



## **State of the City**

### **January 27, 2015**

**Good evening. Tonight, I am honored to report to Bentonville's citizens that their City is financially sound. Through fiscal conservation, your staff and City Council have kept balance sheets firmly in the black during another calendar year.**

**Bentonville's momentum continues as we move into 2015. The 2014 election cycle resulted in four new City Council members being elected to serve with the four members who were re-elected. I am honored to be given a third term and commit to serve with professionalism, character and integrity in all that I do over the next four years.**

**Bentonville is experiencing unprecedented recognition locally, regionally and nationally. The reasons for this are many. The community we live in is very special in that countless individuals, businesses and organizations share a desire to see continued improvement without respect for who receives the credit. This makes for a very special community and helps define this great city we call Bentonville.**

**Tonight, I want to begin by acknowledging and thanking two groups who responsibly and diligently lead Bentonville's endeavors. The first group is my staff. The City is blessed to have an extraordinarily professional municipal team. The City's senior staff oversees more than four hundred city employees. Employees dedicated to providing taxpayers with an "exceeds expectations" return on their tax dollars. The staff team is highly educated and certified in the professions that are critical to providing our citizens with exemplary service. The City employs seasoned professionals in each of these fields of expertise: legal, courts, finance, administration, law enforcement, fire safety, community planning, engineering, library services, human resources, technology, parks & recreation, public works, transportation, utilities management, and customer service.**

**The second group is our City Council. Since beginning as Mayor in 2007, the City Council has embraced both the vision and the methods for responsible growth that I and staff have presented. The Council has also consistently supported the**

**conservative financial strategies we have proposed. The combined efforts of the City Council and staff are decidedly one of the primary reasons our City has flourished and received the positive recognition which I believe is richly deserved.**

**2014 was a busy, productive year. I will briefly summarize some of the high points.**

**Since opening in November 2011, Crystal Bridges had welcomed + 1.5 million visitors from across the world. The “State of the Art” collection was especially popular with more than 127,000 people stopping by to view these unforgettable pieces of American art. Not coincidentally, Bentonville’s hospitality tax collections were up about 12% last year.**

**For the fifth year in a row, Bentonville was named a Volunteer Community of the Year by the State of Arkansas. This past year 19,232 volunteers recorded more than 389,000 hours of service resulting in a gift to our community worth \$8.7 million.**

**Bentonville’s current population is estimated to be 41,725, a 3.2% increase from prior year. The region’s unemployment rate sits at 3.9%, compared to 5.6% nationally.**

**Bentonville's 2014 sales tax receipts were basically equal to 2013 collections. However, November sales tax receipts were up by a little over 24%. The City is financially positioned to continue providing services and customer service that exceed our customer's expectations throughout 2015.**

**Our Utility Billing team managed the collection and administration of more than \$84 million from more than 21,000 accounts while providing a high level of professional customer service.**

**The Electric Department completed numerous upgrades designed to minimize interruptions and increase the reliability of our delivery system. Our reliability rate remains at 99.99%.**

**The Public Works Director continued his ongoing efforts to insure regulatory compliance at our City and Regional wastewater treatment facilities, including our challenge against the EPA's unfounded TMDL for phosphorous on Town Branch. Both historic and exciting, Mike Bender led the City's efforts to purchase 37 acres of real estate to relocate (under one roof) our Street, Water Utilities, Wastewater, Electric and Inventory departments.**

**In 2014, the Transportation Department oversaw the completion of the Windmill Road Project. In the works for several years, the widening of Arkansas 12, or Southwest Airport Regional Boulevard began last November. As part of, and in coordination with this road widening project, electric, water and sanity sewer lines were relocated. Sometime in late 2016, there will be a much needed five lane highway from Walton & Rainbow Curve west to Shell Road. In 2014, right-of-way and easement acquisitions and utility relocation was completed for the Main Street South Street Improvement Project. Right-of-way easement acquisitions for the 8<sup>th</sup> Street project are well underway.**

**Our City Engineer oversaw the completion of Bentonville Municipal Airport's Runway Safety Area Project in 2014. This project brings the safety area into compliance with FAA regulations and provides for safer airport operations. Additionally, the City hired a contractor to update the airport's Master Plan. The current Master Plan was last updated in 2003; much has changed over the past 12 years. The construction of a new T hangar is near completion on the west side of the runway near SW "I" street. This construction marks the beginning of exciting development for the west side. A new box hangar has been submitted for the east side and construction is anticipated in spring of 2015.**

**Thirty-nine Fire Department paramedics were re-certified in Advanced Cardiac Life Support and Pediatric Advanced Life Support. Other personnel were trained in the areas of swift water emergency, hazardous materials and active shooter emergencies. The department was awarded almost \$112K in grants. Construction is underway on Fire Station 6. Located near the corner of SW “I” Street & SW Regional Airport Blvd., this new facility is expected to be completed within the next 30 days.**

**The Police Department and Emergency Dispatch Center experienced another busy year marked with many accomplishments. Total calls for service in 2014 were near 55,000. This number includes all police, fire, and EMS calls and represents a 22% increase over 2013 . Despite the increase in calls, there was no notable increase in more serious crimes or crimes against persons. Likewise, there were no trends in criminal activity in our community that should be cause for concern. One homicide case in 2014 resulted in a speedy arrest despite the suspect fleeing the area.**

**Many of the Police Department’s efforts and accomplishments were aimed toward preparing our officers and our agency to better serve our growing community. Employee development and retention resulted in our police department finishing 2014 fully trained and fully staffed with 67 sworn officers and 30 professional staff members. Defensive Tactics training was completed by all our officers and our SWAT team members received updated training. New tactical response methods**

were developed in conjunction with our Fire Department to enable quicker emergency medical care in active shooter situations. A member of the Criminal Investigations Division specializing in computer forensic examinations now works with a regional task force to combat computer crimes and crimes against children. This detective also obtained an advanced computer forensic certification and is the only law enforcement officer in the state to hold such a certificate. These changes and upgrades serve to increase our overall safety, and promote the efficiency and accuracy of the services our police department provides.

Police and Fire Dispatchers once again implemented and completed a 9-1-1 education program for kids at our local elementary schools. This program allows emergency dispatchers to interact with First Graders and explains when and how 9-1-1 should be used. The program also instructs children that they should “stay calm” and “stay on the phone”. Additionally, in response to nationwide school security concerns, the Police Department also continued its established a program to increase safety and security in our schools. This program involves random visits to elementary and middle schools that are not served by School Resource Officers.

Bentonville’s District Court is completing an interface with the Police Department software that will allow new citations to be directly imported into the case

management software; creating the case and associated name record information automatically.

In 2014, the District Court concentrated on enhancing the existing DWI Court program. Having experienced some changes in the make-up of the DWI Court Team, District Court re-grouped and sought out training opportunities. Using the funds from a \$15,000 Arkansas State Police Grant, the District Court was able to complete a two (2) day “Operational Tune-Up” in March. Additionally, the District Court was able to send four (4) members of their Team to a week-long National Association of Drug Court Professionals Conference in Anaheim, CA.

In August of 2014, the Chief Court Clerk, Jennifer Jones, completed a three (3) year Court Management Program and became one of only four (4) current District Court Clerks to be an Arkansas Certified Court Manager. Graduation took place in the courtroom of the Arkansas Supreme Court and Jennifer was chosen by her classmates to deliver the commencement speech.

The Legal Department focused on innovative problem-solving programs and professional development. Camille Thompson, Staff Attorney attended the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution’s highly ranked and intensive professional skills program at Pepperdine University. The principles of dispute resolution echo many



elements of the City's Mission Statement and allow staff to better understand, manage and resolve conflict while supporting an environment that enhances informed decision making.

Together with other members of the City's DWI/Sobriety Court team, the Staff Attorney attended the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) historic 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference. The NADCP focuses on using proven strategies within the justice system to compel offenders to change their lives and enhance public safety. This movement and the broader problem-solving court principles are creating visionary advancements in the courtroom.

The Human Resources department successfully continued the transition toward complying with the federal Affordable Care Act; being able to add the additional required coverage with a plan cost increase of less than 5%. This enabled the City to control the total cost of healthcare, while adding more covered members and meeting federal plan guidelines for additional coverage. Also, the HR team began the implementation process of a new healthcare cost management tool (COMPASS) which will allow covered members access to comparative cost data for medical procedures and testing and access to comprehensive medical bill review. These new tools will help employees (and the City) make better, lower-cost healthcare choices, thereby saving them and the City money on their healthcare costs.

**In 2014, Parks and Recreation hosted recreation programs that included more than 132,000 participants and \$1,095,000 in gross revenue. Also in 2014, the Bentonville park patrons volunteered 63,044 hours valued at more than \$1.4 million.**

**Our Parks and Recreation Staff completed many successful park improvement projects i.e. The Legacy Orchard at Orchards Park, Sports Fields Improvements at Memorial and Phillips Park, Merchants Park improvements, and the installation of more than 650 new trees in our park system.**

**Bentonville Parks and Recreation received two prestigious awards. First, the International Mountain Bike Association designated Bentonville as a Silver Level Ride Center. This designation is an award only 12 other communities in the world have received. Also, the United States Specialty Sports Association named Memorial Park as the Facility of the Year for the State of Arkansas.**

**Work continues on the much anticipated Bentonville Community Center. To date, the project is 75% complete. The landmark facility should be available to Bentonville residents by mid-year 2015.**

**Bentonville Public Library was voted “Best Library” by the readers of NWA Media.**

**In 2014, the Library checked out 602,217 items, totaling 41,625 more than last year. This is a new milestone for our library's annual circulation records.**

**All five Librarians at Bentonville Public Library published professional articles in the *Arkansas Libraries* journal. Hadi Dudley, Library Director was awarded the LaNell Compton Prize by the Arkansas Library Association for the best article published within a two-year period.**

**The Library partnered with Bentonville Public Schools as strong participants in the *Declaration for the Right to Libraries* initiative. Bentonville's local involvement and statewide leadership in the national advocacy campaign was recognized by the American Library Association. Additionally, the Library staff launched a Tech Card initiative with two test schools within the public school district to provide students with access to educational databases. This program involved designing special library cards and a new student portal website, plus offering professional training to teachers.**

**Grants, sponsorships and donations greatly support the public library in their service to our community. In 2014, contributions valued at more than \$136,900 were made in support of the Bentonville Public Library.**

**Our Community Development team had some very impressive stats to report. Total valuation of all building permits was up by \$83 million from 2013, with a 27% increase in residential valuation and 51% increase in commercial valuation. The number of residential units permitted was up 94%, due in large part to a shift in development trends from predominantly single family to increasing multifamily units. Residential alterations, remodels and additions were high with a 24% increase over 2013.**

**In 2014, the Community Development staff implemented its “Bentonville Blueprint”. The Bentonville Blueprint was developed with the involvement of more than 400 participants that included interviews, visioning sessions and an online survey. The Blueprint includes both the identification of seven targeted sectors for Bentonville to focus its marketing efforts, as well as strategic priorities in seven areas of focus with strategies and action items related to each. These targets and strategic priorities will allow the City of Bentonville to focus on leveraging its exceptional assets, mitigating its challenges and filling voids in its economic development inventory. In addition, an implementation plan and metrics to measure results were also provided.**

**In January 2014, City council adopted the SE Downtown Area Plan that established two new experience districts: The Arts District and The Market District. The plan proposed a year-round indoor public market in the Market District and an Artists’**

**Live/Work Corridor in the Arts District. The Community Development team initiated plan implementation by completing a pedestrian connection between the two districts on SE 6<sup>th</sup> Street.**

**The second annual Tree Planting Blitz was held on October 24 and logged more than 800 volunteer hours from over 200 volunteers planting 634 Trees. The inaugural planting event in 2013 won Bentonville recognition as a City of Distinction by Arkansas Business.**

**In October of last year, the Bentonville Public Art Advisory Committee presented its inaugural public art initiative, Bentonville City ART, with three sculptures installed on the North Bentonville Trail. Located along the hard surface trail within a 7-minute walk south/east of the Hidden Springs parking area, these proposed works constitute a sculpture trail intended to enhance the user experience of walkers, runners, cyclists and other visitors of all ages. The sculptures were selected for their ability to beautify, draw attention to, and visually augment the landscape along the trail, their potential to function as an informative educational site via signage and touring, and for their likelihood to encourage photography and sharing via social media.**

**The authors of *Creating the Best Workplace on Earth*, state that "highly engaged employees are, on average, 50% more likely to exceed expectations than the least-engaged workers. And companies with highly engaged people outperform firms with the most disengaged folks- by 54% in employee retention, by 89% in customer satisfaction, and by fourfold in revenue growth." The end goal is to create a positive, effective and supportive work environment where involvement and cooperation are honored and results are superior. Sustaining our current success and helping insure our continued success depends upon our collective commitment to work together. As I contemplate the next four years as Mayor, I commit to provide the professional leadership that will help showcase our City as America's new hometown!**

**Thank you all ~ may God continue to bless our City and Northwest Arkansas.**

**Mayor Bob McCaslin  
City of Bentonville**