



**State of The City
Jan. 30, 2024
Mayor Lionel Jordan**

Good evening, everyone. I am pleased to announce that the state of our city is sound.

Before I begin my remarks, I want to express my gratitude to the residents of Fayetteville for their ongoing support and engagement.

I want to recognize our elected officials. City Attorney Kit Williams and his staff; City Clerk Treasurer Kara Paxton and her staff; and City Council. Thank you for your service and your commitment to the residents of Fayetteville.

I would like to thank City staff for their diligence in meeting residents' needs and their foresight in planning for the future.

Thank you to our police officers, firefighters and all our public safety staff, who show unwavering dedication to protecting our residents and keeping Fayetteville safe.

And finally, I want to thank our partners: Experience Fayetteville, Fayetteville Public Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville Public Schools, Startup Junkie, the Chamber of Commerce and so many other organizations that serve our residents and businesses.

Anyone who lives in Fayetteville knows that this community is like no other in the region. It's like no other in the State. Fayetteville is consistently named a Trendsetter City. Because we are innovative. Because we are bold. Because we aren't afraid to imagine the future we want – and then work hard to make it happen.

The rapid growth of our city creates both a desire to preserve what we love and a hunger to explore new possibilities. Sometimes we are torn between preserving what feels familiar and embracing a new and progressive approach.

But I believe we can do both if we remember to balance our priorities and focus on delivering the best outcomes for our community.

Tonight, I'll share a few highlights of our work in 2023 to meet the needs and priorities of this community. Then, I want to talk through three very important projects that illustrate the vision and drive this administration has for keeping Fayetteville vibrant, thriving and successful.

As always, delivering essential services without interruption is a priority. Water and sewer service, public safety, streets and sidewalks, permits and licensing, drainage, parks and trail maintenance, recycling and trash removal – these critical services play an important role in your life, your health and your wellbeing every day. Our focus on this work never wavers. It is our keystone.

Last month, we were awarded a \$25 million grant from the Safe Streets and Roads for All program. This federal grant will help us create long-lasting safety improvements for pedestrians and cyclists in key areas of town. This is the largest single transportation grant I've ever seen during my time as an elected official. It is a huge win for our community.

Growing Fayetteville's economy is a priority, and I'm pleased to report that we saw positive economic trends throughout 2023.

Total taxable sales reached more than \$3.3 billion. This is an increase of \$100 million compared to 2022. 1,500 new jobs were added last year, across many different business sectors. We issued more than half a billion dollars in building permits, and that includes nearly 700 single-family homes, duplexes and townhouses.

These are strong results, and I want to see them continue. Our Economic Vitality Master Plan will help us make sure Fayetteville's economy remains healthy and resilient for years to come.

Certainly, public safety is – and will always be – an important priority for this City. As more people and businesses call Fayetteville home, demands on our police and fire services have likewise increased.

Despite these growing demands, we saw significant decreases in our crime statistics in 2023 – violent crime, property crime and total crime were down compared to the past few years.

In 2023, the police department provided security for more than 100 different events across the community. Officers saved the lives of 21 people who were overdosing on

opioids. FPD outreach programs served the community by giving away 325 child safety seats, 250 backpacks filled with school supplies and 200 pairs of kids' shoes. They helped deliver more than 650 boxes of food to community members in need.

Last year, the Crisis Intervention Response Team saw increases both in the number of people they engaged with and the number of people who consented to receive services. This year, this program will expand to four full-time teams, thanks to another \$400,000 grant from the Department of Justice. This expansion means our CIRT will be able to help even more people experiencing a mental health crisis.

We opened a new police headquarters building last year. I am so pleased to see our officers and civilian staff thriving in new facilities that help them do their best work for this community. And I'm grateful to the people of Fayetteville for supporting this project through our 2019 bond program.

Our bond program also included new firefighting facilities. We opened two new fire stations in 2022, and we've started construction on a third station that should be finished near the end of this year.

Last year, the Fayetteville Fire Department saved more than \$150 million worth of property. New facilities and equipment help our firefighters safely respond with better speed and skill during emergencies. That means more lives and property saved, and better safety for the firefighters. Again, I am grateful to the voters for seeing this need and supporting the bond measure.

New fire code inspector positions are being added this year to the Fayetteville Fire Department to help meet the need for early detection and prevention of potential fire and life safety risks in existing buildings.

No matter where you live in Fayetteville, there is a city park nearby, and I encourage you to get out and enjoy it.

Our Parks System Master Plan, completed last year, continues to guide our work in parks development across the city. We made great progress on planning for Bryce Davis, Underwood and Walker Parks last year. We'll see construction on all three parks happening this year. Work on Wilson Park is complete, and Gulley Park should be done later this year.

Last year we began work on Combs Park, which will become Fayetteville's first true river access park designed for water recreation. Throughout 2024, we'll continue collecting public input for this new addition to our Parks system, with the goal of starting construction on phase one in 2025. All of these projects are funded through our 2019 bond program.

I've mentioned a few specific bond projects so far, but I want you to know that we have made excellent progress on all areas of our 2019 infrastructure improvements bond program. Each one helps us address current and future needs for a strong, vibrant Fayetteville. Bond project work has reached nearly \$174 million since the program launched. This is an incredible investment in our community.

Our American Rescue Plan Act funding has been another area of significant progress. With the help of this Council, our \$17.9 million ARPA funding has been committed to programs and non-profits that serve our community.

Late last year, we invested \$1.6 million of our ARPA funding in a program to provide relief and services for people experiencing homelessness.

I am especially proud of the \$2 million childcare assistance program and the \$1.2 million workforce training program we started last year. 145 households have been served by the childcare assistance program, and 256 people have been able to participate in workforce training because of the funding we provided. These programs continue to help residents overcome barriers to entering or staying engaged in the workforce.

Through our Hearth Program, we invested more than \$370,000 to support our unsheltered community through long-term rent, supportive services and case management. And we contributed about \$68,000 for extreme weather sheltering.

Programs like these – along with Ranger's Pantry and AniMeals – give vulnerable residents more options – and more hope – for a better tomorrow.

Tonight, I've highlighted our work across several priority areas for this city. Now I want to talk about three key efforts where we've invested significant time and resources to create meaningful improvement to this city: the 71B corridor, The Ramble and our climate and energy goals.

These projects have something in common. They help keep Fayetteville vibrant, thriving and successful by creating positive, long-term outcomes for our people, our economy and our environment.

You've heard me say that 71B is the backbone of Fayetteville. It runs right through the middle of our city – but in its current form, it doesn't reflect Fayetteville's character and energy. And that's because for a very long time, it was a state highway designed to move as many cars as possible through our town, to points north and south.

71B is no longer a state highway. We can put it to better use. Through thoughtful planning, zoning and street improvement projects, we can repurpose it to focus on meeting our community's needs.

And what are those needs? More housing options. Walkable neighborhoods with access to services and transit. Small business growth and new jobs. Safety improvements for drivers, pedestrian and cyclists.

We are well on our way to achieving this vision. A 2018 community planning process helped to identify five priority street improvement projects. So far, we've completed improvements to Nelson Hackett Boulevard. This year, we plan to start construction on the intersection of North and College, the stretch of road from North to Sycamore, and the intersection of College and Millsap.

With street improvements underway, we can turn our attention to improving how nearly 500 land parcels along 71B are zoned to support our growing community. This year, we will conduct a study and begin a robust community input process to understand where it makes the most sense to rezone 71B to allow for more housing and mixed-use developments.

Much like the 71B corridor, The Ramble is a visionary project that brings new life and energy to a key area of Fayetteville – the very heart of our downtown.

This 2019 bond project is a great example of what can happen when we are open to the idea of transforming an underused piece of land into something that better serves our community.

Last year, the Lower Ramble gave more than 5,000 people the chance to enjoy art-infused programming for free. Work on West Avenue and the civic plaza in the Upper Ramble are underway, and both should be done later this year. I'm looking forward to seeing all the opportunities available to residents and visitors once this work is complete.

The Upper Ramble will be home to a new hotel building. Work on that project begins this year. I'm grateful to City Council for approving this public-private partnership. The hotel project will have a positive effect on businesses throughout the downtown core, and it will bring close to \$1 million a year in additional sales tax to the city.

In 2023 we opened a new parking deck, across the street from The Ramble. Early this year, we will open a police substation in the deck to help keep The Ramble and the entertainment district safe.

This project delivers so much to our community. Public green space and trails. Restored woods and stream banks. Exposure to the arts for everyone.

What began as an idea is now transforming the heart of our downtown and bringing so many new opportunities for our city. But, while we forge ahead on new ideas, we must remember to protect and preserve the assets we rely on every day.

We cannot have a healthy, vibrant community without making it a priority to protect our environment and preserve natural resources. And while we continue to receive national recognition for our work around climate change, we are aggressively pursuing ways to do even more.

Last year, Fayetteville became the first city in Arkansas to receive a Gold certification in the LEED Cities rating system. This award recognizes the practical and measurable ways we improve sustainability and the standard of living for all residents.

We were named a Tree City USA for the twenty-eighth year in a row by the Arbor Day Foundation. Last year, we planted more than 1,300 trees and gave away almost 1,500 more to residents through our Celebration of Trees and Invasive Species Bounty programs.

Last year, our recycling and composting programs kept more than 18,000 tons of waste from going into area landfills. We collected almost 1,500 tons of food waste. To date, we have given away about 850 food waste buckets to residents. This year, we will launch a curbside residential food waste pilot program.

A new Climate Action Plan is coming soon to City Council for consideration. This is an update to our 2018 Energy Action Plan that continues our commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adds a new focus on nature-based solutions to reduce the impacts of climate change. Fayetteville residents helped shape this plan, and I am grateful for their commitment to keeping our city sustainable and resilient. In 2023, we began making energy efficiency improvements across 47 city-owned buildings. This project will help reduce City energy consumption by about 27 percent and produce almost \$4 million in savings over 20 years.

A new 3.77-Megawatt solar array project was recently approved by City Council. This project will save about 100,000 metric tons of CO₂ over the life of the project, and it will save about \$7 million over 25 years. Our existing solar array has saved about 60,000 metric tons of CO₂ and \$1.5 million since the project went live in late 2019.

These solar arrays are an important step in helping us reach our goal of 100% clean energy across the community by 2050.

71B, The Ramble and our climate and energy goals - these efforts are not new. We have been working on them for years. Great projects that support our people, our economy and our environment are not achieved overnight. They start with an idea and become real through hard work and dedication.

Tonight, I conclude my remarks with this quote from Henry David Thoreau:

“It’s not what you look at that matters. It’s what you see.”

I am grateful to my staff for helping me transform vision into reality. I want to thank our council members for supporting our vision for a better tomorrow in Fayetteville.

Friends and Council members, that is what we strive for, every day. A better tomorrow – for our people, our economy and our environment.