

State of the City of La Crosse: 2019

Mayor Kabat's State of the City Address 2019

La Crosse January 10, 2019

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

Good evening. I have the honor of delivering another state of the city of La Crosse address – reviewing our past year's accomplishments, as well as looking forward to 2019. This tradition goes back decades and I know each mayor has relished the opportunity to reflect on our city's growth and development.

By nearly all measures, 2018 was another fantastic year for the city of La Crosse and our community.

This performance – amid yet another national government shut down and on the heels of a hyper-partisan lame duck session in Madison, shows that the local level of government is working and providing service to thousands of citizens each day.

We set the example for getting things done.

We do face complex and difficult challenges in providing these services. At the local level we must balance our budget while facing cost increases. We have state imposed limits in how we fund operations and few options other than shared revenue and the local property tax.

Few of us relish paying property taxes. However, these taxes fund an incredible quality of life here in La Crosse.

In 2018 we measured that excellence through:

- Our progressive neighborhood program, which added two more police resource officers.
- We reached a momentous agreement with Gundersen Tri-State Ambulance to facilitate advanced life support by our on-scene firefighter paramedics, improving the health and safety of our residents and visitors.
- We completed a re-do of the Copeland Park splash pad, remade Leuth Park with new pump track and held a ground breaking for the all-abilities playground at Trane Park.
- We also established a new pop-up library program to deliver learning opportunities to all of our neighborhoods.
- We set up a new MTU circulator route that connects residents to downtown, health care and grocery shopping.
- And most importantly, we fixed and maintained water and sewer infrastructure and repaved six miles of city streets including stretches of Cass, Losey Boulevard, and Avon.

We gauge that quality of life through our community development and improvement efforts:

- Ground was broken on the Garden Terrace affordable housing and community center project
- A new northside façade grant program was started – which will see nine businesses make improvements to their buildings.
- We also saw expansions by Dura-tech and Kwik Trip, adding jobs and tax base. Total city-wide investment resulted in net new construction of more than \$53.5 million last year.
- We hosted public sessions about funding our infrastructure.
- And we facilitated three weeks of early voting this past election – all without a hitch and with record turnout. Some wards saw a 100% and more voter turnout!

We accomplished this and more while still lowering our property tax rate. The \$12.04 tax rate is the lowest it's been since 2007.

In their book, *The New Localism*, authors Bruce Katz and Jeremy Nowak describe a problem-solving practice and governing philosophy that is non-partisan, pragmatic and increasingly focused on linking local communities to the growth sectors of the global economy in ways that are both inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

During 2018, La Crosse moved forward on both fronts.

- In October we celebrated Indigenous Peoples Day, demonstrating both inclusiveness and a hope for better relationships.
- We launched the mayor's home energy challenge, which provides incentives to enhance our housing stock while reducing our carbon footprint.
- We continued progress on reducing our carbon footprint as an organization – now more than 30% less than it was in 2007.
- We completed habitat restoration efforts in our blufflands and re-opened a new "flow" trail in Hixon Forest, led by our wonderful volunteers and non-profits.

In 2019 we are planning for many additional positive developments.

- We will break ground on a substantial renovation and expansion to the La Crosse Center, which will drive regional tourism.
- We hope to finalize our transformative cooperative boundary agreement with the Town of Shelby.
- We will see ground broken for new homes at the Naval Reserve site – much to Council Member Medinger's delight.
- In 2019 we will begin improvements to three critical storm water lift stations courtesy of a federal grant.

- And re-do seven miles of city streets including sections of Losey Boulevard, Gillette Street and the three bridges over the CP Rail tracks.
- We will start replacing our transit fleet – with four new buses on schedule for 2019, a total of ten within the next few years – including two electric buses and charging stations, furthering our carbon reduction goals.
- Our airport will realize new service to Detroit beginning in March of this year, which expands opportunities for travel to and from La Crosse.
- We will continue our plans and work on advancing a new historic and cultural museum.
- And make progress on developing much needed new fire stations.
- We will also make long overdue investments in our senior centers.

The city of La Crosse will continue our pragmatic problem-solving and improve customer service and transparency with technology upgrades to our financial systems. We will continue tackling challenges – large and small.

From addressing our leaf pick-up program, which has been negatively impacted by the focus on repaving more miles of streets, to the significant health issues and well-being of our citizens.

We will continue our work with other units of government, civic and non-profit groups, businesses and our health care institutions to address our opioid crisis, mental health problems, and help find permanent housing and case management for our homeless citizens.

Thankfully and because of our partnerships and spirit of collaboration, government still works well at the local level. We take our responsibilities for service and La Crosse's quality of life very seriously and don't back down from the difficulties that confront us.

After all, how can we not succeed? Our community is filled with great, giving people who invest and volunteer and participate. There are so many who go about their day and do awesome things to benefit our people and our city – many times behind the scenes.

And here's to our employees – we have an incredible staff filled with compassionate, creative professionals who make our city go. We would not be on this road to success without their efforts.

Here's to a happy, healthy and prosperous 2019!

Thank you and God bless.

--Mayor Tim Kabat