

## **ANNUAL STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS**

*2010 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;

From the outset tonight I want to make one thing abundantly clear...this address is dedicated to the some 500 city employees who work hard everyday to serve you. Even though accomplishments they have achieved are numerous; I will only be able to highlight a few.

But these men and women have persevered. They have worked through reorganizations, priority shifts, culture changes, and heightened accountability. They have worked harder, been more creative, and brought your city's operations in well under projected budget...and that was a budget drastically cut from the previous year. At the outset of this address...I feel compelled to ask you to give them a well-deserved round of applause.

(APPLAUSE)

Once again, on behalf of my administration and those dedicated employees of the City of Jonesboro, it gives me great pleasure to report to you that the state of the city is strong and viable, and that we have an optimistic outlook for our future.

2010 was once again a year chocked full of challenges and opportunities. Being the second full year of my administration, we began with an optimistic outlook that we had a built an organization and a budget that would weather the test of whatever remained of the recession. And by the commitment of our employees...it did.

We set out to redefine the budget process. For the first time in my memory, the City of Jonesboro budgeted revenue blind. We paid no attention in the beginning to what we thought would be generated from revenue; but asked each department to forecast and justify each and every expense. They responded in incredible fashion. Their efforts allowed us to trim over \$7 million dollars from the previous year's budget.

When it came to revenue, we worked with our finance department to be "realistically conservative"; where we looked at we truly felt like would happen, then banked on a conservative fulfillment of that projection. It turns out our initial projections were incredibly close; and the conservative budgeting of those projections served us well.

Still, given our best efforts, in both the operating and capital budgets, we began the year with a combined budgeted deficit of \$4.3 million dollars. While all of the year end figures can't be accurately accounted until sometime in late February, I am ecstatic to report to you that I firmly believe we will end 2010 with less than a half a million dollar total deficit. That will be a one year swing of \$11 million dollars in favor of the citizens of Jonesboro!

Efforts like that make me prouder than you can imagine to be the Mayor of such an incredible city with such a dedicated family of employees. Those accomplishments came after sacrifice, ingenuity, and a tenacious commitment to cut cost and increase productivity. The credit belongs to those on the front line for making it happen.

As in previous years, we continue to be a city of interest and investment. We are strengthened as a destination for investment capital, new industry, retail expansion, healthcare and education advances and residential growth.

We continue to look for ways to streamline operations and become more efficient; delivering better service to the citizens we serve.

To aid in that task, in the last 60 days I have welcomed to my administrative staff our new Chief Financial Officer, Ben Barlyske, and our new Chief Operations Officer, L.M. Duncan. Both of these men have assumed their responsibilities in our new organizational makeup with a lot of enthusiasm and have made significant contributions already. I welcome them to our family and look forward to a full year of both of them working with the rest of our department heads along this journey.

In 2010, we not only made some tough choices in terms of expenses, but we made some very honest and tough assessments of our revenues as well. By late Spring, it became obvious that until our economy had an opportunity for full recovery, we could not continue to operate at our current levels, even though drastically reduced. Two years of reduced investment in capital purchases had taken a tremendous toll on our assets, particularly in public safety. Our fleets were showing signs of exhaustion, and some of our key equipment was coming dangerously close to its useful lifespan.

Public safety investments in the last 5 years had multiplied dramatically; but it was a long overdue investment. We were faced with cutting back to staffing levels that would not have been adequate for a growing community of our size.

We took our case to the citizens with total transparency. We held unprecedented budget education sessions where the public was invited to hear the details of where we came from, where we were, and how we got there. Any question was answered, and nothing was off the table.

After months of education and an incredible ground effort by our firefighters and police officers, in August of last year we ultimately asked the voters for a half-cent public safety tax for

four years to help us continue our efforts while the economy made its recovery. And as they always have, the citizens of Jonesboro rose to the occasion, and simultaneously gave those departments a vote of confidence and an overwhelming approval of the public safety tax. It was an incredible victory, and I want to thank the citizens of Jonesboro for their faith and progressive commitment to the safety of our city.

(APPLAUSE)

Obviously, public safety remains a top priority. In 2010 we closed on the land on Harrisburg Road for the next to last station on our facilities plan that, when completed, will improve our overall ISO rating and put all of our citizens under a better blanket of protection.

Our fire department conducted a total of 3,510 incident runs in 2010. While we had 95 more fire runs than the previous year, our total responses dropped by just over 1,000; primarily due to the revamping of our first-responder policy and the lack of ice-storm related calls compared to 2009. 88% of our response times were 6 minutes or less; and 60% in 4 minutes or less. Both of these percentages are better than the previous year.

2010 was our first full year of CALEA certification in our Police Department. I take this opportunity to reiterate once again this year, that as one of less than 900 departments in the entire United States of America to earn the accreditation, it validates what we have known for some time; that we have one of the best police departments in Arkansas.

Like Fire, a full annual report on the activities and accomplishments of the police department are on file for your review. To note some of the highlights, I add this excerpt from their report:

2010 saw a continuation of crime trends that reflect well on our city given the growth we have been and are currently experiencing. Essentially, traditional crime has once again remained stable or has gone down when compared to previous years. Remarkably, this trend has continued during periods of significant growth, a downward turn in the economy, demographic shifts, increased unemployment and other social challenges that typically adversely affect crime rates.

The department has been successful in its efforts to control criminal activity over the last six years, with only a 1.9% per capita crime increase from 2009, and only a 2.9% per capita crime increase since 2005. This effort was achieved despite the 4.5% increase in per capita calls for service from 2009, and a 27.9% increase in per capita calls for service since 2005. Further, the city of Jonesboro has increased in population from 59,852 to at least 66,194 since 2005, an 11% increase in overall.

As with Fire, 2010 saw a major investment in infrastructure to help us better respond to our community by evaluating the strategic locations we work from. Since the first day of my administration, we have begun to talk about the de-centralization of police operations and the commitment to going to a precinct-model structure. Last year, we took the first tangible step

to making that dream a reality with the purchase of a nearly 4 acre tract on Johnson Avenue. This tract will place a precinct in the heart of our heaviest call district, reduce our response times, and give us a much better presence to help deter crime before it happens. I look forward to working with Chief Yates and our Building Facilities Team to come up with a plan for this property that will be functional and effective, and be something that every citizen of Jonesboro can be proud of.

Our E-911 Dispatch Center secured over \$90,000 in grant funding to update our internal telephone system and add two new call stations to better serve the public. In partnership with Nettleton Schools, we launched an inaugural message alert system that will in 2011 be rolled out to every school in Craighead County. Jeff and his team also launched the first ever 911-Text system in the entire State of Arkansas.

The Animal Control adoption initiative started in 2008 and continues to grow in popularity, the Animal Control department sponsored at least 7 adoption clinics in addition to normal efforts. They also sponsored 6 rabies clinics and 1 microchip clinic, resulting in over 650 pets receiving shots or chips.

Our public works departments remain a vital contributor to our communities overall quality of life. Our sanitation department has as an exemplary organization with a reputation for going above and beyond to deliver the very best customer service to every sector of the city.

Our sanitation department made major strides in 2010 with the purchase of an air curtain incinerator in April. By June, we began incinerating yard waste, and by December 31<sup>st</sup> had already burned over 7,000 ton of debris!

Continued efforts to increase recycling efforts and make routes more productive were successful as well.

Our street department has had an extremely busy year on road maintenance and drainage related projects.

We put down just under a quarter of a million linear feet of striping on our streets; laid over 15 million pounds of asphalt; and completed two major drainage retention/detention projects while finishing three major channel rehabilitations.

In engineering, we continued to make headway working through the backlog of open work orders from previous years while continuing to expedite current requests as they come in. As I stated last year at this time, addressing engineering concerns can be a tedious and time consuming process; but our team is doing an incredible job of working through it all.

Our planning department has been busy helping to coordinate our Jonesboro Vision 2030 Plan. Major components of that plan came together in 2010 with the final adoption of both the Master Street and Land Use Plans. The department processed some 848 total cases for the

year, including 443 residential site plans and 275 multi-family or commercial site plans. They handled 23 rezoning requests, 14 conditional use permits and 24 variance appeals to the Board of Zoning Adjustment.

Our parks and recreation department continued to evolve to meet the needs of our city. Jeff Owens replaced Jason Wilkie as Parks Director when Jason left to pursue a ministry opportunity in Northwest Arkansas; and Wixson Huffstetler joined the department to help generate revenue from field and event sponsorships and increased tournament activity. We continue to serve an unbelievable number of children in our City Stars basketball and soccer programs, and 2010 saw the addition of a partnership that added City Stars Baseball and Softball in North Jonesboro.

Our community centers and Craighead Forest Park remain popular destinations for individuals, families and groups. We completed nearly three quarter of a million dollars of improvements in major projects to our parks and centers last year, many with the help of a strategic partnership with our city's A & P Commission. We also made great progress on our Greenway Project, and installed the Turtle Creek Pedestrian Bridge as part of our Safe Routes to Schools program.

Once again, our community development department was recognized on the state and national level for having one of the only true citizen-driven CDBG programs in the nation. By focusing on a single neighborhood in order to begin what will become a citywide initiative, the department launched the Neighborhood Network campaign with three networks ready to elect their leadership next month, and an additional two working through the process. Five networks in single community is a phenomenal achievement, and what we intend to accomplish is even greater. We are looking to establish a Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Area which will allow this neighborhood to seek out additional funding that has not been available to them previously.

The Community Development department has reached out to the other neighborhood associations and hopes to go citywide this year.

These neighbors are gathering together to address their individual needs and we as a City are here to support them in every way possible. The goal is to incorporate City government, foundations, federal and state departments, non-profits, faith based organizations and education into a model that can be replicated statewide and eventually go national. Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, HUD, and several associations are in full support of this endeavor.

Our Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) continues to be a tremendous asset. They assisted with the development of both the land use and traffic plans adopted last year, are aiding in the development of our Jonesboro Vision 2030 plan, and continue to set the standard for comprehensive regional traffic planning.

JETS made tremendous gains last year in restructuring their budget to below \$1 million by improving route efficiencies, reviewing procedures, and tweaking operations. They formed a

true community partnership with other transit providers serving the community and moved toward a true mobility manager system. Most notably, they finally took possession of their new headquarters and dispatch center at the new Public Works campus on Dan Avenue. If you haven't been there, I encourage you to go by...it's an beautiful facility.

Our finance and human resource departments continue to utilize technology and streamline our processes. The progress of finance has been well documented throughout the year; and HR worked tirelessly on new policy handbooks, implementing a new salary administration plan and negotiating benefit packages.

Our inspectors and code enforcement officers saw an increased demand for their services. Permit totals, project costs and generated revenues were all up compared to 2009. Increase efforts in condemnation and clean-up projects produced tangible results in some of our most blighted areas.

Our Information Systems team had a busy and productive year; with major server replacement projects, the building of a communications studio, revamping our phone service, migration of Springbrook, and designing what came to be an award winning website all taking place in 2010.

Our city was blessed, as we continued to welcome new business and industry, and among other honors, had the privilege of seeing the Nordex Plant begin operations, the groundbreaking of NEA Baptist Health Systems campus, and the announcement of the St. Bernards Medical Mile.

We were ranked as the 49<sup>th</sup> Best Small Place in America for Business and Careers by Forbes Magazine and were listed by CNN Money as one of the Best Places to Live in America!

Despite all its challenges, 2010 was a great year for the City of Jonesboro. As I look to 2011, I cannot help but be optimistic that even bigger and better things are on our horizon.

We continue to work our way out of a tight economy. And while we have a distance yet to go, I believe, as predicted, we are well on our way to recovery.

As a city government, we renew our commitment to increase our efficiency and productivity and heighten our awareness of service above what we have already accomplished. As always, we will continue to look for ways to better serve our community and make this a better place to live, work and raise our families.

Susan and I welcomed our fourth grandchild in 2010. I have the same hopes and dreams for my children and grandchildren as you do for yours. Those are the faces I see in the long hours we put in and the with the tough decisions we have to make. And they aren't over.

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

I end this address the same as last year, 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 are committed to serving the citizens of Jonesboro. I would like to 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.