

State of the City: 2017

Mayor Kabat's State of the City Address 2017

La Crosse February 9, 2017

Following is the text of Mayor Tim Kabat's State of the City address, as prepared for delivery:

As we all know, La Crosse is a special place and has been that way since the beginning, when native people lived here, enjoying the bounty of our natural resources, our bluffs, rivers and forests. The city of La Crosse was founded more than 150 years ago – and like the rest of our country – was a place of immigrants and refugees. With a few exceptions of our native families today, we are ALL children of immigrants and refugees.

Cities – like La Crosse – are the economic, educational and cultural engines of the regions and states where they are located. If state and national leaders want to create jobs and a better country, my advice to them is to reach out and work with us – not threaten to take away our funding.

As we reflect on 2016 – it was a tremendously successful year for La Crosse's neighborhoods and economic development. We are on a roll like few other times in recent memory.

The main reasons for this success are La Crosse's people – who work hard and give back to their community in so many ways, and especially our devoted employees – who provide caring and committed customer service through creativity, patience and professionalism each and every day. They provide the services that sometimes are taken for granted, until we think about the importance of clean air and clean water, safe neighborhoods, libraries, parks and bustling commercial areas.

Our comprehensive neighborhood revitalization program includes:

- Six neighborhood police officers, who, along with our other officers, have improved our crime rate and have made our community safe and vibrant
- Second to none fire-fighting and emergency medical response and additional code enforcement, increasing compliance with our housing and property codes – while reducing the time it takes to achieve those fixes
- Neighborhood-driven capital investments like new street lighting, sidewalks and flashing pedestrian safety lights
- Park improvements including a new playground at Cameron Park and a new park honoring George Coleman Poage – one of La Crosse's true pioneers
- We established a new relief program to help our residents remove more properties from the floodplain and
- Continued our downtown campus MTU circulator – without raising fares

Our housing and economic development continues its incredible momentum, with more than \$45 million in new tax base and a three year average for building permits in the city at over \$480 million per year.

Highlights include the transformation of the former Bakalars Sausage factory into affordable housing – including six units set aside for homeless individuals and families.

We provided vacant lots and support for the first two La Crosse Promise homes and we met our audacious goal of finding permanent housing for all of our homeless veterans – becoming the first community in Wisconsin to achieve functional zero for homeless vets.

Our public and private partners completed millions of dollars in new housing, retail, commercial and industrial projects all over the city. And we continue striving for ways to grow our airport and our river services to benefit our economy and our ecology.

We are focusing on customer service in city hall, by staffing a new courtesy and information desk in the lobby and we have started a new one stop shop phone number 789-CITY for residents to call if they are not sure which department to contact.

We are in midst of negotiations with the Town of Shelby on a cooperative boundary agreement. This agreement will establish a more common-sense boundary, provide incentives for future development, and establish a new revenue sharing model to help pay for regional services. This agreement could set the stage for more – including joint libraries, recreation and emergency services.

As an organization, we continue our advance to energy efficiency and reducing our carbon footprint, including significant reductions from our 2007 base year in how we use fossil fuels. Our reductions in electricity, natural gas, diesel fuel, gasoline and paper saves the city more than \$250,000 annually and keeps over seven million pounds of carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

We are now planning for a \$42 million renovation and expansion of the La Crosse Center – highlighted by a total remake of the inside, a new entrance and an expansion toward the mighty Mississippi River.

We started a new summer youth employment program last year that provided jobs to twelve of our area high school students to get them experience, learning and leadership development, while they worked to improve our parks and trails and completed home improvement projects in our core neighborhoods.

Our human rights commission continued their work to help make our city more welcoming.

We know that the work of our human rights commission is absolutely critical to our city, to our workforce and to our character as a community. The recently released results of a 2016 survey for the U.S. conference of mayors highlight that poverty and inclusion are the two greatest concerns for mayors nationwide, regardless of red state–blue state differences.

For 2017 we will build upon all of those successes and do more, including doubling the miles of streets we repave – and increasing our fixes of those annoying pot holes.

We will step up our efforts and work with our partners to better address our community's mental health and substance abuse challenges. Recent reporting paints a bleak picture, with arrests in La Crosse for heroin up more than 1,200% since 2010 and arrests for meth up more than 1,400% during the same time. We need bold leadership and strong partnerships to address these challenges head on.

We will also tackle the additional regional challenges of county-wide affordable housing, transportation and the true costs of regional services.

2017 looks so promising if we can continue building on this momentum. Our citizens expect results – without the partisan bickering, tweets and the name calling we see at the state and national levels. Local officials like us take the responsibility for delivering results seriously and we will continue working together, with compassion and respect for all people.

Thank you and God bless.

--Mayor Tim Kabat
February 9, 2017