



City of Peoria

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Mayor Cathy Carlat Delivers 2017 State of the City Address

PEORIA, Ariz. (March, 28, 2017) – *This is the mayor's speech as written. There may have been slight deviations in delivery.*

Good afternoon, and thank you so much for joining me today for the State of the City address.

I'm honored to have the Peoria Chamber of Commerce as our host today. And I'm pleased to have Peter Ezugwu with us today, a gentleman who has enriched our community with his leadership and passion for service.

I want to thank my husband, Dennis and my kids Adam and Natalie for being here and for always supporting me. Your love brings me strength and keeps me going. I'm also proud to have my mother, my sisters and their families here today. There is nothing more important than family and I am truly blessed.

And to my Peoria community, it is a privilege to serve as your Mayor. Today you will hear a few of the stories that illustrate how a city, at its best, is a hometown. You've heard me talk about the unique characteristics of Peoria and there is no better way to explain what that means, than to show the affect it has on those of us fortunate enough to live here.

But first I want to recognize the Peoria City Council. A dedicated team that brings to the table insight, intelligence, and constructive debate – all for the benefit of the citizens they represent.

I'm going to ask the members of the City Council who are here today to stand and be recognized:

Vice Mayor Jon Edwards, Councilmember Bridget Binsbacher, Councilmember Mike Finn
Councilmember Vicki Hunt, Councilmember Bill Patena.

Your commitment and heart show in everything you do. It is my honor to work with you.



Last November, Councilmembers Binsbacher, Edwards and Patena were each re-elected to another 4 year term. The message from our citizens to keep our City Council together is a show of confidence that we are on the right track in representing their interests and moving the City in a positive direction.

I am grateful for the choices made by the voters because together, we have been a formidable team.

Through budget and policy initiatives,

- We gave a major facelift to Old Town Peoria, setting it on a path for a true resurgence;
- We filled just about all the vacated buildings in our P83 District with a smart Reuse program;
- We strategically positioned specific land sites and buildings to attract private development;

- We brought first rate enhancements to our important, year-round amenity, the Peoria Sports Complex;
- We completed phase I and began phase II improvements of the Veteran's Memorial Wall;
- We expanded public safety facilities, services, equipment, personnel, and programs;
- We welcomed the needed services of Cigna and Honor Health to Peoria.

I think we can agree that doing the work of the people makes for a very full year.

Recently, the City Council and Staff all met for an extended workshop to define our goals. We do this because we know that great cities don't just happen. They are a result of purposeful visioning, and an exploration of the ways that public policy can improve people's lives.

Our goal-setting focused on:

- protecting the value of community for our residents,
- nurturing our unique identity,
- fostering an environment that entices the kind of private development that will shape our finest future.



These ambitious objectives impact our daily lives, in our neighborhoods, on our streets, how we work and how we play.

I want to take a minute to thank City Manager, Carl Swenson, for taking the Council goals and giving them life in the budget and the day-to-day operations of our City.

In Peoria, we are fortunate to have a City Manager who I can truly say is the best of the best.

Carl has created an environment of organizational excellence carried out amid his commitment to the highest of ethical and professional standards.

Mr. Swenson, please stand and be recognized.

The sign of a great manager is reflected in the quality of his team, and Mr. Swenson has built an incredible team – Deputy City Managers Susan Daluddung, Jeff Tyne and Julie Arendall, please stand.

I also want to take a moment to salute Susan Daluddung as she takes her irrepressible spirit into retirement and welcome Andy Granger to his new role as Deputy City Manager.

Thank you all for your tremendous efforts to give our residents an efficiently managed, cost effective, state of the art operation.

Working together, our incredible City has flourished.

In 2016, Peoria was ranked number 7 on the Yahoo Finance list of **America's 50 Best Cities to Live.**

And, while I believe Peoria is THE NUMBER ONE best place to live, it is quite an honor to be 7th in a pool of the most prestigious communities in the United States.

When I decided to run for office in Peoria, I had the goal in mind of creating a place where my kids would stay to raise their families, work at quality jobs and enjoy a safe and healthy life. So often these days, families live far from each other, moving for job opportunities or the best schools or a community that is safe.



Everything I do as your Mayor is aimed at providing these things – all of these things – here in Peoria, so that our friends and family don't need to leave to find these ideals.

So, what exactly does it look like to be on the coveted **50 Best Cities in America** list?

I know that for one resident, Brian Greathouse, it meant moving to Peoria from Anthem. He and his wife Kim had a growing family and wanted to be closer to the heart of our Valley.

They came to Peoria and found so much more. Brian and Kim were able to find a home on a large lot where their three kids could thrive.

They found good schools and great neighbors, and Brian found a community that viewed citizen involvement and participation as a welcomed resource.

As an attorney, Brian has lent our City his expertise on several volunteer committees, including our Board of Adjustment and Industrial Development Board, as well as the Board of the Peoria Diamond Club.

I am especially pleased that his daughter, Brighton has also become involved in our community. 14-year-old Brighton is a member of our City's Youth Advisory Board. This Board is a point of pride in Peoria and part of the Youth Master Plan, which serves to cultivate the leaders of tomorrow.

But there's more. In 2016, Peoria was recognized as 11th on WalletHub's **Best City for Jobs** list.

Measured against the 150 biggest cities in America, Peoria easily cracked the Top 20 as proud number 11 – with a bullet!

Last year, I stood on this very stage and told you about our commitment to the innovation economy. I promised I would advocate for an aggressive economic development strategy with the explicit goal of attracting targeted industries to move here and bring good-paying jobs. I also announced Peoria's first Investor Forum called **Invest PeoriaAZ**.



This year, it is my pleasure to report on the great success of that economic development initiative.

Eighty-one investors and developers attended **Invest PeoriaAZ**. The Forum highlighted the City's portfolio of shovel-ready sites including public-private partnerships for real estate development, as well as opportunities for business location and biotechnology investment.

I'm thrilled to report one of the great results of this Forum: The City of Peoria and the Plaza Companies have entered into a public-private partnership to create a hub for innovation and technology in the heart of the P83 District.

Plaza Companies, headquartered in Peoria, is a leader in Arizona development. Their significant portfolio includes Banner Estrella Medical Center and the award winning biotech campus, SkySong.

This hub for innovation will occupy a one-of-a-kind site that lies at the doorstep of the Peoria Sports Complex, a year-round center of activity. The innovation campus will offer Class A commercial space to attract the quality jobs our residents seek, a hotel and the type of mixed uses that generate a vibrant, pedestrian friendly environment.

I am excited that the 2017 Investment Forum is right around the corner. We will again host dozens of potential partners interested in our City as their new home. We will be showcasing our skilled workforce and development assets to attract robust commerce to Peoria.

Our focused economic development plan is designed to be a bridge of transformation as Peoria grows from a suburban, bedroom community into a World-Class City with a vibrant economy, cultural awareness, and an exceptional quality of life.

I remind myself often of the frank, motivational words of President John F. Kennedy:

“Things do not happen. Things are made to happen.”

And in the vein of making things happen, let's talk about something very close to my heart: making certain we give our young people the choice to pursue a career here rather than someplace far from home.



There is a gentleman in Peoria who, many years ago, began gently, or maybe not so gently, reminding me of the importance of building a City that is appealing to the Millennial generation. His name is Christian Williams and he happens to be a Millennial himself.

His mother brought him to Peoria when he was only five. She wanted him to grow up in a safe place where he could get a good education. After getting his college degree, Christian returned home to Peoria to start his career. I'm sure his mother is proud of the young adult he has become.

Christian loves this City and he cared enough to get involved and make his voice heard.

Christian, thank you for not only speaking your mind, but for expecting your City leaders to listen and take action.

So Christian, as I talk about the Livability Initiative Team, this one's for you!

In my State of the City speech last year, I said that it is absolutely vital that Peoria embrace the talented workforce of our emerging economy.

I'm happy to report that a group of young professionals – calling themselves the Livability Initiative Team – accepted the challenge to determine what steps we should take to attract and retain a viable workforce, the knowledge workers that represent the advanced industry, digital, and technology jobs of our future.

Their year long, in-depth research culminated in practical recommendations.

They proposed:

- ways to inject life, excitement, and beauty into public spaces,
- collaborations to bolster entrepreneurs,
- visibly strengthening our unique character and heritage,
- promoting greater access to amenities and services, such as improved transit opportunities and,
- expanding avenues to interact with our City.



As we enter the budget cycle, your City Council and I have challenged staff to identify ways we can bring life to the substantial recommendations of this committee.

An innovation economy is fueled by people who crave a sense of place, and the Livability Initiative Team did an outstanding job of defining what that means, in real terms.

On behalf of your City Council please accept our thanks for your commitment to Peoria's future. Stay tuned as we use your proposals to enrich and modernize the way we provide value to our residents and to large and small businesses alike.

And I want to draw attention to small businesses for a moment because they are a critical component of our economy and that of the entire Country. There are more than 28 million small businesses in the United States, accounting for 55% of all jobs and 54% of all sales.

To help grow and sustain small businesses in Peoria, I'm proud to announce that we have formed a partnership with the Maricopa County Small Business Development Center, now open for business right alongside the Peoria Chamber of Commerce offices at Huntington University.

The Center is a great resource for small business and is dedicated to giving the tools, services, and information needed to help them reach their greatest potential.

Speaking of potential, last year, I told you about the conversion of the biggest vacant building in our P-83 business and entertainment district into a campus for Huntington University's Arizona Center for Digital Media Arts.

I was thrilled to attend their grand opening and see the amazing transformation of that space into an inviting college campus. It's great to see the way that they've immersed themselves into the community, participating in all that Peoria has to offer. Their students are assisting businesses by designing logos and collateral materials as their class projects. The Peoria Unified School District now broadcasts their PSBN radio program from Huntington's facility.

And I want to tell you a story about one of their students.



I was at the Peoria Sports Complex on the opening day of spring training and a gentleman walked up to me and asked “Are you the Mayor?” I said yes and introduced myself. He did the same and then he said: “I want to thank you. My son had bigger dreams for himself than I was able to give to him. He wanted to be a producer. When Huntington University opened in Peoria, he immediately enrolled. My son is here today at the Sports Complex because the City of Peoria hired Huntington students for production work during Spring Training. My son is happy. He’s doing what he always wanted to do. His dreams are coming true because of the things you’ve done in Peoria. Thank you.”

Mr. McNichols, if you’re watching this, I want to thank you. I got in to politics because I wanted to make a difference for my kids. I realize now that the benefit to other kids is just as meaningful to me. I am grateful to you for taking a moment to tell me about your son. Blessings come at the most surprising times.

We are a City with heart. I believe that’s one of the reasons that WalletHub also recognized Peoria as number 5 on its list of **Best Cities for People with Disabilities**, comparing the 150 most populated U.S. cities across 21 key metrics.

Peoria offers a range of activities for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, from after-school programs to dances, workshops for parents and an award-winning Special Olympics program.

But one of the programs that makes me most proud is the City's “Group Supported Employment Program.”

As a branch of our City’s Adaptive Recreation Program, the employees work in groups, under the supervision of a job coach. Peoria was one of the first cities in Arizona to create a program that helps adults with disabilities get city jobs, for which they are paid a fair and equitable wage.

Robert, one of the adults enrolled in the program has a speech delay and cannot read or write but he loves being outside, so a landscape position was a perfect fit for him.



His mother said he was very excited to receive his first paycheck! She said the job helps to keep Robert active and contributes to his self-esteem.

Making every citizen feel like they are a vital part of our community through inclusive programs like this is not the only way the City of Peoria is excelling. We are also making our mark as a leader in the areas of earth friendly design and sustainable programming.

The City of Peoria was a big winner at the **Arizona Forward Environmental Excellence Awards**. In front of an audience of nearly 500 business and civic leaders, Peoria was called to the stage again and again to accept the coveted awards.

Some 100 nominations were received for Arizona's oldest and most prestigious awards competition. The finalists spanned 4 major counties in Arizona and represented 19 municipalities.

We were honored

- for the PEORIA SPORTS COMPLEX;
- for our COMMUNITY GARDEN;
- for the creation of PEORIA'S DESERT DEFENDERS PROGRAM;
- And for the SONORAN PRESERVATION PROGRAM.

It was truly a great night to be Peoria!

Our award-winning Sonoran Preservation Program is a guide that details Peoria's natural assets and specifies how to balance desert lands and cultural amenities with future growth.

Preserving our natural resources is a top priority for me. With more than 570 acres of parks and 25 miles of trails in our beautiful, growing city, we are able to enjoy a great quality of life.

But a big part of my job is to plan for the future. Growth is inevitable so we must find ways to mitigate its effect on the unique character that makes Peoria great.



Sunrise Mountain, on Happy Valley Road was under critical development pressure. That privately-owned mountain in the heart of Peoria was permitted for the construction of single family homes.

I'm happy to report that, with a developer/owner that cared about the greater good, we were able to work out a deal that allows us to buy the land over time and preserve it for the residents of Peoria to enjoy, now and forever.

Ensuring that Peoria grows responsibly is a key priority for me and while this is not always an easy thing to do, it is the right thing.

And I know this because of residents like Butch Pendergast.

Butch, a geologist and an engineer, spent much of his adult life studying the earth and nature, so when it came time for him to retire, he opted to build a home in beautiful Peoria.

Butch was right at home in our pristine desert and found others who shared his passion, and at 80 years young, he is a member of hiking and biking clubs and finds himself on Peoria's trails at least twice a week. He loves the camaraderie he has found in Peoria and embraces the health benefits he receives living in a community that keeps him active.

But, just as Butch receives so much from Peoria, he gives back in valuable ways. He gives his time and expertise to things that are important to him and for many years has volunteered as a member of the Mesquite District Council Liaison Committee, facilitating an open communication channel between the City Council and his community of Trilogy at Vistancia.

Thank you Butch, for everything you do!

And in addition to a walk in the park, a great city is more. If you don't feel safe in your home or your neighborhood, little else matters.



I'm proud to say that over the last five years, Peoria has realized a downward trend in crime. Major crimes per 1,000 residents have in fact, decreased 25% since 2011, and we continue to be one of the safest cities in the Valley.

I would like to thank our Nationally Recognized Police Chief Roy Minter for his forward-thinking leadership, transparency, and involvement in every aspect of our City.

Chief Minter, please stand and be recognized.

In this day and age, it is not easy to be a police officer. On behalf of the Mayor and City Council, we want Chief Minter and everyone in our police department to know that they have our full support.

Because this is a City that cares about the safety of its residents and the safety of its officers, over the last year, we have added public safety personnel where it was necessary and we currently have 9 new officers getting ready to come out of the academy.

All Patrol Officers are now equipped with Body Worn Cameras and Code Officers and Park Rangers wear body armor to help keep them safe.

It's exciting to watch as the new, state of the art Patrol Services Building rises up out of the ground. This addition will help us to stay ahead of growth as our City expands north.

We don't just think our police department is exceptional – we know they are and here's some proof:

- Detective Mike Griffin was selected as the **Arizona Terrorism Liaison Officer of the Year**.
- Officer Dave Fernandez was selected out of 14,000 SROs nationwide, as the **National School Resource Officer of the Year**,
- Additionally, our SRO program received the **Model Agency Award for 2016**.
- Dispatcher Fabiola Johnson was selected as the **Arizona Telecommunicator of the Year**.
- Supervisor Michael Folia was selected as the **Arizona Line Supervisor of the Year**.
- And, Lt. Tony Wolfe received the **RISE Leadership award at the International Association of Chiefs of Police conference**.



I want to tell you, Chief Minter and your entire Department of dedicated public servants, that this Council backs the blue.

Every day, our Police Department is changing lives and saving lives. And I can say the same for the Peoria Fire-Medical Department.

With a 98% community approval rating, it would be easy for the Peoria Fire-Medical Department to rest on their laurels. They could go on with confidence, knowing Peoria has some of the fastest response times in the country, rising survival rates and overwhelming public support. But that's not how they do it in Fire. Good enough is never good enough for Peoria Fire-Medical—they go for great.

Under the leadership of Chief Bobby Ruiz, Peoria Fire-Medical has continued to innovate and improve on an already exceptional service record.

Chief Ruiz, please stand and be recognized.

With a never-ending desire to improve, the Fire-Medical Department has implemented several new and innovative initiatives that will bring our emergency medical response to the next level.

That next level comes in three parts – the first being the historic launch of our own ambulance service. In the past, Peoria relied solely on a private company for its emergency medical transportation. By utilizing our own ambulances, we keep this core service—a vital life safety service—under our own control, ensuring you will get the help you need, when you need it.

Chief Ruiz and the Fire-Medical Team did not stop there. They are always striving to find new ways to use our resources in the most efficient way possible. Earlier this year, Peoria put another new vehicle on the streets, the Alternative Response Vehicle. By sending this two-person vehicle, loaded with medical equipment, to non-life-threatening emergencies, the Ladder Truck and Engine Company are kept in service and available to respond to fires and other life-threatening emergencies.



Finally, Peoria Fire-Medical began an innovative new program called Community Paramedicine. This proactive healthcare model has our Paramedics reaching out to residents, making house calls and providing in-home health assessments. The goal is to help provide the care that can reduce their reliance on emergency medical services. This has the added benefit of lowering hospital readmission rates, emergency room visits, and 9-1-1 calls.

Interceding on behalf of our residents who need it most, Community Paramedicine touches lives and instills confidence that their health is important in our community.

Last year, Peoria Fire-Medical graduated 13 members from paramedic school, and 23 firefighters from the academy, the largest recruit class in our history.

These men and women are working hard every day to improve the way they provide life saving support. Two firefighters who know this well are:

Captain Tony Neely, who was named **Firefighter of the Year by the Veterans of Foreign Wars** for helping equip tomorrow's heroes with the tools they need to succeed, and

Firefighter Stephen Gunn, who was named **United Firefighter of the Year** after he crawled through the window of a fully engulfed building in a daring rescue attempt of a man trapped inside.

Thank you to Peoria's public safety personnel who make the choice to answer the call to keep our residents safe.

Today, as we celebrate another successful year, it is fitting that we roll out a symbol of our City's reputation, history, and the contributions of everyone who has touched the City of Peoria on its journey.

A flag signifies pride and represents the ideals and values of a people.

Peoria, in lieu of a City flag, has flown a banner displaying the City Seal.

The City Seal is a permanent emblem that bears our name. It has, and always will, be used for purposes directly connected to the documentation of official City business.



The City of Peoria is 63 years old. Let this year, 2017, be the year we commemorate our official flag as a powerful symbol of the pride of Peoria's past, present and future.

FLAG UNFURLS

May I present the Flag of the City of Peoria!

The colors are bold and portray Peoria's own pallet: the rust and browns of the Sonoran Desert and the mountains all around us, the blues of the waters of our own Lake Pleasant and the Arizona skies.

The colors blend together as all Peorians are unified, from one end of our City to the other, from the first citizen to the last, in the shared blessing of our cherished home.

The stars represent our past, present and future. They illustrate our shared principles.

- Courage of the founding pioneers who conquered a harsh life in the desert;
- Strength of the men and women who steered our evolution into a modern city;
- Pride in our City, that driving force that propels us to reach our full potential.

When you see this flag flying against our beautiful skies, remember what it means to be a Peorian, to stand in unity and respect, to honor Peoria's rich heritage and its boundless future. And hear the resolve in the words of Abraham Lincoln who said:

“The best way to predict your future is to create it.”

I'm grateful for this opportunity to convey the strength of the State of our City and I look forward to continuing the work to create our best and brightest future.

Thank you.