



City of Peoria

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Mayor Cathy Carlat Delivers 2016 State of the City Address

PEORIA, Ariz. (March, 22, 2016) – *This is the mayor's speech as written. There may have been slight deviations in delivery.*

Dan, thank you for that warm welcome and thank you for being here for my second State of the City address as Mayor of Peoria.

To my family, my husband Dennis, my kids, Adam and Natalie. My mother Alyce, sisters Candee and Terri and Louis is here, too. You have kept me going through this hectic first year as Mayor and I love all of you very much. Thank you for being here.

Thank you to the members of the Peoria City Council that are here today. Bridget, Jon, Mike, Vicki and Bill. Thank you so much for being here. What a year we've had together!

Well, it's hard to believe that it's been a year already. It sure went a lot faster than I could have ever imagined. And what a whirlwind year it was. Last year I stood right here and outlined some bold objectives for our City. It was an aggressive agenda jam-packed with exciting plans designed to move our City forward.

I want to thank the City Manager, Carl Swenson, and his top-notch team of professionals for taking those plans and incorporating them into the fabric of the day-to-day operations of our City. Carl, please stand and be recognized.

Looking back, I am pleased to report that working together we got most of it off the launching pad.

A year ago today I said I wanted to seize the opportunity of this moment this time, in Peoria's story, as we grow and evolve from a bedroom community into a thriving, modern city, to look forward and plan out our future, instead of just leaving it to chance. And thoughtfully, strategically, put some measures in place that will guide our City through that process.



I said I wanted to protect open t spaces from development, so we can ensure the quality of life for future generations, and I said that one of my first targets would be Sunrise Mountain, the iconic peak at Happy Valley and 91st avenue.

I can report that we have been in valuable discussions with the landowner over this past year. Two weeks from today, in front of Council will be a plan to acquire the first portion of that mountain, and more will follow.

We are moving forward to protect Sunrise Mountain, to keep it a beautiful place where families can go to hike, bike and horseback ride.

Sunrise Mountain used to be at the very top of our community, but because people are discovering what a great life we live here in Peoria, and they are moving here by the thousands, Sunrise Mountain will be smack-dab in the middle of our city. Because our city is still only half-way built out.

In light of the next coming waves of growth, I said I would support and enhance our public safety efforts to make sure Peoria continues to receive the highest-quality services available in this day and age. I can report that our crime rate is one of the lowest in the Valley, response times are good, and we continue to actively monitor our staffing levels in both our police and fire departments.

Over the last year, we have added public safety officers where it was necessary, without increasing taxes.

Our predictive policing strategy is a cutting-edge method that does not rely on old population equations to keep our residents safe. In fact, our Police Chief Roy Minter is considered a national expert on predictive policing and leads other police departments from around the nation who want to model their own public safety efforts after Peoria's.

Chief Minter, please stand and be recognized for your superior work.

I said I was committed to funding the expansion of the Pinnacle Peak public safety facility that serves the new-growth neighborhoods of our city. And I can report that construction of that first-class facility will start this summer and will be completed in fall of 2017.



I said I would review our current ambulance services, and make changes to the existing system if it made financial sense. And I can report that the City Council has now approved the steps to move forward to provide residents with an even higher quality of care and reliable response times. Again, without increasing taxes.

And thanks to the leadership of Fire Chief Bobby Ruiz, Peoria has been granted its Ambulance Certificate of Necessity from the state. Chief Ruiz, please stand and be recognized.

My priority always is to make sure our residents have the best care in the fastest response times possible. When you need help, you will get it, and by someone who is an expert at what they are doing, because this is a city that cares about its citizens.

This is a pattern I intend to keep, as I'm accountable to the people who put me in this office. Success is measured against action and results.

We are marketing our business district, and offering our residents more local education opportunities. We are talking to new businesses with some exciting ideas for our community. We have found a way to make even better our ability to provide emergency medical services for our residents. And we have more than 40 community-minded volunteers working hard to improve accountability in government and the quality of life for our citizens.

Whether it involves the preservation of open space, or keeping crime rates low, or strengthening the city charter to ensure local government is free of political gamesmanship, we have a lot to look forward to this year on many fronts, and thanks to the efforts of many people in the community and the team at City Hall.

Thank you everyone for your hard work, for stepping up, and for making the commitment to help make even better this awesome City that we are proud to call our home.

Of course, what we are doing here is exercising our ability to conceive the Peoria of the future, taking bold steps to plan and invest as we rise to the opportunities of tomorrow.



It's really a lot like the approach Walt Disney took when he was creating an entertainment empire that decades later continues to capture the heart and soul of generation after generation of Americans. Once when he was asked about moving ahead with his vision he offered a simple reply.

"Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future," Disney said.

Well, how do I interpret that bit of wisdom? For me it means that we must always keep our eyes on the horizon. Staying mired in the issue of the day can keep us from rising to our full potential.

While I, along with the City Council, work toward the vision of the future, I want to talk for a minute about the strength and sensibility that is at the core of our City. Peoria is built on a mighty foundation. A foundation that allows us to move forward with lofty goals for the future.

Peoria is fortunate to have had a series of strong leaders who established well-thought out policy decisions, coupled with professional, caring people who then carry them out.

There is a gentleman joining us here today who worked for the City of Peoria in the Public Works Department for 30 years. Mr. Jeff Kezis wrote to me when I was running for election. He was retired and we had never met. He asked me some substantial questions so he could decide how to vote. He wanted to know how I would deal with issues such as growth and development while maintaining existing challenges like water supply, and public safety and complete infrastructure. He also wanted to know how I was going to work with the City Council. These were great questions and they deserved detailed answers, which I gladly gave him.

Only later did Mr. Kezis identify himself as part of the team of employees that kept the City moving, with decreased resources during the economic downturn. He asked me to always remember the tough times we went through and to be very conservative with expenses and City resources.

I promised Mr. Kezis that I would heed his wise advice. Standing before you today I am happy to report that we are mindful of where we have been and thankful to those who worked to bring us through those tough times with our high standards firmly in place.



Because the City of Peoria is made up of people who care deeply about its wellbeing, like Jeff Kezis, Peoria has the reinforced structure that allows us to think big into the future. Please join me in recognizing Jeff Kezis and the City of Peoria employees who are committed to the delivery of exceptional services for the citizens of Peoria. Mr. Kezis, please stand. Thank you.

So, what does *this* year look like and how does it move us closer to the future that we imagine for Peoria? Indeed, the City has grown, and with it our hopes for our community.

I was reminded of that growth a few weeks ago at a meeting to discuss our “Quality of Life” committee. At that committee meeting, the Committee Chairman, former Peoria Mayor John Keegan, noted that when he was Mayor someone said there would never be a Mayor in Peoria elected from anywhere north of Thunderbird Road!

That was the end of the world as far as Peorians were concerned! Now it’s not even the mid-point of our growing city! History has shown that Walt Disney was right about a lot of things he first saw with his mind’s eye. That predictor of Peoria’s future, maybe not so much.

My first year in office was about setting new expectations and an agenda for moving forward. This year is about execution and a plan for the future. Changing the trajectory from bedroom community to a full use of our assets so that our citizens can actually work and play in this great City in which they choose to live. Walt Disney hit a bullseye with his vision and as we work to bring life to ours, I think our chances for success are pretty good, given the people who are volunteering their time on these efforts.

First, there is the Quality of Life Citizen’s Committee. A year ago when I said I would create this group, I envisioned them exactly as they are now, convening regularly to explore the possibilities in the areas of parks, preserves and public safety.

They are pouring over the City’s needs, opportunities and challenges with an eye toward telling the City Council later this year how best to pursue the goals of building the second half of our city; ensuring people are safe, families can play and homeowners can invest with confidence.



Theirs is an important charge. They have a chance to ensure public access while at the same time protecting thousands of acres of beautiful desert lands. And they can grow our tourism economy just by boosting the list of available recreation options for residents. They have the unique opportunity to make our neighborhoods safer, enhance private property values, make us more attractive to potential employers and give families more time together.

That's not too much pressure! But I hope we will find a way to embrace most, if not all, of their recommendations when we see the product of their many hours of research, analysis and deliberation.

You know,

"When we consider a project, we really study it--not just the surface idea, but everything about it. And when we go into that new project, we believe in it all the way. We have confidence in our ability to do it right. And we work hard to do the best possible job."

These are not my words. Again, they're the words of Walt Disney. But they apply to this effort as well as our endeavor to update and improve the rules that govern our approach to public service.

With the help of another group of citizen volunteers, we are looking through the City Charter to determine where changes are needed to strengthen residents' confidence in their local government. This committee includes many passionate citizens committed to transparency and accountability and the notion that people ought to be able to rely on a standard of doing the public's business regardless of those elected to the City Council.

They are a great group, and their conversations are enthusiastic and sincere. The spirit of the debate isn't at the level our forefathers experienced during the first Constitutional Convention, but it's close! And it is my hope that their commitment will result in a strong package of reforms that voters will support this August.

That's the idea. People in Peoria getting together, making decisions about how to move our city forward boldly into the future, our aim focused on tomorrow.



We are not the only ones watching. People outside our city are looking at Peoria too. They want to see what we do, how we live, what the community looks like and what we value. They want to know our vision because from it they can determine our commitment to innovation, ideas, the future.

Do we have the ability to make decisions today that will sustain our community and allow it to flourish? Is our vision worthy of outside investment? Do we have a plan that encourages innovation? Is Peoria a place they want to call home? We are working hard to answer YES to all of the above. And that hard work is paying off. Last year, 524 new businesses opened their doors in Peoria.

That is a 23% increase from the previous year. Attracting good jobs to Peoria is our mission. Last year, with the help of our Economic Development Advisory Board, a vital committee made up of Peoria business leaders, we implemented a roadmap to Peoria 2035. The result of a year-long process of research, analysis, planning and strategy development will guide our economic expansion efforts as we work to solidify Peoria's reputation as a location for advanced industries and a leader in technology and innovation.

We are energized to drive the plan and are committed to making certain we give our young people the choice to pursue a career here rather than someplace far from home.

And I mean that for my children, sitting right there, I hope you heard me.

Let me be clear. It is absolutely vital that Peoria embrace the talented workforce of our emerging economy. Any site selector will tell you the same thing – a quality workforce is the foundation necessary to support the industry of tomorrow.

So let's talk about this workforce. Millennials were born between roughly 1982 and 2000. Their population numbers, 82 million strong, have far surpassed those of the Baby Boomer generation. They are commonly referred to as "digital natives" because they have never known a world without the internet. Which begs the question: What does this generation want from Peoria?

Well, they want accessibility. They want easy transportation, so they don't have to travel far to work. And they want a spirit of innovation. Our youth are characterized by big dreams and an entrepreneurial



spirit. We need to continue our investment in tech startups and tech stayups! They want a scene. An environment that includes arts, music, fun cuisine and entertainment that caters to all ages. And they want engagement. We've been a leader in giving youth an active seat at the table in Peoria's government. Now we need to create opportunities for young professionals to impact and take ownership of the culture, causes and purpose of their City.

This year we will launch a thoughtful, coordinated effort to embed the philosophies of tomorrow's citizens into the update of our General Plan and throughout our policies and programs with investments like:

An overhaul to our Arts Master Plan. Research shows that it is imperative that the arts and cultural aspects of the community keep pace with the demands of this innovative demographic.

A strong sense of the arts completes a well-thought out city, and certainly makes a city attractive to potential new business. Peoria has a strong foundation in place but we must expand our commitment to look beyond traditional installations of large art pieces and to the creation of an environment that communicates the distinct character of our City.

Special events. We know how to put on a good party. But it's time to up the ante as we move towards the identification of a City that has its own spirit. A vibrancy and a pulse that generates a sense of place and provides creative ways for Millennials to congregate. We will look at events and activities that inspire as much as entertain.

To attract the best and the brightest, our Economic Development team will examine programs to boost small business startups. We will walk alongside entrepreneurs and bring new ideas to the table.

We will close the gap with our competitors with bold and collaborative public-private partnerships to develop and expand the assets that make Peoria unique.

We will invest in the infrastructure that young professionals demand, with a special eye on the transportation modes that impact choices and link the venues that celebrate a range of experiences.



So, we will use this opportunity, this moment, and a new initiative to attract Millennials, along with the plans that are already in store for P83, the district that will encompass a university, innovation area and lively dining and entertainment choices within a walking district, to make sure our future workforce will have all the options to work, play and live in Peoria.

This type of assured and purposeful thinking that characterizes the City of Peoria has resulted in a number of creative reuse and revitalization successes. Like the conversion of the biggest vacant building in our P-83 business and entertainment district into a campus for Huntington University teaching digital media arts, certainly one of the most in-demand degree areas of the future.

Walt Disney would be proud! Seeing the opportunity to transform a salon into a place where students can learn how to communicate and entertain in the digital age surely takes vision, at City Hall and in the front office at Huntington!

We engage this sort of creative thinking, this brand of innovation, because we owe it to our children and grandchildren to get it right. We are more than a caretaker. We are stewards with a responsibility to pioneer and create and advance the plans, ideas and proposals that will move us ahead with confidence.

It's too easy for communities to veer off course, distracted by whims and the trendy issue of the day. I believe city government is not the place for selfish political hyperbole. And Council chambers are not appropriate for that dialog.

That is not the case in Peoria. We have a job to do. A job that impacts the lives of 165,000 people who reside here.

This City Council does a great job of staying focused on what matters. This City Council understands that to compete and succeed, we must continue to innovate and initiate, not falter and flail. This City Council works together standing firmly behind a unified vision. This City Council understands that moving forward toward common goals is vitally important.



This is what will allow us to flourish. Whether it is finding a way to save our most precious open spaces, changing the way we deliver emergency services, or bringing more jobs to the community; it will only happen if we can focus on priorities rather than politics.

Ladies and gentlemen, generations of Peoria residents have witnessed the Industrial Revolution, the Great Depression, two World Wars, the Space Age and with the advent of microcomputers, the Information Age. Today, we find ourselves entering the Innovation Age, a time empowered by unprecedented global connectivity.

This exciting transformation brings to light an interdependent world with fresh new perspectives on access to resources and unique solutions to market needs. In Peoria, we embrace the arrival of the Innovation Age. We are committed to encouraging the birth of new ideas and creative processes. We want to make sure entrepreneurs and business people know we are ready to work with them to grow their future, with us as partners in their endeavors.

I am excited to announce that eight days from now, we will host dozens of potential partners at Peoria's first investor forum for companies interested in our city as home for their enterprise.

Invest PeoriaAZ Smart will showcase Peoria development assets to business leaders from strategically targeted Canadian, Asian and domestic markets. This investment forum, the first of its kind in the Valley, is part of an aggressive economic development plan to attract targeted industries to move here with their dollars, their products and their good-paying jobs.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of one of pop culture's hottest science fiction properties, Star Trek, we are encouraged by Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and Scotty that we should always approach each opportunity with good intelligence, warp speed and a sense of curiosity and confidence.

Having the grit and determination to "boldly go where few cities have gone before" is not just a good idea, it's the inspirational path to innovation!

We are primed for the growth that is coming our way. We will embrace the blessings of our surroundings and manage them to our benefit. We will ensure a stronger tomorrow for our residents by sending a



message to others that we have something great to offer future employers, future employees and future investors. We will show that we can revolutionize with the best of them. We will demonstrate that we can keep our focus firmly on the future. And we will prove that Peoria's bet is a wager worth taking.

In 2016, with two citizens' committees working diligently, and with your support, we will change the course of Peoria's history.

I thank you so much for being here today and for sharing the vision for Peoria.

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