



City of Peoria

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Mayor Cathy Carlat Delivers 2015 State of the City Address

PEORIA, Ariz. (March, 31, 2015) – *This is the mayor's speech as written. There may have been slight deviations in delivery.*

Thank you and welcome!

I am so pleased to be standing here before you today. I am humbled that you have given me the responsibility for leading the city the next four years, elated that voters have given themselves a renewed City Council ready to serve, and so grateful that through my campaign for Mayor, and the nine years I served on Council... my amazing family has never wavered.

Thank you Dennis... Adam and Natalie. I am blessed to have you by my side. All my love to you.

I'm also proud to have my mother and sister here today. There is nothing more important than family. Thank you for being here.

Also in the audience tonight is the First Lady of Peoria's History, a woman who has lived here 86 years and has done just about everything.

She helped bring the first traffic light to the city. She promoted cotton. She is a charter member of the Peoria Historical Society. She was the woman behind Mayor Orville Cook.

She has led our community in so many ways over the last eight decades.

Priscilla Cook, thank you for being with us tonight!

Peoria's story is one that is still young even by Arizona standards... but a story deeply rooted in tales of hearty pioneers who took chances, made bold decisions and once moving, didn't look back.



There was William Murphy... a young, former Union Army officer who was given land and water rights in our area in exchange for his service directing construction of the Arizona Canal.

Driven by his vested interest in turning his land into fortune, Murphy finished the canal in three years and promptly sought families from Peoria Illinois to relocate to the desert.

Two of those families, the McMillins' and the Hannas', also took on big challenges to make life better in Peoria.

Among them... they started the school that nearly failed when kids moved, or decided that riding 24 miles for a day's worth of schooling was just too much. Fortunately the founding families hung in there long enough for another family from Idaho to unexpectedly arrive one day with a wagon full of kids, nine to be exact... saving the school once and for all!

The stories of pioneering perseverance are many. Life in the desert was harsh, water was scarce, and rattlesnakes were plentiful. These brave souls accomplished a great deal despite the hardships that always seemed to challenge their hopes and dreams.

Thankfully we don't face those same kind of hardships today. We still have the occasional rattlesnake in the street and coyotes continue to howl in the washes once the sun goes down... but our history now is written without these obstacles to slow our progress.

Today, as I stand before you, the first female mayor in Peoria's 61 year history, I want to work with you to harness the pioneering spirit that first settled our city... using it over the next four years to deliver great projects and make our dreams for a better community come true.

I inherit a job that comes with high expectations... set in large part by the Mayors that have served before me.

Like our pioneers... they too had their hands full... doing their best to keep up with double digit growth, toiling to limit the impacts of a Great Recession, managing regional challenges while keeping the focus on city issues... and of course serving our neighborhoods and our businesses.



Within our city limits, the results of their efforts are more than noticeable... they are admirable.

Peoria is fiscally strong. Our budget is stable. Our amenities... the things that make living here so great... are second to none.

We are safe. Our crime rate is low. Our services are affordable. People want to live here.

So as you may know, we have had some elections in Peoria recently. We like elections so much in Peoria that we had an extra one that just wrapped up earlier this month!

That's a good thing... you want to give voters a little break before the campaign signs go up again.

The elections FINALLY are behind us, and thanks to the voters of this city.... Arizona's ninth largest by population, fourth largest by size and second largest in the West Valley... I am blessed with a full Council that wants to make Peoria the best that it can be.

Let me start by recognizing the newest members of the Peoria City Council:

Mike Finn... Vicki Hunt... and Bridget Binsbacher are just what the doctor ordered. Please stand and be recognized.

They bring fresh perspective... new ideas... great energy and a welcome spirit of cooperation.

I am also proud to work with our "grizzled veterans" on the opportunities that will move Peoria from great to grand... Vice Mayor Jon Edwards, Bill Patena and Carlo Leone. I hope that you'll also stand to be recognized.

As Mayor, I know that I have some tough acts to follow.

I am pleased to have Mayors John Keegan and Bob Barrett here with me today.

Together these men led Peoria for the better part of two decades.

And during that time they made history.



Among many other accomplishments, Mayor Keegan had the forethought and courage to ask voters to approve plans for the Peoria Center for the Arts in our historic downtown. With the economy on the mend, I think this project is once again poised to become the catalyst for downtown development that he envisioned so many years ago.

Of course, Mayor Barrett was leading the Council when the Great Recession hit. But really when you think about it... getting through the minefield of shrinking revenues wasn't the first tough assignment for this former Army veteran who was awarded a Bronze Star for his service in Vietnam.

Mayor Barrett, along with City Manager Carl Swenson and his dedicated Leadership Team, managed a budget that withstood the economic downturn. While many other cities were cutting services, closing libraries, parks and swimming pools, Peoria residents continued to enjoy the benefits of a conservative fiscal plan that held up against the swirling winds of economic calamity

Thankfully... the recession is behind us... the road to the future is clear... the team is ready to engage and we are excited to begin this journey.

So where does this mayor want to go?

I said in my campaign that I wanted to maintain the City's strong fiscal position, bring more good paying jobs to Peoria, protect open space and maintain property values.

I said I wanted to make sure we continued to provide the resources our Fire Fighters and Police Officers need to keep us safe, and I pledged to protect neighborhoods from impacts of development.

That's quite a list, I know... but working together we can get there.

How do we do that?

First, we need to instill reforms that will protect residents from political whims that could threaten to impact the day-to-day operations of City government.



This year, I want to create a Citizens' committee to review the Charter and recommend updates, changes or improvements for voter consideration with the goal of ensuring checks and balances.

When rules are left to interpretation, we have seen what mischief can result. The Charter is intended to serve as the playbook regardless of election outcomes. Passed in 1983, it is time for voters to review it again.

If changes are recommended, I would like voters to consider them in 2016.

I also want to strengthen the objectives of the City's Principles of Sound Financial Management to ensure that taxpayer dollars are managed wisely and properly. We should consider adding these principles to the City Charter as well.

While tying up City Hall's loose ends, we also must ramp up our outreach to businesses looking for a quality community to call home. We have a great plan... but we need more than that.

We need action. We need negotiations. We need results.

Results like our recent partnership with Aviage Systems. Aviage Systems is a \$1.3 billion dollar joint venture between General Electric Company and Aviation Industry Corporation of China. This historic enterprise made up of two world-leading aerospace companies chose Peoria as its American base for the development of civil avionics products. It's exciting because it will bring quality jobs to our community and because it advances our plans to attract other companies that occupy the technology manufacturing space.

So Aviage is coming to Peoria... but to me that is just a sample of what we can achieve.

This year, I will challenge the staff and our affiliate organizations to produce a series of economic development summits... each focused on one of our target industries... for the purpose of getting the attention of those who make decisions to grow or relocate their businesses.



We want to be the home of corporate or regional headquarters. We want companies that manufacture medical devices and advanced technologies. We are interested in health care corporations, higher education partners, bioscience industries and telecommunications endeavors.

Certainly, creating jobs is not something government should be doing by itself. That's why I will ask local leaders interested in our future to help us produce these forums and bring people to the table. Our Economic Development Advisory Board has done yeoman's work on charting our economic course. I will ask members of that committee to be involved as well.

Already, I have pulled key staff together to begin the process for planning these forums. Success will be measured against participation by those that can make Peoria their new corporate address.

Results... Results... Results!

We all agree that a strong education system is key to our ability to attract quality jobs to our city. But educational institutions can themselves bring jobs and synergy to an economic development plan.

I am pleased that Trine University and Huntington University are now part of our City. And I am looking forward to watching them play a role in transforming our economy.

As an example, Huntington's digital media arts programs could help us attract other employers such as production and development companies looking to tap into a steady stream of graduates trained to communicate in the digital space of i-Phones and tablets.

The Engineering program at Trine University has already proven to be a catalyst for business attraction as Maxwell Technologies, a manufacturer of clean energy storage solutions, now calls Peoria home.

We are emboldened by the partnerships with these two institutions and will continue to look for other education partners that will help us achieve our economic development goals.... attracting industries and creating jobs that allow our young people to pursue exciting careers close to home.

Speaking of home... one of Peoria's biggest selling points is its proximity to our pristine Sonoran desert. The views from many parts of our city are spectacular to say the least.



I know because I had a chance to take an aerial tour of some of these lands a few weeks ago. Words cannot describe the majestic beauty of this untouched desert soil.

Like other cities in the Valley, we have mountains and lands within our city limits that need to be preserved.

I campaigned on the idea that we should begin to protect these precious natural habitats and I am ready to get started on that endeavor.

The willingness to stand up and say “not every acre of land needs a house or shopping center on it” is criticized by some. But I think protecting special areas from development can actually benefit our economy and boost our investments.

Certainly homes next to desert preserves become more valuable when their owners can tout the protections of open space to potential buyers.

And when we bring new employers to town, having the ability to show them that we have a vision for a community with pristine mountain views and a robust network of hiking trails and biking trails can absolutely help close the deal with executives.

So to that end, I want to begin the process of developing a plan to protect open space... and one of the first targets on my list is Sunrise Mountain.

Situated at the north end of 91st Avenue where it intersects with Happy Valley Road, Sunrise Mountain is an iconic peak in our community and it is currently zoned for hillside residential development.

Thanks to conversations with a willing landowner, we have an opportunity to begin our open space effort at Sunrise Mountain. I am sure you would agree a ridge such as this should be protected from development.

Soon I will begin working with staff to appoint citizens to an Open Space Commission to review work already done on this issue and begin to develop a realistic list of lands that may be candidates for



preservation, understanding that acquisition costs and zoning, among other issues, will need to be seriously considered.

There are lands that feature historic remnants of civilizations past that may warrant saving sooner rather than later... and there are other unique spaces like Sunrise Mountain that should be protected.

Access to any lands we might include in such a program is equally critical. We need to explore the opportunity to create trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding. And we should be open to the possibility of creating an off-road vehicle park for the enjoyment of our many residents who like to engage in the more extreme sports.

The process for appointing the Commission and a timetable for its work will be forthcoming. But I am excited to begin the conversation in our community as soon as possible.

Of course, many of us base our opinion of our City government and its elected leaders, on whether we feel safe in our neighborhood, on our street, or in our home at night.

Indeed, public safety is our core business. We don't look to Congress to provide well trained police officers and fire fighters. That's the City's job... and as your Mayor I am committed to making sure we maintain these services at the high levels you have come to expect.

Our crime rate is low. Our response times are good. And our professionals are top notch.

Still, we cannot rest on these laurels if we want to keep our residents... our families and our seniors, safe.

We must continue to support our community policing strategy, which is largely responsible for the significant drop in violent and property crimes in our city.

I want to improve our ability to help neighborhoods help themselves by enhancing public safety through better street lighting, organizational support for residents who want to invest their own time helping their communities, and a more aggressive approach to finding grants for local projects.



We also must begin the review of current city ambulance services. We need to determine whether there are areas where we could make improvements. And we need to fully evaluate what cost or savings may be associated with any changes to our existing services.

I remain committed to funding for the expansion of the Pinnacle Peak public safety facility.

This facility will address the growing public safety needs of our ever-expanding northern Peoria neighborhoods... and will allow us to keep police and fire response times short.

Finally, public safety staffing levels are under constant review as we look to balance the demands on current personnel with the cost to taxpayers and the requirements to grow the force when and where necessary.

There is no argument: Cities are in the business of delivering quality of life to their residents. Those that do a good job, thrive. Those that don't whither.

Open space, parks, low taxes, fiscal accountability, affordable city services, the best police and fire protection... they are all part of that formula.

But so are shopping, dining, and places to relax or hang out with friends. Yes, cities are in the entertainment business too.

We don't do this alone. We do it with private sector partners that share our vision for a vibrant community with nightlife, a community where something is always happening, a community where people are out enjoying each other's company.

There are many exciting projects about to become reality. I want to work with this Council and the residents to get them over the finish line.

First though, let's begin where it all started... in Peoria's historic downtown.



Like the early residents of Peoria who found themselves rebuilding their only business district after a fire nearly wiped it off the map in 1917, we too need to take a more aggressive approach to our plans for reviving our community's birthplace.

As with every other economic initiative, we are the enablers. Entrepreneurs have the lead. And recent news of plans for our old Fire Station Number 1 is reason for excitement.

The Lucidi family is already established in Peoria as successful business owners. I know many of you know the Haymaker restaurant.

Now there will be another investment in downtown that could light a different kind of fire under other investors who are considering where to locate a new venture.

The plans for the Lucidi Distillery and associated entertainment venues over the next few years will absolutely draw people from all over the Valley, creating the customer base needed to support even more exciting projects.

I want the City to do everything it can to encourage and assist with those ideas. This is how we build our economy... and promote community pride.

Along those lines... we need to develop the Peoria Place parcel... also in downtown... into a commercial AND residential center... with housing, retail and education offerings and businesses that create good-paying jobs.

And I want us to rethink our approach to the stretch of Grand Avenue that runs through Peoria. We have made some strides in recent years but working with you and your new Council woman, I am excited about our prospects for developing a plan that will attract private sector development.

I am equally excited... as I know is our Vice Mayor... about our P-83 district that now has an identity. We have new signage and branding for the area. But of course, that's only the beginning.

In my first term, I want to see the dream realized of a retail and entertainment district rise up from that parking lot just south of the ballpark.



We have moved the “front door” of the stadium to flow naturally into the future main boulevard of The Avenue Shoppes at P-83.

The private sector team is coming together and will report to us later this year on their plans to get this project off the ground.

Our Peoria Sports Complex is the only spring training facility surrounded by dining and entertainment venues making this location ideal for a project of this scope and I am certain it will be standing room only when it opens for business.

Tourists drive much of that business... coming for spring training games... eating in our restaurants and staying in our hotels.

There is new money and we should work to keep them here longer... spending as much of that money as possible!

That’s where Lake Pleasant comes into play. And yes, it is in Peoria!

I’m always running into people who are surprised by that. In fact, Lake Pleasant gets more than 700,000 visitors a year!

People are attracted to it because it is an awesome get-away only minutes from home.

Boating, hiking, sailing, diving. You can do it all at Lake Pleasant.

Still... I believe we need to do even more with the lake to drive new visitors and new revenues to our community.

Being careful to protect what makes the lake special... I want the City and Maricopa County to get serious about a plan to develop a resort attraction in a single focused project on the west side of the lake.

I’m not talking about development everywhere. I’m talking about one all-inclusive project contained to a single location on the lake.



Lake Pleasant is a statewide tourist attraction. It CAN support a quality resort that could easily become a favorite location for regional and national corporate retreats, conferences, meetings and family vacations.

Beyond the lake... and open space... parks are a high priority for me. They give neighborhoods a place to gather and families room to play.

Work is now underway to identify possible sites for the park facility that would boast amenities similar to those offered at Rio Vista Park in central Peoria or our new Pioneer Park near City Hall.

Northern Peoria has waited long enough for this park and I am looking forward to working with our newest council woman and the residents to find the right place for this awesome new amenity.

Peoria is a community brimming with opportunity.

We have a strong fiscal foundation. We have a new and collegial City Council. We have people ready to invest. And we have residents who love living here.

I wasn't here when Peoria was founded thanks to those first 4 families from Illinois, but I suspect the optimism we see today for our community is similar to the promise that they felt when they unloaded their wagons to make our community a home.

They were probably excited at the opportunity, eager to commit to the hard work required for progress, and dedicated to overcoming challenges... even though you have to expect they wanted to give up more than once.

I for one am glad they didn't quit... and as we have come through the recession.

I truly believe now is Peoria's time to shine... to get great things done... and to make history again.

Thank you for your interest in our city. Thank you for your commitment to our future... and thank you for your faith in me as your new Mayor.