and construction started on the last of those stations.

We continue to monitor our runs and strive to lower our response times to the fastest possible. Our fire department is dedicated to latest in technology and training, and that commitment is getting results. Our firefighters are some of best-trained in the state, and continue to serve as a model department across all of Arkansas.

Our police department continues its same standard of excellence and service that earned it the honor of being one of approximately 900 agencies in the entire United

States as being CALEA (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies) Certified. After two full years of accreditation, it's obvious to all who deal with the department on a regular basis just how the standards and areas of inspection within that certification continue to drive it to new heights of success.

As our city grows, so grows our opportunities to face new challenges in law enforcement. Our departments have and continue to do an exemplary job in meeting those challenges.

Our certification and training programs are affording us some of the brightest and most talented officers in any department. New strategic deployment methods are helping us maintain critical patrols while maintaining a city-wide balance of exposure.

We continue to develop our decentralization plan and move to a precinct management model, and we are hopeful that we will soon be unveiling conceptual plans for our first precinct and community outreach station to be located on land purchased specific for that purpose on East Johnson Avenue.

Both our police and fire departments maintain a separate annual report on their activities and accomplishments on file for your review.

E-911 and Animal Control continue to innovative in meeting the increased demands for their services.

Our E-911 Dispatch Center continued to show the kind of innovation that has earned them a stellar reputation. They received state-wide attention after developing and launching Arkansas's first 911 text service; and they have

continued to take advantage of grants and opportunities to expand their services through new equipment, advanced training and innovative management methods.

The adoption initiative started in some 3 years ago by Animal Control continues to grow in popularity each year, and 2011 was no exception. The department continues to reach out into the community and partner with businesses and other agencies to sponsor adoption and vaccination clinics throughout the city. Sgt. Rogers continues to work with local media in an effort to educate the general public about how they can become more involved. Our facilities continue to serve as a model for departments throughout Arkansas and neighboring states.

Our public works departments remain a vital contributor to our communities overall quality of life.

Our sanitation department has an exemplary organization with a reputation for going above and beyond to deliver the very best customer service to every sector of the city.

The department took full advantage of the air-curtain incinerator installed in 2010 to aggressively dispose of allowable debris without adding to our landfill. Every effort was made to increase recycling education and participation in order to become more “green” conscious and to improve the efficiencies of our routes. We continue to get tremendous feedback and positive comments regarding the high level of customer service given by the men and women in our Sanitation department, and we are so proud of all they do for the City of Jonesboro on a daily basis.

Our street department had yet another extremely busy year on road maintenance and drainage related projects. We put down 911,117 linear feet of striping on our streets; laid over 5,835 million pounds of asphalt; and continued to address major drainage projects and hotspots throughout the entire city.

In engineering, we made tremendous headway working through the remaining open work orders from previous years while continuing to expedite current requests as they come in. As I state every year at this time, addressing engineering concerns can be a tedious and time consuming process; but our team continues working through it all and pushing ahead.

They continue to work hand in hand with Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department on intersection improvements and looking ahead to major infrastructure

engineering and design projects that will be critical to our future growth.

Our planning department has taken the leadership role in working in coordinating our Jonesboro Vision 2030 Plan. Numerous focus groups, strategic meetings, vision-casting round-tables, public information gathering sessions and committee meetings added to their normal duties. The department processed some 949 total cases for the year, including 477 residential site plans and 295 multi-family or commercial site plans. In addition, they handled a large number of requests for rezoning, conditional use permits and variance appeals to the Board of Zoning Adjustment.

Our parks and recreation department continued to evolve to meet the needs of our city. We continue to serve an incredible number of children in our City Stars

programs. New adult leagues were added in basketball, and our football program continued to enjoy tremendous success.

We took over the operations and management of the Southside Softball complex and the leagues that play there. Several physical improvements have been made with more on the horizon. An increased number of tournaments in soccer, baseball and softball led to new revenues for area restaurants and hotels. Sponsorships at the ballparks are at their highest levels in years; and we are proud to announce that we placed a bid last year for a future Little League World Series tournament that was successful!

Our community centers and Craighead Forest Park remain popular destinations for individuals, families and groups. We continue to make improvements to our

facilities, and saw ongoing progress on our Greenway Project. Our Safe Routes To Schools program continues to be one of the most successful and well-funded in Arkansas.

Our Community Development program suffered a tremendous loss last year with the passing of Gayle Vickers. Gayle had an infectious passion for seeing our city become all it had the potential of being.

We were so fortunate to be able to reorganize that department under the leadership of Heather Clements and the addition of Emma Agnew. These ladies and their staff and network of community volunteer leadership are working hard to take our Community Development efforts to soaring new heights.

Our Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) continues to be a tremendous asset. They assisted in the development of our Jonesboro Vision 2030 plan, and continue to set the standard for comprehensive regional traffic planning.

JETS has continued to foster innovative solutions to increasing ridership on targeted routes and managing overall costs. As we move forward in a new and emerging economy, public transit will play a bigger role than ever. The convergence of housing, transportation and economic development into a single thought process will control much of our future dialogue. The adjustments we have made and the partnerships we continue to foster will only place JETS in a position to take full advantage of those future opportunities.

Our finance and human resource departments continue to utilize technology and streamline our processes. The move to more efficiencies and increased transparency is evident in the work of both of these departments. The overall development of our staff continues to be a priority of our HR specialists; and the day to day accounting and fiscal management in our finance department is well documented.

As the economy continued to rebound in 2011, our inspectors and code enforcement officers saw an increased demand for their services. Increases in construction projects placed greater demand on our inspectors, and our continued emphasis on neighborhood clean-up projects produced tangible results in some of our most blighted areas. New commercial construction permits totaled nearly 300 for 2011; compared to just over 150 in 2010. The value of

commercial and residential permits combined topped \$295 million dollars in 2011; compared just over \$97 million in 2010.

Information Systems continued its implementation of conversion and upgrades to our speed, efficiency and equipment. Technology plays a more important role in our success every day, and our IT professionals have risen to the occasion of managing through those transitions while maintaining cost control measures.

We expanded our efforts on programming Channel 24 into a full-service public information channel. We named Jack Turner as our Communications Director to oversee our efforts, and utilized additional talent from Arkansas State University to shore up manpower. The fruits of their labor are evident, and we only see our efforts there

producing bigger and better results in the months and years to come.

We continued to break ground on numerous new projects, including a host of new restaurant and retail operators on the local, regional and national scale investing in Jonesboro.

St. Bernard's opened their new Health & Wellness Center, and NEA Baptist has steel in the air at their new hospital and clinical campus. Arkansas State University was named, yet again, as a Tier 1 Southern Regional Institution of Higher Education. Its Jonesboro campus continues to set record enrollments. We continue to be blessed with growth, and 2011 saw both an increase in new home and existing home sales over 2010.

We have consistently been ranked as a Best Small Place in America for Business and Careers by Forbes Magazine and last year Jonesboro and Craighead County was ranked by Business Insider as the #1 location in America poised to be the “next Silicon Valley” in terms of facilitation investment in new startup companies.

In spite of our challenges, 2011 was a great year for Jonesboro. And as we look at the beginning of 2012, I find no reason to believe that we will not sit here at this time next year and talk about yet another great year of growth and opportunity.

While I am proud of all that we have accomplished after three years in office, I know we are only getting started. We will continue to work tirelessly to meet the challenges head-on, as we strive to make this the absolute best small city in America to live, work and raise

a family. It's a goal I expressed when I ran for this office in 2008, and it's a goal we continue to strive for this year and beyond.

As in previous years, we still have some big decisions ahead; but after the performance of our team the last three years, I'm more convinced than ever we are up to the challenge. Continuing with God as our guide and the citizens as our conscience; we will push forward.

I end this address the same as in previous years, declaring that I continue to be eternally grateful for this privilege of serving as your Mayor; and to have the honor of working with an extremely dedicated staff that is committed to serving the citizens of Jonesboro. I would like to once again take this opportunity to publicly thank the members of the City Council for the trust and confidence they have placed in my administration; and

for working hand in hand with us to develop the kind of working relationship necessary to run an open, transparent and effective city government.

I personally pledge to work with each of you to do all that we can to improve the quality of life and abundance of opportunity for every man, woman and child that make up our community.

May God watch over each and every one of you and your families; may he protect our citizen soldiers who find themselves in harm's way, and may He continue to bless our city, our state, and these United States of America.

Thank you.