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2015 State of the City Address
February 4, 2015
Fort Collins Senior Center

Prepared Remarks

MAYOR: Good evening Fort Collins. Welcome to the 2015 State of the City! Do you hear the music? It's setting the tone for tonight's special event. Are you happy? I'm happy! You know why I'm happy? Because I live in Fort Collins, one of the best places in the world to live, work, and play... and serve as Mayor!

I'm Mayor Karen Weitkunat. With me tonight is City Manager Darin Atteberry. Also, joining us this evening are my fellow Councilmembers: Mayor Pro Tem Gerry Horak, and councilmembers GinO Campana and Wade Troxell.

This is our 10th year presenting a LIVE state of the City address! Thank you for joining us as we celebrate our recent accomplishments and look forward to exciting challenges in 2015 and beyond.

This past year, Time magazine recognized Fort Collins as the number one "Most Satisfied City in America!" And, according to our latest Citizen Survey, you agree! Ninety-seven percent of residents believe Fort Collins is a *great* place to live.

We are celebrating this evening in the recently expanded Senior Center for a reason... It's a beautiful place, but it also reflects some very core values of our city: a commitment to moving forward in a way that keeps our community strong, healthy and happy.

CITY MANAGER: Thank you, Mayor. I, too, would like to say welcome and thank you for being here for what has become an annual tradition that we truly enjoy. As we share our thoughts on the State of the City and our community's future, I am proud of what we've accomplished this past year, and enthusiastic about the opportunities ahead.

The accomplishments we'll talk about tonight don't happen by accident. Whether it's building MAX, restoring the river or crafting a one billion dollar biennial budget, this work takes vision from elected leaders, hard work from City staff and an enduring commitment from the public.

The Fort Collins of 2015 has been shaped by over 150 years of collective community input.

This past year, we significantly expanded our public engagement efforts, going to schools, social service agencies, senior living facilities and community markets. We hosted meetings in every area of town from the north side to south Fort Collins, from midtown to downtown - where you

told us what matters most to you. As we look to the future, the Mayor, City Council and I are committed to partnering with you to shape a City that is “world-class” for all.

MAYOR: As residents, you regularly have opportunities to influence City policies and services ... through open houses, public forums and listening sessions... through online tools, such as Access Fort Collins... and through immersive programs like the Citizen Police Academy and CityWorks. Since 2007, more than two-hundred CityWorks participants have become ambassadors within the community, telling friends and neighbors about city services, and staying involved in city issues. Thousands of you participated in City-sponsored events and gave us feedback online this year.

Our City government is most Effective because of your active input and involvement. You “coach” us - to help us continually improve. To be an effective coach, you need to have a clear picture of how we are doing at any given time. It’s one reason we place such a high value on transparency.

In 2014, we took transparency to a new level by launching the City Council Email Transparency Project. Now, *anyone* can freely search emails to and from councilmembers. We also provide online tools such as the Community Dashboard, which offers a clear snapshot of how your City government is delivering on our commitments.

CITY MANAGER: An important part of a healthy and high-performing city is a robust economy, one that fits our community values and provides the resources to support services that citizens need, deserve and expect.

As many of you know, the City of Fort Collins continues to maintain a triple-A credit rating from Moody’s. This puts us in the top three percent of communities rated. Through our careful and prudent approach to fiscal management and healthy revenues, I’m proud to tell you that the City is in solid financial shape.

As demand for City services continues to increase, it’s vital we *remain* financially fit.

The health of our City is significantly dependent on the health of our local economy.

Fort Collins has an impressive mix of large, medium-size and small employers, along with grassroots startups, and forward-thinking entrepreneurs – all who help position Fort Collins for a balanced and stable economic future.

MAYOR: Hey, who watched the Super Bowl last week? If you did, you saw one of Fort Collins’ manufacturing companies – FiberLok – in action. This local company created the iconic silver Superbowl logos worn by the players.

And, did you know that we have one of the world’s leading robotics firms in Fort Collins? Wolf Robotics continues to push the envelope of what smart robotics can do for construction, mining, agriculture, and other industries.

Have you heard of Numerica Corporation? This hi-tech business with roots stretching back to CSU, is making a huge impact in the fields of surveillance systems and law enforcement... from right here in Fort Collins.

And do you know what else is amazing? We are home to more than 6,000 creative professionals? Musicians, artists and entertainers fuel the vibrant culture of Fort Collins today. Can you imagine Fort Collins without Bohemian Nights at New West Fest or First Friday gallery walks?

CITY MANAGER: No Mayor, I really can't. We embrace the Creative Class.

Attracting and training the next generation workforce continues to be paramount, whether that's machinists and welders training at Front Range Community College or scientists and engineers studying at Colorado State University.

Our Economic Health office actively supports local manufacturers who align VO-tech career training with industry needs. We've built strong relationships with Poudre School District, Rocky Mountain Innosphere, Rotary Club and the No-Co-Bio cluster to support innovative "community-driven" STEM educational initiatives.

But Fort Collins isn't *all* about work. We also have exceptional places to play and relax.

Downtown continues to be a crown jewel for our City. With \$3 million in renovations underway and scheduled to be complete late this summer, Old Town Square promises to be a thriving gathering spot for the next 30 to 50 years.

The southeast area of town is rapidly evolving as well. Planning and design for a new 60-acre Southeast Community park near Fossil Ridge High School is underway, with construction beginning in 2016.

Midtown is reawakening. Almost a year has passed since the official groundbreaking of the \$300-plus million dollar Foothills Mall. This renaissance will bring midtown back as a top regional entertainment, dining and retail destination.

The Cache la Poudre River is a Northern Colorado treasure. We now have a long-term master plan that promises visitors a safe, beautiful and enjoyable experience as we maintain, conserve, and enhance the natural values of the area.

MAYOR: A strong, healthy community is one that works for everyone. That means having safe affordable and available housing for all. We know there is still a lot of work to be done... and that we can't do it alone.

Working with Homeward 2020, the Fort Collins Housing Authority and other community partners, the City is committed to addressing the issues of housing affordability, poverty and making homelessness "rare, short-lived and non-recurring." This is a multi-dimensional issue,

with no easy answers. We're still learning, but we know it requires collaboration, education and coordination across an entire community of businesses, non-profits, government and citizens.

The city's support for those in need extends beyond housing.

Last year, the City awarded more than \$800,000 to local non-profit human service programs and agencies that support those who are most at risk in our community. With that investment, our non-profit partners leveraged more than \$10 million dollars of support to improve the health and resiliency of nearly 14,000 individuals and families here in Fort Collins.

That support goes toward senior services and resources for the disabled. It supports child advocacy, it increases access to dental care and mental health services. It helps agencies feed, shelter and opens the door to opportunities for those who are most vulnerable.

CITY MANAGER: Nine in 10 residents say they feel safe in Fort Collins. With the recent national attention on the roles and limits of law enforcement, we are fortunate to have strong and respectful relationships among community members and our police. In 2014, Fort Collins Police Services was accredited by the Colorado Police Chiefs Association for their rigor in establishing systems and protocols to provide exceptional service.

It takes three things to make a great police department – well-trained people, good equipment and the right facilities. Fort Collins Police Services has great people, and great equipment.

Improving our training facilities is a priority.

Our city is well-served by our emergency responders. Last year, Fort Collins 911 answered nearly 150,000 calls, dispatching personnel to fire, police and medical emergencies.

Have you heard of PulsePoint? When someone is in cardiac arrest, this free smartphone app makes it easy to alert registered CPR and AED users nearby. Poudre Fire Authority collaborated with the City, CSU, University of Colorado Health and others to bring this app to our community and provide training for users. It's just one more example of how our community is working together to save lives!

MAYOR: There's no doubt Fort Collins is special. I hear from people every day who love living here. One of the reasons I love living here is the Gardens on Spring Creek. This year's Christmas lights addition. The beautiful corn flowers were welded from recyclable material from the Foothills mall expansion. Thank you Gardens for adding a splash of Happy to our celebration. Here's what your neighbors say makes *them* happy about Fort Collins today...

VIDEO: *"What We Love About Fort Collins"*

CITY MANAGER: You know, I love this place. In that video, you heard a few emerging themes... People are friendly here; they're happy when they are out biking on the trails and



exploring nature. We are fortunate to have a City with these amenities as well as one that provides exceptional core services. One that provides clean water and keeps our power on - with up to 99.9982% reliability... A city that provides opportunities for everyone.

MAYOR: The decisions we make today impact the long-term health of our City and region.

One of my highlights as your Mayor has been serving on the President's Task Force on Climate Preparedness. This twenty-eight member task force advised President Obama on how the federal government can help best prepare communities for future impacts of climate change.

Through planning, preparedness and involvement with others, we are able to address climate change and our role in greenhouse gas emissions, air quality and attaining a healthy environment. The White House, the State of Colorado, FEMA, the EPA, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture all recognize Fort Collins as a regional leader in environmental health and stewardship.

We are taking innovative approaches to save energy. Fort Collins Utilities has installed nearly 100,000 advanced electric and water meters in your homes, schools, and businesses. As Utilities customers, you hold the power to monitor your own energy use, control costs, and conserve resources.

Now, it's time to take energy conservation to the next level!

Guess what Fort Collins? For the next two years, we're going on an energy diet! We are a semi-finalist in the Georgetown University Energy Prize competition; competing with fifty cities across the nation to reduce energy consumption. Our goal is to double our community energy savings by the end of 2016! A five million dollar prize is on the line! That's something to work for. So, come on, Fort Collins...let's diet together and "Lose a Watt!!!"

CITY MANAGER: We are being diligent with long-range environmental initiatives. Priorities such as Waste Reduction Recycling and Air Quality are important now and will make a huge impact on our future.

This year we're in the midst of updating our City's Climate Action Plan. If we are serious about being carbon neutral by 2050, we must have direct and forward-thinking conversations about how we get there together.

Our community also continues to increase renewable energy capability with investments in solar and wind. This year, Fort Collins Utilities' and the Platte River Power Authority are more than doubling the amount of solar capacity in our community.

And it's not just the sun that's giving our city a bright future... In December, Platte River tapped into wind-generated power at the Spring Canyon Expansion in eastern Colorado. This project will provide the equivalent energy used by about twenty eight thousand homes across Fort Collins, Estes Park, Longmont, and Loveland.

As our power provider, Platte River plays a critical role in helping the City reach our sustainability goals!

MAYOR: Getting from place-to-place safely and with ease is one of your top priorities. It's one of ours too! Last year, City crews plowed nearly 75,000 lane miles of snow, repaired more than twenty-eight thousand linear feet of sidewalk, and filled...are you ready for it?!?!? Fourteen thousand and seventy potholes! For those keeping count, that's five hundred and fifty one more than last year!

The Mulberry Street Bridge across the Poudre River is being replaced after sixty-five years in service. When the bridge is finished, wider lanes, pedestrian sidewalks and bicycle lanes will create a safer route for commuters and bring new life to this important community gateway.

Starting this spring and continuing through the summer, the Colorado Department of Transportation will complete the much needed repaving of College Avenue from Harmony to Mulberry. We know these projects are areas of major frustration and inconvenience for drivers and cyclists. But, the short term pain will be well worth the finished product!!

CITY MANAGER: In last year's State of the City Address, The Mayor and I were really excited about the pending opening of the MAX bus rapid transit system. MAX opened in May as promised, *on time and under budget*, and Transfort added 482,000 miles of new service this past year - an increase of more than fifty percent! Transfort now brings 1.5 *million* miles of service to our community each year. Still, we know there's demand for more routes, extended hours and Sunday service. We must continue conversations about how to fund these transit priorities into the future.

MAYOR: Bicycling is another critical part of our healthy and diverse transportation system. The bicycle library, bicycle ambassador program and bicycle infrastructure were keys to becoming a platinum-level Bicycle Friendly Community back in 2013. That's a designation we share with only three other cities in America! Last year Council approved the Bicycle Master Plan, which lays the foundation for Fort Collins to reach the unprecedented Diamond level.

I am thrilled that Fort Collins will bring the best cyclists from around the globe back this August as we host the 2015 US Pro Challenge! Hosted in partnership with our Northern Colorado neighbors, this event will again showcase our cycling culture on the world stage.

You know we don't pursue these national accolades or awards simply for press coverage. We do it because we are serious about being the best City in America to live, work and play... today *and* tomorrow!

CITY MANAGER: That journey of continuous improvement, as the Mayor spoke to is deeply embedded in all areas of our municipal organization. Last fall, evaluators from the "Rocky Mountain Performance Excellence" program visited the City. After closely examining our focus

on customers, workforce and operations, they awarded our City the prestigious “Peak Award.” In the 13-year history of the program, Fort Collins is the first municipality and only the fifth organization in Colorado to receive this Peak level of recognition! Incidentally our own Poudre Valley Hospital was one of the others that received this award in 2006.

While it’s an honor to get such prestigious recognition, the real benefit comes from what we learn through the process. That opportunity to continually learn and improve is why we have set our sights on the national equivalent, the Malcolm Baldrige Award in 2015.

MAYOR: Just as we have personal responsibility to maintain our own fitness, we must embrace the responsibility we have as City stewards to plan and provide for the future health of a vibrant and evolving city.

We have several major planning projects underway. The Midtown in Motion College Avenue Transportation Study, the Lincoln Corridor Plan, the West Central Area Plan and Prospect Road Design... all of these will influence the character and feel of our city.

CITY MANAGER: We must preserve and enhance the things that make our neighborhoods unique and special. In the recent budget process, City Council approved \$600,000 to support neighborhoods that are in a state of transition. Over the next two years, these funds will be used to improve streetscapes and provide low or no-cost loans for housing reinvestment. We will also engage with residents in new ways to better understand what’s most important within your local neighborhoods.

In addition, the City is investing an additional \$850,000 over the next two years into our historic Buckingham, Andersonville and AltaVista neighborhoods.

As the City continues to experience more infill development, programs such as “Nature in the City” will preserve critical connections to nature, by giving residents access to high-quality formal and informal natural spaces within a ten-minute walk from anywhere in the City.

MAYOR: Many of our most treasured community assets were born as solutions to community challenges and desires ... For instance, Old Town Square helped save a dying downtown, the Museum of Discovery forged a ground-breaking partnership to merge history and science and inspire people of all ages. Even the very Senior Center you are enjoying tonight started as a community vision.

Your ideas motivate us, they challenge us, and they make us proud to be a part of this community. We are grateful to hear from the community every day about what it will take to keep Fort Collins moving forward. Let’s take a moment now and hear a few of the things you think are important about the future of Fort Collins...

VIDEO: *“What We Hope for the Future”*

CITY MANAGER: We hear you! This is why many of those priorities are now part of our City budget and long-range plans. That said, it's important to understand that a healthy and happy future for the City of Fort Collins can't be done by the City alone. Many of the decisions ahead this year continue to require meaningful community dialog. They will need commitment from the community to work together to address impacts of some very large and complex issues. Whether it's infrastructure and traffic impacts that rise from projects such as the CSU on - campus Stadium ... the future of the Fort Collins-Loveland Municipal Airport... or matters such as poverty and housing... these challenges don't go away with a changing population.

MAYOR: As collective stewards we have a shared responsibility to keep making Fort Collins better and better. We have 150 years of history verifying that strong leadership and future vision and planning build a healthy, strong community.

In April, we begin the next leg of the journey to Fort Collins' future. The citywide election presents two community choices about where we are going. Do we renew a ¼ cent community capital improvement tax to renovate historic structures, build a SE community center with an outdoor pool, replace bridges, improve housing options? Do we continue a quarter cent tax to fund Street Maintenance?

In April one-half of the leadership of the city will change with the election of 3 council seats in districts 2, 4 and 6 as well as a new mayor. Voting is the most important way you can participate in creating the future vision, leadership and direction that will continue to make Fort Collins a healthy, balanced and happy community.

CITY MANAGER: As we look to the future, it's impossible to know exactly what's in store. But one thing is for certain... we are building on a great foundation!

We have strong community partners who share our goals of fostering a happy and healthy city for generations to come.

I can't close without taking a moment to thank my colleagues and our Mayor and our City Council. Council, thank you for your hard work vision and support of myself and City staff.

We have a remarkable City workforce with people who are truly committed to this community. They work day-in and day-out to deliver on our mission of providing exceptional service for an exceptional community.

Unscripted remarks regarding the "It, We, and I."

Will you join me in thanking them?

I also want to recognize our Mayor and City Council... *(Unscripted personal comments)*

MAYOR: We are all collective stewards with a shared responsibility to keep making this place better and better. As your Mayor, I stand before you tonight proud to call Fort Collins my home. I am proud of what we've worked together to accomplish this past year. Moreover, I envision a very bright future for Fort Collins. I see a City that continues to be known for innovation – one that continues to be known as a place where people come to be inspired.

(Unscripted personal comments)

Fort Collins is a thriving city. It's a place that's vibrant and full of energy! I thank each and every one of you for joining us here tonight - and thank you for *your* part in making Fort Collins happy and healthy today...and for years to come!