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State of the City in Review

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Mayor Hutchinson and I recently completed our annual State of the City Address. This is a great opportunity for us to look at the challenges and accomplishments from the previous year and to look ahead to what's on the horizon. The State of the City Address is available online at fcgov.com/stateofthecity, but I'd like to share just a few of the highlights from our message:

In 2007, we made several changes to better provide community services. The city, county, and new library district formalized an agreement creating an independent library system with increased hours, expanded programming and a new southeast branch, which will open later this year.

We celebrated the grand opening of Spring Canyon Community Park, home to Inspiration Playground, Colorado's first universally-accessible playground. We also opened the new Northside Aztlan Community Center, as well as a new Police Services Building.

We have increased our environmental stewardship efforts, preserving open space and natural areas for you to enjoy. Last year, we completed the Soapstone Prairie Natural Area Management Plan, which protects the area's precious resources. Bobcat Ridge Open Space also received special state recognition. In 2008, we will pursue further environmental improvements, particularly in the area of renewable energy.

In economic news, we have made steady progress. City staff is actively pursuing redevelopment along both North and South College Avenue. By working with area residents and businesses, the plans will balance new projects while maintaining existing businesses and neighborhoods.

City Council approved the formation of an Urban Renewal Authority for Foothills Mall, which provides funding support for renovation. We are cautiously optimistic that General Growth Properties will submit a redevelopment plan in the next six months.

Construction of Front Range Village is underway and will open later this year; while this is currently the largest retail project, there are several smaller developments under construction along Harmony Road, Mason Street and College Avenue.

The Mason Corridor project crossed its largest hurdle last year by winning approval from the Federal Transit Administration. We are awaiting final funding approval from Congress; the news should come this spring. The Mason Corridor will play a critical role in future land use patterns, travel patterns and economic health.

Last fall, city council approved the 2008-2009 Budget. After several years of reducing services, this budget maintains current service levels and gives a slightly higher priority to public safety. However, even with recent cuts, increased efficiencies, and more positive revenue projections, it

is clear that our current budget cannot support this community's growing needs. Studies have clearly identified that our police force is understaffed. We also have substantial needs for Poudre Fire Authority, transportation projects, and road and park maintenance. In short, our current funding will not support this demand.

It's easy for me to talk about all the good things the city has accomplished, and all the exciting projects that are coming up. But we also have to talk about the difficult issues, and that includes finances. In the coming months, the mayor, city council and I will be asking community members to help us find the right balance between cost and desired service levels. I encourage you to get engaged in those conversations. After all, this isn't up to us as local government; it's up to you!

It truly is a privilege to live and work in this community, and I look forward to the exciting opportunities and unique challenges that 2008 is sure to bring.