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City and County of Denver

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Text of Mayor Hancock's 2017 State of the City Address

DENVER – Mayor Michael B. Hancock's 2017 State of the City Address as prepared:

July 10, 2017

Hiawatha Davis, Jr. Recreation Center

Thank you, Council President Brooks. And thank you all for joining us today.

Thank you to the Hiawatha Davis, Jr. Rec. Center community and staff, and our Parks and Rec. Director, and Deputy Mayor, Happy Haynes for hosting us. It's always my honor to pause, celebrate and acknowledge the true champions of our great city, the eleven thousand-plus city employees who show up every day to carry us forward! And a special thanks to our emergency responders, who risk their lives to keep us safe.

Members of City Council, Auditor O'Brien, District Attorney McCann, Presiding Judge Spahn – it's an honor to serve with you. Thank you for your leadership. Our Clerk and Recorder, Debra Johnson, isn't with us today because she's recovering from surgery. Madame Clerk – we wish you a speedy recovery.

I want to welcome to Lt. Governor Donna Lynne, our State legislators and our neighboring mayors, city council members and county commissioners.

And with us today is my good friend – a five-time all-star, NBA Champion and future Hall of Famer – Chauncey Billups and his wife Piper!

Speaking of the people who serve beside us, who stand with us, and always have our backs, my wonderful family – Mary Louise, Janae, my sisters and my mom, Scharlyne – are here with us. Last week, Mary Louise and I celebrated our 24th wedding anniversary. I am so blessed to have such a strong, loving partner.

She and I met a few miles from here at Cole Middle School. And I grew up here in Northeast Denver. My Grandma Delores lived just across the street. This rec center is where I fell in love with football – and scored my first touchdown – playing for the Skyland Pirates. Getting to spend another summer day here really takes me back. Standing up on this stage, two things come to mind – Chauncey, this might be the

closest I'll ever come to being able to dunk in this gym. And it's good to be back home in the neighborhood that helped raise me.

Denver – you and I have grown up together.

We've seen new buildings go up, new neighbors move in, and whole new neighborhoods get built. Anyone who grew up here would remember the planes roaring overhead as they prepared to land at Stapleton – and having to put phone calls on hold because of the noise. We've worked side-by-side through the good times and the bad, the booms and the busts, the ups and the downs.

Today, we face new challenges – like housing, traffic and the need to better manage our growth. But – no matter how much Denver has changed, some things have always stayed the same – we never give up, we never stop caring for one another, and we never doubt that we can do better.

We are neighbors who help shovel each other's snow in the winter. We enjoy Jazz in the Park together, show our colors at Pride, and celebrate our cultural diversity at Cinco de Mayo. When asked where we live, we proudly respond Park Hill or Platte Park, Mayfair or Montbello. We take pride in our neighborhoods because we take pride in the whole of Denver. We care about this city, where it's been and where it's going. And we care about each other – we don't want to see anyone left behind.

These are our values.

I'm certain the state of our city is strong because you – the people of Denver – are strong. Your determination has powered our progress and empowered each other – while preserving the uniqueness of our neighborhoods. That is what makes us the best city in America – the great city that a great mayor, Federico Pena, challenged us to imagine all those years ago.

In 2011, when I walked into the Mayor's office, we faced almost double-digit unemployment, we hadn't hired a police officer or firefighter in years, and city services had been slashed for three years straight because of the recession. The economic health of Denver, not to mention our self-confidence, was challenged.

I recall the trepidation I had, as a first-year Mayor, having to ask you to help fill a \$100 million budget gap. But you had the courage to act. Together, we pushed and pulled Denver out of the recession and today our economy employs more people than ever before. 2.3 percent unemployment is pretty incredible.

Denver has proven itself to be a global city dedicated to acting locally to ensure everyone matters. Every new international flight to a Zurich, London or Panama is a new opportunity to bring in another Panasonic or Terumo – and for our local businesses to spread their wings. We have worked relentlessly to create thousands of good paying jobs for our residents, provide opportunities for startups and small businesses, and for major industries to take root. And today, we are more active, creative, cultured and enjoy a good farmer's market.

We are leading the way, and the state of our city is indeed strong. But it is not strong for everyone. Our economic success has not reached everyone. That is why we are focused on expanded workforce training, job opportunities and contract work for our local businesses.

It cuts me to the core as I witness my friends and family members get priced out of their homes and entire minority neighborhoods – my neighborhoods – struggle just to get by. But I know that by staying true to our Denver values, this city will show how economic prosperity can bring everyone along.

This city will show how development can serve our needs, not victimize us. And how change can happen the Denver way, so that we remain connected to our past, to our neighborhoods and to one another. The change we're experiencing must reflect the heart and passion of our city and her people. This is not an easy task. But time and again, Denver has stepped up and turned our challenges into opportunities.

It wasn't easy in the telecom boom of the 70s, in the oil and gas crash of the 80s, in the prosperous 90s or the Great Recession. And in the growth and change we're seeing today, we won't lose who we are, either. We will remain a city built by and for the people.

Right now, Denver has a market that's responding to the greatest return on investment, not to the greatest needs of our people. If it's not impacting you personally, then you know a friend, co-worker or relative who has been priced out of the market. My sister Carlyne just moved back home from the East, but she was amazed to find Denver housing prices were out of her reach.

We are working tirelessly to make this a market that works for you – and a city that works for everyone. Our economics must be accompanied by an empathy and compassion – where profits and people carry equal weight.

Listen, we have helped drive the creation of 3,000 affordable homes over the past four years. A total we thought would take us five. Nearly 1,000 more are under construction, and over 1,500 on top of that will get started over the next year. We are pulling every lever we can to offer more affordable options to our people.

We're land-banking vacant property and old buildings to secure those sites for affordable homes. Our mortgage tax credit for first-time home buyers and others was re-upped just this year. And we're financing more affordable condos at rail stations. We've launched our new \$150 million affordable housing fund, and we will continue to fight for more affordable housing whenever and wherever we can.

On this, City Council has been just as steadfast, and I thank them for their continued partnership. I also want to thank Governor Hickenlooper and our State Legislature for finally passing construction defects reform to spur the creation of more condos.

But many residents need an affordable option today, not a year from now. I am excited to announce that we will pilot a new partnership to open 400 existing, vacant apartments to low- and moderate-income residents struggling to find an affordable place to live. We have apartments sitting vacant because there's a gap between what it costs and what people can afford. Working together with the Denver Housing Authority, employers and apartment building owners, we aim to fill that gap.

The truth is, our people *also* need *more* than just a roof over their heads to live a good life. That's why our new Office of Housing and Opportunities for People Everywhere has devised a three-pronged strategy: to live a good life, you need a good job, good health and good housing. This is true for the individual standing in line at the Rescue Mission and the family living in right here in Park Hill.

Let me tell you about Dominic. Due to unfortunate circumstances, Dominic and his family lost their savings, and their home. For six months, they lived in a hotel as they tried to get back on their feet. Dominic enrolled in the Denver Rescue Mission's New Life Program at The Crossing to get a fresh start. They received transitional housing, phenomenal support from counselors, and built their savings back up. This past June, Dominic graduated from the program, and he and his family are back in a good, stable home with their lives back on track.

Dominic, his wife and kids are with us today, let's give them a hand.

There are thousands of people like Dominic. We have people working full time but staying in our shelters because they can't afford rent. Low-income families living in public housing who are just getting by. And seniors living on fixed incomes falling into homelessness because they can't afford health care AND their homes.

That's why we are building 250 supportive housing units with health services for our chronically homeless. That's why we worked with supporters to help get their tiny home village up and running, and partnered with artists to make their live-work spaces safer. That's why we launched the Denver Day Works program to train and hire those experiencing homelessness. Seventy of them now have gainful employment.

That's why we partnered with the My Brother's Keeper initiative and Bank of America to help 25 young men of color find summer jobs and career paths right in their own neighborhoods. Please stand up, gentlemen. And it's why, in the face of a nationwide epidemic of drug addiction and mental health challenges, we're expanding our behavioral health co-responder program to every police district, so that we are connecting people to the treatment they need to reach recovery.

This strategy – a good home, good health and a good job – works for all of us. We don't just want people to have a home – we want them to be able to stay in it, to build their lives and build their futures.

While many worry about losing their homes, the current housing crisis forecasts an even greater loss – the displacement of historic African American and Latino communities. Nobody ever wants to see a Rosa Linda's, a M&D's Cafe or the original Pierre's close their doors – and man, do I miss sitting with former State Senate President Peter Groff for a good catfish sandwich from Pierre's.

They were such important parts of the fabric of our community. When you lose the buildings and homes of a community where roots have grown, you lose those stories, the experiences and that history. You lose the soul of a neighborhood. And our city loses a piece of itself it won't ever get back. It's our job to bring opportunities to communities – especially communities of color – that lift people up, not push them out. But it's not always easy.

When I was on City Council, my friend Paul Lopez and I would spend hours at a time talking about ways we could bring good parks, libraries, jobs and even street lamps to the overlooked neighborhoods we represented – the very neighborhoods where we grew up.

Sun Valley is one of those overlooked neighborhoods. I firmly believe the people who live there deserve the same opportunities that so many others have in our city. A \$30 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development will certainly help uplift residents there. In partnership with Ismael Guerrero, the Denver Housing Authority and the neighborhood, we will deliver more mixed income housing, better low-income housing, expanded parks and open space, and good jobs and businesses created FOR the people who live there.

Community development should benefit the community, and we will be taking the same approach to Globeville, Elyria-Swansea, Montbello and any neighborhood whose people are at risk of displacement. In September, I will deliver to City Council a budget package that puts anti-displacement measures and support for long-time families and businesses front and center throughout 2018. And I will continue to do so until we have a market that is accessible to all our people and neighborhoods.

Rapid population growth, development and traffic congestion are the most visible signs of the changes we've been experiencing the past several years. With roughly 115,000 new residents in the last decade, Denver feels more crowded.

Because it is.

But the reality is, 80 percent of Denver's recent development is happening in only 20 percent of the city. That's intentional, based on our strategic land-use plan, Blueprint Denver, created over a decade ago under then-Mayor Wellington Webb. But like you, I find the pace shocking.

Development shouldn't happen to us, it should conform to our values. Here's how we're making it happen: Residents are partnering with the city to preserve the look and character of their neighborhoods, like we did over in Krisana Park through zoning or along South Lincoln with a landmark district. The city is partnering with neighborhoods to determine their futures through new neighborhood plans – starting in Far Northeast and along East Colfax. And neighborhoods are partnering with the city and developers to find ways to build projects that provide the stores and services that residents need, like at Alameda Station and 38th and Blake.

Cities experience change. Denver is not immune from that. What matters is how we manage change to reflect our values and celebrate our diversity. Through today's Denverwide citywide planning effort, we are creating a comprehensive, 20-year roadmap that will help us better manage change – not from the top down, but with neighborhood direction and your guidance. So far, thousands of residents have weighed in on charting our city's future – including transforming our transportation future.

I know many of us relish the days when it took 15 minutes to drive anywhere in Denver. But 15 minutes now takes 30, or longer. The quality of our streets is deteriorating. We don't have enough mobility options, and our roads are not as safe as they used to be.

We must make it safer and easier to get where we need to go. We're going to have to get smarter. We're going to have to get bolder. And we're going to have to act fast before gridlock becomes a way of life.

Today, I'm announcing a new Mobility Action Plan. This plan will serve as a clarion call for a future that offers mobility freedom for all by supporting the choices we know our residents want to make. It will accelerate the policies and projects necessary between now and 2030 to move more people, more efficiently and more safely.

Today, 73 percent of Denver commuters drive to and from work in cars by themselves. By 2030, our goal is 50 percent, with 30 percent of our commuters biking, walking or taking transit. Also by 2030, our goal is zero traffic deaths. And to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent, we must significantly expand the use of electric vehicles.

How are we going to do all this? We're going to dedicate more travel lanes as transit-only and make bus service more accessible to everyone. We're going to build more bike lanes, neighborhood bikeways and protected bike lanes. We're going to support the next generation of commuters who don't necessarily think owning a car is the only way to go.

Today, we're kicking off two new programs that I'm really excited about. Through a partnership with RTD, we will provide 1,500 high school students free bus passes for the summer. And we're ready to sign up eligible students today at the cookout. In addition, we are ready to kick off new bike camps at rec. centers – including right here at Hiawatha – to teach our youngest riders safe cycling habits.

My Mobility Action Plan will also connect and repair more sidewalks; upgrade more intersections and crosswalks; deploy Bus Rapid Transit along our busiest corridors, starting with Colfax Avenue; expand our network of partners to increase mobility options, services and routes; and accelerate improvements that make our streets safer, address speed limits, and reduce crashes between cars, cyclists and

pedestrians. And since it's 2017 and the future is now, we're deploying the latest technologies that will help you find and pay for parking from your smart phone.

This work will be coordinated through a reorganized Department of Public Works, and ultimately through a new Department of Transportation and Mobility that I announced just last week. I will also be establishing a Multi-Modal Citizen Advisory Committee to drive the whole community towards a more mobile future, and to steer a community conversation about how best to fund these crucial investments.

Revolutionizing transportation and mobility will take significant investment. The State Legislature proclaimed that transportation funding was their number one priority this past session. What they did was kick the can down the increasingly crumbling road. And with Washington cementing its dysfunction 140 characters at a time – it has become clear that any meaningful support from the Federal Government will end where it has for the better part of a decade – stalled. But let me be clear – both the State and Federal governments are not off the hook.

We can't wait any longer. Denver needs a funding commitment that matches our resolve to ease congestion. To address our people's needs, we must prepare to invest a minimum of 2 billion dollars over the next 12 years on our transportation network. That investment starts in September when I submit my 2018 budget proposal to City Council. It will be followed by asking voters to make a major investment in our city infrastructure this November through a General Obligation Bond.

This week, I will deliver a proposed bond package to city council that will allow us to repair roads and bridges, improve parks and rec centers, upgrade our police and fire stations, and enhance our cultural institutions. And this package was created with the most community input of any bond in our city's history – the people of Denver provided more than 4,000 ideas for investment.

I want to thank Executive Committee Chair Roxane White, co-chairs Dr. Jandel Davis and JJ Neiman, the hardworking, diverse volunteers who served on subcommittees, and city staff who whittled down a list of projects to create their final recommendations.

Time and time again, this city has made smart investments in our future – investments that benefit the community, keep us competitive and preserve our history, without placing more financial burden on our people. There is no better example than the National Western Center. The Denver Business Journal said it best: "This campus is positioned to become a nexus for food innovation and Western heritage."

The Center will have a global reach, and a powerful local impact by increasing neighborhood access to the South Platte River, adding bike lanes and running trails, and providing jobs to surrounding residents.

Today, I am excited to announce the National Western Center will be creating a first-of-its-kind community investment fund. This fund will ensure the Center directly invests into the surrounding neighborhoods for the foreseeable future. And it will invest in what the neighbors of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea want.

The people of Denver should expect their public assets to benefit their futures. By upgrading the Colorado Convention Center, we will maintain one of Denver's most important industries – tourism. Richard Scharf and VISIT Denver have been phenomenal partners not only on this, but in their continued pursuit to bring new and bigger conventions to Denver, like the world's largest Outdoor Retailer show they and the State worked to bring here in 2018.

By overhauling the Great Hall at DIA, we will keep Colorado's No. 1 employer and economic driver thriving. And by leveraging the need to protect more neighborhoods from flooding, we will create new green spaces and improve City Park Golf Course.

It is my goal that when the people of Denver look back at these projects, they don't just see a building, but the communities they enhanced, the careers they launched and the futures they secured.

In a city nearing seven-hundred thousand people, it's never been more important to protect, preserve and grow our parks and recreational opportunities. Mayor Speer, in the early 1900s, first deemed Denver a city within a park. This administration, under the leadership of Parks Director Scott Gilmore, has designated and protected over 1,000 acres of parkland over the last five years – that is more than in the 50 years before that combined. And we've added 600 more acres of parks and open space.

This fall, when we wrap up work at Confluence Park, we will conclude five years of revitalization and 30 million dollars of investment that has transformed the banks of the South Platte River into a spectacular network of parks. And that is just Phase 1! We're going to invest 10 million dollars more when we start Phase 2, which includes the future RiNo Park.

The Carla Madison Rec. Center in Central Denver will also open this fall – WITH a dog park. Our rec. centers aren't just places for kids to stay active and healthy. Denver's active lifestyle knows no age limit, and our older adults and seniors are just as active as anyone. Some get a membership discount through programs like Silver Sneakers. Others don't. We're going to change that.

Just like the MY Denver Card gives all Denver kids free access to our rec. centers, Denver Parks and Recreation is developing MY Denver PRIME to expand discounted access for all residents 60 and older.

Everyone should have more opportunity to enjoy the public amenities that make Denver the great city that it is – from rec centers to mountain parks. Our forbearers had the generosity and foresight to purchase 14,000 acres of mountain parks over the last 100 years. And there's nothing cooler than getting to say the people of Denver own two herds of bison! We're heirs to these amazing treasures.

The Civilian Conservation Corps came to Red Rocks in the 1930s to work on the amphitheater during the Depression. Their camp and Red Rocks are now a National Historic Landmark. But the buildings at the camp are dilapidated, and most Denver residents don't even know they exist.

I'm excited that – in partnership with HistoriCorps – we're ready to create a new space for all our residents to experience the outdoors just a short 40-minute drive away. HistoriCorps and Parks and Recreation are going to jump start the camp's preservation efforts by offering skills training to veteran's groups, the unemployed and underemployed. When completed, these individuals will have new marketable skills, and the renovated area will be a place for outdoor activities, weekend get-aways, and where young people can experience our mountain parks at summer and weekend camps.

We must do everything we can to protect our open spaces, our quality of life and the distinctive values that define the people and the spirit of Denver. Especially now. Especially when all we see coming out of Washington is hostility and a desire to roll back hard-fought progress.

They say cities and progressive ideas don't work. Well, in Denver, they do. If 2.3 percent unemployment, inclusive policies and a drive for economic equity are their idea of what doesn't work, then I'm not buying what they're selling.

We have fought too hard to establish Denver as an environmental and sustainability leader. If Washington won't stand by the Clean Power Plan or Paris Climate Accord, WE WILL. We will reduce our carbon footprint and find a way to make Denver 100 percent renewable.

We have fought too hard to make Denver a healthy city. The Affordable Care Act helped cut the number of uninsured Denver residents nearly in half. Bravo to our great Governor, John Hickenlooper, for stepping out and carrying the banner to protect our healthcare.

We have fought too hard to close the achievement gap and offer equal opportunities for our kids of color to achieve.

We have fought too hard to build bridges of trust between our communities of color and law enforcement.

We have fought too hard to uplift overlooked communities, and to make the American Dream an American Reality.

We have fought too hard for equality and for equity, regardless of the color of our skin, our faith, or who we choose to love.

And we have fought too hard to be a welcoming, inclusive city. Cities should not be punished for Washington's failure to fix a broken immigration system. It's time to stop threatening our cities, stop targeting innocent people, and get to work on real solutions to bring hard-working undocumented people out of church basements, and out of the shadows.

We have marched for women. We have marched for science. We have marched for immigrants and refugees. And every time, we have marched together.

Denver, we have fought too hard to let the naysayers drag us down, to let Washington's dysfunction pull us apart and to think we would ever leave anyone behind. And we will keep fighting.

There's a quote engraved on the side of the Webb Building downtown – *What is the city but the people?* The people of Denver are what make Denver a great city. Your aspirations, your civic patriotism, that's what has propelled this city to new heights and new possibilities. A city by and for the people who call it home is our guiding light, because without you, there is no city.

The time is now for a new civic contract, a return to a city where living is easy, where opportunity abounds, and where we remember where we came from, how far we've come, or how far we've yet to go. This gym, this rec center, this neighborhood – this is what makes us great. The heart and passion of this city is embodied right here, and in places, neighborhoods and people across Denver.

God bless you, and God bless the City and County of Denver.

Thank you, all.

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