



The Honorable Donna Jackson
Jonesboro City Clerk

State Of The City Address
2008 Year End Report

Mayor Harold Perrin
February 17, 2009

Annual State Of The City Address

2008 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;

On behalf of my office and 504 dedicated employees of the City of Jonesboro, it gives me great pleasure to report to you this evening that the state of the city is strong and viable, and that the outlook for our future is even better.

We remain a city of destination for investment capital, new industry, retail expansion, healthcare advances, and students from around the world who come to here to further their education.

We continue to defy the odds of a worsening national economy, and despite any “crisis of confidence” fueled by national media that may have some impact on our citizen’s buying and spending habits, in reality we are continuing to do business, make investments, and grow our local economy. Our successes have not, however, been completely void of opportunities.

So tonight, to any of our citizens who have lost their jobs due to downsizing, business closings or revenue shortfalls, please let me take just a moment to talk to you directly.

Please know that you are not a statistic to the City of Jonesboro. Please know that as we celebrate our community’s successes and talk about our accomplishments, that we are not oblivious to your plight or to the challenges being faced by you and your family.

And please know that we are doing everything in OUR power to prop this local economy up against any more losses, and that we will not consider our job anywhere near completed until every lost job is restored and everyone who wants to work in the City of Jonesboro has a place they can.

As we ended 2008, even facing a national economy transitioning into a deeper recession, we ended strong. Our financial position in Jonesboro, while challenged at times, was one of fiscal strength.

Our sales tax revenue for 2008 totaled more than \$25.2 million, and our city alcohol tax to help fund public safety and drug abuse education programs exceeded \$142,000.

Our cash balances in unallocated reserves as of December 31, 2008, exceeded \$27.7 million dollars. We ended our fiscal year with 1.9 times the reserves required by ordinance for operation of the city. And in these times, particularly following the aggressive capital improvement programs of the last few years, we should be a grateful community that we have the resources to continue providing essential services and facilitate future growth.

Public safety continued to be a focus for the city of Jonesboro in 2008. We completed Phase One of a four phase construction plan within our Fire Department, with the construction and relocation of 2 new stations at 2212 Brazos and 8461 CW Post Road, and we are well on our way to completing Phase Two, with stations under construction at 1413 West Nettleton and 209 North Patrick.

We began running "First Responder" calls on August 15, 2008, which added to an already aggressive total of service calls. Our Fire Department made some 3,400 incident runs in 2008, including 554 actual "fire runs" and 1,840 rescue and emergency medical runs. Regrettably, our community suffered three fire fatalities last year. Our Department remained efficient, with response times of UNDER SIX MINUTES over 87% of the time, and UNDER FOUR MINUTES almost 60% of the time.

And we added additional personnel to our Training and Fire Marshall Divisions in order to better proactively protect life and property within the city.

Dispatch center records indicate that our police officers recorded an astounding 98,875 calls for service in 2008.

While we are still addressing staffing issues that have been years in the making, we did have 12 new officers successfully complete training from the department and the academy.

Statistics show a 1% increase in overall crime totals for 2008, but a closer examination of those statistics show that increase fueled primarily by Officer Initiated Activity Crimes, where an aggressive department was more energetic and focused on identifying crimes through pro-active measures rather than reactive response.

Crimes that in previous years may have gone unsolved or unreported were brought to light by the work of a well-trained and committed police force. This resulted in arrests being up by 23%, with 28% more Misdemeanor Charges filed and 11% more Felony Charges filed.

DWI Arrests were up OVER 66%...with the department making 401 arrests in 2008 compared to 241 in 2007.

I'm pleased to report that crimes that affect quality of life were down; with Crimes Against Persons dropping by 11% and Property Crimes down 13%. We had several officers in the department recognized for exemplary performance. While we are not a city immune to crime, we are a safe community, generally experiencing less crime than many other cities of similar size and demographics.

However, any crime, regardless of its nature, against a citizen of Jonesboro is one crime too many. And I firmly stand beside our department as we take each and every opportunity to better serve our community and continue to make this a safer city for our residents.

We hired a new Director for E-911 Center in April of 2008; and in May we announced the formation of the Craighead County Interagency Taskforce, which includes all of the emergency response personnel in the county. Its purpose is the exchanging of information and participation in training to meet Homeland Security Standards.

We teamed up with the Craighead County Office of Emergency Management to provide Mobile Dispatch Service for major events in our area. On that note, please allow me this pause to break from protocol....

I know the primary purpose of this address is to talk about how we ended 2008 and are positioned for 2009, but in recent weeks we saw firsthand some of the handiwork of last year's preparation in how our city crews and emergency personnel worked hand in hand with the Craighead County Office of Emergency Management, as well as state and federal authorities, in responding to the recent ice storm.

I joked to a civic club the other day that I was Mayor for 27 days and the President of the United States declared our city part of a national disaster...but the serious nature of that catastrophic event gave our people the opportunity to rise to the occasion and prove that these steps we're taking are working.

I just want to stop right now and give one more hand to our employees, not only from E-911, Fire and Police...but from EVERY department...who worked so tirelessly and CONTINUE to work to help us recover from this storm.

Our public works departments remain among the most active in the city. We completed a new Stormwater Drainage Plan in 2008, which was the result of nearly four years worth of work under a federal mandate. We have already received 85% reimbursement from FEMA on over \$225,000 worth of flood mitigation projects, and expect the last 15% in the coming weeks.

We completed the landfill construction project, as well as our methane gas collection project. We discontinued commercial sanitation services, and purchased three recycling trailers. We temporarily relocated our street and sanitation offices back to our old facility on Strawfloor Road, and in September had what turned out to be a practice run for our current cleanup project when we picked up over 18,000 yards of brush from storm damage last summer.

Our street department patched or overlaid multiple projects using more than sixty-five hundred tons of asphalt, cleaned out 22 miles of ditches, mowed over 117 miles of right-of-way, laid over thirty-three hundred feet of pipe, and moved more than 18,000 tons of rock. In addition, all our signal lights were upgraded to LED bulbs.

We continue to advance multiple projects in our engineering department, including sidewalk, drainage and public parking projects. Our engineering department resolved some 579 public requests concerning various streets, drainage, sidewalks or other issues in 2008.

In Inspections, we adopted a new set of building codes, implemented new procedures for quicker reference for contractors, and worked to strengthen our relationship with area contractors.

Despite any national news to the contrary, new home construction was up in Jonesboro in 2008, and this kept both Inspections and Planning very busy.

Our planning department processes 439 single family home permits, 9 conditional use applications, 30 rezoning cases, 38 BZA variances, 8 preliminary subdivisions, 70 replats or minor plats, 307 commercial permits and 38 home occupation applications.

Our office of Animal Control continues to make both technical and humanitarian advances in keeping our neighborhoods safe and finding homes for wayward animals. Our new software upgrades in 2008 gave the public the ability to adopt animals online, and we received over 2,800 hits in the first month alone. Our adoption rate increased almost 700%, and we placed dogs as far away as the State of New York.

JETS had a great year with an overwhelming vote of confidence and continuance from the citizens of Jonesboro. The measure to support our public transit system was among the largest margins of electoral victory in the history of Jonesboro. We have taken that mandate to heart, and ended the year continuing to look for more innovative and efficient ways to serve the community. 2008 saw our system enjoy many accomplishments,

milestones and successes, including recognition last October from the Federal Transit Administration for having the highest growth in ridership in the state of Arkansas.

Our Parks Department made great strides toward improving our quality of life in 2008. We purchased Optimist Park, and made several improvements at Craighead Forest Park. We completed Phase One of a Master Plan for Jonesboro's Greenway, prioritized an inventory of potential conservation and park land, solicited public insight and create a pool and aquatics facility study, and worked with Arkansas State University to conduct a study of five park projects.

We had over 2,300 children participate in City Stars, and over 700 youth participated in an activity survey in collaboration with ASU and the Jonesboro Public Schools.

Our Community Development Block Grant Program continues to be the principle source of Federal Grant monies that we use to devise innovative approaches to improve our physical, economic and social conditions. In 2008, we continued to expand and maintain an affordable housing supply, promote housing opportunities and choices, maintain and improve community facilities, and provide supportive services for targeted low-income groups, including persons with disabilities, the elderly, and other special needs groups.

Our community center ID program registered over 5,700 individuals using the system almost 30,000 times. We helped make improvements to Allen and Parker Parks, and the over 57,000 users to those facilities last year. Our Emergency Homeowner Rehabilitation program rehabilitated eight at-risk homes, and our demolition and clearance program eliminated 24 substandard residential structures.

We rehabbed three transitional group homes serving 33 transitional mental health patients, assisted three households in becoming first-time homeowners, developed a greenway walk/ride connection from Allen Park to Nettleton Schools, and helped complete sewer access to over 30 property owners in north Jonesboro.

We helped provide education and life skill training to over 600 low income elderly, disabled children and families through the Foundation of Arts; served over 800 persons with city-wide Spanish language classes through the Hispanic Community Services; helped 600 individuals working in the disability and social services field; and assisted 190 individuals and families through a home ownership counseling program among several other Community Outreach Programs funded through the CDBG program.

We conducted several traffic and operational studies as part of our MPO, drafted an Intelligent Transportation System Plan, and purchased additional buses and vans to aid in public transit.

We continued to improve public facilities and infrastructure, with countless projects and upgrades.

As the year ended, we retired 4 City Council Members who chose not to seek re-election with a combined 53 years of service, and elected a new Mayor. *Forbe's Magazine* ranked our city the 46th Best Small Place in America for Business and Careers. We continue to develop our downtown district, and we saw our commercial air service interrupted with the departure of Mesa Airlines.

We announced several new plant and business openings, and continued to receive tens of millions of dollars in outside capital and infrastructure improvements. Our unemployment rate continues to best both State and National averages, and we created hundreds of new jobs.

Our Indians became our Red Wolves, and regardless of our battle cry we continued to support and promote our largest employer and economic development engine...Arkansas State University.

As we close the chapter in our history that is 2008 and begin our journey in 2009, I am optimistic and energized about our community. I appreciate the service of my predecessor and all the elected officials, employees, and citizens who worked so tirelessly to help us maintain and improve our position throughout the last 12 months.

But our work is only beginning. This year we will celebrate 150 years as a city, and we'll have ample opportunities to both reflect on our history and anticipate our future. Our city seal reminds us that we celebrate our people, our pride and our progress. I can think of no better way to prepare to meet the challenges that lay ahead.

I thank you for your time and this opportunity to work alongside you to make Jonesboro the best small city in America to live, work and raise our families. May God richly bless each and every family represented here tonight or watching at home...may He continue to guide our paths and influence our decisions, and may He always protect us and provide for us.

Thank you and good night.