

2016 West Chicago State of the City Address  
Delivered by Mayor Ruben Pineda  
Monday, May 16, 2016

Welcome to the 2016 State of the City Address, Our Collective Vision, and thank you to all of you for being here tonight. Thank you members of the City Council, Our City Clerk, City Commissioners, Community Leaders, Distinguished Guests, and my wife and my heart, Julie.

You all deserve a round of applause for your service to our community.

Considering tonight's Address competes with the semi-final round of The Voice, and a crucial elimination round of Dancing with the Stars, I am especially humbled you have all chosen to be at **this** reality show. Seriously, though, thank you for being here tonight as we consider the state of our city, focusing on a glimpse at the future and providing a recap of the past year. Tonight you will hear about some exciting firsts, and an even more exciting last.

So much of the success you will hear about tonight is due to a group of men and women seated in the front rows tonight, the West Chicago City Council. The Aldermen have served West Chicago well with their thoughtful assessment of every item that comes before them, their confidence to question why, and their integrity to always keep the best interests of this City at the forefront of every vote they cast on an issue. I am very privileged and grateful to be working with such a fine group of individuals.

To Dave Sabathne, the Board and the staff of the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce, thank you for sponsoring this event; and for the support you and your organization have shown the City this past year. Once again, the Chamber will be at the helm, or should I say at the switch, of Railroad Days this year. Much to the disappointment of the community, last year's event was derailed due to the lack of a suitable venue, and we chose to go with an abbreviated version rather than cancel the event entirely. If anything good came out of that painful process, it was the public feedback that we received in support of finding a new location for continuing the hometown tradition. After extensive discussion, Pioneer Park was chosen as the best short-term, and possibly long-term solution, and this year the event will return in all its glory July 7<sup>th</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>. We thank the Park District for its support in making this happen.

The theme of my Address tonight is ***A Collective Vision***, a nod to the process that began over a year ago when the City retained Houseal Lavigne Associates for the facilitation of a Strategic Plan. It had to be one that was created by the input of the community itself, one that would be tailored to the near-term and rooted in what makes the community successful. While remaining true to its century-old history, traditions and successful community model, we wanted feedback on how to adjust, adapt and modernize that model for continued prosperity well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

A large and inclusive group of individuals and organizations including residents, neighborhood groups, business leaders, inter-governmental partners, and faith-based organizations, rose to the occasion and participated in forums, online surveys, questionnaires, and an interactive mapping tool, to answer the question "what should the City of West Chicago look like in 10 – 20 years, and how do we get there?"

Throughout the process, our opportunities became clear. West Chicago's strengths are extremely attractive to younger generations that see the community for its distinctiveness – a microcosm of 21<sup>st</sup> century America: racially and ethnically diverse, primarily middle-class but with a range of income levels and possessing open green space that affords plenty of recreational opportunities, and eclectic housing inventory that ranges from small starter homes to historic homes to larger luxury homes.

I'd like to share a short video clip of one such representative of this generational group that recently moved into the community, for some of these very reasons. Tim Devitt and his girlfriend Wendy, recently attended a Coffee with the Mayor, which I host on the last Saturday of each month. They had just moved here and wanted to begin enjoying all that West Chicago has to offer. Connecting with City government was an important piece of that for them.

Thank you to Tim and Wendy, who are also here tonight, for sharing your enthusiasm for West Chicago. We're glad you have chosen our community to call home.

Let's get back to the details of the Strategic Plan. What were some of the big takeaways we learned from the many who participated? Some of the comments validated what we already knew: residents cherish the historic character with its ties to the railroad; the small mom and pop businesses that make our downtown unique from every other, and the sense of community that is proven time and time again, in good times and bad.

Surprising to us though, we learned that while residents are proud of living in West Chicago, the constant comparison to wealthier neighboring communities that came to the surface, undermines this pride and satisfaction level.

Also noteworthy is the perceived divide that exists between our White and Latino populations. At the heart of that divide is the uncertainty of how to engage and interact with one another given the difference in culture, customs and language. The fact that Latinos are underrepresented in City government is an opportunity for growth in bridging that divide. By encouraging a greater involvement in civic life, whether by sitting on the City Council, serving on a Board or Commission, or volunteering to work on a City committee, we can move the needle in the right direction. We have begun the process. Working closely with groups like the Mexican Cultural Center DuPage, which is coordinating our Mexican Independence Day Celebration, we are bringing new faces and new ideas to the table.

One of the most universal themes to come out of the many months of community outreach, was the desire for more community festivals and special events to bring the community together and also to showcase the community for those who visit.

From all of these valuable insights, our consultant team created the draft copy of the West Chicago Strategic Plan which goes before City Council tonight for consideration. It outlines four identified priorities:

- Economic Development
- Community Identity
- Intergovernmental Partnerships
- One West Chicago

While the reality of our economic development efforts have proven effective as evidenced by the number of new businesses on the screen above, which opened from January 2015 through today, the perception of our community is that those efforts need to be elevated. As always, business corridors throughout the City will be proactively marketed and positioned as prominent commercial centers and employment hubs in DuPage County and throughout the region.

Also, a greater emphasis on communicating business recruitment, retention, and expansion efforts will be a priority. Here are two good examples of major business additions to the City.

We welcomed Avian USA Machinery LLC to West Chicago in October 2015, becoming one of its global hubs. Part of Avian Granulator Group, the company is a world class manufacturer of size reduction machinery for the plastic rubber and recycling industry. The new facility houses shredding and granulating machines in its 35,000 square foot space, and will handle sales and service for customers in North America. We will monitor the company's growth carefully, as they have already expressed the possibility of future expansion.

DS Container broke ground at the DuPage Business Center in May 2015, on a 300,000+ square-foot distribution center. The attributes of the DuPage Business Center including diverse communication and utility infrastructure, fully improved sites with off-site detention, and adjacency to key transportation routes, make it a solid business destination. So much so that on March 28<sup>th</sup> of this year, the company announced a 250,500 square foot expansion, bringing the total square footage to over 550,000. The expansion will house the company's manufacturing operations and accommodate its metal can production. The additional space and increased roof and floor loads will enable the company to grow its current capabilities while providing room to expand manufacturing further.

These two examples illustrate the development that is taking place in our business corridors, possibly under the radar of the general public.

In the area of community image, the priority will be communicating more stories like that of Tim & Wendy. So many of us have our own reasons for loving this community, yet when countered by unfounded criticism and old community baggage, we shy away from correcting the claim and setting the record straight. Its time we become more vocal and share our love for West Chicago publicly.

The Strategic Plan outlines the concept of creating a formal Citizen Corp of Community Ambassadors dedicated to coordinated, positive interactions with realtors, new employees, and visitors wanting to learn more about the community and its many amenities. Stay tuned for more on that in the coming months, and please contact our Marketing and Communications Coordinator, Rosemary Mackey, if you would like to be part of the campaign to tell others, through a video clip like Tim did, why you love West Chicago.

As validated in the strategic planning process, intergovernmental partnerships are the lifeblood of a community, and we will strive to enhance the positive relationships we have today. Alone, an organization can get just so much done. But imagine what would happen if organizations that serve the community worked together on shared goals and strategies. What it really comes down to is cultivating and maintaining good relationships, coordinating efforts, communicating regularly, and sharing accountability for outcomes. It's collaboration in the purest sense.

The City is eager to look at developing stronger models of collaboration that will positively and exponentially impact better outcomes for the entire community.

Our fourth and final priority outlined in the Strategic Plan is One West Chicago. What is One West Chicago? Simply stated, it is recognizing West Chicago's diversity for the strength that it is. It means many people, many cultures, ONE community. As stated earlier when discussing the takeaways of the Plan, our priority must be to encourage more participation of underrepresented groups so that bonds of trust and friendship can emerge naturally, and the community as a whole can benefit from multiple perspectives.

The Plan spells out these areas in much greater detail. I urge everyone to take some time to read it and acquaint themselves with this roadmap to our future. We can feel great pride in the fact that so many people in the community carved out some time from their daily commitments to contribute to it, especially a group that made up the Strategic Plan Advisory Committee, who met regularly and kept the process moving, ensuring that the Plan was developed by the community and not just the elected and appointed officials. Please stand when I call your name: Doug Domeracki, Dave Sabathne, Alderman Sandy Dimas, Alderman Kurt Meissner, Dona Smith, Gina Steinbrecher, Gladys Proa Santana, Amy Guerra, Merle Burleigh, Drew Cali, and Hank Betts.

Also, we are grateful for the insights of Bob Kosman, who served as a representative of the Forest Trails Homeowners Association and who recently passed away. Let's give these folks a round of well-deserved applause.

Earlier I mentioned distinguished guests in attendance; I'd like to take a minute to acknowledge State Representative Linda Chapa LaVia from Aurora, and State Representative Jeanne Ives from Wheaton. We are honored by your presence tonight.

There is someone else I wish to recognize, we have the honor of having the new Mayor of Naperville, Mayor Chirico. Mayor Chirico & I have known each other for a very long time. As a matter of fact we wrestled each other in the semi-finals for the State championship. It was the toughest match I had and of course I won. I ended up being the State Champ and the Mayor ended up in trouble with his coach because he had a little fit in the locker room. He got over it and I'm glad I wrestled him at that age, because I don't know if I would have beaten him later in High School. He did mention in his State of the City that I was pretty much a full grown man in Jr. High. I had a full beard & mustache and had to shave to wrestle. I also had to carry my birth certificate everywhere to prove my age. If you don't believe me, here I am in 8<sup>th</sup> grade (shows photo). Thank you Mayor Chirico for being a good sport, you're a great Mayor and a great friend.

There have been some noteworthy accomplishments throughout our City Departments, Commissions and volunteer committees, and I'd like share some of these with you tonight.

- Our City Council has directed staff to do what it could to relieve the financial burden on our customers, and following such, there are no new tax, fee or rate increases included in the 2016 Budget.
- The appointment of Acting Police Chief Michael Uplegger to the position of Chief of Police last year has brought great efficiencies and a new operating structure to the Department.
- The first ever City Facebook account debuted earlier this year for the Police Department. The page aims to increase resident engagement with the Department, provide crime prevention safety tips, and assist in building positive relationships between residents and police through yet another communication tool.
- After a hiatus, the Community Relations Officer position has returned.
- An upcoming Police Department Open House is planned for Saturday, June 18<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at the Police Station. This will be a great opportunity to tour the facility and meet the people who serve and protect our community.
- Forestry Program objectives focused on the management of the Emerald Ash Borer. The fifth year of a City-wide seven-year Ash tree Emerald Ash Borer insecticidal treatment program was completed in July. Removal of dead or dying Ash trees was also completed.
- Engineering consultants and City staff were responsible for construction oversight and facilitating completion of the Alta Vista Roadway Rehabilitation Project and the Wood Street Reconstruction Project
- Staff also spent significant time on preparation and administration of many of the City's other annual capital improvement replacement projects including the Crack Sealing and Sidewalk Replacement Programs, and coordinating with the CN Railroad and its contractor on the completion of the George Street Underpass Project.
- The City gained another wonderful new restaurant, Al Chulo, at 1400 South Neltnor Avenue. The experience and kitchen skills of the owners of this new establishment will ensure its success. The cuisine is Latin Fusion and the dishes are the freshest, most inventive I've had anywhere. The interior design is equally appealing, as is the cordial wait staff.
- Earlier this year Healthy West Chicago, the initiative about which I've been talking to you for more than two years now, has hit a milestone. We have hired a Director to take the Action Plan created last year and begin implementing the strategies it outlines.
- I'd like to introduce you all to Andi Cooper, seated in the audience tonight. I'd also like to thank members of the Healthy West Chicago Task Force and Advisory Group for all you have done to get us to this point. As I said from the beginning, when Healthy West Chicago was nothing more than an ambitious idea, we have one shot to

get this right. I think based on what we've already accomplished, who we are bringing to the table to help us, and where we are heading, we are succeeding in getting it right.

- We have formed two new alliances that will benefit current and future generations of West Chicagoans. The American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society have taken a special interest in the health and wellness of our community.
- Both organizations recognize the efforts our community is making through Healthy West Chicago to build a healthier environment. Their offers of help include community outreach to educate residents and businesses about making the healthy choice the easy choice, and also screenings for breast and colorectal cancer. Each organization is interested in helping West Chicago create a culture of health that could be used as a model for other cities across the nation.
- I was pleased to welcome Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti to City Hall to meet with a dozen or so faith-based community leaders who wanted to ask questions, share concerns and speak candidly about issues related to state government. It was certainly an interesting 45 minutes of frank discussion.
- Downtown beautification will reach new heights this summer. The City has purchased 10 new decorative planters and City staff has amended all the downtown planting beds. Working with WeGrow Dreams, the not for profit greenhouse that provides people with disabilities the opportunity to lead fulfilling lives through training and working in the supportive, safe and caring environment of the greenhouse, and with Boy Scout Troop 33 which has again taken on the job of planting the beds, we will be ready for Blooming Fest on Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup>.
- The Cultural Arts Commission has also contributed to the downtown beautification efforts through its annual Community Banner Art Project. Seventeen fantastic banners will be hung along Main Street later this week. This year's theme, Patterns-Patterns-Patterns, will definitely be fun-fun-fun. Also, they are sponsoring the second annual Artéculture event at Blooming Fest. There is still time to get your artwork entered in this exciting multi-media pop-up art exhibit which will be held at 103 West Washington Street.
- We welcomed 22 international guests from our Sister City Taufkirchen (vils) earlier this year. Becky Hall and the entire West Chicago Sister Cities organization did an amazing job of coordinating the 12-day visit, creating an itinerary that kept our German friends busy and happy. The hospitality of the host families should also be commended for providing such a warm West Chicago welcome.
- The City invited the German contingent and their host families, along with all members of the West Chicago Sister Cities organization to the City Council meeting for a special reception and recognition to commemorate the bond of friendship that unites Taufkirchen (Vils) and West Chicago. A delicious spread of food, donated by Augustino's Rock & Roll Deli, was enjoyed by everyone who attended. I would like to personally thank Cathy and Jerry Morelli for their outstanding support and generosity to West Chicago Sister Cities and the community.

I promised you an exciting last. After more than 40 years of living under the shadow of thorium contamination in our city, we reached a watershed moment last year. On November 10, 2015, a rail car carrying the **last** remnants of thorium waste from the former Kerr-McGee factory site, pulled out of West Chicago.

We have many people to thank for this momentous event. Our local, county, state and federal representatives never gave up the fight on our behalf. Also, the tenacity and perseverance of a group of individuals who formed TAG, the Thorium Action Group, kept the issue in the forefront. Their relentless pursuit of cleaning up our community should be commended.

We have fought hard to rid our community of the fallout and stigma of the thorium reality which has plagued us for too long. While there is still work to be done to finish the river restoration and implement a final groundwater remedy, we are closer to the end of a very long chapter in the cleanup. We diligently pursued the remaining federal dollars, about \$33 million, to resolve issues with the contaminated groundwater at the site. I am proud to announce that just this past Friday we received some very good news. Weston Solutions will be receiving its first substantial reimbursement from the Federal Government, which is a portion of the Title X money, in over five years. Weston Solutions will receive approximately 17.6 million dollars. I would like to thank everyone who helped make this possible, especially Senators Durbin & Kirk and Congressmen Roskam & Hultgren. I will continue to advocate for our community so that this Project stays on their radar and all the Title X money due and owing for this Project continues until completion.

I look forward to the day that we can Google West Chicago and not see the word Thorium and dedicate a beautiful, clean and safe park on that land for the enjoyment of our entire community.

Indeed our community image is changing and we have received some great press for our efforts.

1. In spring of 2015, we were chosen to be featured in the Daily Herald series that features a photo gallery of places and things to visit in a short amount of time. An Hour in West Chicago included visits to Reed-Keppler Park; a public art mural, in this together, in our downtown; the ARC Center and more.
2. Our first Frosty 5k got a shout-out on WGN's Morning Show.
3. Earlier this spring, the Daily Herald joined Team Pineda, my community walking group, as we walked through the Cornerstone Lakes subdivision. Every Saturday and Sunday, we walk one of seven neighborhood routes. My wife Julie has been trying to get me to walk for the past 25 years. Team Pineda makes it easy. Please join us, it's a great way to get our exercise and stay connected to our community.
4. I was invited by the Mayor of Green Bay, WI to meet & discuss an upcoming symposium on walking programs, and will partner with the cities of Oklahoma City, OK; Green Bay, WI; Lorain, OH; Columbia,

SC; Indianapolis, IN and the National Forum for Heart Disease & Stroke Prevention (National Forum) to promote walking and physical activity through the Forum's ***Move with the Mayor Challenge***. This will mean national exposure for West Chicago. Our weekend walks are the perfect way to train for the event, which takes place the entire month of September. Each of the six chosen cities will select a theme and use it to inspire and motivate community members. Our theme, "Make Every Step Count" will seek to engage our entire community, and I am working with a few of the "Healthy West Chicago" partners like the American Heart Association and the American Cancer Society to provide pedometers so we can track our steps.

5. Last week, I appeared on WCIU, who contacted me about being part of their neighborhood campaign, My Neighborhood.
6. We are scheduled for a live remote with 95.9 The River radio station this Friday, at the corner of Main Street and Galena to promote Blooming Fest, which is held downtown the next day. We'll be having fun with the on-air personality and members of the West Chicago Garden Club who will be setting up their 30 x 40 foot tent which will be filled with every imaginable plant from member gardens, as well as some very nice larger trees and shrubs that are donated by some of their partners. Join us downtown on Friday between 2:30 – 4:30 p.m. for the live remote, and most definitely between 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. on Saturday for the main event.
7. As I mentioned in the WCIU video, one of West Chicago's downtown restaurants, La Cocina de Maria, was featured in the May 2016 issue of the prestigious Bon Appétit Magazine for its authentic menu of antojitos or "little cravings". The sandwich that was featured was the pambazo. I haven't tried it yet, but looking forward to it. If you haven't tried this sandwich yet, you really must. I'm sure La Cocina de Maria would love all of West Chicago to try it.

Are you getting the idea that our small town is starting to be noticed in a big way for all the amazing things we always knew about it. It is very gratifying and we intend to keep the momentum going.

The future is certainly looking bright. It's an honor to serve as your Mayor. I look forward to the years ahead and to continuing to pursue our collective vision together.

Thank you, God bless you, God bless the City of West Chicago and God bless this wonderful country we live in, the United States of America.

Good Night.