

**Mayor Ashley Swearengin**  
**State of the City 2010 Address**  
**May 27, 2010**

Thank you, Council President Westerlund, for that kind introduction. I am so pleased to be here. I have really been looking forward to this year's State of the City luncheon. I think it's because this event perhaps because this gives us the opportunity to gather as a community, hit the "pause" button on our busy lives, and reflect on where we are as a city and where we are headed. More than in years past, it's important that we do that right now.

So, thank you to the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, Chairman Rick Whitsell, CEO Al Smith and the rest of the board and team at the Chamber. Thank you for your efforts to bring us together today. Also, thank you to the Asian Business Institute and Resource Center, Central California Hispanic Chamber, Fresno Area Hispanic Chamber, Fresno Metro Black Chamber, the Mayor's Community Advisory Panel, and our sponsors – Eye-Q Vision Center and Lyons Magnus. To all of you, my deepest thanks and appreciation for your support of this event.

I would like to recognize and express my appreciation for seven, **special** people who call City Hall "home" with me. They are our outstanding City Council members, and I would like them to stand and remain standing.

- Council President Larry Westerlund
- Councilmember Blong Xiong
- Councilmember Andreas Borgeas
- Councilmember Cynthia Sterling
- Councilmember Mike Dages
- Councilmember Lee Brand
- Councilmember Henry Perea

Before serving as Mayor, I confess that I didn't fully appreciate how difficult the job of a city councilmember is, but I've worked side by side with this group for the last 17 months and have the deepest respect for the work they do and the role they play. I want to especially recognize three who will be concluding their service as Fresno city council members at the end of this year – Cynthia Sterling, Mike Dages, and Henry Perea. Thank you for your service to our city. You have certainly made a positive impact on our community, and we thank you. Please join me in honoring our City Council today.

Next, I am pleased to introduce and also thank our new City Manager, Mark Scott. Most of you know the story...it was a bit of an arm wrestle to get Mark to return to his hometown, but it was worth the effort. He returns at **exactly** the right time with **exactly** the right experience, perspective and ability to move our city to the next level.

And, completing our City Manager's office at the City of Fresno are the ever capable and dedicated Bruce Rudd, Nicole Zieba, Randy Reed, Greg Barfield, Heather Heinks, Elizabeth Jonasson, Liana Leyva, Bryce Marshall, Belinda McMillan and Cyndi Massa. Please join me in thanking them for their efforts on behalf of Fresno.

One of the best things about my job is being able to work every day with the staff in the Mayor's Office. To a person, they are capable, character-filled, and committed to Fresno. They are Georgeanne White, Kelli Furtado, Mike Lukens, Katie Stevens, Cheryl Burns, Priscilla Pereschica, and Jeaneen Cervantes. It is an honor to serve with each of you. Would you please stand and be recognized?

My family is here. Those of you who know me know how special my family is to me. I want to recognize and thank my mom and dad, Ruth Ann and Tom Newton; my sister and brother-in-law, Andrea and Todd Sobrado. Thank you for your encouragement and the powerful impact you have had on my life.

Lastly and most importantly, my husband, Paul, is here. Paul is my biggest support, and without it, I would not be serving in my current position. So, thank you, Paul, for everything you do and for who you are.

### **Key to the City Section**

Now, to our first order of business.

Some of you may recall that I began a new tradition at last year's State of the City address – the presentation of the Key to the City to an unsung hero in Fresno. Last year's key was awarded to Shirley Bobbitt for her work as a foster parent. For over 20 years, Shirley has offered her home as an "emergency home" for children to be placed in at any time of day or night. She has cared for adolescent girls. She now dedicates her home to caring for developmentally delayed, special needs children. She is a gift to our community. Please join me in recognizing, once again, Shirley Bobbitt, the 2009 Key to the City recipient.

This year, I wanted to give my second Key to the City to someone who has demonstrated selfless dedication to the people of Fresno...someone who has expressed with their actions over and over and over again their deep commitment to improving the lives of the people who live here.

As you know, our city is filled to the brim with people who love Fresno, who give tirelessly to improve the lives of others. So, selecting this year's Key to the City recipient was a very difficult decision. So difficult, in fact, that I couldn't just pick one. I had to pick two...and they happened to be married to each other.

This year's recipients have managed to avoid the limelight for the past almost 20 years. They will probably be uncomfortable with the attention they are about to get – because that's not why they do the things they do. But, I'm going to take a little bit of mayoral license and give them some well-deserved recognition for their selfless commitment to the well-being of the Lowell neighborhood and our City. I trust they will understand and, if they don't, that they'll forgive me later.

**The 2010 Key to the City recipients are Dr. Marty and Joanie Martin.**

The Martins are residents of the Lowell neighborhood. As you know, unprecedented efforts are underway to revitalize Fresno's downtown and our historic neighborhoods. The Lowell neighborhood just north of downtown is "ground zero" for the City's revitalization efforts. We are seeing real signs of progress in Lowell thanks to the work of many residents who have blazed the trail.

When we asked the Lowell residents about the Martins and their positive impact on the neighborhood, the stories came flooding in. Let me tell you a little about the Martins.

Joanie grew up in the Lowell neighborhood and moved back there with Marty 18 years ago. Since then, they've demonstrated time and again what it looks like to embrace a community that had experienced terrible neglect.

People in the neighborhood, particularly the young people, are very familiar with what they call "Martin's Park" – which is really the Martins' side yard. There is great playground equipment there that the Martins make available to all the kids in the neighborhood with park benches for moms and dads to sit and watch their children play. I'm told that Dr. Martin has cooked so many hot dogs at neighborhood barbecues where literally hundreds of kids would line up at a time, that he has singed all the hair off his arms.

The Martins have made their home available for years for cooking and English language classes for neighborhood families. They've reserved one of their apartments for use in the Wise Old Owl tutoring program for more than a decade, and another one of their apartments is used as an art room, where Joannie teaches summer art classes to neighborhood children. And they put on a safe Halloween carnival for the neighborhood every year.

Joanie has a love of art. She volunteered to do the murals in the back yard of the Neighborhood Resource Center and the Lowell school library. Because of her talents, she could have done them herself, but she decided to involve the neighbors in the process. As a result, they got to know each other better. Everyone had a sense of urgency over the murals, and people felt they could make a difference in their own neighborhood.

Her love of art is exceeded only by her love of people – especially those who are at the margins because of language barriers. For almost two decades, she has reached out to refugees living in Lowell through her cooking and English classes. The classes have helped many gain jobs in the food service industry. When the women started bringing their children to the English classes, Joanie responded by providing another service – she set up a tutoring program for the children.

Dr. Martin brings a quiet, steady presence to the neighborhood. He has a servant's heart and is more comfortable working behind the scenes. As a physician, Marty has been known to treat many children in the neighborhood at any time of day or night, and he's always there to provide advice and mentor young people.

One Lowell resident, Nancy, writes this about Dr. Martin: "He has willingly seen patients on his day off or evenings to look in painful ears, at rashes, listen to lungs and to check the overall health of distressed neighbors. When needed, he will often provide the antibiotic or inhaler for the person that is in need of it free of charge.

Nancy writes, "One particular story stands out to me. I had a teen mom living with me for a while. Her baby often had a cough and respiratory wheezes and rattles that we could hear when he breathed. One day when the baby really wasn't doing well, we took him up to see Marty. It was on a weekend. He stopped what he was doing when we got there and fully examined the baby. When he was finished, he clearly explained to the mom what was going on and what needed to be done. He gave the mom an inhaler and chamber to use with her child. The peace Marty gave this young mom with a sick baby was as good as the medication he gave her. Given the fact that the ER is the only place one can go on the weekends with MediCal, this was a real blessing.

Nancy goes on to say, "A few weeks later we were in the car driving by the Martin's home. Marty was out in the yard doing yard work. This teen mom rolled down the window and yelled out to him as we passed by. At that moment, I was so grateful for Joanie and Marty choosing to live in the Lowell neighborhood. Marty had become more than a pediatrician. He was now a friend, a role model and a neighbor."

Finally, Nancy says, "**They have sought the peace of this neighborhood, and they have done it well.**"

Joanie and Marty, you've touched the lives of so many who will always remember what you've given them. On behalf of a grateful city, I thank you for the work you've done to improve the lives of residents of the Lowell neighborhood. Would you please come forward and receive the Key to the City of Fresno? (Read plaque).

## **State of the City**

Now, it is my distinct honor as the Mayor of the City of Fresno to bring you the 2010 State of the City Address.

Having walked through a year marked by extraordinary financial challenges, I am pleased to tell you that the state of your City remains strong and that our future is as promising as ever.

"How can that be, given the challenges facing our city?" you might wonder. Let me assure you. I am keenly aware of our challenges. I confront them every day, but strength is not measured by the absence of challenges. The strength of our city is not measured by a lack of resistance.

That would be like bench pressing without putting any weights on the bar and then claiming strength because you can do a hundred reps. That's not strength. That's just moving your joints.

The strength of our City is measured by how well we respond to challenges and how well we overcome the resistance that's before us. By that measure, Fresno, I say you're the strongest you've ever been!

In a time of less money, not more; fewer employees and resources, not extra, Fresno continues to advance on key city goals:

- Returning the City to financial health;
- Protecting the public's safety;
- Restoring our downtown and historic neighborhoods; and
- Promoting business growth, private investment, and prosperity in our community.

### **City Goal #1: Returning the City to Financial Health**

Let me begin by addressing the City's financial health. It is no secret that the City of Fresno, like most every other local government in the country and certainly in California, is weathering an incredibly difficult financial storm.

Since I took office in January 2009, just 16 months ago, we have been responsible for producing 4 budgets. Now, just to give you some perspective, each time the city prepares a budget, it takes at least 4 months to prepare. So, if you do the math...4 budgets @ 4 months each, 16 months in office...you get a sense of just how strenuous this has been, but I am extremely proud of the work that's been done throughout the City to rethink our operations and balance our budget.

I want to say a special thanks to the City's Budget Director, Renena Smith, for her tireless work and expertise in guiding the City through this last year and a half. Her skills have been put to the test like you wouldn't believe, and she has passed with flying colors. In fact, City Manager Mark Scott remarked to me the other day that Renena is the best Budget Director he's ever seen at any city, large or small. Renena, we are very grateful for you.

Together, these 4 budgets that have been produced over the last year and a half address a 70 million dollar budget shortfall in our General Fund...which is a big number when you consider the City's General Fund is projected to be \$213 million in this next fiscal year. Extremely difficult decisions have been included in each of these budgets, and the proposed 2011 budget released earlier this month is perhaps the most difficult yet.

But I want to offer this insight on the history of City Hall finances.

We have analyzed every budget that has been prepared and adopted by the City Council every year since 1979. That's 30 years of City Hall budgets and financials. Here's what we found:

- **1982** - revenue was down 14.3%. 208 positions were scheduled to be eliminated.
- The next year, **1983**, there was another budget gap of \$7.5 million because the state took \$4.6 million of the City's money.
- **1984** – Another \$6.9 million shortfall on top of the shortfalls in 1982 and 1983. The budget documents warned that this shortfall could grow worse depending on continued deterioration in the economy. 101 general fund positions were cut. Sales tax revenue had declined by more than half that year.
- **Fast forward to 1987** – The budget summary begins with a quote from Dickens...something about a “tale of two cities”? Sound familiar? It states, **“This is truly a tough time for cities and the prospects are grim. Indeed, a good case can be made that the outlook for cities has never been worse.”**

- **1989** – The words “structural imbalance” are used for the first time in City budget documents. Staff recommended cutting 7% of the General Fund. Council approved 2-3% in cuts.
- **Two years later – 1991.** Budget documents say the City is “struggling to assume larger and larger service areas without increases in staffing, equipment and facilities.”
- **In 1994** – another citywide reduction of 155 positions, which was 5.4% of the City’s total workforce because they were starting the year \$18.8 million in the hole. \$15.4 million of which was caused by state grabs.

So, why do I share this historical budget information with you? It’s certainly not to depress you, but it is to give you perspective that we are repeating history.

Knowing that we’ve been through this before does not make today’s decisions any easier, but it does provide the perspective that we’ve gotten through these crises in the past. We will get through this one as well.

**But, secondly, there’s an important lesson here that we’ve got to learn and never forget. Local government in California is extremely susceptible to fluctuations in the economy. As a result, we have to engrain fiscal prudence into everything we do at City Hall.**

The actions the city has taken over the last 16 months to cut our operations early and aggressively in response to the downturn in the economy has paid off for our institution’s fiscal health. While other cities continued to deny their revenue pictures last year and refused to take corrective action, the Administration and the Fresno City Council were working together to make difficult but prudent decisions.

Those actions are paying off. In October 2009, the City was projecting a nearly \$90 million budget shortfall at the end of five years in 2015. With the adoption of the 2011 budget, the Council and the Administration will have wiped out that structural imbalance by two-thirds...**and after one more round of cuts at mid-year, the City of Fresno will once again have a structurally balanced budget.**

Looking ahead a few years, the market is going to come back. We will have decisions to make about public services we would like to add back...tree trimming comes to mind...and just like the pain of childbirth, future councils and future mayors may forget just how painful the contractions of the 2010s were.

But, we can’t let that happen. The community needs to retain the collective memory and lessons learned from this particular recession so that maybe, just maybe, we will stop repeating history.

As we move forward over the next several years and as the market comes back, my future budgets will focus on three things: (1) fund core services to a sufficient operating level; (2) pay down debt; and (3) set funds aside for capital improvement projects that maintain the City’s physical assets, as well as attracts private investment into our city.

Abraham Lincoln once said, **“Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm.”**

I'm quite sure these three fiscal principles are the principles upon which the City must stand to restore and to maintain fiscal health, and I am committed to standing firm upon them.

## **City Goal #2: Protecting the Public's Safety**

Financial stability is the foundation for everything we are charged with doing at City Hall. Without it, we cannot deliver essential services, like public safety, which is our first and most important responsibility.

That understanding permeates the work of every single department at the City, whether it's our public works crews, building inspectors, parks maintenance crews, or transportation or utility workers. But that focus is perhaps most evident to the public through the work done every day by our Fire and Police Departments.

The Fresno Fire Department was founded back in 1877. In those days, there wasn't a Police Department, Public Works or a PARCS Department. People pretty much took matters into their own hands, except when it came to fighting fires.

Our Fire Department is a rich Fresno tradition and, as you know, it is capably led by Fire Chief Randy Breugman. You may not know, however, that since we gathered for last year's State of the City luncheon, Chief Bruegman received the 2009 Chief of the Year award from the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

In 2009, Fresno Fire responded to over 44,000 calls for service. 31,442 of those calls were for medical emergencies and rescues. Over 2,200 were fire calls.

One such fire happened just about a year ago today. On Friday, May 22, 2009, three engines and two fire trucks were called out to a structure fire on S. Whitney Avenue.

While the units were rolling, Fire Dispatch was advised that Fresno PD was on the scene and that a family was trapped in the house. Fresno Police Officers Brett Barnard and Ray Hernandez had entered the home and successfully rescued two women from the residence.

Battalion Chief Mickey Taylor and Engines 15 and 8 arrived with Fire Captains Will Veiga and Jonathan Lusk, Engineers Pete Flores and Mike Zimmerman, and firefighters Mike Ressler, Robert Castillo, and Jonathan Lopez-Galvan.

Conditions were deteriorating fast as fire spread to other parts of the house.

The fire crew was alerted that a man was still in the house, bedridden and on a ventilator, but they weren't sure where he was. The crew immediately began fire attack and rescue operations to find the trapped man and get him out, even though there were security bars on all of the windows.

Fortunately, they were successful in finding him and taking him out through a back door as the fire spread into the attic spaces above.

The quick and decisive actions taken by the firefighters that day saved the life of this man. Further, the actions of police officers Bernard and Hernandez in placing themselves in harm's way, without the benefit of proper protective gear, prevented serious injury to the women in the house.

We owe a debt of gratitude to these courageous and dedicated fire fighters and police officers, **not just for their efforts that day**, although that is reason enough, but because I know if you asked them, they would tell you that they would have done it again and again and again because they're committed to serving the people of Fresno. Would you all please stand and be recognized?

I'm very proud of the work of our Fire Department, and I'm also very proud of the work of our Police Department.

Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, our officers, and our staff who serve at the Fresno Police Department are responsible for reducing our overall crime rate in Fresno by 3.5% last year.

Year-to-date, violent crime is down by 9.7% so far in 2010. **This is a tremendous accomplishment.**

The department's average response times to life threatening calls for service in 2009 and thus far in 2010 remains under the department's goal of 7 minutes. And, traffic collisions resulting in injury or death have dropped by 46% and 52% respectively over the last 7 years.

Unfortunately, in the first 5 months of 2010, auto theft is up 15.4% compared to last year which is concerning, to say the least. However, even with the increase in the early part of this year, auto theft rates in Fresno have been decreased by over 70% since the all time high rates in the early 1990s.

That is a direct result of the work of our police officers and the incredible leadership of Chief Dyer. The Fresno Police Department continues to respond to the challenge of keeping our community safe with smart, data-driven, pro-active strategies, and the results speak for themselves.

I want to take a moment to highlight one of Fresno PD's successful programs and take you behind the scenes of that program for just a moment.

Did you know that the Fresno Police Department's Graffiti Abatement Team is one of the best in the country and that cities come from across the U.S. to learn from our department?

In the last year, **3.8 million square feet of graffiti have been removed** and 84,644 calls for service have been answered. 100% of the calls for service are addressed within 48 hours.

The real driver behind the success of the Fresno Graffiti Abatement Team is its leader, city employee Jet Lim. Jet has been working for the Graffiti Task Force for the last 14 years, and in that time he has trained and supervised dozens of employees and coordinated the efforts of over 3,000 volunteers.

But that's not all, Jet worked with a small manufacturer in Los Angeles, Graffiti Removal, Inc., to come up with a new product that is effective, non-toxic, and packaged in easy-to-use pouches so they can be distributed and used by city clean-up crews and volunteers. That product is now being sold all over the world.

Adam Kop-cho of Graffiti Removal, Inc., recently sent me a letter about Jet Lim. It read:

“...we have had a unique experience of being a ‘fly on the wall’ for many hundreds of municipal graffiti programs throughout the country, as well as Australia and the UK.

I have been working with Jet for over 4 years and have keenly observed the success of The Fresno Graffiti Taskforce.

Jet has a unique ability to realize that a city riddled with graffiti is a wounded city, with devalued assets and neighborhoods creating the impression of a crime ridden city. Jet was way ahead of his time in developing a pro-active strategy to combat the problem and has created a model program for other cities.

We are very grateful for Jet's input in helping us develop the Graffiti Safewipes product line and are proud to have now donated over 1000 kits to the City of Fresno. **In our combined experience of working with over 1,000 cities worldwide, the City of Fresno Graffiti Taskforce should be the proudest of all...**”

Jet Lim is here today. Jet, would you please stand and be recognized for your dedication, creativity and ingenuity in leading the City's Graffiti Abatement Team?

As you can tell, Jet is very focused and dedicated to his task, and I know he would want to take advantage of this gathering and spotlight on graffiti removal **to put you all to work.**

On your tables, you will find your very own Graffiti Safewipes kits.

Some generous, responsible corporate citizens bought these for you so you could take them with you. Please keep them in your car, and when you see graffiti on public property, go ahead and clean it right up.

And, thanks to Jet's work with Graffiti Removal, Inc., these Safewipes will soon be on sale at Fresno Ag Hardware for \$1 apiece. So, please plan to visit Fresno Ag and restock every now and then so you can help us continue to push back graffiti vandalism in Fresno.

In fact, I hereby deputize each and every one of you as honorary members of Jet Lim's Graffiti Abatement Team. **You are commissioned to join City Hall in our battle against graffiti vandalism should you choose to accept this challenge.**

In all seriousness, it is **extremely** important that we work together to remove graffiti in our community because so often, it is evidence of a much bigger problem.

Like many cities our size in California, the City of Fresno continues to battle against gangs and gang violence.

It is a constant struggle, **not just for law enforcement**, but for our entire community as we fight to get our kids, our family members, out of the gang lifestyle...and as we wrestle to keep them out in the first place.

It is a fight, like it or not, that we are all in...our families, our schools, churches, City Hall, law enforcement, employers, everybody...and we **must all** be in this war if we are to win it.

Unfortunately, five weeks ago, our City had a very violent weekend. Five shootings, four people hit, 3 people dead – 1 died in a drug dispute; 2 because of gang violence – 1 was a 16 year old gang member. The other was a 47-year-old mother with probable ties to a gang.

I remember sitting in church that Sunday morning after these incidents had occurred. I didn't know about them yet. I just happened to check my Blackberry (don't tell the pastor), and I saw the emails from Chief Dyer. **Subject: "Shooting – 3 Dead."**

I began to read the messages – one, after the other, after the other, and the reality of the events began to sink in.

As I sat there in church, weeping over what had happened, it occurred to me that, as a community, we could respond to these incidents in one of two ways.

We could shrug it off and say, "Oh well. It's just gang members killing each other."

Or we could say, **"Enough is enough. Not one more incident is needed to motivate or to elicit a heart cry from our City that says, 'enough is enough.'"**

I don't know about you, but I choose the second reaction.

I choose to consider the lives that were lost 5 weeks ago and to let it wreck me even though they may not have been innocent people, but because I know there **are** innocent people in our city whose lives were devastated by those incidents...and I don't want anyone else in our City to have to live through that.

In November, 2006, Mayor Alan Autry and Chief Dyer declared war on the Bulldog Gang with increased suppression efforts through the West Fresno Tactical Team, Bulldog Tactical Team,

MAGEC, district crime suppression teams, and investigative and narcotics units. That effort was later matched by the launch of the Mayor's Gang Prevention Initiative.

All of that work continues to this day, and it's paid off in important dividends. Every day, I'm grateful for the work of our local law enforcement agencies to suppress and prevent crime. They do an incredible job.

**But, our long-term strategy to eliminate gangs simply will not work without our residents from throughout the city coming forward to say they've had enough and they're willing to step up and do whatever they can to help in this fight.**

We need residents to cooperate in gang investigations. We need residents to report gang activity. Knowing the dangers that can be involved in that type of cooperation, we have set up a tip line – 621-GANG – that will allow people to come forward and provide us with anonymous tips.

**In addition, today, I'm pleased to announce Project Ceasefire** – a comprehensive initiative to address gang violence in Fresno that takes the full force of the law and swift, sure, and severe consequences for violence and couples it with a complete response from community organizations and family members who promise support if the gang member chooses to walk away from violence.

Project Ceasefire has been modeled for 14 years in numerous cities across the country and the results have been impressive. Communities that have successfully deployed this program have seen drops in violent crime from 36 to 63%.

**Ceasefire targets the 10-percenters, those in gangs who are the most violent and the most influential on others to become violent.** In virtually every case, these 10-percenters are on parole and probation and can be ordered to appear before a Ceasefire panel that will include State, Federal, and local law enforcement representatives.

During this “call in,” the gang member will be told that he has been identified, that law enforcement knows who he associates with, and knows that he is responsible for violence in the city.

**The message will be short and clear: the violence must stop,** and if it doesn't, he will be arrested and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, with recommendations for the maximum sentencing terms available, which can literally be hundreds of years in prison through the Federal system.

The “call in” will also include former gang members who have successfully left the gangs, as well as service providers who will inform the gang member of the immediate steps that must be taken to leave the gang lifestyle.

The targeted gang members will be tracked. In the cases where the gang member continues to engage in violence, the enforcement operations will commence and continue until all of the individuals who are associated with the violence are arrested and prosecuted.

In communities where Project Ceasefire has been extremely effective, two things have existed. First of all, committed law enforcement agencies who keep up the pressure, continue to do the “call ins” and follow up on the targeted 10-percenters; and

Secondly, communities that are fed up with the effects of gang violence in their neighborhoods and engage with law enforcement to put this program to work.

I speak today on behalf of the Fresno Police Department and commit the agency to diligent implementation of Project Ceasefire. Now, I ask you, the community – parents, grandparents, teachers, pastors, volunteers, neighbors - to join with law enforcement on Project Ceasefire.

Let’s vow, once again, to work together **to take gangs apart in our city** and replace them with appropriate, life-giving opportunities and relationships.

**Together, we will not retreat from the war on gang violence. We will not retreat from our inner city neighborhoods. We will give no more territory to gang violence and no more territory to neglected neighborhoods.** Today...join me in recommitting our City to pushing back the effects of violence, retaliation, decay, and blight in our urban core.

This is a battle, **not just for law enforcement to wage on our behalf.** This time... we must use...**all of the tools that we have at our disposal...** so that we can see **broken** and **neglected** neighborhoods be restored and put back in order... so that they become valued once again with a high quality of life for their residents. **That is our City’s future.**

**City Goal #3: Restoring our downtown and historic neighborhoods**

And, to achieve it, an unprecedented, comprehensive effort is underway to restore Fresno’s historic neighborhoods and to revitalize our City’s downtown. 7,000 acres in the middle of the City are the focus of this work.

Led by Craig Scharon, the Director of the Downtown and Community Revitalization Department, we are committed to three things in our historic neighborhoods:

**#1 - Work directly with residents to understand their vision for their neighborhoods and work with them to help bring it about;**

**#2 - Change the local land use laws and regulations that contributed to the problems in the first place; and**

**#3 - Line up every resource inside City Hall from code enforcement, law enforcement, public works, PARCS, our Redevelopment Agency, and our housing rehabilitation programs, as well as community groups and other public agencies to apply their resources in a coordinated fashion to restore our neighborhoods.**

Our efforts to date...culminated...in a week long work session for downtown neighborhoods just two weeks ago...where **hundreds of residents** came to the table to chime in on the future of their neighborhoods.

Based on their input and work being done by our team of experts, the Downtown Neighborhoods Community Plan will be drafted, reviewed by a citizens commission, forwarded to the City Council, and adopted into law.

**We will replace outdated, restrictive, conflicted laws with laws that make sense and make it easier for revitalization to take place.**

We are not waiting, however...for the laws to change **before we take action to change the course of our downtown neighborhoods.**

In the Lowell neighborhood, for example...our police department has cracked down on prostitution, drug trafficking, graffiti, weapons, assaults and robberies.

Code enforcement has worked with residents to lower the number of code violations from a high of 441 violations to only 73 violations today.

29 housing units have either been completely rehabilitated or have renovations underway thanks to the Redevelopment Agency, the Fresno Housing Authority, the City and Habitat for Humanity. ...**And, if you haven't seen these improvements yet, you really should.** They are dramatic and beautiful.

Improvements have been made at Dickey Park like lights...drinking fountains... repaired picnic tables and bleachers...a new backstop for the baseball diamond... sewer drains that work!

Plans are underway to construct a new playground at San Pablo Park thanks to work by the PARCS department and input from residents.

Faculty and students from 15 different departments at Fresno State are working with Lowell residents.

In short...the Lowell neighborhood is undergoing a good 'ole fashioned barn-raising...only in this case...**we're raising an entire neighborhood.**

And, that's what it's going to take to restore Fresno's center city.

And, guess what? We've got a lot more work to do in the Lowell neighborhood and southwest Fresno and southeast Fresno, and the Jane Addams neighborhood, and along the Belmont corridor.

**Time is of the essence. We have 50 years of neglect to make up for, and we've got a decade to do it.**

In the middle of our community's historic neighborhoods **sits Downtown Fresno**, the 972-acre area bounded by the Santa Fe railroad tracks, State Route 99, Freeway 41, and Divisadero.

Our Downtown will be our showpiece, the center of culture, commerce, and civic affairs. We have a ways to go yet before that is the case, but remember, revitalization is an ongoing process. We won't be finished when I leave office, whether that's at the end of four years or eight, and fortunately, my administration is not starting from scratch.

Not by a long shot.

You see, **I'm not the first mayor to this rodeo**. I have had the privilege of following Mayor Autry...and building off the vision he cast...for a revitalized Downtown. I am so grateful to him for the soil he tilled, the ground he plowed. (There's just something about Mayor Autry that brings out the cowboy in me.)

In preparing my comments today, I was trying to pick the downtown accomplishment over the last 17 months of which I am the most proud. A lot has happened in the last year and a half.

Is it one of the 21 buildings that are being renovated, including the Droge building the Fresno Housing Authority just agreed to buy last night?

Recruiting the world's headquarters for the raisin industry back downtown?

The 3 new festivals that have attracted 10 to 15,000 thousand people downtown, not to mention the Cinco de Mayo and Mexican Independence Day festivals that attract hundreds of thousands each?

The beautiful Kress building which is getting a face lift?

Keeping triple-A baseball in downtown?

The beginnings of the Central San Joaquin Valley's entertainment district with nightclubs and dancing?

Could it be the fact that 50 or more citizens gather every quarter at the Downtown Revitalization Update Meetings...or that 35 people just signed up for Fresno's Leading Young Professionals new Downtown Citizen's Academy?

Surely, the development and eventual adoption of the Fulton Corridor Specific Plan that will define the future for the Fulton Mall and **will finally ensure our infrastructure capacity actually meets the requirements of a revitalized downtown?**

Wow. That's a lot of work. I am really proud of each of these accomplishments, but I think the thing that is most encouraging and that indicates we're going to make it this time...is the level of buy-in and involvement from our downtown property owners themselves.

You see, we will do all we can from City Hall's standpoint to support downtown revitalization, but at the end of the day, it is the private property owners who will ultimately determine downtown's fate.

To see property owners, some of whom we haven't reached out to in years, or in some cases ever, began to engage in this process, invest in their properties and even buy additional property...tells me we're going to get it done this time.

In the coming weeks and months, look for the formation of the downtown Property and Business Improvement District, the PBID. The election process ends on June 24. Ballots are in the hands of downtown property owners now, so if you talk to one, encourage them to return their ballot today with a "yes" vote. The owners can then spend the second half of the year forming a board and adopting a budget so that when funds become available in early 2011, they are ready to start work on Day 1 on things like marketing, greater cleanliness and safety, and new events on the Fulton Mall.

**City Goal #4: Promoting business growth, private investment, and prosperity in our community**

Now, let's talk about the state of our economy. As you know, we continue to struggle through this recession. Although most private employers I hear from indicate that at least the hemorrhaging has stopped. They have stabilized and are preparing for growth.

Our local personnel firms are reporting that their clients are just beginning to hire sales and marketing people again, which is a precursor to greater growth and hiring. So, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Nevertheless, an **estimated 37,000 people are unemployed in the City of Fresno right now.** That's 15.9% of our workforce. Clearly, that unemployment figure includes the effects of the recession on our economy, but we also know that...even before the recession...when the economy was booming...Fresno has...for over 30 years...struggled with high unemployment when compared to state and national averages. **That is the reality we must face.**

The good news is that there is a way out...and there is a lot being done to change that reality.

There are two things that must be done to beat back decades of high unemployment. Just like two sides of a coin, two components are required for economic growth. The first are private businesses that have a demand for their products or services. The second are people who are qualified to fill the jobs that are available.

If you have one component without the other, you don't get economic growth. **It takes both.**

There are so many efforts underway across this city and region to support the growth of local companies and to help prepare a qualified workforce. **I dare say there is more work happening in Fresno on these two fronts than any other place in California.**

There are dozens and dozens of employers, non-profits and public agencies working together to help close the gap on these issues and support economic growth, whether it's the Economic Development Corporation, the Regional Jobs Initiative, the Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board, our local SBA office, dozens of training providers and educational institutions...there's a lot going on, and I can't possibly summarize it all here.

But, I do want you to know what we're doing at City Hall to support the growth of local companies and to ensure a prepared workforce so you will have confidence that we are doing our part.

**To support the growth of local companies, we're doing 3 things:** First things first, we've got to "walk the talk" and buy local at City Hall. Second, we've got to "talk the talk" – which means promoting local companies to our fellow Fresnoans so they also choose to buy local. And third, City Hall has to know when to get out of the way. In order to do that, we're streamlining our development and entitlement processes so **we're** not what's causing private investment to be blocked from flowing into the market.

**In other words, our economic development strategy at City Hall is: Walk it. Talk it. And get out of the way.**

So, how are we doing on "walking the walk"? Thanks to the work of Ken Nerland and Jason McDonald in our General Services department, City Hall has stepped up its local purchasing dramatically. Since FY 2009, we have purchased almost \$188 million in products and services from local companies, which is well over half of all of our purchases.

Second, "talking the talk." We're doing our part to make visible to the public their options for buying locally.

I spend a lot of time with local, small business owners who have great products and services to deliver. They're committed to customer service, and they have competitive pricing. What they don't always have are gigantic marketing budgets to make sure that everyone knows they exist.

Now, don't get me wrong. City Hall is not nor will it ever be the marketing department for local businesses. However, we are the keeper of the business license list in Fresno. So, it is very easy for us to develop a directory of all of our local companies that have business licenses and make sure that directory gets into the hands of every Fresnoan. And that's exactly what we're doing thanks to the work of Amy Huerta, our Local Business Initiatives Manager.

Coming this Fall, in October 2010, look for the first ever **City of Fresno Local Business Directory – just in time for your holiday shopping.** There will be a print and an online version of the directory – both designed to make visible your options for buying locally.

And...there are other things we're doing to make our local companies visible to their potential customers. We've organized groups of businesses who are in the same industry so they can network and help promote their companies to the Fresno market. We call them "affinity groups."

We have affinity groups for information technology, licensed contractors, CPAs, community banks, personnel companies, and independent retailers and restaurants. Altogether, there are about 180 businesses working with City Hall to expand their businesses here.

Did you know...that the Fresno Technology Affinity Group includes about two dozen technology firms who collectively employ about 1,000 people?

Did you know that Ticketmaster's largest competitor, ShoWare, is headquartered in Fresno at Vision One? They are. Vision One expanded by 40% in 2009, and anticipate another 50% growth this year.

Did you know that one of the fastest growing on-line market research companies, Decipher, is headquartered in Fresno? True. In April of last year, Decipher added an additional 35 full-time employees to their payroll, and those positions are all still in place, despite the recession, and Decipher is planning further expansion here in Fresno.

Bixly.com, Python software specialists, is headquartered in Fresno. They have tripled their business since their launch in 2008. They are certified "smart people," and they're doing custom software development for clients all over the world, including Google and Campus Crusade for Christ International.

Redcort Software, the makers of employee time clock software, Virtual Time Clock, are headquartered in Fresno. Tens of thousands of workers at businesses in over a dozen countries rely on Redcort Software every single day. **You can read about their product, Virtual Time Clock, in Business Week...or in... MacWorld, but if you want to sit down and have a cup of coffee with their founder, Keith Delong, you've got to come to Fresno.**

These are just examples of the innovations that are coming from our City. These examples prove we can be a birthing place for new ideas, new businesses, and new solutions. Don't be surprised when Fresno companies begin to be sought out for their ingenuity, their commonsense, and their solutions to ongoing problems. That's the shift our entrepreneurs are making in our economy.

**Now, to the "getting out of the way" part of our economic development strategy.**

At last year's State of the City luncheon, I promised to get to the bottom of City Hall's tangled rules and regs and to do something that's been talked about for a long time – straighten out our development and entitlement process so that our standards are set high in our community but that we make it really easy for people to do business in Fresno.

I initiated the Process Improvement and Permit Enhancement Strategy, also known as PIPES, to ensure the work was done.

12 months later, our team at City Hall has **identified the bottlenecks to our entitlement process in every part of the organization.**

We have worked with literally dozens of customers through the PIPES Blue Ribbon Task Force to get their input on the reforms needed to make City Hall work well.

We have involved the City Council and outside public agencies.

We are **well aware** of the problems that have kept Fresno from being a business-friendly community, and we have put new strategies in place to address those problems.

I have every confidence that, given time to implement these reforms, **Fresno will become the easiest place on the West Coast for high quality projects to be developed.**

I want to be forthright with you, however, and tell you that we still have a long way to go to achieve that goal.

Straightening out City Hall once and for all involves...reformed processes...staff training and development...implementation of web-based software that allows total transparency in the process...and ...let us not forget...**a revised development code.**

**All of these elements are in motion, and we will follow through on each and every one until we get the results we want and need to support the investment of private dollars in our community.**

For those of you who are not in a line of work that would require you to interact with the development and entitlement process, it may be difficult to understand why this is such an important “fix” for City Hall. But please know that it is.

At the risk of airing some dirty laundry, I want to tell you this little story so you will get an idea of the types of challenges we are addressing.

In the winter of 2008, a developer approached the City about constructing a two-story, 40-unit apartment building on a vacant lot in downtown. The applicant met with City staff on several occasions over an 8-month period. During these discussions, redevelopment plans and environmental analysis were not discussed in detail with the applicant. The applicant was told that he needed to submit applications for a general plan amendment, a rezoning, and a conditional use permit for the vacant site. He was also told that instead of a two-story, 40-unit project, that the City wanted a four-story project with more units than originally proposed because the City wanted to achieve a more “urban” environment. However, the City had no standards or criteria in place to specify the densities required or how the city defined “urban.” Nevertheless, the City told the applicant these things would be necessary to create consistency with the City’s plans and code requirement of this property.

We don’t have time to go into the maze of confusing and conflicting information and actions related to this project that followed over the next several months. Let’s just say that this wasn’t a process – it was an endurance test that somehow finally ended with a conditional use permit being issued 15 months and \$100,000 later on April 7, 2010.

Unfortunately, by that point, the developer had lost the financing for the project, and it is not moving forward at this point.

I wish this was a unique story. Unfortunately, it is not.

Now, you know why PIPES is needed. Whether you're in the real estate business or not, you ought to care about this major system in our community working well because it is a barrier to our economic growth.

**When PIPES is fully implemented, we will shorten this process you just heard about by months...the cost by at least half...and the frustration by 100%.**

There's one other item I would like to address on the issue of unemployment in Fresno.

**You have heard me say this a dozen times...but it is one of the biggest keys to unlocking Fresno's economic prosperity so it bears repeating.**

Despite our 15.9% unemployment rate, there are thousands of jobs available in Fresno County. 11,609 to be exact according to the Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board in March 2010. The top occupations posted on their website include nurses; occupational and physical therapists; management occupations; sales and related occupations; customer service; installation, maintenance and repair jobs; transportation and material moving occupations, and so on.

But, it continues to be the case in Fresno – during times of recession and during times of economic activity – that thousands of jobs go unfilled because of the mismatch between the skills of the people looking for work and the skills required for the jobs that are open.

Just imagine if those 11,609 jobs were filled tomorrow. Do you think we would experience an economic impact from that? Absolutely, we would. And those 11,609 people would have money to spend, and as they spent it, more jobs would be created, and so on. That would be a good thing, right? This is really a key.

The Fresno Regional Workforce Investment Board, State Center Community College District, West Hills Community College District, and our private vocational colleges like Heald, San Joaquin Valley College, and ITT, have been working at breakneck speed to increase the amount of training that's available in Fresno and to get as many people through their programs as possible...**but I say it's time we take it to the next level.**

That's why in the fall, the Workforce Investment Board, the Adult Education Task Force, and I will work together to launch a public initiative to promote job training and education. We will work together to remove the obstacles for accessing the job training and education that already exists in Fresno so that this time next year, more people are doing what it takes to improve their skills so they can compete for the jobs that are available in our community.

**It is possible to see people's lives turned around. Do you believe that? It's true. Job training and education make a huge difference, and we're going after that big time for the people in our city.**

Unfortunately, for many in our city, about 3,500 to be exact, it's pretty tough for them to enroll in a job training program right now or to get to a job interview because they don't have a permanent residence...or a residence of any type for that matter.

They are living on the streets so that makes it tough to get groomed in order to make a decent impression.

In those situations, housing makes all the difference, which is why in September of 2008, the City of Fresno and the County jointly adopted the 10-year Plan to End Homelessness.

The plan is based on a housing-first model, which means, if you can get people off the streets and into some kind of housing, it's much easier for them to deal with the other challenges in their lives that led to their homelessness in the first place.

The 10-Year Plan was adopted in late 2008, and implementation of the plan began in January 2009 under the coordination of Greg Barfield, the City's Homeless Prevention and Policy Manager.

Greg and the "Housing First" approach to addressing homelessness were put to the test when...in March of 2009... a then-brand new mayor, because of serious public health and safety concerns, directed that the Storyland Motel on Motel Drive be closed and that its inhabitants, all 39 families, be relocated to other housing.

Greg, the Economic Opportunities Commission, the Fresno Housing Authority, and Central California Legal Services got to work to make those arrangements. It was a huge scramble to find accommodations for and move over 100 people within about a 3-week period, but the team pulled it off.

They learned valuable lessons through that process like...our community didn't have a shared database in place to coordinate services for homeless people...we didn't have an inventory of available apartments who would take housing vouchers from the Housing Authority or the City for emergency and transition housing...and they also learned that there are limitations on just which agencies can deliver which services.

So, this team of people, they call themselves the "Continuum of Care," worked diligently to put all of those things in place.

Things were going along just fine until a few months later when the then, less-new Mayor announced to a stunned audience on May 27, 2009 at the State of the City lunch that Tent City, a 7-year-old homeless encampment with 300+ people living in it would be cleared out and closed within 6 weeks...and that all the people living there would not just be shooed away from the site,

but that they would be assessed, triaged, and helped with transitioning to a place to live, as prescribed by the 10-year plan to end homelessness.

Greg and his colleagues from West Care, EOC, and the Housing Authority had a **very busy summer**...but their efforts paid off because on July 16, 2009, Tent City was permanently closed, and 103 of the former residents were housed in permanent housing and began to receive a variety of supportive services to help them achieve a life of independence once again.

Now, almost a year later, **80%** of the people who were formerly at Tent City, are still housed. They've stayed off the streets, and they've taken major steps towards independence.

Jacqueline Frye, or Jackie as her friends call her, is one of those people.

This time last year, Jackie was living in Tent City. She had been on the streets for about 15 years. Drug addiction and prostitution were a way of life for her. Her children would try to reach out to her, but she pushed them away.

Sometimes, they would give her material items or money, but Jackie sold them and used all the cash for drugs. Being under the influence was a way to cope.

While living on the streets, Jackie had tried to attend college and gain employment, but coming back to the tents always got the best of her, and she would succumb to her addiction.

Feeling like she had lost total control of her life, one day Jackie decided she would attempt to end it by jumping off the very bridge she lived near...in the encampment. Someone saved her that day, and she never knew who it was that came to her rescue.

But something began to happen in 2009. Jackie grew tired of her lifestyle. She knew that if someone would give her a chance to get out, she would take it, but she didn't expect anyone to come after her because she had done her best to push everyone away from her for 15 years.

Then, in the summer of 2009, while living on H Street in Tent City, she met Greg, from the City of Fresno. Greg talked to her about how the encampment was going to have to close but that if she was interested, he could help her get access to a place to live. Jackie expressed a desire to want more for her life.

So, Greg introduced her to the folks at the Fresno Housing Authority, and soon after she had an address for the first time in a very long time.

That began her upward climb.

Now, almost one year later, Jackie has been clean and sober for a year. She remains in her apartment and is now enrolled at Fresno City College where she is pursuing a career in social work.

Mother's Day, a few weeks ago, was a significant day for Jackie. Her children treated her to lunch at the Red Lobster, something that had been a tradition in the past.

Jackie says it felt good to be back, participating in life. Her children bought her jewelry. More valuable than the gift, Jackie realized she had finally regained their trust. They knew this time she would cherish her jewelry and not sell it for cash. Later, her niece gave her a laptop computer for school and told her aunt, "I'm so proud to be your niece."

Jackie says she is now independent and knows that people really do care and listen. She wants to become a drug and alcohol counselor. She says she is confident she can help others because she has the ability to spot someone in denial and will not tolerate excuses. Jackie says, **if she can succeed in life, anyone can.**

Ladies and gentlemen, please give a warm round of applause for Ms. Jacquelyn Frye. Jackie?

Because of Jackie and dozens of other stories just like hers, I am pleased to announce today Fresno First Steps Home, an initiative dedicated to implementing our 10-year plan to prevent and end homelessness in Fresno.

Fresno First Steps Home will raise funds and grant those funds to local non-profits and public service providers who are working to implement Fresno's 10-year plan. Organizations like the Fresno Housing Authority, the Marjaree Mason Center, West Care, the EOC, the Poverello House and Angels of Grace. These organizations are already working together in a coordinated fashion, but like a car needs fuel, we need to raise funds to help these organizations do their jobs.

The dollars will go to street outreach to help assess people living on the streets and identify those, like Jackie, who are ready to do what it takes to get out. The funds will also go to pay for rapid re-housing, case management, and support services for the homeless population.

**Our goal is to raise \$1 million a year to help pay for services that our existing funding streams can't pay for, and I believe Fresno is up to this challenge.**

We've thought this through and come up with some really easy ways for everyone in our community to participate.

First, you can talk to your friends about Fresno First Steps Home. Tell them you're excited about the effort and ask them to get involved.

Second, you can donate. **We're asking Fresnoans to give a buck a month.** That's it. Just \$1 per month. Many of you have probably given a dollar at a street corner to a homeless person at one time or another. Instead of doing that, consider giving your buck to this comprehensive, community wide effort where you know the dollars are going to be used to provide services to our homeless population to help get them permanently off the streets.

Signing up to give your \$1 per month is easy. You can make a donation and leave it in the envelope provided on your table. Or, you can go to [fresnofirststepshome.org](http://fresnofirststepshome.org) and sign up to make your monthly donation online.

Third, you can help hand out 2-1-1 cards. On your table, there are business cards with the Homeless Prevention Hotline printed on them. Grab the cards and take them with you. If you are approached by someone on the street asking for a donation, you can give them these pre-printed 2-1-1 cards instead. We want to get the word out to people living on our streets that there is a way out and that there's help available for them. The 2-1-1 phone number is staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by our local Fresno County United Way. Calling this number or the 800 number printed on the card will allow people in trouble to get connected to services.

Finally, you can volunteer to help with the Fresno First Steps Home initiative. Contact information is printed on the brochures on the table.

Easy enough, right?

As a city, we should expect to make reductions in the number of people living on our streets. We can change this situation. Doing nothing is not an option. Doing nothing is costing the public an estimated \$80,000,000 per year in unpaid medical bills, emergency room visits, public safety calls, and other public services. But we can do something about that, and Fresno First Steps Home gives everyone a chance to be a part of ending and preventing homelessness in Fresno.

## **Conclusion**

I started this speech by saying I believe our City is in the strongest position it's ever been in, and I know that is true. All around me, inside City Hall and out, I see a community that is facing its challenges head-on with more force...more fight and determination...more transparency and humility and creativity than ever before. It blows me away when I think about it.

And, I know exactly where we're going as a City.

And, yet, I also see we're not there yet. In fact, in some cases, we're a **long** way from where we want to be.

You all know my family lived in northwest Arkansas when I was aged 4 to 14 years old. And, one of my favorite things to do was to go visit my grandmother and grandfather, who lived two hours away in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

My parents would load us up in the car, and my sister and I would be beside ourselves with excitement, wiggling from head to toe, couldn't sit still. In those days, you didn't have to wear seat belts, so we would be throwing ourselves around in the backseat of the car like two little Chihuahuas on a road trip.

Then, a few minutes into the trip, the excitement of knowing we were going to eventually get to my grandmother's house, started to give way to the feeling of frustration because we hadn't yet arrived...and we **really** wanted to get there. Pretty soon, Andrea and I were about 50-50. Half wild with excitement to get to where we wanted to go; and half impatient that we weren't there yet.

That's when we would start in, "Mom...how many more minutes?...Mom...are we there yet?"

You can see where I'm going with this. Our journey as a community is not all that different from an excited child's trip to grandma's house.

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt where we're headed as a City, and I know we will get to our destination. We are getting our financial house in order. We're taking gangs apart from the inside out. Our center city and downtown will be revitalized and we will see lasting change to long-term unemployment and chronic homelessness in Fresno...but we're not there yet.

So, what do we do in the meantime? How do we put up with this tension of knowing where we're going and realizing we're not there yet?

We stay eyes fixed. Feet firmly planted. Shoulder to the wheel, and we keep on going.

Day after day, week after week, year after year...

It's important along the way that we celebrate each and every win...It's also important that we grieve the setbacks...and there are always setbacks.

But, after we've grieved. We recommit to the vision and to the promise of our City. We stay...excited about the future... Impatient with the present...committed to pushing on. And, that's how we win the fight, the fight for our City.