



**MAYOR & VICE MAYOR'S SPEECHES**

## 2015 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

### VICE MAYOR CEASOR JOHNSON

Thank you for your kind applause. Tonight, I am honored that the Mayor has allowed me to come before you to speak about some of the many achievements and accomplishments of last year. Much of what I will mention tonight was made possible by the productive relationships and partnerships we have with citizens. Tonight, we will honor six citizens who believe in making a difference. Join me in thanking Joseph Berryman, Julie Doyle, Paul and Libby Fitzgerald, Phyllis Webb and Geoff Kershner. Thank you for all you do to make this a great place to live work, and play!

Each year at this time the Mayor and I sit down with staff to talk about the accomplishments we want to consider for this event and every year it becomes harder to narrow the list. But that's a good problem to have.

Since last year, we've seen several promising projects get underway and other exciting projects come to fruition. In April of last year, we joined the Lynchburg City School Board and staff to break ground for the new Heritage High School. This \$63 million dollar project has been a long time coming and affirms this community's commitment to our public schools and to our students who deserve a decent environment conducive to learning. I know we are all looking forward to the completion of this major project and to having two high school facilities of which we can be proud.

Lynchburg is well over 200 years old. Much of our infrastructure is old as well and in need of renovating and modernization. A perfect example of this is our Parks and Recreation Department on Grove Street. The department was housed in a 1911 building that began life as the Miller Elementary School and later the Janet Snead School. Parks and Recreation staff spent years in a building that, not only did not meet program needs, but tended to be cold in the winter, hot in the summer and leaky when it rained. The Miller Center underwent a massive renovation, and today, it is a beautifully restored facility in which we can all be proud. Although Kay Frazier could not be with us tonight, I want to thank her for leadership. She will be retiring later this year, but she leaves behind a great legacy in the Miller Center and in all of her efforts to create a stellar Parks and Recreation Department. Thank you, Kay.

The availability of public transportation is critical to the well-being of many of our citizens who depend on it to get to their jobs, to shop, and take care of the necessities of everyday life. Early last year, if you had ridden through the Plaza in Midtown, you saw citizens waiting for buses in good weather and bad. The Greater Lynchburg Transit Company built a new transfer center located at 800 Kemper Street in June of last year. The Center provides easy access to all patrons from rail to pedestrians and even bicyclists from the Kemper Station Trail. The new Center also provides air conditioned indoor waiting as well as outdoor waiting for all GLTC bus routes and connections. This is a great facility for the users of public transportation and for the neighborhood. The former GLTC General Manager, Karen Walton provided the leadership for this new transfer center and has

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since moved on to another position in Burlington, Vermont where I understand the average yearly snowfall is 81 inches! Although Karen did a great job we are happy to welcome the new general manager for GLTC, Josh Baker. He is with us tonight. Josh would you stand so we may welcome you.

The infrastructure projects I've mentioned are easy to see when improvements are made. But some of our most expensive projects are underground. After an extensive six-year effort to find a more cost effective way to meet water quality requirements associated with the CSO program, the City was finally able to get the Department of Environmental Quality to approve the City's CSO Long Term Control Plan Update. The new plan will enable the City to complete the CSO Program in years instead of decades and save our citizens nearly a quarter of a billion dollars (Billion with a "B"). We thank Tim Mitchell and his leadership for helping to make this happen.

We also have to admit that some have taken longer than projected but even those projects will result in having a positive impact on our community once they are completed... and Kim has promised they will be completed.

One of the reasons the Mayor can say that the state of our City is strong is because of this community's thriving businesses and industries. Our Office of Economic Development is working diligently to attract new businesses like Seven Hills Foods, to the city. This company has purchased and renovated the 100-year old former Dinner Bell Meat processing facility, investing 3 million into the facility and creating 43 new jobs.

We also are aware that while it is important to attract new businesses, it is critical that we maintain our existing ones—businesses like Azdel and others, who reinvest in their businesses, create new jobs and retain the existing ones. Our Department of Economic Development continues to successfully promote Lynchburg as the City of Opportunity (Marjette Upshur).

Our city is also strong because many of our neighborhoods are partnering with us to make improvements, address issues, and even celebrate their successes. 2014 saw the completion of the Sustainable Neighborhood Plan for Tinbridge Hill and the Growing Tinbridge Hill initiative represented an important milestone in the ongoing history and culture of that neighborhood. The Plan examined current conditions and neighborhood issues, the residents and housing, employment and other critical issues.

The best part of the plan was that there was neighborhood involvement every step of the way. I want to thank Community Development, Parks and Recreation and others for their leadership and guidance, but I want to especially thank the residents who worked along beside them to make this a reality.

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In 2014, we also played host to representatives from throughout the state for the Virginia Statewide Neighborhood Conference held at the Holiday Inn Downtown. Once again, Community Development stepped up to make this happen. Our thanks to Dana Horne, whose everyday job is Building Code Official, but who was the major force behind organizing this event and providing Lynchburg with an opportunity to share some of the great work being done in our neighborhoods. Our thanks to her and everyone who made this happen.

We have other departments as well that are building positive relationships in our neighborhoods. In just a few minutes, the Mayor will talk about our public safety departments, but I want to applaud the members of the Police Department, who, through its Badges for Baseball and Badges for Basketball youth mentoring programs, are coaching, mentoring and engaging at-risk young people in our community.

Our Fire Department continues to provide excellent service to citizens and last year received the award for EMS “Agency of the Year” for the Blue Ridge Emergency Services or BREMS region and the award for “Outstanding Contribution to EMS Health and Safety” for the department’s carbon monoxide monitoring program.

We are proud of the work being done to keep this City strong, but there is no avoiding the fact that not all of our citizens are experiencing the American dream. Over 24% of our citizens live in poverty which affects the health and well-being of our citizens and neighborhoods, as well as our economy. Poverty is an exceptionally complicated issue, and trying to discover its causes is equally complicated.

Last year, it became clear that one issue related to poverty is the lack of affordable housing not only in Lynchburg but in the entire Central Virginia region. When the owners of the Virginian Apartments decided to close, it became necessary to relocate the apartment’s low to moderate income residents.

Were it not for the collaborative efforts of the Department of Human Services and our partners like the Lynchburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority and others, it would have been impossible to find these citizens new homes that were affordable and safe. We thank Housing Authority Director Dawn Fagan and Human Services Director Tamara Rosser for their leadership.

Other organizations such as the Lynchburg Community Action Group, Lynchburg Neighborhood Development Foundation and Rush Homes are trying to fill the gap but the need is still so great. Rush Homes is an organization that provides affordable and accessible rental housing opportunities to people with disabilities and low incomes in the greater Lynchburg region, and their Armstrong Place Apartments is a wonderful example of an adaptive reuse project. They have taken the former all-black Armstrong Elementary School that has sat idle for many years and turned it into apartments.

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We are also hoping that last year's rewrite of the Comprehensive Plan and the upcoming rewrite of the Zoning Ordinances will encourage the construction of infill housing in older neighborhoods. (Thank the Planning Commission and the Community Development Department of Planning - Kent White for their leadership in this massive task.) But housing is just one piece of the puzzle. Last year, over 300 people from all walks of life and professions came together to learn about a model to address poverty called Bridges out of Poverty. From that workshop many non-profit organizations, government and religious entities and others have come together to continue the dialogue and seek ways to address this critical issue. We know that jobs that pay a living wage, an education, technical and workforce training are all pieces of the puzzle. It is my hope that in the coming months, we can continue the dialogue and then more importantly come together as a community to take action and address poverty in this community.

This year, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War. We also celebrate the 50th anniversary of the march across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Both events were pivotal points in our nation's history. It was signal of turmoil and the fight for freedom. But it was also the coming together of different people from different backgrounds coming together for a common goal. This year, I celebrate my 50th birthday and I hope 2015 will be a year in which we are willing to do the work, to ask the hard questions, to make the brave decisions and to work together to address poverty in our community. I say it often because it's true, 'We are only as good as our weakest link and we cannot afford to leave anyone behind.' We are one, and together we can make a difference. Thank you.

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### MAYOR MICHAEL GILLETTE

As you have heard from our Vice Mayor already this evening, the list of our 2014 accomplishments is long and impressive. There is no doubt that Lynchburg continues to be vital and vibrant, and that we serve as a social and economic engine not only within the City limits, but also for the entire region. We have much of which we can be proud, and we have many to whom we owe great debts of gratitude for their wise and energetic service to Lynchburg and her citizens. It is always dangerous to single out specific individuals or groups for special recognition, as it invariably leaves other equally deserving honorees without mention. Still, I feel that it is very important at this moment to reflect back on one major accidental event that took place during the past year.

On April 30th, 2014, a CSX train derailed while passing through downtown Lynchburg. Tens of thousands of gallons of flammable oil spilled from the wreck, caught fire, and sent up a giant plume of smoke and flames. The accident took place just across the plaza from The Depot Grill which was filled with patrons at the time. Had the train cars tilted right instead of left, and rolled toward the restaurant instead of down the hill into the James River, there is no doubt that numerous fatalities would have resulted. Even given the good fortune of the direction of the spill, oil remained in many of the tankers and the risk of explosion was high.

Our first responders jumped into action immediately, and our public safety apparatus proved more than up to the task of protecting our lives and our well-being. Without the excellent training, high quality work, and calm leadership in the face of a dangerous challenge provided by our emergency response staff, we surely would not have survived this event so relatively unscathed. Please join me now in giving a special round of applause to our Fire Chief Brad Ferguson, our Police Chief Parks Snead and the then Director of Emergency Services who has now retired Bill Aldrich.

In considering the derailment and its aftermath, I can't help but wonder what could have happened had Lynchburg lacked such a well equipped, well trained, and well staffed public safety system. How would our citizens have felt if we were unprepared, under-prepared, or unresponsive? The answer to this question is important, because it helps us to understand the proper role of government and the standard by which we should measure all of our municipal effort.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson led a committee that was charged with producing The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America. In the preamble to that document, Mr. Jefferson wrote "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

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Mr. Jefferson's writings are impressive indeed, and they rightfully have gone down in history as some of the most influential words ever committed to paper. But as important as the ideas outlined in the Preamble to the Declaration of Independence are, they are hardly original. These concepts fit into a long history of political philosophy that dated back two hundred years prior to 1776, including important intellectual figures such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These philosophers convincingly argued that although people are born free and equal, they must also recognize that there are many worthwhile achievements that depend upon human cooperation, and which could never be attained without collective effort. In order to avoid a life that is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short," in order to avoid living in a state of nature which akin to a state of war, people must band together in communities and submit to common laws. And that is why Thomas Jefferson did not stop after simply listing the rights of citizens. He went on to state explicitly that governments should be instituted to support those rights.

Taken together, these philosophers and statesmen have eloquently communicated the guiding principles of American Democracy. People are free and equal. They have a right to life, liberty, possessions, and the pursuit of happiness, and government is the proper instrument by which they guarantee attainment of those cherished goals that individuals cannot secure without common cooperation.

In Lynchburg, we have adherents to every political philosophy under the sun—some to the left, some to the right, and many in the middle. Some of us stress individual liberty while others value collective effort. Some, on the far right, have argued that government should be comprised only of a minimalist state. They argue that we should tax less, spend less, build less, and that we should do so in the name of preserving individual liberty. Some, on the far left, behave as if the collective good outweighs individual freedom and that the only viable instrument for achieving common advancement is strong centralized governmental regulation and control.

Both have a point; but both points have also been over-stated, because as a people, unified by our commitment to our democratic tradition, I believe that we can all agree that while it is unethical for the government to tax its citizens beyond what is necessary, there are also many things that we cannot do as separate individuals, and that we can only accomplish as a community—as a Commonwealth. If we do not submit to laws, we will not be safe; if we do not uphold the rights of others, we will feel disrespected; and if we do not pay taxes, we will all be impoverished. Government should be small enough to leave room for the individual, but it should be large enough to support communitarian success. Like Goldilocks, we don't want porridge that is too hot or too cold. We want a government that just right. And I believe that we have that right here in Lynchburg.

So consider, where would we have been on April 30, 2014 if not for the Fire Department, Police Department and Emergency Services Department that are paid for with our tax dollars? How would

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we live today if not for the many staff people who filter our water, carry off our waste, and tend to our roads and bridges -- all paid for with our tax dollars? Where will we be tomorrow if we do not build up a next generation of children, at public expense, who are educated, thoughtful, and productive participants in our future economy?

In that community spirit, and by way of example, I would like to focus on education. Lynchburg has a proud history of strong public education, and we should continue to tout the high quality of our schools. But let us be clear—our public education system is far from perfect and it is far from offering every student, each of whom is of equal value, an equal opportunity to succeed. In a recent City Council/School Board session, we had the opportunity to review some objective data regarding our students' performance on standardized tests relative to other comparable localities. The data was stunning. It is clear that although there is a definite correlation between poverty rates and student performance, a number of communities with higher poverty rates than ours performed better than we did. It is also clear that the achievement gap between our minority students and our white students is more pronounced than in many other communities. In fact, our Math SOL scores for African American students had the lowest average of ALL comparison schools, many of which had more severe poverty than Lynchburg. The data is clear. We have a problem to fix. We have a challenge to overcome. And we cannot blame the difficulties simply on a background of economic disadvantage.

So why, on a night that highlights our strengths, have I taken time to so openly emphasize a serious weakness? I did it because I believe that the first step in fixing a problem is admitting that you have one. I did it because I know that as a community we recognize that we have a duty to improve, and that this can only be done with collective effort. And I did it so that I could take the time to acknowledge publicly the great leadership of a man who honestly presented the data to City Council because he also knows that the only way to overcome adversity is to face it head on. That man is our Superintendent of Schools, Scott Brabrand. Dr. Brabrand has been forthright in his presentation of real facts and dogged in his pursuit of improvement. He has been a responsible steward of our public funds and he deserves our public trust. Without a leader of his integrity and vision, I would not be nearly so hopeful that we can overcome an achievement gap that has been years in the making, and which will require years of effort to remove.

I have singled out our educational system tonight as one example among many possible others, in order to make a point. Our future depends on our children. The welfare of our way of life hinges on the capacities that we nourish in the next generation. But problems of achievement cannot be solved simply by spending more public money, although that is definitely a necessary component; they cannot be solved simply by decreasing unemployment rates, although well paying jobs are essential; they cannot be solved simply by reducing poverty rates, although the cycle of generational poverty must surely be broken. The problem of achievement cannot be solved simply by improving our neighborhood centers and their programs, although a wholesome environment for

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our citizens is a necessary component; they cannot be solved simply by strengthening families, although the lack of supportive parents is devastating to our children. Our various City Departments including Social Services and Parks and Recreation, our business community, our healthcare and mental health service providers, our generous citizens and loving and supportive parents and mentors are all important pieces of the puzzle. We can't afford to see the achievement gap as just a public schools issue, or just a private sector issue, or just a private family issue. The challenges that face us and our budding young students are collective issues, and they demand a collective response. It is neither un-democratic nor un-American to perceive them as such and to combine the full weight of the public and private sectors to make a difference moving forward.

I am proud to point out that our school system, under Dr. Brabrand's leadership and with the support of a committed school board and talented staff, has already recognized the need for a collective response. Beginning last June, Lynchburg City Schools convened a series of meetings called the "School Summit." LCS identified key stakeholders, bringing together representatives from organizations such as the Lynchburg City Human Services Department, Horizon Behavioral Health, and the judicial system, among others, to identify and address key areas of challenge. The summit began by examining data trends, identifying service gaps and taking inventory of available resources. They noted three key areas of necessary work: Effective Models for Addressing Mental Health Challenges in Children, Components of Effective Parental Engagement Programs, and Putting a Face on Poverty In Our Community. By identifying the problems, unmet needs and gaps in home-school-community support, this group has impressively demonstrated how government can work with other partners and individual citizens to enhance our children's future. We should all take this approach as a model for how we improve our quality of life in Lynchburg.

Similarly, in an attempt to identify the proper use of public resources in a variety of areas, Lynchburg City Council and City Staff have engaged in a careful process of strategic planning over the past several years. We began by defining our vision and revising our mission as a City. We then catalogued our resources in support of that vision and mission. Next, we defined twelve areas that are deserving of public effort, including 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 that, we devised methods by which we could measure the impact of various programs that are designed to advance our common goals. And now, we are studying outcomes data to determine what works and where more effort is necessary.

We are doing all of this strategic thinking and assessment so that our City can better serve our citizens in the spirit of our common goals, interests and values. But in order to succeed, it is essential that we see this effort as one of true and ongoing collaboration. We must engage both public resources and private. We must harness both business energy and personal. We must recognize that in matters of civic success, the whole absolutely is greater than the sum of its parts.

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Over the next year, please join me, the rest of Council, and all of our dedicated City staff members in our work together by sharing your thoughts through our many avenues of public dialogue, volunteering for Boards and Commissions, strengthening our non-profits, and remaining continually engaged in this wonderful city, Lynchburg, that we have the great fortune to call our home.