

2015 West Chicago State of the City Address  
Delivered by Mayor Ruben Pineda  
April 20, 2015

Good evening and welcome. It's my great pleasure and privilege to report on the State of *Our* City to all of you gathered here tonight or watching at home on Channel 17.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize and thank my fellow City Council members for their support this past year and for all their hard work. Countless issues come before this group of dedicated men and women who serve the community in the role of your elected officials. They are your voice in the many decisions which are made on your behalf and they take this responsibility with the gravity that it requires and deserves.

Some are seated here tonight and I'd like to ask them to stand for a well-deserved round of applause. I would like to convey my appreciation to former Alderman Al Murphy, who resigned in March after being elected District 6 representative on the DuPage County Forest Preserve Board, for his many years of service to West Chicago; and to Alderman Melissa Birch who was appointed to fill his remaining term.

I also wish to recognize and thank two retiring Aldermen, Matt Fuesting and Jim Smith for their dedicated service to our community; and extend a hearty welcome to newly elected Council members Jayme Sheahan, Noreen Liginio-Kubinski and Melissa Birch.

Also here tonight, we are honored to have other local officials.

I'd like to thank the Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce Board and its staff; David Sabathne, Patricia Haskins and Roseanne Balance, for putting this evening together. The Chamber has always served as a positive influence in our community; providing vision, presence and advocacy for its members; and support for the activities of our community that contribute to quality of life for everyone who lives, works and visits here.

It's not always an easy task given the challenges that are sometimes present behind the scenes. For the past two years by contractual agreement with the City, the Chamber has provided a stellar 4-day community event that has rocked the western suburbs and beyond.

Railroad Days has become a household name, not only in our community, but in those as far-reaching as neighboring states, for the caliber of entertainment and good old-fashioned summertime fun it provides. This year, unfortunately, due to site logistics at Reed-Kepler Park and the inability to find a suitable location elsewhere, Railroad Days as we know it, will be on hiatus. We will however provide for fireworks on Saturday, July 12<sup>th</sup> and everyone's favorite, the Railroad Days Parade, on Sunday July 13<sup>th</sup>. We have high hopes of bringing the full event back next year.

Now, let's get started with our recap of the past year and a look at what's ahead.

It's been an incredible year; we have come so far and accomplished so much. Partnerships and collaborations have made the difference in the success stories I am about to share, and I'd like to start by recognizing some of the organizations who have made it all possible. This is a long and impressive list of powerhouse organizations which have joined forces for a healthier community. Please stand if you represent one of these organizations:

- West Chicago Park District
- Western DuPage Chamber of Commerce
- West Chicago Library District
- West Chicago Fire Protection District
- West Chicago School District 33
- WeGo Together for Kids
- Community High School District 94
- Wheaton Academy
- Benjamin Middle School District 25
- Benedictine University
- DuPage County Health Department
- FORWARD of DuPage County
- Northwestern Medicine (formerly Cadence Health)
- Seven Generations Ahead
- Northern Illinois Food Bank
- Glen Arbor Community Church
- ATI
- Aramark
- People Made Visible
- Mexican Cultural Center
- United Way DuPage/West Cook
- Wheaton Bible Church
- Western DuPage Special Recreation Association
- Forest Preserve District of DuPage County
- National University of Health Sciences
- Zellmer Childhood Disease Foundation
- Kids Health & Fitness Bootcamp
- Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

These are some of the champions making a difference in our community. Please give yourselves a round of applause! And let's make it a vigorous round of applause before sitting down, I'm doing my part tonight to increase the physical activity associated with the State of the City Address. Take a look at some of the other ways our community is getting fit. We're getting **Healthy West Chicago!**

Last year, with the partners that I introduced a minute ago, we made great progress on our citywide wellness initiative.

A Community Action Plan was developed from the input of a survey conducted last summer and 11 subsequent community forums held for people who live and work in West Chicago. All the ideas which resulted guided the development of the Action Plan which was then presented to a panel of technical experts who work to support healthy communities. This experienced group, included representatives from DuPage County Division of Transportation, Active Transportation Alliance, DuPage and Kane County Health Departments, the Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children, Community Health Planning for the City of Blue Island, and Northwestern Medicine, the major funder of the Plan.

I would like to personally invite you to celebrate the launch of Healthy West Chicago at this year's Blooming Fest on Saturday, May 16<sup>th</sup> from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. in our downtown. You'll learn more about the many exciting enhancements coming to our community; like a brand new Farmers Market on the grounds of the VFW Hall and an expanded community garden for those who wish to grow their own fresh vegetables. Plus, Healthy West Chicago partnering organizations will provide other great resources such as cooking demo's, healthy snack alternatives, increasing physical activity, the importance of stretching, walking with Team Pineda and so much more. I guarantee you will be inspired to strive for a healthier lifestyle after this launch.

Another major collaboration that has been shaping our community since last year is one between the City of West Chicago, WeGo Together for Kids and the United Way Metropolitan Chicago, which resulted in the formation of United Way's first suburban Neighborhood Network model in West Chicago. The launch event at Lemay Middle School last August brought out more than 900 West Chicago residents to celebrate and learn more about the initiative.

WeGo Together for Kids partners were present with resources for families. 500 students were provided with backpacks filled with school supplies, better preparing them for the year that was ahead. United Way produced a wonderful video that I'd like to share with you tonight.

The energy and commitment of this WeGo Together for Kids and Neighborhood Network partnership, has already inspired progress and impacted our community. It has made possible a number of new resources including a brand new playground at Kress Creek Farms Park, additional community mental health services, and lifestyle health education for our parents and youth. We were able to offer free volunteer tax preparation assistance over several weeks, generating much-needed refunds for area residents, a large portion of which gets spent locally in West Chicago. Preliminary data shows \$335,000 in refunds to area households including \$161,000 from the Earned Income Tax Credit. This is just the beginning of what's possible for West Chicago. With United Way and the right local partners and the right strategies in place, we are making genuine strides toward improving the lives of all of our residents.

Also in 2014, the City of West Chicago was named the 90<sup>th</sup> safest City in the United States by NeighborhoodScout; and the 16<sup>th</sup> safest City in Illinois by Movoto. These kind of impressive rankings don't come without the hard-work and dedication of a very active,

very involved Police Department. Last year, West Chicago Police made: 92 drug arrests; 282 domestic disturbance calls; and 78 DUI arrests. They responded to 917 automobile crashes, issued 6,126 traffic citations and addressed 94 animal-related complaints. In all, our Police Department handled 10,289 calls for service and took another 14,703 self-initiated actions.

We celebrated heroism in our community this year. Four individuals received commendations for actions that went above and beyond in times of crisis which resulted in life-saving outcomes. Jacob Schroeder of West Chicago and Brian Donlan of Hoffman Estates got involved at the scene of a fiery crash that took place on Illinois Route 59 before first responders had arrived. Together they extracted two victims from a burning vehicle who were transported to the hospital and survived.

In separate incidents, 3 other lives were saved thanks to the training, skill and bravery of two of West Chicago's finest, Police Officer's Jonathan Jones and Jeffrey Moos. These two officers are examples of the kind of men and women who protect and defend our community and put themselves in harms way for us every day. We salute all of you.

We can all enjoy recent developments and infrastructure improvements that took place in our community last year.

- How about that great new ARC Center at Reed-Keppler Park? This phenomenal facility features a fitness center, locker rooms, 3-court gymnasium, Treehouse play area, walking/running track, multipurpose gym, party room, dance studio, spin room, fitness studio and meeting rooms. How many here have signed up for a membership? To those who haven't, what are you waiting for? I joined when the weather turned too cold to continue my walking outdoors. I'm amazed and thrilled every time I walk into this state-of-the-art facility. What a great asset for our community.
- The Canadian National Railroad-funded pedestrian tunnel at George Street by the High School is substantially complete, and should be open later in the spring.
- The City acquired One Twenty Chicago Street, which is the final property needed for redevelopment in accordance with the Central Main Street Redevelopment Plan.
- The City Council authorized me to enter into an agreement with the West Chicago Community Center Inc. to complete the terms for transfer of 151 West Washington Street, better known as the Wiant House which was originally constructed in 1859. What was once a building with serious structural and cosmetic deficiencies, and at risk of being demolished, has now become a saved treasure reflecting the craftsmanship and grandeur of the past. Since pictures speak louder than words, here are some taken before and after that illustrate the extent of work undertaken on behalf of this historic landmark.

The completion of this project is estimated to be around June 2015. Tours of the facility will be conducted by the Community Center when all approvals have been received from the City. I think I can safely convey thanks on behalf of the entire community to the West Chicago Community Center for undertaking this project.

Continuing with my report of City improvement projects:

- Raise your hand if you've ever been stopped by a train in West Chicago. Everyone in this room should have their hand up. The \$33 million IDOT project to build an overpass on Route 38 has made the gateway into West Chicago a lot friendlier. While we love our long-standing history with the railroad, catching a slow-moving freight train can feel slower than trying to explain to your grandmother how to program the dvr. After living here 54 years, if I had a nickel for every minute I waited for a train there, I'd be the richest man in W.C.
- DuPage County, in conjunction with IDOT, is in the design phase to widen the intersection of Fabyan Parkway and Roosevelt Road.
- Staff continues to work with engineers on the design of the intersection improvement and traffic signal at Menards. A few more signatures on Plats are necessary before getting the IDOT permit and construction underway.
- The last residential property on W. Blair Street was remediated, leaving only the Factory Site and the W. Washington Street Redevelopment Area (wetland area) to be cleaned. Sadly, but hardly a surprise, minimal Title X Reimbursement Funding was included in the current federal budget, so activity at the Factory Site will shift to maintenance mode, thereby extending the site remediation. I am in constant contact with our Congressmen & Senators to expedite the funding. Several of them have visited the site and are very aware of what is needed to complete this project. My goal is to be able to google West Chicago and not see the words thorium or clean up mentioned anywhere in future articles. Some day in the near future we will be able to enjoy a beautiful park that we can **All** be proud of.

From a new business standpoint, I'd like to call out three in particular:

- The recruitment of Wise Plastics to a large industrial space on Hawthorne Lane will bring approximately 150 new jobs to our community.
- Thornton's gas station and convenience store was approved for the northwest corner of Route 59 and Roosevelt Road.
- Ground will be broken at the end of May for a new 300,000 square-foot building at the DuPage Business Center. DS Container, a warehousing and storage facility for cans and other containers will join our business community.

How can we save money?

We've worked hard on cost-saving measures last year, and have had two noteworthy successes in this area.

- In February 2014 the City solicited bids for its second term Electricity Aggregation Program and, with direction from the Infrastructure Committee, our City Administrator executed a three-year agreement with First Energy Solutions Corporation for the procurement of electricity at the rate of 6.51 cents per kilowatt-hour; this rate is one of the best in the Chicagoland area and is anticipated to remain such over the next several years.
- Plus, a new inspectional services contract was approved with expanded code enforcement staffing and stable contract services (and payments) for four years.

These two proactive measures will benefit our customers for years to come.

Communication remains the cornerstone of the City's relationship with its residents, businesses and visitors. An overall redesign of the City's website was prioritized last year to keep pace with advances in technology and for our ability to manage content in-house.

We recognized the changing needs and preferences of our customers to use mobile devices to get information and transact business, so the need to incorporate a responsive design which would automatically format web content across all devices was essential.

The transition from the old site to the new has been seamless and we have seen indicators of early success. We launched our new website over the Labor Day holiday weekend in September 2014. Analytics in early October showed that the **number of people coming to the site from mobile devices increased dramatically** from August (505 user sessions) to September/early October (2,729 user sessions). This represents over a **fivefold increase** in the number of people accessing our site by mobile devices for that time period, and we anticipate that number will continue to grow. Mobile accessibility has given new dimension to a favorite community event which celebrated 25-years in 2014 – Tales Tombstones Tell. The creation of an interactive mapping application by the City's GIS specialist enabled a value-added experience to the stories of the eight chosen stops at Oakwood Cemetery.

Visitors were able to navigate the individual tombstones through a site map and read about the fascinating lives of those buried there from the palm of their hand on their mobile device, their computer or their tablet.

Converting to a responsive design is proving to be a game-changer.

Other new features of the redesigned website are reaping significant rewards as well:

- The addition of a dedicated Transparency Portal to make it easier for our community to access information and be better educated participants in local government.
- And finally, the visibility of our Twitter feed on the new homepage has helped **increase our follower base by 25%** since launch.

I urge everyone who has not already done so; please sign up for the City's E-News and to follow us on Twitter. These are two sure ways to stay in the communication loop of what's happening in our community.

Tonight is an opportunity to say thank you repeatedly, because truly there is so much for which we are thankful.

I'm humbled to recognize the many volunteers who contribute their diverse talents and precious time to our City Commissions. **We** are the lucky recipients of what results when people who are passionate about something in life contribute to the fabric of their community. *These people are our Commission members.* Because of their service on the Environmental Commission, the Plan Commission/Zoning Board of Appeals, the Civil Service Commission, the Historical Preservation Commission and the Cultural Arts Commission:

- 5,920 pounds (2.96 tons) of paper and 1,094 pounds of holiday lights were diverted from the landfill last year.
- impacted residents may seek the benefit of a thorough vetting process of the issues related to development proposals.
- the community is assured of an impartial recruitment and selection process for qualified police officer candidates, and I am happy to report we will be welcoming two new officers to our Police Department in the near future.
- valuable historic resources related to the architecture of the original structure were shared, and benefited the restoration project of the Wiant House, shown previously.
- a new piece of public art commemorating the historic formation of the first suburban Live United Neighborhood Network, was dedicated in downtown West Chicago. This piece of art, created by Commission member Anni Holm, assisted by more than 950 hands from the community, has captured the excitement and possibility that comes with being "In this – together". The following short clip documents the process from start to outstanding finish.

Look for more public art projects from this active Commission later this year.

And this brings us to the future outlook. There are some intriguing prospects ahead, even in the face of a major new economic challenge presented by our State government.

We, like all our municipal counterparts, face the prospect of an enormous financial hit due to Governor Rauner's proposed legislation that the local governments' share of the Local Government Distributive Fund (LGDF) be reduced by half.

The LGDF is funded entirely out of state income tax revenues with one twelfth of the total collections being set aside for that purpose. Fund monies are then distributed to counties and municipalities on the basis of population. West Chicago currently receives approximately \$2,600,000 in LGDF funds and those funds are used primarily for police and public works (things like streets, garages, cemeteries, forestry, etc.). If the State eventually approves the 50% reduction, the City Council will need to discuss how to close the funding gap through expenditure/service reductions and/or new revenue sources. More information on this issue will be available on the City's website in the days ahead.

Nonetheless, we continue to remain optimistic and focused on growth. We will strive to maximize **every** opportunity that comes our way. Three in particular hold great promise.

- First, the City is participating in a CMAP housing study with two other communities (Glendale Heights and Hanover Park), which will eventually provide a residential housing plan for the City.
- Second, we applied for and received a grant of services for an upcoming Developer Review Panel to be conducted by the Urban Land Institute, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Regional Transit Agency. This panel will bring in real estate developers from around the region to provide an independent assessment and recommendations for the City concerning future Downtown Redevelopment opportunities. The Developer Review Panel will not cost the City any funding, and will only require City participation to complete this effort.
- And third and most exciting, the City retained a consultant to assist in the creation of a City-wide Strategic Plan that will govern decision making over the next 3-5 years. The process for the creation of such Plan will rely heavily on community feedback to organize and assess issues and opportunities, develop community goals, and establish strategies for implementation. This process will allow a responsive Strategic Plan to focus on the areas of economic development, community character, City services, fiscal responsibility and other areas of community importance that may arise during the outreach and engagement process.

This year will hold great opportunity for our citizens to shape West Chicago for future generations. I hope you will feel a sense of community stewardship for our visioning and strategic planning efforts, and become involved. Much more will be announced in the days ahead, and I trust the City will have your support and participation. We are, after all, *In this – together.*

I'd like to close on a personal note. My wife Julie, my wonderful Mother-in-law and I have been saving for a very special trip. We are planning to join the West Chicago Sister Cities group in Taufkirchen, Germany this June. This local group, which established our Sister City relationship with Taufkirchen vils Germany back in 1999, has been fostering

peace through culture, education and “people to people” exchanges. I cannot tell you how proud I am at the prospect of representing our community on this trip. Be assured there will be lots of pictures and stories when I return. There will also be a 1<sup>st</sup>. With the help of my dear friends Len Mahony and Alderman Birch, I will be presenting my speech in German.

On a very personal note, Julie & I will be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary during this trip. The 1st 25 year just flew by and I’m looking forward to another wonderful 25 years.

I’m excited about all the things we’ve accomplished these past years and very excited about the future, and the wonderful things to come. I would like to thank all the people of West Chicago for allowing me the honor & the privilege to be your Mayor.

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.