

## **State of the City: 2014**

### **Mayor Tim Kabat's State of the City Address 2014**

La Crosse January 9, 2014

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

Good evening and thank you. I would like to take a few minutes to reflect on 2013 as well as outline what's to come in 2014.

First and foremost, I must congratulate our departments and staff for providing excellent service to La Crosse's residents, workers, and visitors. This service continues despite the resource challenges we face and is a testament to the staff's creativity and problem solving abilities. I look forward to 2014 and in pushing our service to even higher levels.

The staff recognition included national awards for the Granddad Bluff restoration project and being recognized as one of America's most walkable cities. La Crosse also received a recycling award from the state of Wisconsin – and I know we all look forward to increasing our recycling rates once we implement the new solid waste and recycling system later this year. It is clear that our staff continues to be innovative and resilient.

I also want to acknowledge the Common Council, accomplishing much and doing so with an atmosphere of civility and collaboration. The number of agreements that were approved this past year is phenomenal – especially considering how contentious and difficult these negotiations were at times. These include the Myrick Hixon Eco Park, La Crosse Loggers, UW-La Crosse, CRUSA, Pettibone Boat Club, Eagle Crest South, Joint Development Corp. with Gundersen and the Municipal Boat Harbor.

The City also was a strong partner in several major economic development projects that will add hundreds of jobs, over \$23 million in tax base, including Chart's 100,000 square foot addition and Trane's re-tool of Plant 7 to keep 1700 jobs in La Crosse for the future.

We reached labor agreements that recognize our employees and insures affordability for our taxpayers into the future. For 2014 we are providing our City employees with a 3% cost of living pay increase.

The Council also pushed forward an organizational assessment for the City which will offer an independent assessment and compare us to world class organizations. This effort will improve our operations and will save taxpayer dollars. The City continues to improve the transparency of our decisions and this will only get stronger through the Legistar program, recodification, and more on-line services in 2014.

The safety of our neighborhoods has been and will continue to be a top priority in 2014. The City will add three new community focused police officers who will work in the Washburn Neighborhood thanks to the partnership between the City, the La Crosse Community Foundation, Viterbo University, and Mayo Clinic.

And we will accomplish all of that and more with a budget for 2014 that lowers the mill rate without major program or staff cuts and without tapping into reserve funds to balance the budget. Our bond rating remains strong and our reserve fund enables us to be prepared for the future. And we look to develop even stronger partnerships with our regional neighbors for metro police, fire, and transportation services.

But we have much more work to do in 2014 – especially in our neighborhoods.

We must address the significant backlog of street repairs and maintenance needs through our next capital improvement budget. I pledge to work with our citizens, the Council, and staff to devote every dollar we can to paving streets, new curb and gutter, sidewalks, boulevard trees, and utilities.

We need to address housing issues including pushing the construction of many more new homes, the sale of more lots to private housing developers, more paint and fix-up grants, fully implementing Reinvest La Crosse, and addressing the City's floodplain houses. We will also work with area non-profits to create a transitional housing project and work with the Housing Authority – all to further the goal of providing more affordable housing in the City.

We must address the long-term health of our branch libraries and I look forward to the work of the Branch Library Task Force this year.

2014 will see significant park improvement projects honoring two of our most famous citizens – including an update and upgrade of historic Riverside Park and the Wendell B. Andersen band shell and a re-do of Poague Park to honor George C. Poague.

The City must continue our focus on sustainability and efforts to conserve energy. We must re-charge our work to reduce our energy needs by 25% by the year 2025 and of those needs, make sure that at least 25% of that energy is from renewable resources. 2014 is the five year anniversary of the adoption of the City-County Strategic Plan for Sustainability and we can reach our goals by working with our citizens to develop incentives for more sustainable energy projects.

We look forward to a number of development projects in 2014 including the Naval Reserve, Riverside Center IV, Trane Plant 6, and the Charmont Hotel. We will come together to help plan the former Mobil Oil site – which offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to remake our City.

In 2014 we will continue plans to re-do the La Crosse Center to insure that it remains the best venue for conferences and conventions on the Mississippi River. We will also see a significant upgrade to the La Crosse Airport terminal and increased air service to enhance the customer experience.

We should make sure that City government sets the right example and becomes a model by passing a resolution endorsing the Compassionate City project, establishing La Crosse as a compassionate place. And we should pass a more comprehensive anti-discrimination ordinance to make sure all La Crosse citizens have equal opportunities in housing, use of City facilities, public accommodations, and employment – La Crosse can lead the way.

The road won't be easy, especially as we must continue dealing with the cuts and measures from the State that further reduce local control.

But we are very fortunate to live where we do. In fact we know that it's exciting living in La Crosse. And I feel very lucky and honored to be Mayor of this exciting City.

So here's to a job well done in 2013 and to much more on the way in 2014. Thank you.