

First, let me welcome you to the Rogers City Council Chambers for the 2014 State of the City Address. I want to thank each of you for being here tonight and extend a special thanks to the Rogers-Lowell Chamber of Commerce for hosting the reception this evening. The relationship between the City and the Chamber continues to be one of the cornerstones of our success in Rogers.

Members of the Rogers City Council, Honorable City Attorney, Honorable Clerk, Honorable Judge Paul Bridges, city directors, city employees, and my fellow citizens, it is my honor and privilege to present to you the State of the City.

This is my fourth State of the City Address and with each year that passes Rogers is stronger than ever before. As the national economy continues to recover, Rogers is outpacing most cities across the country. I am happy to report that sales tax collections have continued to rise for the last three years after dipping during the economic downturn. Collections were up eight percent (8%) in 2013. The city tag line is, “where possible lives” and I think it is evident that we are staying true to the tag. 2014 is going to be a very exciting year in Rogers. We have seen a significant increase in building permits over the last year and the trend continues. Many new businesses are slated to open in 2014, some that have been announced and some that haven’t. 2014 will mark the opening of the Arkansas Music Pavilion in Rogers. The AMP will not only make Rogers part of the arts and entertainment experience of Northwest Arkansas but will change the skyline forever. I think the AMP is the game changer and will be the trend setter for development in the surrounding area. As promised, the soccer complex is in the early stages of construction and the southern trail connection will be completed in the next few months which runs directly in front of Veterans Park. Last year, I was proud to announce that we had acquired an additional seventy acres of property surrounding Lake Atalanta. This year I am pleased to report those additional seventy acres has turned into a total of 238 acres and a three year development plan. This project is a glowing example of a public and private project with the very generous matching grant from the Walton Family Foundation totaling almost four million dollars. This grant is but one of the many examples of the Walton family’s commitment to improving the quality of life for northwest Arkansans. I believe the Lake Atalanta re-development will be one of the anchors in the downtown revitalization bringing thousands of

visitors to downtown and making the greater downtown area a place people want to live and work. Within the next few weeks I will ask the Rogers City Council to fund a master plan for downtown Rogers with Gateway Planning. This process will be the most aggressive and comprehensive attempt to plan for a sustainable and vibrant downtown. I sincerely hope that the community will participate in a meaningful way to insure the success of this master plan.

I want to spend a few minutes highlighting some of our individual department accomplishments of 2013 and goals for 2014.

The Parks and Recreation Departments have had another busy and exciting year. 2013 was marked with the opening of the sports park and aquatics center. I told you last year that the opening of the aquatics center would serve thousands of visitors and boy did it ever. I don't think anyone could have predicted how successful this park would be. The park generated sales in excess of one million dollars. The funds over and above the cost of running the park have been set aside with the hopes of future expansion. In 2013 over ten miles of additional trails were constructed and in 2014 the final phase of the Razorback Regional Greenway will be completed. With the acquisition of the necessary land at Veterans Park, the soccer park is currently under construction. We are excited to now have a part-time trails coordinator and welcomed five new volunteer groups in the, "Adopt a Trail" program. This year we hosted twenty-six tournaments which represented a major increase over previous years. Rogers continues to have one of the largest sports programs in the state, the Recreation Department and the RAC were awarded the "outstanding sports program" and the "outstanding recreation program" for youth soccer and the summer day camp respectively by the Arkansas Parks and Recreation Association. It should additionally be noted, that Rogers has become known in the Lacrosse community as the city with open arms. Lacrosse continues to be a fast growing sport in our region and we want to be an advocate as this sport grows and gains popularity in NWA.

The **Rogers Historical Museum** continues to focus on a capital campaign for the planned expansion of the museum. Last year the museum continued the design and development of eight major gallery spaces in the expansion plan, produced seven new exhibits, and hosted many community events including the downtown Ghost Walk tour.

The **Rogers Recycling Center** serves over 250 schools and businesses every week in addition to the thousands of residents who use the facility weekly. The center processed more than 1,800 tons of material saving valuable space in our landfills. Though started in 2013 the department continues to work with the Emerging Leaders of Northwest Arkansas and the Benton County Solid Waste to grow their “event recycling program.”

The **Rogers Police Department** was chosen to host the Arkansas Chief of Police Association annual conference for the second year in a row. The event brought over one hundred police chiefs and vendors from all corners of the state to Rogers. With the added parking and perimeter fencing, the building and grounds improvements from the bond issue are nearly complete. By certifying five new Field Training Officers and four additional officers completing Instructor Development, the department made great strides in their commitment to serve the public with the highest level of professionalism in the industry. The hard work and dedicated service of the men and women of the Rogers Police Department have exceeded the national clearance rates in the categories of crimes against property, crimes against persons, and all violent crimes resulting in a ten percent increase in arrests. The department continues the always daunting task of warrant service and logged a twenty-three percent increase in warrants served in 2013. A continued effort to recruit the best and brightest new officers will ensure the overall long term success of the department that serves and meets the demands of an ever growing community.

The **Rogers Library** saw an increase in use of electronic books, magazines, music, and audio books to a circulation of almost 55,000 in 2013. This increase is a growing trend and one that the Rogers Library continues to build upon as it adapts to the needs of over 34,000 annual users. The staff, trustees, and Friends of the Library completed their three year strategic plan and launched a pilot project with the new Tech High to offer students eCards last year. While continuing to investigate ways to further partner with more schools, city departments, and other

service organizations they will establish an offsite location for the pick-up and return of materials. 2014 will mark the first stage of a portable media lab and the addition of streaming movies to their list of services.

The **Planning Department** enjoyed a busy 2013, preparing the RFQ for the Downtown Master Plan, reviewed and processed seven subdivisions compared to two in 2012, and processed thirty-six large scale developments compared to twenty-two in 2012. Work on expanding the boundaries of the Overlay District during 2013 culminated in the adoption of the changes early this year. This year the department is planning for the adoption of a updated Master Street Plan and Growth Comprehensive Plan. Work continues to implement the new GIS software and system. In 2014 the city will use funds from the CDBG to continue the transportation assistance program, rehabilitate half a dozen homes in the city, and complete the sidewalk design project.

The **Rogers Transportation and Street Departments** had a very productive 2013 including the in-house projects of installing traffic signals at Promenade/Rife Medical Lane and 52nd/Stoneybrook, drainage improvements on Dixieland by the regional sports park and at 6th street and Olive, as well as, many street overlays throughout the city. Street bond projects in 2013 included the completion of 21st Street, 24th Street, Mount Hebron Rd., Garret Road, the repair of the road system in Country Club Estates, the sidewalk and drainage improvements on Highway 94 from 1st Street to Eastside Elementary, and the start of construction on Price Lane and Monte Ne from Gum Street to New Hope. Additionally, the improvements to Dixieland from Price Lane to Laurel Ave. were completed. In 2014, a host of drainage projects and street projects will be completed including; Persimmon and N. 22nd Street, intersection improvements at 8th Street and Olrich, and drainage projects on 24th Street, 2nd Street, and Dogwood at Dixieland. The bond projects in the 2014 scope of work include; Bellview North, Bellview South, Pleasant Grove west of Bellview, First Street and Perry Road from 21st to Bellview. In late 2014 into early 2015 there will be more orange cones in Rogers than cars and while this presents traffic flow challenges they are all signs of progress and better days ahead.

The **Finance, Information Technology, and Human Resources Departments** continue to support all the departments and operations of the city well. IT welcomed Ryan Breese as the new department director in 2013 and began to implement the Asset Lifecycle Plan that includes; scheduled replacement of computers, servers, storage, mobile phones, and network switches. This will allow the department to better serve the individual users throughout the city network. In 2014 the department will complete the transition to the new city website, launch the SharePoint Intranet system allowing for added employee and department collaboration. The department will also coordinate the purchase and implementation of a Community Development system that will integrate the City Clerk, Planning, Inspections, Permits, and Code Enforcement departments. This integrated system will provide workflow automation, web-based services to citizens and contractors, and allow staff to work in the field via mobile devices. The HR department will see some changes later this month as Thomas Dunlap will take the helm of a newly created position of Director of Human Resource and Development. This new position was created after the city and the water & sewer commission entered into an agreement for the city to handle all HR related services for the utility going forward. In addition, HR staff will be able to develop and administer the personal development of all public employees through skill development, management training, communication development, as well as, additional educational opportunities for our workforce. By investing in our greatest asset, our people, it is my hope that with these opportunities for employees, we are able to grow tomorrow's leaders from within for all departments throughout the city. The Finance department under the command of our Finance Director Casey Wilhelm is now recognized as a great asset to my office and all of the management team. The level of cooperation and collaboration that has developed between the finance department and the other department heads has produced mutual respect, admiration, and trust that has enhanced the level of service we all provide to the public. In 2013, the city began accepting credit cards at many locations allowing residents more options when paying for city services, a well-received addition by the public. In 2014, the finance department will work to expand this program into online payment options.

Over 2,500 notices or letters were issued by **Code Enforcement** for violation of city ordinances in 2013. The majority of these were for tall grass/weeds, inoperative motor vehicles, and unsightly/unsanitary conditions. A joint proactive effort with the Planning Department to

address ongoing code violations of the sign and banner ordinance has resulted in many businesses coming into compliance with the City's sign ordinance, thus improving the appearance of the City.

I'm proud to report an increase in commercial **building permits** for 2013 totaling almost \$29 million. Commercial remodels and addition permits totaled \$29.6 million in 2013 compared to \$15.1 million in 2012. On the residential side, there were 429 single family permits issued totaling \$80.6 million and 120 more permits in 2013 than 2012.

Rogers Animal Services had another benchmark year with overall intakes down to 1225 highlighting a progressive animal control team. Euthanasia rates were cut in half for the second straight year in a row, lowering euthanasia to 5% at our shelter. The entire section of city code relating to animals was completely revised in 2013. We believe the new code will further lower our intake numbers in the coming years.

2013 proved to be the year of change for the **Adult Wellness Center**. After seven years in operation, they continue to see impressive levels of growth and participation in services. To date, they have had over 19,800 members join the center. The center has an active membership of over 10,000 members and a daily attendance between 800-1400 people. The center offers an ever changing schedule of over 35 fitness classes and over 50 different educational classes and monthly activities. By adding additional fundraisers, the center realized a 60% increase in 2013. The AWC also received a tremendous showing of community support with the United Way's Day of Caring event, with over 20 volunteers spending a whole day working in the AWC garden. The center partnered with local law enforcement to provide a Safety Academy and with RFD to provide CPR training to members. In 2013, one of the center's great successes was the member involvement in the membership rate change. Almost 1,200 people participated in the membership survey and many others participated in member meetings which culminated in an 87% rate of support for the increased rates. Starting August 1st, the membership rate changed after almost seven years and revenues increased by 16% over the remaining months of 2013. Continued communication venues to utilize member feedback for program and project

development, as well as, the continued development of partnerships with community business to enhance programming, activities, and events will be the focus of 2014.

The **Rogers Municipal Airport** continued making progress in replacing aged and structurally insufficient infrastructure with design work underway for an apron reconstruction project planned for 2014-2015. The Airport also received funding to complete a significant maintenance/rehab project for the east-side taxiways and t-hanger apron. Partnering with the FAA on a yearlong wildlife hazard assessment study will prove to enhance operational safety to airport users. Development of a new business plan began in 2013 to help position the Airport by enhancing opportunities for aviation development, provide a stable financial plan, maximize the Airport's economic impact, and support the growth of the region's aviation needs. Additionally, the Airport gained a new air medical transportation provider to the roster of based businesses, bringing several jobs to the area and enhancing the availability of emergency medevac for the region.

The **City Clerk's Office** issued 2,358 business licenses representing approximately 325 new businesses in Rogers. The office will be working closely with other departments in the selection and implementation of the Community Development System previously mentioned and looks forward to streamlining and enhancing the user experience. With changes in the alcohol laws in Benton County the Clerk's office has been instrumental in helping local restaurant and club owners to ensure compliance with local laws and permitting.

The **Rogers Fire Department** celebrated its 125th year in existence in 2013. The dual-accredited agency worked to maintain its status as a progressive and effective public safety agency. The department operates with low attrition and few vacancies – evidence of successful recruitment and retention programs implemented over the past half-decade. The ripple effects of the 2011 bond issue continued to do marvelous things to protect the lives and improve the safety of our city's firefighters last year, two more pumpers and another ladder truck were ordered. This completes the projects funded by the extension of the one penny sales tax.

By the numbers, 2013 was as busy as ever. From 6,000 emergency responses and 51,000 hours of training, to 16,000 adults and children reached by firefighters through fire safety and CPR training, it isn't hard to find evidence of the department's impact on the community. Rogers boasts one of the lowest property loss rates and highest heart attack survival rates in the multi-state region. The coming year will see many projects and challenges for the department. These include the hiring and training of additional firefighters at fire station 7, acquiring a new ambulance to maintain a reliable fleet, and completing a fire academy for at least 25 regional firefighter recruits at the Rogers Fire Training Center. The department's efforts to relocate fire station 2 to a more strategic location along New Hope Road should make progress as architectural and engineering work continues from last year. A significant amount of administrative energy will be placed in efforts to recalculate the city's Insurance Service Office, or ISO, rating. This rating affects insurance premiums paid by homeowners and commercial business operators. Although the city's rating is already attractively low, the efforts of the last bond issue and accreditation processes will undoubtedly benefit the pocketbooks of our citizens when it is reduced.

As you can see there is a lot happening in Rogers and many reasons for all of us to be proud to call Rogers home. The challenges we face would be welcomed news in most communities across America today. On behalf of the city staff, elected officials, members of the various boards and commissions, and my office, we look forward to continuing to provide unparalleled service to the people of Rogers, the "city where possible lives."

God bless the United States of America, the State of Arkansas, and the City of Rogers.

Respectfully Submitted,

Greg Hines, Mayor

