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## **2018 State of the City Address**

**The following State of the City Address was prepared for delivery by Mayor John J. Tecklenburg on January 23, 2018, at 7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Pro Tem Lewis, my colleagues on City Council, honored guests and fellow Charlestonians:

Two years ago, I laid out a new vision for our city -- a vision that put the livability of our neighborhoods and the quality of life of our residents first. And to help make that vision a reality, I asked you, our citizens, to join us in a new kind of civic partnership. I asked you to get involved, to volunteer, to go to meetings, to join boards and commissions and to make your voices heard.

Put simply, I invited you, as citizens, to take your rightful seat at the table here in our city – and to demand more of us, as your elected representatives. And, perhaps to the surprise of some, that's exactly what you did -- and the results have been nothing less than remarkable.

In little more than 100 weeks, here's just some of what we've been able to accomplish together.

We've created the largest, most ambitious master plan for West Ashley revitalization in the history of our city -- and we've established a dedicated TIF redevelopment fund that's expected to produce more than \$60 million over time to help pay for it.

We've enacted responsible moratoriums on James Island and in flood-prone areas of West Ashley, placed new restrictions on hotel approvals, raised development fees, tightened stormwater requirements for redevelopments, and worked to bring thousands of rural acres into the city -- not to develop the land, but to protect area residents from flooding, traffic and over-development.

For the first time ever, we've reformed and strengthened the Board of Architectural Review, lowered height districts across 80 percent of the peninsula, and rezoned the primary commercial corridor of James Island to reduce heights, control overdevelopment and protect livability.

We've worked to protect, expand and accelerate hundreds of millions of dollars in current drainage and flooding improvements, found solutions for the Church Creek Drainage Basin, and are preparing to proceed this year on rebuilding the Low Battery Sea Wall.

We've collaborated with our citizens and our regional partners to complete the penny, which will provide more than \$2 billion in funding for new and improved roads, more and better greenspace, and a bus rapid transit system that will finally give our citizens an attractive option for public transportation.

We've closed Tent City, and we've launched our city's most comprehensive affordable housing strategy ever, with increased workforce housing requirements for developers and \$20 million in public investment -- which, together, are expected to meet our goal of creating up to 800 units of housing for teachers, police officers, nurses, firefighters, hospitality workers, senior citizens and more.

We've made good on our decades-old promises to the citizens of Daniel Island, with new parks and recreation facilities designed and ready to break ground later this year.

We've also prioritized new parks throughout other areas of our city, including the purchase of the Low Line and the construction of Bender Park in West Ashley, and made major improvements to more than 15 existing parks and playgrounds, including the West Ashley Greenway.

We've founded our first ongoing Freedom School, expanded summer reading opportunities, enrolled more children than ever before in our city's recreation programs, and continued our excellence in the cultural arts with the opening of the Cannon Street Community Arts Center later this year, the appointment and outstanding efforts of our city's first Poet Laureate, Marcus Amaker, and so much more.

We've lowered violent crime, created a successful city bike share program, broken ground on the Waring Senior Center in West Ashley, launched our first independent performance review, balanced tough budgets without a tax increase, and protected our city's Triple A credit rating.

And even as we've been doing all that and more, we've weathered not one but two hurricanes and a historic snow and ice storm -- and emerged stronger on the other side of all three.

In short, we've come together at a time when so many other people and places seem to be coming apart. We've done big things to make our city better -- and we've done it all by working with, and listening to, our citizens.

And that is why, tonight, it is my honor to report to you that the state of our city is strong and united -- and determined to keep moving forward together.

It is also why tonight's State of the City address will be a little different from most.

We do many things in city government every day, and all of these initiatives matter. But now is not a moment for big speeches about small things. Instead, it is a time for setting clear priorities. It's a time for speaking directly about our plans. It's a time for rolling up our sleeves and focusing our work on the most important issues facing our city today, particularly those related to controlling over-development and protecting our citizens' quality of life -- namely, flooding and drainage, traffic and transportation, affordable and workforce housing, and maintaining public safety.

First, flooding and drainage.

For more than 300 years, the people of Charleston have lived with the threat of hurricanes, high tides and flooding. But, now, with rising seas, a history of ill-advised development in some areas, and three major flood events in three years, we simply must make flooding and drainage our city's top long-range priority. And in order to do that, we have to closely examine what we're doing today, what we plan to do tomorrow, and how we're going to pay for it.

Last year, our city spent more than \$32 million on drainage improvements. We worked with federal and state officials to secure FEMA funds to buy out many of the homes hit hardest by the

historic floods in West Ashley. We hired a leading engineering firm to help us find solutions for the Church Creek Drainage Basin. We approved plans for a new Low Battery Sea Wall -- and increased funding for its construction by almost 25 percent.

We hired a new Chief Resiliency Officer, Mark Wilbert, to make flooding and drainage a top concern in everything we do, and we brought together our department and division heads to ensure that all parts of city government are working together with Laura Cabiness and her fine Public Services team to implement our long-term sea-rise and drainage plans.

But that's just the beginning. This year, we will be moving even more quickly.

In order to increase ditch maintenance, check valve installation, and other immediate improvements, in 2018 we will increase available stormwater fee resources by 25 percent.

To ensure we're making responsible decisions about future development, we will hire our city's first, full-time floodplain manager, and create rigorous new stormwater standards for all areas of the city, including highly-impacted areas like the Church Creek Drainage Basin.

In our historic areas, we will direct our design review professionals to create clear new standards that protect historic architecture while allowing our citizens to raise their homes to current FEMA recommended levels.

To make sure our major infrastructure is ready for the challenges of both today and tomorrow, we will continue to move forward aggressively with hundreds of millions of dollars in large-scale drainage projects that are already underway or in development on the peninsula, West Ashley, and James and Johns Islands.

To protect our citizens from both hurricanes and increasing problems with tidal flooding, we will break ground on the new Low Battery Sea Wall, and construct it in a way that allows for several feet of additional protection during extreme weather events.

To ensure our plans are transparent and clear to our citizens, we will update our rising sea and drainage plan with even more detailed information, and establish a new website to act as a clearing house for news about these critical issues.

And to help pay for improvements now and in the future, we will hire a full-time grant writer with a special focus on drainage, and we will leverage the talents and expertise of our residents by bringing together citizen-led groups to help us identify and secure potential funding sources for these and other projects.

But even with all this, there will be much to do in the years ahead -- which brings me to what may be the single most important long-term funding initiative for flooding we will undertake this year.

In 2018, six million tourists are expected to visit our city, and like the 140,000 of us who are fortunate enough to call Charleston home, they too have a large stake in the future of this beautiful and historic community. But under current state law, we simply don't have the authority or the flexibility to ask our six million visitors to contribute in a significant way to keep Charleston safe from flooding and extreme weather in the years ahead.

That is why this year we are asking the state legislature to give us the freedom we need to move existing tourism dollars from accommodations and hospitality fees into flooding and drainage. And it is why we are asking you, our citizens, to help us ensure that our voices are heard in Columbia on

this critical issue.

Together, we can and will protect our citizens from rising seas, extreme weather and flooding. And that goal must remain our city's top long-range priority until the job is done.

The second major issue I'd like to speak with you about tonight is traffic and transportation -- where again, we've laid the groundwork for major progress, but there's still much more to be done.

Last year, under our new Traffic and Transportation director Keith Benjamin, we conducted the largest, most citizen-driven citywide transportation planning process in our city's history, with our residents identifying 13 priority projects that will be added to our region's long-term traffic plan.

We worked with our residents and Charleston County to begin the process of building out more than \$2 billion in new and improved roads, greenspace and bus rapid transit in our region, to include widening of Glenn McConnell Parkway and improvements to Savannah Highway and Main Road on Johns Island.

We created an improved traffic management center that allows for real-time data collection and analysis to help prevent slowdowns and keep traffic moving.

We launched the Holy Spokes Bike Share program, which already boasts over 6000 members and more than 50,000 miles traveled. We also won support from the governor and our regional partners for a separate bike and pedestrian bridge over the Ashley River -- which, with federal approval and funding, would finally fully connect the peninsula and West Ashley without closing a lane of traffic on the Ashley River bridge.

In addition, we retimed signals in West Ashley and parts of downtown, launched the Medical District Urban Greenway initiative, and are expanding park and ride options to the peninsula.

This year, we will be moving ahead with even more major traffic and transportation improvements, including completion of our citywide parking plan, additional park and ride options, signal upgrades, the roll out of a comprehensive bike/pedestrian plan, and major road construction projects with our state and regional partners.

And importantly, we will be working on an all-new approach to road and infrastructure projects here in our city, starting with Johns Island -- an approach that finally ties planning and transportation together in a way that ensures that development no longer outpaces the infrastructure projects required to support it.

Lastly this evening, I'd like to take a moment to speak to you about some of the crucial livability issues that matter most to our citizens -- particularly affordable housing and public safety.

It's no secret that Charleston is booming both culturally and economically, and that almost 40 people a day are moving into our region to take advantage of the great life the Lowcountry has to offer. But with that boom has come a serious shortage of affordable and workforce housing.

Over the past two years, under our Housing Department director Geona Shaw Johnson, the city has taken steps to aggressively address this challenge, with the passage of a \$20 million affordable housing bond, strong new workforce housing requirements for large developments, the renovation of existing homes under affordable housing covenants, the formation of a community land trust with the Historic Charleston Foundation, and more.

In 2018, we will continue these initiatives, and begin planning and construction of the 800 affordable and workforce housing units this strategy is ultimately expected to create.

Finally, I'd like to close on a subject that we can never allow ourselves to take for granted -- maintaining public safety. And as I do, I want to recognize four individuals for their outstanding service: our recently retired police and fire chiefs, Greg Mullen and Karen Brack, and our interim chiefs Jerome Taylor and John Tippett.

Thanks to them, and to all the extraordinary men and women who wear the uniforms of our police and fire departments, 2017 was a historically safe year in our city, with violent crime down significantly, the murder rate down almost 50 percent, and the response rate and professionalism of our fire department at an all-time high. Moreover, our Police Department's Illumination Project has continued as a national leader in the areas of community involvement and fair and equitable policing.

These are remarkable accomplishments, and we salute all those who made them possible. And while we know that public safety statistics can and do change from year to year, we must re-commit ourselves to always ensuring that our first responders have the resources, training and support they deserve.

My fellow Charlestonians, it's a great honor for me to serve as your mayor, and to work in partnership with this distinguished City Council. And while it has certainly been a busy hundred weeks, I can honestly say that I love this opportunity to serve – and that I continue to be inspired and uplifted by the everyday grace and good will you can find all across our city, from the pews of Mother Emanuel Church, to the Farmers Market in West Ashley, to town meetings and community gatherings on Daniel, James and Johns Islands.

Together, over the past two years, we have worked hard to preserve, protect and expand the things that make our city so special. And tonight, here in these historic chambers, we have charted a course that will make our already great city even greater for our citizens in the years to come.

Thank you, God bless you, and may God continue to bless and keep the great city of Charleston.