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FEBRUARY 24, 2014

# 2014 State of the City Address

## *Mayor Michael Gillette*

### **Introduction**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is my distinct honor and great privilege this evening to welcome you to the 2014 State of the City Address and to report to you that the state of this great City is strong. We have had a fantastic year since I last addressed you at this event, and I am proud to say that we are consistently moving forward in positive directions because of the diligent effort, collegial teamwork, and sincere dedication of our strong and very professional City Staff, our well run conscientious volunteer boards and commissions, and, most importantly, because of the caring, generous and engaged residents and businesses of Lynchburg. Over the past year, City Council has carefully tended to the routine business of running this City. But, even in the face of real challenges that are left before us, and because of the shared vision of all of our citizens, we have also been able to cast an eye forward and to consider Lynchburg's aspirational goals. We have made progress on specific projects like Heritage High School, and we have moved forward with strategic visioning that will equip us to manage and respond productively to whatever unforeseen difficulties come our way.

Historically, the State of the City Address has been a time to celebrate and to share some of the accomplishments of the previous year, and in keeping with tradition, we will do some of that tonight. However, I also want to spend a significant portion of our time together by casting our vision toward the future. In order to know where we want to go tomorrow, we have to know where we were yesterday. We also need to take stock of our resources and inventory our strengths so we can plan to utilize our talents and abilities to the utmost effect. So, to start us off, I've asked Vice Mayor Johnson to share with you some of the many accomplishments of 2013. We will then recognize a few very deserving citizens who have already assisted in the task of propelling us forward. Finally, I will conclude by sharing some thoughts about how I think we can collectively prepare for our common future. Then... we will eat! But first, please join me in welcoming back to the podium our Vice Mayor Ceasor Johnson.

## *Vice Mayor Ceasor Johnson*

Thank you Mayor Gillette. The Mayor spoke of the citizens whom we will recognize tonight for their volunteer service to this community. They will be honored more formally a little later this evening, but I want to ask them to stand now and be recognized. Join me in welcoming Carolyn Baker, Cynthia Coles, Claudette Haskins, Ken Garren, Andy Sale, and the representatives of the Links Intercultural Leadership Institute. Congratulations and thank you for your service.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we were digging out from under a record snowfall. I want to publicly thank the men and women who serve the citizens of Lynchburg everyday with dedication and commitment, especially the employees in

Public Works who worked many long hours to ensure that the rest of us could go about our daily routines with as little interruption as possible. Snow removal is difficult and potentially dangerous work. We thank all of you who worked so diligently, and I want you to know that we appreciate your service.

I am, however, becoming just a little worried about the timing of tonight's event. Last year we were talking about the community's response to a massive wind storm. This year it's a record breaking snowfall. I'm a little concerned about what type of chaotic weather we have to look forward to next year.

Lynchburg is a great place to live, work, and play. How do we know? Because you told us so. In the 2013 Citizens Survey, over 75 % of you said that you experienced a good quality of life in the City of Lynchburg and believed the City was a good place to live. Most of you said you would recommend this community to others looking for a place to live. And that is good news.

In preparation for tonight, every City department was asked for a list of accomplishments from last year. We wanted to share this information with all of you. I will tell you that the list was long and impressive, and I wish I could share the entire list with you tonight, but unfortunately time does not allow me to do so. I believe you would be as impressed and as proud as we were to read how this City is continuing to move forward.

One clear indication that this community is pressing forward is from last year's decision by the bond rating agency, Standard and Poor's to affirm our bond rating of AA+ , one of the highest ratings a City the size of Lynchburg can achieve. According to the firm's report, the City of Lynchburg's financial outlook is stable due to several factors including the stability of the City's economy, its budgetary flexibility and performance, and the City's strong financial management and practices. I want to thank our City Manager Kim Payne, Deputy City Manager Bonnie Svrcek and Financial Services Director Donna Witt for providing valuable guidance to City Council in our decision making.

In order for a community to be strong, it must have a growing economy. Last year, Lynchburg companies and business people invested over \$160 million dollars in new capital, created over 224 new jobs and by expanding their operations, maintained over 3,000 existing positions. A net total of 31 new businesses were created in 2013. This number included small locally owned businesses like Pastiche and Cao Chocolates in Downtown Lynchburg, nationally known businesses like Fresh Market in the Old Forest Road area and internationally known businesses like Porter's Fabrications in the Candler's Mountain Road area. Our thanks to the business community, the Office of Economic Development and the Economic Development Authority for working together and for their continuing efforts to ensure that we maintain a strong economy so that our residents may be gainfully employed and continue to thrive.

We cannot have a growing economic environment without a strong foundation. Last year, the infrastructure and aesthetic work for the second phase of Fifth Street was finally completed as was the intersection of Park and Fort Avenues. In an effort to ensure smart growth on the east side of our City, my colleagues on City Council and I joined the Planning

Commission on adopting the Odd Fellows Road/Campbell Avenue Plan to provide a vision and blueprint for future growth and development of important residential and employment.

Construction of new living spaces in downtown continues to grow with more than 550 residential units, and the number of downtown businesses has increased by more than 205% in the past ten years.

Thanks to the great work of our Director of Water Resources Tim Mitchell and his staff, we are hoping to be able to have a revised CSO Plan approved through DEQ that will save \$220 million in taxpayers' money and shave decades off of the program. And all of that is good news.

Vibrant neighborhoods are important to the health of a community. A critical part of achieving that vibrancy is safety. Over 90% of you who responded to the same Citizen Survey I referenced earlier told us that you feel safe in your neighborhoods. That is information that we take very seriously. We know that people take safety into account when making decisions about where to live, work, and play.

Our Fire Department just learned that it was among only 650 of 50,000 other Fire Departments in the country with a Class 2 rating. This was made possible through the joint efforts of the Fire Department, Water Resources and Emergency Communications—all working together to be able to provide you with the best fire protection possible. Perhaps some of you remember reading about one of our brave firefighters, Travis Guthrie, who rescued a family of six when he spotted their house on fire. As it turned out, he was traveling on the street so he could learn the City and become more familiar with his surroundings. He said it was a lesson he had learned from a fellow firefighter and it was certainly a lesson well learned. We are honored to have Firefighter Guthrie with us tonight. Travis, please stand. Thank you for your service to this community and we are proud to have you serve in the Lynchburg Fire Department.

According to our Police Department, we now have 58 active neighborhood watches, the largest number in Lynchburg's history. I thank you for being engaged members of this community and for working with our Police Department to ensure your neighborhood is safe and healthy. We know that not all of our neighborhoods are as engaged, and some of our residents don't feel the same level of safety. I want to reach out to you and encourage you to work with us to identify the issues of concern and together we can find solutions.

Like any other city, we have challenges to overcome. But we have demonstrated time and again a willingness to come together to find solutions to our problems and to work together to ensure that all of our residents—and let me stress—*all of our residents* area able to enjoy everything that this city has to offer.

As my time comes to an end at the podium tonight, I thank you for your attention, and I thank you for allowing me to serve you on City Council. It is a responsibility I don't take lightly. Theodore Roosevelt said, "This country will not be a good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a good place for all of us to live in." But we can't do it alone; government can do little alone. We need everyone, all of you, working with us, shoulder to shoulder in order to make a

difference. In the spirit of that teamwork, I would now like to call Mayor Gillette back to the podium to honor some very special guests who are here with us tonight—Mayor Gillette.

### *Mayor Gillette*

Just a few moments ago the Vice Mayor briefly introduced a small representative set of citizens whom we will recognize tonight for their volunteer service to this community. These individuals have given of themselves thoroughly. They have given their time, their effort, their talent and their caring. Vice Mayor Johnson and I would like to take some time to honor these individuals now with The Mayor's Award of Excellence and the Vice Mayor's Award of Excellence. I now turn the floor over to Council Member Turner Perrow who will introduce our first honoree. After Council Member Perrow's brief introduction, please watch the television monitors for more information about the award recipient, and we will continue down the Council Member line until all of our deserving honorees have been recognized.

## **AWARD CEREMONY**

### *Mayor Gillette*

Please join me one more time in showing our appreciation to all of tonight's honorees!

The individuals whom we have chosen to honor this evening each deserve our most sincere appreciation. But they are just a representative sample of the many individuals in our midst who work every day to make Lynchburg a great place to live, work and play. As the Vice Mayor shared with you before, our list of accomplishments for 2013 is a long and impressive. This community has been able to accomplish some amazing things this past year through hard work and dedication, and I applaud everyone for their effort.

When I look back over the past year and contemplate our present, I see a year of dynamic effort and exciting work, but I also see a year of relatively little controversy or contention. We have moved forward on exciting developments. I believe that our most notable accomplishment over the past year is the completion of plans and the soon to be complete bidding process to get Heritage High School underway. This is a phenomenal milestone in our City's history, and we should all be proud. We should also rejoice in the fact that by combining different points of view on Council and by working together productively as a team containing diverse opinions, we have not only reiterated our commitment to our children's educational future and our City's workforce development, but we have done it in a fiscally responsible way that will allow us to complete an approximately \$80 million project without any recourse to a tax increase! We have not all agreed on all points at all times, but by working together we have been successful in ushering forward a high quality project in a responsible way. And I want to publicly say tonight, before this audience of Lynchburg Citizens, that I do not believe that we would have been successful in achieving this victory for our City were it not for the individual input and participation of every single member of City Council.

But we have done more than plan for a new high school. I am confident that every one of you listening tonight is thrilled to finally be driving on streets that are more open and more smooth than they have been for a decade. There were times, especially during the dark days of street closures on Fifth St. and on Kemper St., when even I began to wonder where we were headed. I remember going into Kim Payne's office on numerous occasions just to "Really?". And I know that he must have exercised great personal control to stay calm and remind me that "the next generation will thank us". Well, it hasn't taken until the next generation. It did take time, but because of the talent and hard work ethic of our phenomenal City staff, we can know all see the light at the end of the tunnel. More importantly, we can all see that sometimes it takes vision to peer through the fog, to keep our focus on the future, and to realize our success. Our street improvements are a wonderful testament to the expertise of our City staff which was able to see the diamond while it was still rough, and which we can now begin to see take shape as it is polished. Our new street infrastructure will not only be attractive and safe, but it will support continued private sector economic growth.

This past weekend my wife Jodi and I engaged in an activity that has become an annual tradition for Lynchburg. We attended the Loft Tour, which, if you don't already know, is a fund raising event for the Free Clinic that features tours of newly developed residential units in the Central Business District. For some reason, perhaps because I was still considering what to put in this speech tonight, the tour was especially pleasurable. I saw how private interests could coordinate with public infrastructure to create useful, valuable and attractive adaptive re-use of previously dilapidated buildings. I was thrilled to see that City government could create an environment in which the private sector could thrive, and that people of all ages would want to live. But I was also cognizant of why the event was taking place. As wonderful a showcase as this tour was for private development, it was done to raise money for a local non-profit. Over the past year, we have seen great accomplishments from many of our non-profits. Rush Homes is building living units for low-to-moderate level income citizens. The Humane Society has broken ground on a new facility off of Graves Mill Road. Elizabeth's Early Learning Center has achieved elevated accreditation and Miriam's House has introduced a rapid-rehousing program for homeless woman and their families. These are just a few examples of the myriad non-profits that work for the betterment of our City.

And to give you an additional sample of how all of these disparate actors can come together to cooperate for the common good, let us consider the new children's reading room at the Midtown Branch of the Lynchburg Public Library, for which we will break ground in just a couple of weeks. Liberty University donated the land, the City of Lynchburg managed the project, St. John's Episcopal Church raised significant funds, the Greater Lynchburg Community Trust made a generous donation and an individual citizen stepped forward to offer a gift of over \$100,000.00 to close a funding gap. Please join me now in thanking all of these groups and in giving a standing ovation to a woman who has dedicated her life to the library system and to all that it represents: Lynn Dodge.

I have now provided you with several examples of success, each involving different players. Our City Council has been working efficiently, our City staff members have remained dedicated, our private industry has thrived, our local non-

profits have remained tireless, and our individual citizens have been generous. But efficiency in all of these areas can be increased if we recognize opportunities for synergy. And so, over the past year, Lynchburg has engaged in what I believe is the most important project of all- the development of coordinated strategic thinking. I won't call this a strategic plan, because that could connote, for some, a specific set of inflexible action items. Rather, what we have developed is a better understanding of our overarching mission, a long range vision of where we want to be, and a set of categories to measure success.

You have heard us say several times tonight that Lynchburg is a great place to live, work and play! Last year, City Council unanimously adopted that phrase as Lynchburg's vision. Nothing about that statement is particularly groundbreaking. It could be the vision for any number of cities similar to ours. What does makes it unique to Lynchburg and not just empty words to put on a bumper sticker, is that we also adopted 12 focus areas that ground our strategic thinking. Some clever and artistic staff members created a graphic to illustrate this work. A copy of that graphic is in your programs and is now on the monitors here in Council Chambers. Please take a look at the Lynchburg Parthenon to see how many thousands of words can be conveyed by a single picture.

The core elements of this picture are the pillars that are supported by a variety of foundational documents, plans and philosophical commitments, and which in turn support our mission and vision. These pillars include Arts and Culture, Citizen Engagement and Social Capital, Economic Development, Healthy and Active Living, Infrastructure, Land Use, Lifelong Learning, Natural Resources, Neighborhoods, Safe Community, Social Equity and Transportation. After comprehensive work by many staff members, led by our Deputy City Manager Bonnie Svrcek, and by our IT Director Michael Goetz and our City Assessor Greg Daniels (all three of whom deserve a special round of applause), City Council endorsed these pillars as core areas of concern.

But knowing what we want is no guarantee that we will get it. If we don't know where we are going, we won't know when we have arrived. We need to both identify our goals and to measure when we have made progress in the right direction. Over the past year, we have come a long way in solidifying an understanding of our goals. This work was the natural continuation and culmination of the Sustainable Lynchburg project that we initiated several years ago. But the work is not complete. Now that we have a better understanding of what type of community we want to be, we need to develop concrete rubrics for testing the efficacy on one activity or another. With this effort, we are far better off now in our ability to consider whether or not the specific decisions that we make are justified in light of our desired outcomes, but we still do not have sufficient ability to test empirically whether or not a particular program works. Developing that sort of verifying data is what we need to do in the next year, and that is what I challenge you all as citizens to help us with in the months to come.

In mid March, the City will host three opportunities for in-person citizen engagement. We will review basic budget information in those sessions, and we will seek feedback on our strategic positioning initiative. We also provide ongoing opportunities for citizens to give their feedback at [www.LynchburgisListening.com](http://www.LynchburgisListening.com). This is a powerful and convenient

website that is designed to garner your input. And as always, each of us is available to you by telephone and by email to respond to your concerns and suggestions.

This is an exciting time to be in Lynchburg. We have weathered a financial storm with impressive resiliency. We have recently overhauled our comprehensive plan, thanks to the hard work of our planning commission and input from numerous citizens, and we are currently working on rewriting our zoning ordinance. We have advanced major infrastructure projects and we have succeeded in providing for our children's futures. Now is a time of excitement. Now is a time of energy. Now is the time to look forward. Now is the time to plan. And although it might feel like now is the time to rest and recover from challenges overcome, all the more so, now is the best time to keep up our pace and to work together for another glorious year in Lynchburg Virginia.

But in reality... now is the time to eat! Please join me in A Taste of Lynchburg.