

## State of the City 2013

It is much like a long, long journey across a thick, tangled wilderness – complete with hills and valleys and streams and swamps and brambles and briars. Only when you get to the other side and look back can you completely appreciate how far we have come and all the hurdles and hardships that have been endured. Of course, there are those occasions of victory against all odds, bright days of promise and achievement and sometimes brief periods of smooth, easy going that arrive just often enough punctuate the long strange trip and make it all worthwhile.

In this case, however, this particular eight year marathon trek across the wilderness is bisected by a wide rocky financial canyon called “The Great Recession” – a totally unique and difficult disruption.

One thing stands out: It is better if you start with a map – and that’s exactly what we did. We started with a map - or more correctly with a plan.

From the campaign for Mayor, 2005 – our “Seven Step Strategy”

### **Strategy One: Finish what we’ve started.**

That was the opening line...and then we go on to talk about the downtown and riverfront and specifically about the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Waterfront Plan.

Everyone now knows that finishing that beautiful new centerpiece of our community hit a few snags, construction problems and (most alarming) dangerous electrical problems in the Passage – that wonderful water feature where children love to play. It was disappointing and painful – much like receiving a dazzling gift and then finding that it’s broken – but we pushed on, took the political heat for closing it and finished what was started. In spite of the fact that repairs were expensive, we completed it. The Passage was reopened, the cracking concrete along the river’s edge was analyzed and - in the coming months - the rest of the riverfront reconstruction will be completed at a total cost of more than \$10 million. In the process, however, we have revised the plans and we have resolved to make it better than ever. We are taking the opportunity to take the plan and our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Waterfront to the next level.

Better than ever.

...further, the Seven Step Strategy refers to the 25 year struggle to remake the old Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant into Enterprise South and goes on to stress that attention must shift to filling the new park with “top quality, job producing, economy expanding new business and industry.”

Remember, that’s a quote from the beginning of our campaign in January 2005 – how are we doing with that?

### **Strategy Two: Fill in the economic gaps.**

Quote: “The loss of employment in old-line manufacturing must be matched by creation of new family wage jobs. The shrinking manufacturing base must be rebuilt.”

Again, how are we doing with that? Alstom, Amazon, Gestamp, Volkswagen.

It is not an exaggeration to say that we have installed a new manufacturing heart in this old industrial city.

### **Strategy Three: Enhance links and gateways.**

The strategy talks of improvements in the downtown freeway entrance at Fourth Street and goes on to state that the long-delayed reworking of US 27 through the central business district must proceed.

How are we doing with that? Can you see all that earthmoving underway and all those impressive new retaining walls? Just as proposed, we are enhancing links and gateways.

We must also acknowledge that those existing, reliable old principal streets that carry traffic in and out of downtown – the arterials - are much improved – specifically Main Street and Eleventh Street. See then new streetscaping, the pedestrian lights and the landscaping. Drive those and see – that’s how you enhance links and gateways to improve the quality of life and spark new economic development. It’s working.

### **Strategy Four: Nourish the neighborhoods.**

We state: “Nothing is more essential to a healthy city than healthy neighborhoods.” We speak of strengthening the Department of Neighborhood

Services, the installation of traffic calming devices, removal of blighting influences, noise abatement and other measures. We have done that. We have nourished our neighborhoods.

During the eight years of this administration, Neighborhood Services has been reorganized and reinvigorated to more effectively do its job. The code enforcement staff has been configured into teams with each team assigned to a specific council district. This has led to increased accountability and better communication with neighborhood leaders.

The department implemented routine systematic inspections – with property owners given courtesy notices of violations to prompt voluntary abatement before issuing citations possibly leading to court action. This has proven to be an effective and efficient way to achieve greater compliance.

All inspectors hired under this administration have been required to obtain and maintain certification from the International Codes Council.

Working with the World Changers mission program we have provided over \$229,000 to enable 235 elderly and disabled citizens to receive minor repairs to their homes.

We have graduated over 107 neighborhood leaders through our Neighborhood Leadership Institute and we have maintained 100 registered neighborhood associations in our database.

During this administration, the Department of Neighborhood Services assumed responsibility for federal entitlement and other grant programs. As a result, we have successfully managed over \$25 million in funding for housing, public infrastructure and business investment in the city's most economically challenged neighborhoods.

We followed the plan – the Seven Step Strategy from the campaign of 2005. We have been nourishing the neighborhoods.

**Strategy Five: Keep growing the green.**

...We are talking about parks greenways and outdoor initiatives. We detailed back then – in 2005 – how Chattanooga had invested decades of effort and millions of

dollars in our greenway system, our downtown parks and other outdoor facilities. In keeping with this strategy, this administration has completed miles of new trails, major new segments of the RiverWalk, the dazzling new softball facilities at Warner Park and the new Summit of Softball, the home of Outdoor Chattanooga in Coolidge Park, plus a new civic center in Hixson – and much more. We have definitely kept on with “growing the green”.

Thanks to Chattanooga once again being able to attract large tournaments, those new facilities at Summit and Warner Park have paid off. In four years, the tourist traffic from these new fields brought some \$30 million into the community. (Five million more in four years than was projected to occur in five years?) In the campaign of 2005 we all saw those signs that “Dan Johnson Loves Softball”. He’s an accountant – a dollars and cents man – and now we know why he loves softball so much.

During this very active administration we have planned and are currently undertaking construction of one of the most significant links in our Tennessee Riverpark – from Ross’ Landing to Lookout Mountain – the new link that we promised Alstom and part of the deal that we offered when they agreed to invest in Chattanooga.

In addition, that other greenway – our first greenway – the Chickamauga Creek Greenway also saw a major 3 mile link completed.

Back during the previous administration, when I was on the City Council, it made us sad that Montague Park was closed due to environmental issues. I made a personal pledge to somehow get the park reopened. Of course, we are fortunate that through two public private partnerships we have reprogrammed this very significant property into a new type of recreational facility with rugby and soccer fields now in use and a passive outdoor sculpture park to open soon.

### **Strategy Six: Attack fear with Technology**

Have you seen all those new cameras located throughout our city – particularly in the downtown area? Are you aware of the security measures provided by EPB’s fiber optic system. Perhaps you’ve read about the new LED street lights that can be brightened or dimmed or even made to flash or strobe from a police officers’

laptop computer. Then, there are those camera equipped, marked police cruisers used as unmanned surveillance units in high crime locations. The cops have dubbed them the “Unwelcome Wagons”. You might have seen one parked near a street corner or vacant lot or construction site. We found a new use for one when we parked it on a hill out at Enterprise South, proceeded to connect the camera to a website and invited our new German friends to watch from their offices in Europe as the site was prepped for the new Volkswagen plant.

But it’s not all about new technology. We have also invested in our conventional fire and police services.....more about that later.

### **Strategy Seven: Focus on teaching**

And we all agree that the City of Chattanooga is no longer in the business of operating a school system and this strategy from 2005 admitted as much – but we also proposed that we can never be out of the business of providing the best learning environment for our leaders of the future. One example that we proposed back then to equip all citizens – and especially parents – to be teachers is to model our local library system into a more modern, more readily accessible learning resource. The 2005 strategy says: “The computer age and the internet offer almost limitless possibilities.” That was eight years ago and since then we have taken over full responsibility for the public library from the county, we have installed a new board and new leadership, we have cleaned and brightened the downtown main library building, we have adjusted hours to better serve the public, we have secured a site for a new and innovative Eastgate Branch – and more. The downtown main library is now fun and inviting. The empty fourth floor – just used for storage since the building was completed in the 1970’s – is now equipped with gigabit wireless internet capability. It has become a laboratory for creativity and innovation – a place where ideas can take form, where dreams can tap into the fantastic new technology that exists almost exclusively in Chattanooga and the future can begin.

But let’s examine that issue that tops almost every poll of public opinion in every city in every election – and Chattanooga is no exception.

**Let’s talk about crime and violence.**

In the campaign of 2005, we unveiled a program to deal with the gang problem. I have a copy of the media release dated April 6, 2005. “Ron Littlefield and Rev. Ternae Jordan have Plan to STOP THE MADNESS in Chattanooga.”... and we did...and as soon as my administration took office we took steps to implement that program that had shown great success in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. It made great strides, but because it was a faith-based initiative, some members of the City Council at that time were uncomfortable with the program and funding was cut from future budgets. Notably and admirably, Rev. Jordan has continued the program on his own. I salute him for that.

So, about two years ago we embarked on an additional anti-gang effort based on the Boston Cease Fire Model – a program designed by Professor David M. Kennedy of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York. With the help of the City Council, we hired a small but well qualified and enthusiastic staff and employed the local Ochs Center coupled with the Center for Applied Social Research of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to complete a comprehensive gang assessment for our city. That work along with the input of a multi jurisdictional task force is guiding our continuing progress in addressing our youth violence problems.

I was pleased to see that the incoming administration plans to model some of their efforts on the Highpoint Initiatives – a similar program also designed by Professor Kennedy but more focused on open drug sales. This should fold in very well with work already underway.

While I am here, let me say a few words about our police department. Contrary to what you might have heard in the context of political campaigns, I have the greatest respect for our police officers and the work that they do. I have personally worked with more Chiefs of Police than almost anyone still living – and I count many active and retired police professionals as personal friends. Remember, I’ve been in local government for almost 40 years. But I do know that in every administration that I can recall and in almost every larger city that I know of, there is a constant rub between the Mayor’s office and the local police unions. I can recall sitting in meetings back when Gene Roberts was Mayor and listening to some of the same complaints that we still hear today – complaints about pay and benefits and moral. And I hear the same sort of issues from mayors of other cities.

Here are the facts:

During the eight years of this administration - from 2005 to 2013 – the police budget has increased 56% – a cumulative change of over \$20 million per year. To put this into perspective, consider that the very controversial tax increase that was such a topic of discussion in the recent campaigns raised about \$15 million per year – not nearly enough to cover the annual increase in the police budget. I take exception to the claims that our police officers have been shortchanged or slighted in any way. Don't believe what you hear from the police unions.

Other facts: During the “Great Recession”, when most cities were cutting back and furloughing and freezing pay, we were hiring, training, equipping and raising the pay of our safety personnel. It has been a stretch and a strain, but we did it.

Over the eight years of this administration, we have hired and trained more than 200 new police officers – over 25 per year. We will leave office with more commissioned police officers that the city had when we arrived: 477. (The city had 472 in 2005.)

When this administration arrived in 2005, not every patrol officer had a personally assigned vehicle. Now, each has his or her own – and they can drive it home or not drive it home – whatever they prefer. This administration did away with “pool cars” used by more than one officer on different shifts and so called “park and lock” vehicles that were assigned but the officer could not drive it home. Contrary to campaign claims, the officers' cars have never been “parked” by this administration. We unparked them. Yes, if you live outside the city (and therefore don't pay city taxes) a mileage charge is required – far less than the operating cost of the vehicle. Each officer has an assigned vehicle and a choice whether to drive it home. I know of no city with a more liberal policy on the use of vehicles. Don't believe what you hear from the police union.

Let me just note for your consideration that when this administration took office gasoline was \$2 per gallon. Also, police vehicles (and other autos) cost considerably less then than they do today. I should also add that we offer special housing allowances to our commissioned public safety officers to encourage them to live in the city they serve.

During the two terms of this administration, we have completely replaced the police fleet. Further, we have professionalized our fleet management (in this department and others) so that equipment is replaced on a regular basis before serious maintenance costs and problems arise.

In addition to the new uses of technology described earlier, we have managed to make the Chattanooga Police Department 100% wireless and 95% paperless. We have installed Toughbook laptop computers in every patrol car and digital in-car cameras in 90% of the fleet. The entire department has made a transition from the old analog radio system to the new 800 MHX digital system.

In terms of firepower, we have completed a change over from the 1999 Smith & Wesson handguns to the new Sig Sauer .45. Plus every patrol unit is equipped with urban response rifles to defend against suspects with superior weaponry.

As for pay, I have often said that we can never pay our employees – all of our employees enough, but we regularly compare our pay with that of other comparable communities. We spent years designing and implementing an incentive pay plan for the police to allow those who are willing to take advantage of additional training to qualify for increased pay. I have personally talked with officers who have achieved pay increases of more than 15%. We know that more than 8% of the force has received raises of more than 25%. Interestingly, some who have complained the loudest in recent months actually received some of the largest increases. Just don't believe everything you hear.

Other improvements in our police services include the construction and equipping of the new Onion Bottom Police Station on 11<sup>th</sup> Street and enhancement of services operated out of that location including the Bike Unit and the electric 3 wheeler vehicles in our downtown and parks districts. Soon a new \$4 million indoor firing range will be added to the complex – giving us state-of-the-art training facilities and replacing the old outdoor range on Moccasin Bend. (This will have the added benefit of permitting the development of the long discussed Moccasin Bend National Park to move forward.)

We have mentioned technology a few times already – and I will cover that subject in greater detail a little later, but I do wish to note while we are talking about police services that they have benefitted from new software packages provided by the city



Information Technology department. “Coplink” is a program that provides assistance to law enforcement in identifying investigative leads and allows regional agencies to share details of ongoing investigations. There are more new tools such as cameras that read automobile tags and special surveillance features that have been made available during this administration. Just like we proposed 8 years ago, we have been attacking fear with technology.

I take serious exception to claims that we are short changing our police in any way.

And we aren’t shortchanging our other blue service either – the Chattanooga Fire Department. I’m proud of them, as well.

During this administration, we have constructed 3 new fire stations and we have property and plans for 3 more. We are committed to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design in all that we do and we are both replacing and relocating old, outdated facilities and extending new operations into high growth areas. We have replaced all of our Squad/Pumpers used for a wide range of emergencies, replaced a large Quint for downtown and purchased three tankers to replace some pieces of equipment that dated back to the late 1950’s.

Really – only 60 years old – was that necessary?

Technology has also come to the fire department. We have upgraded all computers in the fire stations and fire inspectors have gone wireless – making it possible for them to do their jobs more efficiently without having to return to the office for research.

I’m proud to report that while other cities were cutting back, laying-off firefighters and closing fire halls, just like in the police department, we continued to hire, train, equip and deploy our fire services. We have 29 more firefighters today than when this administration took office.

There have been promotions as well as some veterans stepped up to new levels of authority and responsibility. One in particular made me proud – it should make us all proud – but having been around back when the first female firefighters were employed by the city many years ago, (and what a controversy that was) I’m happy to have been Mayor when the department named its first female chief. Battalion Chief Lesley Morgan. In case you are wondering, she got it the old fashioned way.

She earned it through diligent work, bachelors and masters degrees and excellent performance on departmental evaluations. We are proud of you, Chief Morgan. Please stand and be recognized.

### **Technology:**

Now, let's talk briefly about the larger subject of technology and this new digital age in which we find ourselves. It is difficult for me to believe – except that I know it's true – that this is the first smart phone and web based administration in the city's history. I can remember when we had the first fax machine at City Hall – it was back in the 1980's and it was in our office at public works. But now management is all about digital and fiber optics and paperless – and the city has been keeping up.

Employing almost 300 switches and routers, the city's network infrastructure has grown to include 92 physical locations, providing support for over 3,500 devices – a figure that does not include telephones, all of which now employ “voice over internet protocol” technology. I must admit that I do not speak “geek” as our highly qualified staff will attest, but I do enjoy saying things like “voice over internet protocol” – it makes me feel smart.

Perhaps the most significant addition to the City's infrastructure is the city-wide wireless mesh network, a blanket of wireless access covering much of Chattanooga's geographic area. Made up of approximately 600 wireless access points the capabilities of this one project has been leveraged in multiple applications including projects for Public Works, the public safety “blue” services, and traffic management – meaning signals and such.

That most important medium for public access and transparency – the city's web site has undergone a significant redesign and upgrade during the terms of this administration. Now, the site offers interactive mapping, improved search capabilities, and enhanced navigation structure, integration with Google products, and social network connections. The site has been a key tool in providing not only information – such as City Council meeting agendas and minutes – but as a method of linking the citizen to City government.

Recently, I was in the “Google Cities” – Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri. I was invited out by their mayors because they are now seeking to become laced with fiber optics and enjoy the same digital capabilities that already exist in Chattanooga. They gave me a copy of their playbook and one item that they hope to achieve is a “wireless mesh network”. What a great idea. The point is that we are ahead of the Google Cities and I told those mayors – great mayors – that we wish them the best. Their partner, Google is a great creative company and I promised that whatever new innovations they might come up with – we will shamelessly steal.

Who would have ever thought that this old industrial city – previously tired, rusty and declining - could suddenly become “cool” and ahead of the pack – but here we are. And we plan to stay ahead of the pack.

**Another subject – back to 2005. Whatever happened to that homeless campus?**

In my inaugural remarks in 2005 I spoke of three elements important to the city’s future: Change, Creativity and Compassion....and looking back now, we have addressed all those elements in the 8 years since. But let’s go back for a moment to that third element: Compassion. We described how during our campaign at our headquarters near the Community Kitchen we had come face to face with poverty - with homeless people attempting to live in the cold, unused parts of the drafty old warehouse building that we were temporarily occupying. That led to a call to citizens of all faiths to come together and help.

Well, you might ask, how is that going?

If you haven’t been there lately, just drive down 11<sup>th</sup> Street and see. With our help and more private funding from our generous community, the Community Kitchen was able to expand and renovate and finally offer a day center, a respite care facility and other services that they had talked about for years – but had been unable to provide. We also purchased sleeping mats so that they could serve as an emergency shelter. With our help, Family Promise – a nonprofit formerly known as the Interfaith Homeless Network and supported by more than 50 Christian and Jewish Congregations – was able to build a new facility to undertake their exceptional work with homeless families – principally mothers and children. In

addition, Hamilton County was able to upgrade their homeless health care facilities and a new \$3 million building is now under construction financed by a federal grant.

The public service complex – now named for our late Mayor Gene Roberts who had a special heart for the homeless and was proud of the fact that the surrounding neighborhood called “Onion Bottom” was his childhood home – also includes a center for regional transit operations and a large complex for downtown operations by the Chattanooga Police Department.

Now let me say a few words about the department where I started my career as an elected official more than 25 years ago:

### **Public Works**

Not to take anything away from any other function of city government, but I know of no department that has handled more difficult and diverse tasks over the last 8 years than Public Works. They manage the built environment and the public infrastructure of the city and that has been in a state of constant change.

Remember, this is the department that went out there with their county counterparts and began to clear and grade the industrial site at Enterprise South before Volkswagen had made a decision to come to Chattanooga. Then, they were charged with overseeing the development from earth moving to engineering to permitting and inspection of structures and equipment installation. It seemed at times that the employees of public works were wearing several hats, attempting to hold several full time jobs and somehow holding it all together. They were the general managers of the most significant industrial project in Chattanooga’s history. Only a few of us know how difficult the task was and how diligently they met the challenge.

In addition to that, they were involved in the process of taking another part of our regional infrastructure to the next level.

In my 2009 inaugural remarks, I called for the creation of a regional water and sewer authority – like our Electric Power Board – with such reach and responsibility to offer essential water services effectively and efficiently to a growing region. With the tireless efforts of our public works engineers and

professionals we secured a new state water quality permit dealing with stormwater and water quality. Further, we successfully negotiated a consent decree with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Justice, the Tennessee Dept. of Environment and Conservation and the nonprofit Clean Water Network dealing with our sewer system. The final stage in this process is the creation of the new authority which has just occurred. Papers were filed just a few days ago and the new authority board had its organizational meeting March 7.

There have been other accomplishments involving such diverse functions as the scientific management of street pavement, to the collection of solid waste and recyclables to computerized permitting. I asked them to give me a list of their principal street and bridge projects and they gave me pages and pages. This department has been very busy.

**Finally, it all comes down to money.**

.... And I must admit that I was both offended and amused when I heard some candidates talking about the city's financial condition – especially those suggesting that the city was in financial distress. The true story is right there on our web site – freely and publicly available.

Let me put this simply and underscore it: The city is in excellent financial condition.

The respected rating agency, “Standard and Poor’s”, stated flatly: “Chattanooga’s financial performance is strong”.

In the depths of the recent “Great Recession”, Chattanooga’s bond rating was raised from “AA” to “AA+”. Remember this was happening when the same financial industry was downgrading the bond rating for the United States.

Chattanooga always operates with a balanced budget and we have ended our recent fiscal years with funding surpluses – adding to our unreserved fund balance – or the so-called “Rainy Day Fund”.

The city is in excellent financial condition.

**Points of Pride**

Finally, looking back on the last 8 years, I am asked what are we most proud of? Here is my list:

1. EPB's Gigabit fiber optic system and the wireless mesh it supports – putting us ahead of those Google cities
2. Volkswagen (of course) and Chattanooga's new Sister City: Wolfsburg, Germany
3. The McKamey Animal Care and Adoption Center – another example of compassion
4. The City WellAdvantage Center – proving that investing in the health and wellness of your employees actually saves money – and lives!
5. The Traffic Cameras – and the driver training classes funded by the fines. (We did it right in Chattanooga. We tamed the deadly Hixson Pike S-curves and we use funds from those breaking law to teach our young people how to avoid breaking the law – over 1500 students, so far.)
6. The Moccasin Bend Clean Water Authority – promising to do for regional water and sewer what the Electric Power Board does for electrical and digital services
7. The Gene Roberts Public Service Center
8. Settling the half-century old City/County sales tax debate
9. Public Art – those beautiful stained glass windows in City Hall, the lovely if scantily clad “Four Seasons” at the Market Street Bridge, Rail Wave down at the Aquarium, the Main Terrain Art Park and – yes – I love the Blue Rhino in Coolidge Park – and more...I love and defend public art.

And here is the icing on the cake – that makes me most proud:

10. Chattanooga is cool and green and growing – No longer dingy and declining, Chattanooga has status as a fast-advancing, youth-attracting, “cool” city. Nothing could be finer

And so, standing here looking back across that long rocky road, let me return to those inaugural remarks of 2005. I made a point then of recognizing Mayor Robert Kirk Walker. Mayor Walker, who served for four years, courageously saved the city by reaching out and annexing enough people and territory to ensure that Chattanooga could grow and become the vibrant city that it is today.

(Annexation – what a concept.) Without Mayor Walker’s vision, Chattanooga would not have been able to achieve its potential. He was with us at the inauguration in 2005 but has since passed away.

As Missy Crutchfield knows, I made a promise to Mayor Walker that I would finish the job of renovating this theater and making it handicap accessible. As many will remember, Mayor Walker suffered a stroke later in life and developed a real appreciation for those who need special facilities and an elevator. So Missy promised me that we would have it open for this occasion and here we are – updated, upgraded and fully ADA compliant. This is the first event. Accordingly, I think it is fitting that we resolve here and now to name this auditorium:

### **The Robert Kirk Walker Community Theater**

What do you think? (hopefully, they will applaud)

...and thank you Missy for a job well done.

So, here we are at the conclusion of the journey. We started with a plan, and we worked the plan.

We started fast, persevered through the hard times and finished strong.

Looking forward to the incoming administration, it can be truthfully said in those words of John Kennedy: “The torch is passed to a new generation.” ...and we expect new energy, new ideas and new enthusiasm.

I just want to thank all those – too numerous to mention and many too close for me to name without becoming emotional – those who traveled with us on this great adventure. What a fantastic experience. We have definitely left the city better than we found it.

Yes, Mr. Mayor-elect and the incoming new City Council, the state of the city is good. In fact, it is very, very good.

I cannot overstate the responsibility as we place this city that we love – this “Most Transformed City in America” – into your hands. It is now up to you.

We look forward to where you might take us.

May God continue to bless this City of Chattanooga...