

State of the City of La Crosse: 2018

Mayor Kabat's State of the City Address 2018

La Crosse January 11, 2018

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

This past year – 2017 – was a remarkable year for the city of La Crosse. We witnessed robust economic growth and new development, compassionate efforts to house and provide services to our community's most vulnerable citizens and a spirit of innovation and collaboration like few other times in our city's proud history.

La Crosse remains the regional destination for housing, employment, education, health care, the arts, recreation, tourism and shopping. And this past year saw those advantages strengthened even more through our neighborhood efforts, our partnerships, our staff's excellence and our creative approaches to service.

La Crosse – and cities like ours – is where Wisconsin's new businesses start, where jobs are located and are created and where people come together to enjoy a lively and vibrant community that includes an incredible abundance of natural resources, clean air, clean water and recreational opportunities.

Like every other year before, the main reason for the success we enjoy are the people – our citizens who invest in their homes, families and neighborhoods and who volunteer and give to our community in countless ways AND our employees.

Our employees are second-to-none. I would argue at this point in time – and I've been involved in public service for almost twenty-five years – we have the best staff in the city's history, with forward thinking and progressive leaders and can-do front-line employees that demonstrate compassion, care and professionalism each and every day. They make our city go.

Highlights for this past year include:

- Finalizing permanent city funding for all six NROs and our community policing program has become the heartbeat of our neighborhood efforts.
- We are coming together on a plan for new and refurbished fire stations, and for the first time in a long time – we are seriously discussing joint medical and fire services with our neighbors.
- We installed new street lighting on 5th Avenue, 7th Street and Vine Streets.
- We refurbished Powell and Tower Parks, and built a new kayak and canoe facility at Pettibone Park. We also are coming together on the Trane – all abilities – Park, because everyone has a right to play.
- We re-instated hours at the branch libraries and we look forward to potential partnerships between the library and our recreational programs.
- We completed long-range plans for the Highway 53 and South Avenue corridors – with the goal of enhancing and growing these critical entrances into our city.
- We continued our efforts to address our community's floodplain challenges with a new relief program.
- Right now there are 13 new homes under construction in our core neighborhoods – with city, schools, non-profits and private entities making those investments.
- We cut the ribbon on the Roosevelt School apartments and worked collaboratively to close our homeless tent city, with housing and support programs for more than 20 chronic homeless people this past year.

- We saw a 9% increase in our city's total property value and more than \$62 million in net new construction.
- We improved customer service in city hall with the new staffed lobby, 789-CITY phone number, Q alerts, and on-line applications.
- We reorganized several departments to maximize performance and efficiency and we are evaluating a new wellness pilot program.
- We came to an historic agreement in principle with our neighbor, the town of Shelby, on a cooperative boundary that includes revenue sharing and incentives for new growth in the southern portion of La Crosse County.
- We started the LSE Leaders program to grow business use of the La Crosse Regional Airport and thirty members joined in 2017. American Airlines also announced plans for upgraded aircraft – improving our customer experience.
- We further reduced our organization's carbon footprint – it is now 32% less today than it was in 2007 when we started tracking our use of fossil fuels.
- We planted more trees and restored native prairies in our precious bluffs – including work by our summer youth mayors crew in partnership with Wiscorps AND
- We worked closely with the county's health department on addressing several of our most challenging issues including mental health, substance abuse and used needle disposal.

That is quite the list of accomplishments and those are only the highlights.

For 2018 we will continue all of this and more – by working together. And with our strong fiscal management and discipline, we will provide these excellent services and programs without increasing property taxes on our residents.

In fact, our total spending and staffing, tax levy and tax rate are all lower today than they were in 2013.

For 2018 – we have big changes in the works including – breaking ground on a renovation and expansion of the La Crosse Center. This project promises to raise our award winning downtown to even higher levels of excellence and vibrancy.

We will continue improvements at the La Crosse Regional Airport with a terminal apron expansion to accommodate a new jet bridge for larger aircraft.

We will finalize a long-term plan for addressing our senior centers and begin addressing our fire stations and public safety – with an eye toward joint services and partnerships.

We will continue our strong effort to repave and repair even more miles of city streets.

We will see more new housing like the Garden Terrace apartments and townhomes in connection with the Kane Street community gardens. We will enjoy more growth and development by our businesses large and small and we will begin a dialogue about the need for a new destination historical and cultural museum.

To accomplish our goals, we must ALL come together. We must set a good example of what government is capable of when we share a vision and common purpose. I know we can do it.

We still have big challenges ahead – too much mental illness, substance abuse and poor quality housing stock. There are too many children living in poverty and too many of our pre-K through 12 students going hungry – especially each weekend when they aren't able to enjoy a meal at school.

In some ways we have a divided country, but we must not allow a divided La Crosse or a divided council and mayor. We must come together – with a better understanding of each other’s perspectives and improve our ability to agree and disagree without being disagreeable.

We have our work cut out for us, but we have all of the ingredients and the timing is right. So please join me, our employees and citizens in making 2018 in La Crosse our best year yet.

Thank you and God bless.

--Mayor Tim Kabat
January 11, 2018