

STATE OF THE CITY - March 30, 2017

Good morning.

Given the state of politics these days, it's hard to imagine getting anyone out to hear an update on government. It's great to see so many of you here this morning.

Governing is difficult these days. The public is very frustrated. Frankly, little trust exists in our country for government leaders.

People feel overtaxed and under-served. They are concerned for their future, and for the quality of life for their families.

I believe the presidential campaign was a clear indicator of just how frustrated the general public is with government.

At City Hall, we take our role and responsibility seriously in serving our community. And it's paying off.

Today, I plan to review some of the progress we achieved last year and point out some of the challenges and opportunities we're facing this year.

Going back a few years, many of you will remember the days when Renton didn't have the great reputation we enjoy today.

How many of you remember John Keister with Almost Live?

To set the stage on how Renton was perceived in the past, we have a short video with John Keister.

VIDEO

Things have really changed since the days John Keister ranked on this city.

We have a lot of quality development taking place. New housing opportunities are popping up throughout the city. New companies are locating here, which means more local jobs.

We're home to the Seattle Seahawks and the top jet airplane maker in the world. And we're home to the northwest branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, which holds more money than any other bank in this corner of the country.

Best of all, we have the only IKEA store in the state!

But it's not all good news.

Some people feel that our success has also made it more difficult to own a home in our city, and created more traffic problems.

A recent KING 5 story cited Renton as one of five cities in this state, along with Seattle, Bellevue, Everett and Kirkland, as the most expensive places to purchase a home.

Twenty-five years ago when John Keister was making fun of Renton, there was very little development taking place here.

Renton was considered by many developers as one of the worst cities to do business.

But things changed dramatically. Renton has become a city that is attracting significant investment. And we're now considered by developers to be one of the best cities to work with.

2016 was an interesting year

Despite living through one of the most divisive presidential campaigns on record, we actually experienced a vibrant economy and a lot of growth throughout this region.

The stock market broke all-time records.

Seattle earned the distinction of having more building cranes up at one time than any other city in the country.

In Renton, three hotels and a major Class A office campus began to change the landscape on the south-end of the lake, while additional office campuses popped up in what we call the “Valley” or, what I like to refer as the “IKEA” part of the city.

Group Health became a major employer in Renton with its new 29-acre campus near the Federal Reserve Bank.

IKEA built a new, 400,000 square foot, state-of-the-art retail store, and celebrated its grand opening just a few weeks ago.

We completed the rebuilding of Logan Street that serves Renton Stadium, Boeing, The Landing and, unfortunately, commuters trying to avoid the freeway.

Downtown revitalization showed more progress than we have seen in decades, and there is more to come. And work began on a new, 3-acre park in the Sunset community as part of the huge redevelopment effort taking place there.

Last year, we had well over \$2 billion invested in our community and there are a number of exciting projects yet to be announced.

But not all was rosy last year.

The presidential campaign created a divided nation – a level most of us have never experienced.

It created uncertainty in some areas and a tremendous amount of fear for many people, especially our immigrant population.

And despite the vibrant economy, homelessness throughout the nation hit an all-time high. And in concert with the homelessness crisis was the explosion in heroin-related addiction and deaths.

Few communities in this country have escaped the impacts of homelessness and the heroin epidemic.

In Renton, we're actively working with local churches and other volunteer agencies to help provide services to those who are in need of food, shelter and other services.

The Center of Hope at City Hall, continued to be a valuable resource to many women and children who find themselves homeless and desperate. Last year, Center of Hope provided assistance to 997 women and children. Thirteen families have since moved into stable housing.

During the colder-than-normal winter, the Cold Weather Shelter was open 18 nights and provided a warm place for 389 people.

Renton-area churches continue to provide meals and shelter to as many people as they can serve, but the need continues to outpace the available resources.

We are working with other city and county leaders to try and figure out a plan on how to address these issues. Millions of dollars are being dedicated in this region for housing and treatment centers, and yet we're barely scratching the surface.

There are no proven solutions to date, which frankly is alarming.

A predictable impact of this crisis has been the increase in overall property crime. There are very few places throughout King County, where you can safely park your car, to avoid it being broken into or stolen.

Mail theft, car prowls, auto theft, burglaries and even robberies have risen to an alarming rate in this region. Despite countless task forces, and millions of dollars committed to address these issues, little relief has been found and jurisdictions continue to struggle for answers.

In Renton, public safety continues to be our number one priority. The desire to feel safe where you live and work is human nature. This is the environment we're working very hard to create.

It seems like everybody is carrying a gun these days. Disputes are resolved with gunfire. Domestic violence and issues

involving the mentally ill continue to rise. Protecting the public has become a very dangerous profession.

I can't offer enough praise for the professionalism and dedication of the men and women who work for the Renton Police Department.

Our officers are committed to exploring innovative ways to reduce crime, not just respond to calls. They are also working hard to improve relations between police officers and the public they serve.

Our officers are making an effort to build strong, trusting relationships with our residents. This means getting out of police cars when possible, attending public events and interacting with youth at our park facilities and rec centers.

A relationship between police and the Renton African American Pastors continues to be very strong. And we've launched efforts to create the same connection with our Latino community.

Which leads me to brag just a little about the progress we have made in building relationships with all members of our community.

Through the **Mayor's Inclusion Task Force**, we are meeting regularly with representatives from 15 different ethnic and religious groups, as well as individuals representing other vulnerable populations.

This dynamic group of people, who applied and were appointed to serve on this task force, have shown a true commitment to help us become **an inclusive and informed community**.

Last fall, we held our first, very successful multi-cultural festival, thanks to the efforts of task force members. Plans are already underway for this year's event.

We're also trying to better understand the needs and challenges facing our senior population. We hosted a senior fair at the Renton Senior Center that drew over 700 people.

We learned a lot about some of the needs and interests of our senior residents and plan another event this fall.

We continued our emphasis last year, on helping to promote local employment opportunities, through job fairs co-hosted with the Chamber and local schools. These efforts are continuing this year.

Politics and policies from the nation's capital involving immigration issues are taking a heavy toll on many residents.

The fear is very real. Our concern is that victims or witnesses of crimes won't call the police in fear of being deported for not having proper documentation.

We have been meeting with leaders from a number of immigrant groups to emphasize that Renton does not check the immigration status of people in our community. We never have and don't have plans to do so in the future.

Some critics are concerned that our lack of enforcing some of the federal immigration policies is allowing wanted criminals to run free.

This is not true. We treat all suspected criminals the same. If caught, they are arrested and processed through the criminal justice system. If we come across an individual who has an outstanding warrant, they face arrest regardless of their immigration status.

But we don't check immigration status. We also don't check on whether or not you have paid your federal income taxes. This is the responsibility of federal agencies.

On the flip side, federal agents don't investigate or make arrests for mail theft, even though it's a federal offense. Most illegal drug cases are also violations of federal law, which they rarely enforce locally.

I want to move on to a more positive topic and talk a bit about the culture we have at City Hall for serving the public.

As part of addressing the financial crisis of the big recession, we launched a major effort to improve our productivity and efficiencies. We worked to change the culture at City Hall to one that is committed to providing quality customer service.

In 2008, with less than half the population, our workforce was larger than it is now. Today, we are serving over 103,000 people.

It is really gratifying to receive ongoing feedback from our residents, willing to take the time to recognize members of our staff for providing quality service.

Our employees routinely look for solutions to problems rather than excuses.

For code enforcement issues, we have created new tools to address abandoned and dangerous structures and nuisance properties. We're holding property owners accountable and most of them are taking care of violations. Those who refuse are ending up in court.

Not long ago, it was common to see shopping carts piling up each week in bushes and along most of our public right-of-ways. We drafted an ordinance and have been working with store owners to solve this problem.

Carts are now picked up every week.

We continue to enjoy the same success with our anti-graffiti campaign.

If you want to see how it looks when you don't pay attention to issues like graffiti and other code violations, take a drive just a few miles north along Rainier Avenue to downtown Seattle.

Most of you are aware of a major change with our fire department this past year. Residents voted to change our local fire service from city control to a separate taxing entity called the Renton Regional Fire Authority.

The reason this proposal was offered to the public was the need to raise enough dollars annually to maintain fast response times to fires and emergency medical calls.

As the area grows, and the population ages, so do calls for emergency medical aid. In fact, more than 77 percent of the calls fire fighters receive each year are for medical

emergencies. Last year, that amounted to more than **15,000** calls, about 42 medical responses every day of the year.

When a majority of voters approved creating a new fire authority, it transferred tax dollars historically collected by the city for fire service to the RFA.

They also approved an extra fee that increased the amount of fire units able to respond to calls today. This improves response times.

And a new fire station will finally be built this year in the Kennydale neighborhood.

It's important to note that you continue to be served by Renton fire fighters. **Chief Rick Marshall**, who has devoted his entire career working for this city, and his staff work in partnership with all city departments as part of our continued commitment to provide quality services to our residents.

Last year was a good year in many ways.

Renton experienced its fair share of cranes and new development, and more is on the drawing board. As I mentioned earlier, we had more than \$2 billion dollars in private investment made in our city.

John Keister neglected to mention this!

As you can see, the Southport area has continued to grow.

Gene Coulon Park is a household name throughout the region. More than one and a half million people visited the park last year. It's without doubt one of the finest parks in King County.

Boeing's 737 plant, next door, has always been iconic for Renton.

And for the past 10 years, we have bragged about being home to the Seattle Seahawks, located just a short bike ride up Lake Washington Boulevard.

The Landing gave this part of our city a huge boost in notoriety and has become a destination point for residents and many people living in surrounding communities.

And now with the building boom at Southport, which originally had only two apartment complexes, a new **Hyatt Regency Hotel** and a major Class A office campus are under construction.

The Hyatt is going to be one of the finest hotels in the entire region when it opens this summer. Waterfront dining and 40,000 square feet of conferencing space will attract thousands of new visitors each year.

Directly behind the hotel, a 750,000 square foot office campus is planned, which will provide the highest quality office space available in south King County.

On the other side of Lake Washington Boulevard, the **Hampton Inn** will soon open a **110** room hotel, featuring an indoor pool and fitness room, outdoor plaza, restaurant and a roof-top deck.

And construction is scheduled to begin soon on a **Marriott Residence Inn** next door that will have 146 rooms.

The Boeing Company has continued to break all records at the Renton plant. They plan to be producing 47 airplanes per month within the next 60 days.

This Saturday marks their 75th anniversary in Renton!

If you haven't noticed, there is a lot of change taking place in our downtown.

We're very excited about all of the recent activity. This has been a big goal for this Council, and many previous councils.

Historically, it's been very difficult to attract private investment downtown for a host of reasons.

But that's all changing.

I believe our vision of creating a pedestrian-friendly downtown community, with lots of activities, restaurants and shops, is now within reach. Millions of dollars are already committed to redevelopment and new construction, and other exciting plans are in the works.

- The Lofts at 2nd and Main are now renting space in their new complex.
- Leases are being filled in the Cortona Building (former Renton Western Wear). The owners have invested \$800,000 in renovating this building.
- A new brewery opened on S. Wells St.

- The sagging Delancey Building has been sold to a quality developer for future redevelopment.
- Property including the old Salvation Army Thrift Store on S. 3rd Street has been sold.
- Renton Commons Project will be built near the high school this year. The six-story building will offer 48 affordable residential units.
- The American Drapery Building has been sold with plans for improvements to begin soon, including a new façade funded through a city grant program. A restaurant and retail outlets are planned for this building.
- The transit center will be moved by the end of the year. And plans continue on converting a number of the downtown streets to two-way traffic to reduce commuter traffic.
- Conversion of S. Main St. is already underway and it includes a plaza-like entrance to one of the major gateways to the downtown. This will be very impressive when completed.
- Old City Hall property is under option for redevelopment that may include a public plaza along the river, along with senior housing, international school and retail and restaurant space.
- And a new elementary school will soon break ground.

Major changes are also taking place in the Sunset Area.

Work has begun on a new, 3-acre park that is the center of major redevelopment plans for the Sunset area. This is another

long-term city vision. It's really exciting to see the progress that's being made.

New, quality housing for low income families, along with attractive market-rate housing, will soon anchor this area.

And plans for new retail shopping outlets in this community are also being explored by developers.

MOVING BACK DOWN TO THE VALLEY FLOOR -

Our community has been blessed to have the only IKEA in the state since 1994. You may not think of them as a tourist attraction but consider these facts:

With over 2 million shoppers each year, they draw more people than most of the popular attractions in Seattle.

That's more than the Woodland Park Zoo or Chihuly Glass. Twice as many visitors each year as the Space Needle!

The new store features a dining area that will seat 600 people.

And here is some trivia for you to quote. Globally, IKEA sells more than a billion Swedish Meatballs each year, which equates to nearly 3 million per day. The Renton store is the top seller of meatballs in the United States.

It's important to note that businesses like IKEA play a huge role in supporting local communities. **Renton IKEA** not only provides over 400 local jobs, but the sales tax collected helps pay for a lot of city services, including police, parks and roads.

The company has been a dedicated corporate partner for this city since opening 23 years ago, funding local school needs, sponsoring Renton River Days and making the IKEA Performing Arts Center a reality.

I would like ask **Store Manager Diedre Goodchild** and **Marketing Director Annie Boeckman** to stand so we can all thank IKEA for its commitment to Renton.

Healthcare service continues to grow in our community.

Valley Medical Center is building a new, five-story, 160,000 square foot medical facility. It will feature enhanced cancer treatment, including radiation treatment areas, outpatient surgery clinic, and a large parking facility.

Group Health Cooperative was acquired by California-based Kaiser Permanente, making it one of the largest healthcare providers in the country.

Final construction on its new campus in Renton is underway. They plan to add approximately 2,300 new employees at this site.

And Providence Health Systems, with about 1,300 employees, continues to expand its headquarters here.

SO YOU MIGHT ASK, "What about transportation?"

Despite the passage of a statewide transportation package last year, and despite the passage of Sound Transit 3 last fall, transportation will continue to be a real challenge for this entire region.

There is no question that this is impacting the quality of life for commuters and negatively impacting commerce.

Locally, cars trying to avoid the freeway gridlock use our surface streets as a bypass, creating a host of problems for our residents trying to get to work each day.

A new transit center with enhanced bus service will provide local residents with improved transit options. Bus Rapid Transit along 405 to Bellevue and Lynnwood, which is part of the ST 3 package, will provide our residents, and those coming here to work, with options other than sitting in gridlock.

To wrap up.....

As John Keister sits in his jail cell, working on an attitude adjustment about Renton, rest assured that the state of our city is strong.

We will continue to face challenges of an ever-changing economy.

And I fear the public divisiveness, brought on by the presidential campaign, will take a long time to heal.

But our future in Renton is bright!

The partnerships we have here between the City, Chamber, School District, Renton Technical College and our hospital district make challenges easier to address.

It's 2017 John, and Renton has become a desired community to live, work, learn and play.

Thank you.