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**2019 State of the City
North Little Rock, Arkansas
Joe A. Smith, Mayor**

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Diane Whitbey, City Clerk and Collector
North Little Rock, Arkansas
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Distinguished members of the North Little Rock City Council, City Attorney, City Clerk, and my fellow residents of North Little Rock, thank you for the honor of serving as your Mayor.

This is my seventh State of the City. Each of my previous State of the City reports attempted to present a much broader understanding of our shared achievements, goals, and shortcomings. Lists of street projects, stats on job creation, and complicated budget figures are helpful for gaining more information and answering specific questions, and those resources are readily and always available to you and the public.

But as Mayor and City Council Members, we are entrusted by those who elected us to develop a higher understanding of how our city works.

While our city's day-to-day operations and specific projects certainly deserve our dedicated attention and oversight, we must also concern ourselves with a North Little Rock that some of us might never see. Together, as a Council, we must make decisions today that will impact our children and grandchildren. What we choose to invest in, or not invest in, has consequences for our city decades beyond our terms in office.

Earlier State of the City reports emphasized our need to become more efficient in our operations and reduce our debt and expenditures. Later year's reports included dire predictions of budget shortfalls. In 2018, I offered an optimistic outlook for our city as we began experiencing the results of a strong financial future and incredible returns from economic development investments. This year's report builds on all of those prior to hopefully help provide a broader understanding of the future of our city.

2019 finds our city on sound financial footing with a bright short-term outlook for economic development. Our Public Safety departments are the envy of most Arkansas cities and provide outstanding protection for our residents. Other public services we provide on a day-to-day basis, from Sanitation and Planning, to our Electric and Parks and Recreation departments, are efficient, customer-friendly, and award winning. As Council Members, you should be proud of the strong foundation we have built for a successful future for North Little Rock.

Our NLR Proud Projects provide excellent examples of this Council's dedication to investing in infrastructure needs for every part of our city. More streets and drainage projects were completed or begun this year than any in memory. Our fire stations are getting much needed remodeling work they deserve and in some instances, we are able to construct new ones. The Police Headquarters project is on track to provide our local law enforcement with the facilities they need to provide excellent protection for our residents.

Our economic development successes have been plentiful in the past year. We found a new tenant for the vacant Timex building. We cut the ribbon on Ben E. Keith's new state of the art regional distribution center and the much-needed Fairfax crossing, opening up even more development out East. Our Jump Start Programs in Levy and Park Hill are moving out of the planning stages and hopefully into construction work this year.

New merchant associations in Levy and Rose City are becoming more active and producing groundwork critical for future economic successes. New medical facilities are creating a new Health Care corridor off Springhill, further diversifying our local economy. The multi-million-dollar project to improve Pike Avenue to help facilitate new business investment will hopefully begin this year after years of study and planning. Our Chamber of Commerce might have set a record for the number of ribbon cuttings for new businesses.

Though economic development occurs all over our city, and looks different in each neighborhood, the most high-profile project in our city is undoubtedly the new Argenta Plaza. This wise public investment began nearly five years ago, when we decided to dedicate the proceeds of property sales for future construction of a public space. This \$5.2 million-dollar public investment has created nearly \$50 million in private investment, highlighted by First Orion's International Headquarters, and we haven't even opened it yet. Without a doubt, it is the single most successful economic development project I have worked on in the past 25 years.

But there is a danger in being complacent.

When we have department shortcomings or projects that do not result in the expected outcomes, we scrutinize the poor outcome for ways to improve. We make a point to learn from our mistakes. The institutional knowledge we gain is used to make better decisions in the future.

We must do the same for our successes.

Rarely do residents choose to make their home in our city based purely on chance or circumstance. Tourists do not visit and spend their money here on a hunch. Companies never randomly decide that North Little Rock is the best place for them to do business. It takes more for someone to be proud of their hometown than a government that only does the bare minimum.

Our job, as the political leaders of this city, is to work every day fulfilling the mission making North Little Rock a great place to Live, Work, and Play. We don't throw money at things. We don't play favorites. We don't avoid the hard or unpopular decisions. We don't listen to a select few voices. What we are called to do is think of all our residents, businesses, and visitors. We plan years in advance on projects. We know that investments by definition cost money, but if they are well thought out and executed accordingly, may return the financial investment many times over in a better quality of life and services for our residents, businesses, and visitors.

The future of our city is never written in stone. Exciting announcements of new businesses or beneficial public projects today can easily be replaced in a few years with reports of unemployment or crumbling infrastructure. It took decades of hard work by staff, difficult decisions by our Council, and dedication from our residents to truly become a great place to live, work, and play. My office is dedicated to continuing this hard work and long-term planning to ensure North Little Rock is a city everyone, including our future residents, can be proud of.

Thank you,

Joe A. Smith
Mayor
City of North Little Rock