

STATE OF THE CITY

MAYOR JOSEPH P. RILEY, JR.

JANUARY 27, 2015

Good evening. Tonight I am proud to present to you the State of our City. I wish to begin by thanking you for the honor you give me to serve you as your mayor and I wish to thank City Council and City employees for their hard and successful work.

We are all so proud of the recognition and acclaim Charleston has received, but we are not resting on any laurels. We have much to do!

As we began this journey together in 1975, it was with the joint commitment to seek to excel in all we did. This historic city and its citizens deserve nothing less. And that is our goal every day.

And the Gaillard Performance Hall will achieve that goal. It will be one of the finest concert halls in America and I believe one of the most significant public buildings in the City's history. The Gaillard will beautifully grace our streets, and behind these handsome windows will be municipal offices where citizens can come to conduct their business and attend public meetings. And then you will enter one of the most beautiful and acoustically perfect performance halls in America. This building will be held by our succeeding generations as a special personal treasure. It belongs to every citizen. There will be a lifetime of memories of going to the Gaillard. This building will have a special emphasis on the young by developing programs to engage school children in the arts with experiences that will be a birthright for young Charlestonians and frame positive lifetime memories. The Gaillard will also house splendid conference facilities that will hold gatherings of all kinds for Charlestonians and those who visit us – memorable experiences will be created there as well.

A very talented and hardworking team has made the Gaillard possible, but I must especially thank Martha Rivers Ingram for her leadership and generosity.

Not far away on the banks of the Cooper River will rise another center of excellence -- the International African American Museum. It is being designed by gifted architects and exhibit designers. The International African American Museum will honor those enslaved Africans who were brought to our city hundreds of years ago and in the most difficult of circumstances to this very site which was then Gadsdens Wharf. This museum will enlighten all of us about our country's history – a part of American history about which we know so little. It is a compelling history of 3 centuries of tragedy, struggle and triumph. It is the story of a people who helped build this city and our country. This museum will become a local and national treasure.

Almost 40 years ago, we carefully developed a strategic plan for the redevelopment of an economically devastated center of our city, King Street. Diligently following the plan and

working tirelessly over the years to ensure the appropriate investments were made, we now can begin to see the complete fulfillment of that effort.

Midtown, at the corner of Spring and King, a handsome development with 2 hotels, office and retail space, will be completed in late spring, creating a fine and robust book end, if you will, to the first redevelopment project, Charleston Place, a mile down the street that opened 30 years ago. The rebuilding of a city takes time and unrelenting commitment.

King Street, a national poster child of a dying downtown in the 70's, now can boast a retail vacancy rate from Calhoun Street south to Broad that is zero.

This year construction will begin on Courier Square just north of Midtown, which will be very well-designed buildings with offices, residences and shops.

King Street is now a national example of excellence in city planning, design and development. And King Street is listed with the likes of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue as among America's great shopping streets.

We have another exciting strategic planning opportunity. West Ashley, the home of the first Charleston settlement in the 1670's, was also the home of Charleston's first suburban development. It now boasts a population of over 60,000 residents in this city and a growing number of fine new residential neighborhoods being added to the fine older neighborhoods, which are seeing new families moving in.

West Ashley's retail infrastructure is ready for its enhancement, as well. The City and citizens of West Ashley have developed a strategic plan for the future which will include the redevelopment of centrally located Citadel Mall, which in many respects will be West Ashley's downtown.

Many commercial districts in West Ashley are experiencing revitalization and Avondale is one of them. This very handsome median also created a greatly enhanced, safe pedestrian crossing knitting this commercial district together.

Bees Ferry Road was beautifully improved and widened with median, bike and pedestrian paths, and the West Ashley Circle will be completed. Walmart, years ago, built their West Ashley Superstore pursuant to our plan for the West Ashley Circle. The circle will increasingly become a wonderful mixed use neighborhood and a West Ashley civic center. Also we are going to enhance the gateways to West Ashley, creating a special sense of arrival.

And last year we opened Northbridge Park. It has already become a most cherished public space.

We recognized the need for more public access to the water's edge West of the Ashley, as we have in other parts of our city. Northbridge Park is a beautiful site to see and a spectacular place to visit.

Another waterfront park access West of the Ashley is soon to open, Higgins Pier, which is at the end of West Ashley Bikeway. This beautiful space honoring a longtime community leader, Leonard Higgins, will provide not only this marvelous vista of historic Ashley River, but create a kayak launching opportunity. In Charleston we have greenways and we are developing connecting blueways too.

This year we will complete the construction of the last 2 portions of the West Ashley Greenway, a 9 mile bike/pedestrian path connecting dozens of neighborhoods West of the Ashley and construction will begin this year on the bike/pedestrian path across the Legare Ashley River Bridge, providing a wonderful amenity and biking opportunity for residents West of the Ashley to commute to and from work.

This bike and pedestrian path will eventually connect to the Ashley Riverwalk, which we hope to begin construction on this year. The Ashley Riverwalk will actually go out onto the river and underneath the 2 Ashley River bridges, connecting Brittlebank Park to the wonderful bike and pedestrian path along Lockwood which, of course, connects to the historic district.

And we are planning other bike and pedestrian connections West of the Ashley – all of which will connect into a world class system of new transportation and recreational assets. And remember, I-526 will have a 7.9 bike/pedestrian path connecting the West Ashley Greenway to the James Island County Park.

A wonderful public/private community effort allowed for the acquisition of 29.1 acres surrounding Angel Oak, which will then allow this priceless, iconic Lowcountry living heirloom to be the center of a most handsome large community park.

We are working closely with a non-profit corporation to have constructed a pool and community center on Johns Island. So many of our citizens, especially our young, don't know how to swim and Johns Island would greatly benefit from a community center with a range of activities.

I will propose this year we fund a cover for the James Island swimming pool. The cover, similar to that used at the Martin Luther King, Jr. pool, will allow for year-round swimming, and during the summer the cover will be removed so that swimmers can enjoy the fresh air and sunshine.

I believe we have a responsibility to have constructed in our community a natatorium – this is a recreational fitness and athletic competition asset that this region needs. We will be working hard to seek to make this a reality. This will require substantial public and private funding and regional partnerships and may take many years to accomplish. I believe that in the redeveloped Citadel Mall area there will be an excellent site for this wonderful facility.

We will begin soon the design of the West Ashley Senior Center adjacent to St. Francis Hospital. This will be a 16,000 SF state of the art facility. Construction should begin later this year.

Because of the positive response by the citizens of Charleston County, our school district is in the process of building or rebuilding brand new schools throughout our county. Here you see the St. Andrews School of Math and Science nearing completion. It will open this August.

Also, among the newly authorized school projects, West Ashley High School will receive a Center for Advanced Studies, focusing on science, technology, engineering and math. And, as a part of the West Ashley High School campus, a new middle school building will be constructed for the very successful Wallace Middle School.

With all the interesting and exciting initiatives underway, we never forget that our first priority is the public safety of our citizens.

Our splendid Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Greg Mullen, has achieved a 70% reduction in serious crime since 2006.

This year City Council approved a very modest tax increase that will allow for construction of a new team police headquarters West of the Ashley.

Chief Mullen continues to seek additional ways to make our community safer. This year our Police Department created a family violence initiative with special attention and resources directed to the tragic fact that physical harm and death is too often caused by violence in the home. There are other victims and these are the children in the families. Our unit will continue to work with the families which have been subjected to this violence and with special attention given to the children who have witnessed these violent acts. If a child learns the only way to solve a disagreement is to use violence, then that habit may be sadly repeated in life. We are working to reduce family violence and its long-term harm on our children.

Also, the revolving jail door adds to the violence of a community and wasted lives. We are attacking this challenge with a new initiative, Turning Leaf, a wonderful non-profit headed by the most amazing woman, Amy Barch. This initiative works with hardened criminals who have served their time and who are willing to turn their lives around. This intensive program could become a national model.

Our Fire Department, under the great leadership of Chief Karen Brack, continues to advance in quality and achievement. The unsolicited comments I get from those who watch our Fire Department in action give me an enormous sense of pride.

An unusual fact about the City of Charleston is that we continue to use historic fire stations. In fact, some of our fire stations are the oldest continually used firehouses in America. We want to keep them in use -- they are centrally located and are a part of our history -- but they need a lot of work. With the modest public safety tax increase approved by City Council, we will be restoring our older firehouses so they can serve in this new century as well as building new ones including a new fire station West of the Ashley on Savannah Highway.

Our economy is robust. The highly regarded *Milken Report* says Charleston is the 4th fastest growing hi-tech economy in our country. We have seen a wonderful explosion in the

development and growth of our knowledge-based economy. That is why we have created hi-tech incubators, Flagships 1 and 2, and we will now build a 3<sup>rd</sup> at 993 Morrison Drive, which itself has become a hub of new technology activity.

On Daniel Island, our Charleston's own BenefitFocus is expanding with this beautiful and rapidly developing campus for 1,334 employees.

And the Horizon development, which will help link the biomedical research at the Medical University of South Carolina with job creation and will begin its first 3 buildings this year. The Horizon District will be a new live/work neighborhood on the banks of the Ashley River, adjacent to the Medical University campus.

And another new community, Magnolia, in the Charleston Neck, continues to move forward with its planning and a wonderful new adjacent neighbor will be the finest skate park in South Carolina – a project which will be built by Charleston County Parks and Recreation commissioned with support from the City of Charleston.

With the amazing success of the redevelopment of Upper King Street, we have seen the acceleration of the development of late night establishments. Bars and restaurants are good things for cities. They provide places for relaxation and entertainment. But like anything in life, sometimes you can have too much of a good thing. Because of our concern of an over preponderance of these establishments changing the nature of Upper King Street and the adjacent neighborhoods, City Council approved an almost year-long citizens-led study of the late night activities while we placed a moratorium on any further development of those establishments in this part of the City. Charleston has led the way in city planning and tourism management. We will now show how to have a lively downtown at night, adjacent livable neighborhoods and a main Street (King Street) that is also healthy and lively during the day.

Running between King Street and Meeting Street is the no longer used Norfolk Southern Rail Line. We are working with a wonderful group of citizens in an effort to acquire this right-of-way and have it become a handsome pedestrian and transit asset. It's been given the name, the Lowline, after the Highline, the very successful redeveloped abandoned elevated train line in New York City.

In the last 39 years, we have tripled the number of parks and improved the others. The Battery, a park or promenade, is a much beloved amenity. High Battery terminated with steps to the Low Battery, which was awkward for many. This beautifully designed and gentle slope protected the visual, iconic nature of this part of the Battery and has given all of our citizens and those with disabilities the opportunity to continue to enjoy this wonderful walk.

We have begun engineering on the rehabilitation of the Low Battery, which will happen in phases over the years to come.

Colonial Lake, a public place for over 200 years, is undergoing a beautiful transformation. Working with the Charleston Parks Conservancy, we will be enhancing the water quality, adding trees, flower beds, and benches, as well as allowing the Colonial Lake Park

to be enlarged by shrinking slightly the right-of-way on Rutledge Avenue adjacent to it. It is a historic treasure and is being made even more so.

A beautiful new park, Gadsdenboro Park, will be finished this spring. This park on Concord Street will have playground swings for the little ones, soccer and ball fields for older ones, chess tables for their parents and grandparents, a bocce court, 137 trees, flower beds, a beautiful fountain and more.

A new park is a very special permanent gift to all future generations. Gadsdenboro Park will become much loved and will have as an adjacent neighbor, Williams Terrace, which will provide affordable senior housing in a handsome building from which citizens will be able to sit in their rocking chairs and watch several generations enjoying a variety of park and recreation opportunities on Gadsdenboro Park, a park they will regularly use as well.

16,000 young people use our parks each year along with 16,000 adults.

This beautiful replica of American's first passenger railroad car was put on permanent display in this small museum on John Street.

The Best Friend was Charleston creatively using new technology almost 200 years ago. Here you see Charleston creatively using new technology to address a centuries-old Charleston problem – storm water drainage and flooding. This is an 8-foot diameter tunnel, 140 feet under Market Street. This \$25 million dollar project will be completed next year.

The same technology will be used for the next phases of the Crosstown drainage. Phase 2, a \$23.5 million project will begin in March and Phase 3, a tunnel 50% larger than what you see being constructed on Market Street may, we hope, get underway later on this year. The construction estimate for this phase is \$49 million.

We also will begin construction of the West Ashley Forest Acres drainage improvement this year.

Here you see our wonderful, national best, First Day of School celebration. This is one of many initiatives we undertake to support our greatest treasure – our children.

We are fortunate to be working with our Tri-County Cradle to Career Collaborative chaired by our wonderful community leader, Anita Zucker. This collaborative helps us focus on initiatives that really pay off in benefiting our children like Communities in Schools, Reading Partners, the Charleston Promise Neighborhood and many others.

And tonight, I will challenge us as a community to engage one more initiative and, that is, increasing summer youth employment for our students. For a teenager, a summer job not only often provides much needed income for college and their families, but lifetime beneficial experiences are gained in the workplace and the students make a great contribution to the organization for which they are working.

I am announcing a regional summer youth employment challenge. Our goal is to have 1,000 high school students in summer jobs. I am working in partnership with the Charleston Metro Chamber of Commerce, our regional school districts and we will be reaching out to businesses and local governments. Let's make the summer of 2015 an especially rewarding one for our youth.

Two vitally important major infrastructure projects continue to move forward. The deepening of our harbor channel to 52 feet is essential to the continued growth and development of our port and all the businesses and jobs that are engaged in waterfront commerce. I am working closely with the State Ports Authority in communicating with our nation's government about the importance of a deeper Charleston Harbor to our nation's economy.

Also vital is the completion of I-526. It is absolutely essential for the continued health and livability of our community. Without this important transportation artery completed, we will increasingly suffer the equivalent of a traffic heart attack because the bypass was never completed. I will continue to work closely with our county and state governments to insure that this project is completed.

Also, I believe it is essential that our state government pass a gas tax increase. It is a user fee – those of us who use the roads will pay for it. Additional resources are essential because improvements to our roads and bridges are vitally needed.

And I am pleased to report that the City of Charleston has achieved the highest possible financial rating; that is, the gold standard AAA. We are the first city in South Carolina to receive the AAA credit rating from both rating agencies. I am very proud of our CFO, Steve Bedard, and his team.

This is the State of your City – a report I am so proud to give as I am so proud to serve you as your mayor. We have accomplished so much together and have so much more to do. This will be, as it should be, a busy year.

Thank you and good night.